

Annual Report

2021/22



Our Report to Residents



As we emerge from the worst health crisis in a lifetime, we are even more committed to our core mission. Our aim is to help more people to shape what matters to them at home or in their neighbourhood and to build a sense of belonging through promoting co-op and community led housing.

The pandemic changed the way that many of us live and work in a fundamental way. We are all much more experienced at using the internet, video calls or messaging to carry out everyday tasks or to build and maintain relationships and many of us now work from home for all or part of our week. For us, working in this way has made it easier to ‘get together’ with residents, clients or groups and means that resident engagement is more open to everyone.

Our teams do less commuting – which is great for their health and work/life balance and we have been able to reduce our London office space, putting more money back into service. However, we continue to meet with tenants, leaseholders and co-op members at home or on estates and carry out all of our regular safety and quality checks in person.

The impact of the pandemic on our services has probably been felt more in this year than in the previous one. There have been significant delays in getting repairs and major works carried out due to shortages of contract labour and supply chain difficulties. We know that these have been frustrating and we appreciate residents’ patience and support. We were pleased that, despite these challenges, we continued to keep homes safe and that the vast majority of our residents were satisfied with their most recent repair.

We always try to reflect our values in the way we work with residents but we know that – despite our best efforts – we sometimes fall short. During the year, we dealt with

complaints from a small number of residents but a significant proportion of those complaints offered opportunities for learning and improving. This is covered in more detail in this report and we continue to encourage residents to let us know whenever our service fails to meet expectations.

We continue to strive to be an anti-racist organisation and have been working to raise the awareness and confidence of residents to report any issues or incidents to us. We have a small proportion of residents from minority communities but this can mean that people are more visible and less supported. We want all residents to know that we are alert to and intolerant of racism and prejudice and that we will always try to help.

In the coming year, we will be redoubling our efforts to improve our repairs service and working closely with residents to help them manage the very serious effects of the cost of living crisis. Our Hardship Fund is available to support tenants or leaseholders with financial pressures and our welfare adviser has been able to do some excellent work to ensure people get the money that they are entitled to.

In closing, we would like to thank our excellent Board Members who provide expertise and care in ensuring that we are accountable and well governed and to the continuing efforts of all of our talented staff to provide great service for our residents.

Linda Wallace
Chief Executive

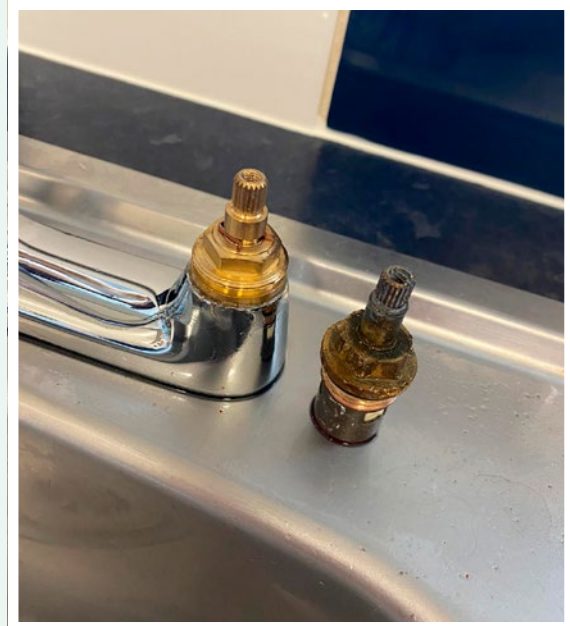
Brigid Sutcliffe
Chair

Our Performance



Repairs

During this year we moved our repairs service over to an online platform called Plentific. As a small organisation with homes spread across a wide geographical area, we have sometimes found it hard to get good quality contractors when we need them for every estate. Plentific is a marketplace that gives us access to a much bigger pool of contractors, working in every trade and in every area. We also moved our gas repairs over to PH Jones (a member of the British Gas family) and this company now provides a full service of safety checks, repairs and replacements for us. These two measures have significantly simplified the way we can provide repairs to our residents and have made the availability of good contractors more resilient.



We carried out more than 2700 repairs in our homes during the year, just under 3 repairs for each property that we own. Most of our repairs were routine but we carried out a small number (25) of emergency repairs. Standard repairs were completed in an average of 10.4 days with 98% of emergency repairs being made safe within 24 hours.

We telephone customers following repairs to check on quality and satisfaction. We spoke to about 20% of residents who received a repair and the vast majority of them rated the service highly (98%)

Our repairs costs were high during the year with an average of £918 per home being spent on routine service. We recognise that there have been particular pressures on materials and labour this year that have made this challenging but we also know that there is more work for us to do in controlling the quality and cost of work being undertaken. Our new Plentific platform means that we receive photographic evidence of every repair before it is completed and paid for.



Repairs in 2021/22

2,700

Standard repairs completed
in an average of

10.4 days

Rent Collection and Welfare Services



Our income management team helped residents to stay in credit with their rent accounts this year and we ended the year with arrears (rent debts) of just under 1.5%.

Our Welfare Benefits Adviser and other team members helped residents to claim all of the money that they were due, supporting them to complete budget forms, apply for benefits and manage spending plans. In total, the team helped residents to claim more than £140,000 with the majority of this going directly to residents themselves (£85,000). The balance went toward reducing rent arrears and £10,000 supported the residents of client co-operatives.

Homeowner arrears at the end of the year were 11% lower than in the previous year.



Managing Anti Social Behaviour



During the year we dealt with 16 cases of anti social behaviour and 9 of these remained open at the end of March. Most cases related to noise or poor neighbourly behaviour but we have seen an increase in more serious issues such as drug abuse or threatening/harassing behaviours. We value the support of residents to report and challenge these issues.

One long running anti social behaviour case in London was successfully concluded with an eviction at the year end. This outcome was only achieved through the consistent efforts

of neighbours who worked through the long legal processes with us whilst living in a very difficult and sometimes frightening situation. We are grateful to them for their courage and patience and delighted that they are now able to enjoy their homes. Serious anti social behaviour is relatively unusual in our stock but one of the things that we have learned from this case is the huge importance of regular communication with the affected tenants, even when there is little progress to report. We have embedded this into our approach to all future cases.

Lettings

We carried out 22 lettings during the year with a further 5 homes going through a mutual exchange process. Many of the homes that were relet required major works to bring them up to a full decent home standard in line with our strategy. Standard voids took us 36 days to relet which is above our target of 28 days but significantly better than the previous year outturn (65d). Our teams know how important it is to get homes back into use quickly and continue to work on improving communication and processes to get these times down.



Tenant Satisfaction – How We Compare to Our Peers

We carry out independent surveys each month (Acuity) to constantly check on the satisfaction of our tenants with services. Doing this each month means that we can get a better idea of the direction of travel and make changes quickly if our efforts to improve services are not having the impact we hope for. For the year to end March 2022 our overall satisfaction fell to 71% (from 75%) and is below the median for our peer group (80%).

We achieved results that were similar to or better than our peers for quality of home (75%) and for the value for money or our rent charges (83%) and for providing homes that make tenants feel safe and secure (79%). We improved our overall score for listening and responding to tenants views (55%) and for being easy to deal with (70%) but these scores were still lower than our peer median (72% and 80% respectively).

The most common reason for dissatisfaction was repairs where tenants felt that things took too long to complete and that service and communication were inconsistent. These results are out of line with the feedback we get from residents on individual completed repairs where a very high proportion of residents are satisfied with the work and so this is an area where we are focusing our efforts for improvement. We will also be focusing on really listening to residents and involving them in decision making.





Learning from Complaints

About half of all the complaints we received were upheld (51%) or partially upheld (16%). It is really important to us to remain open to complaints and to honestly respond to residents or clients who are unhappy with our service. It is also really important that we learn from the complaints that we respond to.

During the year, most complaints were about how we dealt with repairs. The main changes that we have made as a result of those complaints are:

- ▶ Introduced a weekly check on all open repairs to spot any unreasonable delays
- ▶ Provided additional training for repairs staff on dealing with damp/mould
- ▶ Provided refresher training for all staff on how to handle complaints
- ▶ Introduced peer reviews for all complaint responses
- ▶ Ensured our heating contractor always offers temporary heating where needed

Keeping Residents Safe

We have invested heavily in making sure that our homes and estates are safe. During the year we completed £1.4m of essential work to our newest development in Camden where external wall and cavity barrier works protected 22 tenants and leaseholders.

We also carried out a significant programme to ensure that every one of our homes has a 5 year electrical safety certificate, carrying out hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of

improvements to older circuit boards and installing heat, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors where these were needed.

We are compliant with all of the required safety regulations and have an independent audit of our safety compliance each year to provide assurance that our systems and reporting are accurate.



Work for Client Co-operatives

We provide a range of services for 30+ housing co-operatives across the South East of England, covering both direct housing management, repairs and estate services and 'back office' support for finance, governance and administration. During the year we saw satisfaction with our services rise, with improved performance on meeting attendance, financial reporting and complaint resolution.

After some years of work to encourage our 'founder member' co-operatives to set up their own local management committees, we were delighted to see full local control established in one of the oldest of our co-ops in Kent. We have also expanded the membership and role of our Founder Member Committee so that it is more democratic and independent.



Promoting Growth in the Sector

The Community Led Housing Hub London, which we helped to establish in 2018, continued to provide practical advice, support and funding for emerging and established community led groups who wish to build or acquire their own homes. At the end of the year, 9 projects were actively seeking planning permission for schemes and more than 60 groups had received some level of help or financial support. The Hub is funded by the GLA, with staff employed and supported by CDS. We are actively working on the longer term strategy for the work of the Hub as the GLA grant comes to and end in 2024/25.



Building a Sense of Belonging

One of our key goals is to help people to build a sense of belonging in their local community. This can mean all sorts of different things – from feeling proud of your home or estate when you come back to it – to having a regular programme of ‘meet ups’ or events where you feel connected to your neighbours or local organisations. This year, we have provided

far more opportunities for engagement with policy and service consultations, estate based events, webinars, newsletters and service improvement groups. We are always keen to know what you want to do in your local community so that we can try to help and support connection wherever it naturally arises. Let us know if you have a great idea!



Our Board

We have a strong Board including tenant and client members and independent members who bring a wide range of skills and experience. At the end of March 2022, our Board Members were:

Brigid Sutcliffe Chair

Nick Whitaker Treasurer (resigned 28/3)

Juliet Lack Treasurer Designate

Ben Anim-Antwi

Tony Bush

Matthew Creasey

Satish Jassal

Lakechia Jeanne

Rebecca Southern

Linda Wallace

Our Senior Team

Linda Wallace Chief Executive

Christina Friedenthal Corporate Services Director

Anne Hauxwell Finance Director

Levent Kerimol Project Director, London CLH Hub

Hony Premal Interim Operations Director



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