Annual Report to Tenants

1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017

Each year, our regulator, The Homes and Communities Agency, asks us to report to our tenants how we are meeting the standards they have set. These 'standards' are included under seven headings:

1. **Tenant Involvement and Empowerment**
2. **Home**
3. **Tenancy**
4. **Neighbourhoods and Communities**
5. **Value for Money**
6. **Governance and Financial Viability**
7. **Rent**

We must demonstrate we comply with these standard to our tenants, our regulator and other stakeholders, such as our funders. We are proud of our work in the past 12 months. We hope this report gives you a flavour of what we have achieved and how we have performed.

TENANT INVOLVEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

The standard covers customer service, choice and complaints, involvement and empowerment and understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants.

During the year four resident "Feedback Groups" were organised, with one of these being preceded by an afternoon of activities with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust in the Codford Wildlife Area. All residents were invited to attend, talk to members of staff and comment on the services we provide. In total **48** tenants attended the feedback meetings, representing **13%** of all tenants. In addition, 20 local children attended the activity afternoon.

The main comments made at the meetings were:

Tenants felt that they receive good value for money for their rent with high private rents in the vicinity given as a comparison. In addition, where solar panels had been installed, tenants felt that their homes were more energy Efficient, saving them money.

Many commented about the high quality of their homes. Where new windows and doors had been fitted, tenants felt it had made a big difference.

Tenants felt that the repairs service was good, that staff are helpful and quick to attend.

Tenants also suggested improvements for the future. These varied from improved parking, more clarity over the repair priorities, assistance with fencing, more preventative action with regard to the dumping of rubbish, and in some areas more inspections and site visits.

Tenants said the management of their scheme was generally good. One tenant commented, *"Our cul-de-sac is always tidy and friendly and I've loved living there these past 22 years".*

Resident's Scrutiny Panel

During the year a number of tenants came together to work with our consultants on the re-procurement of the repairs and maintenance service. They commented on their past experience and highlighted what was good, what was bad and what their priorities for improvement were. They also looked at the specification for the new contracts. They made a number of suggestions on how the service should be delivered.

Many of these suggestions have now been implemented, including:

- ☑ Repairs appointments at first point of contact

- ☑ 2 new response times - 'emergency' and 'standard' - to simplify the process

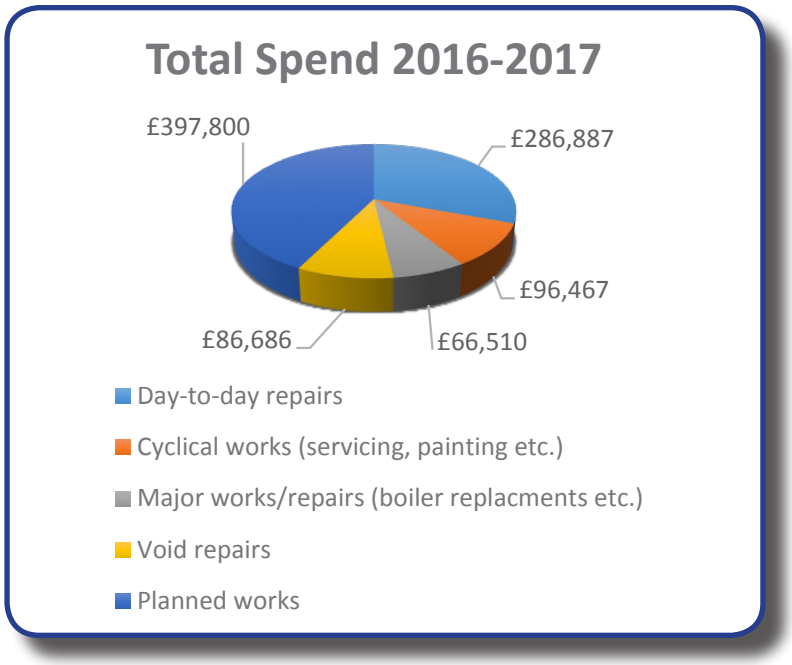
- ☑ Appointments made for all jobs, including external work
- ☑ Greater choice of kitchens, bathrooms, flooring and decorating colours
- ☑ Contractors to have professional image - with logo vans and uniforms for operatives

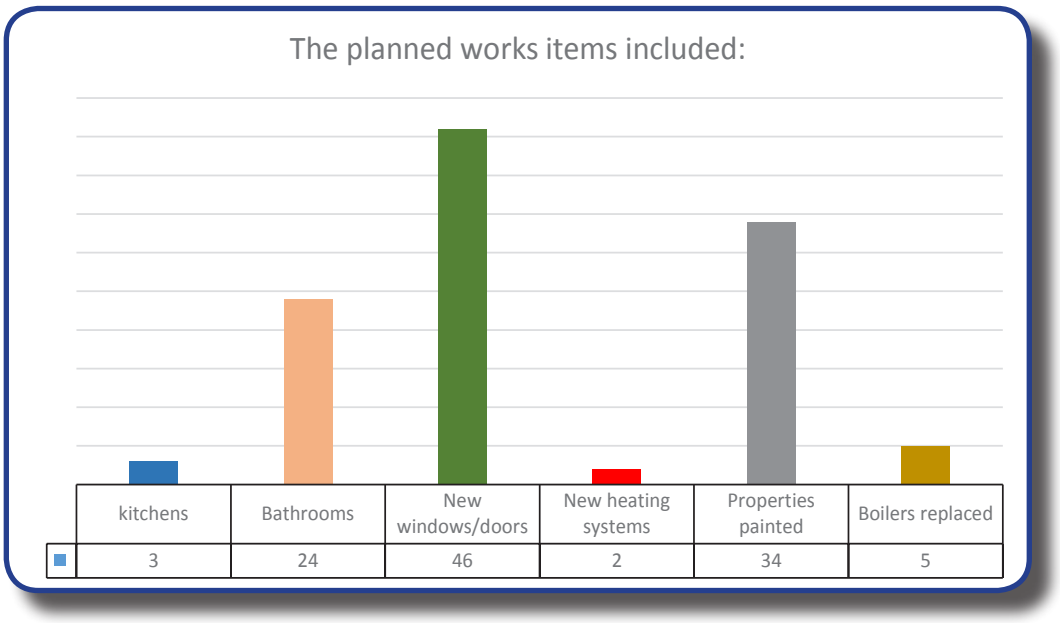
We continue to monitor tenant satisfaction with all repairs and maintenance services. Telephone surveys are undertaken for all completed work including day-to-day repairs and planned work, such as kitchen and bathroom replacements.

HOME

The Home standard covers quality of accommodation and repairs and maintenance.

During the year we spent a total of **£934,350** on the repair and maintenance of our homes. **This was split:**





Day to Day Repairs

During the year we completed **1086** day-to-day repairs. The average time to complete all repairs was **7.9 days**.

When compared to other similar organisations our overall performance was amongst the top **25%** in the country.

The results showed the following:

Type of repair	Number completed	% completed on time
Emergencies	227	100%
Urgent Repairs	494	93.69%
Routine Repairs	365	100%

Appointments

In total, appointments were made for **96%** of all our repairs, with **95**% of these appointments kept by our contractors. From the 1 April 2017, all repairs were given an appointment – including external works – so tenants were aware of when workman arrived. We believe these figures will improve further over the year.

Gas Safety

Gas safety is vitally important. During the year **112** gas boilers were serviced, with **100%** being completed within the statutory 12 month deadline. The Association also serviced **55** oil-fired boilers and **28** solid fuel systems.

Satisfaction

Overall, **95%** of tenants were satisfied with the repairs service they received. Our surveys also show high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the repair and the conduct of the workmen.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Value for Money is not just about saving money, it's about using it wisely to provide good value services to our tenants.

We continually look at our costs, the quality of the services we provide and the levels of satisfaction we receive. By comparing our costs and performance against other landlords we can identify those areas that need improvement and put in place measures to address them.

During the year we completed a review of our repairs and maintenance service. Whilst previous performance and satisfaction levels were good, the cost of the service was higher than many of our peers. We therefore decided to re-tender our repairs and maintenance contracts. As a result, 3 Solutions were awarded the contracts, which started on the 1 April 2017. Already we are seeing improved performance and satisfaction levels and, most importantly, reduced average repair costs. By saving this money we are able to complete more work to our properties and improve the overall service we provide.

We have also made savings or improvements in other areas of the business. For example, we have introduced new office systems to help staff work more efficiently and invested in new software (My Tenancy) to allow tenants to access their personal accounts at any time of the day.

The most recent survey showed that 87% of our tenants say their rent is good 'value for money'.

TENANCY

This standard covers allocations, mutual exchanges and tenancy management.

In the last year we let **21** properties to new and existing tenants wishing to move to a different home. **19** of these properties were re-lets and **2** were new build lets. 4 tenants also moved home through a 'mutual exchange'.

All our homes are let through the relevant Local Authority's Housing Register (e.g. Homes4Wiltshire) and are allocated to the applicant who demonstrates the highest level of housing need and, where possible, a local connection to the village.

On average, each empty property was inspected, repaired and let to the new tenant within **14 days.**

NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

The standard covers neighbourhood management, local area co-operation and anti-social behaviour.

Managing our homes

All our homes are managed by the Operations Team. They undertake regular scheme inspections to ensure they are clean and tidy and well maintained, assist tenants with paying their rent and sustaining their tenancies and provide opportunities for tenants to comment on our services through regular Feedback Groups. They also deal with any complaints, boundary issues and neighbour disputes. The team will also manage vacant properties and help to administer mutual exchanges.

Complaints

During the year the Association received 6 formal complaints regarding issues with their neighbours. In all cases the Association acted swiftly to resolve the complaint and deal with the problem that had occurred. All complaints were resolved and closed with 14 working days.

Working with Partners

We work with a wide range of partners both nationally, regionally and locally. These partnerships help to shape policy and improve services. By working together we have a strong voice when talking to Government and are able to comment on new ideas and proposals. We also work closely with local agencies to tackle any issues that arise. Our relationship with the Police enables us to respond to neighbourhood complaints, while the Wiltshire Money partnership has enabled all landlords to help tenants through the recent changes to Welfare Benefits. We also work closely with Local Authority's and other landlords to understand the level of housing need and plan new housing delivery.

In 2016/17 the cost of the Associations housing management service was £315 per property, per year – well below many similar landlords.

RENTS

Rents are set in line with our rent policies. These policies are decided in accordance with Government guidelines.

Currently, this means that most rents will reduce by -1% each year until 2020.

- **Average weekly rent charged is £106.46.**
- **Average 'affordable rent' charged is £135.64.**
- **Rent arrears owed at 31/03/17 was 0.96% (£19,177)**
- **Rent arrears owed at 31/03/17 (including Housing Benefit payments) was 1.76% (£35,213).**
- **Former Tenant arrears: 0.05% (£1,000)**

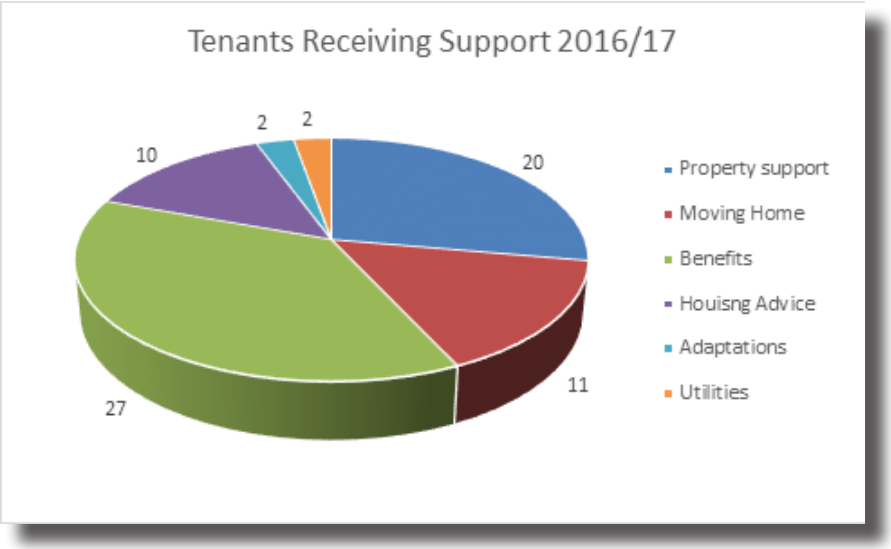
Where services are provided to communal areas tenants may be charged a 'service charge' in addition to their rent. These charges vary each year depending on the cost of providing these services and the amount of money tenants have paid. The most recent survey showed 72% of tenants felt their service charge offered good 'value for money'.

Since then we have worked hard to improve the way we calculate these charges and to make it clearer which services tenants are actually paying for.

Tenancy Plus

The Association has continued with our Tenancy Plus service throughout the year. The service aims to assist those tenants who have a variety of problems by ensuring they are given advice and support to help overcome whatever the problem is. In 2016/17 44 tenants used the service and were assisted with 72 different problems that they needed help in resolving.

The **chart below** shows the types of queries the Operations Team assisted with.



GOVERNANCE AND VIABILITY

We follow the National Housing Federation's Code of Governance which sets out standards for how we run our organisation. During the year we also implemented a new Governance Framework clearly setting out the roles and responsibilities of the Board and its Committees. The Framework ensures we have the correct mix of skills and experience to manage the Association effectively and ensure our long term future.

White Horse Housing Association
New Hall, Market Place, Melksham, Wiltshire, SN12 6EX

TEL: 01380 850916
info@whitehorsehousing.co.uk

www.whitehorsehousing.co.uk