

DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL

2021/22

ANNUAL REPORT TO TENANTS



DOVER
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

HOUSING
SERVICES

Welcome

Welcome to our 21/22 Annual report to Tenants and Leaseholders. This report provides a snapshot of our performance between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022. Although we have continued to operate against the challenging backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic we are looking forward to the future with a renewed sense of optimism.

The housing service has been busy working to return services for you to the standards expected before the pandemic and to improve them. Rapid advances in new technology have meant that we are becoming increasingly able to deal with you, our customers, in a much wider

range of ways and we want to harness this change to make sure our services are delivered more effectively.

As more details emerge of the changes proposed for social housing in the Governments Social Housing White Paper we are making sure that we will be

ready for these. With your help we want to make sure that the right services are delivered for all our tenants and in particular those who need them most.

We would like to extend a special thank you to the members of the Dover District Tenant Group and all tenants and leaseholders who give up their time, experience, and expertise, voluntarily to work with us. We hope you enjoy reading the report and that, like us, you are excited about the way our housing services are going to develop over the coming year.



Nadeem Aziz
Chief Executive



Cllr Derek Murphy
Housing Portfolio Holder

Rents and value for money

We set our rents using a government formula. This creates a 'formula rent' for each property, which is calculated based on the relative value of the property, the size of the property and relative local income levels. Affordable rent is no more than 80 per cent of the local market rent (including service charges, where applicable).

Our income team and benefit and money advisors have been working hard to help residents keep on top of their rent payments and bring down rent arrears across the board. We have increased collectable rent by £360,006, have lowered rent arrears from 3.79% to 2.13% and more than doubled the amount of people we have helped through our benefit and money advisors, from 281 to 595, an increase of 314.

Amidst an emerging cost-of-living crisis, our tenants were strongly

supported to utilise the benefits and access money entitled to them through support grants and other entitlements.

We are working closely with other agencies to gain better support for our tenants such as the DWP partnership manager and other local offices, Kent County Council's social services and Civica. This helps to improve accuracy on benefit accounts and ensure tenants are well supported.

How are we doing?



Our 2 Benefit and Money Advisors have helped **595** households.



£20,087,343 in collectable rent.

2.13% of rent is in arrears, compared to 3.79% last year.

The Homes Standard

This standard covers the way in which we maintain and improve Council homes and to meet it we must show that we have a cost effective repairs and maintenance service where most repair issues are resolved at the first attempt. We must also comply with all appropriate health and safety standards to keep homes safe for you to live in and invest in improvements to them including, where needed offering tenants disabled adaptations.

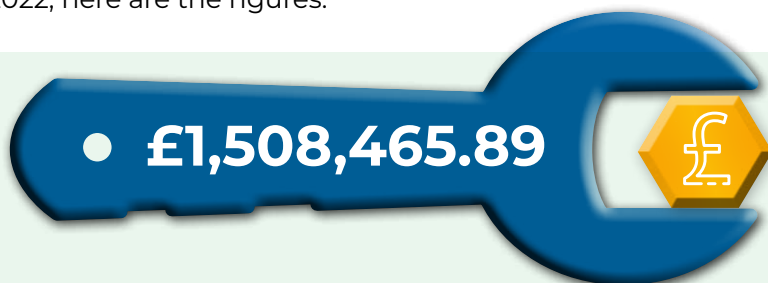
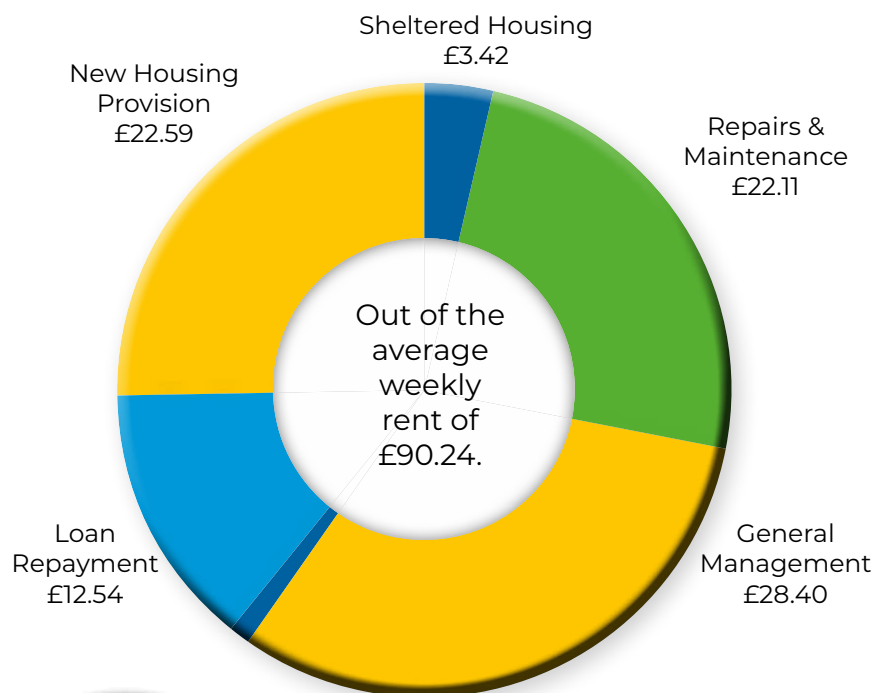
Repairs and maintenance

Our repairs service is carried out in partnership with our contractors.

This last year has seen a nationwide shortage of labour and materials, we are working hard with our contractors to overcome barriers and have made changes to entice workers and bring in the materials we need to get the work completed, however our figures reflect these struggles.

We have a landlord's duty to carry out certain repairs and maintenance works in order to keep our properties in a safe condition and good working order. A huge number of repairs and improvements were carried out between April 2021 and March 2022, here are the figures:

How we spend your rent



Total spend on repairs in the year



11032

Number of repairs completed on time



11684

Number of routine repairs completed in the year



98.02

% of appointments kept



34.62

Average number of days taken to complete routine repairs

What have we been doing in the last year?

64

Kitchens replaced

108

Bathrooms replaced

148

Homes had windows replaced

68

Number of front or back doors replaced

18 houses and **5** blocks totalling **45** flats roofs replaced

£382,000 spent on disabled adaptations, of which

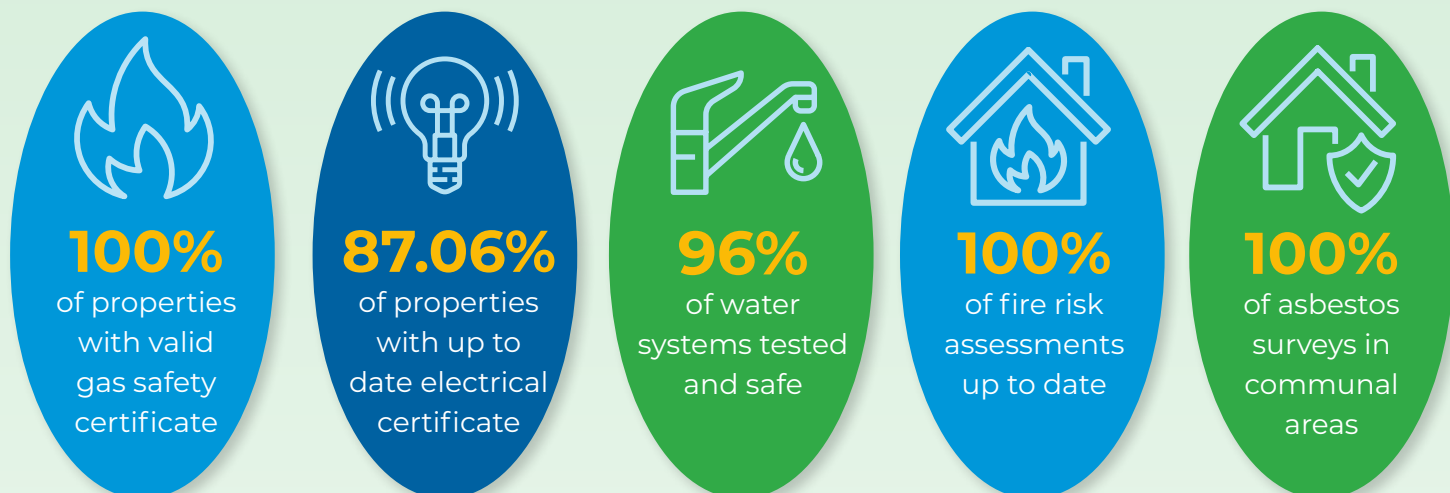
63 involved major works including 30 flush floor showers, 4 over bath showers, 1 through floor lift and various other works including ramps, internal alterations etc. 16

stairlifts were installed and there were 173 minor works installations involving grab rails, minor paving and access works etc.

£3,965,000

spent on planned work in total.

Health & Safety



Disabled adaptations

Dover District Council offer a disabled adaptations service for our tenants and wherever possible we will try to make adjustments to the home that mean that our tenant can remain living there and enjoy a better quality of life.

Our Adaptations Surveyor works closely with Occupational Therapists and Kent County Council to ensure all work undertaken is of benefit to the

tenant and we endeavour to complete adaptations to make an improvement to lives and provide a better quality of living to some of our most vulnerable residents.



Type of work	Numbers completed
Major adaptations (total)	30
Over bath showers	4
Stairlift	16
Through Floor Lift	1
Other major adaptations	12
Minor works and installations (total) Including grab rails, paving, access works etc.	173

What we want to do in the coming year

- The high number of tenants not at home for repairs appointments is a concern to us because the work is delayed. We want to work with tenants to find ways as to how we can resolve this issue.
- Our response to the climate emergency will continue to be a priority for us and we will be drafting a strategy on how best to make our housing stock more energy efficient. We will look for government funding opportunities to contribute towards the cost of making our housing stock green. We will embark on a small pilot project to retrofit external insulation and other energy efficient initiatives to some council properties.
- Create an energy advice area on our website to help reduce effect on energy price rises for customers.

The Tenancy Standard



This standard covers the work that we do to make sure that empty homes are allocated in a fair, transparent and efficient way, that tenants have access to an online mutual exchange system that helps them find other households with which to exchange, that we relet empty homes as quickly and efficiently as possible and that we have policies in place and tenancy types that help us make the best use of our housing stock.

Allocations and lettings

Our Housing Allocations Policy sets out the criteria you need to meet to qualify to join the council's housing register, the reasons why people may not be able to join and who we will prioritise for re-housing. We regularly review our allocations policy to make sure it helps those

in greatest need and that all applicants are fairly dealt with. Empty homes are advertised through a choice-based lettings scheme called HomeChoice. It allows you to bid for the properties you want so that you can make choices about where you want to live.

The Council receives many enquiries from people looking to rent a home in the district each year. At 31 March 2022 there were 1773 applications on our housing register and the average time they waited for properties is set out below.

Type / Size	No. of Lets	Shortest wait	Longest wait	Average wait
Sheltered accommodation.	57	12 days	28 years	26 months
Studio general needs	1	13 months	13 months	13 months
1-bed general needs	106	12 days	10 years	13 months
2-bed flat or maisonette	94	4 weeks	5 years	13 months
2-bed house	57	4 weeks	5 years	17 months
3-bed flat or maisonette	4	7 months	34 months	19 months
3-bed house	49	5 weeks	5 years	20 months
4-bed	1	5 years	5 years	5 years

Mutual exchange

A Mutual Exchange is a way that tenants can move home by 'swapping' their property with someone else. Approved exchanges can take place between tenants with council houses or housing association properties anywhere across the UK. Dover District Council is a

member of HomeSwapper and this provides a popular way for our customers to find a suitable exchange. The site allows customers to add photos and a description of their property and to see what other properties are available. More information about HomeSwapper can be found at:

www.homeswapper.co.uk. To sign up, just select Dover District Council as your landlord and complete the easy to follow steps.

Between 01 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 we helped 37 households exchange homes.

Reletting empty homes

As soon as we know a property is going to become empty we start to plan the reletting of it. Our team advertise the accommodation so that housing applicants can decide whether to bid or not for it and our property services team organise the work to get the property ready.

Last year, due to restrictions introduced as a result of the

Covid pandemic, this affected the time that it takes to get properties ready and a shortage of building materials added to those problems. The time it took to relet properties was 41.91 days, this has now improved to 31.97 days. It is not the relet time that we would like, however there are many supply issues, staffing issues and other hang overs from

the pandemic which has caused unavoidable delays. In 2021-22, we relet 330 properties, which was 226 standard tenants and 104 temporary tenancy lets. This is an increase from 90 homes let between October 2020 and March 2021.

Tenancy types and increasing

Our tenancy conditions set out clearly both your responsibilities and ours as landlord. We also have a dedicated area of the Council's website specifically for tenants and leaseholders and use this to provide useful information about your tenancy.

In July 2021 Dover District Councils Cabinet accepted recommendations that the Council stop the use of flexible fixed term tenants for those living in Council owned accommodation. Since September 2021 we have been offering all new tenants an introductory tenancy for the first twelve months of their tenancy followed by a lifetime secure tenancy. We have also been working with all tenants who have flexible tenancies to move them across from their fixed term tenancy to a lifetime tenancy. Lifetime tenancies have no automatic end but can still be brought to an end by the tenant giving notice or the Council taking possession action where



there has been a serious breach of the tenancy conditions.

- We built or purchased 65 new build properties, these included:

- 32 properties at affordable rent (4 of which were for Temporary accommodation)
- 4 properties at social rent (all Temporary Accommodation)
- 29 properties at shared ownership.
- We purchased 8 properties which were 'buy backs' and/or open market purchases. These properties are on our estates or very near our existing properties to streamline housing and estate management.



Tenancy Fraud

We are committed to tackling tenancy fraud. We have a contract with Ashford Borough Council to

investigate suspected fraud and have referred 5 cases to them this year. We keep our website

updated with information and appeal for reports to be made via our dedicated online form.

Case study

Neighbour reported ongoing DA at property but named a female different to our tenant. Benefits, council tax and police checks confirmed the neighbours accounts that tenant does not live there anymore. The tenant had allowed another person to

live there. This was referred to Ashford Borough Council for further investigation. Ashford established that the tenant had changed her address and the recommended next step was interview under caution. The Tenant quickly terminated

the property once she was confronted with this information and the property was returned to DDC to allocate to someone on the Housing Register.

How did we do?

Local offers for last year	How we've done
Encourage more tenants to make use of the hometracker app in HomeSwapper so that we can complete the process in a more secure online account	We have had a great deal of success with this and all of our mutual exchange requests are now conducted in this system.
Redraft our tenancy strategy and policy Continue with our programme to deliver more affordable housing in the district	A new tenancy strategy and tenancy management policy were approved and adopted by the Council in September 2021 recommending that the Council stop using fixed term tenancies. We are busy moving those households who have this type of tenancy across to a more secure lifetime tenancy
Continue to buy back ex-council homes when they become available for sale to increase our stock numbers in 2021/2022	We purchased 8 ex council homes to add to our stock and were given a grant from the Government to purchase 5 of these to house 6 rough sleepers. This project has been a big success and 6 people who had previously been living on the streets are now managing their tenancies well.
Work with colleagues in other authorities to promote, detect and deal with any cases of tenancy fraud	We have a contract in place now with Ashford Borough Council that allows us to refer cases where we suspect tenancy fraud for investigation. In 2021-22 we referred 5 cases for investigation by Ashford Borough Council.
Improve the time that it takes on average to relet our empty homes.	It proved more difficult than we had expected to meet this offer because of further lockdowns caused by Covid and a national shortage of tradesmen and building materials. However, we have managed to clear the back log of voids causes by these things and will be working hard to reduce our void turnaround times this coming year.

What we want to do in the coming year

- To maximise the number of council homes available for letting to address the increasing housing demand. To achieve this a dedicated voids improvement group has been established, prioritising properties that require minimal work and also diverting resources from other areas to tackle the backlog that built up during the lockdown periods
- Review our processes for new tenants to make sure we know about any support needs before they move in and that all new tenants have a full understanding of their rights and responsibilities.
- We will make every effort to visit at least 85% of new tenants within 6 weeks of their tenancy starting and help them organise any support they might need to manage their tenancy.

Neighbourhood and Communities Standard

This standard covers the arrangements we have in place to make sure your neighbourhoods and the communal areas of estates are kept safe and clean, the arrangements we will make to work in partnership with other agencies and the work that we will do to deal with nuisance and anti-social behaviour.

Neighbourhood management

We have a team of officers who deal with housing management including 2 estate assistants

who visit all blocks of flats and inspect communal areas. We also work closely with the fire service,

contractors and other agencies to make sure that our estates are kept clean and tidy.



Tackling ASB

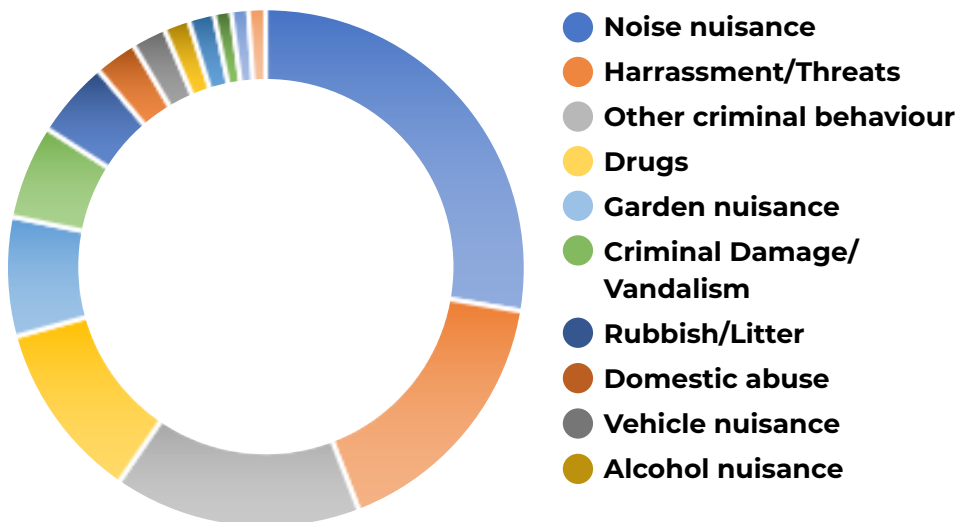
DDC take reports of ASB seriously and try to resolve issues of ASB as soon as possible. Once a report of ASB has been received the ASB Housing Officer will contact the complainant to gather as much information as possible and liaise with the police where they have also been involved.

Those affected by ASB can report this using our online ASB form or contact us through any of our other contact arrangements. Following all reports our ASB Officer will make contact with the alleged perpetrator to discuss the allegations made along with any information provided by the police or other agencies. In some cases, the perpetrator may need support to be put in place to address their behaviour and to be able to maintain their tenancy. However, if the nuisance behaviour continues despite

support being provided by the correct agency, then there are a range of options that DDC can take, providing there is sufficient evidence of the noise or nuisance behaviour.

**Between 01 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 we have:
Dealt with 188 cases of reported ASB.**

Here is the distribution of types of cases:



How did we do?

Local offers for last year	How we've done
Develop and publish a neighbourhood management policy	A new neighbourhood management policy was approved by Cabinet in June 2022.
Launch the use of a 'noise app' that will allow tenants to download the app and record incidents of noise nuisance in cases where we are managing ASB rather than wait for us to install sound recording equipment.	We are currently trialling the use of this app and if it works well for us will start using it across the district in the coming year.
Make better use of the small number of mobile CCTV cameras that we have to collect evidence of ASB and consider the possibility of a 'loan a cam' scheme so that a larger number of our customers have access to this equipment	We have been working closely with our colleagues in the community safety team and have access to mobile cameras to deploy in hot spots when we need them.
Continue to work with local registered providers of social housing to encourage the development of affordable social housing in the district.	We continue to work with other social housing developers in the Dover District as well as develop our own stock. Full numbers will be counted for the annual report.

What we want to do in the coming year

- Use Community protection warnings and notices to help us deal robustly with estate based issues that are causing dissatisfaction in our communities.
- Introduce a mechanism for grading the communal areas of our estates to help us determine where we need to make improvements.
- Publish more information about our estate service standards and whether or not we are meeting them.

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

To meet this standard landlords need to demonstrate how they encourage tenants to be involved with monitoring performance and improvement of the housing service, the types of activity that they offer to encourage tenants to be involved, the information they provide to tenants and the way in which they respond to the needs of their tenants. They must demonstrate how tenants can get in touch with the landlord and what they do when things go wrong and complaints are made.

Measuring performance

We try to find a range of ways in which we can let you know how we are doing. This report is one of those ways but others include

- Sending you a tenant newsletter twice a year with information in about our performance
- Keeping our web site up to date with information about our performance
- Answering your specific enquiries when you contact us

Ways to get involved

Ways you can be involved at the moment:

- Take part in our surveys - We send surveys by post, text, email or telephone so we can find out what you think of our services.
- Comment on our policies, we list them on our 'Have your say' page on our website.
- Join the Dover District Tenants Group – a group of DDC tenants who work with housing officers to help improve the services we offer
- Sign up to our 'Keep me Posted' scheme – a messaging service that keeps you up to date with local housing news.
- Join one of our estate walkabouts – dates are published on our website and you are encouraged to come out and join our team as they look around the estate. Their visit is intended to check conditions but the team are also keen to hear about your ideas to improve the estate.
- Join a focus group or Housing Performance Scrutiny Group

Finding out what tenants need

We try to find out what our tenants want and need in a variety of ways this includes

- Implementing a programme of transactional surveys to help us understand what our tenants and leaseholders think about services they have just received. We're introducing surveys for lettings and anti-social behaviour.
- We support the Dover District Tenant Group – a group of tenants who meet regularly with officers from the housing service to look at our performance, help prioritize environmental improvement work, give us feedback on any of our draft policies and generally make sure that the voices of our tenants are heard.
- Day to day contact we have with our tenants and leaseholders
- By looking at the complaints that we get and trying to learn from any mistakes we make.
- We have put together a consultation plan and toolkit to ensure that major works and changes in service are consulted on with residents prior to decisions being made.

Customer information and contacting us

There are a range of ways in which you can get in touch with us:



By letter - Write to us at Housing Landlord Services, White Cliffs Business Park, Whitfield, Dover, CT16 3PJ



By telephone - Call us on 01304 801084 about Housing Management enquires only. Lines are open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays). This line can also be used for out of hours emergencies.



By email - For tenancy matters email housing@dover.gov.uk If you've already reported your repair and want to speak to someone in DDC's repair team email housing.repairs@dover.gov.uk



In person – We are happy to meet you face to face, however please ensure that you book appointments in advance at your home or at the Council offices. If you turn up unexpectedly at the Council Offices, staff will be unable to see you as they are often busy,

out and about on visits or are working from home.

Information about our services is published on the Dover District Council website and through our tenant newsletters sent to all tenants every 6 months. We encourage out tenants and leaseholders to sign up to the housing specific 'keep me posted' message service so that they can receive our housing updates. You can subscribe to this service through our website.

In some cases you may wish to speak to or contact your local elected Councillor and their full details are published on our website.

It has been a very difficult year for us all and our team have needed to work from home for some of the time and find news ways for you to contact us. Here's what we have been doing to help with that.



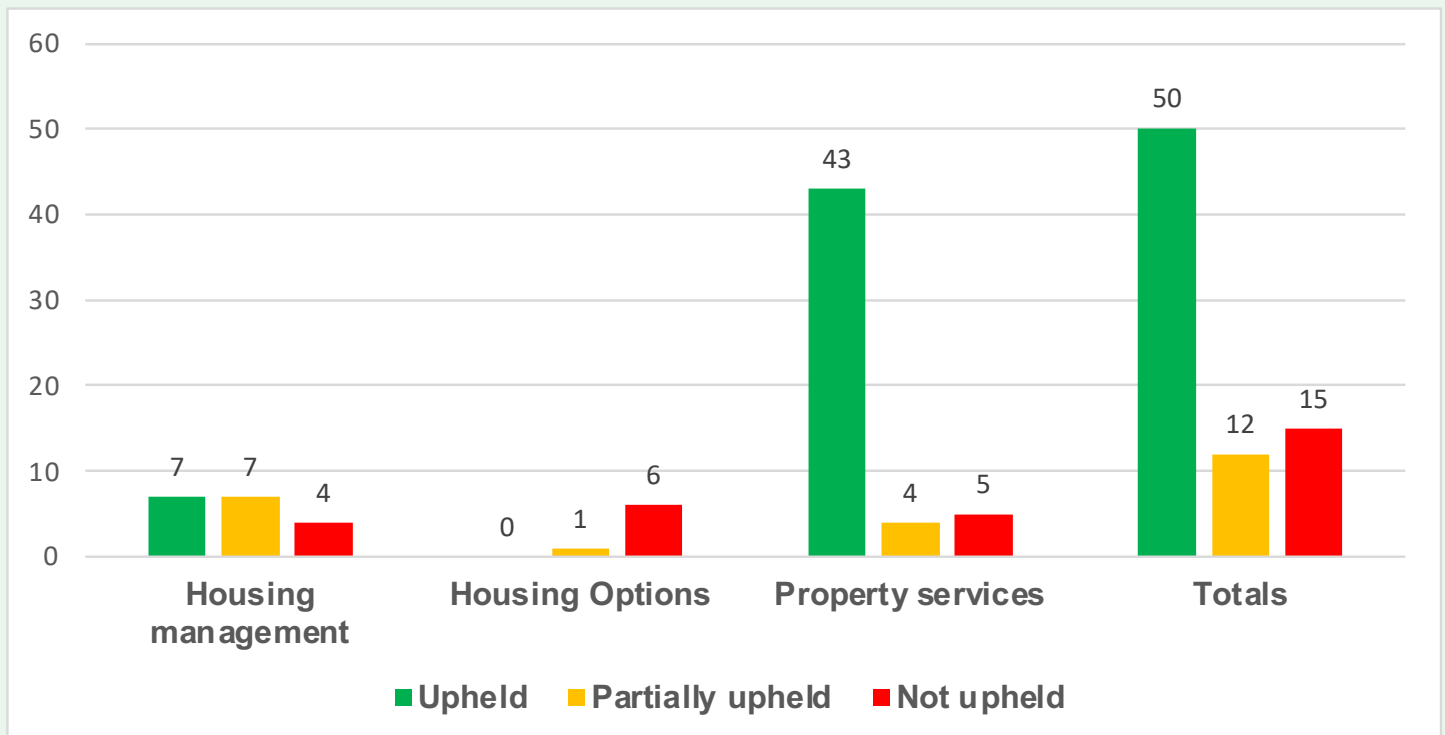
When things go wrong

We try to provide a right first time service to our tenants and leaseholders but we know that we don't always get things right and that sometimes our customers need to complain. To make sure we deal with the things that go wrong quickly and fairly we have a 2 stage complaints process. Find our Feedback form in the 'Housing For Tenants' section of our website.

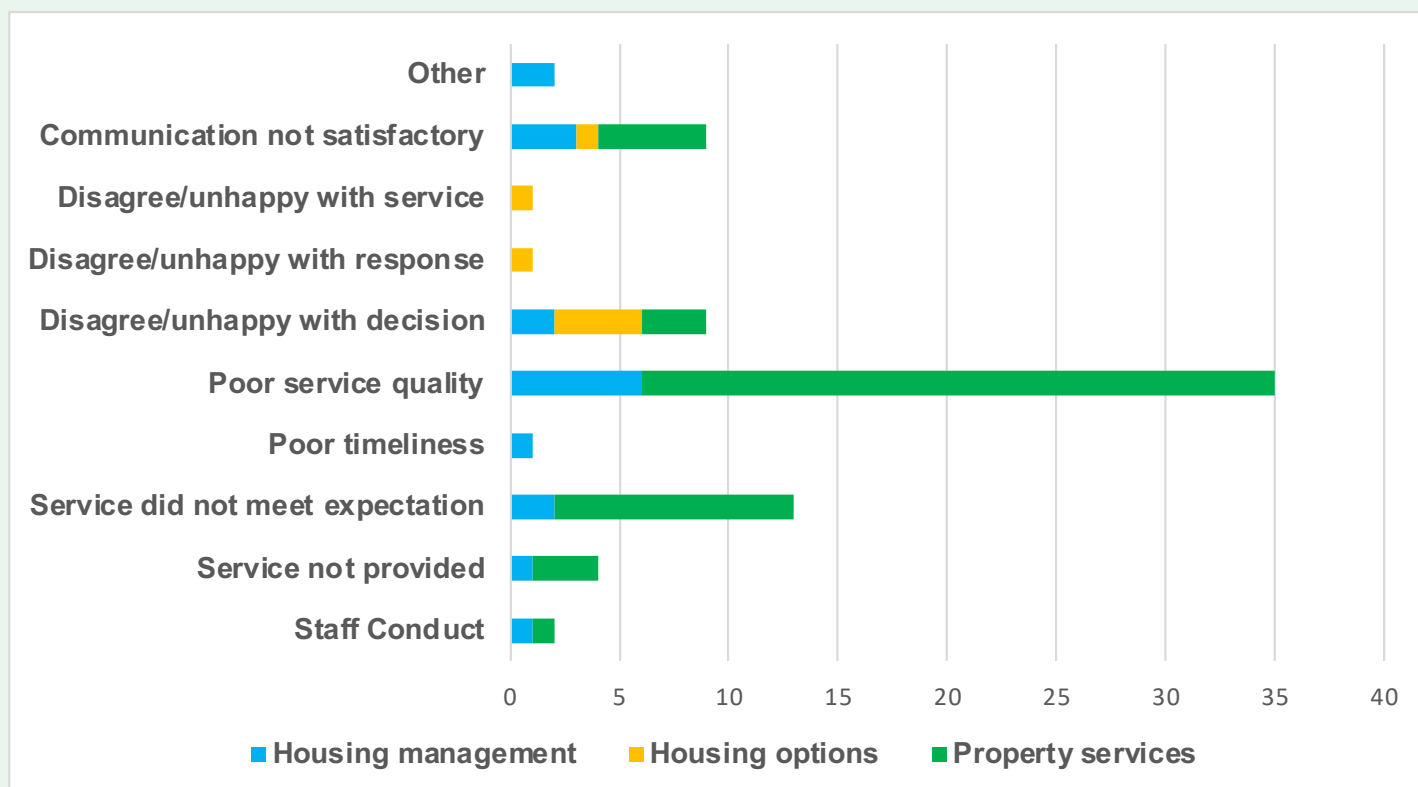
We have assessed ourselves against the Ombudsman's guidelines and published this on our website's complaints page.

We work closely with the Housing Ombudsman to deal with complaints and promote the service on our website and in our Tenant Newsletter.

Complaint Outcome by service:



Complaint cause by service area:



How we've done

Current local offers for last year	How we've done
We think there is still more we can do to encourage tenants to share their views with us and this year we will be rewriting our tenant engagement strategy to include more options for customers to be involved.	We have been working with tenants and leaseholders to come up with more ways that you can be involved with the housing service if you want to be. You can find out more details about this online and in our summer tenant newsletter.
We will be publishing more information about our performance on the website so that tenants and leaseholders can see how we are doing.	We have created a suite of performance pages which link to DDTG and provide information about how DDC use performance.
We recognise that when things go wrong we need to learn from this and we aim to do this by analysing complaints and adjusting our behaviour and processes. We will publish more information about complaints and what we will be doing differently	We have published our self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's standard on our website and details of how we are doing managing complaints. We also provide examples on the web site of changes we have made to make sure that whenever we receive a complaint, we consider whether there is anything we would have done differently and learn from it.
We will be supporting the Dover District Tenant Group recruit new members	In the last year we have had 2 new members join the group and 1 returning member who had a sabbatical during online meetings.

What we want to do in the coming year

- We always try to answer queries at the first point of contact, but when this is not possible, we will let you know who will be dealing with the query and make sure that we provide updates until the query is resolved.
- We will prepare for the anticipated changes announced in the Government White Paper 'The Charter for Social Housing Tenants' by
- Improving our customer engagement and scrutiny arrangements
 - Doing more testing of your satisfaction with our services
- at the point at which you use them.

We will be starting to compare our performance against other against other housing landlords and if they are suitable using some of the good ideas they come up with to improve our own services.
- Improve our communication with you by developing a joint editorial team with tenants so that they can help us write our newsletter, check that our forms and letters are easy to follow and that our information on the website is useful and interactive.
- Check that the information we hold on you and your needs is up to date so that we can improve how we communicate with you and provide services to meet your needs.
- Build a self service section of our housing IT system so that you can create an account and log in to look things up and report things to us.
- Prepare the sheltered housing service and our telecare provision for the transition from analogue telephones to digital.

Independent Living

Dover District Council have a number of Sheltered Housing schemes, available for the over 55s.

Sheltered housing schemes are purpose-built accommodation designed to make your home and life easier to manage as you get older. All accommodation (which can range from bungalows, flats to studios) have their own front door and front door key. All tenants have their own private

facilities including living area, bedroom, bathroom and kitchen.

Some schemes include communal facilities such as a laundry room, kitchen and communal lounge where tenants can meet friends and neighbours.

There is no personal care component to Sheltered Housing, this has to be implemented separately if required.

We have 5 Independent Living Managers who look after the Independent Living.

Accommodation which is spread across the district:

Dover

- Tower Hamlets and Dover Town
- Harold Street
- Goschen Road
- Douglas Road
- Lowther Road
- Noahs Ark Road
- Wellington Gardens
- Sunny Corner

Sandwich

- Barnesende Court
- Hazelwood Meadow

- St Bart's Road
- Laburnum Avenue
- Burch Avenue

Deal

- Norman Tailyour House
- Lambert House Villages
- Reece Adams House and Cauldham Close, Capel-Le-Ferne
- Eastry Court, Aylesham
- Wilmott Place, Eastry

We've created leaflets for each of the schemes:

