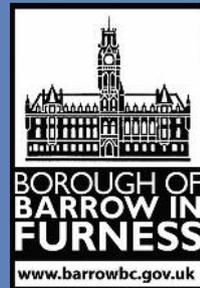


HOUSING SERVICE

Annual Report 2012 - 2013



Our vision: *To provide well maintained homes and estates where people choose to live*

WELCOME

Welcome to the Housing Department's Annual Report to Tenants which gives details of our performance during the period 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013 and our plans going forward.

Once again, this report has been produced in partnership with members of the Tenants' Forum who were consulted on the design, style, layout and content of the report.

In this report, we have dedicated pages for our performance in each of the following areas:

- ▶ **Tenant Involvement and Empowerment**
- ▶ **Tenancy (including anti-social behaviour)**
- ▶ **Value for Money**
- ▶ **Home (quality of accommodation)**
- ▶ **Neighbourhood and Community**

This report also gives an update on our Local Standards which reflect the issues which are of most importance to you.

We hope you enjoy reading this report and welcome any feedback you may have.



Pauline Charnley
Chair of Tenants' Forum



Councillor Kevin Hamilton
Chair of Housing Management Forum

FEEDBACK

Your questions and comments regarding this Annual Report are very welcome. Please send your feedback to:

- ▶ Housing Department, FREEPOST BBZ51, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria
- ▶ Email: housing@barrowbc.gov.uk
- ▶ Tel: (01229) 876536

WE GIVE YOU A CHOICE ON HOW YOU CAN ACCESS OUR SERVICES

We have our office at: Cavendish House, 78 Duke Street, Barrow-in-Furness. Our office complies with the requirements of the Equality Act

Our office hours are: Monday to Friday: 9am - 4pm
Telephone enquiries: Monday to Thursday: 8:30am to 5pm
Friday: 8:30am to 4:30pm

You can telephone us: Customer Services 876491 or call a specific member of staff using the contact numbers we publish at the office, on our website, and in our Newsletter

Our 24 Emergency No. For Homelessness or Repairs Tel. 833311

You can email us at: housing@barrowbc.gov.uk

We have a website at: www.barrowbc.gov.uk



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Tenant Involvement & Empowerment

LOCAL STANDARDS

Performance for the period 1/1/13 - 31/3/13

We have now been working to these local standards for two years. We are not always meeting the standards but are trying to improve this.

Customer Service and Choice Standards

We will aim to answer all telephone calls within 10 rings and give our name.

A random observation test revealed 9 out of 10 staff answered calls within the time and 7 out of 10 gave their name.

We will wear our name badges in the office and whilst conducting home visits at all times.

A random observation test revealed 22 out of 27 staff were found to be wearing their name badge.

We will help you fill out housing related forms, immediately if we are able to and by appointment if we are not.

We do this whenever a request is received.

We will arrange a private interview at your request.

We do this whenever a request is received.

We will provide information in different languages, mediums (audio/DVD) and formats (large print/Braille) at your request, when we are able to do so.

We are currently providing large print for 5 tenants and audio for 1 tenant. We provided translation for 2 tenants, as appropriate.

Neighbourhood and Community Standards

If you make a complaint about anti-social behaviour we will respond to incidents involving threats or actual violence within 24 hours of being notified during office hours and other problems within 10 working days, giving the name and contact details of the officer who will deal with your complaint.

We received 28 complaints within this period and all were dealt with within the times detailed. All complainants were given a contact details.

We will take legal action for anti-social behaviour on our estates where we deem it necessary to do so and when we believe there is a reasonable prospect of success.

We took legal action on five occasions in this period.

We will conduct regular estate inspections and take follow up action, where necessary.

We carried out 13 estate inspections within this period and took follow up action where necessary.

We will remove offensive graffiti within two working days and other graffiti within seven working days of being notified.

We received no reports of non-offensive graffiti and 1 report of offensive graffiti within this period and all were dealt with within the time.

We will remove hypodermic needles within two hours of being notified, during office hours

We received 1 report of discarded hypodermic needles in the period but non were found.

Home Standards

We will acknowledge all repairs issued to the contractor in writing.

We did this with every repair issued.

We will carry out emergency repairs within 2 to 24 hours, (dependant upon the nature of the repair) urgent repairs within 7 working days and routine repairs within 30 working days.

Our results are:- 2-24 hours = 87.2%, 7 working days = 70.9%, 30 working days = 78.3%

If we cannot complete a repair in one visit for whatever reason, we will inform you what will happen next.

We did this 100% of the time.

We aim to carry out a post inspection on at least 10% of repair jobs to assess the quality of the job.

We only managed to undertake 6% of inspections but we are trying to improve this.

When we undertake planned maintenance, we will offer a choice on the design and materials that can be used, wherever possible.

We are currently offering choice on all our planned maintenance programmes with the exception on our re-wiring programmes.

Tenant Involvement & Empowerment



Customer feedback & involvement

We continue to work well and receive feedback from many of our customers. Tenants have the opportunity to get involved in how we provide services. This ranges from being members of the Housing Management Forum to being consulted on any matter to do with their home or the services they receive.

More recently, the Council tasked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to carry out a review of these arrangements. Tenant representatives and our Housing Manager were involved in the information gathering exercise to enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to reach its conclusions.

Key Changes

The key change is that in future the Chair of Housing Management Forum will be appointed by the Council, the number of tenant representatives will be reduced to four and they must be tenants. (The previous arrangement enabled residents to be representatives).

Scrutiny Role for Tenant Compact Working Party

Secondly, the role of this working party will develop a 'scrutiny role', with an aim to scrutinise two, or possibly three, areas of service each year. To reflect the change in role, the name of the working party will change and it will be known as the Tenants' Scrutiny Working Party.

With regard to other changes, they seek to re-affirm the Council's commitment to tenant participation and signal little change. Whilst at Housing Management Forum level the participation must be tenants, at all other forums the involvement of residents will continue.

During the STAR survey it was identified that some of our tenants feel they have not had the opportunity to engage with the Housing Service. During the next financial year in line with our continual improvements to the service, we will look at further opportunities to engage with our customers.

Our Priority

- To continue to encourage more tenants to take an active role in Tenant Participation to assist in the improvement of services.



SUPPORTING DIVERSITY

We are committed to gathering tenant profiling information which enables us to communicate and deliver our services in a way which meets the diverse needs of our community. We do this by asking tenants to complete our 'Knowing our Customers to Improve our Services' form. Collecting this information has helped us to:

- Identify which tenants may have special communication needs for example, providing documents in large print or translating correspondence for our customers whose first language is not English.
- We have been able to identify families who are under-occupying properties and will be affected by the 'bedroom tax' to ensure we can provide help and support.

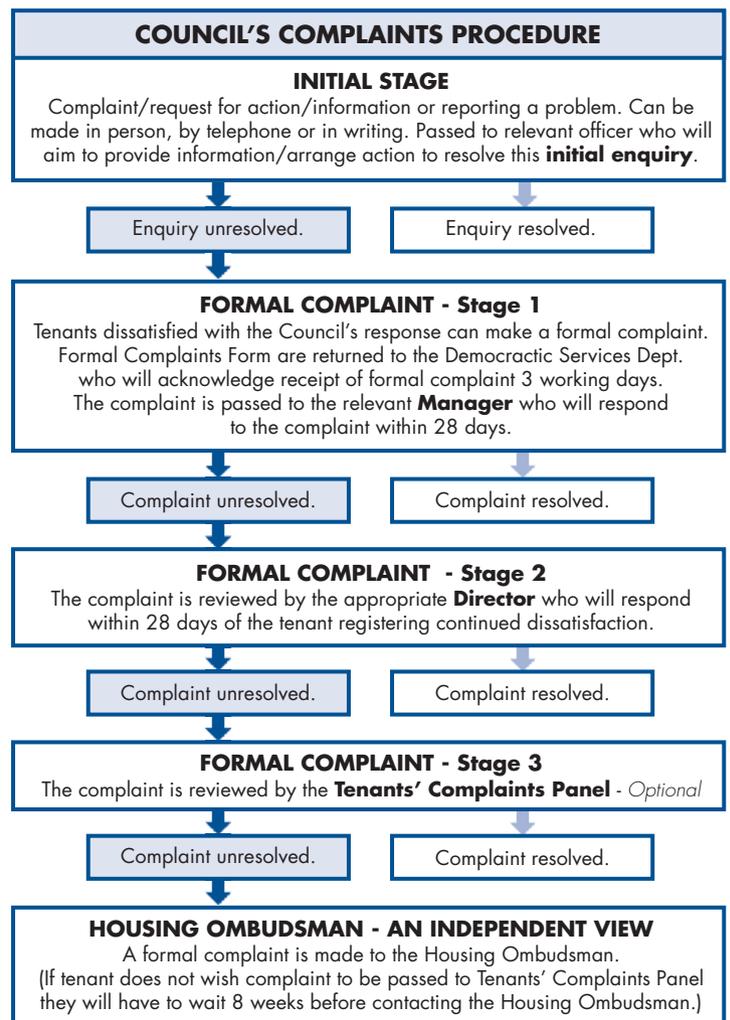
- Identifying where tenants may need additional home visits ie, we have a number of elderly and disabled tenants who often require home visits due to mobility problems.

Complaints

With effect from April this year, the Local Government Ombudsman Service changed and a Housing Ombudsman has taken over responsibility for investigating complaints about the landlord functions of local authorities. The new arrangement allows a 'designated person' to be appointed within a landlord's complaints procedure to assist in resolving tenant complaints. A 'designated person' can be an MP, local councillor or a designated tenants tenant panel.

At its meeting in June, the Council's Housing Management Forum (HMF) agreed a Tenants' Complaints Panel be established to act as the 'designated person'. They also agreed the Tenants' Complaints Panel consist of the Chair of HMF and two tenants who represent tenants on the HMF.

If complaints are not resolved through the Council's Complaints Procedure, tenants now have the option to ask the Tenants' Complaints Panel to help resolve their complaint. The different stages of the complaints process is shown below and indicates the stage—if the tenant so wishes—that the Tenants' Complaints Panel becomes involved.



REPAIRS

We carried out 10,109 responsive repairs last year, costing £1,271,366. The average cost of a repair was £125.76.

Repairs to our properties		
	No. jobs	% on time
Emergency	1355	94.6%
Urgent	5202	77.3%
Routine	10835	62.2%

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The 2012/13 customer satisfaction survey shows that overall satisfaction for tenants receiving works was:



- ▶ Routine repairs: 96.5%
 - ▶ Gas repairs: 98.7%
- The contractor carrying out the work was Vinci.

AIDS & ADAPTATIONS

Some of our tenants needed aids and adaptations like walk-in showers, ramps and handrails fitted to their homes. Social Services ask an Occupational Therapist to assess individual tenant's needs and then make a referral to us.

Last year we put 220 aids and adaptations into tenants' homes at an average cost per home of £760??

Key Facts



- ▶ **£167,154: The amount we spent on aids and adaptations**
- ▶ **172: The number of minor adaptations we completed**
- ▶ **48: The number of major adaptations we completed**
- ▶ **Customer satisfaction results for AB Mitchell Ltd who carry out adaptation work is 100% satisfied**



SAFETY IN THE HOME Gas Servicing

Ensuring the health and safety of our tenants and the neighbouring community is of high importance to us.

We make every effort to complete this area of work by offering an out-of-hours service to our tenants. We also put a flag on our repairs system which acts as an alert to staff who will not input any new repairs until a gas safety check has been arranged.



Key Facts



- ▶ **In 2012, 100% of properties had valid gas certificates.**
- ▶ **In 2012 we had to seek warrants to gain access into 24 homes where tenants refused to provide access for gas servicing.**
- ▶ **We estimate each warrant to cost around £140.00. That equates to around £3,360 per year that has to be spent due to our tenants not co-operating with our contractor.**
- ▶ **This figure has reduced by 54% from the previous year.**

Electrical Testing

We carried out around 700 periodic electrical tests to your homes to make sure they comply with the current wiring regulations.

Average SAP (Energy) Rating

The rating for our homes was 69.2 (upper quartile). Energy Efficiency Rating—to band equivalent 'C'.

EMPTY HOMES

We had 277 empty homes and our cost to repair these empty homes before they could be relet was £290,323 which is an average of £1,048 for each home.

I would just like to say a great big thank you to all of your excellent workers. I recently had my kitchen replaced by you and it is superb. Thank you very much.



All of the workers (AB Mitchell) were brilliant, helpful, clean, considerate and friendly - cannot fault them. They are a credit to your firm.

With many thanks and best wishes.

Tenant of Whinfield Place, Askam



PLANNED INVESTMENTS: IMPROVEMENTS

Every year we plan to spend around 70% of our planned investments via Cumbria Housing partners to ensure we deliver value for money.



Our Priorities

We plan to do the following works in 2013/14



	Kitchens:	£300,000 - 200 properties
	Bathrooms:	£300,000 - 150 properties
	Wiring/Rewiring:	£227,000 - 100 properties
	Central heating:	£500,000 - 176 properties

TOTAL: £1,527,000

Key Facts



- ▶ There are presently no properties that fail the Decent Homes Standard.

WORKS TO PROPERTIES

Key Facts



- ▶ Last year **£2,076,353** was spent on planned works
- ▶ **1,264** properties had major improvements

	Kitchens:	£763,514 = 302 properties
	Bathrooms:	£249,613 = 151 properties
	Wiring/rewiring:	£239,614 = 102 properties
	Central heating:	£650,232 = 252 properties
	External painting:	£173,380 = 457 properties

If you wish to view examples of improvements we deliver, eg: kitchens/bathrooms/heating/adaptations, you can visit AB Mitchell's showroom at 182 Roose Road, Barrow. To arrange an appointment, please contact Helen on (01229) 835463.

Our Priority

To work with trained Tenant Inspectors look at our planned improvements on behalf of CHP.



CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Results for Planned Maintenance Satisfaction Survey for 2012/13.

The table below shows tenants' overall satisfaction with the quality of the improvement, by the contractors carrying out the work. We ask contractors who work less well to improve performance before carrying out further work.

CONTRACTOR	Overall score	
K Wilson (rewires)	100%	
AB Mitchell (kitchens)	100%	
AB Mitchell (bathrooms)	100%	
AB Mitchell (heating)	98%	
Average	99.5%	

Just to let you know that I have just had a wet room fitted by your company and would like to say how pleased I am with the result.



It was fitted with the minimum of mess and disruption. Your staff treated my house and belongings with care and respect. Thank you!

I would also like to pass on special thanks to Ben Drake, who worked extremely hard every day he was there. He left everything clean and tidy - many thanks to him.

Tenant of Worcester Street

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Just a few words of thanks to the work staff of Mitchells for the excellent work they did on my kitchen. They wasted no time and left the room clean and tidy - a very nice transformation.

Thank you to the workers, the unit men, electricians, tilers and decorators.

Thank you all.

#### Tenant of Whinfield Place



# Tenancy

## HOUSING OPTIONS TEAM

Our Housing Options Team assist prospective customers find a home through Cumbria Choice—our county-wide choice-based lettings scheme. They also support our customers in a range of ways to move the properties through Homeswapper, Downsizing Scheme or assistance with bidding through Cumbria Choice.



The Housing Service has a range of useful leaflets available in our reception area to give advice and assistance to all housing options available:

**DIGS (Deposit Guarantee Scheme)** Looking for private rented accommodation, but can't afford a deposit? Make an appointment with our Tenancy Officer who will be able to discuss the DIGS Scheme in more detail.

**Private Landlords Accommodation List** gives useful advice on private letting agents, Central Access Point (CAP) - short-term supported housing projects and bed and breakfast available in the area.

**Prospective Tenants' Newsletter** explains how to access Council housing, the types of accommodation by area and the turnover of stock within the last financial year to enable prospective tenants to make informed choices of which properties to bid for.

**Homeswapper** is the UK's largest and most successful home swap service. Homeswapper is free to all our tenants and is an easy and exciting way to move home. We currently have 128 tenants registered with Homeswapper and 33 swaps were facilitated through the Homeswapper Service in the last 12 months.

**Cost of Running a Home** A new leaflet providing clear information about key costs on running a home to assist prospective tenants make an informed choice prior to taking on a tenancy.

**Downsizing Scheme** A recently launched scheme to help tenants who may be adversely

### Our Priority

To continue to develop our Housing Options Service to provide advice and assistance to all our customers on a range of housing options available



## INCOME & DEBT RECOVERY

Income Management is about collecting rent and service charges. We understand that times are hard for everyone at the moment and we will do what we can to advise and support all of our customers. To that end, we have made the following improvements to our service.

We have continued to develop our service. This year we have provided financial advice and information to new customers when they are signing up for their homes so that we can help prevent people getting into debt. A key concern being fed back to us by our customers is the increasing worry about the cost of living and the concern about getting into debt or increasing their current debt. We believe it is only right our Service helps support all our customers. We have improved our service by:

- ▶ Continuing our Money Advice Surgery – Appointments can be made on a weekly basis with a specialist CAB Advisor. Customers can come into the office for a confidential appointment and specialist advice on budgeting and debt issues.
- ▶ Appointments or home visits are available with our dedicated Housing Benefit Liaison Officer who is available to assist with completion of benefit forms and a liaison role with our Benefit Contractor Liberata to ensure the smooth processing of Housing Benefit claims.
- ▶ In recognition of the difficult times due to changes in line with the Welfare Reform we have recruited an additional member of staff into our Income & Debt Recovery Team to ensure all our customers have access to a dedicated officer to assist with any problems with their rent account.
- ▶ A new post has also been created. Our newly appointed Customer Finance Officer can assist with supporting customers to help them manage their tenancy including their rent and water charges etc. by assessing their income and helping them budget. (Our new members of staff have introduced themselves in our 'Face to Face' section of our Newsletter).

- ▶ We have introduced our 'Downsizing Scheme' to assist customers to move to a smaller property to prevent arrears and debt accruing due to the effects of the 'bedroom tax'
- ▶ Our County wide choice based lettings policy – Cumbria Choice has been reviewed this year and provision has been made within the banding scheme in recognition of 'hardship due to the welfare reform'.
- ▶ This year we have been able to offer our customers more flexible payment dates for direct debits – this makes it easier to pay.
- ▶ At the start of new tenancies we offer affordability checks and have introduced a new leaflet highlighting the 'Cost of Running a Home' for all prospective tenants. In this way we are providing clear information about key costs for customers to make an informed choice prior to taking on a tenancy.
- ▶ This year we have carried out a review of how we deal with arrears. The aim of the review is to ensure we are making our service as efficient as possible. We have reviewed all our letters to ensure they are in 'plain English' and not complicated to understand.

Please let us know if you feel there is anything else we could do to make things easier for you to understand as we will continually strive to improve our service over the coming year and your feedback is always a welcome part of this.

### Our Priority

Working with our customers to ensure the relevant advice and assistance is given to prevent debt or assist customers to reduce their debt.





## ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Our Neighbourhood Management Team are responsible for dealing with all aspects of anti-social behaviour effectively and efficiently.

We take complaints or concerns very seriously because anti-social behaviour destroys the quality of people's lives. We have renewed our Service Level Agreement with ASB Action Ltd who provide us with expert advice, training and support staff in preparation of legal case work.

Legal action is one single part – it has a place but we will always try a good housing management approach in the first instance unless it is a serious case. For example, use of violence when we would look to use legal action without notice.

## HATE CRIME

We are a designated reporting centre for Hate Crime. Last year there were no incidents of hate crime reported.

| Reports of Hate Crime |        |            |             |
|-----------------------|--------|------------|-------------|
| Homophobic            | Racist | Disability | Transgender |
| 0                     | 0      | 0          | 0           |

## Key Facts



- ▶ We have seen an increase in percentage of customers who have reported their ASB case was successfully resolved from 72% in 2010/2011, 91% in 2011/12 to 99% in 2012/13
- ▶ We have renewed our Service Level Agreement with ASB Action Ltd who provide us with expert advice, training and support staff in the preparation of legal case work.
- ▶ We referred 8 cases to ASB Action Ltd. This led to 8 cases being referred through to court for legal action which involved 13 court appearances.
- ▶ We have reviewed our Equality Impact Analysis (EIA) for Anti-social Behaviour and Estate Management. An Equality Impact Analysis is a way to ensure that individual teams within the Housing Service think about the impact of policies and procedures and services to identify any unmet needs and to provide a basis for action to improve our service.

## ESTATE WALKABOUTS

Members of the Neighbourhood Management Team co-ordinate monthly estate walkabouts. The walkabouts are also attended by the community police officers, ward councillors and tenant representatives. The aim of the estate walkabout is to view the general condition of the estate looking at tenants gardens, fly-tipping, repairs. It is also a chance to speak to residents to address any community problems.

### Our Priorities

To review our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedures to ensure we continue to deal with all aspects of ASB effectively and efficiently making our estates places where customers choose to live.



## MOBILE CARETAKING UNIT

Our Mobile Caretaking Unit (MCU) Team is responsible for assisting with keeping our estates tidy and safe including graffiti removal and the disposal of hypodermic needles. They also carry out regular inspections of communal areas to ensure they are kept clean and tidy. The Team are also responsible for clearing and cleaning all our void properties to enable us to re-let them as efficiently as possible.

The Probation service work in partnership with our MCU Team to enhance the service through the Community Payback Scheme. The type of work regularly carried out is weeding of communal areas and footpaths, clearance of empty properties, assisting with fencing requests.

## IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT Environmental Enhancements

Our Environmental Enhancement Scheme is funded through our repairs budget. Proposals are put forward to the Tenants' Forum who decide how the money is spent.

The aim of the scheme is to enhance estates by carrying out improvements which will benefit the community. The types of initiatives completed are for example, provision of bulkhead security lights, fencing, gates and low level railings to provide a more secure environment.

Last year we carried out environmental enhancements on estates.

Works included:

- ▶ Provision of skips to assist estate clean-ups at Vulcan and Roosegate.
- ▶ Provision of steel Palisade fencing (photo shows fencing provided at rear of Middle White Close). Wooden pallet fencing has also been provided through the Probation Service's Community Payback Scheme.
- ▶ Provision of rotary washing lines at Stackwood Avenue. The original washing lines posed health and safety concern due to sloping surface.

### Our Priority

To continue to monitor tenant satisfaction with the Environmental Enhancement Scheme.





# Value for money

In last year's STAR survey 89% of you were satisfied that your rent and 81% that your service charges represented 'value for money' to you. Both of these are an improvement on the response from when last surveyed in 2008.

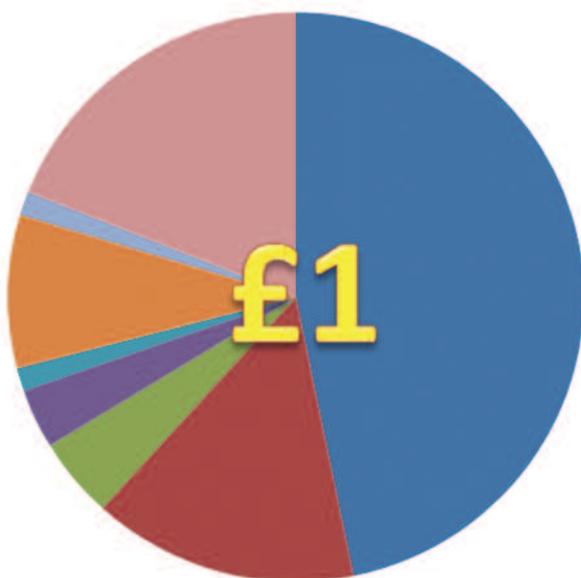
## Your average weekly rent for 2012/13 was £74.38

From the same survey you also said that repairs and maintenance were the most important aspects of your tenancy. In 2012/13 there were fewer tenant demand repairs per property down to 3.7 from last year's 4.3 – this means we were able to spend more on Planned Improvements.

The table below shows you that for every £1 spent from the rent 63p goes to maintaining and improving your property.

At the end of March 2013 we were owed £203,623 by current tenants. This is money that could have been spent on your homes or your neighbourhood. This money could have paid for **40 new kitchens and 40 new bath / shower rooms.**

## How your rent was spent



- ▶ We have redesigned our statements to make the balances and the charges easier to understand and we have improved payment facilities so that it is easier for you to pay and we offer an £5 incentive to pay by Direct Debit. Our information tells us that tenants who pay by direct debit are less likely to get into debt with us and it also costs less to process the payments.
- ▶ Empty properties continue to be a problem and an area we would like to improve during 2013-14. Some properties are left in a very poor state by the outgoing tenant. This not only costs more to make the property attractive to let but also takes us longer so we lose rent as well.
- ▶ We stopped using outside debt collection agencies last year and chase former tenants ourselves. This way we avoid extra charges and are less likely to give up and write the debts off.

**During 2012/13 we sold 8 properties and now have 2697.**

**Almost half our properties are now flats.**



## Do you want this document in another language or large print?

We will do what is reasonable to provide information in alternative formats on request, including tape, Braille, large print and translations. If we encounter difficulties meeting your request, we will discuss the best solution with you.

**English:** If you require this document in Braille, audio or another language please email: [housing@barrowbc.gov.uk](mailto:housing@barrowbc.gov.uk). You may use your own language if you prefer.

### Cantonese:

如果您想獲取該文件的不同版本，如：大字體印刷，盲文，音頻或其他語言之版本，請電郵至：[housing@barrowbc.gov.uk](mailto:housing@barrowbc.gov.uk) 查詢。  
(您可以選擇使用自己的語言)

**Lithuanian:** Jeigu jums reikia dokumento Brailio šriftu, audio rašo ar kita kalba, prašome atsisti elektronin laišk adresu: [housing@barrowbc.gov.uk](mailto:housing@barrowbc.gov.uk). Jus galite rašyti savo kalba, jeigu jums taip patogiaus

**Polish:** Jesli zyczysz sobie kopie tego dokumentu w alfabecie Braille, systemie audio badz innym jezyku, prosze przeslac swoja prosbe na adres e-mail: [housing@barrowbc.gov.uk](mailto:housing@barrowbc.gov.uk). Jesli preferujesz, mozesz uzyc swojego jezyka

**Portuguese:** Pode obter este documnetoem Braille,Audio ou Outra Lingua por favor [housing@barrowbc.gov.uk](mailto:housing@barrowbc.gov.uk) . Tu podes usar a tua propria lingua se tu preferires .

**Turkish:** Soruflutmaya ihtiyaci?iz varsa,bu belyeyi bulabilirsiniz,Körler Alfabesi, Körler için Kabartma yaziye, ses dinlemele kendi dilde, bafkla dilde,Elektronik posta ile araftirma yapa bilirsiniz [housing@barrowbc.gov.uk](mailto:housing@barrowbc.gov.uk). Istersen kendi dilinle konuflla bilirsiniz .