

# A look at life in Halton



## Annual Report 2010



**Halton**  
Housing Trust



## Halton Housing Trust's annual report for customers

Firstly, thank you for taking the time to look at this report, which sums up some of the work being done to improve your homes and neighbourhoods.

Customers have helped us put this together ...and given us honest advice on what they think you would like to know.

We have done our best to look at some of the highlights – and some of the ways we need to improve.

This is a shortened version of our performance (covering between 1st April, 2009 and 31st March, 2010), so, if you would like more details, please get in touch on 0151 510 5000.



This is the first of a new-style annual report, which we have been asked to send to you by the Tenant Services Authority – the national organisation representing tenants, which oversees and checks what we do.



We are keen to find out what you think of the report and would value your comments, so we can make it even better for next year. (Please see page 18 to find out how you can help).



If you would like the information in this report in a different format – such as large print, as an audio version, or in another language – please let us know.

## A message from the Chief Executive

Halton Housing Trust has had a busy year working on the things that really matter to you.

We've modernised our homes 14 months ahead of schedule, whilst making savings of over £6 million, improved our estates, and set down firm roots within the community.

When the Trust was set up we made 100 pledges to you, our customers, to show exactly how we would improve your quality of life.

We've met 95 of the pledges – and the final five are on target to be completed on time.

We're proud of what we've done so far, – but that's just the start. As you will see in this report, there's plenty more still to come!



Nick Atkin  
Chief Executive

### How satisfied are our customers?



## Contents

Welcome	2
About you	4
About your home	8
About your community	14
Tell us what you think	18

### Look out for our little person!

Throughout this report we've included a little 'Halton' person who changes colour depending on how we have performed.

 Better than last year

 The same as last year

 Worse than last year



This section is about how you get involved and help shape what we do.

## Your views are important, so we want to listen

We want to give you the best service we can – and we can do this by listening to you and acting on what you say.

It's not easy for everyone to come to meetings in working hours, so there are lots of ways you can be involved in shaping what we do.

As well as regular customer meetings, you can have your say in our postal and telephone surveys or by contacting us on our dedicated customer involvement phone line number 0151 510 5180.

Other ways our customers were involved in 2009/10 were by taking part in:

- The editorial and readers' panels – giving feedback on the way we word newsletters and leaflets.
- Customer focus groups.
- Membership of the Management Board.
- The Customer Forum, and other groups such as the Disability Forum.
- Inspections as 'customer inspectors'.

- Community days and Neighbourhood Walkabouts.

In these ways, you've helped us to select contractors, set new standards of service, and choose how investment money is spent.



### We're getting to know you better!

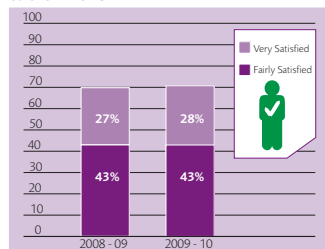
Your views are at the heart of everything we do – regardless of your age, ethnicity or background. And so far, 89% of you have given us more information about yourselves as part of our Customer Profiling project.



### Why is this so important?

By understanding more about our customers, we have been able to deliver your services with your specific needs in mind, adopt a more personal touch and make informed decisions about things that affect you.

## How satisfied are customers that we listen to their views?



## Complaints

Customer feedback is very helpful and we also want to hear if things don't come up to scratch, as this helps us to improve.

Between April 2009 and March 2010 we received 450 complaints, and 173 compliments about the service we provide.

We responded to 87% of complaints on time – this is better than the previous year, but still below our target of 90%.

With help from customers, we are looking at how to make our enquiries, complaints and compliments systems better, as well as giving you the chance to put your views to us on online.



### You said...

You wanted more ways to stay in touch with us.

### We did...

This year, we've brought in text messaging, a 'browse aloud' button on our website, and new mobile 'touch screens' where customers can leave comments at our offices and at community events.



Celebrating the start of work at Clarke Gardens in 2009.

## A new chapter begins

A £2.3million development to transform unpopular bedsit flats at Clarke Gardens is now well underway.

We are building 12 new two-bedroom apartments and six bungalows on the site to provide much-needed affordable housing in Widnes.

Because we now know more about you, we were able to contact our customers aged over 55 years that were living in family homes, to offer them a newly-built apartment in Clarke Gardens.

They will now benefit from a new, smaller home – freeing up bigger homes for families who need extra space.

## Did you know

We have bought an extra 14 new homes from private developers in Widnes.



# About you



## Community life is at the heart of what we do

We have a dedicated team of six people who support community groups and tenant and resident associations.

In 2009/10 we held 31 community events – six more than the previous year, which included events on 'how to keep warm in winter' and help with budgeting.

During the year, £14,940 was also spent on supporting customer groups with small-scale projects such as Simms Cross Fun Day, the

Grange Beach Bonanza and a Green IT campaign.

Our Customer Forum also has £10,000, which it decides how to spend on small environmental projects such as bulb planting, gate repairs and tree pruning.

We are particularly proud of securing £100,000 from Lloyds TSB, which, over four years, has been used for community events and projects to benefit customers.



### Sign language

Some of our staff are learning sign language so we can improve our service to customers who are hearing impaired.

Pictured is Sue Walkley, Customer Services Officer for Halton Housing Trust, who is among those learning sign language.

## How you are helping us to improve in the future

You've already been helping us to plan how we can make our services better – thanks to our ICE (Improving the Customer Experience) programme.

And it's every bit as cool as it sounds – as we've held events across Runcorn and Widnes to ask you what we do well...and what we can do to make your lives a little easier.

We've gathered views of customers, employees, Board Members and other organisations in a number of ways including questionnaires, surveys, coffee mornings, fun days and pizza events.

Thanks to some great ideas and suggestions, we've developed a handyperson service, and are also looking at the possibility of a new gardening service.

The ICE project also includes setting up a new customer contact centre and increasing the amount of time employees spend out of the office and in the community.



### You said...

You wanted a faster response when you call us about repairs and gas servicing.

### We did...

In May 2009 we set up a new system, which has resulted in 91.8% of calls being answered within 10 seconds.

(This compared with 58% of calls being answered within 15 seconds in April 2008).



Fred Talbot from Granada TV.

### TV weatherman lends a hand

TV presenter Fred Talbot supported our campaign to keep people warm during the winter.

In October and November last year we teamed up with Age Concern and the Community Food and Health Team from Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to give people tips on how to stay warm and safe.



Look out for the Halton Advice Bus that makes stops in our neighbourhoods and in shopping centres to promote topics such as healthy eating, and saving energy to lower fuel bills.



### Charity support

Trust employees voted to support Norton Priory as its chosen charity for 2010 and have also agreed to back Halton Haven Hospice in a continuation of a partnership that began two years ago.

# About your home



This section is about your home and the quality of services we offer.

## Setting high standards for housing

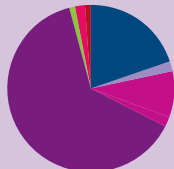
Did you know? We manage 6,147 homes in Widnes and Runcorn.

Last year, we completed an £85 million project to improve thousands of homes, which included installing nearly 4,000 kitchens, more than 3,000 bathrooms and rewiring more than 1,300 homes.

This met the Government's Decent Homes Standard, which ensures all homes are warm, weatherproof and have modern facilities.

But we have gone further – setting out our own higher 'Halton Standard' – which will continue to improve homes with the installation of 2,667 energy-efficient boilers, 729 central heating systems and more than 5,000 electrical upgrades.

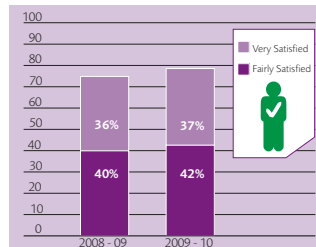
For every £1 in rent, we spend:



Improving people's homes gives a real boost. People feel happier in their surroundings, which makes them care more about the area they live in, and creates a better community spirit.

– Bill and Mavis Greenhow from Runcorn.

## How satisfied are our customers with our repairs and maintenance service?



## Repairs

We've asked you what you think about the repairs service – and you've given us some great ideas, which are now making a difference.

These include:

- Making the repairs service clearer and easier to understand by detailing different types of repairs and how you want them prioritised.
- Using text messaging to remind you about repairs appointments.

Our maintenance officers are now present on all Neighbourhood Walkabouts – giving you the opportunity to meet with them and discuss any issues or concerns you may have.



### You said...

Being at home for repairs in working hours can sometimes be difficult.

### We did...

We now offer more repairs appointments at weekends and during the evening.



Gas servicing is something we have to do every year by law, and we are committed to ensuring the safety of your homes. Last year, 100% of our homes were included in the gas safety certificate process.



## £2.2million makeover

Families from Bankfield Road, Widnes, were handed back the keys to their 'new' homes as part of a £2.2 million makeover project.

We are spending an average of £55,000 on each of the 39 homes being renovated to make them as good as new – including a full rewire, new bathroom, kitchen, doors, windows and a new central heating system.

"It was like moving into a brand new house," said customer Jaïne Lee.



## Safety at home

We have backed a Runcorn mum's campaign to raise awareness about the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning.

For the fourth year running, we have shown ongoing support for Lynn Griffiths, founder and president of charity CO-Awareness – helping to make homes safer by spreading this important safety message.

## About your home



The Hill family, who have two children with serious medical conditions, will be moving into a fully adapted home with wheelchair access at Clarke Gardens. Sixteen-year-old Connor Hill (pictured) was asked to lay the first bricks for his new house at a special ceremony.

## Aids and adaptations

We are working hard to reduce the time you have to wait for major adaptations to your homes, such as level access showers, stair lifts and ramps.

The average waiting time for work to be done is 18 months ...and so we are spending more than we pledged to cut this backlog.

This year we've spent £619,606 on home adaptations, which included £178,000 from the Council.

A total of 231 homes were adapted and we are planning to invest another £500,000 in 2010/11 – which we expect will end the waiting list for major adaptation work.



**By being efficient we have helped our money for aids and adaptations go further.**

We are:

- Making use of modular extensions (PODS) that can be recycled.
- Carrying out adaptation work at the same time as other home improvements, to cut disruption and costs.
- Looking at ways to re-use homes that have already been adapted. In 2009/10 we helped six customers to move to suitable properties – saving £36,250 on extra adaptation work.

## Did you know

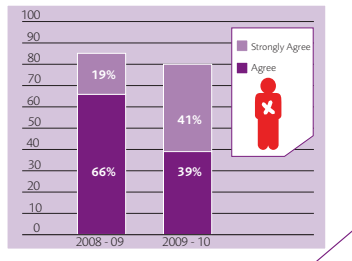
Requests for smaller adaptations – such as hand rails and stair rails – are much easier now. Under our new system 82 customers have asked for minor adaptations to their homes – which have been fast-tracked and completed within 10 working days.

## About your rent

We do our best to offer fair rents and 80% of you believe the amount of rent we charge offers value for money.

Every year we compare our rent levels with other landlords, and our rent is currently less than the amount the government wants us to charge. For this reason, most of our customers saw an increase in their rent from April 2010. The average increase was 87p per week, although some increases were higher.

### Do customers agree that we give value for money for rent paid?



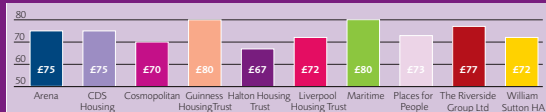
### You said...

You wanted more ways to pay your rent.

### We did...

There are now nine different ways – including being able to pay rent online, a service introduced this year. If you visit our website, there's also a benefits calculator to work out any benefits to which you may be entitled.

### Average rents charged locally.



## Special POD

A special modular building (POD) was lifted into place in Blackburne Avenue, Widnes, last October. The extension was installed to give a local family more space for wheelchair access – without the need for a costly, permanent extension.

The number of bank direct debit payments to the Trust has increased by 4,000 which has saved £3,000 in administration and transaction costs.





## Re-letting our homes

Once someone has moved out, it's important to re-let their home as quickly as possible, so less rent is lost...and customers wanting to move in are happier!

Over the past three years we've cut the time it takes to re-let an empty home by more than a week\* – which means more rent to help invest in your community.



\* In 2006-07 it took us 70 days to repair an empty home and re-let it. We've reduced that in 2009-10 to 30 days.

We now have an incentive scheme (£250 for houses and £150 for flats) if they are left in good condition – cutting the cost of repairs and shortening the time it takes to re-let a home.

We have also reduced the cost of making empty home repairs by £700 per home – by reducing work by contractors.

We've cut down on the number of employees involved in tenancy assessments, which saved £3,600 in 2009/10.



And by cutting the size of our transfer application form by 50%, we've made it quicker and easier for customers to apply.

### You said...

You wanted better information when you move into your new home.

### We did...

Our customer inspectors have helped us to make an information pack for new customers. This includes instructions for appliances, and daylog cards showing where the gas, water and electricity points are.

## Preventing debt

In 2009 we worked to help prevent people going into debt.

As a result, we now hold weekly sessions where customers can get benefits advice, and we work with others such as Halton People into Jobs, Sure Start, Age Concern and Halton Credit Union to run 'Be Money Wise' days.

We've also helped to speed up the way housing benefit is decided.

Employees have been trained so that they can help customers with completing housing benefit forms, making the whole process quicker and simpler.

Because of our efforts, rent arrears are now at £584,000 – the lowest level since the Trust was set up.

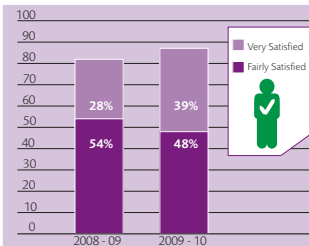
We realise there is still more to do and so we have more plans to use firm, but fair, ways to reduce outstanding rent.

### Did you know

This year, our welfare benefits advisor has helped 528 customers to claim benefits totalling £528,000.

Much of this money helped existing customers who were not claiming all of the benefits to which they were entitled.

### How satisfied are our customers with the quality of their home?



### You said...

The current way we let our homes, using a 'points system' is confusing and needs to be simpler.

### We did...

We have been working on a new system – called Choice Based Lettings – due to start in Summer 2011. This will give customers more choice and clarity over how homes are let.

## Leading the way

Halton Housing Trust has been chosen to help with a pilot project for the entire country. We are helping to create a Landlords' Pledge – setting out standards that can be expected by customers seeking a home. A final version of the Pledge, called a 'Local Offer', will be ready in September 2010, but for a sneak preview visit [www.haltonhousing.org](http://www.haltonhousing.org)

### Did you know

We are the largest landlord in Halton – and we manage the Council's housing waiting list?

There are 2,895 people on the waiting list, with the number of applications received each week increasing by over five times, which inevitably is as a result of the recession.

## About your community

This section is about how we are helping build great neighbourhoods.



### Improving your quality of life

Being a good landlord is not just about bricks and mortar. It's also about the neighbourhood you are part of ...and we work hard to play our part in improving your quality of life.

We have a team of seven people who work to clean up neighbourhoods and our 97 flat complexes. They also remove fly-tipping as soon as possible.

Each year we hold 47 Neighbourhood Walkabouts. Customers are invited to join Trust managers and employees to take a stroll and find things that need improving, such as repairs, which can be put right.

Our customers and staff have helped us set out four priorities, called Trust Themes, which include ways we can improve our services:

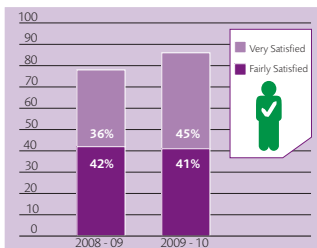
- Customer culture.
- Inclusive and open.
- Right thing, right place.
- Making the best use.

For more information please visit our website [www.haltonhousing.org](http://www.haltonhousing.org)

### 39 miles of fencing is being replaced!

In November 2009 we started work on a major project to improve your fencing including boundary fencing for 680 homes. This is just the start: we are planning to invest another £1.8million in 2010-11, and up to £40million on improving neighbourhoods by 2015.

### How satisfied are customers with their neighbourhood as a place to live?



### Apprentice

Runcorn mum-of-three Lisa McKenna is inspiring single mums to find new ways of getting back to work.

Her life was turned around when she started work as an apprentice electrician with Halton Housing Trust.

"I've always tried to be a positive role model for my children and look to improve myself. Getting back to work has given me the chance to do that," she said.



### You said...

Improving your neighbourhood is a priority.

### We did...

In every local community we are asking customers to help us draw up an action plan to make their neighbourhoods better.

All these 'local plans' will feed into the Trust's masterplan to invest £262million in the next five years.



We joined forces with Widnes Vikings to become the team's sleeve sponsor for the 2010 season. The partnership also includes players working at the Trust and sponsoring a summer school.

“The Trust and Widnes Vikings share similar values in wanting to make a difference to local communities. – Noel Sharpe Director of Customer Services.”

## About your community



76% of you feel the way we deal with anti-social behaviour has improved in the past year.

## Tackling anti-social behaviour

You wanted us to take a tough line on anti-social behaviour and we have listened. In 2009/10 we recorded 307 cases of anti-social behaviour and have issued:

- 14 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts
- One Injunction
- 22 Notices seeking possession

But where we can, we've also worked hard to prevent anti-social behaviour from starting in the first place.

We currently pay for two full-time Police Community Safety Officers (PCSOs), run a service to help resolve neighbour disputes, and have drawn up maps showing 'hot spots' where crime and anti-social behaviour need tackling.

You've helped us too, by taking part in our Good Neighbour Awards, 47 Neighbourhood Walkabouts and to help decide the best ways for our PCSOs to work.



### You said...

You wanted us to focus on tackling anti-social behaviour.

### We did...

We have bought CCTV surveillance equipment and are working closely with the police, Halton Borough Council, and other groups to help share 'intelligence' and stamp out anti-social behaviour.

We've also spent £300,000 on improved security at three blocks of flats and with fencing at Grangeway shops, in Runcorn.

We've set aside £2,000 to help prevent anti-social behaviour by organising 'fun' things to do instead.

## Customers in the spotlight

Here are some of the events that you've been involved in with us over the last year.

### Eyes down for bingo



We teamed up with English Churches Housing Group to hold a free Christmas bingo for residents. Fifty people turned out for the event at Southlands Court – including residents living at Brunswick House, in Water Street, and Queen's Close, who were offered free transport to and from the event.

### Apprenticeship Week



Derek Twigg MP took time out of his busy Westminster schedule to discover what it means to be a 21st century apprentice. The MP for Halton went 'back to the floor' to meet our apprentices as part of National Apprenticeship Week, in February 2010.

### Good neighbours

This year's Halton Housing Trust Good Neighbour Awards proved a huge success – recognising people who have contributed to their community in a special way.

The winners (pictured right) were treated to a thrilling day out at a Widnes Vikings match.



### Remodelling Widnes Shops

Halton Housing Trust has invested £195,000 remodelling Widnes shops to combat anti-social behaviour.

The Trust, in partnership with Halton Borough Council, has helped to redevelop a local shopping centre in Bancroft Road, Widnes, to discourage fly-tipping and prevent anti-social behaviour.



### Growing strong

Low-cost fruit and vegetables are ripe for the picking – thanks to the new Lowerhouse Food Club, available in central Widnes, including Stewards Avenue and Kingsway estates. We have supported the project, which is run by New Shoots Halton and can save people up to £10 as opposed to buying fresh fruit and vegetables at a supermarket. Customers who sign up can order £3 bags of fruit, vegetables or salad and then pick them up from Stadium Fitness at the Stobart Stadium.

# Summary and feedback



## We're improving all the time

The regulator of social housing in England has praised Halton Housing Trust for improving its services.

The Tenant Service Authority (TSA) says the Trust is properly governed, well managed and financially strong, in a recent report on its performance.

The report stated: "The Trust has continued to strengthen its governance arrangements and has plans in place to ensure continuous improvements."

All the actions that needed addressing as part of the inspection have now been completed and approved by the TSA.

Finally, we want to keep getting better!

So, we held a 'mock' inspection in April 2010. This was carried out by external housing experts who gave us positive feedback and confirmed that we have the passion and ability to keep improving our services for you.

We look forward to a great year ahead.

The focus is now building upon the foundations, to ensure we develop and grow as a business with a social conscience and play our part in the wider success and life chances for people across Halton.

– Nick Atkin, Chief Executive, Halton Housing Trust

## What do you think of this report?

We would love to know what you think and if there are ways we can improve it.

Was the amount of information right?

Too much	Just right	Not enough
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How easy was it to understand?

Very easy	Fairly easy	Difficult
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is there anything extra we should include?

No, it's just right	Yes (please give details)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>

Other comments

Name and address (optional)

In addition, we may also seek your views about this report in other ways. If you prefer, you can let us have your comments in any of the ways listed below:

Telephone: 0151 510 5000  
Email: [info@haltonhousing.org](mailto:info@haltonhousing.org)  
Website: [www.haltonhousing.org](http://www.haltonhousing.org)

Visit your local area office: **Simms Cross**  
120-124 Widnes Road  
Simms Cross  
Widnes  
Cheshire  
WA8 6AX

**Runcorn**  
Grange House  
930 Grangeway  
Runcorn  
Cheshire  
WA7 5LT

Post to: FREEPOST RRGJ-XRJE-GHHK  
Halton Housing Trust  
Daresbury Point  
Green Wood Drive  
Manor Park  
Runcorn  
Cheshire  
WA7 1UG



Cut and send to: FREEPOST RRGJ-XRJE-GHHK, Halton Housing Trust, Daresbury Point, Green Wood Drive, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 1UG.

# Useful Numbers

## Halton Housing Trust

Daresbury Point  
Green Wood Drive  
Manor Park, Runcorn,  
Cheshire WA7 1UG



Tel: **0151 510 5000**



Fax: **0151 510 5100**

## Repairs:



**0800 195 3172**  
from a landline



**0303 333 0101**  
from a mobile

## ASB:



**0800 074 3074**  
from a landline



**0303 333 0100**  
from a mobile

## @ E-mail:

**info@haltonhousing.org**



Website:  
**www.haltonhousing.org**

Follow the Trust on



**Halton**  
Housing Trust