

CALLING ALL TENANTS & LANDLORDS

Annual Reports: A tenant perspective

A good start, but could do better



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on behalf of the National Tenant Organisations **March 2011**

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All landlords were required to produce an annual report to their tenants last October. The National Tenant Organisations (NTOs) have produced a review report "A good start but could do better" setting out what we think is good and bad about the first year reports.

Landlords are also required to produce another report to tenants next October, and our aim is that our review may help tenants and landlords improve reports for next year.

Our challenge to the housing sector is to make this requirement irrelevant because landlords and tenants are working together to willingly produce much better annual reports as part of a changing culture where tenants are an integral part of decision-making.

We should not underestimate the importance of annual reports. Now more than ever, ensuring the quality of services tenants receive will be the task of tenants and landlords together.

Annual reports to tenants are a key part of that partnership. They are reports for tenants – allowing them to scrutinise and compare their landlord's services. They are a way that tenants and landlords

can work together to plan out what needs to be done in the next year.

Better landlords welcome working with tenants to produce the annual reports. They know how important tenants are to their business.

But others are less keen! We found that the majority of landlords produced what we considered to be only "adequate" reports - with far too many of them being self-congratulatory PR exercises.

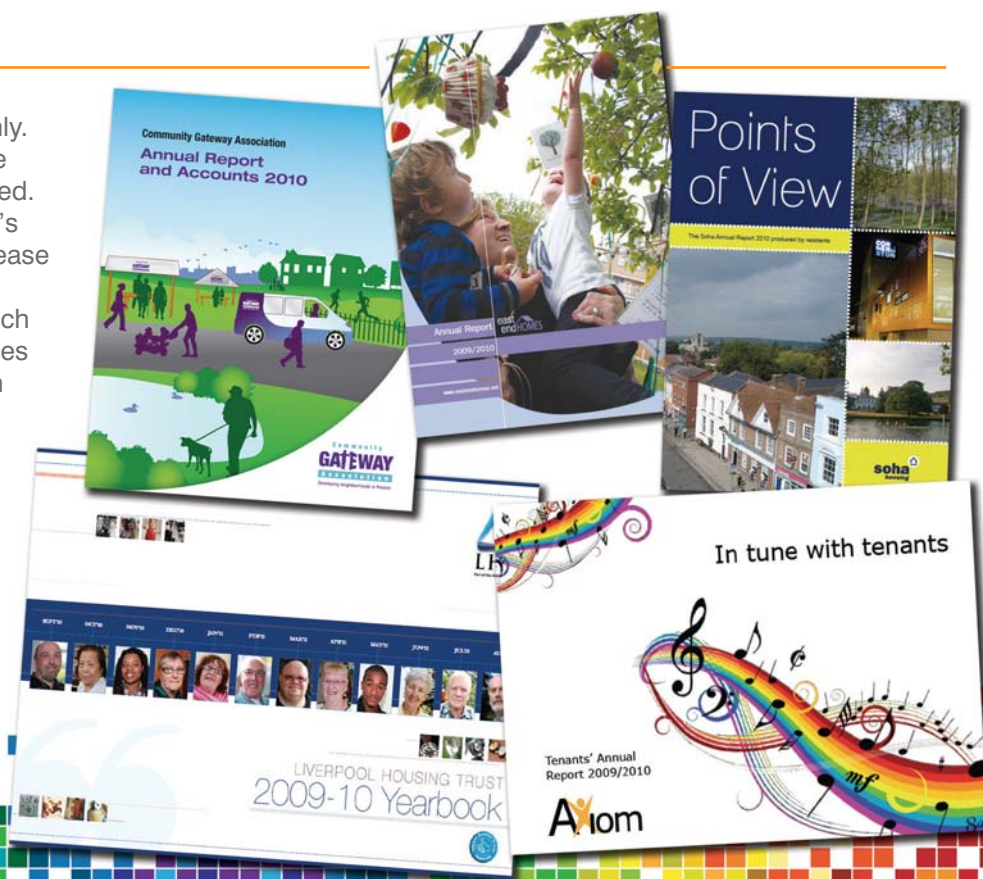
OK - so that was year one - and maybe landlords didn't have much time to get reports together. Our research sets out what tenants should expect from year two reports.

Details on how to get the full report can be found on the back of this summary.

GOOD REPORTS

We rated the following reports highly. It might help to take a look at these reports and how they were produced. Most can be found on the landlord's websites. If you can't find them, please get in touch with us. NB. We only reviewed a sample 259 reports which were selected by the Tenant Services Authority to give us a cross section of landlords. There may be other good reports out there that we did not review.

Top rated reports as follows:
(Clockwise from top left) Community Gateway Association, Eastend Homes, Soha Housing, Axiom, Liverpool Housing Trust.



It is important to note from this that there were good reports from every type of housing organisation - housing association, council, Arms Length Management Organisations, Tenant Management Organisations, large national landlords, local landlords, urban landlord, rural landlords. There is no reason why your landlord can't work with tenants to produce a good report if they want to.



A selection of other top rated reports:

(Top row - from left to right) Harvest Housing Group, Leicester City Council, Salix Homes, Hackney Council, (Bottom row - from left to right) North Devon Homes, Sandwell Council, Peabody, Guinness Northern Counties, Regenda Group.

WHAT WE LIKED & DIDN'T LIKE

Easy for tenants to read

We liked reports that were aimed at tenants (and not the TSA - which some reports seemed to be) - well designed - tenant friendly explanations - good use of graphics - and not a lot of text splurge.

Whilst we couldn't tell from the reports, we hoped that all tenants had at least received a summary of their report.

Tenant involvement

Some of the best reports were produced by tenants with staff support. In some cases, tenant groups had decided what to put in them and how they should be designed. In some, tenants had also been consulted more widely as well.

Some reports had good sections setting out many opportunities for tenants to get involved in decision-making in their landlords. But only a few reports set

out how landlords are working with their tenants on ensuring value for money.

Fairness & equality

We were really excited by the very few reports that covered fairness and equality issues well (particularly regarding bi-sexual, lesbian, gay, transgender, religion & belief issues). Many reports just skirted over diversity issues (if they mentioned them at all).

Assessing services

It was great to come across reports where the landlord was really honest about their services. Some were. But there was too much saying "what we do well" and "we pass this standard" - and not enough "what we don't do well" and not nearly enough comparison with the best landlords. Tenants should expect an honest assessment against the highest possible standards - tenants will value this more than backslapping.



Local offers

The TSA told landlords to identify “local offers” to their tenants. Not many landlords have got this - although some people have said to us that this was because the TSA’s definition was not clear. In a small number of reports, landlords discussed how they and their tenants had defined “local” as estate, village, parish, street etc or as particular groups of people - and were considering whether services could be adapted to meet local needs and aspirations.

But in most reports, “local offers” were entirely landlord-wide (in some cases covering thousands of homes across several counties) and about things that landlords should be agreeing with tenants anyway.

What is important is how landlords are working with tenants locally. But if landlords are doing that, most are not describing it in their “local offers”.

How landlords are governed

A small number of landlords explained how they are governed and their financial accounts. We were annoyed that many landlords said that they didn’t have to explain these things because the TSA, the Audit Commission, lenders, auditors, councils or someone else had said they were OK and so tenants don’t need to worry about it.

Other things that annoyed us

We were annoyed that large landlords used global performance figures, thereby masking problems in particular areas – and that we came across the same report in different parts of “group” housing associations – not really treasuring local identity.

No landlord is above the standards

Some landlords made out like they were above the standards and/or didn’t refer to them. We were angry about this. The standards were developed through a process that involved many tenants and landlords. They are there to develop and protect quality of life for all tenants. Tenants have a right to be told about the standards they should expect, and it is arrogant for landlords to decide that they do not need to be told of them.

A small number of reports we reviewed scored very low points. Some seemed like committee reports. Some were arrogant. Some seemed to be performing badly and had no plans to improve. If landlords aren’t prepared to accept and meet basic standards, we suggest that they give their homes to someone else who will.

VIEW THE REPORT

This report has been produced using grant from the TSA’s Tenant Excellence Fund, but the resources are not sufficient to enable us to print copies of the full report to give to tenants.

The full report is available on the following websites:

www.cch.coop/annualreportreview

www.nftmo.com

www.taroe.org

www.tpas.org.uk

www.tenantservicesauthority.org

Some tenants will be able to access the report on the internet but many won’t. We request that landlords make the full report available to those tenants who request a copy of it. If a tenant is unable to obtain a copy of the report through their landlord, please contact the TSA’s Customer Service Team on **0845 230 7000**, or by e-mail at enquiries@tsa.gsx.gov.uk. The TSA will provide printed copies of the report and can also provide copies in large print, Braille and audio cassette, on request. Other language versions may also be available. The report is available on the CCH website as a pdf file and a word file.

The CCH can be contacted at info@cch.coop

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