

2021

Resident's
Annual
Report

Year ended 31 March 2021

“

Thank you for all of your services during this very tough time.

Housing Solutions resident

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About us

Our core purpose is to provide rented housing for disadvantaged local people who cannot afford to buy or rent on the open market.

People are at our heart. They are our community, our neighbourhood, our priority. Housing is more than just a roof and four walls to us – it’s about creating places people can thrive in, places residents are proud to live and our people are proud to work.

Our work is guided by three core themes. Safe, Satisfied and Sustainable. These foundations shape our new five year Corporate Strategy, developed with our Board members, residents and staff and help us address the three big concerns of residents and colleagues.

Safe – Keeping residents and our people safe at home and at work.

Satisfied – Providing value for money services for residents and fulfilling careers for our people.

Sustainable – Delivering more effective services and more efficient homes.

This annual report for 2020-21 sets out our activities and achievements over the year under these three core commitments.

Welcome



Housing Solutions' priority over the last year has been to keep you safe, and I am proud that we have maintained our strong safety record, both for residents and staff, throughout the COVID-19 restrictions.

Safety and maintaining 100% compliance is central to Housing Solutions. We achieved 100% compliance for both gas and electrical in 2020 and 2021. Equally for open spaces, play sites and trees are all 100% compliant.

I want to thank you for your support and understanding over the last year. I particularly want to thank the active residents who have been instrumental in helping us make the right decisions on what services we should prioritise.

It has been a challenging year for everyone, but at Housing Solutions we've still managed to achieve a lot. We kept all communication open and made thousands of welfare calls to older and vulnerable people. We carried on with emergency repairs and servicing, dealt with serious anti-social behaviour, and supported people facing financial hardship.

We continued to build on engaging with you through the resident-led Scrutiny and Improvement Team, and we also established an e-Panel (over 110 members). The e-Panel offers insight on policy reviews and proposed changes to our services. In response to specific concerns raised by residents living in our sheltered schemes we recently established a Community Living Panel (37 members), who have been instrumental in designing the 'New Deal' for sheltered residents. Similarly, the Homeowner Panel, formed in 2021, provides valuable insight for the home ownership 'New Deal'.

Looking ahead to 2022 we want to get even closer to residents:

- We are redoubling our commitment to local people, so that we truly understand the concerns of our diverse community and can positively impact their lives.

- Working to increase the number of new sustainable homes we build.
- Forming partnerships to expand our local reach and create training and employment opportunities for local people.
- Focussing ruthlessly on providing value for money services for residents, which includes pushing on with our digital transformation.

At the core, we want to strengthen our involvement in a wide range of community matters, to help us truly understand the challenges residents face. We think this is how we can deliver the housing and services that are right for our community and we're going to work even more closely with you to successfully do this.

To do this successfully, we are delighted to welcome Jackie Fearon as the new Executive Director of Resident Services and Community. Jackie is a highly experienced housing professional with a passion for resident engagement and improving residents' services.

I do hope you find this report informative and helpful. I have no doubt it's going to be another demanding and unpredictable year, but we've seen, by working with residents and listening to your views, how we can improve the housing service and overcome any challenge that comes our way.

Orla Gallagher
Chief Executive

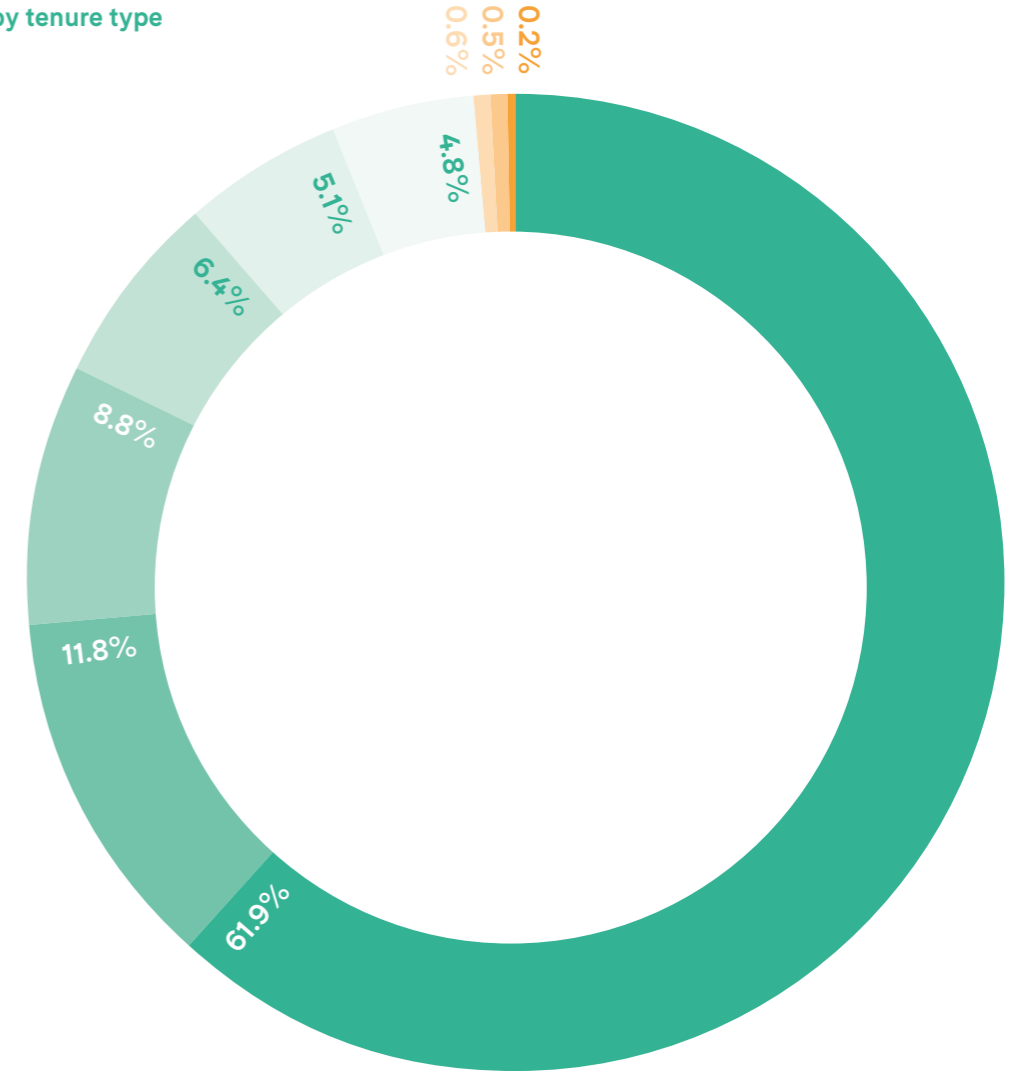
Our homes

We are one of the leading social housing providers in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, supporting communities for over 25 years. We now own, manage, and maintain over 7,500 homes but remain rooted in our local communities, close to the people we serve in the vital services we support and deliver.



Housing Solutions homes by tenure type

- General needs
- Care
- Shared Ownership
- Affordable Rent
- Sheltered Schemes
- Supported Housing
- Market Rent
- Key Worker
- Temporary



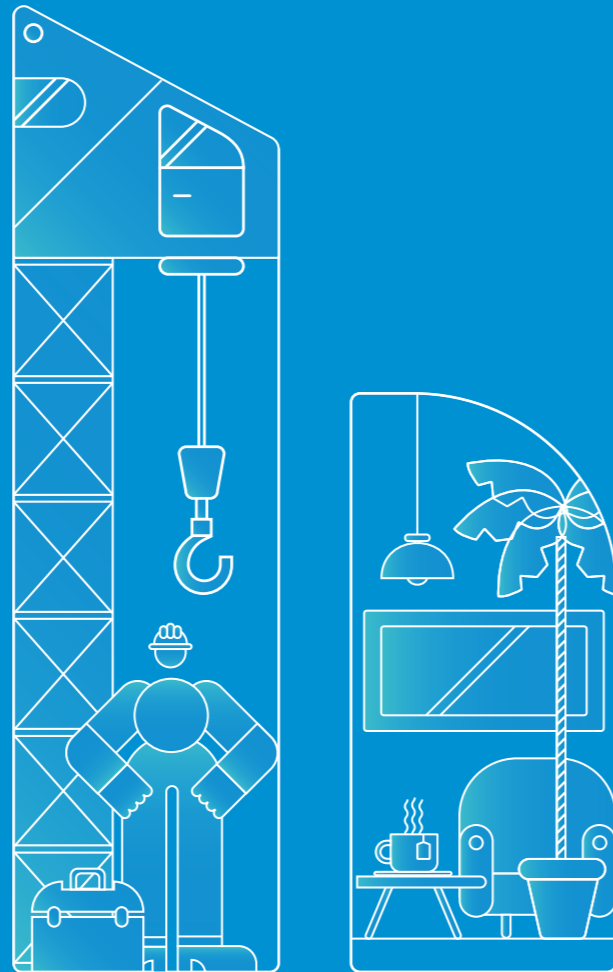
The vast majority (78%) of our housing stock is dedicated to social, affordable, and supported rent accommodation.

All work required to maintain our housing stock at the government's Decent Homes standards was completed during the year. All housing associations are regulated and monitored by the Regulator of

Social Housing which assesses their governance standards and viability. Last year the Regulator of Social Housing once again awarded us the highest (G1) rating for our governance standards and (V1) rating for our financial resilience, confirming our position as a well-run, financially resilient organisation.

Safe

Making sure you're safe in your home is our top priority. We continued to deliver vital services over the lockdown, working with residents to carry out essential property-related health and safety checks during the period.



409

Fire risk assessments completed

100%

Asbestos inspections completed

£9.9m

Invested in fire safety

Safe in your home

Despite the challenges in 2020-21 we achieved 100% property compliance matching our performance the previous year.

We also continued to invest in technical health and safety training for our staff to ensure the highest levels of compliance and expertise in this area.

Fire safety

In the critical area of fire safety, we continued to maintain our fire risk assessment programme to make sure residents feel safe, and are safe, in their homes. We met our target of delivering 409 fire risk assessments in our multi-occupancy properties and we completed 2,436 remedial actions identified in the year.

We have developed a £9.9m five-year investment programme for fire safety works, including sprinkler installation, flat entrance door replacements and improvements to the fire protection within our buildings.

This programme sees us moving towards an 'above compliance' position beyond what is legislatively required.

Safe in your community

In response to resident feedback, we created a new role of Resident Liaison Officer (RLO) and now have three dedicated RLOs out and about across our estates, carrying out over 1,600 estate inspections over the year to keep our schemes and estates clean and tidy, and keep in regular contact with residents.

We experienced an increase in reported anti-social behaviour over periods of lockdown as more people stayed at home. Partnering with the police and other agencies, our specialist Anti-Social Behaviour officers provided dedicated support and advice and dealt with 365 incidents during the year under our commitment to deal with issues quickly and proactively.

1000



Calls made to offer additional support

Supporting vulnerable residents

We're much more than a landlord – we're part of the community. Many residents were particularly impacted by the pandemic, and we redoubled our efforts to stay close and connected to provide support with the emerging challenges they faced. We adapted our normal programme of events and activities to help people and families stay connected. We worked with local foodbanks to provide food and other essential supplies to residents who needed them.

We also partnered with two of our local authorities to reduce housing shortages in the pandemic by making 19 temporary accommodation units available to quickly relocate people in urgent housing need.

The pandemic accelerated the existing trend towards the use of online services, and we saw more residents using our online account services over the period. Increased use of our website chatbot enabled our staff to reach our more vulnerable residents who needed that extra bit of help. And in 2020-21 staff made over 1,000 calls to offer additional support.

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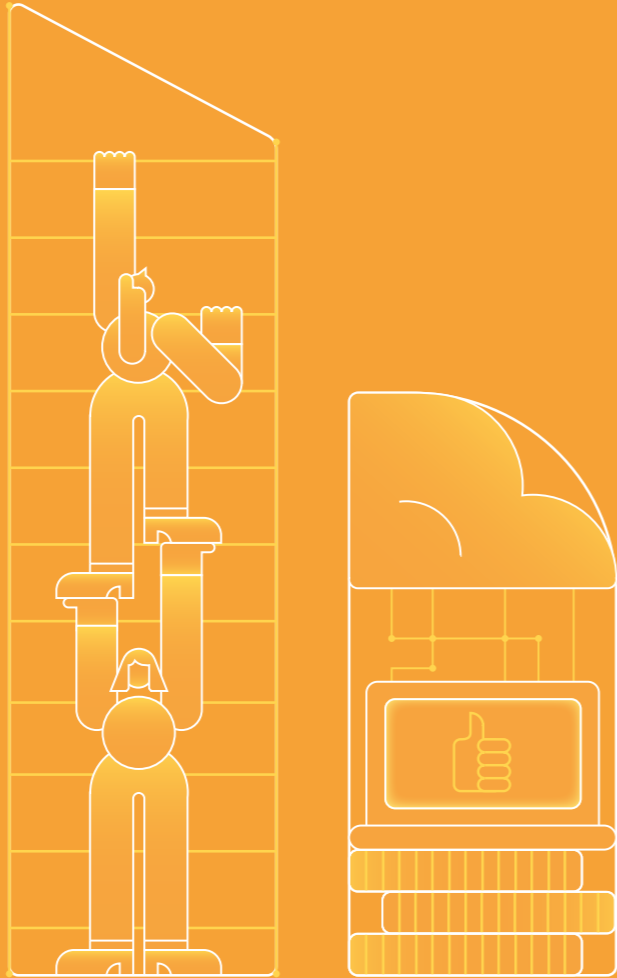
To the grounds team, thank you for working hard even in the rain and for checking in on me. Your thoughtfulness is appreciated.

Housing Solutions resident



Satisfied

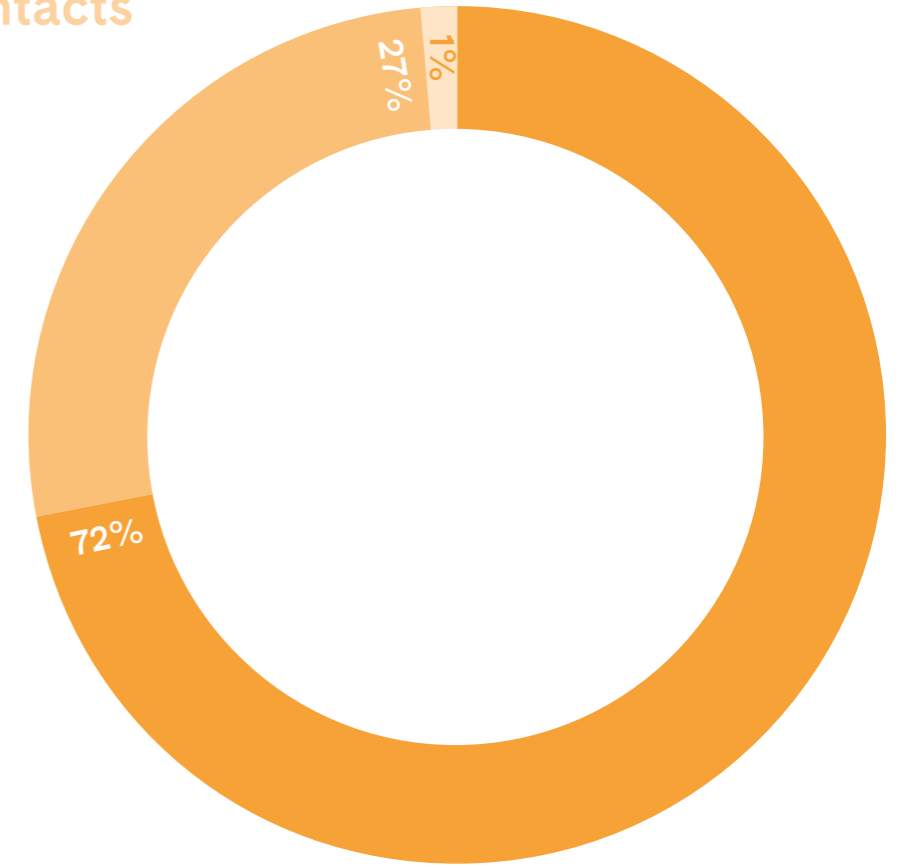
We have listened to feedback from residents and worked hard to increase levels of satisfaction with our services. During 2020 we re-structured our housing services creating a new Neighbourhood Team to give residents better support across all aspects of their tenancy.



Total contacts

60,000 total contacts

- Calls
- Emails
- Webchat



Our contact centre continued to focus on providing a high quality first point of contact for residents, handling over 60,000 contacts during the year, 72% by phone and 27% through email. We handled over 700 enquiries through our webchat facility, freeing up our staff to provide more in-depth support to those residents who needed it.

Overall resident satisfaction with our services was 83%, equalling our satisfaction rating last year despite the many challenges we all faced.

700 

Enquiries through webchat facility

Caring for our community

Our team worked hard to support residents achieve their personal goals and improve their prospects, partnering with specialist agencies to provide training and work opportunities. In 2020-21 these social activities were at a net social value of over £1.5m, an increase of 81% on the previous year.

Listening to your feedback

We want to hear feedback from a wide variety of residents, so we know how we're performing across all areas. That's why we've set up dedicated resident engagement panels (New Deal e-Panels) for sheltered and homeownership residents to engage with us digitally, in addition to our existing resident Scrutiny and Improvement Team. This combined feedback helps us make continual improvements including:

- > New style rent and service charge letters
- > Improved communal area cleaning in sheltered schemes
- > Trials of digital noticeboards
- > Improvements to policies

We want residents to have a great experience with us every time, but we recognise that things can go wrong and, when they do, it's crucial that we learn from these cases. During the year we received 80 informal complaints, 94% of which were resolved quickly and easily. We received 115 formal complaints 4 of which went to our complaints panel for review.

We have therefore put in place additional measures to improve complaint handling, working with our engaged resident panels to support us in this area, alongside increasing our training of staff and strengthening our Complaints and Compliments Policy.

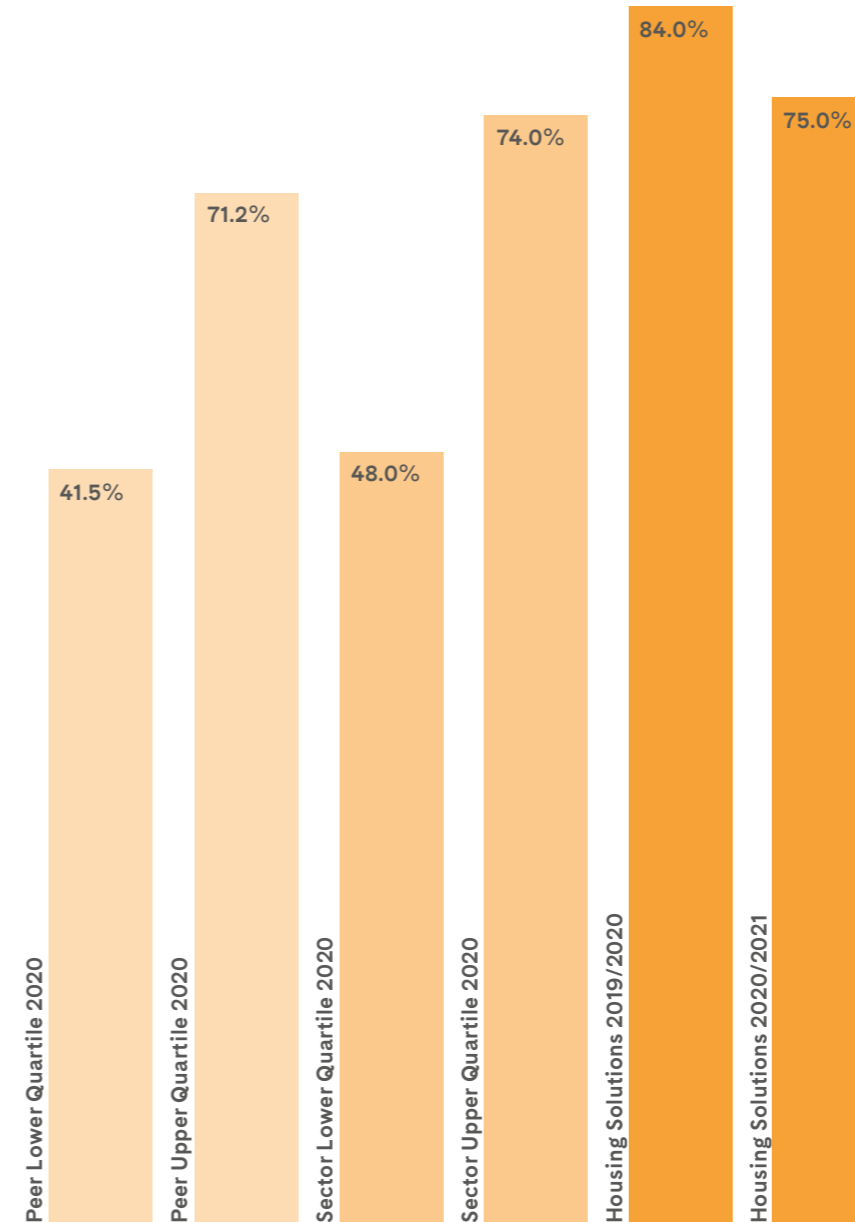
However, satisfaction with complaint-handling (at 75%) remained higher than that of our best-performing peers and the social housing sector as a whole.

£1.5m



Social value from activities

Complaint handling



75%



Satisfaction rating, higher than peers

Investment in homes

Despite the difficulties posed by COVID-19 in 2020-21, we continued the roll-out of our investment programme to improve and upgrade our homes. Maintaining investment in our properties in line with previous years, we were able to undertake a significant amount of upgrade work including improvements to keep residents warm and dry as well as modernise kitchens and bathrooms:

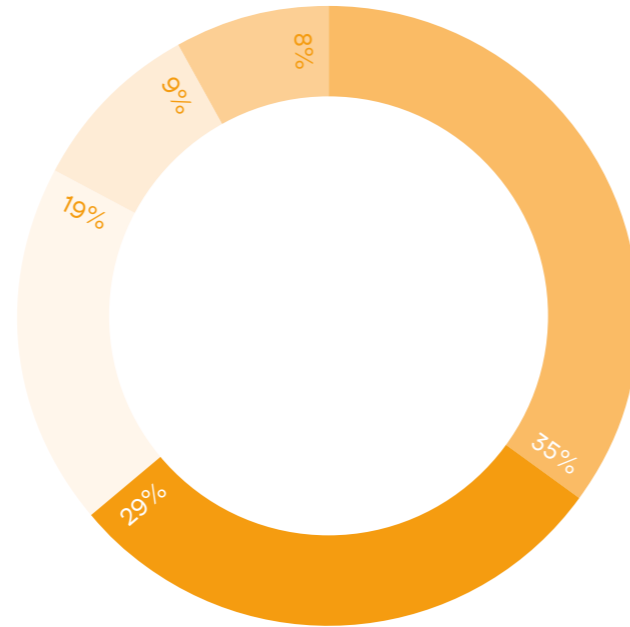
- We invested a total of £6.8 million last year repairing, maintaining, and improving our homes, double the amount spent in 2019-20.

- > Fitting new windows to 227 homes
- > Installing 112 new boilers
- > Fitting 87 new bathrooms
- > Installing 56 new kitchens

£6.8m [£]

Planned maintenance spend

- New kitchens & bathrooms
- New roofs
- Window replacement
- New boilers
- Fire safety



We invested a total of £6.8 million last year repairing, maintaining, and improving our homes, double the amount spent in 2019-20.

“ You always respond in a timely manner with queries and go the extra mile when you can. ”

Housing Solutions resident



Repairing homes

During the year we completed almost 17,000 routine repairs, almost matching the number last year, despite the restrictions.

The initial phases of the pandemic inevitably impacted our ability to carry out routine repairs but, after the easing of restrictions, our teams focused on completing all current and outstanding repairs as quickly as possible. Over 99% of emergency repairs were completed within 24 hours and more than 94% were completed within four hours, including during the height of the pandemic. As expected the lockdown impacted the average number of days to complete a repair, at 13.6 days, an increase from 10 days in 2019-20.

Despite the restrictions 97.7% of residents continued to be satisfied with our repairs service, an improvement on our 94% rating the previous year. We're proud of the dedication and hard work of our in-house maintenance team, working throughout the pandemic at personal risk to themselves, to provide vital services to residents. It was a superb effort by the team to maintain core services throughout successive periods of lockdown.

17,000



Providing value for money services

Achieving value for money on behalf of residents remains a key focus to improve the services you receive and make them as efficient and effective as possible. The costs per home of running our service reduced by £54 over 2020-21 and our in-house maintenance team continues to offer clear value for money.

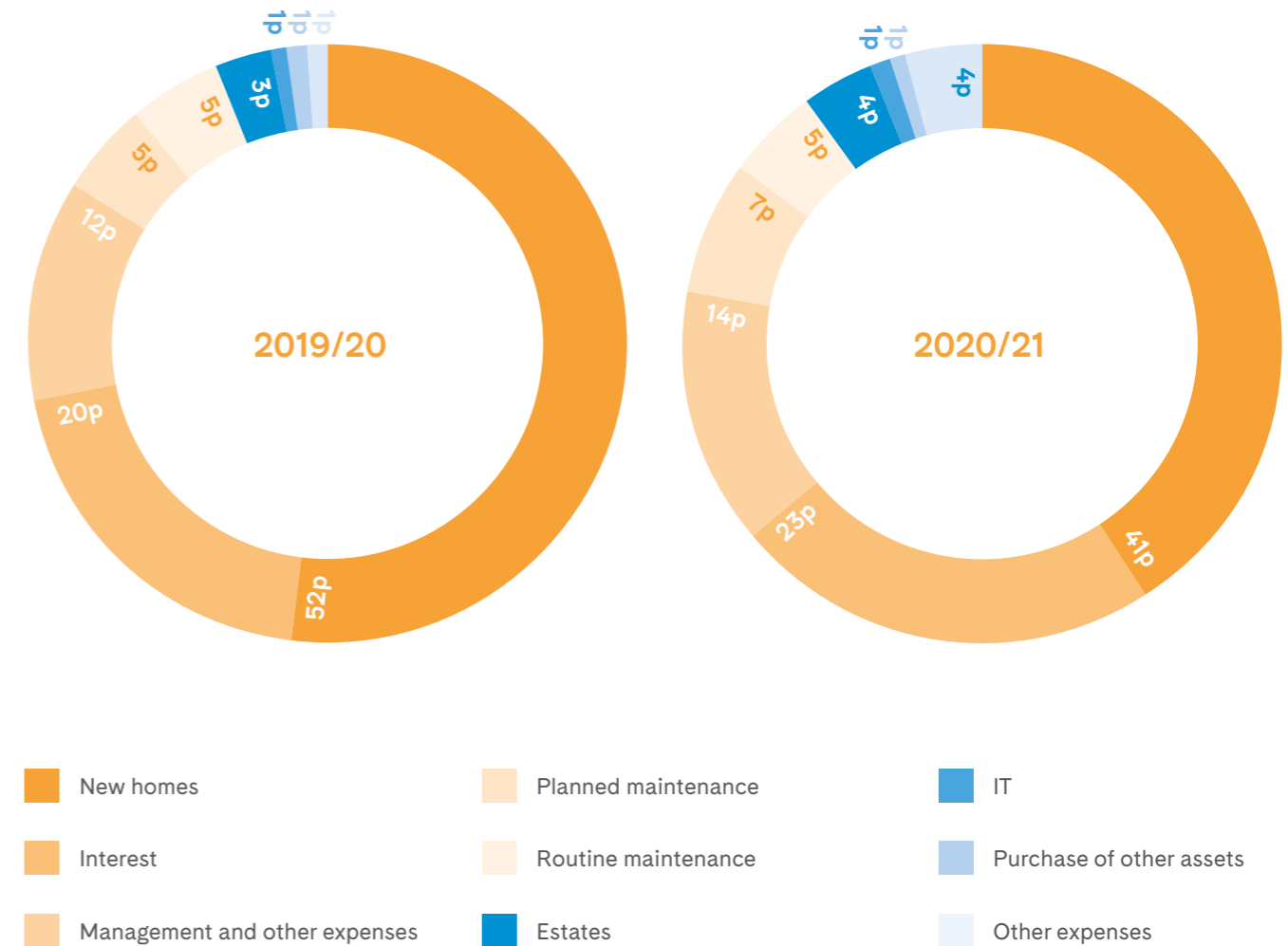
The average cost of a repair in 2020-21 was £786 with each home having, on average, 3.9 repairs during the year. 66% of all these repairs were carried out by our in-house team.

Increased use of our digital services helps us achieve greater value for money for residents, in freeing up time to help those who most need our support. 60% of residents are now signed up to our online customer portal (up from 42% last year), managing many aspects of their tenancy online. Last year we delivered £458,000 in additional savings by procuring equipment and services more efficiently, an increase of £241,000 on the previous year.

How our income is spent

The efficient collection of rent is important in allowing us to invest in the services residents want. £3.16m of rent due was paid online last year through the online account, almost double the amount the previous year.

In the year, gross rent arrears stood at 2.73%, again an improvement on the previous year.



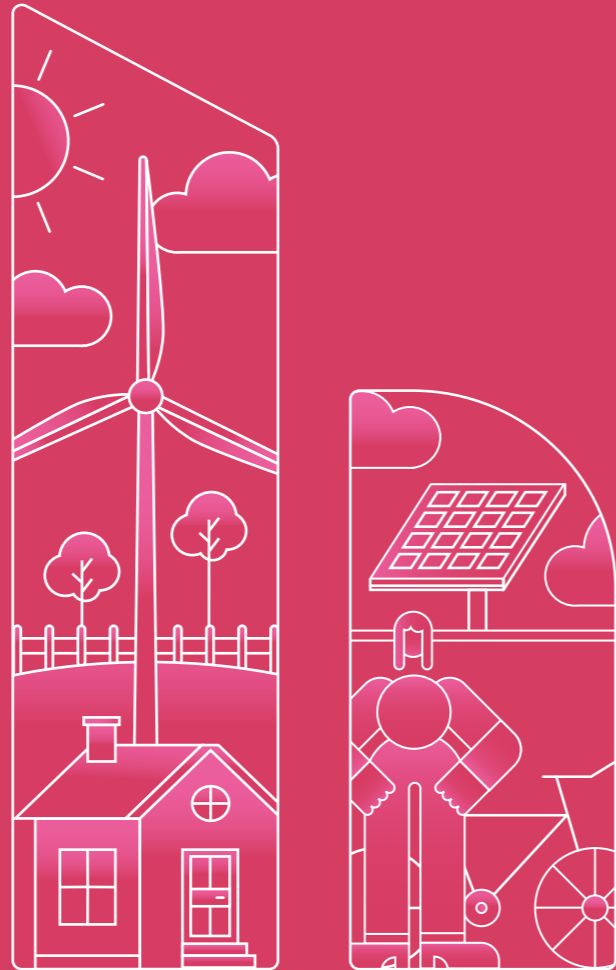
99%



Emergency repairs completed within 24 hours

Sustainable

Housing has an important role to play in fighting climate change, reducing carbon emissions and improving the sustainability of homes and we're determined to play our part to support this.



Environmental sustainability

Last year we reprofiled our planned maintenance spend to improve the safety and condition of our existing stock in meeting the government's EPC C target by 2030 and wider 2050 zero carbon objective. By 2022-23 we're aiming to have all new homes performing at EPC B or better and 97% of existing homes rated at EPC D or better – rising to 100% by 2026.

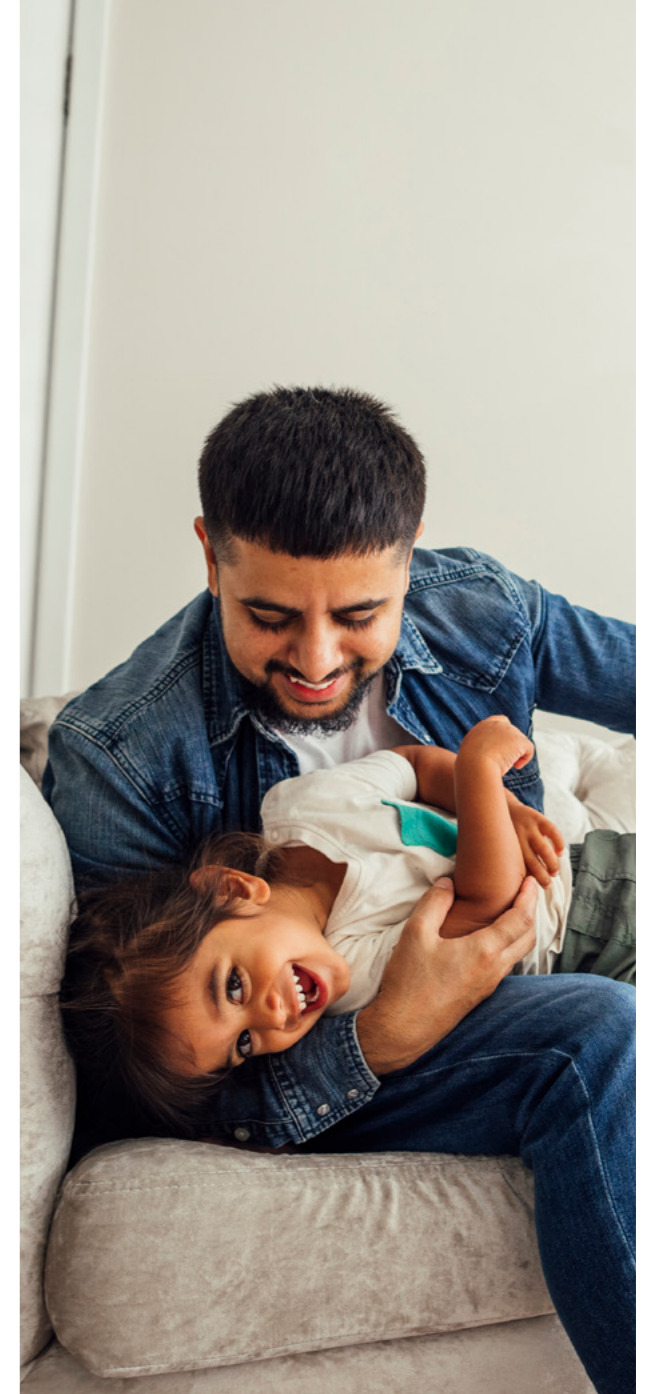
Sustainable tenancies

Last year our welfare and benefits team supported 811 residents to access over £134,000 of extra income. We also saw a significant increase in requests for help with food vouchers and foodbanks. Working with our local authority partners, we helped those most in need by sourcing an additional £56,000 in discretionary housing payments.

New affordable homes to sustain communities

We're committed to investing in the homes and services we provide for local people. Despite increased financial pressures, we continue to deliver more homes than providers of a similar size. Over 2020-21 we invested £11.4 million and completed 89 new homes, whilst fewer than last year this remained a major achievement given the pandemic.

Handovers during the year included the first 26 new homes at our York Road development in partnership with Countryside – the first of four major regeneration sites in Maidenhead. This development will include 88 affordable homes.



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**Thank you to the
operatives who
attended. They were
absolutely brilliant.**

Housing Solutions resident

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