

2020/2021
Annual Report for Residents



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Welcome

Hightown's annual report for residents 2020/21

Over the past year, we continued to focus on our mission of **'Building homes. Supporting people.'** There has never been a more important time to support our residents and this report will give you a clear picture of how we've performed and what we've achieved in 2020/21 financial year.

The past year has been very challenging for everyone and the coronavirus pandemic has left a lasting impact on all of our lives. Following the first national lockdown in March 2020, Hightown responded quickly with the wellbeing of all residents and colleagues being the top priority. We swiftly implemented measures to keep essential services

for our residents up and running and avoid any further distress. Where face to face meetings and visits were not possible, we replaced these with telephone calls and video conferencing. We were also able to digitise our lettings process so residents could still view and move into a new home.

Colleagues also went the extra mile to safeguard all residents by supporting those who were experiencing specific challenges such as needing to access welfare payments and grants quickly or reporting domestic abuse.

Despite a turbulent year, we continued to demonstrate resilience and commitment to our communities and local people by adapting to a new way of working safely with stakeholders to build, let and sell 429 much needed new homes. The coronavirus pandemic has shown our ability to transform the way we work whilst continuing

to put residents' wellbeing and safety first. It is important that we now reflect on what worked well and get your feedback on how we can use your experience to further improve service delivery.

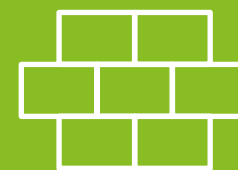
Last year also saw the publication of 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents - Social Housing White Paper' which 'sets out the actions the government will take to ensure that residents in social housing are safe, are listened to, live in good quality homes, and have access to redress when things go wrong.' We actively listen to our residents and you'll see in this report where we have carried out your recommendations.

We would like to thank all of our residents for their patience and understanding over the last year as we navigated our way through the impact of the pandemic and developed new innovative ways of delivering our services.

Our year in numbers

429

new homes built



7,227

homes in management



15,000+

residents



20,717

repairs completed





Our response to Covid-19

The coronavirus pandemic has had a profound impact on everyone's lives. With it came significant challenges as it impacted various areas across the organisation. For example, we were **initially forced to only carry out essential and emergency repairs** as resources and safety restrictions were tightened.

Hightown's response was in line with government guidance and restrictions, ensuring we kept our residents and colleagues safe whilst providing a good service.

Our teams remained committed and driven which resulted in outstanding successful outcomes for residents.

Here are some examples of our response to Covid-19:

- Moving to a virtual workforce with very little time or planning
- Filming virtual tours of homes and conducting electronic tenancy agreements to avoid delays in people being housed quickly
- Maintaining statutory health and safety inspections and urgent and emergency repairs on our properties – in April 2020 – March 2021, we carried out 10,205 urgent and emergency repairs
- Working with our stakeholders through restrictions which were in place, Hightown built a further 429 new homes showing its ongoing commitment to the communities

- Ongoing communications with residents on various matters to ensure their safety and wellbeing is maintained
- Responding to a significant increase in anti-social behaviour (ASB) and domestic abuse cases
- Our financial inclusion and tenancy sustainment officers provided support to residents who experienced extreme hardship to access welfare payments and grants. In April 2020 – March 2021, this included over £119,500 in discretionary housing payments
- Setting up a coronavirus hub on our website to share regular advice and news with residents about government schemes and support available for those financially affected by coronavirus
- Moving resident involvement activities online
- Hosting virtual opening events to celebrate the completion of some of our housing developments
- 102 shared ownership sales



Elected Mayor of Watford Peter Taylor opened the new homes at Goldfinch House in Watford



Your involvement

Our involved residents continually contribute to service development and make sure that our decisions are accountable. **Residents' feedback and suggestions on different areas of our organisation help us to shape and develop our services.**

It's important that residents' needs are embedded into services that directly contribute towards their quality of life. As a result, we provide a variety of formal and informal ways for residents to offer their views.

Our resident involvement work aligns with the new resident charter set out by the 2020 Social Housing White Paper, which 'puts forward ideas to improve how landlords engage with residents and listen to what they have to say.'

In 2020/21 residents were involved in:

- The tender and selection process of our new cleaning contractor
- Estate 'meet and greets' with our property services inspectors
- A focus group on Neighbourhood Management Policy
- Inspections on estates
- Virtual door knocking at various estates
- Mystery shopping with 10 residents taking part
- Strategic Plan Working Party
- Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel
- Complaints Scrutiny Group

Thank you to all of our involved residents who continue to give up their time to provide us with invaluable feedback on our services and engage with us, even during a difficult and challenging period.



If you would like to become an involved resident, please let us know by emailing involve@hightownha.org.uk

Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel

One of the key contributions made by the Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel (RVSP) involves scrutinising our services to make sure they meet our residents' and business needs. They represent residents' views and play a very important role in ensuring their voices are heard.

They meet every three months with managers and a member of the Board to offer their feedback. Last year, they scrutinised our performance in areas, including lettings and repairs, arrears recovery, considering the impact and value for money of Hightown's resident involvement activities as well as voting on bids for estate improvements.

Thank you for contributing to the production of this report.



The Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel in discussion

Customer service



43,103

Calls to reception



28 secs

average time for reception to answer calls



4,632

residents using MyHightown

Resident satisfaction

The result from our 2020 STAR satisfaction survey of general needs residents shows that residents were most satisfied with the energy efficiency in their home (74% satisfied), safety and security (73%) and the service provided by Hightown (73%).

Where resident satisfaction scored lower – ease of dealing with Hightown (70%) and the quality of their home (69%). Resident satisfaction for service provided and the quality of their home fell by 7% and 12%, respectively – we are reviewing our practice with a view to making improvements.



Hightown's reception staff receive over 43,000 calls per year

Compliments and complaints

We aim to deliver all our services to the highest possible standard, however, we know things do go wrong sometimes.

This is why we encourage our residents to let us know when we do particularly well and also when we fall short

as your feedback is a valuable source of information that monitors our performance and highlights areas where we need to improve.

We received a total of 118 complaints in 2020/21, below is a summary of how they break down.

94

complaints were resolved at the early stage

14

complaints reached formal complaint Stage One

10

complaints reached Stage Two

You said, we did:

Learning from complaints

Following the feedback we received through complaints, we have made several changes to our services, including:

- Reviewing the way we arrange inspections after a flood at a property to ensure that residents know who will be visiting
- Organising a refresher training for Hightown's repairs team and out of hours repairs contractor regarding dealing with repairs which are reported around 5pm
- Ensuring regular contact is maintained with residents when dealing with defects in new build properties, and keeping residents informed if there is a delay in repairs
- Holding a refresher session for staff who process mutual exchange applications
- Reviewing the proposed site of communal bin stores at an early stage of the development of a new housing estate

We will be reviewing our Disposal of Goods procedure to provide clearer information about disposing of items left in bin stores.

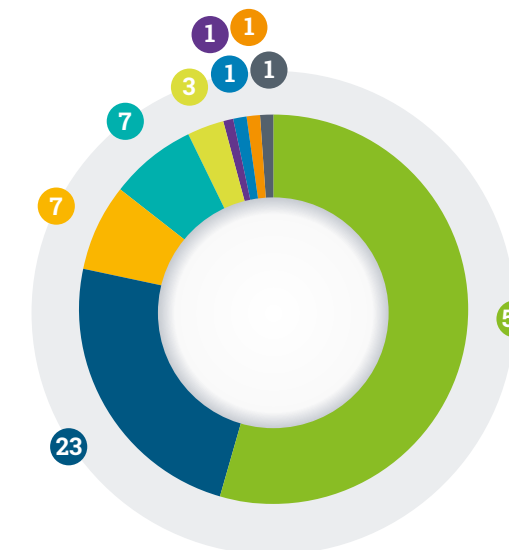


Staff member visiting residents

Compliments breakdown

This year we recorded 97 compliments. The services they relate to are:

Housing	53
Repairs	23
Estates	7
Income Recovery	7
Lettings	3
Communications	1
Development	1
Home Ownership	1
Reception	1





Your involvement

Compliments from residents

"Having only recently moved into our property, could I please say a huge thank you to everyone at Hightown who have made our arrival so seamless. From the staff at the office, to our caretaker and the various tradesmen we've had come to our apartment, it has been faultless. We're looking forward to being here for a very long time."

"Thank you so much for everything you did to get my mutual exchange over the line. You have no idea how much it has meant. You have gone above and beyond to help me and a thank you doesn't even do it justice."

"Thank you so much for the response to the repair. I really appreciate your help, the gentleman that came round was so kind and helpful."

"Very helpful and kind, understanding staff. I'm a dental nurse and have had no work since March. Tracey and Dawn have been so kind and helpful, putting me at ease. Thank you for all your help."



Looking ahead

Increasing our resident involvement activities and digital channels

To increase our resident involvement activities and channels used, we will be launching a series of webinars and information videos on a variety of topics, including resident involvement and service charges. If you would like to suggest a topic for a webinar, or would like more information on becoming an involved resident, please let us know by emailing involve@hightownha.org.uk

We are also reviewing our resident involvement strategy and are looking to get more timely and frequent feedback so we can continue to challenge and improve how we deliver services.

Anti-social behaviour training

We are also offering our estates champions online training about anti-social behaviour so they are better equipped to manage scenarios.



Your home

Our top priority is ensuring your home is as safe and secure as it should be. We've continued to work hard to keep your home well-maintained so you can be comfortable.

During 2020/21, we maintained very high repairs satisfaction levels, with **90% of residents saying they were satisfied with their repairs** (down by 1% from last year). Last year we **invested over £6.8m to keep our properties in good repair**.

Thank you to all our residents who took part in our annual gardening competition to showcase their beautiful outdoor spaces.



Competition winning gardens



Competition winning gardens

90%

of residents are satisfied with their repairs



82%

of repairs completed are 'right first time'



25,069

calls to our repairs team



17 secs

is the average time for our repairs team to answer calls



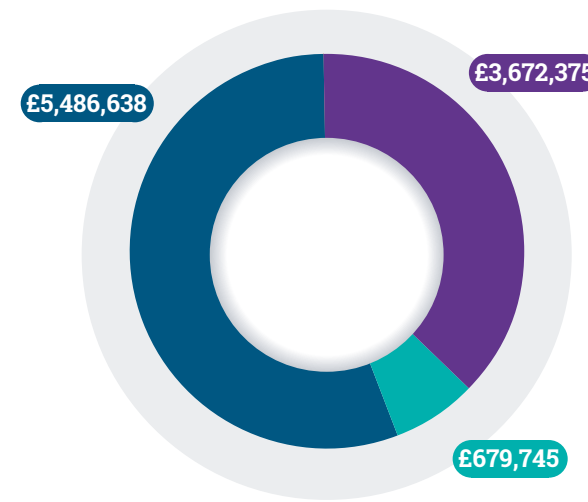
5,297

gas safety checks completed



Major works completed 2020/21

Type	Quantity
External decorations	315
Electrical upgrades	140
Door replacements	138
Heating and hot water replacements	127
Internal communal decorations	114
Kitchen replacements	111
Window replacements	95
Communal area flooring replacements	56
Bathroom replacements	24
Other (including roof replacements and works to paths and paving)	194



Our repairs and maintenance budgets (2021/22)

(General needs and supported housing)

Routine repairs and voids	£3,672,375
Planned maintenance	£679,745
Major works	£5,486,638

Having an in-house voids team during the pandemic and national lockdown has been beneficial as this meant that our void operatives could continue to work with safety measures in place. If we had to rely solely on contractors, work would have stopped for several weeks. Despite the impact of the pandemic on lettings, our average re-let time in 2020/21 was 23 days.

The in-house voids team has led to a reliable, professional service which has in turn improved the inter-departmental relationships as the voids team have been able to provide real time 'live updates' on voids progress.



Hightown voids team

Looking ahead

Building safety

We will be focusing on building safety and continue our improvements to ensure residents can be confident the buildings they live in are safe. We will also work to rectify issues as soon they are found and/or reported.

Energy efficiency

Hightown will be reviewing the energy efficiency of our properties to make improvements wherever

possible. This contributes to the affordable warmth of the property, helping to make fuel bills more affordable and tackle fuel poverty. This will also contribute to the government's target of achieving net zero carbon by 2050.

Customer service

We will be reviewing how you make contact with us and how we can respond to your queries and service requests more effectively.



Your neighbourhood

As well as building affordable homes for people who have been unable to rent or buy at market rates, we aim to build communities where our residents can thrive and feel proud of. Over the last year, we carried out 6,066 estate inspections and completed several works to improve your estates and keep them in good condition.

From the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020, our housing team saw a major spike in the number of anti-social behaviour (ASB) reports – up by 36% year on year to total 779. We have put extensive measures in place and have been working with our local partners and the police to tackle the issue.

In 2020/21, we built 429 affordable homes and reached a key milestone of owning and managing 7,000 homes. Hightown has ambitious plans to build 700 homes by March 2022. Around 525 of the homes will be for rent and 175 for shared ownership. This will be the most number of homes we will have delivered in a year.

6,066

estate inspections completed

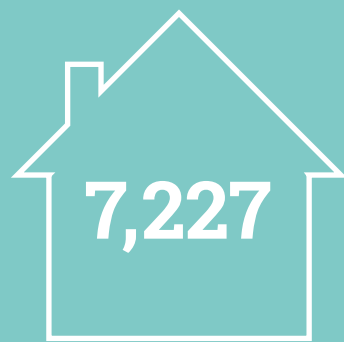


779

anti-social behaviour reports logged

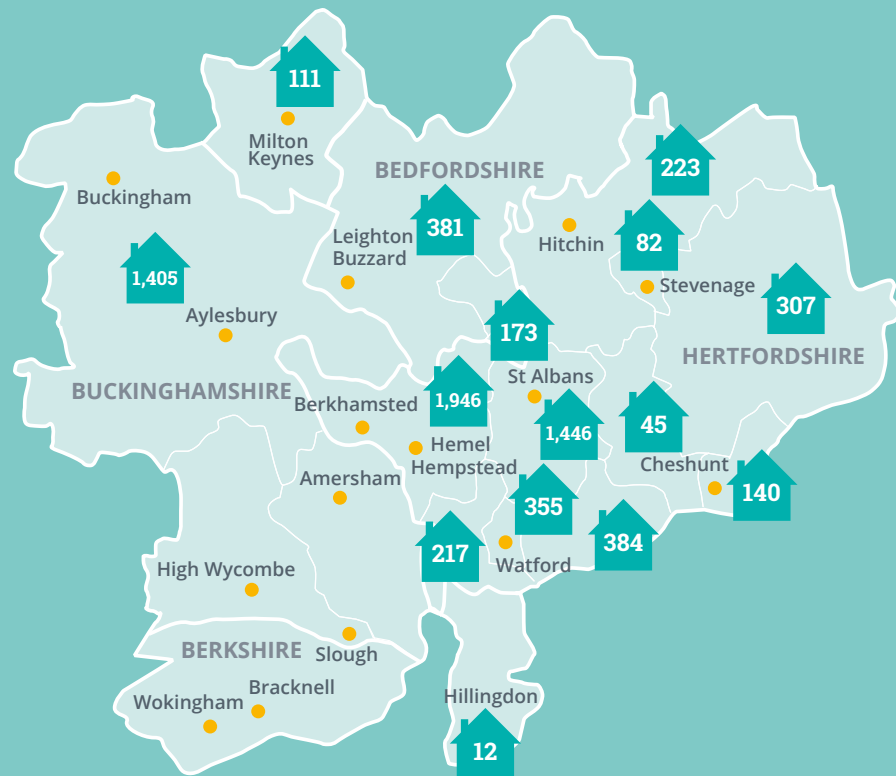


Where we work



7,227

homes in total



You said, we did:

Neighbourhood upgrades

Throughout the last year, our property services team have been working hard to make improvements to a number of our estates, following requests from residents. Take a look at some of the upgrades made this year:

Introduction of three speed bumps at The Cornfields, Hemel Hempstead

We often received reports of inappropriate driving and speeding on the long, straight roadway into the estate through to the garage area. To help resolve this issue, three speed bumps have been added to the road.



The Cornfields



The Cornfields with new speed bumps

Construction of bin stores at Howard Agne Close and The Bourne, Bovingdon

Waste disposal in this area was an issue due to a lack of bin stores. Historically, there were open areas where the bins were placed, which often meant that any excess or overflowing waste was

blown across the estate. This also led to missed bin collections. The creation of wooden bin stores for these areas has since reduced the need for caretaker visits, missed collections due to contaminated waste and has stopped litter being blown across the estate. The bin stores also have a greater capacity to store waste.



Howard Agne Close and The Bourne



Howard Agne Close and The Bourne with the new bin stores

Neighbourhood upgrades (continued)

Metal gates installed at The Close, St Albans

The area has previously suffered from regular fly-tipping. There were also reports from residents of unauthorised access into the rear communal garden. The installation of gates has since deterred the dumping of rubbish and fly-tipping, as well as restricted access into the rear garden, preventing any non-residents from trying to gain entry.



The Close



The Close now with the metal gates installed

Gates added to bin stores at Praetorian Court, St Albans

Our caretakers were regularly attending this estate to clear items that had been dumped in the bin stores. The knock on effect of this meant that on occasion the local authority would refuse to collect bins due to restricted items being dumped and large, bulky items blocking their access to the bins. By adding gates to all four of the bin stores, the amount of fly-tipping on the estate has reduced and bin collections have resumed as normal.



Praetorian Court



Praetorian Court - gates added to bin stores

 If you have any proposals or suggestions for improvements to your estate, please **contact your property services inspector for consideration**



Your tenancy

At Hightown, we want our residents to live a fulfilling and independent life in their home. We have a number of services in place to help our residents settle into their new home and maintain their tenancies. Our housing officers conduct regular tenancy reviews to ensure our residents are happy in their home and their needs are met, and to offer any support if needed.



New Hightown residents

Supporting residents to sustain their tenancies

The role of our financial inclusion officers have never been more important as they've worked hard throughout the year to support residents who have been financially impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

The team have been working closely with residents referred to the service to ensure that they are claiming all of the benefits they are entitled to and maximising their income so they can avoid getting into debt. In the last financial year, they've supported 556 residents to obtain just over £119,500 through the provision of Discretionary Housing Payments, Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment Care and Mobility, Utility Grants, Council tax refunds and Housing benefits.

Other support from the team includes budgeting advice, signposting residents to external agencies for support, and helping them to reduce their utility bill costs.

237
new homes let



102
shared ownership sales



221
homes re-let to new residents



79%
are satisfied with the quality of our new homes



41
mutual exchanges completed



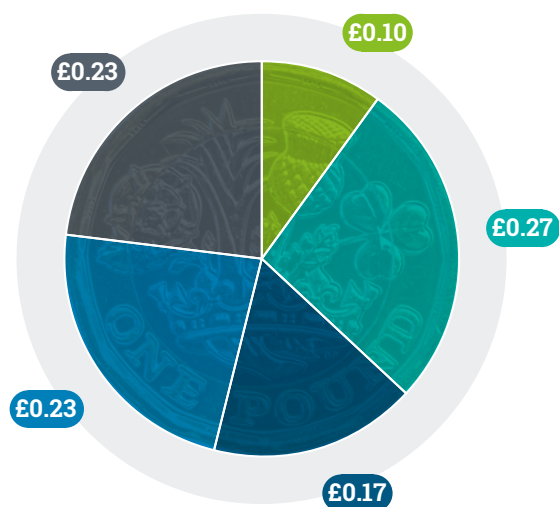
Money matters

556
referrals to
financial
inclusion officers

£119,500
benefits and
grants received
by residents



How we spend our income, per £1



£0.10	managing your homes
£0.27	paying loans to build your homes
£0.17	repairing your homes
£0.23	improving your homes
£0.23	reserves

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

MyHightown

Did you know? You can use our online resident account portal, MyHightown, to check your balance, report a repair, notify us of changes or report something needing action.

We recently added applying for a mutual exchange as an option. We're always looking to add more ways for you to apply online as it saves you time and paper!

Signed up yet? Visit:
<https://myaccount.hightownha.org.uk>



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.



Housing management

£353.27
per property

▲ up
Top group



Responsive repairs

£686.08
per property

▼ down
Top group



Overheads
(such as office costs, IT, training)

7.14%
as a proportion of turnover

▼ down
Top group



Rent lost due to empty homes

0.43%

▼ down
Top group



Rent collected

100.08%

▲ up
Upper group

Looking ahead

New appointment

We've appointed a new tenancy sustainment and welfare officer who started at Hightown in June 2021.

The officer will be part of the financial inclusion team, and will support residents with issues such as mental ill health, hoarding and anti-social behaviour (which impacts on tenancy sustainment), as well as offering some of the services provided by the financial inclusion officers.

The tenancy sustainment and welfare officer will also support new residents at the start of their tenancies, for example, supporting people to set up their utilities or get furniture for their new homes.



New residents in Leighton Buzzard



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	propertyserVICESTeam@hightownha.org.uk

Additional resources

Reporting a gas leak	0800 111 999	
My Home contents insurance	0345 450 7288	www.thistlemyhome.co.uk
The Money Advice Service	0800 138 7777	www.moneyadvice.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	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

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 emergencies: 0845 160 0077 (local rate call)
0203 701 3525 (if calling from a mobile)

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Benefit Societies Act 2014 with a registration number 18077R. A Charitable Housing Association.

