



Hightown

2021/2022

Annual Report

for Residents

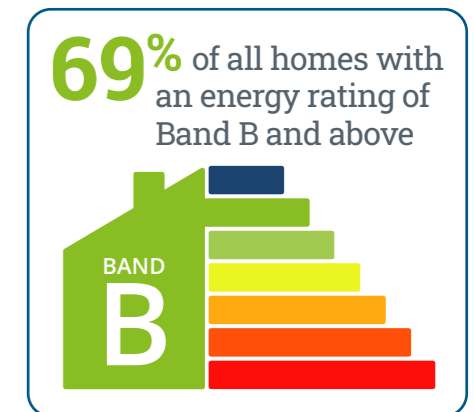
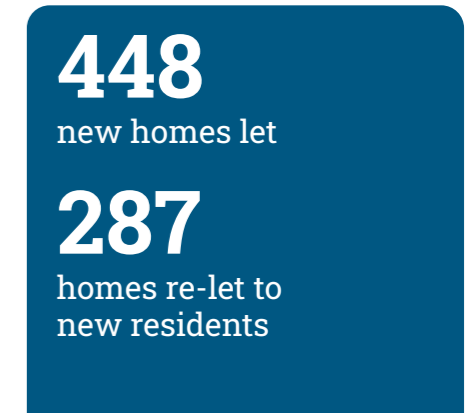
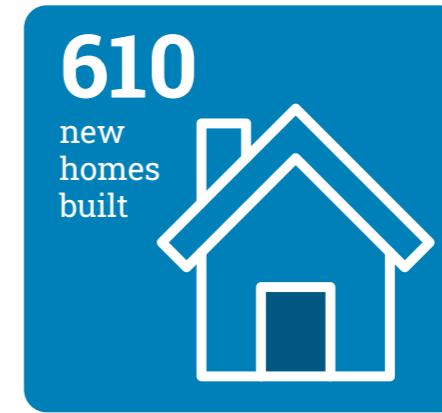


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2021/22 at a glance



Welcome

Hightown's annual report for residents 2021/22

As vice-chair of the Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel (RVSP), I am well aware of the challenges that have faced Hightown in the last financial year.

The continued presence of Covid-19 meant lockdowns still needed to be implemented and were only finally relaxed in February. Hightown continued to innovate and adapt to new ways of working by expanding techniques used in 2020 such as virtual door knocking to assist resident involvement. There was also the introduction of hybrid meetings for the RVSP. These techniques proved very successful and will be continued in the future.

There also proved to be other new challenges last year which included the start of the cost of living crisis. This was exacerbated by Russia invading Ukraine in February, immediately causing increased energy prices. However, the excellent work of Hightown staff, such as the Financial Inclusion team meant residents have been fully supported even when in difficult financial circumstances.

As a member of the RVSP, we receive reports on all aspects of Hightown's performance at our quarterly meetings. This includes statistics such as the percentage of emergency repairs fixed first time, the percentage of rent arrears and how many mutual exchanges happened in the quarter.

We also judge the resident bids for estate improvements and try to maximise results so there is the greatest beneficial effect for residents. The budget has significantly increased over the years which I hope will continue, so more residents will have proof that Hightown is working for their benefit.

There was an emphasis during last year on increasing resident involvement. This has always been important to Hightown as during RVSP meetings there is a report on how successful events were in attracting residents. This was when the popular virtual events during the lockdowns was discovered. This importance was further increased with the implementation of the Social Housing White Paper which was published in November 2020 in which the government set out actions it will take to make sure residents of social housing live in safe, decent homes, and are listened to.

The concentration on resident involvement will continue in to 2022/23 with further consultations with the RVSP. Membership is open to tenants and leaseholders. The contact details are available on the 'Involving you' page.

Kathryn Hallet
Vice-chair of the Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel



Emerging from Covid-19

Although 2021/22 was another challenging year, Hightown continued to make good progress towards our targets. For example, we exceeded our target of delivering 500 homes a year, building 610 affordable homes for local people and families in housing need.

The pandemic led to an increase in residents needing support – whether that was with their finances, sustaining their tenancy, or with their mental or physical health. Hightown staff, including our Financial Inclusion Officer, Housing Officers and Tenancy Sustainment Officers were there to provide practical support and advice. To continue to support those struggling financially, we have adapted our services to meet the changing needs of our residents and have created a form on our website so residents can engage with us if they're experiencing hardship.

We have continued with our virtual door knocking events – this is where staff contact residents to check in on them and get feedback. The virtual door knocking events were followed up with 'You said, we did' newsletters for the estates, to demonstrate the service improvements and changes that were made as a result of resident feedback.

The Lettings team carried out 692 viewings in the year. During the coronavirus restrictions, we introduced virtual viewings, where we would video call or send a recording to the applicant



Poppy and Primrose Court, Hemel Hempstead

for housing. As restrictions lifted, we began to reintroduce in person viewings, but have also continued to offer virtual viewings for those who prefer to receive a recording of the home they are applying for.

We were delighted to resume face-to-face events, including opening events to celebrate the completion of new housing developments. We held opening events at Rossway Quarter in Bushey, Poppy and Primrose Court in Hemel Hempstead, and Goldfinch House in Watford. These events gave us the opportunity to hear what residents think about their new home and to showcase our developments to some of our stakeholders. We also organised a groundbreaking ceremony at our Heart of Maylands Phase 2 site in Hemel Hempstead, to celebrate the start of construction. This is Hightown's largest development to date with 158 new, affordable homes and three shops being developed. The development is due to complete early 2023.

LOOKING AHEAD:

During the pandemic, we introduced DocuSign for new tenancies and will be expanding our use of this to include applications and disclaimers to make it easier for residents to submit applications and requests.



Rossway Quarter, Bushey

Residents' events

Our Housing team were able to reconnect with residents in person last summer at a series of events across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire. All the events had an environmental theme and offered residents the opportunity to meet with Hightown staff and partner agencies, including the police, fire services, and representatives from local authorities and their local councillors. It was good to be able to meet residents in person again after 18 months of restrictions due to the pandemic; staff and residents had a brilliant time connecting with each other.

We asked residents to complete a survey on what they thought of Hightown's opportunities for involvement and how they access our services. The feedback received was used to assist with the Resident Involvement Strategy.



Involving you

Our residents are at the heart of Hightown's services, and our ongoing communication with you helps us to improve our services and how we deliver them. We're committed to giving you a voice, and offer a range of ways for you to provide feedback on our services and the management of your home.

Over the last year, we have reviewed and relaunched our Resident Involvement Strategy, in partnership with our Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel. This aligns with the Regulator of Social Housing requirement to involve our residents in the monitoring and scrutiny of our performance, and to hold us to account. We want to hear your views and for you to feel confident that we take them into account when delivering our services.



In 2021/22, residents were involved in:

- Review of income recovery letters
- Neighbourhood management policy focus group
- Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel
- Complaints Scrutiny Group
- Virtual door knocking
- Estate champions inspections
- Mystery shopping
- Living at Height Panel
- Maintenance consultation
- Working party: Review of Hightown's Strategic Plan



Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel

The Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel is led by residents, and plays a key role in scrutinising performance and shaping services. The Panel meets quarterly with managers and a member of the Board to review our services, performance and policies. Last financial year the Panel considered the impact and value for money of resident involvement for the Annual Impact Assessment, provided feedback on the results of the independent review of Hightown's Financial Inclusion Service and the updated Income Recovery correspondence, as well as considering resident bids for estate improvements.

Another important role of the Panel is to review and provide feedback on the Residents' Annual Report. We would like to thank the Panel for their contribution to the production of this report.

The Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel need you. If you want to:

- 🏠 Scrutinise Hightown's services and performance
- 🏠 Influence change and improvement of Hightown's services
- 🏠 Be involved in the development of Hightown's services
- 🏠 Meet new people

We'd love to hear from you. Please let us know by emailing involve@hightownha.org.uk

LOOKING AHEAD:

Resident Involvement Strategy and Structure

We are implementing an action plan to deliver the commitments of our strategy. In addition, we are enhancing our resident involvement opportunities to expand the ways in which residents can influence and shape our services, and hold us to account on performance.

How are we doing?



Complaints

We aim to provide an excellent service to all our residents. However, we recognise that sometimes things do go wrong. We welcome complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve. We are members of the Housing Ombudsman Service, and assess the way we manage our complaints against the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. Here's a link to the Housing Ombudsman website [housing-ombudsman.org.uk](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk). Our self-assessment is reviewed annually and an updated version will be published on the website by 1 October **Compliments & complaints | Hightown Housing Association ([hightownha.org.uk](https://www.hightownha.org.uk))**

We saw an increase in complaints during the pandemic, and received a total of 166 complaints for Head Office departments in 2021/22. We worked closely with residents to resolve the issues as quickly as possible. We have a two stage formal complaints process, which is preceded by an early resolution step to swiftly address the problem and prevent it from escalating to the first stage.

Formal Stage 1 complaints by service area

Departments	Complaints
Tenant Services	52%
Asset Management, Estates Quality & Repairs	24%
Development	19%
Home Ownership	5%

Formal Stage 2 complaints by service area:

Departments	Complaints
Asset Management & Repairs	59%
Home Ownership	18%
Development	12%
Tenant Services	11%

Early Stage complaints categorised by service area:

Departments	Complaints
Tenant Services	23%
Estate Quality	20%
Asset Management	19%
Repairs	17%
Development	13%
Income Recovery	4%
Home Ownership	3%
Sales	1%

You said, we did:

We made several changes to our services following feedback from complaints, including:

- Introducing an Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) casework forum to Housing Officer fortnightly team meetings to discuss cases and share best practice and learning
- Notifying tenants with open ASB cases of any staff changes to ensure they are always aware of who their point of contact is, and where possible, that the same member of staff leads on an ASB investigation
- A series of refresher sessions on customer service standards and call handling for the Tenant Services team
- More frequent monitoring of repairs for new developments, and working more closely with developers for updates on the progress of repairs to defects
- Reviewing the process for claiming on our buildings insurance and carrying out repair works when a building is damaged due to an incident covered by the insurance
- Reviewing our mutual exchange leaflet and disclaimer form, to make resident responsibilities for the condition of the property clearer
- Updating the template form for work progress for our properties being prepared for re-let to include additional information relating to the property

Learning from complaints



Compliments



"Hightown gave me and my family a home after searching for years. I work full-time but just couldn't afford the private sector again. We are now very happy in a new build property and extremely satisfied with their service - any snag or repair has been done very promptly and everyone we speak to is extremely helpful. Look forward to many happy years under Hightown."

We welcome all forms of feedback and are pleased to receive compliments. In 2021/22, we recorded 130 compliments, an increase from last year. The services they relate to are:

Compliments breakdown

Departments	Compliments
Repairs	40
Housing	37
Home Ownership	20
Estates	12
Lettings	11
Income Recovery	9
Reception	1

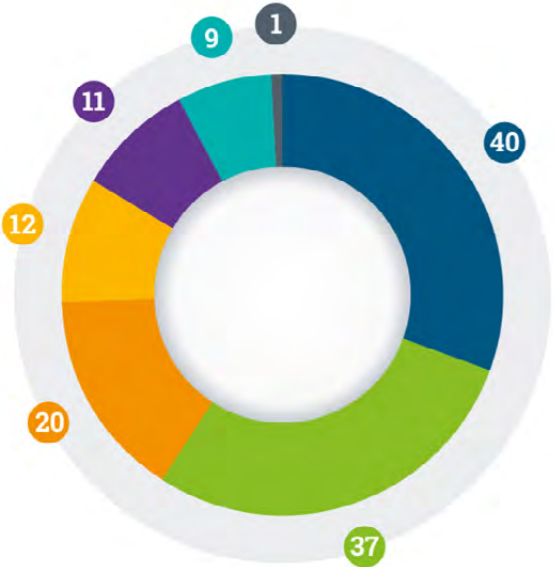
"Just want to say thank you so much for sorting a new home out for me. I'm so pleased you have made the process easy for me and showed care and patience which I really appreciate."

"We picked up our keys today, and I just wanted to take the opportunity to thank you for all of your help and support throughout this process. We're very grateful for your quick responses, and consistent communication - so thank you for making this possible!"

LOOKING AHEAD:

STAR survey 2022
We will be carrying out the Survey of Tenants And Residents (STAR) survey in summer 2022! Look out for the questionnaire as we would love to hear your feedback.

Increasing our digital engagement
We will be further developing our digital channels to engage more with residents and get feedback, including touch point surveys. We will also continue to review the ways our residents access our services.



Your home

At Hightown, we are committed to providing safe, good quality homes for people who are unable to rent or buy on the open market. Last year, Hightown invested £8m in keeping your homes in good repair.

Congratulations to all of the green-fingered winners of our 2021 gardening competition who have shown dedication to create some beautiful outdoor spaces.



Competition winning gardens

4,541

gas safety checks completed



80%

of repairs completed are 'right first time'



91%

of residents are satisfied with their repairs



562

fire risk assessments completed



29,252

calls to Repairs team



17

seconds is the average time for our Repairs team to answer calls



Major works completed 2021/22



Type	Quantity
External decorations	289
Door replacements	195
Heating and hot water replacements	169
Internal communal decorations	119
Kitchen replacements	91
Communal area flooring replacements	73
Electrical upgrades	67
Window replacements	62
Bathroom replacements	18
Other (including roof replacements and works to paths and paving)	253

Our repairs & maintenance budget 2022/23

Routine Repairs & Voids
£3,952,945

Planned Maintenance
£887,721

Major Works
£3,224,732



LOOKING AHEAD: Energy efficiency

The average energy performance certificate (EPC) banding across Hightown's rented stock is Band B. However, we do have a small number of properties at Band C and 21 below Band C. We will continue with our efforts to improve those properties to Band B or higher, to help residents lower their energy bills and meet Carbon Net Zero targets.

Your neighbourhood

We work with our residents to make sure our neighbourhoods and communities are well maintained as we want to create great spaces for our residents to enjoy and feel proud of. Last financial year, we carried out 6,973 estate inspections and engaged with residents to identify improvements to our estates and neighbourhood. In the last year, we spent £273,648 on estates and neighbourhood upgrades.



In line with national trends, we saw an increase in anti-social behaviour reports during the pandemic. The most frequently reported issues were noise and neighbour disputes.

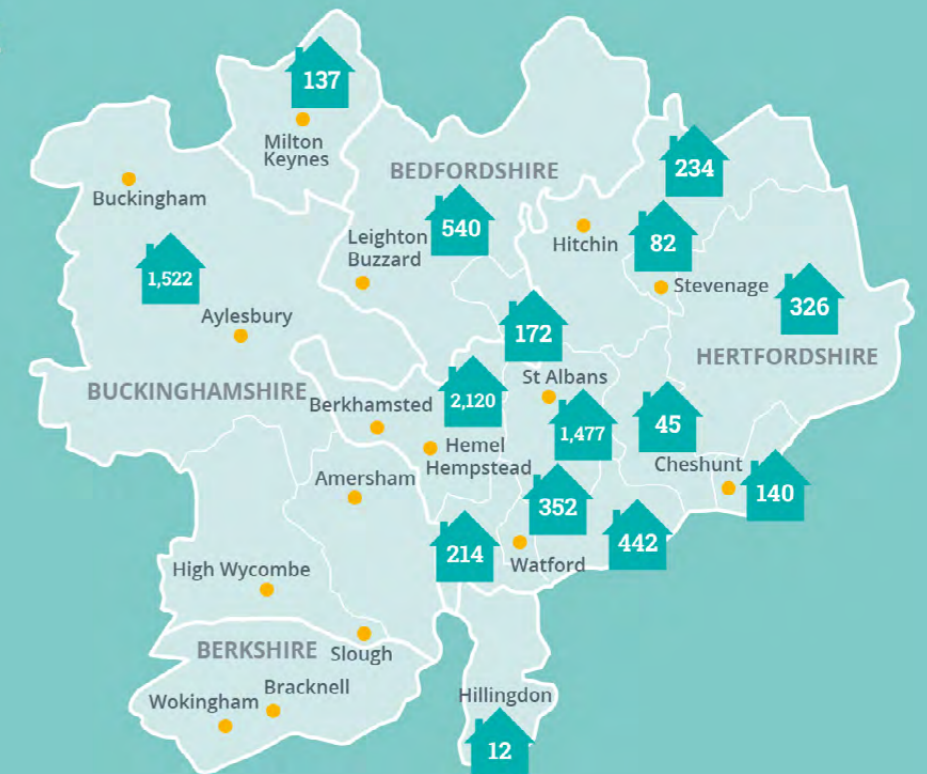
Hightown is setting up an anti-social behaviour scrutiny group to increase the amount and type of feedback we receive from residents about our ASB services. If you are interested, please email involve@hightownha.org.uk.

456 anti-social behaviour cases logged (up from 323)

73% residents feel Hightown provides a home that is safe and secure

Where we work

7,815
homes in total



You said, we did:

Last year, the Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel considered and agreed several improvements to our estates following requests from residents, including:

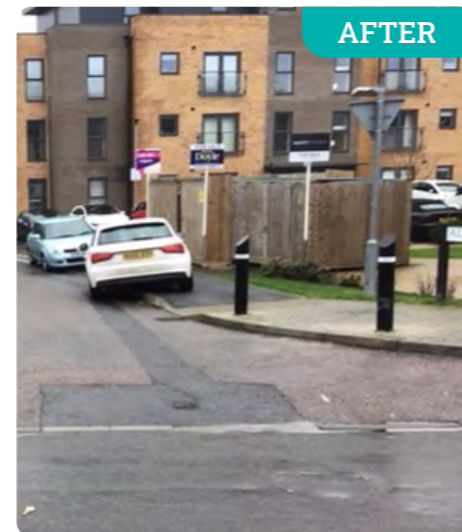
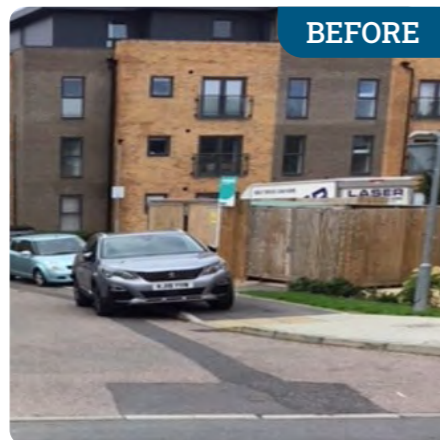
Elmshall Place The installation of CCTV

The introduction of CCTV has had a positive effect and has helped reduce reports of fly-tipping, further reducing residents' service charges in relation to ad-hoc caretaker visits.



Lockview court/Ebberns Road - Introduction of bollards to prevent parking on roadway entrance

Residents and visitors consistently park on the corners which restricts access to the refuse truck leading to missed collections, overflowing rubbish and litter blown across the estate. Bollards have been installed and have stopped inappropriate parking and also eradicated missed refuse collections.



White Hart Court - Installation of reinforced door with magnetic lock

People were able to gain access to the communal entrance by using the slats as a ladder. We also received reports of theft from the communal garden area. A new reinforced door with a magnetic lock in place has restricted unauthorised access, addressing residents' concerns, greatly improving security to the block.



If you have any proposals or suggestions for improvements to your estate, please contact your Property Services Inspector.

Your tenancy

Supporting residents to sustain their tenancies

We understand that residents can face difficulties and financial hardship during their tenancy, which could possibly put the tenancy at risk. As a housing association committed to supporting people and ending homelessness, we work closely with residents to support them to manage their tenancy when they are experiencing difficulties.

In 2021/22, we expanded our Tenancy Sustainment team and recruited two new Tenancy Sustainment Officers (TSO), who provide intensive support to residents with complex needs across multiple areas, which are affecting their ability to set up or maintain their tenancy. They work in partnership with external agencies, including the community mental health team, adult social care, social services and GPs, to ensure residents receive the right support and a holistic approach to their needs. Last year, the TSOs helped 245 residents with various needs, carried out 59 face-to-face appointments to provide tenancy sustainment and welfare support and made 380 successful phone calls.

Our Financial Inclusion Officer (FIO) continues to work with our Housing and Income Recovery teams to support residents experiencing financial difficulties, including assisting them to apply for welfare benefits, offer budgeting support and help them to reduce utility bills. In the last financial year, 535 residents were referred to our FIO. They helped to recover **£98,000** in additional financial support such as welfare payments for residents.

Over the last year, our Tenancy Sustainment Officers have:

- Provided specialist support and signposting to residents on a range of issues such as mental and physical health, domestic abuse, hoarding and fuel poverty
- Supported residents to apply to their local authority for a transfer to a property that better suits their needs
- Accessed grants for furniture and utilities
- Supported residents with their benefit applications
- Assisted residents to set up bank accounts
- Issued food bank vouchers for residents who are facing financial difficulties.

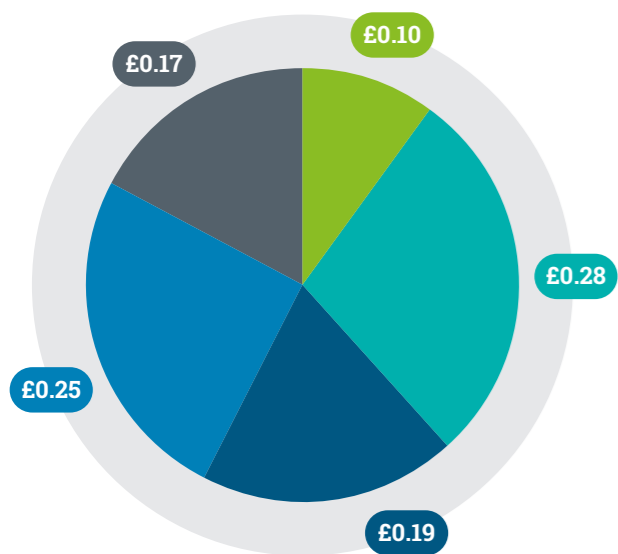


Sarah-Jane Jackson & Nichola Thompson
Tenancy Sustainment Officers



Melanie Gomez
Financial Inclusion Officer

Money matters



How we spend our income, per £1

£0.10	managing your homes
£0.28	paying loans to build your homes
£0.19	repairing your homes
£0.25	improving your homes
£0.17	reserves

*reserves are used for future investment in new homes and to satisfy the conditions of our bank loans.

MyHightown

Your online portal

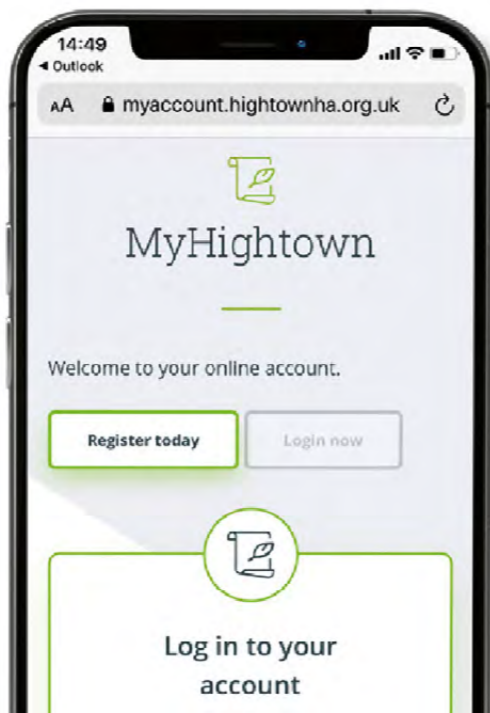
Did you know? You can use our online resident account portal any time, anywhere, **to check your balance, report a repair, update your details or pay your rent.**

"I find the MyHightown portal very easy to use. What I like is that I can access the portal at any time and on any device. It's made a huge difference as I can easily check on my rent payment and balance and it reduces how often I need to call Hightown. Everything you need to know is available on the portal."



Signed up yet?

Visit: <https://myaccount.hightownha.org.uk>



Our sustainability journey

At Hightown, we're committed to building and maintaining greener, more energy efficient homes. Our Board and Executive leadership team have focused on the green agenda by creating a new sustainability strategy that sets out our path to reach the Government's Net Zero by 2050 target. Our aim is for all our properties – new and existing - to have an energy efficiency rating of Band B or higher.

At the end of last financial year, the average energy performance of a Hightown home was 81.4. This is significantly higher (more efficient) than the housing sector average of 70*. The score is measured out of 100 and shows how energy efficient your home is. A score of 50 represents median energy performance, while a score of 75 or higher indicates your home is a top performer.

We continue to invest in energy efficiency improvements to existing homes, including **£595,399** in 2021/22. This is further reducing our impact on the environment. The drive for preserving our environment and ensuring our business practices are sustainable are key priorities for Hightown.

*Source: English Housing Survey Social rented sector, 2020-21



Meet our Board members

The Board members are responsible for directing the overall strategy and activity of the Association, ensuring it delivers on its objectives. The Board hold the Chief Executive accountable for the Association's performance.

Chair



Bob Macnaughton
Chartered Accountant and former company Chief Executive

Vice Chairs



Cordelia Pace
Senior Legal Counsel

Other Elected Members



Alan Head
Retired Chartered Building Surveyor



David Matthews
Banker



Frances Kneller
Housing Consultant



Sarah Barton
Chartered Accountant



Sarah Pickup OBE
Deputy Chief Executive
Local Government Association



Anne McLoughlin
Housing Professional



Catherine De Souza
HR Professional



James Steel
Commercial Consultant and former Banker

& Executive leadership team

The Executive management team, led by the Chief Executive, are in charge of the day-to-day management of the Association. They ensure the Association is well run, effective and deliver on its mission. They make the operational decisions, and manage outputs and performance.

Chief Executive



David Bogle

Executive Directors



David Skinner
Director of Financial Services



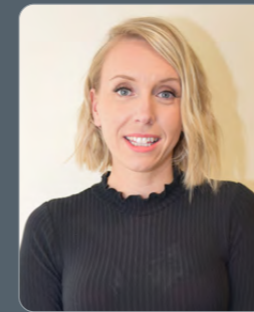
Andrew Royall
Director of Development



Susan Wallis
Director of Corporate Services
(from 05/04/2021) one year sabbatical leave from 25 April 2022



Manpreet Dillon
Director of Housing
(from 24/05/2021 to 31/03/2022)



Gemma Richardson
Director of Care & Support
(job share role started on 01/12/2021)



Amy Laurie



Natalie Sturrock
Director of Housing
(from 01/06/2022)



Sarah Salter
Interim Director of Corporate Services
(from 25/04/2022)

Value for money

We measure how we are performing against similar housing associations to make sure that the services we provide give you value for money.



Useful contacts



Hightown resources

Hightown main contact	01442 292300	housing.services@hightownha.org.uk
Did you know you can look up the contact details for the officers responsible for your home on MyHightown? Log in at https://myaccount.hightownha.org.uk		
To report a repair during office hours	01442 292301	maintenance.services@hightownha.org.uk or on MyHightown at https://myaccount.hightownha.org.uk
To report an emergency repair out of office hours	0845 160 0077 0203 701 3525	
To talk to your Housing Officer about anti-social behaviour	01442 292300	housing.services@hightownha.org.uk
Report nuisance neighbours	07768 286694 (Text or phone)	www.hightownha.org.uk or on MyHightown at https://myaccount.hightownha.org.uk
Having difficulty paying your rent, or to set up a direct debit	01442 292 387	www.hightownha.org.uk
Pay your rent with your Allpay swipe card	0844 557 8321	www.allpayments.net or on MyHightown at https://myaccount.hightownha.org.uk
Report subletting/fraud	07768 286694	housing.services@hightownha.org.uk
To join an inspection of your estate	01442 292300	Property.ServicesAdmin@hightownha.org.uk

Additional resources

Reporting a gas leak	0800 111 999	housing.services@hightownha.org.uk
My Home contents insurance	0345 450 7288	www.thistlemyhome.co.uk
The Money Advice Service	0800 138 7777	www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk
National Debtline	0808 808 4000	www.nationaldebtline.co.uk
Step Change debt charity	0800 138 1111	www.stepchange.org
Turn2Us - for help accessing benefits and grants	0808 802 2000 0203 701 3525	www.turn2us.org.uk
Crimestoppers	0800 555 111	www.crimestoppers-uk.org
Police (non-emergency)	101	
Homeswapper/options to move		tenants@homeswapper.co.uk
Samaritans	116 123	www.samaritans.org
Citizens Advice Bureau	03444 111 444	www.citizensadvice.org.uk
Women's Aid	0808 2000 247	www.womensaid.org.uk
Mind charity	0300 123 3393	info@mind.org.uk
Housing Ombudsman	0300 111 3000	www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

More information regarding local services is available on the Hightown website.



If you would like help to read any of the documents referred to in this report see our website or contact us:

www.hightownha.org.uk

T: 01442 292300

E: housing.services@hightownha.org.uk

Hightown Housing Association Ltd, Hightown House,
Maylands Avenue, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP2 4XH

Further detailed information is available in the Annual Report and Financial Statements on Hightown's website.

Out of Hours emergency repairs: 0845 160 0077 (local rate call)
0203 701 3525 (if calling from a mobile)

Registered under the Housing Act 1996. Regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing.
Registered number: L2179. A registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 with a registration number 18077R. A Charitable Housing Association.