

Annual report to tenants 2022-23



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Introduction

from **Bob Heapy, Chief Executive,
Town & Country Housing**



It's always a privilege to be able to write the introduction to our Annual Report to Tenants. As you'll see there's been a huge amount of work taking place over the year, and I'd like to thank my colleagues at Town & Country Housing (TCH) for all they do to support you, our residents.

There's lots to be proud of from the past year, but it's only right that we also consider areas where we haven't performed so well too. One of the areas where concerns have regularly been raised is our repairs service.

A larger than expected number of repairs being booked coupled with, quite rightly, increased resident awareness about the potential dangers of damp and mould, saw our newly launched joint venture repairs service, TCH Repairs, facing an unprecedented workload this winter.

I'd like to personally thank you for your continued patience around our repairs offering. It's clear that our service has been lacking at times, but please believe me when I say that we're learning from the problems and from your feedback. We are constantly evolving and adapting our approach to ensure we deliver excellent services.

Tackling damp and mould

For example, we have adopted a whole new policy and approach to damp and mould. As well as dealing with the visible signs we're also working hard to establish the causes in individuals' homes.

And it goes further than that – we've been using the data we hold and actively contacting those we believe could be at increased risk of, or from, damp and mould. This might be because of property type, previous repair issues or individual issues such as known health conditions.

Dealing with damp and mould is a challenge for the whole housing sector, not just TCH. We are committed to ensuring that all our homes are in good repair and our approach to tackling damp and mould reflects that challenge. We are aware we do not always get it right first time but we are committed to doing all we can.

A growing organisation

The 2022-23 financial year has been a tremendous year of growth for TCH. You'll see evidence of this as you go through the report. The very end of the financial year finished on a real high when we completed our merger with Rosebery Housing Association.

Based in Epsom, the organisation has more than 2,770 homes across Surrey and West Sussex, ranging from one-bedroom flats to four-bedroom family homes.

Rosebery strives for excellence in customer care and is proud to be a local business that creates sustainable communities, working closely with residents and creating local jobs. I'm delighted to welcome Epsom colleagues into the TCH family, and we are now working as one strong team operating in one well defined region.

Bringing together the best of both areas of the business, we will continue to learn from each other. I know that together we will create a stronger, more robust organisation as the Southern Operating Region of the Peabody Group.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R. O. Heapy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Welcome from the Resident Scrutiny Panel

Hello and welcome to the annual report 2022-23 from TCH's Resident Scrutiny Panel. We are eleven residents (eight tenants, two shared owners and one intermediate market rent tenant) who undertake in-depth reviews of services and make recommendations for service improvements directly to the Board.

We continue to meet online as our panel members are geographically dispersed. This also fits well with our work commitments and other responsibilities, and is more efficient. We do however start each new service review with an in-person meeting at Monson House, Tunbridge Wells.

In Autumn 2022 we completed a review of the Tenancy Sustainment service and made nine recommendations to Board, the first of which was to change the name of the service to Tenancy Support, which has now been adopted. The focus of the review was to better highlight the help which is available to residents from TCH and other sources, as well as making it a more of a wraparound service. The remaining recommendations are due to be implemented by spring 2024, with most expected to be completed before that.

We then began a review of the Community Safety service. We selected this and the Tenancy Support service as we were aware that both areas of operation had been much utilised following the pandemic.

It is important to say that although we have made recommendations to improve these services, we would like to extend our gratitude to the staff who undertake these challenging roles. During both reviews, we gained insight into the wide-range and volume of cases that the respective teams manage on a daily basis.





Please visit the [Get Involved](#) page on our website or look out for updates in the resident newsletter to see how our recommendations have improved services.

As part of the reviews we often research how other social housing providers are delivering similar services. But, due to our successes and longevity, in July 2022 it was our turn to share knowledge with a relatively new resident scrutiny panel at West Kent Housing Association.

Two panel members met online with their peer equivalents and staff from both organisations to share learning and best practice. We are proud to mentor other resident scrutiny panels and hope to do more in the future.

If you'd like to find out more about the Resident Scrutiny Panel, suggest a service area for review or apply to join, please visit our website or email Amanda Mankelow, Resident Scrutiny Administration Assistant on: [**amanda.mankelow@tch.org.uk**](mailto:amanda.mankelow@tch.org.uk)

**We are
all about**
people



All about people...

Resident engagement and scrutiny

71.9%

overall satisfaction in 2022-23.

85.8%

of residents said that TCH treated them with respect.

66.8%

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

22.1%

of residents said that TCH did not listen to views and act upon them.

We now have a group of colleagues called **Resident Voice Champions** working to better understand barriers to communication and how we can work together to improve this and really hear your views and concerns.

16.9%

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 actions to be taken.

These can be found on our website: tch.org.uk/service-commitments

Resident engagement is all about listening to, really hearing, and working with our residents' so that we continue to learn and improve the services we deliver.

Investing in Resident Engagement

Last January we recruited a Resident Engagement Manager to help us work with our residents more closely.

Alongside other activities it's really important to work with you to develop and review all our customer facing strategy and policy to make sure our services reflect your needs and priorities.

During 2022-2023 we reviewed a range of policies and strategies and made improvements to each based on the feedback we received from residents through focus groups and consultations.



All about people...

Resident engagement and scrutiny

Involving everyone

Involving a wide range of residents and giving everyone the opportunity to contribute and be heard can be our biggest challenge. As well as holding some face-to-face events, we try to make getting involved easier by creating virtual sessions, such as online focus groups. However, we understand that not everyone can engage digitally.

To make sure we are giving all our residents the opportunity to have their say, we also provide options to take part through telephone surveys. We can also carry out larger scale consultations by post for those residents we know aren't online.

Looking forward

One survey conducted through multiple methods was our recent resident engagement survey. This was the starting point to developing our Resident Engagement Strategy. We'll be using your feedback and further consultation sessions to co-create this strategy with you.

We're also developing a Customer Experience Strategy. This will look at how we can improve the customer experience to ensure we always listen to and incorporate views and demonstrate to residents the changes we've made as a result.

Two key themes of the strategy's action plan are Listening and learning and The right tools for the job. The plan will also look at how we create easy to use, flexible, local services informed by accurate, up to date records and data.

The Resident Scrutiny Panel

Our Resident Scrutiny Panel (RSP) have already introduced themselves at the start of the report, where they highlighted the great work they've been doing over the year.

One of our newest panel members, Sue, told us how she is finding the role:

“So far, I am really enjoying myself, I've enjoyed meeting so many people. The training is really good, you're not left to struggle. Each meeting I get something out of it and our views are always listened to. The Community Safety Team shadowing had a big impact as I had so many misconceptions about what the team can and can't do, so it was a real eye opener. I learnt so much.”

Next steps

After finishing its review of the Tenancy Support and Community Safety services, the RSP is now reviewing the services we provide to residents who are experiencing damp and mould issues.

Customer Services team

The Customer Services team at a glance

34,237

Calls received

2021/22 = 40,873

29,652 (86%)

**of these were answered against
a target of 85%**

2021/22 = 32,553 (79.6% against
a target of 85%)

Our Customer Services team (CST) went through a period of change during 2022-23.

Having to transform the team due to staff changes, while incorporating the Repairs Service Advisors (RSAs) following the creation of our new joint venture repairs company, TCH Repairs, meant it was a challenging year.

Despite these challenges, we managed to answer 86% of the calls you made to us, just exceeding our target of 85%. We will increase that target to 90% next year as our aim is to miss as few calls as possible.

Improvements to our service

To make sure we're providing the best possible service to residents, we have made improvements based on the challenges we faced and your feedback including:

- After the RSAs joined the team, we focussed on improving the quality of our calls. We looked at what was needed on both repairs and customer service calls and offered tailored training to our advisors
- We've improved the way we communicate with teams across TCH by appointing Team Liaisons from within our team. The role of the Team Liaison is to become experts in their liaison subject, and they meet with and exchange information with colleagues to improve our collaborative approach.

Supporting residents and staff

Unfortunately, during 2022-23 we saw an increase in the number of calls from residents telling us about support needs or personal challenges including, sadly, calls from people talking about taking their own lives.



All about people...

Customer Services team

Throughout the year we provided a range of training and support to make sure our advisors were able to manage the calls and provide effective support for residents in crisis and those who found themselves in difficult situations.

Looking forward

Looking ahead to 2023-24 we aim to resolve the number of complaints we receive at the first point of contact and have set a target to resolve more queries during the initial call.

Customer feedback

I'd like to compliment the team on how they handled my call. The person I spoke to was lovely and very helpful when dealing with my queries.

Customer feedback

I would like to thank you for your help with overgrown trees at the bottom of our garden yesterday - it was all cleared and I can now see the trees. Thanks so much, it looks amazing!

Customer feedback

You've been extremely helpful dealing this week, dealing with an emergency situation over the space of a few days. You were lovely and couldn't have been more helpful. You've gone above and beyond to help in what would otherwise not have been a very nice situation.

Income team

We collected

99.9% of rent (including rent arrears) against a target of 100%

For payments made on four weekly (housing benefit) or monthly (universal credit) our rent arrears for social and affordable rented homes reduced from

1.2% → 1%
in March 2022 to in March 2023

The number of households we had to evict due to rent arrears halved from

six → three
in 2021-2 to in 2022-3

It's good to see this positive trend as eviction is always a last resort for us, we will always try to work with you if you are having trouble paying your rent. Please get in touch if you need help or advice - the sooner we know you are facing issues the sooner we can help.

We know that the cost-of-living crisis is having a huge impact on many of our residents, and our income team is doing all it can to support those who may be facing challenges in paying their rent.

As the statistics show we have performed strongly over the year, but the statistics only show part of the story.

Our success comes from our approach to supporting individual residents, tailoring our approach to fit the specific needs of the person we're working with.

This personal approach of working with residents is backed up with technical systems that look at data to identify cases where residents may need extra help or advice.

By being better able to automatically find cases where support is needed, staff have more time to focus on helping individual residents rather than analysing spreadsheets and reports.



All about people...

Income team

Customer contact

We use a range of different approaches to build relationships with residents. We match our approach to individual tenants to bring a positive result, offering them support and advice to solve their issues rather than resorting to the threat of court action.

Over the course of the year we reviewed our rent arrears letters to make sure that they were easy to understand, explained the range of help available to residents, and that the tone of the letters was supportive and open.

Working with other agencies

Relationships with Local Authorities (LA) are also important, allowing us to work with LA colleagues to make sure we are working together to deliver the best outcome for our residents.

The combined impact of both approaches is that we can resolve issues around non-payment and help people to remain in their homes. This also ensures that income is coming into TCH that can be used to fund services and housing. A large part of our day-to-day expenditure on providing services is funded through the rents we collect. Please see the chart on page 35 for further details on how rental income is spent.

Customer feedback

Following a visit to Susan's* home, where we were able to offer advice on how to avoid falling into arrears, we received this message:

Thank you very much for your visit it was very nice to meet you and I appreciate your patience - I tend to ramble. I will adhere to the payments agreed and as I assured you I will never cancel the direct debit again. Hopefully bit by bit my account will make it into a position where I am in credit. That will give me peace of mind. Thank you for taking time out to come over and it did a lot to reassure me.

* All names have been changed

Tenancy and Money Support

The Tenancy and Money Support team helps residents manage their tenancies and access services that can support them with their finances.

We work closely with residents who would benefit from additional help and who could be at risk of losing their home often because their support needs impact their ability to manage their tenancy.

We provide benefits and budgeting advice alongside referrals to external agencies such as addiction and substance abuse services, mental health, and social care.

Cost-of-living crisis

2022-23 was made difficult by the challenges we all faced from the cost-of-living crisis and fuel poverty.

We were busy throughout the year supporting over 1,000 residents to reduce their debt. The combined value of the debt that we were able to help them reduce added up to £218,860. This is a substantial increase from the £132,000 debt reduction in 2021-22.

Funding support

During 2022-23 we dedicated a lot of time to managing and allocating the Discretionary Support Fund (DSF). This grant helps pay for essential costs such as food, gas and electricity where residents meet the criteria for funding.

The fund was used to support our residents by providing:

- 300 fuel vouchers
- 62 food vouchers
- 16 home essentials vouchers
- 45 kitchen appliances
- 11 garden clearances
- 8 property clean and clearances
- 18 Mattresses or beds
- 2 sofas
- 3 mobile phones.



All about people...

Tenancy and Money Support

Customer feedback

Sarah* was struggling with her wellbeing due to her bipolar. Her home was cold because of an issue with her heating system that she couldn't report to us as she didn't have any funds to top up her phone.

Sarah was struggling financially, and the Tenancy and Money Support team were able to access the hardship fund to pay for school uniform and a new washing machine. They also made a referral to support Sarah with her budgeting skills and a referral to help improve her wellbeing.

Sarah said:

With this bit of support I can now see the light at the end of the tunnel and can be a little more positive about the future.

Customer feedback

Charlotte* was supported by the team and a successful grant bid was made for a new cooker for her kitchen.

She said:

I am so very grateful. It has been a tremendous help to be able to cook at home using an oven, instead of some borrowed camping things. It's a huge weight off my shoulders and I don't think I could say thank you enough. TCH have been so professional and supportive.

*names have been changed

Community Safety

Our Community Safety team uses a range of preventative measures, early intervention, and legal action to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB).

Community Safety at a glance

1,016

new cases of
antisocial behaviour

2021/22 = 793

195

safeguarding
cases opened

2021/22 = 159

68.3 days

on average to close
an ASB case, within the
target of 75 days

2021/22 = 72 days against
a target of 42 days

Anti-social behaviour

During 2022-23, we saw an increase of 30% in the number of ASB cases reported and dealt with. Despite this considerable increase we only had to make two evictions. We can't tackle ASB without the great support we receive from our local authorities, police and other agencies. While we always try to work with residents to resolve issues, it is sometimes necessary to pursue legal remedies to protect the communities impacted by ASB.

The top four types of ASB reported were:

Noise 188 cases

Verbal abuse 185 cases

Drugs 148 cases

Domestic Abuse 141 cases

Reports of noise and domestic abuse remained consistent with volumes over the last two years. However, verbal abuse has increased by 38% and problems associated with drug use by 66% from the previous year.



All about people...

Community Safety

Problem solving approach

The biggest challenges we face as a team are the number of cases we are managing and the expectations of residents about what our interventions may be able to achieve.

To help us deal with the increase in ASB cases, during 2022-23 we created two new roles and welcomed two new colleagues to the team.

Growing the team has enabled us tackle the increase in ASB cases and helped us reach our target of 75 days to close a case, an improvement of 3.5 days from 2021-22.

Looking forward

Our general approach for the coming year is to focus on helping people manage their tenancies. We aim to keep people in their homes and to reduce the impact ASB has on our communities.

We've seen the benefits that come from partnership working and we will continue to look for ways to further develop our collaborative relationships with other agencies, such as the police and local authorities.

We'll also be looking to achieve a White Ribbon Accreditation to cement our commitment towards reducing violence against women and girls.



Community Investment

Community investment

Our commitment to helping people flourish isn't just focused on providing homes. We're also passionate about listening to our local communities and supporting their needs. Over the year we've invested close to £100,000 on community activities and projects, with the following case studies giving you a taste of the type of work we've been involved in.

FutureCoders SE

FutureCoders SE are working in collaboration with resident learners and resident focus groups to develop a virtual community noticeboard app. Residents have been involved in developing the coding for the app. This has enabled them to gain valuable work experience and build their skills as future Information Technology developers by working to a real-world project brief. Further work is planned with resident focus groups to ensure that the way the app works, and the content it promotes, meets residents' needs.

Snodland Food Assist (SFA)

Thanks to our grant of £4,800 SFA was able to buy food and arrange to deliver food parcels to 13 TCH families and the 40 children within these households. We were also able to put families in touch with our Money Support team for wider support on budgeting and benefits.

Denise* said that the team had: helped her tremendously, and that she felt much more confident in managing her household budget with their help and support.

Getaway Garden

This Dover-based initiative is billed as 'a place where people and plants can grow'. It aims to support wellbeing and learning in a calm environment, and is a joint project between Dover Counselling Centre, TCH, Dover District Council and Future Skills. The project has also been supported by TCH Repairs who donated scaffold boards that have been turned into planters, a skip, gardening tools and other useful equipment.

Future Skills

Future Skills, a Community Interest Company, has been delivering City & Guilds Functional Skills Modules for our residents living on the Showfields estate in Tunbridge Wells. The programme has focused on English and Maths skills, but tailored support has also been offered to meet individual residents' needs.

Maryam* said:

The English and Maths courses have enabled me to be able to help my children with their homework.

She also received a laptop, donated by Fortem Solutions (the joint partner for our repairs service, TCH Repairs), which has allowed her to develop her digital skills.

*All names have been changed



Complaints

621 complaints

resolved at stage one

96 complaints

resolved at stage two

During 2022-23 we resolved 621 complaints at stage one of our complaints process, and we upheld 392. We resolved a further 96 complaints at stage two and upheld 60 of them.

Upholding a complaint means that our investigation has shown that we've made an error. Complaints are an important part of receiving feedback from customers and we always welcome the opportunity to correct something that has gone wrong. We always try to learn from our mistakes and tell you what we're planning to do differently in the future.

Challenges to the service

Most of the complaints we received during the year were about repairs and maintenance. This is to be expected as this is our most used service.

We've experienced some issues with the launch of our new repairs service and changeover in systems which contributed to the high number of complaints, as did the understandable increase in media attention on damp and mould.

We've also seen an increase in the number of complaints escalated to stage two. We always try to resolve complaints at stage one and are working hard to understand the reasons that complaints escalate. This year some escalations have been linked to delays in repairs promised at stage one being

completed. It's good to know that residents feel they can continue to follow our complaints process if things aren't fully resolved initially. You can see on page 23 how we're working to bring improvements to our repairs service.

We've recruited additional complaint handlers across the organisation to address the increase in complaints.

The Housing Ombudsman

We've recently completed a review of our complaints policy to make sure it's in line with the Ombudsman's complaint handling code, which was updated in October 2022.

There's a requirement for landlords to self-assess against the code annually and to publish the results. You can find the self-assessment in the Complaints section of our website. We have also updated our compensation policy by listening to your feedback and have produced an easy access overview version.

If you're dissatisfied about how we've handled a complaint you can ask the Housing Ombudsman to review our decision. You can seek advice from the Ombudsman at any time during the complaints process, but they usually ask you to go through stage one and two of our process before they'll investigate.

Learning from complaints

We've received nine Ombudsman determinations this year. Five cases found no maladministration, one case found that we offered reasonable redress and three cases found there had been a service failure.

All about people...

Complaints



In these cases the Ombudsman makes determinations or recommendations about service improvements. We've followed their guidance and implemented the suggested improvements.

We know we need to get better at doing what we say we will, especially when a complaint about repairs has already been made. We're working with our contractors to improve this.

Improvements to the service

We've appointed a voids inspector following resident feedback about the process and lack of clarity around what's expected when vacating a property. This has resulted in properties being left in better condition.

To improve our communication our repairs team are undertaking additional training with a focus on keeping customers updated, providing clear

messages (and improved methods for contacting residents when attending appointments) and following up more effectively when we're unable to gain access to carry out a repair.

Looking forward

The coming financial year (2023/24) sees the introduction of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) by the Regulator of Social Housing. The requirement for landlord to report on these comes into effect in 2024.

One of the TSMs is about complaint handling times, which is something that we know we need to improve on and will be working towards.

We are also expecting the Housing Ombudsman to publish an update to its complaint handling code in preparation for their new powers included in the new Social Housing (Regulation) Act. We will work to ensure we are compliant with all updates.

All about people...

Home Improvement Support Team

HIST received

6,982

referrals where people were **assisted with advice and support** from the team.

They supported

1,104

people to **achieve major adaptations** within their home through **Disabled Facility Grants and private funding**, with a completed works value of more than **£10 million**.

1,451

minor aids like grab rails and key safes were fitted

The handyperson service assisted

2,707

 with

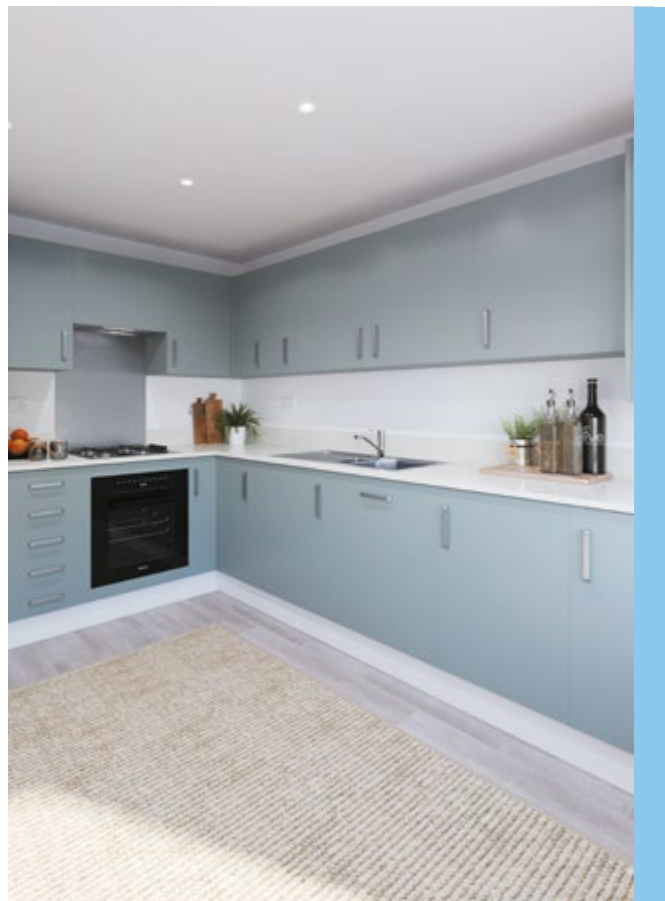
4,443

people jobs completed

At the start of the financial year we were delighted to welcome more than 70 new members of care and support staff, who transferred into TCH from Peabody South East.

Known as the Home Improvement Support Team, or HIST for short, having them as part of the team has enabled us to expand our service offering to both residents and non-residents.

The majority of HIST's work is around providing support and advice to older or vulnerable people who own their homes, through its status as a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) – a recognised local, trusted organisation that helps older, disabled and vulnerable people to live a good life for longer.



All about people...

Home Improvement Support Team

Supporting independent living

The team has been commissioned to provide HIA services by county, unitary and local authorities since 1990.

With more than 33 years' experience we offer a range of solutions to anyone in the region, including TCH residents.

Adaptations such as a level access shower, wet room, grabrails and replacing steps into a home with a low-gradient slope can help residents to continue to live independently in their own homes.

However, it can be daunting for homeowners to know where to start. Through our work as a HIA, we can help people access Disabled Facilities Grants and then plan and implement the necessary adaptations. We also work with those who want to fund the adaptations themselves.

HIST offers a range of additional services across Kent, including a hospital discharge service, Home Straight and our handy person support.

Home Straight

The team supports those experiencing issues caused by excessive clutter. By working compassionately, they are able to understand the root cause of the situation and develop an approach that will best support the person's needs.

Handyperson Service

The Handyperson Team carries out smaller jobs in the home that people can often struggle to find a tradesperson to complete, such as putting up a shelf or changing a lock.

Hospital Discharge

The Health and Housing Coordinators provide support and advice around housing related issues that could be delaying a loved one's safe discharge from hospital to home.

Support Service

Our support service provides housing related support to people with mental health challenges, learning disabilities and older people. This work covers both TCH residents and those living in their own homes.

Looking forward

- We are working with local authorities to better understand how we can continue to meet their priorities and provide services that support their target groups
- We are integrating services to some extra care schemes in Kent that are set to join the TCH family in 2023
- We are scoping the potential to expand the size and nature of the Handyperson Team.

**You can find out more about HIST
and its work here: www.tch.org.uk/hia**

**We are
focused
on getting
the basics
*right***



Repairs and maintenance

Repairs

This was a year of change for our repairs service, with our existing ten-year contract with Countrywise Repairs ending in March 2022.

Countrywise Repairs operatives were directly employed by TCH until November 2022 when they then moved across to TCH Repairs – our new joint venture with Fortem Solutions.

Fortem Solutions is an established company that provides specialist property solutions to keep homes and buildings running smoothly. As well as bringing its technical know-how and supply chain contacts, it will also be able to introduce new technologies and systems to keep residents informed about work in their homes, and support better diagnosis of repairs.

November marks the start of the busiest time of the year for repairs, so launching a new repairs service at that point was always going to be difficult. TCH Repairs rose to the challenge and did all it could to hit the ground running. However, we quickly started to see an exceptionally high number of repairs jobs being requested.

Damp and mould

A large part of this was down to growing awareness around damp and mould, following the inquest into the tragic death of Awaab Ishak. The coroner concluded that the two-year old from Rochdale had died from respiratory illness caused by damp and mould in his Rochdale Boroughwide Housing flat.

Damp and mould quickly and correctly became a focus for all housing associations, and we and TCH Repairs promptly reviewed our processes to ensure that we were doing all we could to support our residents.

There's been a whole raft of work taking place, with the focus on treating any outbreaks while also establishing the cause. All damp and mould repairs visits see insulation, extractor fans, windows and air bricks being checked, with surveyors instructed to investigate more complex cases.

A data driven approach

As well as encouraging residents to contact us about damp and mould problems we've also been using data to actively contact residents who we believe may be at increased risk. This could either be because of their property type, previous repair issues, known health concerns or their age - very young and older people can be more at risk to the impacts of mould in their homes.

Directing resources to focus on damp and mould impacted on our ability to carry out other types of repairs. We know that our repairs service has not been operating at the standard that it should and we're sorry for this. We will be learning from this experience to improve our service for the coming winter and beyond and have now increased staffing resources to meet the increased repairs demand.

Looking forward

- We have a long-term arrangement with Fortem Solutions and look forward to delivering a modern, fit for purpose repairs service
- This will include the use of video calls and better communications when scheduling work, with the aim of increasing the number of first-time fixes and better scheduling of jobs to increase productivity.

Focused on...

Planned maintenance

In 2022/23 we had **84 homes in need of major work** before we were able to rent them again to new residents, compared to 47 in 2021/22. Despite there being more homes to work on we were able to do works more quickly with our **average turnaround time for completing the works being 17.1 days**, against a target of 30 days.

842 homes

had external repairs, decorative works, and gutter clearances

23

full roof replacements on flats and houses

48

double glazing installations or upgrades

291

fire door replacements to flats

173

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

120

riser cupboard doors replaced and 383 repaired

At the time of the first lockdown in March 2020 we had to suspend almost all our planned maintenance activity. As COVID restrictions eased we started up work where it was safe to do so.

However, it wasn't until the start of the 2022/23 financial year that we were able to pick up the pace to anything like pre-Covid levels.

External planned maintenance

This was one of the areas that we were able to pick up sooner than others, as it was safer to work outdoors rather than in residents' homes.

Even so we lost a year to COVID, and so took the decision to spread two years' worth of work over three years.

Work has progressed well over the year, as the statistics (above) show. However, we have had to reschedule all future planned external works as it was not possible to regain the time lost.

Heating and insulation

The number of new boilers being installed is now back up to pre-pandemic levels, however the installation of renewable technologies has yet to achieve the numbers planned, due to the limited availability of suitably skilled contractors. Where appropriate we insulated homes that had poor energy efficiency or damp and mould.

Disabled adaptations

We deliver hundreds of adaptations each year, and this service was back at full capacity in 2022/23. There was a small backlog at the start of the year, but this was cleared as the year progressed.

Focused on...

Planned maintenance

Stock condition surveys

We use data from these surveys to understand the condition of our properties so we can plan future programmes of work. We have a rolling programme to survey all our properties, with a target to survey 80% of them every five years. At the start of this financial year that figure was at 55% due to the service being heavily restricted during Covid. A recovery plan was put in place which will help us improve the situation over the coming months.



Customer feedback

We were delighted to have two of our residents work with us to decide the types of kitchen and bathroom units that will be installed in homes through our Internal Improvements Programme.

Following a robust procurement process we appointed Foster Property Maintenance to deliver our Internal Improvements Programme for the next three years, with the option of two, two-year extensions.

The new contract will see residents able to pick a selection of kitchen units from the Howdens' Greenwich kitchen range, which offers a wide selection of high quality, popular off-the-shelf options.

Two of our residents, Pat and Misty (pictured above), were able to share their views as to which items should be included in the offering.

Commenting on the process Pat said:

I thought it was brilliant with all the things that are on offer and the range of colours.

Misty was particularly pleased to see showers and heated towel rails included in the package. She said:

It's fantastic to be getting showers – I can't tell you the difference that having a shower will make to people's lives, and not only because of the cost of living, with showers being much cheaper to run than a bath.

Estate Services

If you pay a service charge some of this goes towards the upkeep of your neighbourhood, so we're committed to ensuring that you receive value for money and that our estates are well looked after.

With more than 10,000 individual homes across 15 local authorities in Kent and Sussex we've a huge area to cover, but in 2022/23 we completed more than 4,000 estate inspections, compared to 1,783 in 2021/22.

The visits are carried out by our Estate Contract Officers (ECOs), who are tasked to visit each site at least once every three months. Large estates or areas where we've identified concerns get more frequent visits.

During the inspections the ECOs check that our contractors, who carry out tasks including grounds maintenance and communal cleaning, are working to the prescribed standard.



A case for growth

Over the year we've been able to grow the team numbers by internal promotion. We've also reduced the geographical area that each ECO is responsible for. These two changes have meant that our ECOs are able to visit sites that need extra support more frequently.

Sometimes estates need targeted support to tackle issues such as problems with bin stores not being kept clear. When we identify estates that have ongoing issues of this type we'll add them to our Sensitive Site list.

Once a site is on the list our ECOs will visit more frequently and work with the contractors to bring the site up to the required standard.

Problem solving approach

In some cases we may move areas to our Needing Improvement Site list. This decision will be based on a range of factors including resident feedback or where we notice ongoing trends or problems.

In these cases, the Estate Services team Leader will meet with our contractors to directly address the situation. As the problems are resolved we'll move the site onto the Sensitive Site list until we're confident that any problems have been properly dealt with.

Looking forward

- We would like to increase our ECOs' presence so that we can revisit sites within the quarter if needed
- We aim to reduce the number of sites on the 'needing improvement' list, and ensure that sites on this list don't fall back on to it.

Focused on...

Lettings and empty properties

686 new tenancies issued
2021/22 = 572

54

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

2021/22 = 74

214

of these homes were new build properties

2021/22 = 141

The **average time to re-let each empty property was within our targets of 60 and 150 days**: 101.1 days for general needs properties, 160 days for sheltered accommodation

2021/22 = 58.4 and 146.2 days respectively

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

In **2022/23**, the **rent lost because homes were empty was 2.35%** of the annual rent due, which was higher than our 1.2% target

With the 686 new tenancies we've issued, this has been a busy year for the team.

The rise in tenancies is mainly down to two key factors – the number of new homes being completed by our development team and its plans to regenerate the Showfields estate in Tunbridge Wells – see page 30 for more details on both.

Ahead of any building work starting at Showfields our focus has been on helping residents living in the first part of the estate that we aim to regenerate to transfer to a new home.

There is a mixture of 68 flats and maisonettes in this initial phase, and we've been working with residents to find them suitable homes.

We've been busy supporting them, holding regular weekly drop-ins at Showfields at the start of the year, and then through ongoing one-to-one support.

Discussions about suitable alternative housing have been based on a number of factors including employment, schools, public transport links and family needs.

Decants explained

Sometimes people need to move out of their homes so that repairs can take place – this process is often referred to as a decant. If the works will take less than 12 weeks then residents will move out temporarily.

However, if the works are expected to take longer than 12 weeks we will work with residents to find them a permanent new home. We'll then let their original property to a new tenant once the works have been completed.

It's important that we re-let empty properties as quickly as possible so that we don't have shortfall in our income – as well as an individual's rent covering the costs associated with their own home, some of what they pay supports the upkeep of communal areas and the wider estate.

Focused on...

Letting and empty properties



We have seen some challenges over the year in letting some properties, including some sheltered units. Where we see that a property is becoming hard to let we'll reach out to other agencies, such as local authorities or charities, to see if they know of anyone who may be a suitable tenant. In some cases if it is no longer financially viable to maintain or re-let a property we might dispose of it, after following an asset disposal process.

Looking forward

Rather than us allocating empty homes, people who want to move into one of our homes, or transfer to another of our homes in the area, can 'bid' for the properties they are interested in through a Choice Based Letting (CBL) scheme.

Our main CBL is Kent Home Choice, which is set to change its system in the coming financial year. This will allow residents to see much more detail, such as how close a home is to bus routes, schools or shops. This will make a huge difference to those looking for homes, and we've been working with Kent Home Choice as it prepares for this change.

We are
passionate
about
creating a
sustainable
Town &
Country
Housing



Passionate about...

New homes and development

329 new homes completed against a target of 444
2021/22 = 230

56.8% of completed homes were social or affordable rent
2021/22 = 67%

202 new homes started, 60 of these are for social rent
2021/22 = 374 started, 123 for social rent

133 homes sold to shared owners
2021/22 = 162

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 2022-2023 we invested £78.4 million into building new homes. This investment was made up of £2.4m million from government grants, £14.1 million from the sales of new homes and £61.9 million from TCH funding.

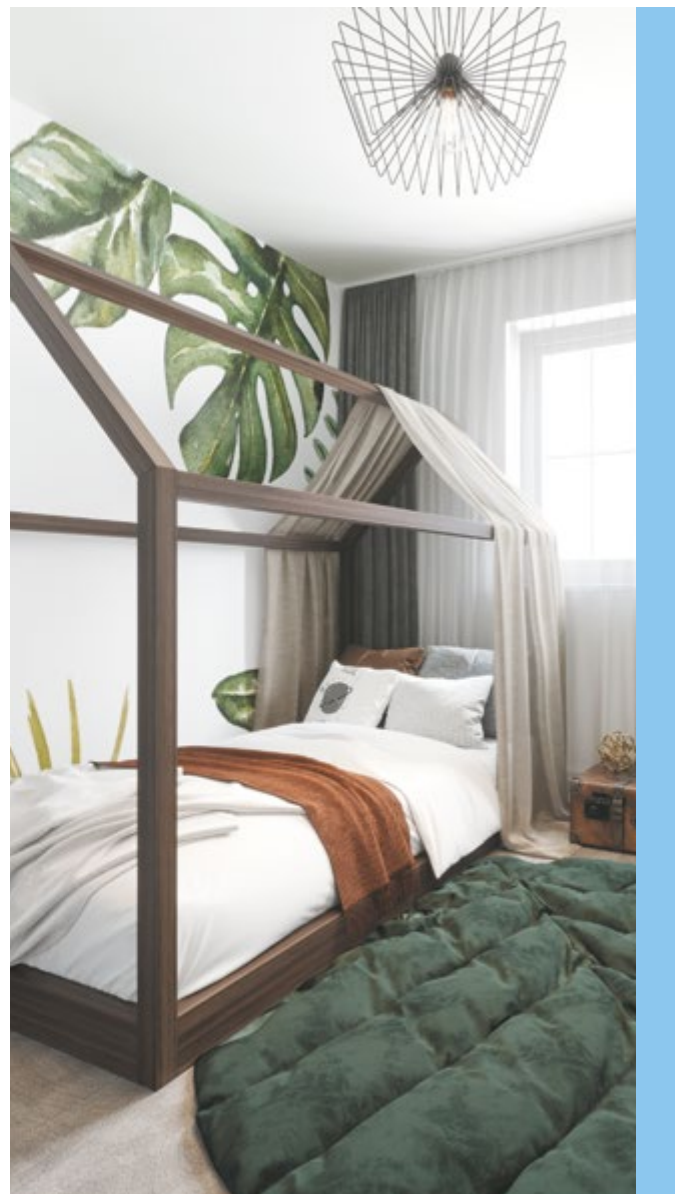
A year of growth

Towards the end of the financial year the number of homes that TCH owns hit 10,000. This has been something of an ambition for a number of years and so we were delighted to achieve this.

The success was mainly achieved by adding new homes into our local communities, with just a relatively small element of stock transfer contributing to the growth.

One key area of development is Westwood Acres in Broadstairs, which won the Evening Standard's Eco Living Award 2022.

We were extremely proud to have received this recognition alongside our partner, Legal and General Modular Homes, for our sustainable offering of 153 new affordable homes.



Passionate about...

New homes and development



Sustainability in action

Every home at Westwood Acres boasts exceptional sustainability features including air source heat pump technology rather than a traditional gas-fired boiler, Photovoltaic Panels and high quality insulation in the fabric of the houses.

All of this reduces energy consumption, carbon emissions and the need for power from non-renewable sources, thereby reducing overall running costs. This is very much in line with our sustainability strategy – see page 34 for more details on this.

All of our homes at Westwood Acres received an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) 'A' rating. This is something we're proud of as only 1.4% of new build homes received this rating in the year that this development started. And it means we are offering new homes that are easy and cost effective to keep warm.

Looking forward

Our plan to redevelop the Showfields Estate in Tunbridge Wells was granted planning permission by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council at the end of the financial year.

The proposal will see the replacement of 110 properties with 146 quality modern homes with secure parking, as well as a substantial upgrade of green spaces and safer layout of streets.

This project will form a large part of our development work in the coming years, and we look forward to working with the Showfields community to successfully deliver this once-in-a-lifetime transformation.

Social value

When we procure a new contract or partner, we always consider the social value benefits that they will bring to our communities and make sure they align with our social purpose.

TCH Repairs, our new joint venture repairs service with Fortem Solutions (see page 23 for more info) has been offering a whole range of extra support to our communities since becoming part of the TCH family in November 2022.

In the run up to Christmas it donated festive food to the Showfield's food larder, which is run by the Number One Community Café.

And some of the TCH Repairs team also gave up time between Christmas and New Year to give the Number One Community café a paint refresh. This was celebrated with an official reopening and ribbon cutting by Celebrity Chef and Ambassador to the Number One Community Trust, Rosemary Shrager.

But TCH Repairs isn't the only company giving time, money and goods to support our communities. Over the course of the year we have secured around £40,000 worth of social value contributions from our contractors, including JHK, George Jones and M&S Electrical, as well as from our own IT and Facilities team.

Their contributions range from providing IT equipment to the donation of materials and contractor time to deliver on-site projects that benefit our resident communities.

Looking forward

We will develop a framework with Fortem Solutions, our repairs joint venture partner, to track, monitor and evaluate its social value contributions. We'll then look to replicate this approach with all our contractors to make sure that, together, we can deliver even more positive outcomes for our residents and communities.



Digital

How is our online customer portal, MyHomeOnline performing?

955 more residents signed up to use MyHomeOnline
2021/22 = 500+

2,766 messages received
2021/22 = 2,310

47% of our homes have a MyHomeOnline account
2021/22 = 49%

5,138 total number of registrations
2021/22 = 4183

As the statistics show, our online customer portal MyHomeOnline is an important element of our digital offering to residents. The free, safe and secure online service allows residents to manage their account day or night. As well as reporting repairs, MyHomeOnline users can find details about their tenancy, planned maintenance programmes and rent.

There's also a range of additional information available to tenants on our website, www.tch.org.uk, which was relaunched with a new look and menu structure in March 2023.

The new website was created following technical issues with our previous site in November 2022, which finally caused the site to crash. This gave us a great opportunity to incorporate feedback we've had from residents about what you'd like to see on the website, including lots of recommendations from the Resident Scrutiny Panel.

We understand the impact the website issues had on residents, and we heard from a number of people with concerns that the security of their personal data may have been compromised.

We were quick to reassure people that the site was not linked to MyHomeOnline and held no personal data, but again we'd like to take this opportunity to apologise for any concerns the issue caused.

After spending some time trying to resolve the technical issues we took the decision to fast-track existing plans to build a new website, rather than spend money on fixing the old one.

One of the downsides to this approach was that there were a couple of months where the website held limited information, mainly around how to contact the wider TCH teams.

However in March 2023 we were able to launch the new-look website, which features a simpler, more intuitive menu, presents information in a more logical manner and uses design features such as font size and colour contrasts to be ensure it's accessible and easy to read.



Future plans

We'll be adding additional content to the site over the coming months, including a new recruitment section, and will be engaging with residents on the look, feel and usability of the site to inform future developments.

Sustainability

We're committed to meeting both the government's target of net zero carbon by 2050, and our own objective of our homes achieving, at least, an EPC Band C energy efficiency rating by 2030.

We'll do this both through the way we build and manage the homes we provide and the way we run our business.

Our journey to net zero started last year with the completion of a Sustainable Homes Index for Tomorrow (SHIFT) environmental assessment.

This industry-recognised standard gave us an independent assessment of our environmental performance, rating us as Silver. But more importantly it outlined a series of actions that we could take to improve our rating.

We've now taken those findings, plus data, intelligence and insights from a range of groups, to develop our Sustainability Strategy.

As part of this development we ran two rounds of consultation with residents. Their input was invaluable in ensuring that your needs and views were reflected in the final strategy.



Defining sustainability

During one of the focus groups, residents were asked how we should define what makes a home sustainable. They concluded that a sustainable home is one which is warm, dry and ventilated but also truly affordable to run.

They also made a number of positive suggestions on how we could approach sustainability, including reducing emissions and fuel consumption during repairs appointments by using local trades, or grouping repair appointments within a smaller area, and exploring wider use of solar panels on properties.

The strategy has been signed off by our board and we'll continue to ask what you think to inform the implementation of the strategy, as well as promoting opportunities for you to engage in decisions about sustainability.

Looking forward

We've created a four-year action plan with a series of objectives and outcomes to ensure that we can deliver on the ambitions set out in the strategy.

The first year will focus on data capture, and we'll be working with a specialist company to gather information on the thermal energy performance our homes. Information from this stage will then inform plans for coming years.

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 2022-2023

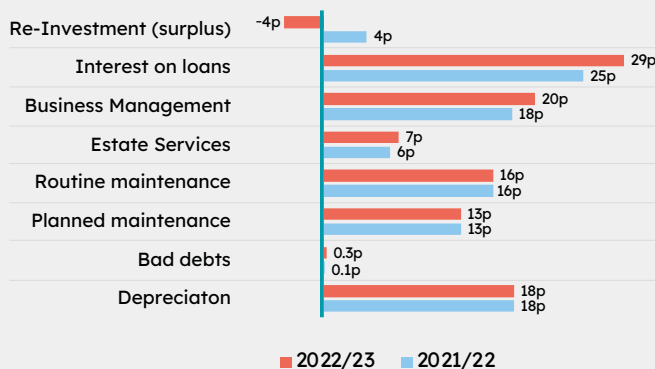
- We re-procured our major repairs contract. This was completed in November 2022
- We integrated the care and support team following its transfer from Peabody South-East Ltd
- We generated a 25% margin on building sales compared to our target of 15%
- Our development contractors provided 38 apprenticeships.

Looking forward

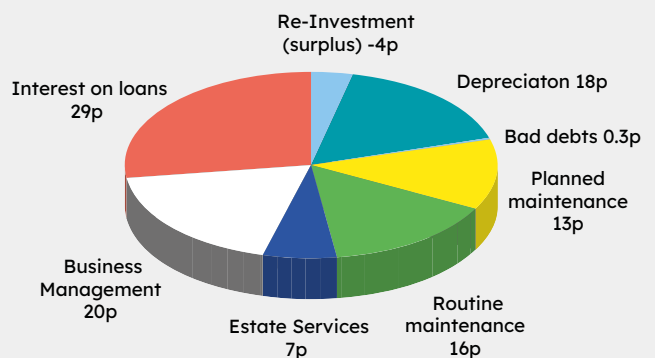
We will drive improvements in our new repairs contract to maximise customer service alongside improved value for money and social value.

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. As part of our Sustainability Strategy we will be working with a specialist company to gather information on the thermal energy performance of all our homes.

How each pound was spent 2022/23 compared to 2021/22



How each pound was spent in 2022/23





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