



**Resident
Checked** ✓



2010 - 2011 In Review
Mercian Housing Association

How has the last year

Mercian Housing Association's
Managing Director **Laurice Ponting**
discusses the last 12 months
with resident board member
Andy Pountney



Mercian's MD
Laurice Ponting

Laurice: It's been another busy and challenging twelve months for Mercian. To start with, this year has been the first full year of us being part of Circle. We are already seeing many benefits of being part of a large Group such as being able to tap into lots of expertise and gain better value for money on some of our contracts.

Andy: And residents have also been able to get involved with shaping Group decisions on services, which is really interesting.

We were invited to take part in Circle's Repairs and Maintenance Review which gave us a real chance to put our views across to the whole organisation. Getting together with residents from other Circle partners has shown that no matter where you live, we all share the same hopes and concerns about our services and similar thoughts on how things can be improved.

Laurice: It's good that Mercian residents have been able to represent us at these events and share our ideas, Andy.

Resident feedback is really important and one of our first tasks this year was to address feedback from residents to the mock short-notice inspection we had last year. The results showed that our key strengths are our

gas servicing, estate management and void management processes. Things we needed to improve on included customer care and equality and diversity. We had identified these as areas that needed work and this year we have made these our priority.

Andy: From a resident point of view, I feel that the customer services review has really driven positive change. I know that things have definitely improved because I undertook some of my own mystery shopping at the beginning of the year by sending a non urgent email about replacing the batteries in my smoke alarm. After a week I'd had no response so I called your team and my feedback has helped shape how these enquiries are dealt with now.

Laurice: That's a good example of how we are listening to our customers and feedback like this helps us improve.

We know that we have not been as good as we could have been at responding to customer emails. As a result of our customer services review we now treat email enquiries with the same urgency as we do phone enquiries. Also in response to the inspection we have looked at equality and diversity.

Andy: I attended the Disability Group that Mercian held to look at how we can improve

gone at Mercian?

services for people with disabilities as part of this equality and diversity work and it was a really useful meeting.

Laurice: Yes, the feedback has given us lots of ideas that we are looking to implement. For example, customers have told us they want to be treated based on their individual needs and for us to look at the way we deal with customer enquiries. We are really trying to tailor our services and communications to address this.

We have recently exceeded our target in collecting up to date information about all of our customers. This information means that we can better identify who needs to know what and when and which services they particularly require. A good instance of this was at Christmas last year when we made calls to our elderly and vulnerable residents to provide further information about how they could get in touch if they had heating issues during the cold snap of weather. We were only able to target this so effectively thanks to the up to date data we collected about our customers.

Andy: It is definitely important to see us as people with different needs. This year residents have been given lots of ways

to get involved with shaping the services that Mercian offers. I have personally been involved with the Disability Group and the Asset Management Focus Group.

Laurice: Mercian has included resident views collected at events like these in our business planning priorities and this is now really reflective of resident feedback. I do want to mention our repairs and maintenance service as well. It's been a big challenge for us this year. Having to wind down several of our contracts led to a drop in performance. But through staff input and dedication to putting this right we have turned this around. Complaints are down and we're hitting our performance targets again. This process has not been easy but it shows we are determined to get things right. I think it is important to be honest about areas that need improvement and hopefully residents will continue to tell us where we need to concentrate our efforts. Andy, what do you think we should be looking at in the year ahead?

Andy: I really think that it is important to get more young people involved with Mercian. They need to be represented in the decisions we are making. It is really difficult but encouraging younger residents to come to focus groups and feed back on the services,

take part in community events etc will mean we can take their thoughts and feelings into consideration.

Laurice: I take your point on board Andy and we are introducing a new customer involvement strategy to help address this important issue. On top of this, my goal for the year ahead is to put more focus on getting the very best value for money and really make sure all our staff really understand what this means and look to deliver it at every chance they get.

Mercian's Board
Member Andy
Pountney



Getting you involved

Performance 2010- 2011

Our performance has been compared with four other local housing providers so you can see how we are doing.

	Mercian HA	Castle Vale Community HA	Family HA (Birmingham)	Jephson HA	Staffordshire HA
Satisfaction with views taken into account	70.3%	75.7%	50.0%	67.0%	71.0%
Satisfaction with landlord services	76.9%	88.6%	61.6%	84.0%	89.0%
Complaints resolved at first stage	89.9%	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable

My Say



Working together with local community groups is high on the agenda for Mercian's Customer Involvement Team. It enables us to get to know our residents at a local level, to identify their needs and interests and helps us to shape the ways people can get involved.

The Newtown Neighbourhood Forum is one such group. Mercian resident and Chair of the forum, **Dennis Hamilton**, explains: "We have 12 members consisting of residents from the local community and representatives from local agencies. We meet on a monthly basis to discuss the issues that are important to our community. The link into Mercian is a mutually beneficial way of sharing knowledge and resources."

* Pictured left: Newtown Neighbourhood Forum members Dennis Hamilton, Jacqueline Harris and Ann Kelly

Highlights from 10/11

We have:

- o offered our customers the opportunity to shape our services through a variety of ways to get involved
- o introduced a Resident Scrutiny Panel, enabling residents to take a formal role in challenging our performance
- o completed work towards ensuring that our services are fair and meet the diverse needs of our customers
- o increased our customer profile data to 71% and used this information to tailor service delivery
- o refreshed our approach to customer complaints
- o enhanced our standard of customer services through improved performance management and people development
- o kept residents updated via our quarterly magazine Home Matters, including feedback relating to agreed standards in service areas - "You said...We did."

Plans for 11/12

We will:

- o develop our Resident Scrutiny Panel and work towards embedding scrutiny arrangements
- o develop a new Resident Involvement Strategy in partnership with residents
- o use the information we have collected about our customers to increase customer loyalty and ensure that all residents are offered an equal opportunity to get involved.
- o engage with under represented groups such as young people, the disabled and those from ethnic minorities.
- o work with residents in local communities to identify priorities important to them
- o consult with residents on the transition of Mercian's website to a Circle group site

Giving you what you asked for...

Develop your skills to enable you to influence and scrutinise services

We offer you a wide range of formal and informal ways to get your voice heard

Continue to feedback to you about how your involvement has shaped our services

Use technology to improve access to information for our customers



Looking after your homes

Performance 2010- 2011

Our performance has been compared with four other local housing providers so you can see how we are doing.

	Mercian HA	Castle Vale Community HA	Family HA (Birmingham)	Jephson HA	Staffordshire HA
Repairs completed on time	98.0%	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable
atisfaction with repairs	93.0%	83.9%	53.4%	81.0%	88.0%
Homes meeting Decent Homes standard	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	99.6%
Homes with valid gas safety certificate	98.8%	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable

My Say



When terrible weather stuck in December 2010, Mercian was concerned about the impact it might have on our elderly and vulnerable customers. Using our customer profile data to identify those in need, our teams called over 400 residents to check that their heating was working and remind them of how to contact us in an emergency.

For residents who did not have anyone to turn to in the event of a problem, we asked their permission to share their details with our out-of-hours service so that they could ensure priority treatment.

Clair Hamilton (pictured left) of Mere Green, a resident for 32 years said, "Mercian is like a good friend to me and has always been there to help, as they were during the cold weather snap. Mercian cares."

Highlights from 10/11

We have:

- we met the Government's Decent Homes Standard for all Mercian homes. Our Property Service Team organised various improvement works during the year to ensure that this target was met
- 126 homes received works to bring them up to the Decent Homes Standard, including insulation, electrical upgrades and heating upgrades
- 977 homes received various works through our normal planned programme of works:-
 - 27 homes had digital aerial upgrades
 - one scheme of 36 units had car parking areas resurfaced
 - 704 units had external painting
 - two homes had new windows
 - two homes had new heating systems
 - 100 homes had new bathrooms
 - 116 homes had new kitchens

Plans for 11/12

We will:

- we have a three year replacement programme for all major works required, for example kitchens, bathrooms, windows and heating systems etc.
- we have changed how we identify homes needing work. In line with the Circle Group, we now use data based upon stock condition surveys as well as existing data transferred from our old system. Works are identified on an individual basis so each house is looked at individually.
- the planned maintenance programme for 2011/12 includes both improvement works to maintain the Decent Homes Standard to our properties and planned improvement works to 464 properties.

Giving you what you asked for...

Residents identified as needing kitchen and bathroom replacements have a say in the choice of the colour of their units and fittings, including decoration

When properties are surveyed, we identify the specific needs of vulnerable customers

We deliver a consistent quality of service, completing emergency repairs in 24 hours, urgent repairs within 5 days and routine repairs within 21 days

We offer our customers repairs appointment slots which are convenient to them



Providing homes

Performance 2010- 2011

Our performance has been compared with four other local housing providers so you can see how we are doing.

	Mercian HA	Castle Vale Community HA	Family HA (Birmingham)	Jephson HA	Staffordshire HA
Average re-let turnaround times (days)	22	14.2	28	27.3	Data unavailable
Dwelling vacant	0.4%	0.3%	1.1%	1.3%	1.1%

My Say



When her husband was made redundant, Mercian resident Ann continued to spend as she always had done. Soon their debts mounted up and, unable to meet all their commitments, Ann began to skip the rent.

When her Income Officer, Sabrina, visited her with a Notice Seeking Possession, Ann admitted how bad things had become. Sabrina referred the couple to Alison, Mercian's Financial Capability Officer, who helped them to create a realistic budget to ensure all their priority bills were paid. Alison then signposted the couple to a Debt Counsellor. Ann is now able to save a small amount of money each week and can still afford some little luxuries as well as keeping on top of all of her bills.

* Pictured left: Financial Capability Officer, Alison Ottaway

Highlights from 10/11

We have:

- o worked closely with Birmingham City Council to develop common Eligibility Criteria for Choice Based Lettings arrangements
- o signed up to Birmingham's new nominations agreement
- o received recognition for our partnership work with Trading Standards in re-housing victims of Loan Sharks
- o exceeded the expectations of all of our local authority partners by ensuring that more than 50% of our lettings were to households off the Council's waiting lists
- o reduced our re-let times from 24 days in 2009/10 to 22 days in 2010/11, keeping us amongst the best performers in the country
- o employed our own Financial Capability Officer to make sure that our customers can maximise their incomes and address any debts
- o increased the use of Direct Debits by over 50%, which is cheaper and simpler for customers
- o reviewed our Allocations Policy making us confident that we are delivering a fairer, clearer and more transparent service.

Giving you what you asked for...

We provide or refer debt advisors to tenants who need to reduce their debts and improve their finances

We offer you a variety of convenient ways to pay your rent

We offer starter tenancies to help us build sustainable communities. We also provide all new tenants with detailed local information about the area you have moved to.

We have our own mutual exchange web site www.houseexchange.org.uk for people wishing to find someone to swap homes with



Plans for 11/12

We will:

- o extend our participation in Choice Based Lettings arrangements in Birmingham and Walsall, providing more options for our customers
- o work with residents to find ways to reduce overcrowding and under occupation
- o make more use of Mutual Exchanges to reduce the amount of time our customers have to wait before finding a home to move to
- o work to reduce the number of evictions by early intervention. Work to sustain tenancies by proactively contacting and supporting customers who fall behind with their rent payments
- o introduce an "Any Day Tenancy Start" for our new residents, meaning that they get re-housed more quickly and that Mercian saves rent loss creating more money to be spent on homes and services
- o Start to work with our residents to review and update our tenancy agreements

Building communities

“Mercian has a duty to maintain and safeguard neighbourhoods and communities, working with partner organisations and agencies where necessary.”

My Say



Estate walkabouts give our residents the chance to speak to their Neighbourhood Officer and representatives from various agencies including; contractors, environmental health and the police, face to face. This helps us to build relationships and tackle local issues.

Erdington resident, Sandra Blackett said: “My Neighbourhood Officer, Linda Johnson, regularly organises Estate Walkabouts and Resident Meetings on my estate. It gives me and my neighbours the opportunity to raise any concerns that we have with our homes or the local area, for example, anti-social behaviour or fly-tipping”.

* Pictured left: Erdington resident Sandra Blackett and Neighbourhood Officer, Linda Johnson

Highlights from 10/11

We have:

- o worked with police, local councils and, most importantly, our residents, to manage our estates.
- o held 131 estate walkabouts with residents to identify and tackle any local issues such as resolving problems with over-grown trees, fly-tipping and removing abandoned vehicles
- o resolved 111 cases of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and worked with residents who had previously experienced ASB to improve our ASB Policies and Procedures. We are now seeing a 14% increase in satisfaction levels with the handling of ASB cases
- o commenced procurement of our new grounds maintenance, cleaning and window cleaning contracts. Involved tenants in the development of local specifications and the level of work to be carried out at their scheme.
- o employed 25 people through the Future Jobs Fund scheme to gain work experience at Mercian and with our contractors
- o helped 150 people access employment and training through the Open Door Programme.
- o In 2010-11, we completed 22 separate improvements to our schemes which will benefit 371 residents.

Plans for 11/12

We will:

- o continue to work with residents to improve our ASB policy and services
- o complete our consultation with local authorities and put in place local lettings plans to help achieve a more stable community
- o spend a further £30,000 on improvements to our housing schemes based on the recommendations of our residents

Giving you what you asked for...

We provide opportunities for tenants to become involved in the inspection of their local area through Estate Walkabouts, which are advertised in our estate newsletters

We provide help or refer customers to other agencies who can assist our residents back into work

We will respond to all complaints about ASB to time targets in line with our ASB Policy

We have a free mediation service available to residents in dispute to help them resolve their differences

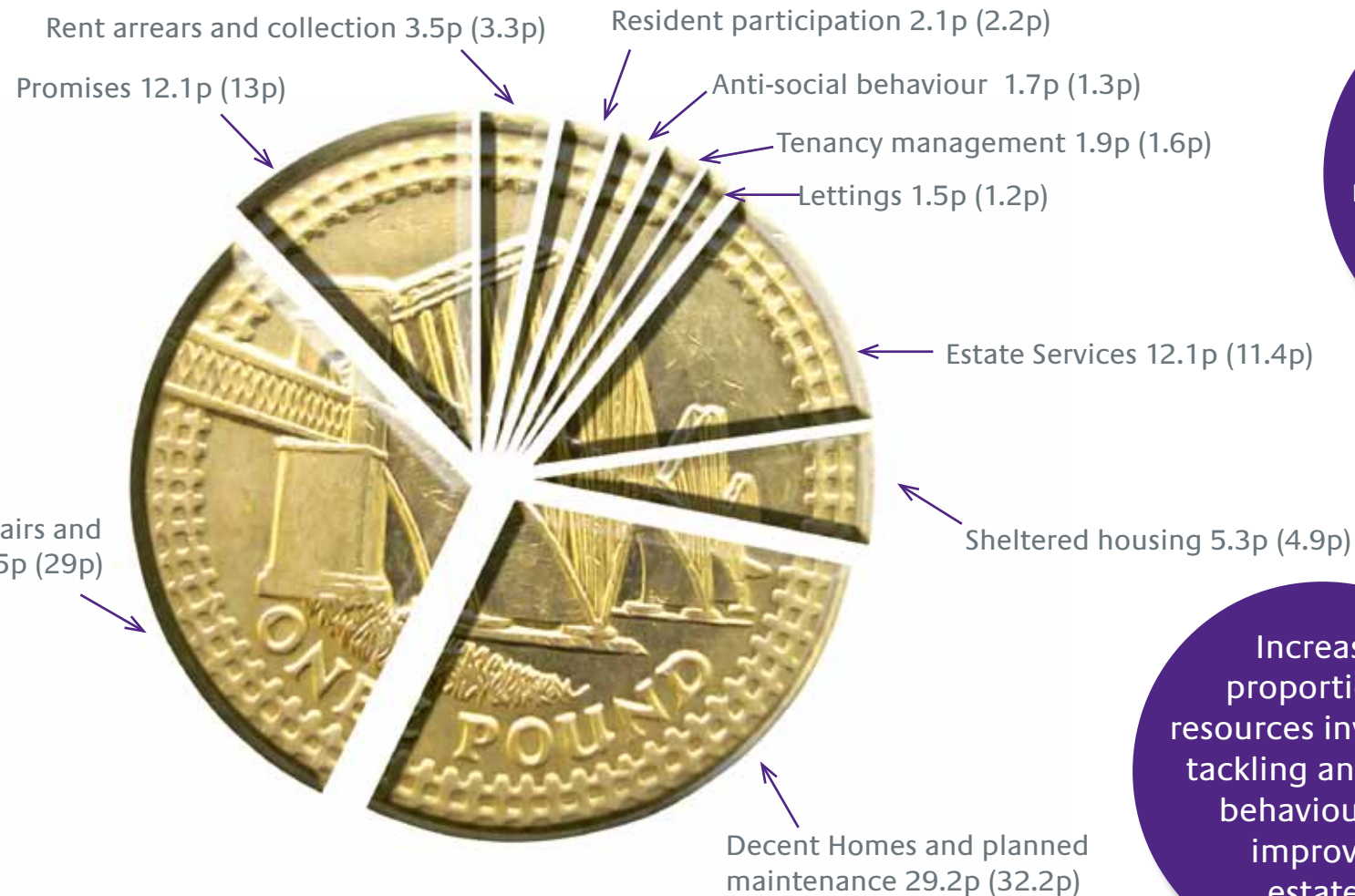


Offering value for money

Performance 2010- 2011

Our performance has been compared with four other local housing providers so you can see how we are doing.

	Mercian HA	Castle Vale Community HA	Family HA (Birmingham)	Jephson HA	Staffordshire HA
Rent collected as % of rent due	101.5%	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable	Data unavailable
Current resident arrears as % of rent due	5.1%	5.5%	5.4%	4.4%	Data unavailable



Proportion of resources invested in property maintained to deliver full Decent Homes compliance

Proportion of resources invested in resident participation increased

Increased proportion of resources invested in tackling anti social behaviour and improving estates

Highlights from 2010/11

We have:

- o managed within our budgets to ensure we achieve a balanced position in accordance with our Financial Plan
- o through VFM efficiencies, re-invested over £300k into service improvements beyond what was originally budgeted
- o shared VFM achievements and plans with residents
- o amongst other things, we have been able to deliver scheme improvements planned for a previous year but postponed due to the credit crunch
- o invested in noise monitoring equipment to support the management of anti social behaviour
- o enhanced the life chances of residents in one of our supported housing schemes by developing community hub activities
- o recruited a Financial Capability Officer

Plans for 2011/12

We will:

- o continue to seek residents' views of VFM through our VFM review days, and the activities of our Resident Scrutiny Panel.
- o review and improve our procurement process through the recruitment of a specialist Procurement Manager to work with service teams
- o procure new contracts for Estates Services (Grounds Maintenance, Window Cleaning and Cleaning) in consultation with residents balancing cost with our commitment to provide excellent services
- o take advantage of Circle Group's buying power to procure new kitchens, bathrooms and painting contracts, again in consultation with residents
- o review our internal customer service and repairs processes to improve service delivery to our customers.

My Say



Last year Mercian held its first Value for Money (VFM) review day. Members of staff from each team presented information about their VFM achievements and plans to the senior management team, along with two resident representatives.

June Stevenson, a resident Board member who attended the day, said, "It was encouraging and exciting to hear about initiatives in individual teams to deliver value to customers. For example, one sheltered scheme officer arranged access to a free travel service for residents of her scheme in negotiation with the provider. This really highlights how going the extra mile can deliver fantastic results."

* Pictured left: June Stevenson



Making decisions

Mercian Housing Association's Board is made up of eight members – six independents and two residents. It's their job to ensure Mercian is well managed, financially viable and performs to a high standard.

About you

Age:

Almost half of Mercian residents (46.8%) are aged between 35-54

Gender:

62% of Mercian residents are women

Ethnicity:

64% of Mercian residents are white, 4% are of mixed ethnicity, 6% are Asian (including Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi), 13.8% are Black (including Caribbean and African). Data is not available for 11% of residents

Disability:

20% of Mercian residents said they have a disability, 50% said they do not have a disability and the other 30% did not reveal that information

How have residents have been involved in this document?

A copy of last year's residents' review was sent to every resident. Within it we included a survey asking for feedback and offering the chance to join our Circle Group wide residents group - Communications Connectors.

Based on what you told us we have made several changes this year. This includes simplifying the text to be more resident friendly, not using technical jargon and reducing the corporate feel of the document.

Feedback from this group means that this year we will not send this document to every resident. A summary version will be included within the Autumn 2011 edition of our resident newspaper Home Matters. Copies of the full document will be sent to any resident that requests one and a PDF version of the document will also be available on the Mercian Housing Association website.

Our Communications Connectors group now has nearly 300 residents signed up and we asked them what format they would like this document to take this year and what information.

By not sending copies to every resident we will save paper wastage and money that can be spent on the services you want to see improved.

A resident board member took part in an interview for the introduction to this document. This was to give an honest and transparent view on how the last year has gone.



You can view our policies, publications and your tenant handbook on our website.
If you would like this document in large print, Braille, audio, an alternative format or in a different language contact us.

Part of The Circle Housing Group

We're one of 12 partners within Circle. Being part of a larger group means we have more financial security and more influence to achieve better deals with suppliers to deliver value for money for you.

We are first and foremost a Registered Provider and charity. We retain our individual and independent approach and run our services to meet your needs.



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