



Hightown



Our Impact 2021/22



Chief Executive's foreword

Welcome to Hightown's Impact Report for 2021/22.

The report aims to showcase the positive outcomes we deliver across the business – for residents, service users, staff and the wider communities we serve.

As a charitable housing association with a social purpose – formed in the 1960s era of Cathy Come Home – alleviating homelessness is core to what we do. We are therefore proud to be one of the UK's fastest-growing housing associations - in 2021/22 we built 610 affordable homes to meet local housing need, a major achievement given the challenges around shortages of labour and materials and rising build costs. By the end of 2021/22, our housing portfolio totalled 7,815 properties, of which 62% were general needs rental homes. Not only does our development activity benefit people in housing need, it also has a positive ripple effect on the wider community, creating jobs and boosting the local economy.

However, our impact as a social landlord goes beyond bricks and mortar. Our tenancies are secure and long-term and our homes warm, energy efficient and safe. When residents need extra support to remain in their homes, we provide it through our tenancy sustainment and financial inclusion teams. All this means that residents enjoy security and stability, enhanced wellbeing and the foundations to flourish. In this report, we capture some of those outcomes in terms of improved employment, health, training and finances.

This year, for the first time, we have also calculated in monetary terms the social value generated through the work of our dedicated homelessness services, using the HACT Social Value Bank. Built on robust, big-data insights, the Social Value Bank quantifies the return on investment of supporting people to move away from homelessness and into permanent housing.



In a year that saw COP26 and the launch of the Government's long-awaited Heat and Buildings Strategy, we also take a look at our work to create a more sustainable future. Despite the lack of clarity on how the housing sector should meet the net-zero carbon challenge, we have started to explore decarbonisation solutions that are right for our business and, most importantly, our residents; this report shares our progress.

Finally, we examine the investment we make in our staff - the people who deliver our impact and without whom, we could not achieve the fantastic outcomes we do: building homes and supporting people.

We hope you enjoy reading about our work.

David Bogle, Chief Executive

Contents:

Chief Executive's foreword	3
2021/22 Highlights	5
Improving quality of life	6
Preventing homelessness	14
Creating a sustainable future	26
Investing in people	30
Care and support for vulnerable groups	32



2021/22 610 affordable homes built to meet local housing need



2021/22 Highlights

£98,000

recovered in additional welfare payments for residents



535

residents offered financial inclusion support



245

residents referred for tenancy sustainment support



81.4

average SAP energy efficiency rating of our homes, compared to sector average of 70



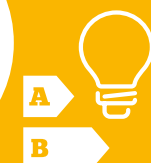
1.75

tonnes of CO₂ equivalent emitted per home, compared to sector average of 2.53



69%

all homes with an energy rating of B and above, up 4% year-on-year



over £2m

social value generated through dedicated homelessness services



38%

new lettings made to homeless households, compared to social housing sector average of 21%



776

service users supported to live with independence



80

people moved on from temporary supported homelessness services to secure accommodation



119

people accessed Open Door night shelter



13

people housed through Housing First





Improving quality of life

We do not just provide homes – our activities deliver social impact in many ways.

Not only are our tenancies affordable, they are also sustainable – 91% of our general needs tenancies are assured for three years or longer giving residents the security of a stable home from which they can pursue education, training and employment.

We also provide safe homes that residents can enjoy living in – 100% of our properties meet the Decent Homes Standard, we work to rectify issues as soon as they are reported and we continue to invest in improvements to properties and neighbourhoods. Last year, we invested £273,648 in neighbourhood and estate upgrades and completed 20,786 repairs*, with a 90% resident satisfaction rate.

Through our resident engagement work, we support residents' wellbeing by involving them in decisions that affect their lives.

Lastly, we provide individual support where it is needed; our housing officers respond to cases of domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour,

while our tenancy sustainment and financial inclusion officers ensure that residents do not risk losing a tenancy because of financial hardship, ill health or other vulnerabilities.

* This figure includes service chargeable repairs as well as day to day repairs.



Better life outcomes

A survey of Hightown's fixed tenancy tenants, carried out at final tenancy reviews during 2021/22, demonstrated the positive impact of a safe, secure and stable home on employment, health, training and financial circumstances.

- 1 in 3 tenants reported an improvement in their employment situation
- 10% of tenants reported health improvements
- 13% of tenants accessed training opportunities
- 1 in 4 tenants reported improved financial circumstances



Involving and engaging residents

Over the past year we have developed a new resident involvement strategy, which has been reviewed by our existing Resident Voice and Scrutiny Panel; this new strategy aligns with the regulatory requirements of the 2020 Social Housing White Paper, which sets out to transform the way tenants can influence services.

Our aim is to develop a culture where feedback from customers is encouraged and informs our decision making. A key focus going forward will be on digital engagement, with the introduction of touch point surveys

to optimise resident feedback. Plans

are also in place to enhance our formal resident involvement structures, so that

our residents can

influence change and

improvement and

hold us to account

on performance.

In order to

achieve this, we

have introduced

resident

involvement

and engagement

objectives for every

customer facing

member of staff.



I had a really good relationship with my financial inclusion officer - knowing my circumstances, she gave me the option to catch up with my rent payments and supported me to apply for a discretionary housing payment to cover the shortfall. She was very caring, communicating with me every step of the way.

Hightown tenant

Supporting residents to sustain tenancies

As part of our Homes for Cathy commitments, we work hard to ensure that none of our residents become homeless because they are struggling with their tenancy, whether for financial or behavioural reasons or because they are vulnerable. Two new tenancy sustainment officers (TSOs) were appointed in 2021/22; providing a customer-focused service, the TSOs work with other agencies such as social services, community mental health, adult social care and GPs in a holistic way to help our most vulnerable residents. In addition to providing practical support, the TSOs can also access our flexible welfare fund on behalf of residents experiencing financial hardship.

Our financial inclusion officers continue to work alongside the TSOs and our housing and income recovery teams to improve residents' financial situations, helping residents access welfare payments and grants, supporting them to challenge benefit decisions and signposting them to low cost energy tariffs and information on energy saving measures.

In the past year, our tenancy sustainment officers have:

- Provided specialist advice and signposting to tenants experiencing a range of issues including mental and physical ill health, dementia, domestic abuse, fuel poverty and hoarding
- Supported tenants with household budgeting and setting up bank accounts
- Assisted tenants to make benefit applications
- Accessed grants for furniture and utilities
- Supported tenants to transfer where an existing property does not meet their needs

Improving quality of life: Highlights



Safeguarding victims of domestic abuse

Sadly, reported cases of domestic abuse have continued to rise, in line with a national trend. In 2021/22 we supported 79 domestic abuse cases, up from 56 in 2020/21. We recognise that domestic abuse is a significant factor in homelessness – particularly for women – and along with other local registered providers, we are working closely with Buckinghamshire Council to develop and pilot a reciprocal arrangement to increase housing options for victims to support them to safely move away from the perpetrator of the abuse.

We are also taking part in a pilot project with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) to tackle rising cases of domestic abuse in the county. Since December 2021, a dedicated Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) has been co-located at our central office to work jointly with our housing team to identify and support cases. The IDVA is also providing training to staff in areas such as talking safely and confidently to residents who disclose domestic abuse, spotting the signs of abuse and civil and criminal proceedings.

Improving quality of life

Case Study:

Jamie's journey to a forever home

In 2019, Hightown's homelessness outreach worker Sarsha found Jamie sleeping in a tent in a muddy field.

He and his then partner had been rough sleeping for quite some time and Jamie was desperate for some help – the constant daily struggle to keep himself and his partner warm and fed had taken its toll on Jamie mentally and physically. "I was waking up in a tent in the morning in the freezing cold, you could barely feel your fingertips, scraping ice off logs so I could make a fire to keep warm. You're battling the cold and the wet – it was a struggle. We were in a farmer's field and it took us about 45 minutes to an hour to get to any sort of civilisation. I had actually got myself a job and was working as many shifts as I could, doing 18-20 hour days, just because I had nowhere to go and no money – it was my only lifeline at the time. Living in a tent, I was not able to keep up with my hygiene, so my employer let me go. Then it was almost like every door was shut. When Sarsha found me it was like bumping into an angel," says Jamie.

Sarsha supported Jamie and his partner to apply as homeless in St Albans and referred them to Open Door, Hightown's homelessness drop in and night shelter.

Jamie explains, "Sarsha guided me to the Open Door shelter – in fact she held my hand through it, even picking us up so we could take as much of our stuff as we could grab."

So started Jamie's journey from homelessness into supported accommodation and then to a permanent general needs Hightown home.

Whilst Jamie was staying at Open Door, he was supported to access mental health support and staff were also on hand to offer emotional support whenever he needed it. With a stable place to stay, he really started to flourish.

Says Jamie: "From that point I was able to start working on my mental health. As soon as I had a room, that was when I pulled my finger out and realised that now I had an opportunity to turn things around, make a fresh start and move forward with my life. The staff at Hightown did something that not many other people have done – they listened. That's all I needed, someone to hear me."

Jamie and his partner were then referred to Kent House – Hightown's longer-term supported housing scheme for people experiencing homelessness – and when their relationship ended, Jamie moved on to a single room at Martin House, another Hightown temporary supported housing scheme, where he continued to thrive.

In 2021, Jamie was offered the chance to move into Hatfield Road, a smaller homelessness scheme for service users who are more independent, where support is provided but staff are not on site. This gave Jamie more responsibility; he developed long lasting friendships with like-minded people and contributed to the cleaning and upkeep of the scheme on a weekly basis.

In February 2022 Jamie was offered a Hightown general needs property, which he accepted. He is now settling well into his new home and will be supported for up to a year by Hightown's floating support worker to sustain his tenancy.

One of his goals is to work with homeless people and he hopes one day he can gain employment with Hightown, to be part of the organisation that helped him back on his feet.

"It's been a struggle and a battle but I'm here, out the other side with a smile and feeling optimistic and positive. I genuinely believe I could become a valuable member of a team. I have real life knowledge of how to make things better."



“

The staff at Hightown did something that not many other people have done – they listened. That's all I needed, someone to hear me.

Improving quality of life

Case Study:

Space to grow for Jodie's young family

Hightown has been there to support 30 year-old Jodie through some major life challenges and milestones.

Forced to leave her family home as a young adult in 2014, Jodie was housed by Hightown's Young People's Housing Service (YPHS), our scheme for young single homeless people. There she had a safe and secure place to call home and received flexible support to build the skills and confidence to live independently.

Once she was ready to move on from the YPHS, Jodie was allocated a one-bedroom Hightown general needs property where she lived with her partner. However, the arrival of their two boys – now aged 2 and 4 – meant that the property was no longer suitable for them and they applied to be transferred.

Fortunately, in March 2022, a bright and spacious apartment became available at one of Hightown's new developments in Hemel Hempstead. With a light and airy open plan kitchen and living area, an outdoor children's play area and local amenities nearby, the property is ideal for the young family.

For Jodie, the whole moving process went very smoothly and the family has quickly settled in to their new home.

Jodie says:

"The staff at Hightown were very, very helpful. It was a quick, easy and simple process. The boys have got their space, they've got their freedom back. They've got a little play park outside where they can go out and meet other children - they love it! It's absolutely amazing. We're much happier here."

Although she has been through some tough times, Jodie is now feeling positive about the future. She adds, "There's definitely light at the end of the tunnel."



“

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Preventing homelessness

Playing our part in tackling homelessness is core to our social purpose and one of our strategic objectives. We achieve this by building affordable homes, supporting residents to maintain their tenancies and through delivering specialist supported housing, providing a pathway for homeless people with complex needs to rebuild their lives.

In 2021/22, 38% of our new lettings were made to statutorily homeless households, nearly double the social housing sector average of 21%*.

Meanwhile, we expanded our homeless supported accommodation offer with the addition of The Mews, Hemel Hempstead, four self-contained ‘move-on’ flats for single people that provide a stepping stone towards independent living. Another new supported move-on scheme of nine flats is currently under development in Dacorum, which will increase our total number of homelessness move-on units to 29.

We also grew our Housing First programme, increasing the total number of clients housed to 13.

Our five temporary supported housing schemes in St Albans and Hatfield continued to provide a safe, caring environment to empower residents to move towards independent living, while a sixth – Martin House – is being redeveloped into self-contained properties for homeless people.

Moving from temporary accommodation to secure housing can be challenging – in 2021/22 our housing resettlement team worked with 35 people to prevent a vicious cycle of repeat homelessness, supporting them to reduce debts and maximise their income through benefits and grants and signposting them to other agencies such as mental health.

At the same time, our ‘Safer Streets’ outreach team continued to provide services in St Albans and Dacorum, building a rapport with local rough sleepers, promoting their wellbeing and encouraging them to access services.

*Source: DLUHC CORE data 2020/21 April to September

Open Door

Our Open Door night shelter and drop in service provided emergency accommodation to 119 people at risk of sleeping rough. The St Albans based service – run in partnership with the Open Door charity – provides overnight accommodation for up to 12 people, a free lunchtime meal and help with job applications, housing and health issues.

Of the 119 people supported by Open Door, 68 are recorded as moving on to other housing, including 20 who found accommodation with Hightown's own temporary supported accommodation services and one who was housed through our Housing First scheme.

In 2021/22, Open Door introduced a new scheme in partnership with local counselling provider Rephael

House, offering both one-to-one and drop-in therapy sessions on a weekly basis. Counselling was accessed by 28 service users between June and November 2021, enabling them to invest in their mental and emotional health and make positive changes. All of the service users who participated reported increased ability to cope with difficulties and setbacks, improved relationships, increased self-worth and more confidence.

Open Door also continued to work with other St Albans agencies to deliver severe weather emergency protocol (SWEP) provision during the coldest months of the year; 17 people were supported by SWEP, including two at Open Door and 15 in self-contained pods on the grounds of Emmaus Hertfordshire, a local homelessness charity.

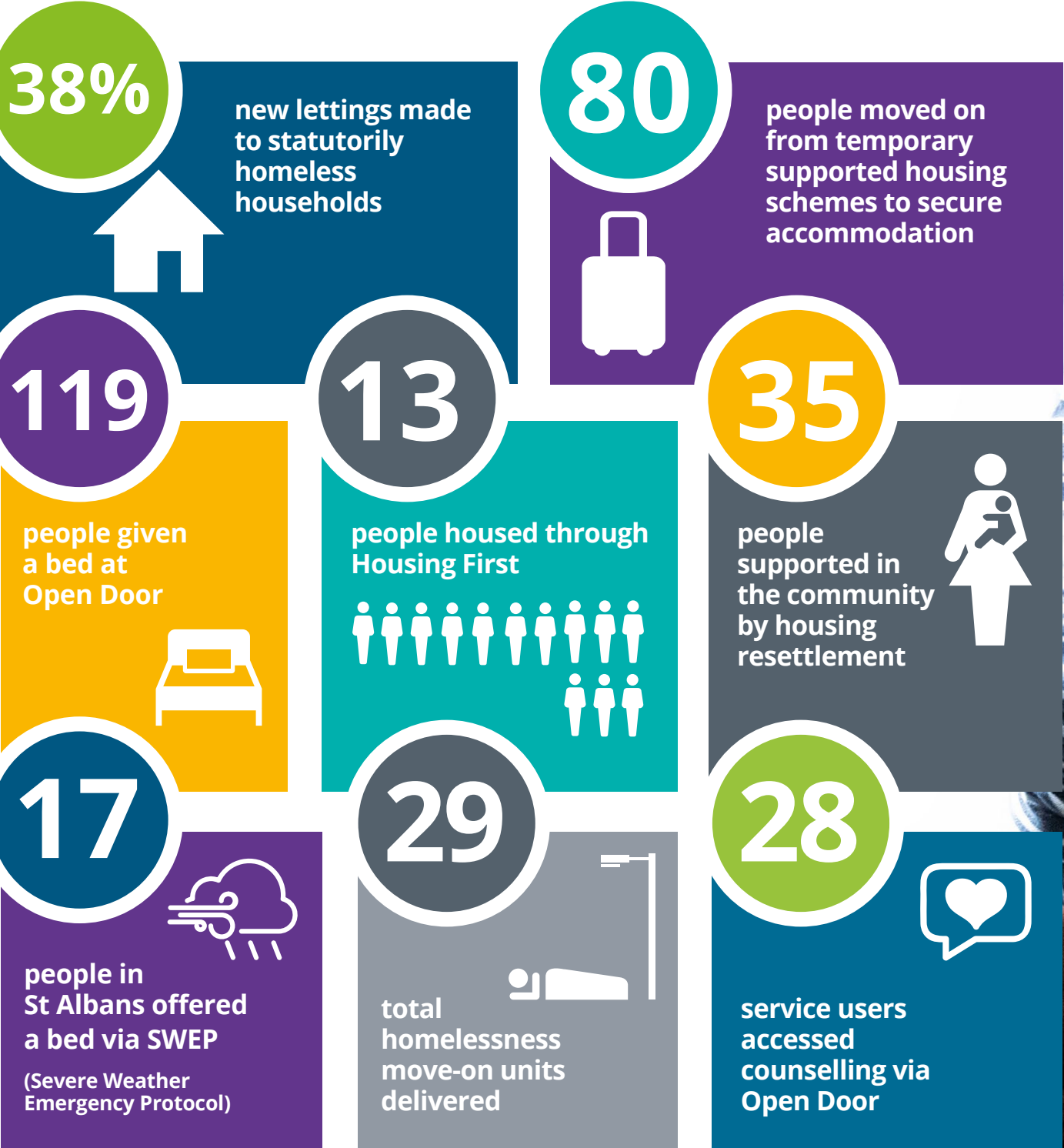
“

All staff have been professional, courteous and informative...the speed and kindness that my case was dealt with was amazing.

BM, Open Door service user



Preventing homelessness: Highlights



Preventing homelessness

Creating social value

Social value is a way of quantifying outcomes that are not inherently quantifiable, such as improved wellbeing, better health or a feeling of safety. The most widely used approach to measuring social value in the housing association sector is the HACT Social Value Calculator, which assigns monetary values to the common outcomes we deliver.

In this year's impact report, we have used the Social Value Calculator to quantify the social value of our dedicated homelessness services. Specifically, we have valued the

outcomes we delivered through our Open Door night shelter, the expansion of our Housing First service, our temporary supported homeless accommodation services in St Albans and Hatfield, our Mother & Baby scheme and the emergency relief provided by our rough sleeper outreach service. The social values recognise the impact of these services on an individual's wellbeing.



Social value created from our dedicated homelessness services

-  **£1,592,458**
temporary accommodation for 119 rough sleepers at Open Door
-  **£641,520**
80 people moving to secure housing from temporary supported accommodation
-  **£37,439**
3 additional Housing First clients
-  **£80,360**
10 young mums moving from our Mother & Baby scheme to secure housing
-  **£3,744**
emergency relief for 39 rough sleepers including food, clothing and vouchers



Homes for Cathy

Hightown is a founding member of Homes for Cathy, an alliance of over 100 housing associations, homelessness charities and local authorities united by an aim to end homelessness. We play a key role in the running of the group, lobbying for change to put people experiencing homelessness at the forefront of policy, provision and decision-making in the housing sector and sharing innovative practice around homelessness solutions.

As a Homes for Cathy member, we strive to meet the nine Homes for Cathy commitments, developed in consultation with the charity Crisis. We deliver an annual homelessness action plan and report to our board on progress.

In 2021/22 this included:

- Playing a key role in influencing and designing homelessness strategies in our three biggest local authority operating areas of St Albans, Dacorum and Buckinghamshire.
- Operating a flexible allocations and eligibility policy that recognises the histories and unique circumstances of homeless applicants: homeless applicants are automatically referred to our head of housing.
- Offering constructive solutions where homeless applicants do not meet lettings criteria, for example working closely with our local authority partners to fund rent in advance through Discretionary Housing Payments.
- Avoiding evictions into homelessness through our financial inclusion and tenancy sustainment work: we doubled our flexible welfare fund and appointed two new tenancy sustainment officers (TSOs).
- Supporting vulnerable tenant groups including victims of domestic abuse and those experiencing mental or physical health challenges to remain in their homes or transfer to a more suitable property if necessary.
- Building over 600 affordable homes to meet the needs of the local communities we serve and delivering new supported housing provision for single homeless people.
- Ensuring properties offered to homeless households were ready to move into – our TSOs and housing resettlement team sourced furniture, white goods and other essential items through charities and grant funding.
- Playing a part in ending migrant homelessness through our supported housing scheme for unaccompanied asylum seeking minors and converting a property into a home for a refugee family under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme.
- Our senior leaders contributing to industry events and research projects to share best practice around homelessness prevention and inspire others to do more.



Preventing homelessness

Case Study: A safe place to stay for young mums like Mia

What do you do when you're young, homeless and pregnant or have a new baby? For the young women living at Hightown's Mother and Baby services, this is an all too real predicament: they are among the 122,000 16-24 year olds who present as homeless every year in the UK*.



Provided in partnership with St Albans City and District Council and Dacorum Borough Council, the Mother and Baby services offer a safe, secure and welcoming place to stay for up to eight young women in St Albans and up to 17 in Hemel Hempstead. Residents and their babies – who stay for up to two years - each have their own room and the young women work closely with Hightown's support workers to learn independent living skills in areas such as parenting, budgeting and health and wellbeing. A large part of the support they receive is emotional; the staff are on hand round the clock to provide advice and a shoulder to cry on if needed.

Mia, 18, was referred to the St Albans service in October last year after her family home became too overcrowded following the birth of her son, now 10 months.

She says:
"It's nice to have people around you going through the same situation, you get support and you make friends. It's also nice to have your baby socialise with other babies their age. The support workers help you feel welcome and I have settled in very quickly. You have to do everything on your own and I've had to learn how to plan meals, especially now that we're weaning, but John is always there to listen and give advice."

Once she is more settled, Mia hopes to resume her job at a local day nursery – experience that has stood her in good stead for life with her new son.

*Source: Centrepoin



Our residents have to deal with a lot of emotions but we aim to give them hope and something to aspire to. Their world is just beginning but there's nothing to stop them from following their dreams.

John, support worker, St Albans
Mother and Baby service

Preventing homelessness

Case Study: A new life for Mitch with Housing First

Housing First tenant Mitch, 26, didn't have an easy start in life; he entered foster care at a young age and later found himself in hostels, and then semi-independent supported accommodation before moving into a privately rented home.

This wasn't to last due to the high cost of the rent and he then had no choice but to sofa surf with friends. He had reached a low point - using drugs and doing anything he could to survive, like finding food, somewhere to stay or money for a tent - when he found himself at the Open Door night shelter and first came into contact with our Housing First team.

Mitch was eventually recommended for the Housing First service and moved into a one-bedroom flat near St Albans in February 2020, the foundation he needed to start building a better life for himself. The continuous support offered in the Housing First programme has been a key factor in helping Mitch turn things around, with support that is flexible and tailored to his needs, and he has successfully maintained his tenancy for over two years.

Having been diagnosed with a mental health condition, Mitch recognises the support is helping him manage his mental health in a better way and he's not struggling as much. He now regularly uses the gym, has joined a boxing club and even took part in a charity boxing match for Cancer Research.

He says:

"Boxing is a controlled environment where I can release my emotions and the anger within myself in a safe way, without hurting myself or anyone else."

He's also volunteering at Open Door, cooking and serving food for the drop-in service, and secured a temporary retail job over the Christmas period. With this experience under his belt, he's now looking for a permanent retail position.

"I have a passion for cooking, especially spicy food. From the life I've come from, I never imagined doing anything like this. I've come to such a different point in my life. I'm putting myself in positions I wouldn't have previously put myself in and learning things about myself. The past year has been about getting my life in order, getting rid of toxic relationships and living a 'normal' life. I'm grateful to work now and appreciate the small things, like listening to music and doing gardening."



From the life I've come from, I never imagined doing anything like this. I've come to such a different point in my life. I'm putting myself in positions I wouldn't have previously put myself in and learning things about myself.

Preventing homelessness

Case Study: A stepping stone for Stuart

Opened in 2021, Ardenham House is Hightown's first specialist homelessness service in Buckinghamshire.

Located in the centre of Aylesbury, the service was co-produced with Buckinghamshire Council to provide a vital stepping stone between emergency accommodation and independent living.

Service users at Ardenham House live in their own self-contained studio flats and are supported by our on-site team for up to two years as they prepare to secure and maintain their own tenancy, receiving help with health issues, substance use, budgeting and housing applications.

Stuart moved into Ardenham House in October 2021 after he became homeless through alcohol addiction. He says:

"I fell into a bit of a dark place really. I was living in a rented bedroom and was drinking a lot. The drink became a problem and that's why I lost the tenancy and became homeless. I got put into temporary accommodation and was put in touch with AHAG - Aylesbury Homeless Action Group - who helped me. I was also in hospital for five weeks due to the alcoholism and was referred to One Recovery Bucks, which specialises in supporting people with alcohol addiction."

Whilst in temporary accommodation, Stuart was assessed for his suitability for a tenancy at Ardenham House. Since moving in, he's made great progress.

He adds:

"I get all the support I need here. They help me with letters, bills, monitoring my alcoholism – they're just fantastic. They are there 24/7, day and night. If I need to go and knock on the door, there's always someone there on the other side.

"I've recently gone back to work, back to the job I used to do before. They took me back on and my colleagues there have stood alongside me. At the moment I'm just taking it day by day with the help and support of the staff here, AHAG and One Recovery Bucks. Having my colleagues at work also makes all the difference.

"At the moment I'm taking it week by week at work; it has been a struggle because I was off for 15 months and I've gone straight back into it. I've achieved a lot because 15 months ago this was never possible. It just goes to show that there is help out there but people need to work towards it, help themselves. Being here has changed my life – life is finally getting back to normal."



Watch Stuart's story

www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQXtYZnw6SU



I've achieved a lot because 15 months ago this was never possible. Being here has changed my life – life is finally getting back to normal.



Creating a sustainable future

Creating greener, more energy efficient communities is a top priority for Hightown. We understand that decarbonising Britain's homes is essential to accomplishing the Government's ambition to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050 and we are committed to playing our part in achieving this aim. Our 2021-24 strategic plan sets out our objectives to develop and commence the implementation of a roadmap for improving the environmental impact and efficiency of our existing homes and for all new build homes to have an energy efficiency rating of Band B or higher. Equally, we are determined to make our business activities as green as possible. Our new sustainability strategy is being led by two new Hightown sustainability working parties, focusing on both housing and business operations.

In order to benchmark our environmental impact against other housing associations and identify where improvements can be made, this year we undertook our first SHIFT audit, an independent assessment of the Scope 1, 2 and 3 greenhouse gas emissions generated from our activities during 2020/21.

The audit indicated that emissions from independently heated homes accounted for around 83.5% of our total organisational emissions, at 1.75 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per home managed. This figure is significantly lower than other SHIFT social landlords (2.53 tCO₂e per home managed) and can be attributed to the large proportion of new homes in our portfolio. In terms of our offices and business mileage, the audit revealed an opportunity for improvement, an area which our business operations sustainability working party will continue to explore.



Our carbon footprint



Housing stock emissions
1.75 tonnes of CO₂e per home
managed compared to the SHIFT 2021 average of 2.53 tCO₂e per home managed.



Office emissions intensity
54.3 kg of CO₂e per m² office space
compared to the SHIFT 2021 average of 48.1 kg of CO₂e per m².



Business mileage emissions
15.9 kg of CO₂e per home managed
compared to the SHIFT 2021 average of 9.82 kg of CO₂e per home managed.



Decarbonising existing homes

In 2021/22, the average SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) rating of the energy performance of a Hightown home was 81.4 - up from 80.6 - compared to an average of 70 for all housing association homes*. We invested in remedial works to improve the energy performance of 40 of our lowest performing homes by one EPC Band, creating £8,680 of social value through lower energy bills for residents, based on HACT Social Value Bank figures. At the end of the last financial year, only 22 of our rental properties remained in Band D or lower and a review of these properties is being undertaken with a view to increasing their banding.

With the launch of the Government's Heat and Buildings Strategy in 2021, which sets out a strategic direction for the decarbonisation of housing over the next decade, there is a renewed onus on the housing association sector to not only improve the insulation of properties, but to also install 'clean heat' technologies. While gaps in policy and funding remain, we have continued to explore the implications of this strategy for our business, while remaining mindful of the need for residents to enjoy warm, comfortable homes and low energy bills. Actions we have taken so far include:

- Conducting an energy cost comparison of existing homes heated by air source heat pumps versus gas central heating;
- Commissioning external research into the practicalities and costs of fabric upgrades to existing homes, including installing air source heat pumps where appropriate;
- Undertaking research into U values (building heat loss) of existing properties to determine potential gaps in energy performance compared to original building specifications.

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

Sustainable development

Hightown's focus for new development has been to 'build in' sustainability through maximising the performance of the building materials used – a 'fabric first' approach. Our sustainability strategy seeks to take this a step further through the early adoption of the Future Homes Standard, regulation to ensure that all new homes built from 2025 produce 75-80% less carbon emissions than homes delivered under existing regulations.

We are also trialling the use of gas alternative heating systems where appropriate, including the installation of air source heat pumps in 155 new affordable homes at our Maylands development in Hemel Hempstead. We continue to invest in trusted technologies such as solar panels for developments where renewable energy is required by planning and to include water saving measures in new homes, such as dual flush toilets and water saving shower heads.



Creating a sustainable future



Placemaking

As a large-scale developer, we are committed to creating sustainable places that serve the needs of the local community and which future generations can continue to enjoy.

Around 90% of our new developments reclaim and reuse brownfield sites, making use of existing infrastructure, reducing the need for residents to travel and preventing sprawl into surrounding Green Belt land.

One such example is Maylands, Hemel Hempstead, where we have worked closely with Dacorum Borough Council to transform an existing business park into a vibrant and dynamic investment location that promotes human activity and social interaction. Through the development of Maylands Plaza, we have created a thriving functional centre which now forms the ‘heart’ of the wider business area.

The first phase of the development incorporates two modern buildings providing 130 affordable flats and ten shops – including a supermarket – and a public square which sits alongside the housing. A local church has also relocated to the development.

Phase two of the development commenced in 2021, which will add a further 155 new affordable homes and three commercial units to the area, as well as green spaces for residents to relax in and socialise.

Find out more

www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7U9OtrCMBQ

Case Study

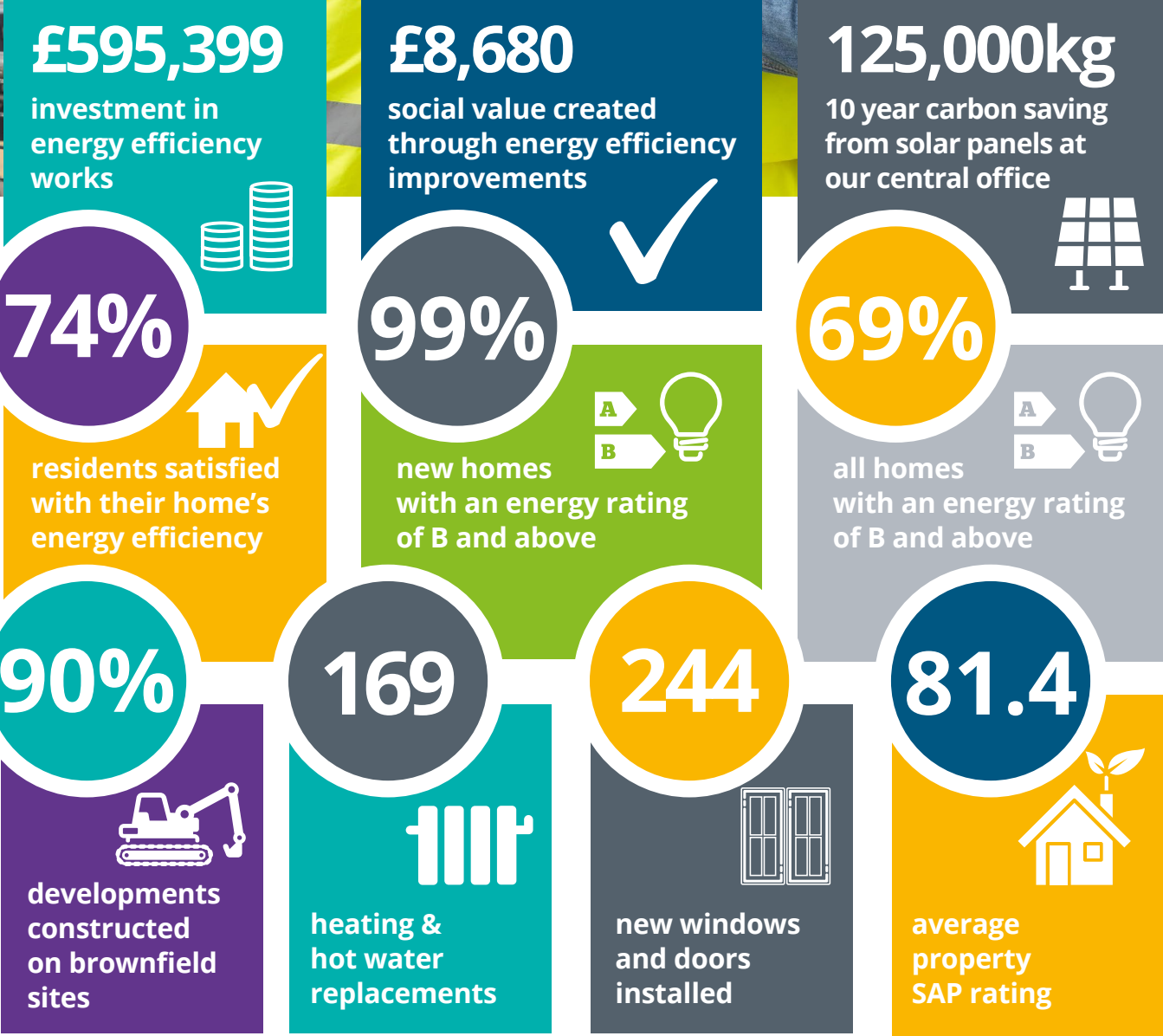
Renewable energy at Belswain's Lane

Belswain's Lane is a new development of eight two-bedroom homes in Hemel Hempstead, each of which are individually fed by solar panels on the roof to generate low carbon renewable energy, saving up to 441kg of CO2 per year per property – equivalent to a quarter of the CO2 produced by an average Hightown home - and reducing each resident's annual fuel bill by an estimated £364*.

*Figures based on Energy Saving Trust Solar Energy Calculator



Highlights





Investing in people

One of Hightown's core values is to develop passionate, committed teams – people who are dedicated to delivering impact each and every day.

Our employees are one of our most critical resources and one in which we invest through a culture of continuous development and engagement. We believe in the importance of staff wellbeing and use the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' – connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, give - to support staff to find balance, build resilience and boost mental health and wellness. Our wellbeing 'champions' promote regular activities such as wellbeing walks, while our charity team holds regular fundraising events for our nominated charity, Mind.

Workplace learning

In 2021/22, we invested £142,337 in staff learning and development, covering a range of training courses, e-learning, external qualifications and professional development. In the first part of the year, almost all training was delivered in a 'virtual classroom' setting, as staff continued to socially distance during the pandemic. Virtual learning has proved a great success - particularly

among our care and supported housing staff who work across four counties, saving time and reducing travel costs – and will therefore continue for many of the courses we deliver.

Meanwhile, as restrictions have eased, we have re-introduced training that requires delivery face-to-face, such as first aid. In 2021/22, we introduced an innovative new management skills programme – designed and delivered in-house – for managers in our care and supported housing services. The training promotes group learning and mentoring in a range of management disciplines, from effective relationships to delegation and coaching.

In addition to staff training, we invested £43,556 from our apprenticeship levy pot, with five employees successfully completing apprenticeships in Level 2 and Level 3 Adult Care and one finishing a Level 7 MBA. An additional six members of staff began an apprenticeship. While apprenticeship numbers are down year-on-year – a consequence of the pandemic – we hope to see greater uptake going forward, particularly with the rollout of a new apprenticeship specifically for our young people's housing service staff.

Driving equality and diversity

As an organisation we continue to promote equality and diversity to ensure no one is at a disadvantage because of who they are. Our quality and diversity forum - made up of 15 staff from across the organisation - meets monthly to share and take forward recommendations for good workplace practice, including promoting positive stories of diversity through our staff communications.

In 2021/22, we delivered the following key objectives from our diversity action plan:

- Recruited a new board member from a minority ethnic background.
- Undertook an ethnicity pay report for our central office.
- Addressed the gender imbalance amongst our care and supported housing staff by promoting positive messages around males working in the sector.

Based on the findings of our ethnicity pay report, we are taking forward various actions to ensure equality and diversity is maintained within the business, including the introduction of blind recruitment processes, employing a board member as an equality and diversity champion, interviewing female and minority ethnic candidates for roles within our senior leadership team if they meet the essential criteria listed in the person specification and supporting career progression through our learning and development programme.



Case Study

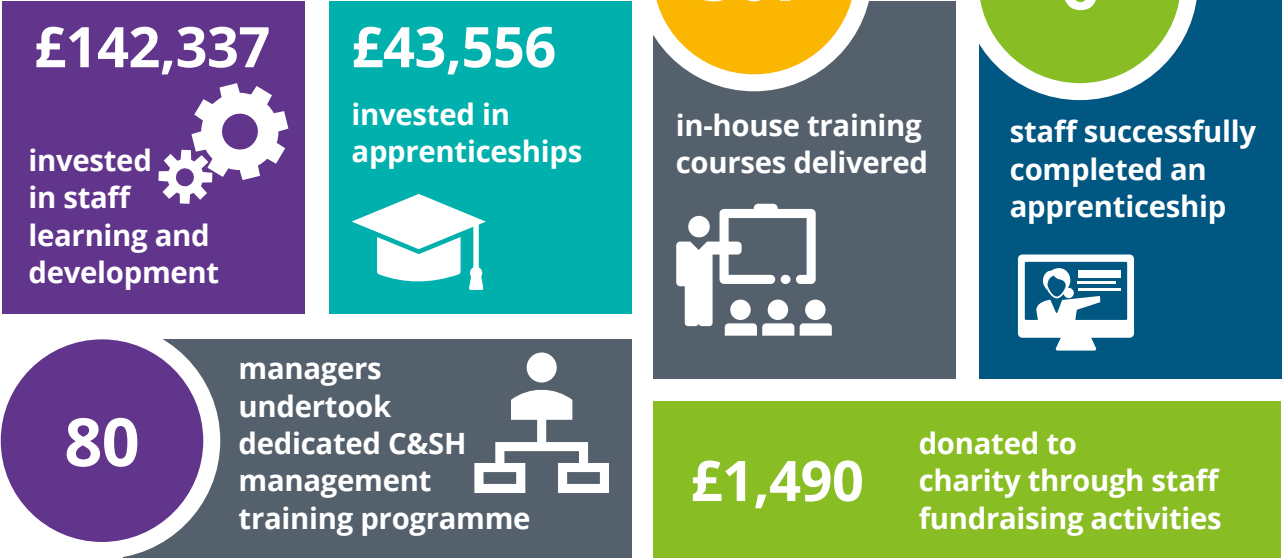
Alyson's apprenticeship journey

Alyson, Hightown's head of care and supported housing for Hertfordshire, is proof that a successful apprenticeship programme can nurture talent at any level within an organisation. In 2022, she successfully completed a Level 7 senior leader apprenticeship and executive MBA with Cranfield University's School of Management, developing a leadership skillset which has proved invaluable in her role.

Alyson says:

"The skills I have gained through the apprenticeship have given me the confidence and competence to take on new challenges, such as leading on negotiations with key stakeholders and driving forward new initiatives within the business, such as our equality and diversity forum. I've also been able to bring on managers within my own team, vital in keeping talent in the business."

Highlights:





Care and support for vulnerable groups

Hightown is a major provider of care and supported housing (C&SH) for the communities in which we operate, supporting 776 people in Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Bedfordshire across 93 services.

Our key aim is to promote independence, choice and confidence; we use our own growth model – the Growth Tree – to measure our service users' journeys towards achieving goals and outcomes across key areas such as physical health, mental health and living skills. Progress against the Growth Tree is recorded and evaluated through a dynamic digital platform using mobile devices,

making it easier for service users and support workers to complete assessments together and freeing up time for staff to focus on support work.

Our new C&SH managers' internal audit programme is set to further involve service users in the design and personalisation of their care, allowing for 360 degree feedback from both service users and their family members.



Emerging from Covid-19

During 2021/22, we continued to follow Government Covid guidance to keep service users safe, including the use of PPE, a rigorous testing regime for staff and restrictions on visitors to our registered care homes and regulated residential services. Staff were encouraged to get vaccinated against Covid through an ongoing awareness campaign; by the end of the year, 80% of C&SH staff were fully vaccinated.

On a positive note, the easing of restrictions meant that service users could once again begin to participate in clubs, activities, day trips and parties including:

- Visit to Cadbury World
- Sports days
- Mad Hatter's tea party
- Barbecues
- World Cup parties
- Black History Month celebrations
- Christmas jumper days



Service user involvement

Our VoiceBox group – made up of service users from different areas of adult social care – is actively involved in co-producing how our C&SH services are devised and delivered. In 2021/22 the VoiceBox:

- Scrutinised complaints to identify trends, outcomes and potential service improvements;
- Reviewed our website's complaints system and recommended changes;
- Co-produced guidance for recruiting managers on involving service users in interviews;
- Fed back on a new 'easy read' risk assessment document;

- Featured in a new staff induction video;
 - Co-produced new procedures to remind service users in short-term supported housing to attend linkwork appointments;
 - Launched a new 'Your Voice' newsletter for service users.
- With Covid restrictions now lifted, our C&SH mystery shopper programme of unannounced scheme visits by service users has kicked off once again, with the aim of improving service delivery.

Care and support for vulnerable groups

Case Study:

Supporting Paul to access healthcare



Paul, who has Down's Syndrome, lives at Hightown's Aplin Road learning disability service in Aylesbury, a scheme made up of self-contained shared flats with round the clock support on site.

He loves to interact with people, including the seven other service users at the scheme - they often share meal times at each other's flats. Last year, the service's garage was converted into a fantastic activity room - the 'Crafty Hut' - and Paul and his fellow service users have made the most of the new space, particularly during lockdowns.

Andrew, Paul's link worker, has seen Paul through both happy and difficult times; he ensures Paul can live his life with choice, confidence and independence, not only supporting him to do the things he enjoys, but also helping him to navigate emotional and mental challenges.

Andrew says:

"I've worked with Paul for just over 12 years now. We hit it off from day one because Paul uses Makaton sign language as he's non-verbal. I learned Makaton many years ago so I can sign to Paul and we're able to communicate. He calls me 'Ahoo' and we've built up quite a relationship."

Recently, Paul, who is now 59, has experienced some changes to his behaviours and general health; the Aplin Road team has supported him through these changes and put plans in place to ensure he can access the healthcare he needs.

Andrew comments:

"Because Paul is non-verbal it's hard to know what's going on inside of him. Recently, he needed a CT scan to investigate a potential underlying health condition; this was a big thing for Paul, particularly as he gets very anxious about hospital appointments. We managed the situation by talking to Paul about what he would get to do on the visit, including going under his favourite railway bridge to see the trains and stopping for coffee and cake at the hospital. We also arranged several practice runs in advance so that Paul could get used to the hospital environment, meet the learning disability liaison nurses and see the x-ray department."

"On the day of the scan, one of the nurses had some relaxing music playing on her phone and was playing a YouTube video of some fish, Paul's favourite thing. As a result of all these preparations, the scan went very smoothly. Once Paul got home, he even insisted on visiting his favourite café!"



Watch Paul's story

www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLfZJ_-frBQ



Case Study:

Supporting Simon to live with autism

Simon was born with a condition called hydrocephalus - a build-up of fluid on the brain - causing brain damage. He is also non-verbal and has a diagnosis of autism.

Growing up, he continually banged his head and his family recognised that he used this as a form of communication. However, that didn't stop him from leading an active lifestyle and he enjoyed activities such as swimming and horse riding. At 17, he first moved into supported housing and now, aged 45, he has his own self-contained flat at Grove Gardens in High Wycombe, where he has lived happily for the past seven years.

A few years ago, Simon lost his eyesight due to the long-term effect of his head-banging and his needs began to change. After discussing the issue with his family, staff arranged for padding to be added to Simon's flat, to allow him to move around independently, and safely. Staff also noticed that he felt anxious going out and was happier within his own environment and were able to advise his family that changes were needed to his day programme. His changing sensory needs have led the team to use their expertise around autism and they've tried out a range of sensory activities using sounds and touch to stimulate and relax Simon.

Simon's mum comments:

"The team at Hightown has been superb - especially throughout the pandemic. The care workers we've known over the years have always been empathetic, but the scheme manager Jeanette's knowledge about autism and her sensitivity to his needs has turned his life around."

"You can't help being overprotective as a parent but we trust Jeanette, she is like family to us, her door is always open and it helps us to feel more relaxed knowing that Simon is in safe hands."

Care and support for vulnerable groups

Giving young people a better start

In 2021/22 we supported 76 vulnerable young people aged 16-24 through our Young People's Housing Service (YPHS) and three Hertfordshire-based schemes for unaccompanied asylum seeking minors. These services include an emergency 'crash pad' in Watford - two bed spaces reserved for 16-17 year olds who are immediately homeless.

In 2021, we partnered with Luton Borough Council to introduce a new scheme in Luton, providing semi-independent living for five young people aged 16-17 who are either looked after children, care leavers or young people eligible for accommodation provided by Children's Services and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Once housed with us, service users are supported to access work, education or training within three months of starting their tenancy, often by way of short-term courses to encourage a routine; throughout 2021/22, 123 young people were supported to enter into work, education or training. Service users are also encouraged to develop independent living skills, in preparation for moving on to permanent housing.

Case Study: Brendan learns skills for life

Eighteen year-old Brendan had a difficult start in life but since moving in to Hightown's YPHS, he is looking forward to a more positive future.

Brendan's key worker has supported him to access Hertfordshire's Building Better Opportunities (BBO) employment and skills mentoring programme and as a result, he is receiving ongoing one-to-one mentoring tailored to his needs.



I have been here for nearly two years and the staff are welcoming and understanding of your needs. My support worker is very down to earth, honest and demanding of positive results.



Psychologically informed approach

Our YPHS team recognises the ongoing impact of traumatic childhood experiences on the lives of the young people we support. In 2021, we introduced a psychologically informed approach within our YPHS, putting service users' emotional needs at the heart of the service and introducing interventions that take into account their past histories.

In addition to encouraging positive engagement, the approach has had a significant impact on reducing evictions; in 2019/20 there were 13 evictions, going down to seven in 2020/21 and just one in 2021/22. Plans are now in place to introduce the approach across our mental health and homelessness services.



Case Study: Ryan's* journey to permanent housing

One of the key aims of our Young People's Housing Service (YPHS) is to prepare young people for successful independent living.

When a young person is ready to move on, they are assessed by our team to ensure they have the necessary practical skills to maintain a successful tenancy and are assisted to apply for housing.

When 21 year-old Ryan* was ready to move on from the service in 2021, his key workers were there to support him every step of the way. Unfortunately, Ryan had gone into arrears with his rent, a challenging situation for him to be in terms of applying for permanent social housing.

Our YPHS team worked with him to put in place a repayment plan for his rental arrears and supported him to access the local authority's choice based lettings system. As a result, Ryan was able to bid successfully for a housing association property. Not only has he settled in well in his new home, he has kept up with his rent and even started a new job.

*Name has been changed to protect identity

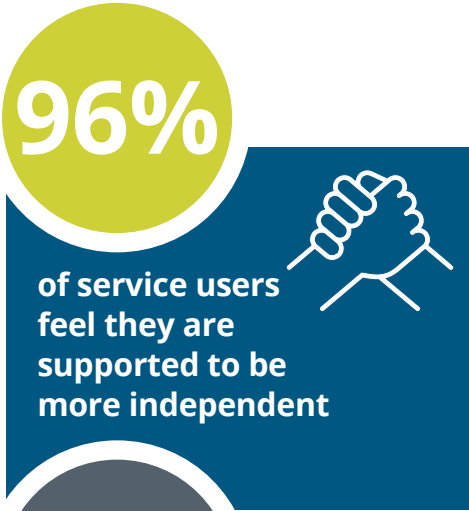


Our ultimate objective is to avoid any young person becoming homeless once they leave us. Navigating through a housing application can be really challenging for a vulnerable young person, especially when they don't have the support of family. We try to equip them with the resilience and confidence they need to see the process through.

Dannielle Read, YPHS operations manager

Care and support for vulnerable groups:

Highlights



Our Impact



The social values contained in this report were calculated using the Social Value Bank tool.

Authors: HACT and Daniel Fujiwara (www.hact.org.uk / www.simetrica.co.uk)

Source: www.socialvaluebank.org

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For more information on how we calculated the values, visit

www.hightownha.org.uk/about-us/our-impact

Want to find out more?

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