



Thanet District Council
Tenant and Leaseholder Services

Annual report

2021/22



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Foreword



Bob Porter (Acting Director of Place)

Our Annual Report provides an overview of our performance over the last financial year. We have included some case studies to show how our services affect our residents and the changes we have made over the last year to improve the way we work.

Over the last year, the team has been executing their improvement plan, which is aligned with the Housing White Paper. The Housing White Paper '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.'

There are many other factors that have affected the way the team work and will continue to do so over the coming years which includes the government's pledge to achieve net zero by 2050 and new building safety legislation.

Other challenges faced during 2021/22 include the recovery from the COVID 19 pandemic and the effect of Brexit on the supply of materials and workforce. Both events have affected our team, our partners and our residents.

Despite these challenges, the team has continued to steadily improve their performance and their service offer to residents. They still have a long way to go to deliver the service they aspire to but we are proud of what they have achieved so far and we hope that residents can see a difference in the service from 2 years ago.



Cllr Jill Bayford

I have been pleased to see how the team has gone from strength to strength over the last year. The execution of their service improvement plan has seen a strong policy framework fall into place, giving the team structure by which to work, guiding them on how to deliver this important service.

I also take part in various opportunities involving residents, who help scrutinise and shape the service. I like the respectful and collaborative relationship the officers have with the residents and can see the positive impact this is having on the service. The team appreciates the time residents give to this work and the high impact it has on the way they do things.



Claire Smyth, Chair of the Thanet Tenant and Leaseholder Group (TTLG)

I think the team is doing a great job.

The services and improvements delivered within the year have been steered by residents. Residents told the Tenant and Leaseholder Services what improvements were needed when the services were brought back in-house. I'm pleased to see residents are listened to and so many of those improvements being delivered.

It's great to see vital safety and maintenance works being done to homes and communal areas. It gives residents a sense of safety and that we are cared about.

I see first hand how officers work with contractors and residents to find solutions to problems when they arise. Before it almost felt like residents were forgotten but now we are asked for our opinion.

Throughout the year the TTLG has collaborated with officers, contractors and residents to reduce stigma and be mutually respectful to each other. This report shows how working together we are improving homes, estates and the services we receive. I look forward to seeing more in the year ahead.

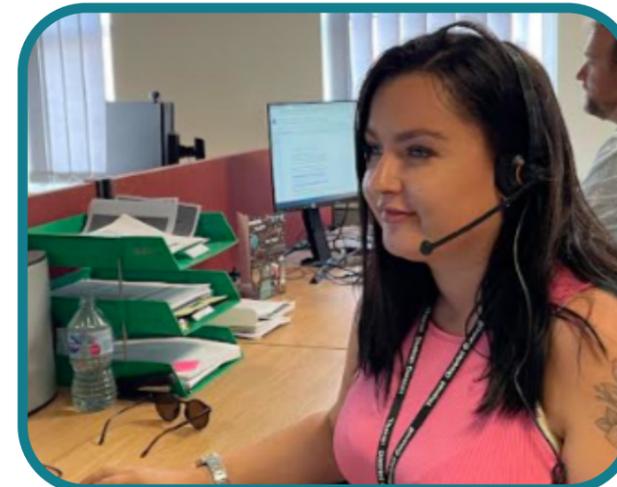
Our People



We must not forget, we are a brand new team, formed only 18 months ago. Our people are collaborative, motivated and ambitious. Without them and the hard work they have put in over the last year, we would not be in the position we are now.

They have worked hard to claw back from the poor position we were in 18 months ago - which included our gas safety being at 99.64%, electrical safety being at 7.04% and having spent only 37% of money allocated for major works.

The team has gone from strength to strength as the culture matures into one of inclusivity, honesty and accountability.



Vision and Values

Our team is dedicated to delivering the council's core business objectives: to deliver high-quality housing, safer communities and enhance the health and wellbeing of our residents.

The council's core business objectives set out the direction of travel. However, the team wanted to develop their own vision and values to describe how we will achieve their goal; and set the behaviours that will help them do this.

The entire team contributed to the creation of their vision and values, as follows:

Our Tenant and Leaseholder Services team cares about delivering the best landlord experience for our residents because:

- Our team is proactive, collaborative and committed to providing great landlord services.
- Our dedicated officers are respectful, professional and take pride in their work.
- Our values are at the core of our vision and guide the behaviour of our team.

We are people-focused

We listen to individual needs, take notice of them and treat our customers and our colleagues as we expect to be treated ourselves.

We are trustworthy

We do what we say we are going to do, by taking responsibility for our actions. We act with integrity, are honest and transparent. We recognise when things go wrong and will put them right.

We are professional

We are professionally trained and knowledgeable in our area of expertise, with access to relevant qualifications. We are unbiased in our approach, professional and inclusive in our communication.

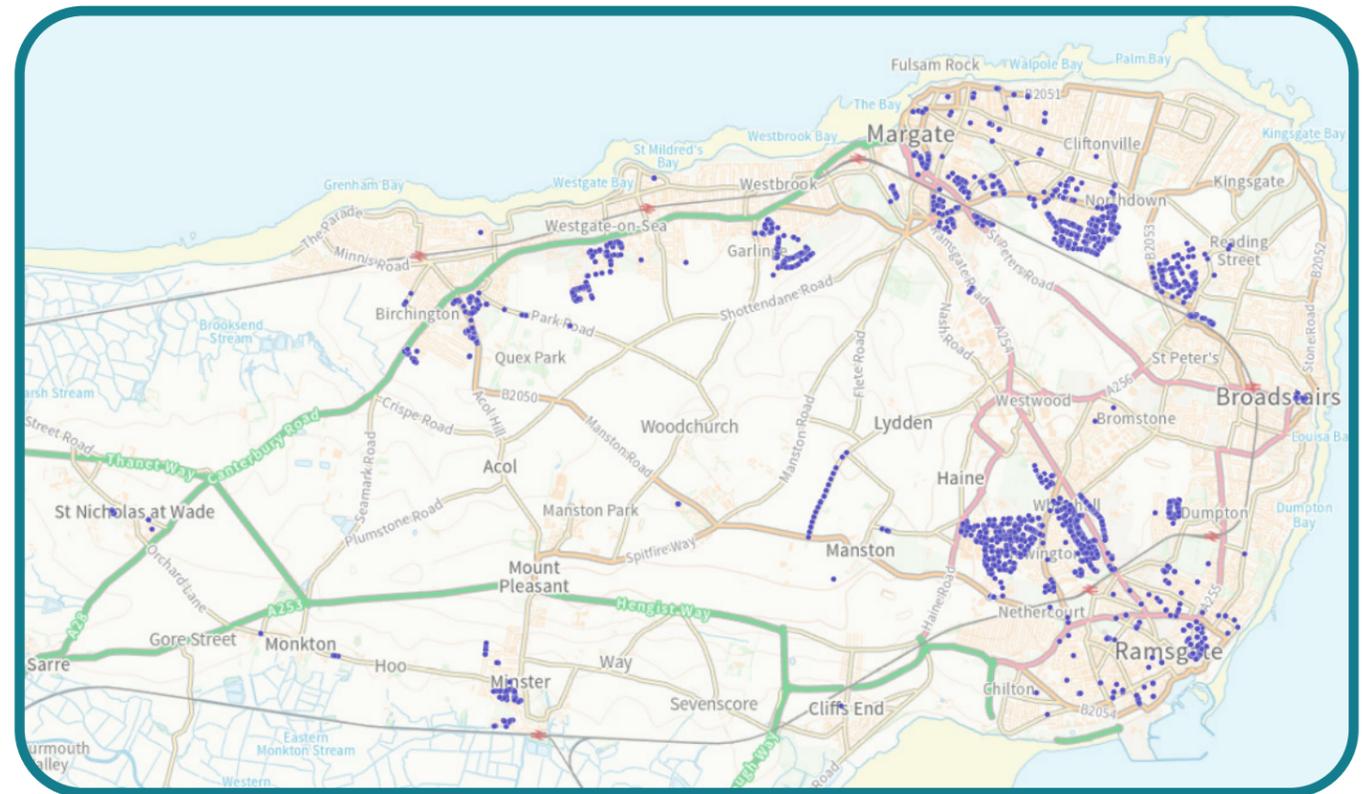


Our Homes

Number of homes owned and managed:

Tenure type	Number of homes 2021/22
General needs	3054
Leasehold	386
Shared ownership	11
Total units	3,451

The location of our properties in the district:



Resident Involvement

We know that for our service to be successful, we need to design and deliver it in partnership with our residents. We also know that when the service was managed by East Kent Housing, their relationship with residents was not very good. They did not engage well with residents, who felt like they were offered only lip service to their opinions. They did not do what they said they were going to do. This meant our residents did not trust them.

Since taking the service back in-house, we have found out how residents would like to engage with us and offered a wider variety of opportunities for residents to get involved. Here is what we have done during 2021/22:

Engaged 596 residents in 22 projects
Held 25 meetings with residents
Published 24 newsletters

Our residents' satisfaction with our service

In January 2021 we were keen to understand how satisfied our residents were with the service and what improvements were needed. We used this information to inform our service improvement plan, which we have been delivering during 2021/22.

The infographic below shows the percentage of residents who were very or fairly satisfied with the different services:



Here is what residents told us was most important to them

Residents said	We did
Identify areas for improvement by carrying out estate reviews.	We organised Neighbourhood Inspections to identify improvements.
Provide improved information about planned home improvements.	We are in the process of developing a webpage that details all planned works. Produced dedicated newsletters for residents who live in high-rise blocks to keep them informed about improvement works.
The opportunity to scrutinise our service, including contractors' performance.	With the help of residents we have developed new surveys for residents to give us feedback on our day-to-day repairs contractors, Mears and Gas Call. The TTLG Monitoring and Performance Sub-group scrutinises our performance every quarter. Residents attend our key contractor meetings, providing grass roots feedback on their service performance.

Building a better relationship with our residents

During 2021/22, we carried out a survey to find out how we could build a better relationship with our residents. We were happy to find that since the service had been brought back in-house, they felt they had a good relationship with us as their landlord.



Residents told us how we can build a better relationship

What residents told us	What we are doing
Improving communication by keeping them informed, providing more face-to-face communication, listening and getting back to them was the top priority.	We are improving the information available to residents on our website and will continue to publish our newsletters. We are carrying out more face-to-face visits, including visiting 10% of residents each year that we would not usually have contact with. Providing more opportunities for residents to be involved with different aspects of our service.
Provide well maintained homes and repair services. Provide residents with maintenance plan. Improve the communal areas and ensure contractors deliver a quality service, was the second priority.	We have put a repair service improvement plan in place with our partnering contractor. Improving the information we provide to residents about planned maintenance. Improving the repairs satisfaction survey so we can gain better insight from residents' experiences.
56% of those who completed the survey would like to be further involved.	We are engaging residents in the development of service standards, policies and other service improvement consultations.

Neighbourhood Inspection 2021

Over the summer we held 8 Neighbourhood Inspections across the district. Almost 140 residents joined our officers, Mears operatives, staff and ward councillors on the inspections, community litter picks and at our central Housing Hubs.

Here is what our Customer Engagement Officer Louise had to say:

"It was really great going to our estates and meeting the residents at our events in the summer. Some residents told us how deeply unsatisfied they were with our services up to that point and really appreciated the opportunity to tell us how they were feeling. They also told us they now felt like people were listening and genuinely wanted to make a difference."



What you told us during our neighbourhood inspections

What residents told us
The following areas need action and may need longer term solutions in order to improve satisfaction with neighbourhoods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communal repairs - a total of 187 communal and individual jobs were raised. ● Issues with communal areas in the hallways and under the stairs such as rubbish and abandoned or stored household items.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Issues with grounds maintenance and external paths and hard surfaces.
Improvements suggested by residents include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Litter and waste/rubbish - including improvement to bins/chutes, fly tipping, and more litter picks, particularly before grass cutting. ● Safety/security and anti-social behaviour (ASB) - Residents reported feeling intimidated by drinkers and addicts on stairs ● Parking - residents want more or improved parking and enforcement of resident only parking. ● Repairs and maintenance

What we are doing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encouraging residents to report communal repairs to help us get them fixed sooner. ● Creating an Estate Strategy to set out that we will provide cleaner areas with suitable waste/rubbish provision and review parking, removal of abandoned vehicles and ground maintenance. ● Rubbish and abandoned items left in communal areas are a fire hazard and in the event of a fire may obstruct residents when leaving the building. To improve safety we are introducing zero tolerance on the storage of items in communal areas. We will put a legal notice on items left in communal areas and we will dispose of items if they are not removed. ● In partnership with residents we Reviewed our Anti-social Behaviour Policy to tackle ASB issues.

Resident Involvement case study

We have asked residents to help inform policies and strategies by attending focus groups held at the Thanet District Council offices. Tracey from Ramsgate got involved for the first time, joining a focus group that co-developed our Resident Involvement Strategy.

Here is what she had to say about the experience:

"I was nervous about going to the meeting in the council offices. I didn't really know what to expect, even though the team had told me all about the project I was going to be involved in. I'm so pleased I did it, it was not scary and corporate like I thought it might be, not 'them and us'. We were all part of a team and everything we had to say was listened to. It was a very enjoyable experience that I would definitely do again."

Customer Services

Our Customer Transactions Team is the first point of contact for our residents. They will always try to resolve the query on the first point of contact. If this is not possible, they will pass messages to the relevant person within the team who will call our resident back.

Number of calls taken during 2021/22	8023
Average call waiting time	01:18mins

We want to improve the service we give to our residents by:

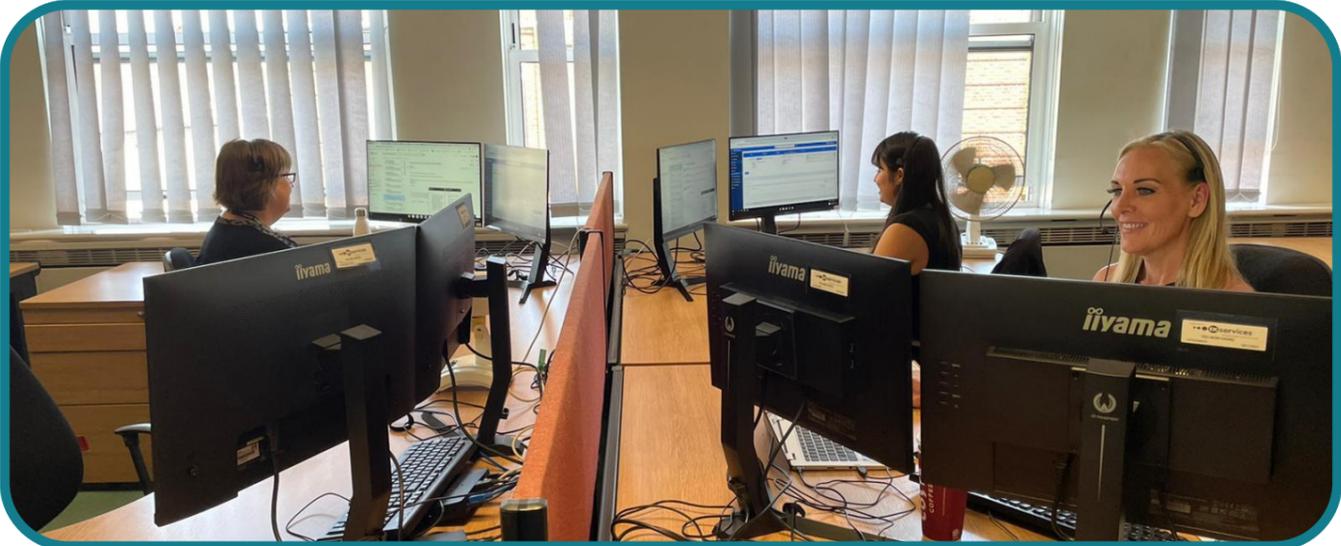
- Training our Customer Transactions Team to answer more queries at first contact.
- Improving our digital offer.
- Improving our call waiting time.

Residents helped improve our telephone system

Some residents told us that they found it difficult to navigate our phone system to get through to the right person. We therefore asked residents to help us test our systems, to identify improvements.

Residents were given scenarios to call in with and see how easy it was to get through. They recommended a number of improvements which we have implemented:

- An option to select for all other council services
- A new option to select for tenancy, home or neighbourhood enquiries
- Making it clear if the option will connect you to an automated service



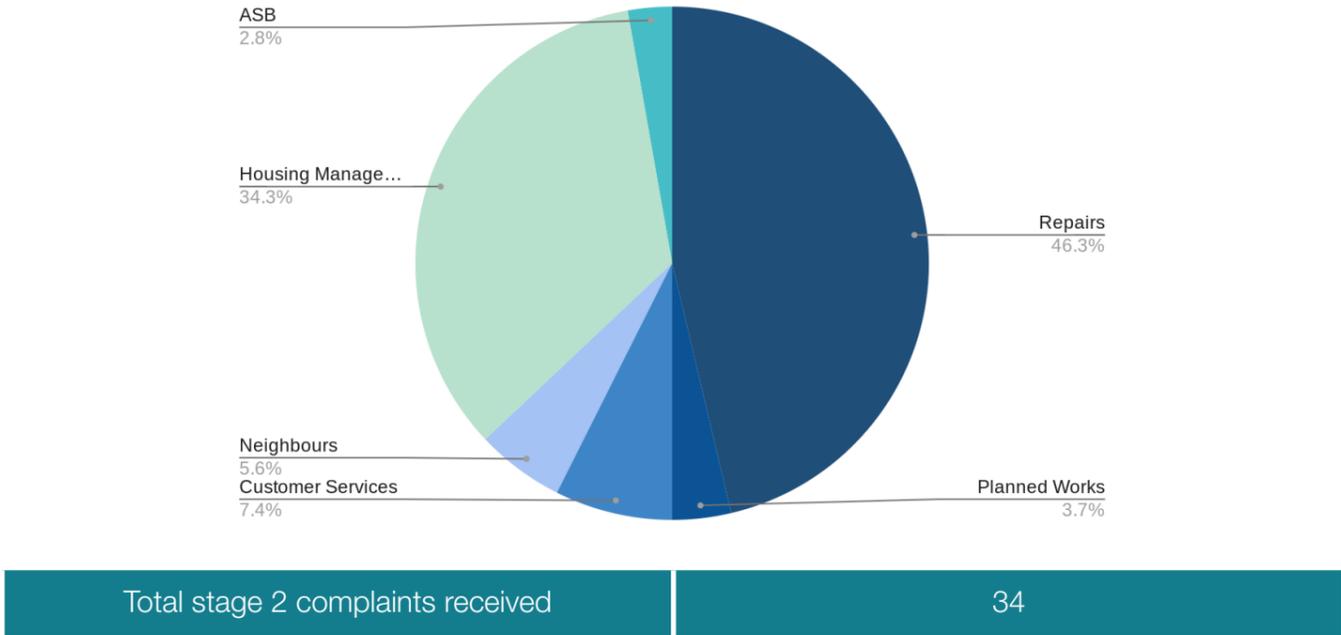
Complaints

Since quarter 3 2021/22, the team has carried out in depth 'lessons learnt' sessions from complaints which are key to improving our services. So far we have identified policy and service improvements and additional training for officers.

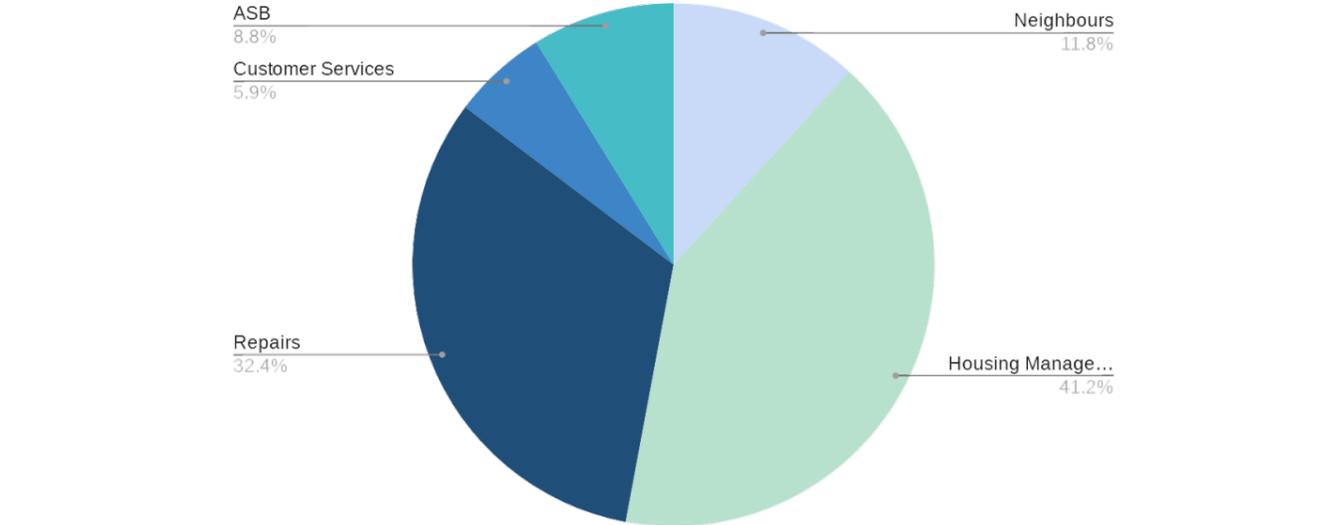
Breakdown of total complaints received:

Total stage 1 complaints received	108
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Breakdown of stage 1 complaints by category:



Total stage 2 complaints received	34
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Repairs

During 2021/22 our partnering contractors Mears and Gas Call carried out 12,637 repairs, which represents an average of 4 repairs per property.

What we have spent on day-to-day repairs:

	Total spend	Average cost per job
Total spend on day-to-day repairs for 2021/22	£1,992,802.74	£157.70
Total spend on repairs to residents' homes	£1,246,697.82	£127.47
Total spend on communal repairs	£746,104.92	£261.14

Mears performance over 2021/22

Performance Indicator	Q1	Traffic Light Icon	Current Target
% Emergency jobs completed on time	99.9%		98.5%
% Urgent jobs completed on time	96.8%		98.5%
% All jobs completed on time	95.2%		98%
Average days to complete non-urgent works	26.1 Days		10 Days
% Appointments made and kept	96.3%		96%
% Work completed in one visit	98.5%		80%

Post inspections

Our Maintenance Inspectors aim to post inspect 10% of the repairs carried out by Mears and Gas Call. The purpose of the inspection is to check the quality of repairs carried out by our contractors.

Total post inspections carried out by our maintenance team for 2021/22	1223
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Customer Satisfaction

New resident satisfaction surveys were introduced in January 2022. The survey was developed in consultation with our Thanet Tenant and Leaseholder Group (TTLG), who also tested the survey to ensure it delivered useful information that could be acted upon.

Upon completion of a repair order, residents are sent a message to their smartphone prompting them to complete a satisfaction survey via nine key service area questions. There is also an opportunity to provide free-text comments to support feedback on their repair experience.

Below are the results for both contractors for Quarter 4:

Mears: overall satisfaction with the repairs service	93.3%
Gas Call: overall satisfaction with the repairs service	72.2%

Over the past year our partnership with Mears has strengthened and this is reflected in the improved service. We continue to work with Mears to achieve more timely completions of repairs and we can see that the customer service training that Mears call centre officers have been receiving, is having a positive effect.

Gas Call's average results are shown to be much lower than Mears' due to one bad month. Customer satisfaction was very low during that month. There were delays in obtaining parts. This in turn, delayed boiler repairs.

Not with standing, it is clear that Gas Call needs to improve its service in certain areas. We will be analysing completion time data more closely over the coming weeks to establish trends against their existing resource to meet seasonal demand. The team is also looking at ways to improve communication when a repair cannot be completed at first visit.

We are really pleased with the amount of detail that this new survey provides, enabling us to see which aspects of the service requires improvement.



Void Properties

When a resident moves out of one of our properties, we want to prepare it as quickly as possible for a new tenant to move into. A quick turnaround reduces the time taken for someone on the council waiting list to move into their new home. It minimises the loss of income to the council, through rent lost while a property is empty.

Rent loss through voids 2021/22	£25,1298.12
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Our performance during 2021/22 was below where we hoped it would be.

	Actual	Target
Average re-let time excluding properties that needed major works	13.72 days	16.6 days
Average re-let time including properties that required major works	65.43 days	22.5 days

Many properties are returned to us in very poor condition. 70.19% of properties returned to us in 2021/22 required major works, many requiring a full property refurbishment. This is exceptionally high and a phenomenon that is being experienced by other councils and housing associations across the UK.

The amount spent on void properties during 2021/22 for works or damage that is the responsibility of the tenant	£293,581.32
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To reduce the amount of time it takes us to bring a void property up to the required standard, we have:

- Reduced the number of stakeholders involved in the process by creating a standalone Voids Team.
- Carried out a visit before a tenancy ends
- Introduced a process to work closely with our partnering contractor to reduce the length of time it takes to carry out works to a property.

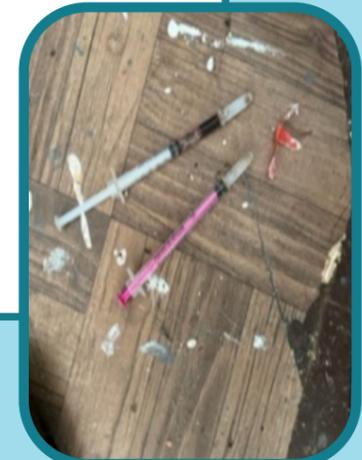
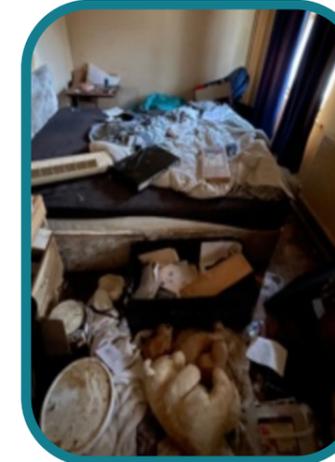
We re-let a total of 151 properties in 2021/22.

Our figures, broken down by bedroom size:

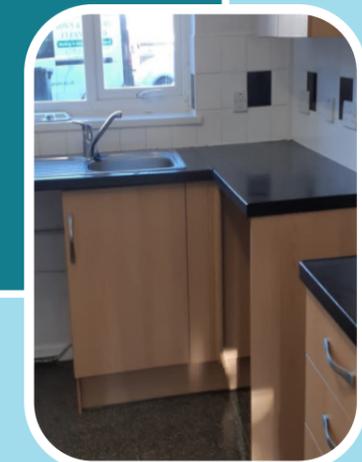
Number of bedrooms	4 bedroom	3 bedroom	2 bedroom	1 bedroom	Studio
Number of re-lets	3	24	70	45	9

Before and after of some of our voids

Before



After



Capital Programme



Every year we spend money on our homes, to maintain them and to keep them safe. We work hard to make sure that Thanet District Council homes meet our residents' needs.

In 2021/22 we invested £4,651,969.47 in our existing properties. Works included kitchen and bathroom renewals, roof replacements, the installation of windows, boiler replacements and fire safety works to list a few.

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| ● Fire alarms installed in 4 high rise blocks | ● 82 kitchen replacements |
| ● 209 properties - exterior decoration | ● 50 bathroom replacements |
| ● 56 major adaptations | ● 7 passenger lift refurbishments |

 **72 Properties had Window Replacements**

 **209 Properties had External Decorations**

 **335 Electrical Upgrades**

 **£575,344.70 spent on fire upgrades**

 **82 New Kitchens**

 **50 New Bathrooms**

 **190 New Boilers**

Before and after of some of our works



Before



After

External decoration on the Newington Estate



Before



After

Wooden window refurbishment at Meeting Court

Kitchen and bathroom replacement



Compliance

Keeping our residents safe is our highest priority. We do this by making sure we follow landlord health and safety legislation and regulations.

The previous year has been one of recovery for us. While our housing service was under the management of East Kent Housing, the council was put under regulatory notice. This was due to failings in the way that landlord health and safety was managed.

Since the service has been back under the control of Thanet District Council, we have put systems into place to recover our compliance position. In February 2022, the notice was lifted.

Our greatest challenge is getting access to all the properties we need to be able to carry out these vital checks within our residents' homes. We work closely with our residents and with our legal team to find the best way to ensure these checks are carried out.

Our compliance performance since October 2020			
Compliance area	October 2020	March 2021	March 2022
Gas safety	99.64%	99.77%	100%
Fire risk assessments	99.41%	99.42%	100%
Asbestos surveys	97.44%	100%	100%
Water risk assessments	100%	100%	100%
Electrical testing - communal areas	7.04%	92.86%	99.38%
Electrical testing - domestic units	16.18%	72.65%	90.21%
Passenger lifts	100%	100%	100%

Housing Estates

We have four Housing Response Officers (HROs) who work across all of our estates. Their role is to:

- Carry out block inspections.
- Identify and report on communal repairs to our partnering contractor.
- Ensure bin rooms are tidy and bins are rotated where bin chutes discharge.
- Mop the lobby of high rise blocks daily - where there is a high footfall.



When time allows, the Housing Response Officers will:

- Carry out litter picking.
- Remove larger items of waste.
- Weed paved areas or car parks.

Our HROs carry out vital work on our blocks maintaining health and safety and condition. Below are some examples of their work on our estates.

Claire Smyth, Chair of the TTLG said: "This decision has come from tenants, most of us agree and are behind it. This is another step forward in effective communication and understanding. It is the difference between assuming what people want and listening to people"

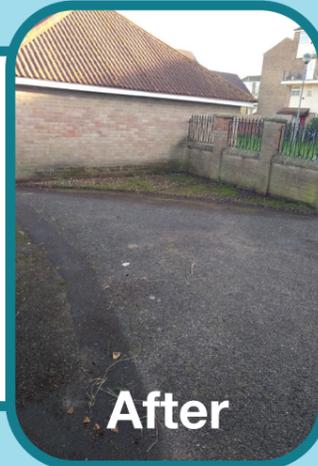
We recognised that we did not have enough HRO resource on our estates to maintain them to the desired standard. We carried out a consultation with residents in our high rise blocks to see if they would like to have additional, dedicated HRO resource, to be funded through their service charge. Residents indicated that they would support the introduction of two additions HROs, dedicated solely to our high rise blocks.

We will be recruiting for the new posts during 2022/23.

Before and after of some of our work



Before



After

We received a complaint regarding the condition of the garages in Sundew Grove.

The team worked hard to litter pick and remove the weeds to improve the overall appearance of the area.



Before



After

The carpark to the rear of Conflans Court, Camden Square and Albion Mews.

Paths were cleared by our HROs following complaints of weeds and rubbish.



Before



After

Leaves were blocking drains and access to sheds in Clements Road. Our HROs removed the leaves, leaving the area in a tidy and useable condition.

Anti-social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) is distressing and disruptive for those affected by it. It is our job to intervene when one of our residents is causing ASB, and to put in place measures to support the resident to change their anti-social behaviour. Where our intervention fails, we use other tools to reduce the impact of ASB on others.

There are the types of interventions we can use:

- verbal and written warnings
- mediation
- acceptable behaviour contracts.

Before eviction is considered, Community Protection Warning (CPW), Community Protection Notice (CPN) and Civil Injunction are considered, and offered to assist sustainment of a tenancy. Our Anti-social Behaviour Policy was adopted in March 2022, and in use from April 2022. Our policies can be found here:

www.thanet.gov.uk/TLpolicies

The policy describes how we will tackle ASB in a responsive, proportionate and robust manner.

Our team deals with a wide range of ASB and nuisance behaviour, including noise nuisance, harassment and pets. In extreme cases, legal action is required.

During 2021/22 we carried out:

- Four evictions for serious ASB
- 18 CPWs of which 9 were progressed to a CPN.



Case study

The behaviour of one of our tenants was affecting all the residents in a block of flats. They were holding noisy parties late into the night and their visitors were intimidating other residents.

We attempted all forms of intervention including breach of tenancy warnings and mediation to curtail the behaviour and support the resident to keep their tenancy with us.

As our intervention was not successful, we worked closely with the victims of this anti-social behaviour, and were able to build a case that meant a Closure Order was put on the property.

This gave the victims some much needed respite and the Housing Officer the opportunity to rebuild the community.

Income Recovery

We developed our Income Recovery, Including Evictions and Enforcement Policy during 2021/22, ready for adoption in April 2022.

The policy is designed to increase financial stability for our tenants and leaseholders, by developing a culture of responsibility through empowering residents to manage their own accounts.

Our policies can be found here:

www.thanet.gov.uk/TLpolicies

Our dedicated team has achieved a phenomenal reduction in debt, despite this being a challenging year.

Reduction of debt achieved by reducing the amount of arrears owed by current tenants	£107,000	0.43% reduction in debt from previous year.
Reduction debt achieved from former tenants	£200,000	45% reduction in debt from previous year

Financial Wellbeing team

The Financial Wellbeing team forms part of the Income team. They take referrals for residents who are struggling to pay their rent and afford home essentials.

Over the last financial year, the Financial Wellbeing team has increased resident's income by £314,397. This is made up of backdated benefits, discretionary housing payments and ongoing entitlements to benefits that were unclaimed by residents.

The team were able to allocate £11,000 to residents who needed support with food and fuel vouchers, white goods and carpets.



Case Study

from Matthew Still, Financial Wellbeing Advisor.

I first met John (not real name) when I was a Rent Officer. He was in rent arrears and so I worked with him to apply for Universal Credit. He was reluctant to do so at first but when he did we were able to settle the rent account. Together we found an easy way for John to pay his rent regularly to minimise the risk of him falling back into arrears.

More recently, I took up a position as a Financial Wellbeing Advisor. This means I still help resident's to manage their finances and pay their rent, but in a more holistic way. I look at someone's finances to see if they can make more from the money they are receiving, and to see if they are entitled to any benefits that they are not claiming. I also support residents with other aspects, like helping to get grants for carpets or white goods, or with vouchers for food, or utility bills.

In my new role, I was again in contact with John because he had fallen back into rent arrears. I hadn't heard from him for around a month, so I went to visit him with a colleague. John was not home but we did notice that his front garden was in a very poor state. We managed to track him down at work and get everything we needed to apply for a discretionary housing payment (DHP). We also found out that he did not have carpets or white goods in his flat and so we got a list of everything he needed so we could apply to the Household Support Fund for these items.

We applied for a DHP which cleared John's arrears, and paid for the carpets and white goods that he needed for his flat. John called me to tell him how happy he was.

John called me again recently because he was worried about a letter he had received from his Housing Officer about his front garden, as it was still in a poor state. I spoke to the Housing Officer on John's behalf and agreed an extension until the end of the month for John to fix it up.

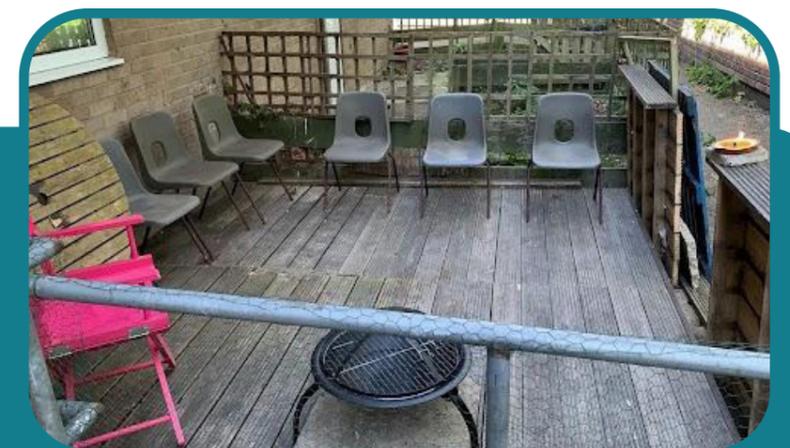
John called me to show me photos of his new garden, which looks great! He has also built decking for his neighbour from the left over materials, as she likes to have her tea outside.

Since our intervention, John has kept on top of rent payments and gets on better with his neighbours.

Here are before and after photos of John's front garden.



Before



After

This case study illustrates the impact that the Financial Wellbeing Team can have on the way a tenant lives, both for the individual and their community.

Right to Buy



During 2021/2022 we received 32 applications under Right to Buy legislation.

Number of properties sold	17
Number of applications denied	3
Total value of properties sold	£1,849,715
Number of properties bought back	0

Plans for 2022

Customer data review

During 2022/23 we will collect demographic data from our residents using a variety of methods. We will do this during phone calls, when we visit, and using a questionnaire that can be issued to residents (as a web link, text message or by post).

The quality of our data is central to our understanding of the diverse needs of our residents when developing and delivering housing services. The Customer Data Review will improve resident engagement and enable us to identify and target underrepresented groups. The information collected will also help us deliver our services to tenants with additional support needs.

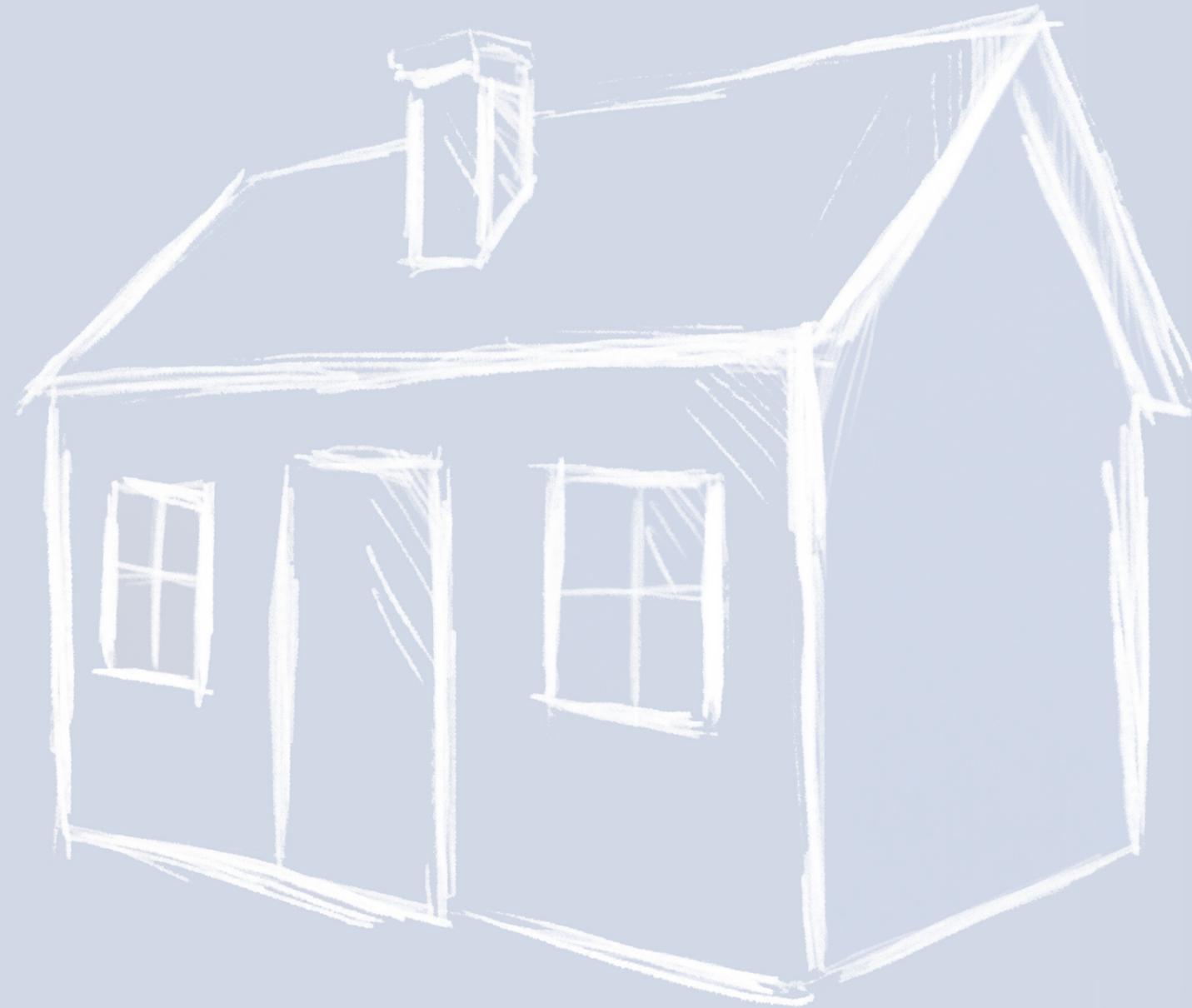
Introduce a set of service standards

Service standards set out what residents can expect from us.

We have drafted four service standards that will be published in 2022/23:

●	Responsive repairs standard
●	Lettings standard
●	Void standard
●	Estate standard

We would like to thank the residents that gave up their time to co-develop, or respond to a survey. Their input helps us greatly in producing these documents.





Contact the Tenant and Leaseholder Services

Housing enquiries - to discuss your current housing arrangements

Call: **01843 577 262**

Email: **myhome@thanet.gov.uk**