



Liverpool Mutual Homes Annual Report Supplement Self Assessment 2010



Pride in Our Homes, Proud of Our Neighbourhoods

Self assessment

About this self assessment

This supplement to our annual report sets out how we have performed against the TSA's national standards, which were published in April 2010. Overall our assessments show that we do perform well against the standards, but we believe we can do much better and will always strive for continuous improvement.

In this supplement we provide an overview of our performance against each of the six national standards. When measuring ourselves against the standards, we always ensure we provide supporting evidence to back up what we are saying.

Our vision to 'have pride in our homes and be proud of our neighbourhoods' is as strong as ever and our improvement plans are designed with this in mind. The areas we wish to focus our improvements on this year are set out in detail in our operational plans and a number of examples are provided in both our main annual report and this supplement.

Making it simple

We are aware that there is already a wealth of information available for our tenants, covering all aspects of our services. We also regularly report to tenants about how we are performing against a number of key indicators, and a good summary of this is provided in the annual report.

In order to make this a simple, concise and user-friendly document, we have not listed all of the means of accessing information here, or additional key performance indicators, but we have flagged up in each section where there are links to other sources of information.

Being open and honest

We hope that in sharing this self assessment with all our tenants, other customers, stakeholders and partners, we have provided an honest update on how we are doing and have been open about the areas we know we need to work on.

We are still a relatively new organisation and some of our aims and aspirations will take much longer to achieve than the two and a half years we have had so far. We believe we are well on target to deliver all of our promises, and ahead of target on many of them. Over the next year we will concentrate on putting into practice the improvements we have identified in our plans. With the support and scrutiny of our tenants, we will continue to strive to be the best we can.

Developing local offers

We already have a number of local offers in place that were developed as part of the transfer process. These particularly focus on the empowerment of tenants, which was seen as a priority for a tenant-led organisation like LMH.

We are now working with our tenants to develop three more local offers between now and April 2011. The three new offers will cover repairs, the improvement programme and anti-social behaviour. Once we have developed these three priority local offers, we will look at how we can develop more.

These local offers will form part of a new updated offer document, which will be published in April 2011. This will show how we are performing against the 135 original promises and how we will deliver the new local offers.

The National Standard for Tenant Involvement and Empowerment

This standard sets out the requirements we must meet for the following areas: tenant involvement and empowerment; customer service and choice; understanding and responding to diverse needs; and complaints. We set out below examples of how we meet the standard and the areas where we believe we can improve.

How are we performing?

Encouraging tenant involvement and scrutiny

We are a tenant-led organisation committed to meeting the needs of our customers. We keep our customers fully informed and provide a range of opportunities for them to shape the services they receive. Our tenants have been involved in all aspects of our development, across all the service areas and standards.

Since transfer, over 2,000 of our tenants have responded to our request to get involved. They have attended various events, formed local consultation groups on the Improvement Programme, joined a range of specialised focus groups, answered tenant satisfaction surveys, completed questionnaires, responded to draft publications, and given us their valuable feedback to influence and shape the services we deliver.

Over the last year we have worked with tenants to train them as inspectors and mystery shoppers. Our plan now is to further develop this role and set up a tenant scrutiny panel. This panel will be part of our governance structure and will have real teeth to challenge and change things on behalf of tenants.

Our Customer Involvement Team works closely with tenants and tenant groups in our communities. The team has been looking at how we can provide more opportunities for more people to get involved in a way that suits them. Tenants have also told us how they would like to see more tenants involved from different neighbourhoods and with different backgrounds. Feedback has also highlighted that we need to involve more young people in our processes.

We have plans to develop these opportunities for involvement over the coming months, as outlined in our annual report.

We have also set up a Customer Involvement Steering Group (CISG) to oversee tenant involvement across all service areas, this is made up of 25 tenant members. The CISG ensures all changes we make to services, processes, and procurement is undertaken with the involvement and support of tenants.

The group has also reviewed the repairs service, which has resulted in us making changes to the repairs call handling processes. It has looked at our telephone service and in response to the issues raised we will now have one Customer Service Centre, which will be up and running in October 2010.

Over the next year LMH will be working in partnership with "tenantspin" to engage young residents from across LMH, delivering training opportunities in Digital Filmmaking, Citizen Journalism, Digital Story-Telling and other new media practices. These training opportunities will run over several weeks and will provide regular video content for the LMH website, LMH TV - demonstrating customer involvement, community engagement and resident consultation in an innovative manner.

This year we have invested in a new software system (the Tenant Participation Tracker) which we are using to increase our knowledge of who wants to get involved and how. We have been looking at

how we can include opportunities for training, such as a possible Tenants Academy and a support forum for future tenant board members.

LMH's published involvement menu identifies a range of opportunities for tenants to communicate their views and to get involved in decision-making at all levels. A recent survey, completed by a specialist company, found that 68.8% of our tenants are satisfied that their views are being taken into account.

Providing customer service information

Feedback from our tenants tells us that we do provide relevant and timely information about our activities in a range of ways that meet expectations.

We want information to be easily available and accessible for all tenants and potential customers from diverse backgrounds. Some of the ways we share information are more traditional, such as customer leaflets, policy documents, newsletters, and home visits.

We have also listened to our tenants and used their feedback to look at new ways of doing things, such as the interactive website, email news bulletins, text messaging, and a video diary, which was used to record the experiences of our tenant inspectors and mystery shoppers.

Ensuring a quality service

The stock transfer 'offer document' sets out the LMH promises in terms of how we will deliver services to our tenants. This has been supplemented with our Customer Charter, which sets out our service standards and is given to all tenants. A recent survey found that 75.6% of our tenants are satisfied with the overall services provided by LMH.

Our main corporate plan and our annual operational plans are based on the nine focus areas that we have identified as being key to our success. Each focus area is championed by an Executive Director and one of our Board members. The focus areas on improvement, customers, and value for money, all ensure that our staff deliver cost-effective services that meet the needs of LMH tenants.

Performance against a range of key performance indicators is reported to our Board and to tenants in a range of formats. Although there is still some way to go to achieve the higher standards we have set out in our plans, our performance has demonstrated continuous improvement over the two years that LMH has been in existence.

As a tenant-led organisation, all our Service Managers are expected to show how tenants have been involved in the decision-making processes. Encouraging choice is also important. Within our Improvement Programme we have involved tenants in contractor and supplier procurement and they have agreed the range of scheme choices we offer for windows, doors, kitchens, bathrooms and tiling.

Tenants have helped to agree an improved standard for grounds maintenance and communal area cleaning services. They were also involved in interviewing the contractors that bid to deliver the service.

We have listened to what our tenants have said about standards of service. Responding to tenant concerns, our repairs contract and contractor were changed after one year and the service has been brought in-house. LMH now operates the repairs call centre and has an appointments system for repairs.

A tenant handbook in DVD format will be distributed to all our tenants later this year. The DVD was developed with tenants, who helped to write and film it, and it sets out LMH's service standards.

Handling complaints

Our published complaints policy provides information on the complaints service standard. It sets out how tenants, leaseholders and applicants for housing with LMH, have a right to be able to make a complaint, where they have a concern or are dissatisfied with the service provided, and how to make the complaint.

Our Customer Charter also provides information about the way a complaint will be responded to, and within what time period. At LMH we recognise that we can learn from complaints and can improve service delivery as a result of issues highlighted

through the complaints process.

How we manage complaints was reviewed this year and all staff have received extensive training on the new approach. A recent survey found that 78.7% of tenant complaints are resolved at stage one of the complaints procedure.

Responding to diverse needs

To achieve compliance and enhance services to customers, during 2008 - 2009 LMH developed a policy and implementation plan for equality and diversity. We have a Board Champion for Diversity who is involved in promoting the profile of equality and diversity. This has included attending staff and tenant forums and ensuring the continued high profile of this focus area within all LMH activities. We also have an Executive Champion for Diversity.

We have demonstrated our commitment to equality and diversity by recruiting a specialist Equality and Diversity Manager to embed awareness across all our service delivery teams. Equality and diversity training has been carried out with all staff and Board members. A cultural and diversity handbook was produced for staff and this is also being rolled out to contractors over the next six months, so customers can expect to receive the same quality of service whether they are dealing with a contractor or an LMH member of staff.

Ahead of the Equalities Bill coming into force in 2010, LMH produced a draft Single Equality Scheme (SES). The priorities and actions of the SES were set by community groups, stakeholders and partners. This was to make sure that the individual action plans for race, disability, sex, transgender, age, religion and sexuality, reflected our customers' needs and complied with the new legislation. LMH's SES was approved by the LMH Board in February 2010 and is due to be launched in September 2010.

Since LMH was formed we have been collecting customer-profiling information. Our aim is to use this information to tailor our services to customer needs, and develop future products and services in line with emerging customer requirements.

The National Standard for Home

This standard sets out the requirements we must meet for the following areas: the quality of accommodation we provide; and the repairs, maintenance and adaptations service. We set out below examples of how we meet the standard and the areas where we believe we can improve.

How are we performing?

Providing quality accommodation

The transfer of homes to LMH took place in 2008, and as part of our Improvement Programme we agreed with our tenants that we would go beyond the Decent Homes Standard and deliver the higher LMH standard for our homes.

We started work on the five-year Improvement Programme on the first day of transfer. By March 2010 we had completed the following number of improvements:

- 3,757 bathroom improvements
- 5,739 central heating systems installed
- 6,564 double glazing installations
- 3,715 kitchen improvements
- 13,219 new doors fitted
- 650 structural improvement works

These completions are actually 115% of the target we had planned. We will continue to work hard to stay ahead of schedule next year, which will enable us to bring in additional works earlier than planned.

However, the requirement to meet the Decent Homes Standard has not yet been fully achieved across all our properties. Our 2009 - 2010 assessment found that 64.6% of LMH properties now meet the Decent Homes Standard, compared to 51.3% for the previous year. We are making good progress on this work and expect to fully comply before the deadline of March 2013.

We have completed an updated stock condition check this year, to make sure the Investment Programme remains up to date and relevant. We have also been involving tenants in developing

local programmes and standards. Performance has exceeded targets and procurement savings are being used to bring forward improvement work.

Delivering a repairs and maintenance service

The requirement to provide a repairs and maintenance service that is cost effective, meets all statutory requirements, responds to the needs of tenants, and is 'right first time', is not fully met in all areas. We have a range of improvement plans in place to continually improve this performance.

Our tenants expect the delivery of an excellent repairs service and we aim to provide a quality service that is 'right first time' and has the highest standard of customer care. We are working to achieve this through ensuring flexibility, showing consideration for individuals, and continuously monitoring the cost effectiveness of the responsive repairs service.

Our responsive repairs service has continued to improve. One significant performance improvement is that 83% of repairs were completed within target in 2009 - 2010, compared to 45% the previous year under a different contractor. We recognise that this can still be improved further and we have service improvement plans in place with our contractor to achieve over 98% in 2010 - 2011.

In terms of appointments made and kept, we achieved a performance of 78% in 2009 - 2010, falling short of our target of 90%. We are currently improving this performance and working towards a new increased target of 95% for the amount of appointments made and kept.

A tenant survey in 2009 found that 69.6% of tenants were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service, a 39% increase from the last survey in 2006. We aim to build on this strong performance and continue to increase tenant satisfaction with our repairs service.

We have adopted a prudent, planned approach to repairs and maintenance of homes and communal areas, and we can demonstrate an appropriate balance between planned and responsive repairs, and value for money. Our asset management strategy sets out our approach to repairs and maintenance. Our Investment Programme is set to deliver investment of well over £300m over the first five years of transfer. Comparison of repairs and maintenance expenditure is provided within our annual report. Our asset management strategy is supported by 29 individual neighbourhood plans, allowing us to prioritise the most deprived areas within the city.

Ensuring cost effectiveness

LMH complies with the requirements on this area of the standard, but we recognise that further service improvements are required to achieve the higher standard we are aiming for. We developed new procurement arrangements in 2009, and these have enabled us to focus on performance against clear standards, to maximise appointments, to achieve a 'first time fix' for our tenants.

Responding to the needs of customers

Clear service standards are in place for both planned and responsive services, which are regularly reviewed. A repairs customer focus group meets several times a year to review these standards and the service delivered.

A consultation procedure for residents is carried out before delivery of any major work programme to ensure customers are fully involved. A review meeting is then held annually with the repairs contractors to formally review customer comments and revise service standards if appropriate.

Customer satisfaction is monitored by Volontas, an independent organisation. Telephone calls are made to tenants after responsive repairs have

been completed. Any comments from dissatisfied customers are reviewed and action is taken where appropriate. Specific customer comments are reviewed weekly so individual concerns can be addressed without delay.

As a key organisation within the local community, LMH delivers its services to a wide range of people and we ensure we have a broad understanding of the needs of different cultural groups. We are also developing new ways to deliver our services specifically to vulnerable customers, and we have introduced a new computer system to inform staff of specific customer details, such as visual or hearing impairment.

In order to ensure the repairs service appropriately considers the needs of our customers, an annual impact assessment is undertaken. This reviews the diversity data of our customer base and looks at how our service provision can be tailored to meet these needs.

We monitor our contractors using the Construction Excellence 'Respect for People' standards, to ensure the delivery of a fair service to all, and we monitor satisfaction by diversity group. Our repairs partners have an active apprenticeship programme employing local young people. They are also working to actively increase the number of female operational staff.

We have taken specific actions within our sheltered and supported services to provide residents with homes that are well maintained and comply with the Disability Discrimination Act. We have successfully completed the backlog of stair lift installations inherited at transfer.

Our tenants form a large part of the procurement group that selects appropriate framework contractors to work with LMH. Our tenants positively influenced the change of our service provider from Enterprise to Kinetics Group, with new contract arrangements starting in 2009 - 2010. Following feedback from customers, the inspection function for responsive repairs has been transferred from the contractor to LMH during 2010 - 2011, to allow more scrutiny on behalf of tenants.

Tenant communication was previously highlighted as an area of weakness and now forms a major part of our service improvement actions for 2010 - 2011. Following tenant feedback on the repairs call handling processes, the decision was taken to establish one Customer Service Centre, which we are now currently developing. This will be up and running in October 2010, with the extended opening hours of 8am to 6pm, and will give customers the necessary information at first point of contact.

Meeting statutory requirements for health and safety

LMH fully complies with all health and safety requirements of this national standard. Maintaining an effective annual gas-servicing programme is a key priority for us, and a detailed gas process has been developed in consultation with all teams. The process remains under constant review and innovations are added where appropriate to make it more effective. These include incentives for first time access, and the use of a device to interrupt the gas supply intermittently as a reminder where tenants don't respond to requests for safety appointments or do not give access.

Our Cyclical and Gas Management Team oversees gas servicing and maintenance, with litigation arrangements undertaken by partner contractors PH Jones and Kinetics Group. An assessment in March 2010 confirmed that 100% of our homes had a valid landlord gas safety record (LGSR). This is being achieved through positive active engagement by all LMH staff and customers.

This same team undertakes all other areas of health and safety compliance, including electrical testing, legionella testing, and other specific specialist maintenance.

Implementing cyclical maintenance

Following an assessment of LMH's 700 communal areas after transfer, and taking into account feedback from tenants involved in the repair and maintenance group, we made the decision to focus the cyclical maintenance expenditure on bringing these communal areas up to an acceptable and maintainable standard. This will continue until

2010 - 2011, when the bulk of this work will be completed.

LMH's business plan focuses on the implementation of a planned cyclical maintenance programme, including external decorations and maintenance of key external building components. Development of this programme is planned for 2011 - 2012, with implementation later that year, following the completion of the substantial Investment Programme currently being undertaken.

Managing vacant homes

In 2009, we reviewed the void service and subsequently a value for money review was undertaken and this has outlined specific service improvement actions to take the business forward.

Performance in the turnaround of empty homes has continued to improve over the last year, with an average re-let time of 33 days in March 2010, compared to over 43 days for the previous year. For 2009 - 2010, the average time for a vacant home to be with our repairs team before being relet was 14 days, far exceeding the target set of 21 days.

Providing aids and adaptations

LMH is a member of the Adaptations Forum, which identifies common issues in delivering an adaptations service to disabled tenants, to ensure a consistent and unified approach is taken. Our aids and adaptations service is delivered in collaboration with Liverpool City Council, who provide occupational therapy services. LMH carries out the specification of work and the management of contractors.

Emergency access to minor adaptations, such as hand rails, grab rails and lever taps, are available without the need for an assessment visit. Sheltered Scheme Managers undertake standard health and safety assessment of facilities on a daily basis.

The National Standard for Tenancy

This standard sets out the requirements we must meet for the following areas: allocations; rents; and tenure. We set out below examples of how we meet the standard and the areas where we believe we can improve.

How are we performing?

Managing allocations

As an active member of Liverpool First for Housing (LFFH), we work collaboratively with Liverpool City Council and its partners to develop and deliver the city's Housing Strategy. We champion the needs and aspirations of tenants and residents to provide choice and deliver challenging targets. We also fully participate in the council's choice-based lettings system, Property Pool.

The LMH allocations policy covers all of the requirements for dealing with under-occupation, overcrowding, mobility, and suspension. This year we have revised the allocations policy to include local lettings schemes. We are currently completing equality impact assessments on all aspects of our allocations policies and associated procedures. All of our lettings are recorded in CORE, a system that helps us to monitor performance and test ourselves against other similar providers.

Setting rents

Rents are set in accordance with the TSA directive of November 2009, and to comply with the promises we made to tenants at transfer. An internal audit of LMH's rent and cash collection found no inaccuracies and identified good practice in relation to rent setting.

To ensure compliance during 2009 - 2010, LMH put in place a rent setting policy detailing how new rents should be calculated in line with government guidelines. All tenants have been sent a letter informing them of the annual rent increase for 2010 - 2011 and explaining how this increase has been calculated.

Tenants receive quarterly rent statements, which provide a breakdown of the amount paid and any housing benefit claimed. As part of our risk management arrangements, an analysis of compliance with the rent standard is undertaken with any risks identified going to the LMH Board and other financial stakeholders.

Tenants of sheltered accommodation receive a breakdown regarding their service charges. The policy and procedures covering service charges were recently reviewed and improvements will be implemented in 2010 - 2011.

Leaseholders receive an annual bill containing charges for services provided. This also provides information about the sinking fund contribution, buildings insurance, management fee, ground rent and other day-to-day services such as electricity.

Tenancy management

We have clear and accessible policies developed with our tenants covering all the requirements on tenancy management. LMH tenancy agreements clearly set out the rights and obligations of tenants and landlords. New tenants are informed of their obligations through a comprehensive sign-up procedure and through post-tenancy visits. A range of specific service leaflets are available on the LMH website and in office reception areas.

We are not complacent and have used customer feedback to make improvements each year since we have been in operation. All of the policies covering tenure are reviewed on an annual rolling programme with our tenants.

The National Standard for Neighbourhood and Community

This standard sets out the requirements we must meet for the following areas: neighbourhood management; local area co-operation; and anti-social behaviour. We set out below examples of how we meet the standard and the areas where we believe we can improve.

How are we performing?

Managing neighbourhoods

In consultation with tenants, we have developed 29 neighbourhood plans designed to improve the sustainability of individual neighbourhoods, by maximising the level of internal and external resources and services available in those neighbourhoods. Using a sustainability index (which collates data such as unemployment, crime levels, numbers of benefit claimants, household income, demand for property, empty properties etc) we have classified each neighbourhood as bronze (potential), silver (aspiring), or gold (performing). We aim, through tailored interventions agreed with tenants, to close the gap between bronze and silver neighbourhoods, and to maintain the performance and improvement of gold neighbourhoods. We have published and made available the neighbourhood plans to all of our tenants and partners.

LMH's five-year improvement programme has been developed through tenant consultation and involvement. Tenants have made informed decisions on contractors, suppliers and materials, and have identified the programme priority in each area to address specific neighbourhoods in most urgent need. This approach has delivered a major benefit in terms of improvements being made in areas of greatest priority.

We work closely with our tenants and partners to improve our neighbourhoods and together we have achieved some great successes this year, many of which have been acknowledged by the awards we have received.

One example we are particularly proud of is the award-winning Community Payback Scheme, which has been delivered in partnership with the Westminster Estate Tenant and Resident Association, the Community Justice Centre, Merseyside Probation Service, the police and other members of Citysafe. This innovative project, which sees offenders working full-time in the community, won the 2010 Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Connecting People Award. This work has resulted in a 50% reduction in the number of reports of anti-social behaviour in North Liverpool, compared to the three months before.

Another recent initiative is the roll out of the Good Neighbour Agreements (GNAs), which are voluntary agreements setting out acceptable standards of behaviour agreed by the local residents. LMH has fulfilled the role of being a Home Office GNA Pathfinder, demonstrating our commitment to leading the way in neighbourhood improvement.

We have also developed and implemented local letting policies with local tenants in two areas suffering from anti-social behaviour. These have been set up to address the particularly entrenched decline in these neighbourhoods.

All these projects, along with the physical improvements, have resulted in marked improvements in the environmental and social aspects of the neighbourhoods. There has been a decrease in empty properties and more demand from applicants from Property Pool, who now see the areas as attractive places to live. We now plan to roll out these interventions across the city.

Working in partnership

LMH has housing in 29 of Liverpool's 30 wards, so our presence and potential impact across the city is significant. As the housing provider with most stock, we play a major role in developing multi-agency partnerships that work for the benefit of our tenants and help address the wider issues that impact on their quality of life, such as provision of youth services, access to training, education and employment, dealing with health inequalities, environmental quality, tackling anti-social behaviour and fear of crime.

Within our five housing management areas, we work closely with Liverpool City Council's own neighbourhood teams and the Neighbourhood Partnership Working Groups. We participate in a range of steering groups such as the Homelessness Steering Group and provide Family Intervention Tenancies. We have also been working directly with the council's Supporting People Team, so that later this year we can bring back into use four supported accommodation units for up to 40 vulnerable single people.

Tackling anti-social behaviour

Our published anti-social behaviour statement of intent was developed with a customer focus group and is tenant approved. This statement identifies the definitions of anti-social behaviour, the purpose of the policy, the service standards, and how we will implement the policy working with partners.

For new tenants, the rights and responsibilities in relation to anti-social behaviour are identified within the tenancy agreement, through the sign up process and at the interview. This is further reinforced through the website, newsletters, leaflets, customer forums and exhibitions, as well as within citywide residents' meetings such as 'Your Community Matters' events.

LMH also endeavours to use local media to publicise actions against perpetrators of anti-social behaviour, to boost confidence in the community and encourage increased numbers of customers to report incidents. Strong and longstanding partnerships are in place to facilitate a multi-agency approach to tackling anti-social behaviour, and LMH plays an integral part alongside other 'Citysafe' partners.

We demonstrate strong leadership, commitment, and accountability in tackling anti-social behaviour, and it is a key issue that cuts across our corporate and operational plans. We have a dedicated team of Safer Estate Officers and we have budgets in place to deliver prevention, early intervention, diversionary activity, and enforcement measures.

These tailored preventative measures and early intervention initiatives are further supported by customer involvement and neighbourhood budgets. This enables targeted interventions to improve community safety and minimise inequalities in environmental and other social issues, as identified within our neighbourhood plans.

We have invested in a specialist anti-social behaviour management system (ReACT), which enables us to accurately record data on case reports and react swiftly with intervention where appropriate. We use a broad range of anti-social behaviour actions including evictions, anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), injunctions, and family intervention tenancies (FITS) where appropriate.

We have a dedicated out of hours anti-social behaviour reporting service, providing a '24/7' service to tenants via the telephone or the website. ReACT enables us to record and monitor all stages of this process. Additionally, our knowledge map system 'ASK' (Advice, Support, and Knowledge), is available to all staff and enhances the signposting process throughout the organisation.

An action plan is agreed with the individual reporting anti-social behaviour as part of the case interview process. This action plan identifies the responsibilities of LMH and the complainant, as well as identifying witness support needs. If witness and perpetrator support is required, it is provided by LMH's Safer Estates Team and partner organisations. We accompany all witnesses to court and our personal approach helps to promote confidence in our services.

Our 2009 - 2010 survey has found that 91.4% of anti-social behaviour cases are responded to within five days, with an average direct cost of £584.40 per case.

The National Standard for Value for Money

This standard sets out the requirements we must meet for the following areas: securing and testing value for money; plans and priorities for further value for money improvements; how expenditure has been prioritised in relation to each of the standards; and meeting other needs such as investment in new social housing provision. We set out below examples of how we meet the standard and the areas where we believe we can improve.

How are we performing?

Securing and testing value for money

Robust performance management monitoring and review, has shown that we have achieved a stepped improvement in our performance. For example, rent collection increased from 98.9% in 2008 - 2009, to 100% this year, and the re-let rate for void properties decreased from 43 days in 2008 - 2009, to 33 days in 2009 - 2010.

Despite a reduction in rental income, due to the negative Retail Price Index in September 2009, we have been able to avoid a reduction in service levels or planned property works, by offsetting savings through revised staff terms and conditions.

As part of our value for money testing, we carried out a cost appraisal of our service promotional materials. This has led to the recruitment of our own in-house graphic designer, generating savings of £40,000 per annum. This saving will be used to part-finance LMH's proposed Customer Services Centre, in 2010 - 2011.

Our business plan includes provision to deliver the transfer offer document promises; in particular the building works improvements, for which a new stock condition survey was commissioned in 2009.

Favourable budget variances identified in 2009 -2010, have enabled an additional £0.5 million to be earmarked for investment in disabled adaptations works, after consideration of tenant requirements identified through the disabled

adaptations waiting list.

In terms of prioritising expenditure, £100,000 has been included in the 2010 - 2011 budget to support the delivery of the neighbourhood plans, which have been developed following significant consultation with local tenants. This investment will also be financed through favourable budget variances.

Plans for improvement to fully comply with the requirements include:

- Carrying out our business planning review procedure, in consultation with tenants on their priorities
- Delivering our customer feedback strategy, to enhance customer influence on services delivered by LMH
- Implementing our 2010 - 2011 value for money plan, which includes SMART targets
- Recording and evidencing the delivery of all our value for money service operations
- Reporting to tenants on actual value for money services delivered

Responding to feedback from service users

Via the Income Collection Value for Money Review conducted in 2009/10, tenants informed LMH that they required increased flexibility in the availability of direct debit rent payment dates. In response, the direct debit payment dates have been increased from 2 payment dates to any date with a variety of options on payment frequency, supporting the increased sign-up of approximately 150 tenants to the direct debit rental payment method.

We also ensure we have arrangements in place for tenants to influence services where there is a service charge. Comprehensive service charge and procurement procedures were developed in 2009 - 2010. These procedures require LMH staff to provide tenants with easy to understand information about their service charge costs, and also to fully involve tenants in the selection of services for which they will be charged.

The National Standard for Governance and Financial Viability

This standard sets out the requirements we must meet for the following areas: having a code of governance with clear roles and responsibilities for board members and senior staff; checking these roles and responsibilities annually to see that they are fit for purpose; and submitting an annual return. We set out below more information about the code of governance, how we have ensured there are clear roles that are checked regularly, examples of how we meet the standard, and the areas where we believe we can improve.

How are we performing?

Establishing a code of governance

We have carried out an assessment against the National Housing Federation's Excellence in Governance Code and have decided to adopt this, as it is approved by the TSA and meets our needs. The code provides a framework for the LMH Board based on the principles of setting high standards, being open and accountable, taking account of equality and diversity, and putting customers first. We are satisfied that we fully comply with this requirement and our assessment found no gaps or weaknesses.

Defining clear roles and responsibilities

We have developed a quality assurance framework for the LMH Board to ensure that all members are competent in their roles. This framework begins with recruitment and appointment processes, ensuring that board members have sufficient skills to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively. Board vacancies filled in 2009 addressed diversity gaps in membership.

A structured induction programme has been developed to provide sufficient guidance to new board members to help them to understand their role and responsibilities together with the organisation's objectives and operations.

A comprehensive Code of Conduct for board members has been developed, which fully sets out the responsibilities of board members and the standards of behaviour expected. We have also

agreed a comprehensive scheme of delegation, which sets out the responsibilities of those with authority to commit or make payments, and defines the limits of their financial authority.

Demonstrating continuous improvement

All our board members are subject to an appraisal process that feeds into a training and improvement plan. This addresses individual skill gaps and ensures their effectiveness as a group. This plan makes a positive contribution to the personal development of members and to the LMH Board as a whole. Our next board member appraisal will be carried out by the independent consultancy Campbell Tickell, in the first quarter of 2010 - 2011.

Maintaining financial viability

This part of the standard requires us to have effective controls and procedures in place, manage risk and have a business planning and control framework. There is also a requirement to provide financial information to the TSA, which we have done.

In terms of implementing effective controls and managing risk, we have many mechanisms in place to ensure we comply with all requirements. We operate a scheme of delegation, laid down by our standing orders and financial regulations, which sets out the responsibilities of those with authority to commit or make payments, and defines the limits of their financial authority.

Our annual internal control assurance report has identified no significant material control weaknesses, and this view has been supported by both internal and external audit reports. Our asset management operations and controls are subject to regular audit. Monthly and quarterly progress reports against agreed plans and meeting targets are also reported to the LMH Leadership Team and Board

Financial reviews, which forecast progress in meeting budget and financial covenant targets, are reported to LMH's Leadership team and Board regularly and are included within our risk register, which is reported to Audit and Risk Committee. The risk register identifies future planned risk control actions, to reduce the assessed risk associated with the business area.

When it comes to carrying out business planning, our systems and activities demonstrate how we comply with all requirements. Our 30-year financial plan has been formulated after full consideration of previous financial performance and with the involvement of LMH's Leadership Team. We have a £195 million facility agreement in place with lenders, which is in excess of LMH's forecast peak debt of £186.5 million. Our annual update of the 30-year financial plan identifies peak debt and repayment periods and ensures these are within LMH's facility agreement. We also have annual forward loan drawdown forecasts, ensuring that loan requirements are consistent with the business plan, budget, and within the asset cover covenant.

Our annual business plan is regularly reviewed and this includes an internal and external environmental analysis, a risk and sensitivity analysis of the financial plan assumptions, and a comprehensive covenant analysis reported to LMH's Leadership Team on a monthly basis.

Translation, braille, audio tape and large print available on request.

Call LMH on 0151 235 2328.

Na życzenie można uzyskać tłumaczenie lub informacje w innej formie, prosimy w tym celu zadzwonić na numer 0151 235 2328. (Polish)

Vertimus ir kitus formatus galima gauti pareikalavus. Skambinkite telefonu 0151 235 2328. (Lithuanian)

Turjumaad qoraal ah iyo qaab-qoraalo kale ayaa la heli karaa haddii la codsado, fadlan wac 0151 235 2328. (Somali)

Están disponibles a petición traducciones y otros formatos. Favor llamar al 0151 235 2328. (Spanish)

可以根據你的要求提供翻譯文本和其他版式的文本，請致電 0151 235 2328. (Chinese)

درخواست کرنے پر تراجم اور دیگر اشکال مہیا کئے جاسکتے ہیں، برائے کرم پرفون کریں۔ 0151 235 2328. (Urdu)

অনুরোধ করলে অনুবাদ এবং অন্যান্য ছাঁদ পাওয়া যাবে। অনুগ্রহ করে নম্বরে ফোন করুন 0151 235 2328. (Bengali)

अनुवाद और अन्य रूपविधान पूछने पर उपलब्ध हैं कृपया पर सम्पर्क कीजिये 0151 235 2328. (Hindi)

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