

Annual report to tenants 2021-22



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INTRODUCTION FROM BOB HEAPY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, TOWN & COUNTRY HOUSING

Hello and welcome to our Annual Report 2021-2022.

Firstly I want to thank you for your ongoing patience as some of our services continue to be impacted whilst we adapt to the post-pandemic world.

We fully understand that everyone has been affected in some way by the health, wellbeing and financial consequences that the last two years have brought and we're really grateful for your ongoing understanding and support.

Last year was another challenging time. The impacts of Covid-19 are still being felt both globally and nationally. Providing our services against this background, along with the additional impacts of Brexit, has meant that we sometimes haven't met the standards we aspire to, and some service backlogs have unavoidably occurred.

Whilst performance in many areas has remained positive and we've introduced additional services for those residents with support needs, we haven't been able to meet our targets for every service area.

Throughout this report you'll notice some recurring themes, like resourcing and supply chain issues.

We hugely value our committed and knowledgeable workforce; they're vital to delivering the high-quality services we aim to provide. However, as for many businesses, recruiting staff has been a challenge in the last year.

Fortunately we're now starting to see more positive recruitment trends both for vacancies to existing roles and the new roles created by the growth of our business.

Supply and delivery of some goods continues to be slower than pre-pandemic and can impact on repair and replacement programme times. The inflationary pressures we know our residents are facing are also heavily impacting the prices of some of the services and goods we use to deliver a service to you.

One key focus this year has been on listening to the 'resident voice'. We're constantly looking to improve our communication with residents, understand when you need support and advice, provide clear and honest information and learn from your feedback.

Thank you for taking the time to read the report.

Best wishes,



YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY BOB HEAPY

Do you still employ Housing Managers? What is their role nowadays? How do residents find out about them?

Our Neighbourhood Housing Managers (NHMs) are responsible for a local 'patch' of rented properties. NHMs look after around 950 properties each and are responsible for managing tenancy and neighbourhood issues.

NHMs visit new residents at six weeks, six months, and nine months. The purpose is to make sure they've settled in, are aware of the services available and to answer any tenancy queries. These visits also make sure that residents are clear about their tenancy responsibilities.

NHMs aim to carry out tenancy audits to every home once every five years. This allows us to make sure that we have up-to-date household information and are aware of any individual needs, answer any tenancy queries, and check the condition of properties.

NHMs deal with a wide range of enquiries about things like anti-social behaviour, tenancy changes, pest control, hoarding and abandoned properties.

They work in partnership with the Community Safety and Tenancy Sustainment teams who deal with more complex issues, and our estate contract officers who oversee the contractors delivering estate services.

Since Covid-19 restrictions we have moved towards a hybrid way of working, and NHMs have adapted how they deliver services – like signing tenancy paperwork digitally. NHMs do a pattern of home and office working, but this hasn't affected their availability and they're now back out on the estates whenever needed.

If you have a housing query, please contact the Customer Service team who can answer many of your queries or put you in contact with your NHM if more specialist advice is needed.

Considering the long waiting list for social housing, how many new social rent homes are planned in the coming years?

Along with ensuring the safety and quality of our existing homes, providing affordable, quality homes is our main priority. Our private sales and rentals help to fund development of our affordable homes. From 2022-2025, we expect to start building 1,488 new homes. At least 30% of these will be homes for social rent.

Where does the money from my service charges go?

Your service charges are spent on providing and maintaining the communal services we provide to you.

Depending on where you live, your service charges may be spent on grounds maintenance, communal cleaning, lighting in communal areas, lift maintenance, communal entrance door servicing, pest control, communal utilities or bulk waste removal.

We also charge a fee to cover our administration costs. Your annual service charge statement shows exactly what charges apply to your tenancy.

Town & Country Housing is a not-for-profit organisation. We do not make any profit from service charges. Our variable service charges ensure you only pay for the costs of the services provided.

Some residents have received new or additional sinking funds/equipment usage charges from April 2023. How can you justify this?

The sinking funds and equipment usage charge had not been reviewed for several years. Due to rising costs, a review was undertaken to make sure that replacement costs start to be sufficiently covered.

These funds spread the cost of communal items like carpets in shared corridors, furniture in communal lounges,

or lifts. This means that when works or replacements are undertaken, the impact of large bills are mitigated as much as possible.

We have tried to balance the need for collecting the sinking funds with affordability and have limited the increase with a cap each year. The sinking fund will be reviewed every ten years.

There is never a good time to increase costs. However, we believe that collecting sufficient funds is the most fair and reasonable approach.

Anthony joined us as Housing Manager in November 2021. He has worked for various housing associations and councils as a housing manager across Peterborough, London and Dudley.

"My daily work ranges from dealing with anti-social behaviour, working with other agencies to support vulnerable residents, and delivering services in relation to tenancy management.

"The most rewarding part of my job is helping people to resolve issues with their tenancy and knowing I have made a difference."



WELCOME FROM THE RESIDENT SCRUTINY PANEL

Hello and welcome to the Annual Report for Tenants 2021-22 from the Resident Scrutiny Panel. We are 11 members (nine residents and two shared owners) who carry out in-depth reviews of services and make recommendations for improvements directly to TCH Board. We've been carrying out reviews since 2014.

In 2021-22, we completed a review of the 'resident voice'. This is about how resident views and feedback influence our services. The review was carried out in two phases:

Phase 1 - digital communications, service standards and local offers

Phase 2 - staff recruitment, induction and training, and resident involvement in procurement.

The Resident Scrutiny Panel



In total we made 63 recommendations to Board, 41 in the first phase and 22 in the second phase. An action plan has been developed to make sure the agreed changes are introduced across the next 12-18 months.

The 'resident voice' features prominently in the government's charter for social housing (known as the Social Housing White Paper) published in 2020.

The Together with Tenants Charter and the Housing Ombudsman's revised complaint handling code both add weight to this, by requiring housing associations like TCH to work with residents to deliver transparent, quality and accessible services.

Our recommendations reflect this cultural shift and the need to really listen and use resident feedback to improve services across the whole organisation.

We are now reviewing the Tenancy Sustainment team and expect to make our recommendations to Board in autumn 2022. The service supports residents who may be at risk of losing their home and we chose this review due to the increasing cost of living and the inevitable impact on day-to-day affordability for residents.

If you would like to find out more, suggest a service area for review or apply to join the resident scrutiny panel, please visit the [TCH website](#) or email Amanda Mankelow, Resident Scrutiny Administration Assistant on: amanda.mankelow@tch.org.uk

COMPLAINTS

Formal complaints

749 2021-22 589 2020-21

As these figures show, we saw an increase in the number of formal complaints within the financial year.

There are a number of reasons for this, including a more robust way of recording complaints, and active promotion of our complaints process.

We recognise that there are times when we get things wrong and want to make sure we always work with customers in these cases to put things right and to learn from our mistakes.

Most complaints continue to be about the repairs and maintenance service as this is the service most people use. Some of these complaints have been due to the challenges of the past year such as national supply issues and weather events that caused damage to homes.

It took an average of 19.1 days to close complaints this year which is considerably longer than our target of ten days for responding to stage 1 complaints.

The time taken to respond to complaints has been influenced by the number of complex cases received, and supply and resourcing issues and staff shortages that we, and many housing associations, are facing.

Forward planning

We continue to work hard to answer more complaints within the target time. In early 2022 we updated our complaints policy and procedure to make sure there is good guidance and that it's easy to make a complaint if you need to.

We will continue to complete and publish an annual self-assessment showing how TCH meets the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code to help make sure our complaints process is clear, simple and accessible.

Our focus is on providing full and clear responses to customer complaints, and to learn from complaint feedback

You said, we did

We always review what's gone wrong and look at ways to improve things. Here are just some of the changes we have made from listening to you. It is important you continue to share your feedback with us, good or bad, so we know what's going well and what needs changing.

Keeping you up to date

You often tell us that we could be better at updating you about queries and ongoing issues. To improve this we've done some training with existing and new members of staff about our Brilliant Basics – a set of simple rules about communication with residents and colleagues. We have also re-emphasised the importance of keeping residents up to date.

Letting you know if we need to put up scaffolding

We know that scaffolding is an inconvenience, but it is sometimes needed to support the repair and maintenance of our buildings. Our repairs service is working to improve its processes by making sure residents and any other households affected are contacted as soon as the use of scaffolding has been approved. We're also aiming to include more key information in the letters to help minimise any issues that may arise.

Making sure belongings aren't wrongly disposed of

A decant is when we offer someone a move due to major repairs or improvements being needed in their property, often because of an incident like a fire or flood.

Following a flood in a resident's property, they were offered a permanent decant and we mistakenly disposed of some of the resident's personal items, wrongly believing they were no longer wanted. As a result of this we have reviewed the decant process to provide clearer steps for staff and contractors to take. We have also made the decant documents digital, including the signed disclaimer and inventory form so they can be quickly sent directly to residents.

Accessing CCTV

A complaint about CCTV has led us to reviewing our policy. As a result, we have trained more staff to download CCTV footage so we can respond to queries more quickly.

and findings to make improvements to services.

Please read our [current self-assessment](#) that is set against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

CUSTOMER SERVICES

40,873 Calls received

32,553 of these were answered

90% 80%

of queries resolved during initial call, against a target of 80% and up 2.7% compared to last year

The team went through a period of change this year, recruiting and training a number of new team members.

Due to staff shortages at times, we weren't able to meet our target of answering 85% of calls.

We're now fully staffed and aiming to answer 85% of all calls and continue to resolve at least 85% of calls first time, up 5% on 2021/22 target.

Improvements to our service

The customer service team is your first point of contact. To make sure that we are offering the best service possible we have made some improvements including:

- We've increased the number of customer service advisors and now have a fully staffed customer services team which will help us to achieve the levels of customer service we always want to provide
- We've increased the amount of staff training and organised external training for more specialised subjects, such as understanding dementia and other cognitive differences.

How we have listened to your feedback

Using your feedback, we have modified the way we take calls. We work collaboratively with all departments to make sure that our customers have clear timescales for expecting call backs and updates if these are needed.

We have improved our complaints process by training staff on how to deal with complaints more efficiently and empathetically.

We analyse the types of calls we receive on a weekly basis to see how we can improve our services. If we're getting lots of calls about one type of query, we will publish updated information in our newsletter and on the website to try to answer the queries most people call about.

Your feedback

Samantha*, a resident said "I received very good help this morning, I spoke to a lady on webchat and the call somehow dropped. I then called in and spoke to the same lady who was very helpful and patient in dealing with my enquiry. She took the time to listen and made sure that my enquiry was dealt with in full. I appreciate the time and effort from her."

*Not her real name.

Customer Services team at Monson House



INCOME AND MONEY SUPPORT SERVICE

We collected **100.1%** of rent (including rent arrears) against a target of 99.5%

455 residents helped by our money support team

£132,000 reduction in total household debts

With the reduction in Covid-19 restrictions, the money support officers were able to offer additional support through home visits and by photographing documents and sending these to the Department

for Work and Pensions, on behalf of residents. The current increases in fuel and utility costs and other living costs are expected to increase the demand for our money support service.

Most of our income comes from the rent that residents pay. It is therefore very important that we collect it efficiently so that we can continue to provide high quality services. Over the year, we were able to reduce the amount of arrears owed. This is the reason our rent collection is just over 100%.

We only ever use eviction as a last resort. In 2021-22 there were six evictions compared with 18 evictions in 2019-2020. We always try to work with residents who need support to remain in their tenancies if this is the best option for them. Please talk to us if you're worried about paying your rent or any other tenancy issue.

Case study

Emma* was referred to the money support service by her income manager in November 2021. She was paying bedroom tax after her son moved out of their two-bedroom house. This resulted in Emma struggling to make ends meet after paying for food and rent.

During a call with the money support officer (MSO), Emma explained that she had been diagnosed with chronic physical health issues which meant different family members provided regular overnight care. Emma's GP provided evidence that she required overnight care and the council agreed to restore her benefits to cover the full rent. As some arrears had built up, the MSO completed a discretionary housing payment application to clear these which was successful.

The MSO made an application to Southeast Water's helping hands scheme to help clear her water debt. Emma said that she "feels more confident seeking help to deal with her debts" and has set up monthly payment plans to address her other debts.

*Not her real name.

LETTINGS AND EMPTY PROPERTIES

Between April 2021 and end of March 2022:

572 new tenancies issued

74 of these tenancies were for our older person schemes/ supported housing

141 of these homes were new build properties

The average time to re-let each empty property was within our targets of 60 and 150 days:

58.4 days for general needs properties

146.2 days for sheltered accommodation

Looking forward, we aim to repair and re-let empty general needs properties within 45 days in 2022/23.

The target for sheltered housing remains within 150 days. This longer timescale is because there is lower demand for some of our properties that have age restrictions, and some older residents moving into those homes have additional needs that may take longer to meet.

We are currently developing a new older persons' strategy to look at how our homes for older people continue to best meet their needs and aspirations.

In 2021/22, the rent lost because homes were empty was 1.94% of the annual rent due, which was higher than our 1% target.

This was mainly because properties often needed more repairs than before Covid-19 restrictions were in place and it took longer to complete these before they could be let to someone new.

Case study

Mary's* daughter contacted us as she was concerned that her mum was isolated, and the condition of her property was negatively impacting her health. A surveyor and neighbourhood housing manager attended the property and found that Mary was struggling to manage her property, as she was undergoing cancer treatment. The surveyor recommended that Mary moved to sheltered housing.

The rehousing and decants officer identified a flat that was close to Mary's support network and local shops. When the sheltered property became available, Mary's friend arranged a virtual viewing, and Mary was very happy to accept the property.

While Mary was in hospital the housing options team arranged for packing and removals of her items and for floor coverings to be installed throughout the property. Once Mary was discharged from hospital, she moved into her new property and said, "I was very happy with my new home and the support offered from TCH and the housing options team".

*Not her real name.



Rehousing discussions with the Housing Options Team at Showfields



PLANNED MAINTENANCE

Getting homes ready for re-let

In 2021/22, we had 47 homes in need of major work before we were able to rent them again to new residents. While the number of empty homes and the volume of works increased, our average turnaround time was 15.3 days, against a target of 15 days.

In 2021/22, our team faced challenges such as social distancing (meaning fewer workers could be in a property at one time), material shortages and cost increases. Despite these challenges we completed:

external repairs, decorative works, and gutter clearances to 1,110 homes

82 full roof replacements on flats and houses

104 double glazing installations or upgrades

214 fire door replacements to flats

115 repairs to fire doors to ensure compliance with changing fire regulations

One of the main ways we identify the works that need completing is through the property surveys we ask you to complete. If you receive a survey through the post or by email, please help us to keep your property well maintained by completing the survey and returning it to us as soon as possible. We also carry out stock condition survey visits. If you receive an appointment request, please work with us so we can access your property to assess what elements of your home need updating and when.

Meeting your individual needs

65 major home adaptations made for residents with disabilities

28 more than the previous year

We appreciate that resident needs can change over time. This can mean that existing facilities become unsuitable. When this occurs, we can make adaptations following an assessment carried out by medical professionals. These works allow residents to continue to live independently in their homes.

Looking forward

In 2022/23, we will be making improvements to our service, including:

- Choosing a new contract partner to deliver our internal improvements and major empty property work programmes
- Focusing on energy efficiency to help move our properties towards zero carbon
- Delivering fire safety interventions to change cladding and balcony decking which has become non-compliant due to regulatory changes
- Incorporating the Home Improvement Agency, now known as the Home Improvement and Support Team which provides services such as

property adaptations, hospital discharge and handypersons into the TCH service offer. <https://www.tchg.org.uk/about-us/home-improvement-and-support-team/>

Working with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

We have been working with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) on a bathroom to shower room conversion project at one of our older persons' housing schemes. For this project, TWBC provided grant funding for a number of the bathroom to shower room conversions.

We worked closely with an approved private occupational therapy team who arranged individual resident assessments. We designed the new shower rooms around individual needs to work out seat heights, the position of showering equipment and any additional adaptations.

In total 14 bathrooms were replaced with wet rooms and all 30 flats in the scheme received electrical upgrades.

We look forward to more collaborative approaches like this in the future.



REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

Our number one priority is keeping you and your home safe.

Highlights

100% of safety checks carried out on time for:

- Gas safety
- Fire risk assessments
- Water testing and risk assessments
- Lift safety checks

87.7% of repairs completed on first visit

99.2% of emergencies responded to on time

28.1 days average completion time for a repair

Performance and challenges

Many repairs are completed more quickly than the 28.1 days average time, but this includes more complex and delayed works too.

Our ability to deliver an effective repairs service in 2021-2022 was inevitably impacted by Covid-19 and by ongoing global economy issues such as the supply and cost of materials and a highly competitive labour market.

Moving forward, our focus will be on improving the amount of time taken to complete repairs jobs. We have improved our scheduling system to ensure that workers with the appropriate skills attend each appointment, which will increase the number of repairs that we are able to complete at the first appointment.

Improving our service

In March 2022 our contract with Countrywise Repairs Ltd ended and we established an interim in-house repairs service 'Town & Country Housing Repairs'. Our in-house repairs service will set the standard for our new repairs contract that will be in place from November 2022. We look forward to welcoming a new contract partner and their industry knowledge, skills and experience.

Throughout 2021-2022 we worked with residents and resident-facing staff through surveys and focus groups to design our new repairs service. Residents told us that we need to work on getting the communication about all aspects of the service right and this will be a priority for our new repairs contract.

Town & Country Housing Repairs, April 2022



COMMUNITY SAFETY

Our community safety team specialises in dealing with cases of anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, safeguarding, self-neglect and hoarding.

With the reduction of Covid-19 restrictions, the team has continued to face high levels of demand as we continue to support and safeguard residents.

Community safety at a glance:

793 new cases of anti-social behaviour

159 safeguarding cases opened

72 days on average to close an anti-social behaviour case. Target is 42 days.

Anti-social behaviour

Top three reports of anti-social behaviour:

- 23% noise complaints
- 16% verbal abuse
- 11% substance abuse and drug dealing.

In 2021-2022, the number of reports of anti-social behaviour decreased by 5.8% in comparison to 2020-2021.

Reports of anti-social behaviour, however, remain significantly higher than before Covid-19. The time to deal with cases has been higher than usual because we have been dealing with more complaints, complex cases, and reduced staff numbers.

Safeguarding

We opened 159 safeguarding cases in 2021-2022. This was an increase of 112% from before Covid-19 numbers. We have continued to see the impacts of Covid-19 restrictions on our more vulnerable residents.

Domestic abuse

In 2021-2022, the number of domestic abuse cases decreased by 14.5% compared to 2020-2021. However, the number of cases remain high compared to before Covid-19 restrictions were in place. We continue to offer specialist support and partnership working to effectively support survivors of domestic abuse.

Looking forward

We are expanding our Community Safety Team which will help us meet our targets for responding to reports and reduce the average time to close cases.

We have also increased our staffing numbers in our neighbourhood team who will be able to assist with tackling anti-social behaviour.

ESTATE SERVICES

1,783 estate inspections carried out

Throughout the last year, our estates team was presented with challenges due to staffing issues. However, with the dedication of our estate contract officers (ECOs) and the help of our trusted contractors, we have still been able to complete most planned inspections.

Our inspections monitored cleaning and grounds maintenance standards and checked communal areas to ensure that there were no health and safety or fire safety breaches. Over 99% of these inspections were rated as excellent or good.

Improvements to our service

In 2021-2022 we expanded our estates team and now have four ECOs and a new team leader. Having a larger team will allow the ECOs to complete all their inspections and return to estates to check that work has been completed to the correct standard. This also ensures value for money with the delivery of the cleaning and grounds maintenance contracts.

We are also making improvements to our aftercare service for new homes to address communal issues more quickly.

How we have listened to your feedback

At the start of the Covid-19 restrictions, residents in our older person's accommodation were concerned that not all touch points in communal areas were being cleaned. Based on this feedback we introduced additional anti-bacterial cleans several times a week to door handles, bannisters, and lifts. This level of cleaning was in place throughout the last year.

Some residents raised the issue that others were using communal areas to store bulk items. We have and will continue to remove and dispose of these items, when necessary, often without notice where there is an immediate health and safety risk.

During Covid-19 restrictions, we followed all government requirements, including the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE). Since the lifting of restrictions we have requested that our employees and contractors carry a supply of PPE and continue to use when requested by residents such as before entering homes.

Looking forward

Previously the ECOs have been able to complete smaller environmental improvements, such as installing cigarette bins, moving post boxes, and building communal gates. We are now able to reinstate some of these improvements which will save money and will mean we can complete this type of works more quickly.

Meet Zac, our Estates Services Team Leader

Hi, my name is Zac, and I am the new Estate Services Team Leader for Town and Country Housing.

I manage a team of four estate contract officers who are responsible for the on-site inspections of all internal and external communal areas on our estates.

Our goal is to make sure that an excellent standard of estate management is provided and maintained in communal areas.



ECOs Mark and Victoria with Zac (right)

Winwood, Stonecross



The Hollyfields Estate, Hawkenbury



RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AND SCRUTINY

We have been speaking with residents to gather their feedback about our policies through online surveys and focus groups. They have also been able to provide feedback over the phone. Residents have provided their opinions and influenced a range of different policies and service areas, including empty homes standards, aids and adaptations, and kitchen and bathroom improvements.

The Resident Scrutiny Panel

In 2021-2022 the resident scrutiny panel reviewed the 'resident voice' in two phases. Recommendations included to:

- Create simple and measurable service standards so residents know what to expect from TCH
- Develop 'resident voice' champions from each team to pass important information to colleagues, identify best practice and discuss lessons learned

Looking forward

The resident scrutiny panel is now reviewing the tenancy sustainment service.

Over the next couple of years, it plans to review:

- Community safety service
- TCH's approach to sustainability
- The new responsive repairs and maintenance service, once the new contract has been in place for a year.

During the pandemic, digital meetings on Zoom were more cost-effective and enabled residents to participate from a wide range of geographical locations. The panel will continue to meet online, with occasional face-to-face meetings and team building activities where needed.

Case study

Kevin, a panel member since 2019, says:

"I was interested in joining the panel to help improve services for me, my neighbours and all residents. While there are plenty of things that TCH does well, there are always things that could be done better. I like the fact that TCH listens and acts upon our feedback".



Teresa, a scrutiny panel member, was invited to the Chartered Institute of Housing's annual conference in September 2021 to speak as part of a panel called 'Tackling Stigma: Are we making progress?'. Teresa said,

"The best bit of the conference for me was that there were many like-minded people who wanted to listen to what I had to say as a resident. I've experienced stigma myself and hope I can help TCH effect change by talking about it openly and raising the profile of this important issue in future."



Together with Tenant's charter

We held focus groups with residents and staff to co-design service standards in line with the 'Together with Tenants' charter. This is to make sure the standards are clear and simple.



Residents have asked us to call them 'our commitments'. We will be consulting with residents digitally on the finished design to ensure they are easy to read and accessible.

Monthly satisfaction survey

Independent market research company, Kwest carry out monthly satisfaction surveys on our behalf.

This enables residents to provide feedback on their overall satisfaction with TCH as a landlord and on nine specific TCH service areas, including the repairs and maintenance and estate services.

In 2021-2022, overall satisfaction was **72.7%**

93.4% of residents said that TCH treated them with respect

81.1% of residents said that TCH cares about providing a good service

80.7% of residents were satisfied with TCH's contribution to the management of their neighbourhood

23.3% of residents said that TCH did not act on what they said - we now have a group of colleagues going to team meetings to discuss barriers to communication and how we can work together to improve this

20.4% of residents said that it was not easy to get what they needed from TCH - we have worked with residents to create 'commitments' so you know what to expect from services, including timescales for action to be taken.

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

We have provided grants to multiple community projects to support our residents with their mental health and wellbeing, educational support and access to food through community larders and pantries.

Men's Mind Project

The Men's Mind Project was set up to create a safe space for men to talk about their mental health. The founders both have lived experience of poor mental health and have faced the same challenges accessing support.

The project consists of a Facebook group with instant support through a shared network, as well as one-to-one support. The founders have also organised face-to-face group support sessions in Snodland. The project is planning to develop more groups in other locations in future.

"The funding has had a massive impact on how we can deliver our service allowing us to focus on helping others and doing talks in a variety of environments"

- One of the founders of MMP

Number One Community Trust



Number One Community Trust

Number One Community Trust (NOCT) provides support to the Showfields and Ramslye community in Tunbridge Wells, through a café, community hall, library and pre-school. About 80% of the 900 users are TCH residents. NOCT supports families to improve their wellbeing, through informal English conversation groups, a community pantry and signposting to other support networks.

"Since my son started at the pre-school, he has come on leaps and bounds. His confidence has massively grown, and he is developing in his social and communication skills. The Little Learning Tree pre-school is a god send to my son and our family."

- A parent

"The funding provided by TCH has been essential to ensure we are able to keep our doors open and provide a high standard of early years education."

- Preschool manager

Kent High Weald Partnership (KHWP)

KHWP have two community allotment projects in Tunbridge Wells, one in Sherwood and one in Showfields, for residents to volunteer in their community or have their own plot. The project encourages social inclusion. Involvement in maintaining green spaces can improve mental health. In 2021-2022, 94 TCH residents engaged with the allotment projects.

KHWP also ran development and play projects in woodland spaces for primary school children. The schools have seen a positive improvement in the wellbeing and behaviour of 46 children since the forest school programme was introduced.



Looking forward/best practice

Looking forward to 2022-2023, our community activities will continue to focus on supporting our residents in areas that are identified as priorities by our neighbourhood teams and through what residents tell us is important to them.

Feedback and evidenced-based research indicate that help is likely to be needed in the following key areas: employability, fuel poverty, money management, mental health, social isolation and loneliness.

TENANCY SUSTAINMENT

219 households supported by the Tenancy Sustainment team

The sustainment team helps people manage their tenancies and access services that can help with health and wellbeing challenges.

Referrals can be made for a range of scenarios, but the most common reasons are for mental health support; first-time residents needing help setting up their property; and for socially isolated residents with a limited support network.

Some of the outcomes included:

- Residents were better at managing their mental health issues
- Improvements in residents' financial situations
- Increased access to local support groups

The team also supported residents who struggled to complete forms online and provided advice and guidance to those who needed further support to move.

Funding support

The exceptional needs fund (ENF) was set up to support residents who are struggling to maintain their tenancy, home or wellbeing due to financial difficulties. The fund is intended to support residents in some situations where external funding is not available or has been declined. ENF bids are made to the tenancy sustainment team by internal TCH teams and are reviewed by a panel.

In 2021-2022, we received 33 bids and provided £9,700 of goods/services to residents. The main items provided included removals, property and garden clearances and white goods.

Case study

Daniel* was referred to the tenancy sustainment team after recently completing an exceptional social needs (ESN) move. Due to threats made against him at his previous property, Daniel couldn't return to collect any furniture or belongings to take to his new property.

The sustainment casework officer (SCO) submitted an ENF bid for a bed and bedding which was quickly delivered to his property. The SCO also worked to secure external funding for white goods and furniture.

The SCO made a referral to Citizen Advice to support Daniel with his universal credit (UC) application and liaised with the local authority to cover the full arrears from his previous property. Daniel is now in a comfortably furnished home with facilities to cook and store fresh food. He is also receiving all qualifying benefits and has access to his online UC portal.

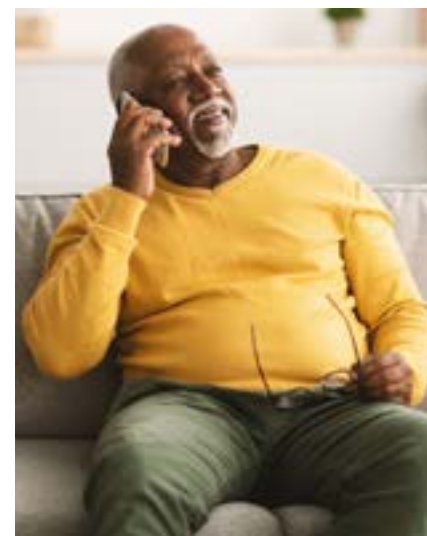
Daniel said, "I appreciate all the work you and all involved have done to get me to this point and getting me into what I'm now calling home. Thanks so much, I can't express how much it means to me."

*Not his real name

Your feedback

Michelle* was supported by an SCO and said, "I spoke to a sustainment worker on the phone, and they were fantastic in helping me to get my bathroom renovated, which was something I had been desperately trying to get done for a very long time, so I was very happy with their service."

*Not her real name



SOCIAL VALUE

We expect contractors and organisations we work with to provide added value by supporting local people and projects.

We currently have 37 apprentices working alongside our contractors and developers. We have supported a further six apprentices on our TCH service contracts (such as electrical testing and grounds maintenance) - the figure is lower than we would typically expect, however all suppliers have indicated recruitment is currently challenging due to a large number of vacancies elsewhere.

Projects

TCH supported Blossoms of Hope, a community garden project, by funding a cabin for its site in Dover. An informal signposting service is run from the cabin, and it's also somewhere for volunteers to shelter during breaks. TCH also utilised the social value element in its contact with George Jones & Sons Ltd who were able to put up the cabin at no additional cost.



Our electrical contractor M&S Electrical has completed 20 minor handyman tasks in our sheltered schemes. These were provided free of charge, and covered items that residents would otherwise have been unable to afford.

Countrywise Repairs (CWR) helped a resident to remove some rotten decking. The tenant had been unable to maintain it due to physical health constraints, so CWR replaced it with a gravel path complete with stepping stones - and they even provided a free skip to get rid of the debris.

At TCH we donated all the furniture from a show home at one of our new developments to a women's refuge in Crowborough. We also held a silent auction for show home furnishings with all proceeds going towards a Ukraine relief fund.

Before the work was carried out



Show home, Crowborough



New and improved gravel pathway



Future Plans

As part of the procurement of our new repairs and maintenance contract, contractors have been scored on how they will meet or exceed the requirements of our social value policy.

This includes:

- The number of apprentices employed
- Days per year that contractors volunteer for charitable causes in our community
- Employment opportunities created
- The amount of money spent at local companies.

NEW HOMES AND DEVELOPMENT

230 new homes completed | 67% of completed homes were social or affordable rent

374 new homes started, 123 of these are for social rent

162 homes sold to shared owners

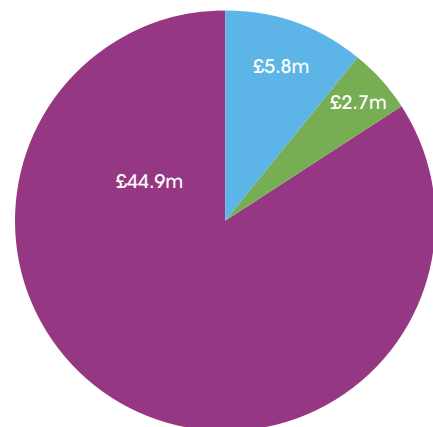
Funding the development of new homes

The government expects us to generate most of the funds needed to develop affordable housing through private sales.

In 2021-2022 we invested £53.4 million into building new homes. This investment was made up of £5.8million from government grants, £2.7 million from the sales of new homes and £44.9 million from TCH funding.

Funding the development of new homes

- Government grants
- Sales of new homes
- TCH funding



Castriona, Head of Sales, Love Living Homes, at Montague Place, Sandwich



Listening to residents

We started consulting residents about the regeneration of the Showfields estate in Tunbridge Wells. We gathered feedback from residents about the proposed designs from online meetings, face-to-face consultations and open events. Residents told us that it was important that the green space on the estate is protected, and we will use this feedback in the planning process.

Resident consultation on the Showfields estate regeneration



Accessibility

We currently have 20 wheelchair adaptable homes being constructed and have completed nine wheelchair accessible homes at Cable Wharf in Northfleet, Barty Farm in Bearsted, and Elm Avenue in Chattenden.

Looking forward

In 2022-2023 we will focus on developing far more homes for social rent, rather than for affordable rent. Next year, we aim to provide at least 30% of our new homes for social rent.

Cable Wharf, Northfleet



SUSTAINABILITY

In 2021 we started reviewing the way we operate to ensure that we act sustainably and responsibly, and to meet the government's targets of net zero carbon by 2050.

We completed a Sustainable Homes Index for Tomorrow (SHIFT) environmental assessment to understand how we are performing against environmental targets, and in April 2022 we achieved a silver rating. We have used this assessment to develop a road map towards our net zero goals.

Tope Falade joined TCH in 2021 in the new role of Sustainability Manager role.

He was instrumental in helping us achieve the SHIFT assessment, and brought a wealth of experience and ideas to help us reduce our carbon emissions and work towards meeting our net zero target.



Tope Falade presenting Bob Heapy with the SHIFT Certificate

Building sustainable homes

In 2021 we started development on 80 modular homes which will achieve the highest energy performance certification (EPC) rating of A. These homes will be well insulated, have air source heat pumps and solar panels and will be highly energy efficient.

Computer Generated Image of Westwood Acres, Broadstairs



Working with residents

Reducing energy use is not only an environmental concern, but also has significant impact on living costs. In 2021, TCH partnered with AgilityEco to provide energy advice to our residents to help reduce energy bills. To find out more and book an energy advice session, visit our website.

We have started installing heat pumps in some of our homes and are introducing electric vehicle charging points across some schemes.

Looking forward

In April 2022 we consulted with residents to find out how we can create more sustainable communities. We will use this research to support residents to reduce their energy consumption and to make other sustainable lifestyle choices.

Over the next year, we will start implementing the changes in our sustainability strategy. We will start to scale up our programme of insulation improvement works, focusing on properties with the lowest energy efficiency, so that all homes meet EPC rating C by 2030. We will also develop plans to manage our green spaces and communal areas more sustainably.

Worried about rising fuel and energy bills?

Save money with our new

Energy Advice Service

We've partnered with AgilityEco to deliver a new service for Town & Country Housing residents through the Peabody Group.



Save an average £140 on your bills like Angela did

Sign up today and start saving!

Online at www.peabody.org.uk/free-home-energy-advice

Electrical Vehicle charging point at Coppers Lane, Matfield



DIGITAL

How is our online customer portal, MyHomeOnline performing?

500+ more residents signed up to use MyHomeOnline

24,890 visits

438,133 web pages viewed

2,310 messages received

49% of our homes have a MyHomeOnline account

4,183 total number of users

Our commitment to you

We recognise that being online is quickly becoming a basic need and can provide huge benefits to our residents. Whether that's managing your home, universal credit journal or connecting with loved ones.

This is why we are committed to helping our digitally excluded residents to get online through signposting to digital support services, supporting local government projects and through exploring ways to upgrade broadband speed.

Supporting you to get online

Last year we worked with a local charity, Compaid, to provide residents with digital skills training and a device with internet access for the duration of their training. A total of 36 residents were referred to the scheme and 18 received support to get online.

Case study

Cara* was referred for support as she had broadband at home but had never owned a computer, laptop, or tablet. Cara and her son had no way of accessing the internet other than through her son's phone.

After gaining digital access through our Compaid campaign, Cara said:

"I found the training with Compaid very good, and the trainers were really helpful. I've learnt how to generally browse online and do some online shopping.

"I've also been able to access GP and medical services during Covid-19 restrictions and connect with my family."

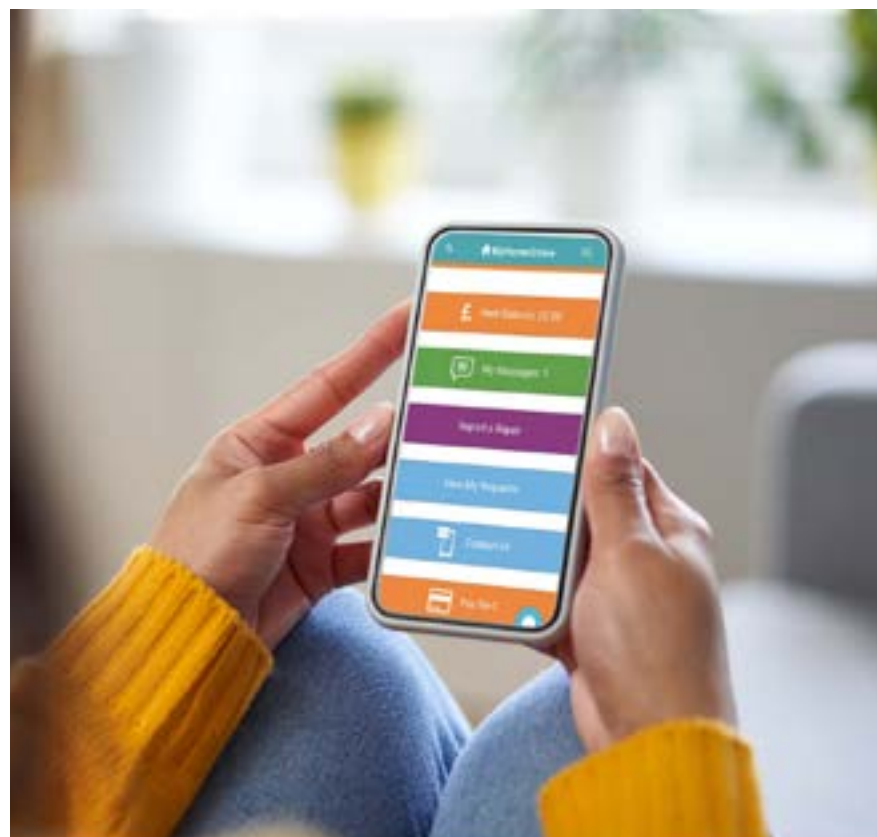
*Not her real name

Digital support going forward

We are exploring the possibility of having our staff volunteer to join the 'Digital Champions Network', run by the Digital Kent team at Kent County Council (KCC). Digital champions are there to support and help improve digital skills. This will provide our residents with a place to access the support needed to get online.

We are also working with KCC on its 'Kent community Wi-Fi project', which aims to install free community Wi-Fi in an area within each district of the county.

We will also explore how we work with telecom providers in the future as they upgrade their broadband networks with high-speed fibre network. This will mean our residents are able to access fast reliable broadband within their homes, as part of the government's levelling up plans.



VALUE FOR MONEY

We continue to deliver value for money by balancing investment with quality, so we can invest more in the services we provide to you.

In 2021-2022

- We commenced the re-procurement of our repairs contract which delivers most of the repairs to our occupied and empty properties. The new contract will deliver improved value for money
- We facilitated digital resident engagement activities, including the resident scrutiny panel and focus groups. Holding digital engagement events has also enabled participation by residents who are geographically dispersed or who have caring responsibilities
- Increased efficiency by continuing to roll out DocuSign, to fill out forms digitally, and Claritymail, our digital mailroom

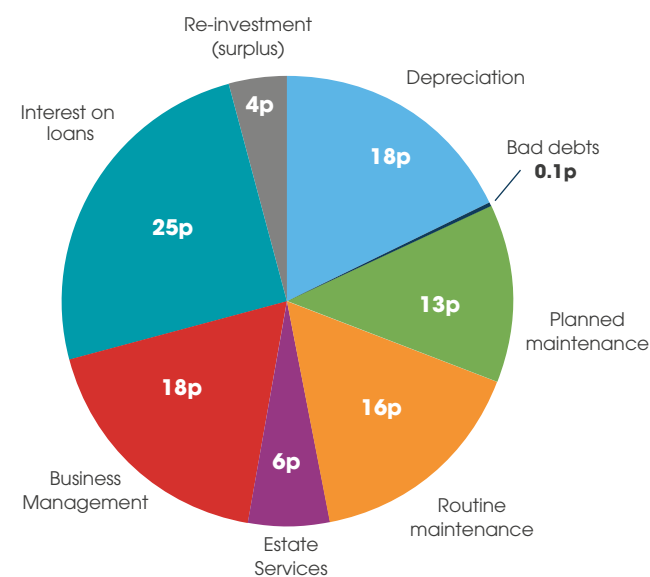
- Our development contractors must provide one apprenticeship for every £1 million spent.

Looking forward

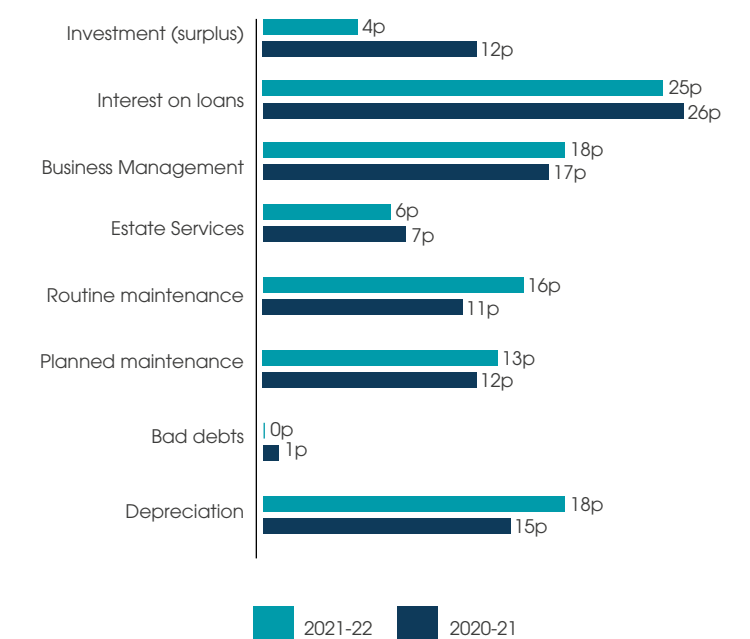
Our new repairs contract, which will start in November 2022, has been procured to maximise customer service alongside improved value for money and social value.

We will continue to build energy efficient homes which use less electricity and gas. Our new homes are designed to reduce the cost of having to adapt homes later to meet the government's carbon neutral targets. In 2022, we will develop a plan to improve all our empty homes to meet an EPC C energy efficiency rating.

How each pound was spent in 2021-22



How each pound was spent 2021-22 compared to 2020-21



AFTERWORD FROM BOB HEAPY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE

I hope you've found the annual report interesting and informative. We're starting to move forward, filling staffing vacancies and catching up with those services that have been on hold or subject to delays.

Looking forward, a highlight in 2022-2023 will be our new responsive repairs and maintenance contract which will be in place from November 2022. We know that quality repairs are a priority for you, so we have been working hard on the new contract to make sure that there will be real improvements to the service, based on your feedback.

We will be working with our new contractor to improve communication and the time taken to complete repairs.

I'm excited about the progress we have been making on reducing our carbon

footprint and look forward to publishing our sustainability strategy in early 2023.

By making sure that we operate sustainably, we will continue to meet the housing needs of present and future generations and increase the supply of housing that is both genuinely affordable and of outstanding quality.

Thank you for taking the time to read the report.

Best wishes.



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