

# NEWSLETTER

April 2024



## The results are in and it's official!!



Pictured: Members of White Horse Housing Association's Tenant Scrutiny Panel with Operations Director Belinda Eastland showing off some of the scores in our recent tenant satisfaction survey

Thanks to your responses White Horse Housing Association is at the top of the charts of small housing associations in the UK.

The results of our tenant satisfaction survey, carried out last winter by respected housing research company Acuity, show WHHA scored higher than any other landlord surveyed by Acuity in 11 out of 12 categories.

The results showed **96** per cent of you are satisfied with our service, **97** per cent are satisfied they have a safe home and **93** per cent said they are satisfied with the time taken to complete repairs.

Chief Executive, Steve Warren praised WHHA's staff and contractors and thanked our tenants for their responses but added: "We are by no means complacent, we'll look at every aspect of the responses we've had to satisfy ourselves we are doing all we can to maintain our standards."

**Read more on Page 2 and look out for the full results in our report inside.**

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# Glowing report from tenants in satisfaction survey

Chief Executive Steve Warran has thanked tenants and praised his staff after this year's satisfaction survey showed found that 96 per cent of its tenants are satisfied with our service.

The findings showed nine out of ten tenants (91 per cent) feel they are provided with a well-maintained home and almost all tenants (97 per cent) are satisfied they have a safe home. The same number said WHHA is easy to deal with, while 94 per cent of tenants say they are treated fairly and with respect.

The bi-annual survey, part of which is a requirement of the Social Housing Regulator, was carried out between October and December last year by research company Acuity. More than 230 tenants responded.

It reported that nine out of ten tenants who have had repairs carried out are satisfied with our repairs service and 93 per cent said they are satisfied with the time taken to complete their most recent repair after they reported it.

More than three-quarters of tenants (78 per cent) believe the association makes a positive contribution to their neighbourhood and 85 per cent say it listens to their views and acts upon them.

The Acuity report said: "Eight out of ten tenants are promoters, very loyal and happy to promote WHHA to other people (80 per cent), with 71 per cent giving a score of 10 out of 10, which is exceptional."

With just five per cent of tenants said to have negative views about the association, it posted a Net Promoter Score of 75 – higher than Amazon and Netflix.

Steve said: "I'm absolutely delighted that we've seen an increase in our overall satisfaction over the last survey in 2021, and in eight of the ten categories where the same questions were asked in 2021, our score increased. It shows that our brilliant staff are not only maintaining our excellent service to tenants they are improving it.

"We are a relatively small association but whatever size you are is no excuse for poor service and part of the reason why we perform so well is that we work really hard at making our whole set-up gel together. From the person that answers the phone or responds to an email in the beginning to the person that deals with the issue, we're a team."

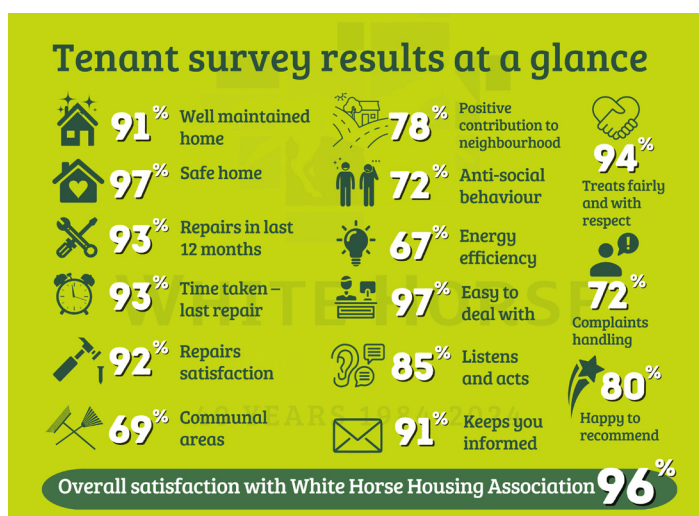
Acuity director Denise Raine said the results earmark WHHA as "an exceptionally high performing landlord in the very top of the sector".

"You're not going to get scores like this unless you've got a really good, responsive repair service and you've got phenomenal staff in the office," she said. "The fact the 'easy to deal with' question came in at 97 per cent, which is pretty unheard of being that high, suggests their relationship and the way they handle queries must be exceptional."

The survey showed that some tenants are unhappy about the upkeep of communal outdoor areas and gardens but Steve said this has already been countered with the appointment of two new grounds maintenance contractors. Our Tenant Scrutiny Panel is also going through any negative comments in the survey to identify ways to improve our service.

"These are exceptional scores but we are by no means complacent," he said. "We'll look at every aspect of the responses we've had to satisfy ourselves we are doing all we can to maintain our standards. I'd like to thank our tenants for putting their trust in us and for their appreciation and for all the hard work our staff, board and contractors put in to continue meeting our tenants' needs."

**See the full Acuity report inside this issue.**



# Steve Warran's column



**Pictured: Steve Warran,  
Chief Executive**

Where else can I start this quarter but the response from you all to our tenant satisfaction survey?

Firstly let me say a huge thank you to everyone who took the time to fill in the survey and especially those who added comments.

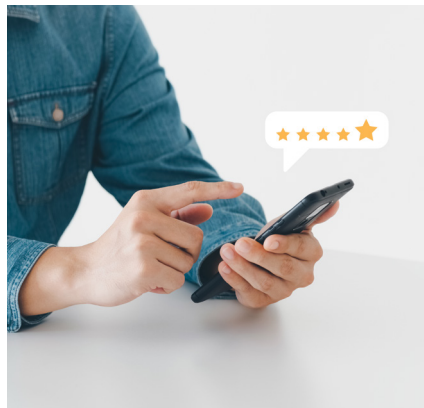
I know you might think these don't go anywhere but I can assure you both the team here and our Tenant Scrutiny Panel are studying them very closely to assess how we can improve our service still further. You might say there's not much to improve when 96 per cent of your tenants say they are satisfied with your service but we are by no means complacent.

One of the most pleasing things about the results is how well we compare to other housing associations in our response times, the way we deal with queries and issues and the sense we give you, our tenants, of safety and security.

This isn't just because we are a comparatively small organisation, although we do punch well above our weight. Whatever size you are shouldn't be an excuse for poor service and part of the reason why we perform so well is that we work really hard at making our whole set-up gel together.

From the person that answers the phone or responds to an email in the beginning to the person that deals with the issue to the member of staff or contractor that fixes it, we're a team. Each link in the chain has to be strong and reliable – if one breaks the whole service fails.

The survey was conducted by Acuity and I will be at its annual conference in April, alongside many other housing associations from all over the country. One of the topics under discussion will be the new consumer standards being introduced by the Regulator of Social Housing, prompted by the recent Social Housing Regulation Act, which in turn was inspired by the Grenfell tragedy.



The new standards concern safety and quality, transparency, influence, accountability, tenancy and neighbourhood and community standard. They set out what the regulator expects us to do and we have to prove, should we be asked, that we comply.

A lot in there is to do with the condition of homes, repairs, maintenance and timescales and the results of our survey show we're doing well there. But there will still be things we are going to have to do to ensure that we continue to comply and I'm determined that we do it.

I had a reminder of what this job is really all about when I read the interview you'll see elsewhere in this newsletter with Ali and Romany, who have moved into their new home in Kilmersdon. To see a young couple able to start their life together close to the community they belong in is really gratifying.

In the next few weeks we'll see the first tenants moving into our passivhaus development at Hook Hollow in Seend Cleeve, which is really heartening as well, after a bit of a saga with an electricity pole you may have heard about.

To close though I'd just like to say again to all of our tenants, thank you for putting your trust in us and appreciating our service. It's a team effort and we couldn't do it without our brilliant staff, our board, our Tenant Scrutiny Panel and our contractors. We're all proud to be a part of this organisation.



**Pictured: Staff & Board taking a look at our two new houses at Hoares Lane, Kilmersdon**

# Repairs and maintenance



## Maintenance Manager Darrel Smith gives us his regular update on what his repairs and maintenance team are up to

It will come as a surprise to no one that I'm really pleased that the coming weeks will see the start of our new grounds maintenance contracts right across the Wiltshire area.

The upkeep of hedgerows and grassed areas have been a thorny issue, pardon the pun, for tenants for some time and I'm looking forward to some very noticeable improvements over the next few months.

We have two new contractors, Tom Bolton and his team from Upton Garden and Fencing will be looking after Warminster and Westbury, while Ben Head's team from Dependable will be taking care of the rest of our area.

After we advertised the contracts we received a great deal of interest and it was only after careful consideration that we appointed Tom and Ben. I've talked to them both and they are in no doubt about the importance of doing a good job.

We are taking tenants' concerns very seriously and I was interested to read the comments that came back in our survey just before Christmas. To make sure we stay on top of any issues that arise we've set up a customer focus group especially for grounds maintenance.

At the moment we have five in the group but I'd welcome a few more. We stay in touch via a WhatsApp group so they can send through photographs of any problem areas, which will be fed straight back to Tom or Ben's team.

I'd also like some but probably not all of the group to be involved in the regular meetings we'll be having with the contractors so they have a real time involvement in the delivery of the contract. I'm really keen to have a professional set-up that the tenants can play a part in and take ownership of.

**If anyone would like to be involved in the group they can contact me direct at [darrel.smith@whitehousehousing.co.uk](mailto:darrel.smith@whitehousehousing.co.uk).**

Now that spring is on the way we'll be hoping our furry friends the bats in the roofs of Ammerdown Terrace at Kilmersdon are waking up and on their way so that we can continue with the work to replace the roofs. We managed to get just under a third of the way through the project before we had to stop to let the bats, which are a protected species and are nesting in the roofs, hibernate for winter.

We are also in the process of appointing assessors, designers and retrofit coordinators for Phase Two of the renovation project, on another 17 houses in Kilmersdon. We'll be making contact with tenants in the near future to begin consultation and I'm hoping we can start in earnest later this spring.



## **New grounds maintenance contractors are raring to go.**

Two new grounds maintenance contractors are looking forward to transforming communal areas and gardens across White Horse Housing Association's area this month.

Ben Head of Chippenham-based Dependable and Tom Bolton of Upton Lovell firm Upton Garden and Fencing have won the tenders for grass cutting, hedge trimming and all the other work needed to get the association's outdoor areas looking trim and tidy.

Tom and his team will be looking after sites in Westbury and Warminster while Ben's team of 15 will be taking all of the other areas. Both say they will be out and about over the coming weeks and look forward to meeting tenants.

"I want to meet and sort of greet the residents and get to know them," said Tom, who has been running his business for three years. "I'm local, so obviously I see the sites every day, and some of it is right by my kids' school, so obviously it means something to me as well.

"I hope people will have a chat, I'm very approachable and I'm keen to help wherever I can."

Ben founded his company in 2009 and sees the White Horse contract as a perfect fit. "Walking around some of the sites, I could see what we're being asked to do is bread and butter to us, it's just something that we do on a regular basis.

"I think just performing at our most basic standard will see us improve things straight away."

Because both firms are relatively small they will try to use the same workers on each site so they get to know it. "The continuity and the communication is key," said Ben. "After every visit, we produce a report for every site with photographic evidence of what we've done and how we've done it. If we've noticed anything that's not quite right, it will go in the report.

"For the first couple of visits, we'll be cutting the hedges right back to how they should be. It's going to be an interesting time and a steep learning curve for us but we're raring to go."



**Pictured: Ben Head of Chippenham-based Dependable**



**Pictured: Tom Bolton of Upton Lovell firm Upton Garden and Fencing**



# Couple loving village life in their first home together

It was while out on a walk that Romany Cooper and Ali Sen came across a building site that was to become their dream home – a smart new three bedroom house in Kilmersdon from White Horse Housing Association.

Romany, 23, and Ali, 22, had been together for three years and were planning to move in together but were struggling to find anywhere they could afford that kept them near family, friends and their work.

“We knew we wanted to buy somewhere together,” says Ali, who grew up in the village. “We didn’t want to have to rent because being young it’s hard to get out of the trap of renting. We decided we’d be better off paying into a mortgage straight away.”

With the mortgage they could afford they were looking at either a tiny flat or a home on a vast estate much further away in Frome or even Bristol. But the two new homes being built in Hoares Lane by White Horse Housing Association, and offered for part-ownership, were the perfect solution.

“It was ideal for us because the market at the moment is so high,” says Ali. “We thought that there’s no better opportunity because we’d get to live in such a nice house. It works out so we own 60 per cent of the property and we rent 40 per cent, but there is the option to buy the other 40 per cent eventually.”

After applying for the house the couple faced an anxious wait to see if they had been accepted. “We really wanted it to happen because we like the village and although we hadn’t been looking that long, once it was an option we didn’t want to go back,” says Romany. “We knew we’d never have been able to buy a house here otherwise.”

Ali, who is a roofer, and Romany, who works in admin for an education trust, finally got the news the house was theirs via a phone call at work. “We were so happy, I think we’d thought it was all too good to be true,” says Romany.

Ali, who plays football for Brislington in the Western League, adds: “I was over the moon to be still in the village where I grew up.”

The couple have been welcomed by neighbours and were delighted to be invited to a barbecue, despite the February weather. “It was actually quite sunny and everyone came so it was lovely to meet them all,” says Romany.

Romany rides in her spare time and appreciates the opportunity to enjoy the country life. “I love it and I love the village and the quiet,” she says. “I lived in Midsomer Norton and Westfield so I do like the area.

“The house is just right for us and there is plenty of space. We both think we are very lucky to be here and to be close to family, friends and our jobs.”

Ali, who used to work in construction, adds: “We’ve got lovely views over the back across the fields and the house is well designed. I came in had a look when it was being built and I was really happy with the way it was going, so I think they’re a good developer.

“We obviously know we have to make a bit of sacrifices in terms of money to be here. All our friends are going out and going on holidays, but when we are 30, 35 or 40 we’ll be thankful.”

**For more details about the housing association or to get in touch, go to [www.whitehorsehousing.co.uk](http://www.whitehorsehousing.co.uk).**



**Pictured: Ali Sen and Romany Cooper outside their part-ownership home in Kilmersdon.**



# Tenant Profile

**Shakira Hilton is the new chairman of White Horse Housing Association's Tenant Scrutiny Panel.**

Originally from the West Midlands, she moved with her son to Wroughton, just outside Swindon, more than 30 years ago to be closer to family, continue her studies and resume teaching.

She said: "I'm very happy to be part of the scrutiny panel. It's my way of giving something back to say thank you to White Horse Housing.

"I've gone through a lot with them and if it weren't for them, I don't know what my life would be like. I'm dyslexic and they could have made me feel very awkward about it but I've always been treated with warmth and understanding and I just want to pay that back."

Shakira suffers from a variety of illnesses, including lupus and arthritis but remains determined not to let it get in the way of living her life. She wants to use some of that positivity on the panel.

"I just want people to see someone who has gone through a lot of things and can see the good the housing association is doing for people. Because I do appreciate what they're doing, and when you see how hard the staff work to make us happy it's eye-opening."



**Pictured: Shakira Hilton**

Shakira worked at Swindon College teaching hair, beauty and media makeup, a skill she first gleaned when she worked for a company organising photoshoots for models. She was also a mentor across the college. She was involved in organising the college's spectacular theatrical and special effects make-up shows. She studied for a PCET in teaching at Greenwich University in London and intends to return some day to study for a master's, followed by a PhD in health and social care management.

"I want to be one of those people that tries to help society," she says. "Just in the background, doing my little bit."

**The next visits are scheduled in the table below. To book an appointment: email: [info@whitehorsehousing.co.uk](mailto:info@whitehorsehousing.co.uk)**

Neighbourhood Scheme Visits 2024	Date of Visits
Luckington/Burton/Castle Combe/Colerne	11/04/2024
Redlynch/Whiteparish/Winterslow	25/04/2024
Ashton Keynes/Upper Minety/Leigh/Hullavington/Moors Cottages	09/05/2024
Heddington/Rowde/Bromham/The Comptons	23/05/2024
Bishopstone/Hannington/South Marston/Wanborough/Wroughton/Winterbourne Monkton	06/06/2024
Coleford/Peasedown St John/Writhlington	20/06/2024
Hindon/Dilton Marsh/Kilmington/Corsley	04/07/2024
Kington Langley/Great Somerford/Sutton Benger	18/07/2024
Bruton/North Bradley/Southwick	08/08/2024
Kilmersdon	22/08/2024
Ogbourne St George/Mildenhall/Chilton Foliat	05/09/2024
Burbage/Collingbourne Ducis/Milton Lilbourne/Rushall/North Newton/Pewsey	19/09/2024
Tilshead/Great Cheverall/Urchfont/Codford/Edington	03/10/2024
Hilperton/Seend/Semington/Staverton	17/10/2024

# Staff Profile

## Dawn Bowker - Office Manager

### How long have you been working at White Horse Housing?

I've had the privilege of working for White Horse Housing since September 3, 2001 – 23 years where's that time gone? Back then the association was called Wiltshire Rural Housing Association. I can still remember my first day driving into Bromham and thinking what a lovely drive out, turning up at a small office next to the butcher's. I started as clerical assistant and as the association grew and I took on more responsibilities, my job title changed to Office Manager and my hours became full time.

### Tell us about your role, what are your main responsibilities?

My main role is providing accounts support to the Finance Director and Housing Managers. If I'm not paying suppliers or running wages, I'll be at my desk getting to grips with Adobe InDesign, creating all the association's publications or I will be updating the association's website. I love designing the annual review, the annual report to tenants and the quarterly newsletters. I'm even the cleaner for the association, which I do before work or at the weekends.

### What do you most enjoy about your job?

The people that I work with. If you have ever worked for the association, it's like working with your extended family. I even introduced my best friend Tracy Crook in 2005 to come and work here. "You will be looked after," I said.

### Where did you work before White Horse Housing?

I worked for Avon Tyres in Melksham as a secretary before having my twins, then while looking after the kids I worked part time as a dinner lady at a local school and a housekeeper at a care home.



Pictured: Dawn and Bonni - both having a bad hair day!!

### How do you like to spend your free time?

I spend lots of time with my grandchildren. We are either out at the local swimming pool or trying to cook cakes at home. I'm usually the washer upper.

### Where's your favourite place to visit?

I love spending time at the beach – my favourite place is Hengistbury Head at Southbourne, Bournemouth. I love walking Bonni my border terrier, who is my little partner in crime.

### Who is your hero?

My dad who passed away 2017, a very kind and hardworking man.

### What's your secret talent?

Oh, I'm multi-talented, like most women are.

### What's your guilty pleasure?

Can't say really, but what I can say is Lindt Chocolates.

**THIS YEAR THE  
ASSOCIATION IS  
CELEBRATING  
40 YEARS  
1984-2024**



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