

# Annual Report to Residents 2020/2021



## Sanctuary

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Sanctuary

# Introduction

Welcome to our 2020-2021 Annual Report, which details progress in our commitments to our residents; and how we responded to the unprecedented challenges through the Covid-19 pandemic.

This past year has affected us all like no other. We worked very hard to maintain our vital services for residents, including emergency repairs and gas servicing. Recognising we could not provide all services as normal, amongst other initiatives we implemented a wellbeing and food parcel service when residents needed them most. Our feedback confirms these were greatly appreciated by our residents. The next 12 months will continue to be challenging as we recover, and our teams are already focused on restoring all our services to normal as quickly as possible. We thank you for your patience as we are committed to continue improving our services in the coming year and beyond.

Engaging with our residents and understanding what matters most has never been more important. Investing in new and more mobile technology has enabled us to transform our services allowing us to have more conversations with our residents than ever before. We piloted a new programme of resident engagement, 'A Conversation with Sanctuary', and this will be expanded in the year ahead.

Experience tells us we achieve most when we all work as one. By working together we can continue to help communities fulfil their potential while ensuring our services remain fit for purpose. There are many great examples in this report where we have supported our communities in showing great resilience through the pandemic. We encourage residents to engage and make your views known so as to inform how we serve you in future. The more diverse and inclusive the views we receive, the more we learn and improve. You can read in this document how we continue to transform our approach to how we engage. You can read in this document how we continue to transform our approach to how we engage with our residents and will provide even more opportunities to get involved.

**Graham Jones**  
Chair, National Resident Scrutiny Panel

**Craig Moule**  
Group Chief Executive



The regulations cover services to our tenants who rent their home from us, as well as shared owners. Through our Homeowners Forum we also make sure that all homeowners (and leaseholders) have an opportunity to influence our services.

## Regulation and our Local Offers

We are regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). They ensure we comply with two sets of regulatory standards: economic and consumer.

### Economic standards

Governance and Financial viability – this looks at how well we manage risk, how we manage our money, how we plan for the future, whether we comply with laws and whether we deliver the right services.

- **Rent** – this sets out what changes we can make to levels of rent.
- **Value for money** – this examines whether we offer good value for money

The RSH rates all organisations like us. We are rated as 'G1' and 'V2' for governance and financial viability respectively, reflecting we are both compliant and financially resilient.


### Consumer standards

- **Home** - this is about the quality of your home, and whether it is safe and well-maintained. This includes meeting the government's 'Decent Homes' requirements.
- **Tenant involvement and empowerment** - this looks at how well our residents are involved in our services and how we respond to their diverse needs and complaints.
- **Tenancy** - this examines how homes are allocated and ensures we are offering customers the right type of tenancy.
- **Neighbourhood and community** - this explores how well we manage neighbourhoods and prevent or respond to antisocial behaviour.

Our commitments to our residents against these standards are our '**Local Offers**'.



In developing our commitments, we had feedback from almost 2,000 residents in 2018 who were representative of all our residents. We will be reviewing these commitments with residents in the year ahead.




### Home

- ▶ We will respond to emergency repairs within 24 hours.
- ▶ If a repair is not urgent, residents will be offered a morning or afternoon appointment.
- ▶ If we fail to fix a repair on the first visit, we will provide the date of a further appointment.
- ▶ We will make sure properties are safe and compliant with health and safety law.
- ▶ We will make sure properties are maintained to the Decent Homes Standard.




### Neighbourhood

- ▶ We will make it clear what somebody should do if they experience antisocial behaviour.
- ▶ We will also respond within one working day if a serious incident is reported.
- ▶ We will make sure our neighbourhoods are well maintained.




### Moving Home

- ▶ If a resident wants to move home, we will help them identify options to meet their needs.



### Value for money and governance

- ▶ We will provide an annual assessment of our performance against plans and objectives.
- ▶ We will comply with all relevant legislation and regulation and remain accountable to our residents and partners.
- ▶ We will use external credit rating companies to check our performance and make sure we continue to be financially strong.
- ▶ Our Group Board is committed to effective leadership and controlling the organisation and supporting residents to shape and scrutinise the services we provide.



### Customer Service

- ▶ We will make it easy for our residents to contact us if they have a problem or want information or advice.
- ▶ If a staff member cannot resolve a query immediately, they will explain the process and the timescale for resolution.
- ▶ If a resident has a problem, we will keep them regularly informed about how we are dealing with their query or complaint, and the reasons for any changes.
- ▶ If a resident cannot get through or has to leave a message, someone will call them back within one working day (Monday to Friday).
- ▶ Information on the level of service that can be expected from us is available on our website.
- ▶ We will provide training for staff to ensure they are competent, knowledgeable and treat everyone as a valued customer.



## The events of the last year have resulted in unprecedented challenges for our residents and communities.

Through the dedication and commitment of our teams we have been able to adapt to make sure we continued to provide essential services throughout Covid-19.

We have strived to address the specific needs of our residents and neighbourhoods to help make our communities more resilient, while supporting the wellbeing of our frontline staff who have continued to demonstrate immense devotion to supporting those in need.

We have continued to fulfil our vital role as a landlord by providing accommodation to those most in need and this year let almost 6,200 homes. Virtual viewings for letting homes became the new norm as Covid-19 lockdowns prevented us completing many lets face-to-face.

Based on excellent feedback from residents about the ease and convenience of virtual viewings, we will continue these alongside face-to-face lettings in the future.

We have invested £103.1 million in repairs and reinvestment works across all of our homes. Throughout the pandemic we focussed on ensuring we maintained a repairs service that helped resolve emergency issues, completing more than nine out of 10 emergency repairs within a day with resident satisfaction at 95 per cent.

As a result of government restrictions preventing us from being able to go into residents' homes to carry out many day-to-day repairs, we recognise they are now taking longer than we would want. We have a plan in place to deal with this.



## Communication is key.

**We have worked hard to keep residents informed about how we are resolving issues. We have used our website, social media and local electronic communications more than ever to share information quickly.**

We will be working with residents to make big changes to our website in the year ahead, so it is even more useful. This is one part of our approach. We will be having an even greater focus on local communications in the coming year, keeping our residents up to date on what matters most.

We also recognise that our local presence is crucial. We are redesigning many of our local offices as 'hubs' for all of our staff to drop in and use, reducing the amount of travel needed, maximising the time our front-line staff can spend meeting our residents and visiting homes.

We are introducing a new Housing Support Team who will be making sure we understand our residents' concerns more quickly and we are addressing them more pro-actively.

We have intensely supported residents to manage their income and rent. Our income teams helped residents with the impacts that Covid-19 had on their finances including when they could not work due to illness or being Furloughed. All of this meant that we were able to support more residents to sustain their tenancy and remain in their home, and rent arrears were at the lowest level since the introduction of Universal Credit.

We received slightly fewer complaints last year and the percentage upheld reduced slightly too. As complaints have tended to become more complicated, we have taken longer to resolve them. We know we need to improve. The largest number of complaints were about repairs reflecting that we haven't been able to complete day-to-day repairs as quickly as we want to.

We are compliant with the new Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling code and about 200 residents have worked with us on improving our approach to how we deal with complaints.

**Through the pandemic we expected to see an increase in the number of anti-social behaviour cases reported to us. We did not see this last year.**

**We recognise this could be because of challenges residents have had in access services. We have very sadly seen a rise in Domestic Abuse, where we have worked with local agencies such as health and the police to make sure our residents are provided with the support they need.**

As we all come out of the pandemic, unfortunately it will take time for our services to return to anything like normality. We are working very hard to improve as quickly as we can. We really appreciate our residents' patience whilst we do this.



# Performance 2020/2021 at a glance



As we have previously said, the unprecedented challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic have made this year tough for all of us. We have maintained our essential services and have plans in place to improve performance in the year ahead as we all emerge into the new 'normal'.



## Local Offers - Customer Service

Local Offers Indicators	2019/2020	2020/2021
Residents who found it easy to contact us	86%	<b>83%</b>
Residents who said we provide staff who are knowledgeable and treat you as a valued customer	96%	<b>96%</b>
Residents who said we told them if we cannot resolve their query immediately, we will explain the process and the timescale for resolution	75%	<b>77%</b>
Residents who agreed we keep you informed regularly of how we are dealing with your repair	67%	<b>81%</b>
Number of complaints received*	2,294	<b>2,262</b>
Number per 1000 properties	33	<b>31</b>
Percentage of complaints upheld	64%	<b>62%</b>
Percentage of complaints responded to on target	92%	<b>66%</b>

\*Includes housing, supported living and retirement living complaints



## Local Offers - Neighbourhood

Local Offers Indicators	2019/2020	2020/2021
Number of anti-social behaviour cases reported	5,758	<b>5,546</b>
Average number of days to resolve cases of anti-social behaviour	89	<b>88</b>



## Local Offers - Moving Home

Local Offers Indicators	2019/2020	2020/2021
Number of days to re-let a home	24	<b>42</b>
Number of residents registered with Homeswapper	5,855	<b>5,311</b>
Number of swaps on Homeswapper	403	<b>416</b>



## Local Offers - Home

Local Offers Indicators	2019/2020	2020/2021
Residents who said they were satisfied with the quality of their home	70%	<b>69%</b>
Emergency repairs completed within 24 hours	92%	<b>91%</b>
Residents who said they were satisfied with the repairs service overall	94%	<b>95%</b>
Residents who said they were satisfied with the repairs service overall	94%	<b>95%</b>



## Local Offers - Value for Money and Governance

Local Offers Indicators	2019/2020	2020/2021
Average cost of managing each home/£	4,499	<b>4,218</b>
Average cost per responsive repair/£	122	<b>139</b>
Credit rating (Standard and Poor's)*	A+	<b>A+</b>
Credit rating (Moody's)*	A2	<b>A2</b>

\*Standard and Poor's/Moody's assess the credit worthiness of an organisation that takes on debt.

# Supporting our communities



Our mission is 'to build affordable homes and sustainable communities where people choose to live'. For us this goes beyond the essential services we provide to growing our contribution to society.



**We believe that no one should be excluded or left behind.**

We believe that everyone should have a home to live in and community they can belong to. We want to help build a society with opportunities for everyone, regardless of their background or circumstance.

During the last year we have learned a lot from the Covid-19 pandemic about resilience in communities. We have seen residents and colleagues working together to help each other through very troubled times.

## Supporting our communities

Our approach to community investment has responded to the needs of our residents. With a strong network of community partners our starting point was to work closely with them to identify the best and most helpful way that we could support them to maintain contact with and support our residents.

We supported 122 initiatives which specifically responded to the impact of Covid-19 through funding and advice. Our investment went across the country to help to build connection and resilience, supporting people with food, health, technology, reducing social isolation and accessing financial support.

## Here we share some examples of our investment:

### Platform for Life (Blacon, Chester)

We worked with this charity to offer counselling to families working with schools and the children's centre. Platform for Life take a holistic approach, recognising that parental trauma and adversity can have a significant impact on children.

They focus on strengthening family relationships and creating more stable and nurturing environments for children. During the pandemic we helped to promote their services to local residents, gave access to our meeting rooms for counselling and a grant through our Community Investment Fund.



### Barne Barton (Plymouth)

The response to the Covid-19 lockdown was led by the tenants and residents' association – they provided food parcels for people facing financial hardship due to the third lockdown.

There was a sharp increase in redundancy and furlough cases, combined with the impact of school closures meant many needed these parcels. Wherever possible personal hygiene products such as nappies and baby milk were included in the parcels. Alongside this, we signposted residents to other areas of support as part of the project.

### Worcester Community Trust

We supported a programme of care packages in the community. A total of 495 people were supported between March and October 2020, particularly vulnerable people who needed to shield and isolate.

The project offered these people weekly wellbeing calls from key workers, care packages containing non-perishable food and wellbeing activities.



### Changing Lives Together

A social enterprise and registered charity who provide many services to communities. We supported their work with the Cheshire Food Hub that works to tackle food poverty.

During summer 2020 they were involved in the sourcing and distribution of fresh food boxes, delivered to residents who signed up to the scheme (approximately 100 boxes per week – and 200 children benefitted).

The project was so successful within the Lache area of Chester that it continued through November and Christmas holidays and the February half term.

### Restore (Banbury)

We supported this group to introduce 'bullet journaling' in Banbury which has shown that there is a positive impact on mental health. A bullet journal contains sections to log daily to-dos, keep a monthly or weekly calendar, jot down notes, track both physiological and mental health, plus record both short and long-term goals.

A group of clients were able to work virtually with a mental health support worker to understand the power of bullet journaling to cultivate hope and positive mental attitude. The group gained a sense of camaraderie and felt able to take part in the safety of their own homes.



## Community Wellness Services Virtual Keep Fit Sessions (Shiregreen, Sheffield)

This group ran fitness sessions via Zoom to older people and young parents free of charge.

## Play Torbay's Eco-Play Packs (Paignton)

A range of support activities and opportunities for vulnerable children and their families was provided through a range of play-based activities – helping families to support each other.

Free activity boxes with craft, art, cooking and play materials were delivered to families' doorsteps and supported with live on-line activity sessions.

## Hear to Help (Yorkshire)

A telephone helpline started in response to Covid-19. This was available to children, young people, adults and older people across Harrogate, Hambleton and Richmondshire.

It provided support to those feeling lonely, isolated or anxious. Signposting to other support was also offered such as bereavement support and counselling.



## Minerva Arts – Older Persons Project (Chester)

Several local artists were commissioned to develop short instructional guides and resources to help people engage in creative activities in their own home without needing to be online.

This project aimed to create a small 'creative care package' for 100 older adults living in the Lache area of Chester. This concept developed out of the 'age friendly Lache' partnership group and has been developed to help support older adults in the area to feel less isolated, improve their wellbeing and connect with others.



## Homemaker resettlement and Tenancy Support (Exeter)

This programme provided advice and guidance on all financial matters particularly for those affected by hardship through Covid-19.

They delivered a resettlement project for new residents who needed support to set up a new home and supported existing tenants who were struggling to maintain their tenancies due to financial issues.

## Afghanistan & Central Asian Association Telephone Advice Service (Stoke)

The project was a means to provide legal, financial, mental health and social well-being advice and support virtually to vulnerable refugee, asylum seeker and BAME families who were especially in need because of their isolation during lockdowns.

They helped people during and in the recovery phase of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Support was provided to 300 people on issues such as financial advice, benefits advice and Universal Credit applications, citizenship applications and liaison with the Home Office, mental health and welfare advice, support with domestic abuse and suicide.

# Engaging with our residents



**Engage is a one of our key priorities. Engaging with our residents, understanding what matters most, has never been more important than in the unprecedented challenges we have all faced through the Covid-19 pandemic. We have never been interested in ticking a box or paying lip service to resident involvement; we believe residents can and should drive up standards through your views.**

Early in first national lockdown in 2020 it was clear our approach to resident engagement needed to change significantly for it to be sustainable during unprecedented times. Conversations with our National Resident Scrutiny Panel (NRSP) were how we might not see each other for a while and how could we make sure we continue to be accountable to our residents in the way we are all so committed to be.

We would normally do about 350 resident led estate visits together with 25 family and friends visits to our Supported Living services. Unfortunately, these had to stop as a result of lockdown. We were still determined that listening to our residents and taking action was more important than ever.

Our focus shifted to how we could support our operations in understanding our residents' immediate challenges and how as a landlord we can give vital help. What emerged was a massive programme of 'Keeping In Touch' calls, with Local Operations' teams doing an amazing job of reaching more than 18,500 residents.

Amongst other things, targeted income advice and more than 150 food parcels followed. These are great examples of resident involvement in a practical way in a real crisis. Next, we very quickly supported our NRSP to use video conferencing so we could meet them. It was really important we did not cancel meetings with them. We didn't. Our Group Housing Committee (GHC), the part of our 'governance' responsible for our homes, kept meeting too.

We needed to share the huge upheaval our Operations teams had faced and how they had responded so GHC and NRSP could hold us to account. Both were really impressed to hear how fantastically our teams had adapted. Amongst this came a big opportunity. Having those meetings 'virtually' proved what was possible. We could build on this from an already solid base to involve more residents in more flexible ways in how we run our services.



**This again showed our commitment to hearing from residents who reflect the diversity of our whole resident base.**

Over the summer of 2020, more than 1,700 residents said to us they wanted to be involved, from commenting on policies, testing new technology to being part of formal groups scrutinising how we run how services. This was amazing. A big thank you to you all and the hundreds of residents who had been involved before.

**We have learned through Covid-19 how we can keep our residents up to date about our services faster and hear their views. To help us, more than 450 residents have already been involved in testing an 'App'. We ran webinars on our emerging resident communications strategy so hundreds more of residents could directly influence what we do. We could never have done this by using face-to-face meetings alone.**

At the same time residents' views have been fundamental to our new complaints policy. Almost 200 residents provided feedback. We have also harnessed the power of technology to conduct virtual family and friend visits at our supported living schemes, and we tested virtual estate visits. In the year ahead we now have a programme more than 20 family and friends visits and 125 estate inspections, using a mix of virtual and face-to-face methods.



Working with and supporting our residents allows them to continue to hold us to account in how we run our services. We now have our own Chartered Institute of Housing training programme, Sanctuary Residents' Academy, where residents can improve their knowledge about housing and gain a recognised professional qualification. We will expand this to reach many more residents in this coming year. Thanks to Phoenix Community Housing for this great idea.

NRSP met 12 times this year. This did not take any more of members time as they didn't need to travel. They challenged the performance of our operations every quarter as always, plus had monthly meetings focussing on specific topics – such as communications, customer service and climate change. We of course want to be back in a position where we can meet in person, but the benefits of technology have become clear over the last year. We will be increasing the membership of NRSP to 12 during 2021, and we have had great interest so far.

We will continue to strengthen our approach to engaging with our residents. We will offer more opportunities for our residents to get involved in how we develop and run our services. We will set this out in our new Resident Engagement Strategy and we will make sure we hear your views in 2021/2022, not waiting for any changes in how we are regulated resulting from The Charter for Social Housing Residents – The Social Housing White Paper.



# The Charter for Social Housing Residents

## The Social Housing White Paper



**A White Paper is a document produced by the Government that sets out their proposals for future laws.**

The Charter for Social Housing Residents – The Social Housing White Paper was published by Government on 17 November 2020 and was developed in response to the Grenfell tragedy. You can read the Charter by clicking [here](#).

**The Government will work with the RSH to create a stronger, more proactive consumer regulatory regime, strengthening the formal standards against which landlords are regulated and requiring us to:**

- › Be transparent about their performance and decision-making - so that tenants and the Regulator can hold them to account;
- › Put things right when they go wrong; and
- › Listen to residents through effective engagement.

**The new Charter sets out what every social housing resident should be able to expect:**

- › To be safe in your home. The government will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure.
- › To know how your landlord is performing, including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account.

- › To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with access to a strong ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed.
- › To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.
- › To have your voice heard by your landlord, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board. The government will provide help, if you want it, to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens.
- › To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
- › To be supported to take your first step to ownership, so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.



Some elements of the Charter, in particular those relating to consumer regulation and the role of the Regulator, will require changes to the law. There will therefore be a transition period before some of these changes come into practice.

Building on a sound basis, we have set out already how we have transformed how we have engaged with residents over the last year. We welcome the Charter, and we have not waited for the changes it proposes to come into practice before we take action.



**Led by NRSP, we are currently doing a ‘self-assessment’ of our position against every part of the Charter, engaging a large number of staff and our Board. This will inform our new Resident Engagement Strategy.**



## We believe our residents should play an active part in driving our improvement.

We thank every resident who has given up time and engaged with us. It's an exciting time to get involved and help shape and scrutinise our services, and we have developed opportunities for residents to engage in scrutiny virtually without leaving their home and at a time convenient to them.

To get involved in any of this work, or suggest ideas about how we should engage, residents can email: [scrutiny@sanctuary-housing.co.uk](mailto:scrutiny@sanctuary-housing.co.uk) or call us on 0800 131 3348 (0300 123 3511 from a mobile).

As we have already said, 'Engage' is one of our key priorities and our governance structure enables and empowers residents to engage and participate in decision making at the highest levels of the organisation. Two of our residents are members of our Group Housing Committee, the sub-committee of Group Board which has strategic oversight for housing.

The National Resident Scrutiny Panel (NRSP) reports directly to the Group Housing Committee. The panel is responsible for scrutinising policy and performance to ensure greater accountability around service delivery.

Our 'communities of interest' are groups of residents who have experience of a service and want to work with us to improve it.

Currently more than 2,500 residents interested in being involved, and the number is growing all the time. Taking part in a community of interest is a great way of doing practical scrutiny work with services. At the moment, there are communities of interest that cover:



- **Estate inspections** - Reviewing the condition of housing estates with staff and recommending any improvements.
- **Resident communications** - Focussing on how we can use technology to provide residents with up-to-date information that they think is most valuable.
- **Environmental strategy** - Helping us shape our approach to dealing with climate change.
- **Resident inspectors/service reviews** - We are currently investigating how effectively we respond to residents' emails.
- **Family and Friends tests** - Visits to retirement living and supported living services to consider whether the member of the group visiting would want a family member or friend to live there if they needed a similar service. Any improvements identified during these visits were completed promptly, sometimes within 24 hours. Again, we are developing virtual methods for this.
- **Homeownership** - A specific group of homeowners/shared owners whose work over the last year has included supporting the Head of Homeownership to review how service charge information is presented.
- **Complaints reviews** - Most recently this group has focused on our new complaints policy and procedure.



**Listening to residents is not just about governance or scrutiny. We recognise that, every day, our residents give us information about the condition of our homes, communities and performance of our services.**

**We survey approximately 10,000 residents each year regarding their experiences and satisfaction with services and use this feedback to review and improve the services we provide.**