



COUNCIL HOUSING ANNUAL REPORT

2020-21



A YEAR TO REMEMBER

None of us will ever forget 2020-21. It will, of course, go down as the year the Covid-19 pandemic struck, and life was turned upside down in ways we had never imagined. It was a challenging year for all of us.

To work for Lancaster City Council during this time was a privilege. We had the chance to support residents and communities, pulling together to help each other through.

We hope you enjoy looking back on some of the positive things that were achieved during this most difficult of years.

Jo Wilkinson
Head of Housing



A WORD FROM COUNCILLOR JACKSON

2020 and Covid...what a year it was for everyone in the housing team and all our tenants too!

We survived due to the amazing hard work of housing officers, and also because tenants looked after each other. You proved to be great neighbours.

Some things were a struggle, under Covid conditions and with staff deployed elsewhere to carry out emergency tasks - Repairs, and Grounds Maintenance, for example - but we kept up with essentials, including the gas safety checks, the support for people shielding, and helping tenants access any benefits due to them.

Here's to 2021/22 - things back to a "new normal" and exciting projects on the estates. I wish Cary Matthews - your new portfolio holder - all the best after my fantastic two years with housing.

Caroline Jackson
Councillor Caroline Jackson

OUR RESPONSE TO COVID-19



During 2020-21 the whole Council swung into action to support communities and tenants during what was a difficult and trying period for us all. The Housing Service immediately announced we wouldn't evict anyone impacted by the pandemic (as long as they were working with us to resolve any issues) and made clear the financial support and advice available to tenants.

We wrote out to all residents several times during the year to confirm the support available, the service we were providing during the pandemic, and to offer reassurance where we could.

We also made phone calls to every tenant – more than 3600 calls – to offer advice around benefits, furlough, availability of food banks, and other community support.

Although many housing staff moved to work in other areas of the council temporarily to help manage the impact of the pandemic, we continued to provide a scaled back version of all our key services, including a Covid-safe emergency repairs service.

Kevin Taylor and Colin Mulliner paused their day jobs as Landscaping Operatives to carry out crucial welfare checks on vulnerable and at-risk members of our community.

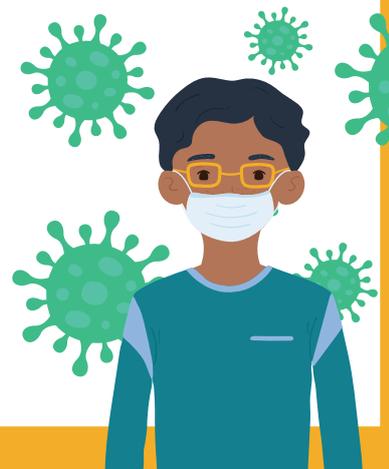
"We helped to make a difference to people's lives whether it was organising a food parcel or just something as small as a conversation with a friendly face," they said. "That really is what drove us every day: that satisfaction, pride, fulfilment, the honour of being able to say we were part of the Welfare Team and we played a part in everything the council did during lock down when our local and wider community needed us."

All of us in the housing service are grateful for your support and understanding, and your acceptance and adherence to relevant Covid-safe measures, during what were the most challenging circumstances imaginable: Thank You!



"I would like to thank the housing team for their caring nature - checking on how people are coping with the lockdown and their health. You should be very proud!"

**Mrs H, council tenant,
June 2020**



Council Housing Performance Data 2020/2021

Here is a general overview of how we performed in the 2020/2021 in a number of key areas.



Income Management



£113,435

Current Tenant Arrears



53% reduction from previous year



£129,000+

less rent arrears owed by our tenants



Empty Properties



We let 250+ homes with a:

50.41 days

Average relet time



£298,226

of rent was unable to be collected due to empty properties



this equals a:

106% or £153,000+

increase of rent lost due to empty properties



Repairs and Maintenance



9286

Number of repairs completed in 2020/2021



100%

of council homes had a valid gas certificate



50 adaptations carried out in 2019/2020 worth **£220,000**

enabling tenants to remain living in their homes independently



96% of tenants were satisfied with the repair service received



Anti-Social Behaviour



We responded to

348

SB reports - 78 more than the previous year



276

cases of ASB were closed in the same time period



96%

of ASB cases closed were resolved



Noise Nuisance is the most common type of ASB- making up 29% of reports.

These results show that, even in the face of a global pandemic, our approach to supporting & assisting tenants to reduce arrears and sustain tenancies is working.

The increase in rent collection has dampened the increase of void loss. Allowing Council Housing to continue with new projects and existing services for our tenants and the wider community

Housing Services Lancaster City Council

Housing Services are working to deliver social value across the district



NO POVERTY

Over **£362,000** additional income gained for customers through benefit and welfare checks



ZERO HUNGER

1 food club supported in our estates



GOOD HEALTH & WELLBEING

296 adaptations completed helping keep residents independent at home

73 residents supported to be safely discharged from hospital



AFFORDABLE & GREEN ENERGY

10 residents engaged to help them reduce their energy use in their home

789 tenants provided with energy efficiency measures within their homes

At least **71.3 tonnes** of CO2 emissions saved through new initiatives



DECENT WORK & SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Over **£3,121,000** spent with local businesses based working on contracts within our district

24 Apprentices employed directly by us or by our contractors providing services to our residents



REDUCED INEQUALITIES

41 homes let to people who were previously homeless

Over **£1.6 million** additional income secured by teams to be able to deliver better services to residents



SUSTAINABLE CITIES & COMMUNITIES

£31,400 spent on neighbourhood improvement projects across our estates

34.6 tonnes of waste collected as part of planned estate clear-ups

4 new properties completed within the HRA.

1235 residents supported to remain in their homes through adaptations, advice or guidance

94% of housing staff employed, live within the District



AFFORDABLE & GREEN ENERGY

£102,000 awarded in grants to the community / voluntary sector supporting our residents

Note: social value includes work carried out by the entire Housing Service (the Home Improvement Agency and Housing Options teams, as well as Council Housing).

To find out more about how we performed against our other KPI's check our website:
www.lancaster.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/policies-and-performance

GETTING IN TOUCH

Through the Covid-pandemic we had to adapt quickly – pivoting from a front counter in-person service, with the ability to answer over 21,000 housing related phone calls per year, to working from home. Hats off to our frontline staff who, under these challenging conditions, managed to answer over 14,300 emails and questions via Facebook Messenger, along with many thousands of phone calls taken from home.

As part of our Winter Welfare service, in the run-up to Christmas 2020 we contacted 117 residents over the age of 75 currently living in general needs homes. This enabled us to refer people to the services they might require, including accessing food parcels, benefit advice, and ensuring their vital medication could be delivered.

As Housing Assistant Anne Garwood explained, “The welfare calls made me recognise that council housing

estates have a strong sense of community, rich diversity, and good local connections, and tenants want to help their vulnerable neighbours; a level of camaraderie that’s not always present in other neighbourhoods. As I am relatively new to council housing, it was an absolute joy speaking to the tenants and understanding their unique circumstances and to be able to provide help where I could.”

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR TENANTS

The team worked hard to support tenants and residents with financial issues and rent arrears prevention. By year-end total rent arrears owed by all tenants was at a record low – down 53% on the previous year - and only one rent arrears case was taken to court for legal action!

It’s so pleasing that we’ve been able to help tenants manage their rent accounts in a supportive, constructive way, and with minimal recourse to legal action.

Our Income Management Team also retained Housing Quality Network accreditation and were held up by that organisation as an example of good practice at their annual conference.

In addition to supporting residents to manage their rent accounts the team helped to secure total additional income for tenants of £362,000 over the course of the year, through benefits, grants and other financial support.

“I never want to go through this again...happy days! I was feeling down until I heard from you. Thank you so much for your patience with me, you’ve been fabulous.”

Mrs L – tenant, after successful resolution of an arrears issue, March 2021.

“I got so depressed about all this and just buried my head. I’m so relieved. I feel like I can talk to you now if I have any more problems and I’m really glad about that. Thank you!”

Mr F – tenant, after working with his Income Management Officer on a plan to clear his arrears, Jan 2021



REPAIRING AND IMPROVING HOMES



2020-21 was a challenging year for our Repairs and Maintenance team. As the team who are in and out of tenants' homes more than any other, delivering a Covid-safe Repairs service was no easy task.

Some work was postponed, other programmes of work were re-arranged in line with Covid guidelines, and for several weeks of the year many of the team were deployed elsewhere in the Council delivering emergency Covid-related services.

Throughout the whole year an emergency day-to-day repair service continued to be delivered, and once Covid restrictions eased the backlog of repairs unable to be carried out was tackled.

Hats off to the repairs operatives and our gas partner Emcor who kept things moving – they (like so many housing staff) were our key workers this year and managed to:

 <p>Repair 215 empty properties for re-letting</p>	 <p>Re-roof 110 properties</p>	 <p>Maintain 100% gas safety compliancy</p>	 <p>Install 200 A Rated energy efficient gas boilers</p>
 <p>Install 50 disabled adaptations to assist tenants in maintaining independence</p>	 <p>Install Solar PV to 35 sheltered bungalows on the Vale Estate</p>	 <p>Undertake crucial electrical safety checks and smoke alarm checks</p>	
 <p>Fit 400 external doors</p>	 <p>Replace composite fencing to reduce fire risk</p>	 <p>Complete approximately 7,000 day-to-day repairs</p>	 <p>Achieve EPC 'A' standard on two Independent Living conversions on Hala.</p>



IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD



The work that we, as a housing team, all love to do – getting out and about across the district and meeting and working with tenants and residents - became increasingly challenging during 2020-21. This was due to the Government’s ‘stay at home’ Covid guidance being in place for long periods, and careful risk assessment being required to get out and about in the community for much of the year.

We were, however, able to keep up lots of good work.

Keeping your home safe:

At the start of May 2020 a significant fire took place on the Marsh estate. The Housing team (working with partner agencies) attended swiftly and worked with residents to ensure the health and safety of all involved: assisting with the clean-up effort and supporting affected residents into alternative accommodation where needed.

During spring and summer two partnership estate clearance events followed: one on the Marsh estate, and then a follow up event on Ryelands. Fire safety was the focus, with Estate Teams, Repairs and Maintenance and Public Realm staff working with the fire service to

deliver a whole-estate door knock and a rubbish clearance effort. A massive 34.6 tonnes of waste were cleared.

As ever, Gas Safety was a big priority, and working with our gas partner Emcor we maintained 100% gas compliancy across the year, ensuring that annual gas safety inspections were carried out on all council homes.

In addition, our teams carried out a huge amount of crucial work around electrical inspections, smoke alarm tests and fire safety, legionella testing, and asbestos removal across the district.

Anti-social Behaviour

As residents coped with the challenges of daily life under Covid conditions, and we all spent much more time at home, friction between neighbours became more common. During the year we responded to 348 reports of anti-social behaviour and reports of noise and neighbour nuisance, in particular, increased.

But let’s not forget: the vast majority of tenants coped with the challenging conditions admirably, and a healthy dose of co-operation and community spirit was also strongly in evidence.

Household Intervention Team

The team provided lots of much needed support during 2020/21 to tenants requiring short term assistance – setting up utilities, sourcing furniture, and accessing benefits, for example – and also those with more complex or long-term support needs.

Support in successfully maintaining tenancies was as important during 2020/21, with all the challenges we

faced, as it has ever been, and we’re delighted that we’ve been able to make a difference.

We picked up 208 new tenant support cases during the year – for tenants for who require a bit more than the standard housing management services we provide – and ended the year with 86 open cases receiving continued support.

YOUR VOICE

Although the restrictions of 2020 made tenant engagement challenging at times, lots of great work still took place.

The District Wide Tenant's Forum went online for the first time, and we held three forum meetings during 2020/21, where a group of enthusiastic and committed residents helped to guide and inform the direction of the housing services we delivered.

We continued to support community centres in your neighbourhoods, and also provided a venue for the Ridge Food club to carry out their excellent work for their community.

We spent around £10,000 in supporting residents on the Marsh and Ryelands to deliver big clean up events, removing a mammoth 34.6 tonnes of household waste

and working with colleagues from Lancashire Fire and Rescue to offer crucial fire safety advice.

We also delivered a number of small (but valuable) projects in response to tenant requests, including a de-weed, levelling and gravelling of communal areas at Langdale Road; a much-needed car park barrier at Glebe Court, Lancaster; and provision of handrails at Elterwater Place, Lancaster.

In addition, we had lots of fantastic conversations with residents at Branksome, Mellishaw Park, and on Mainway, as part of the ongoing projects in those areas.

NEW HOMES

The challenge of carrying out essential work on empty council properties, bringing them up to our lettable standard, and then signing up new tenants, was a big one. For long periods of the year we stopped all but the most urgent of new lets due to lockdown conditions, and adhered strictly to a Covid-safe way of working at all times.

The team developed new ways of working – virtually where possible, minimising the number of people in an empty property at all times – and avoided all but the most essential contact with people: not the way we like to work, but very necessary!



"Moving house during a pandemic is not something many of us, thankfully, have ever had to experience," said Debbie Dewhirst, one of our Housing Options Officers. "It was great to be able to support those who needed to find a new home – we worked so hard to do it safely, and while we didn't let as many new homes as we would in a normal year, we were definitely no less busy!"

At the end of 2020/21 we had a total of 2166 applicants registered on the housing waiting list.

Over the course of the year we:

- Re-let more than 250 new homes and 15 garages via our website:
- Helped tenants agree 17 Mutual Exchanges with other tenants
- Worked with our Repairs and Maintenance team to bring 129 properties requiring major works up to our lettable standard
- Received over 9,000 property 'bids'
- Reviewed and updated our Housing Allocation Policy (you can find it here: www.lancaster.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/policies-and-performance)

Our Technical Team within Repairs and Maintenance also delivered four new homes during the year: conversions of former scheme manager housing on our Independent Living schemes into self-contained flats. The Ground floor flat created at Beck View delivered an excellent example of a modern, fully accessible property: wheelchair accessible, with ramped access, widened doorways and a wet room.



INDEPENDENT LIVING



Throughout 2020-21 our Independent Living (formerly known as sheltered housing) team continued to support our tenants by working hard on our schemes: keeping up with our daily contacts on all tenants (sometimes increasing them), with most staff continuing to work safely from scheme offices during Covid restrictions.

It was January 2021 when we started the process of rebranding the service to become known as 'Independent Living' and the team as 'Independent Living Officers'. We have begun to arrange new signage for the schemes which we hope will be in place in 2022.

By the end of 2020-21 staff and residents alike were very much looking forward to re-opening communal lounges, in-person visits, and catching up with each

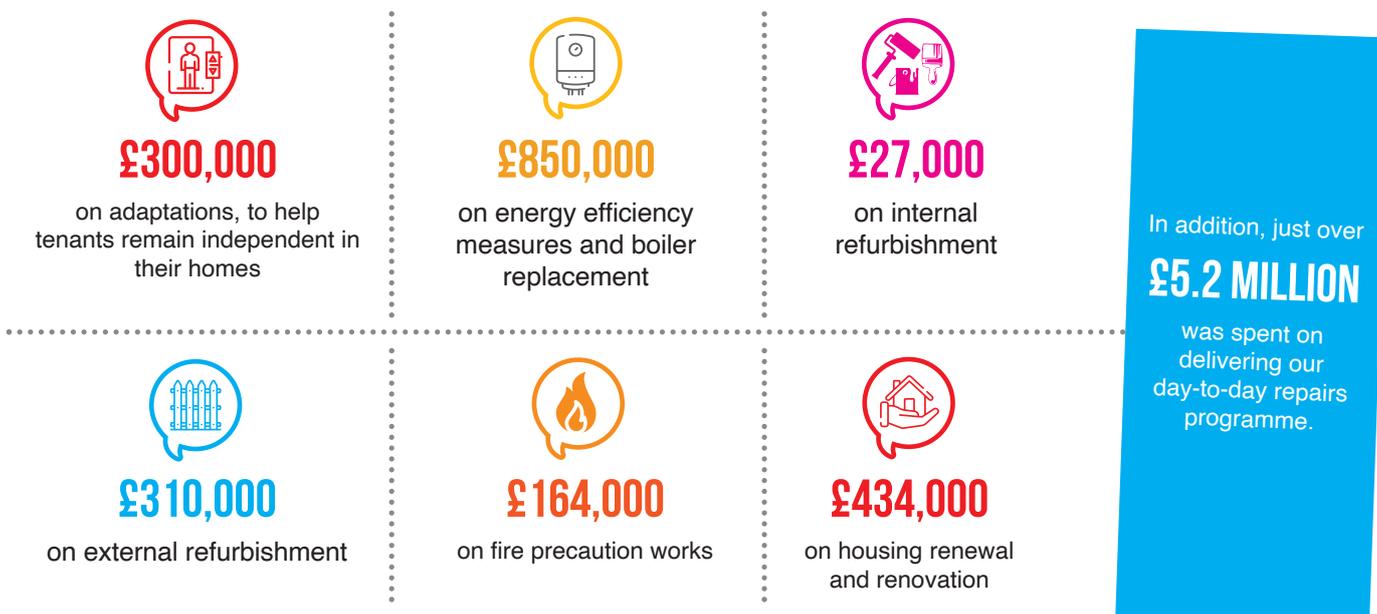
other. The health and wellbeing of residents is at the heart of everything the Independent Living team do, and in-person contact remains the best way to deliver this.

As Independent Living Team leader Helen Wright put it, "In this year to remember it helps to reflect on how well we all looked out for each other. Even the little things – a socially distanced coffee in the garden, for example – make a difference."

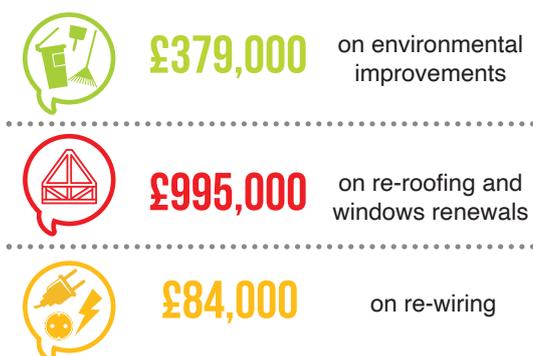
MONEY MATTERS

The total rental income received for 2020/21 was just over £13.5 million. Average rent stood at £74.87 (for general needs homes) and £70 (for Independent Living). In addition, service charges covered the cost of services (mainly relating to communal blocks of flats) such as cleaning, decorating, floor coverings, CCTV, and in the case of Independent Living, staffing and management costs.

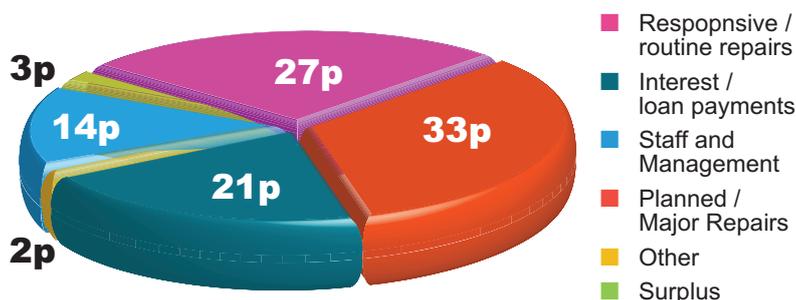
In delivering a capital programme of repairs to your homes we (and our contractors) carried out an awful lot of work and spent a total of just over £3.5 million:



Other significant areas of spend:



FOR EVERY £1 OF RENT YOU PAY, WE SPEND:



PROJECTS UPDATE

MYMAINWAY

The MyMainway project is an exciting development of the Mainway Estate, on the banks of the River Lune on the edge of Lancaster City Centre. During 2021/22 the council's Cabinet will be asked to consider ambitious plans to rejuvenate the estate in providing modern, energy efficient homes in this fantastic location.

Mainway is currently made up of over 257 homes (council tenants and leaseholders), and during 2020 we had lots of (Covid-safe, socially distanced) conversations and events with residents to understand how they would like their estate to be developed. The Mainway Hub (on Owen Road) opened for business as a drop-in for residents to keep in touch with progress of the project.

Expect more Mainway news in the coming months. To keep up to date with the latest news about the project, or to contact the team and have your say, visit www.keepconnected.lancaster.gov.uk/my-mainway-lancaster



MELLISHAW PARK

Having acquired full ownership of the Gypsy Roma Traveller's site at Mellishaw Park from the County Council, in 2020 we began conversations with residents to agree an ambitious and wide ranging refurbishment to bring the site and it's services up to date, and ensure it allows residents to create a thriving community.

Planning work will continue through 2021, as designs are drawn up and agreed for this exciting piece of work.

BRANKSOME

Building on the excellent work of the Branksome Residents association in previous years, during 2020 we identified a venue to provide a community hub on the estate. This will act as a base for residents and other organisations to deliver community activities and services in the area.

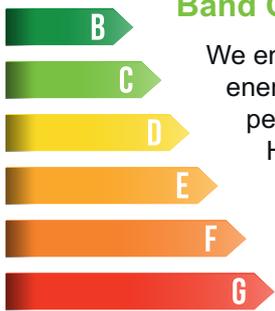
While Covid ultimately restricted the amount of resident involvement work that could take place, a summer event took place in 2021 which generated lots of great ideas for the future of the Branksome Estate.



COMMITTED TO REDUCING CO2

In response to the ongoing climate emergency declared by the Council the Council Housing service has developed programmes of significant investment and activity:

A Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C Housing Stock:



We embarked on a 10-year programme of energy efficiency improvements and performance upgrades across all Council Housing, with the goal to raise the energy performance certification of all Council Housing to a minimum 'C' rating. At the end of the year 71% of our properties reached this standard.

Empty property, energy retrofit improvements:

An on-going programme of whole house improvements and energy efficiency upgrades to existing homes. Selected properties are surveyed by our technical team and full renovation specified, including retrofit performance improvements, air tightness, and improved insulation.



Mount Avenue:

An ambitious investment of whole house improvements and energy efficiency upgrades at Mount Avenue, Beaumont Estate, Skerton. The project will be completed over 3 years and will see the renovation of more than 50 homes which will benefit from building fabric improvements and repairs, and upgrading the interiors and finishes, including kitchens and bathroom upgrades. The properties will be made more thermally efficient with energy saving improvements including heating systems, heat recovery extractor fans, new windows and doors, and increased loft insulation.



Loft insulation:

The standard of loft insulation is checked on all void properties and on all new roofing installations and all properties brought up to at least 300mm as required.

Boiler replacement:

We have increased funding and accelerated the rate at which we fit new boilers and central heating systems, reducing CO2 by replacing time expired systems with energy efficient systems.

Solar panels:

We are undertaking an estate wide installation of solar panels targeting suitable Independent Living schemes, directly benefiting a group of elderly and vulnerable tenants, addressing fuel poverty and reducing carbon emissions. Also, all new house conversions are assessed for solar panel installations as part of our commitment to reducing reliance on gas heating and incorporating a renewable component in the design.



Energy Support Officer:

We have appointed an Energy Support Officer, to provide an energy advice service to tenants, promoting energy efficiency, carbon free energy, and ensuring tenants are sign-posted to a range of energy related initiatives.

Electric Vehicles:

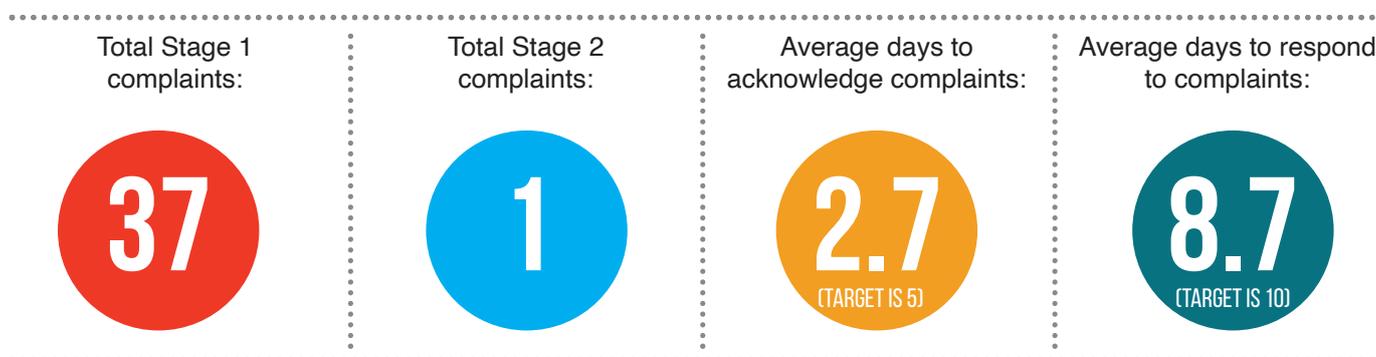
We have begun replacement of the repairs and maintenance vehicle fleet with electric vehicles, with the first eleven delivered for use in early 2021. In addition, three electric vehicle charging points have been installed at Cedar Rd (Lancaster), Christie Avenue (Morecambe) and Tarnbrook Rd (Heysham) for use by council staff and for wider public use through the Charge My Street network.



COMPLAINTS



While we do our best to deliver great services, we don't always get it right. Complaints are a valuable source of feedback showing us where we are doing well and where we need to improve: every complaint is a chance to learn.



We also received 39 compliments from happy tenants and residents. The most common compliments related to the quality of work carried out by our repairs team (and frequent praise for their attitude and professionalism), and for the caring and empathetic approach of staff across the whole service.



"I would like to compliment Stephen (Income Management Officer), he went above and beyond to help. He was thorough, and a delight to deal with"



As a direct result of complaints received, we improved the way we deliver our service in a number of ways. For example, we have enhanced the information provided to tenants on how rents and service charges are calculated (look out for this in March 2022) and made improvements to the administration and invoicing of rechargeable repairs.



"Thank you to Phil the plasterer. He did a great job done, worked socially distanced, and wore a mask throughout"



We have also developed a satisfaction survey to help improve the quality of our complaints process and are working with tenants to create a complaints panel to help us review and act on the complaints we receive.



"Please pass on my thanks to Lisa (Household Intervention Officer) for her help. She is a credit to the Council and needs an award"



You can view the housing complaints policy at:

www.lancaster.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/policies-and-performance

SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Providing a great service for tenants is the reason we are here. We do everything we can to make sure we deliver our services in response to what you tell us you want and need from a housing service. We also make sure we are contributing to the objectives of the council as a whole.

Our Service Improvement Plan is where we turn all this into actions that we can deliver, doing our bit to help you make the district, and the communities within it, great places to live.

What we have achieved this year:

Priorities	Outcomes
<p>Deliver a 'Customer First' approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More visible and accessible services including opening of the MyMainway Hub Ensuring residents at the heart of service delivery with tenants contacted by letter and phone throughout the pandemic Service implemented actions contained within the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code.
<p>Promote and enable tenancy success and independent living creating neighbourhoods people want to live in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Options appraisal for new Extra Care housing scheme underway New Allocations Policy implemented New independent living equipment installed at Beck View and Melling House with a full roll out planned during 2022/23.
<p>Contribute to the sustainable development of the district, including access to and quality of accommodation and actions to meet the challenges of the Climate Emergency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homes strategy: delivery of increased provision of quality homes across the district approved by Cabinet Explored and implemented home energy opportunities
<p>Reduce inequality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council purchased Mellishaw Park and confirming commitment to improvement works on the site Financial inclusion strategy being developed: supporting food clubs, tenants' financial resilience, appliance poverty.
<p>Ensure residents have a voice in services and their communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TPAS accreditation being worked towards and Tenant Engagement Strategy Implemented Neighbourhood Project budget implemented Neighbourhood working pilots started initially on the Branksome Estate
<p>Maximise efficiency and develop a commercial approach within a socially minded environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Value started to be understood throughout contracts Review of housing management finances continues to be understood – ensuring tenants are fairly charged for services provided.

HOW TO GET IN TOUCH:

By telephone: 01524 582929

Email: councilhousing@lancaster.gov.uk

Facebook: @LanCityHousing

Or you can visit us in person at:

Housing One-Stop shop, 5 King Street, Lancaster (Mon, Wed, Fri, 10-4)

MyMainway Hub, 7 Owen Road, Lancaster (Mon, Tues, Thur 10-4 and Tue, Fri 10-1)

GET INVOLVED :

There are lots of ways for you to get involved in helping us to shape the housing service, including resident's groups, the District Wide Tenants' Forum, scrutiny panels, the complaints panel, as a neighbourhood project fund assessor, and more.

Get in touch to find out more.