

BERNICIA

Tenants' Annual Review **2020/2021**



Your home



Your tenancy



Your neighbourhood



Your customer experience



Your rent and charges

Welcome to our review of 2020/21

Our review will take a look back at the last year to show you how we've performed generally and against the Regulator's Consumer Standards along with how we've worked to keep you and your home safe.

At the start of our financial year on 1 April 2020 we were in full national lockdown, a time that no-one could have predicted or prepared for.

We know that many people suffered the worst consequences of COVID-19 and we hope that we all now can look forward to the future with some positivity as we start to emerge from these dreadful times.

Our absolute priority over the last year has been to keep you safe, which meant suspending some operations and limiting face to face contact whilst carrying on with essential and emergency services, such as health and safety.

Our involved tenants were instrumental in helping us make the right decisions on what services should be suspended and when they should be reintroduced.

In addition, involved tenants carried on with their normal work in checking our performance and holding us to account. This had to be done by adopting new technical skills to hold meetings virtually. Involved

tenants were determined that your voice continued to be listened to and heard, for this we'd like to say a very big thank you.

Whilst it has been a challenging year and one that changed everything we've still managed to achieve a lot. We kept our lines of communication open and made thousands of welfare calls to our older residents, carried on with emergency repairs and servicing, dealt with serious anti-social behaviour and supported people facing financial hardship to name but a few.

We continued to build on engaging with you through our Your say, services your way campaign. You gave us a fantastic response, so we now have a full picture of what matters to you. This will help us improve services in the future. See how 'Your say' has shaped 'our promise' to you on pages 12-18.

We do hope you enjoy our review. It's not a year any of us would want to relive, but the hard work, care, kindness and resilience that was evident in our communities are things that we won't forget.

“Our involved tenants were instrumental in helping us make the right decisions on what services should be suspended and when they should be reintroduced.”

Your home



It's all about the quality of accommodation which means an efficient and effective repairs and maintenance service, keeping you safe and providing extra things such as aids and adaptations.

Throughout the year we continued to deliver emergency and urgent repairs along with programmed health and safety work. A lot of improvements inside homes couldn't go ahead due to the pandemic.

Whilst making sure you felt safe while we were in your home, our operatives strictly followed safe systems of work including wearing appropriate PPE. This became increasingly important as we started to extend our repair service beyond emergency and urgent works.



Over **92%** of customers were satisfied with the repairs service



99.7% of emergency repairs were completed within 24 hours



All of our properties meet the Decent Homes Standard



This year we invested **£13.1 million** in new homes



186 aids and adaptations installed



100 permissions granted for Disabled Facilities Grant funded works



We continued to invest in regeneration and new development.



Completing external works at Dean Bank in Ferryhill, Durham



Roseborough in Cramlington will be ready for new residents by the end of 2021

Last year we told you about some projects and areas of work identified as priorities, here's an update on how we got on with these



MyBernicia, your on line portal, has been improved so you can now book repair appointments on line.



Last year we started on site with 147 new homes and completed 78. Our new build programme was affected by Covid restrictions.

See pages 22-23 for more details on how we performed.

Your tenancy



It's all about how homes are allocated and the support we provide to help you maintain your tenancy.

Allocating homes

We are pleased to report 1055 properties were relet. Whilst we were temporarily unable to allocate homes due to government rules we quickly restarted as soon as we could.



93% of customers were satisfied with the letting service

Here's what one of our new tenant's said:

“You’ve done an awesome job finding something that’s perfect for me and the dog too. I’m looking forward to having a look around”

Sadly this person needed a home of their own after their mother died of Covid-19.

Rents

We set our rents in line with government regulations which saw an increase for the first time, following 4 years of reductions.

We are pleased to report that our rents continue to be affordable and compare favourably with other social landlords across the region.

We continued to provide advice and support to those facing difficulty paying their rent. This year our help became even more important as many people faced changes to their income as work places and businesses closed their doors during the pandemic. No evictions took place due to rent arrears.



**Average rent
£77.81**

Rent collection - we collected 100.02% of rent due against a target of 99%



Supporting you in your tenancy

Our Intensive Housing Management Team continued to offer help, advice and support to new and existing tenants to help manage their homes.

This year...



544 referrals for support were received



477 cases were closed



73% of cases closed had a successful outcome



£83,246 was secured by the team in financial gains for tenants



251 customers found a new home in our retirement and independent supported living housing schemes which provide comfort and support independence.

Your neighbourhood



It's all about the cleanliness and safety of the neighbourhoods and communal areas where you live, the prevention and tackling of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and the promotion of social and environmental wellbeing.

Throughout the pandemic we made sure the things that matter to you continued to be dealt with including ASB.



488 anti social behaviour cases were reported and responded to



97.5% of ASB cases were successfully resolved



10 ASB cases related to hate crime



296 estate inspections were carried out by our Housing Team



We are pleased to report the priority identified to develop our approach and policy for estate and communal inspections is complete and in place.



We've made progress in identifying priorities for investment as a result of the completion of our sustainability exercise. A number of schemes will now be subject to option appraisal. Work is progressing to rationalise garages and deal with dampness.



Your community

As well as providing good quality homes, we help shape the places around those homes and support communities that live in them.

Community Investment Fund

The continued availability of our Community Investment Fund helped support local projects that received grants ranging from £150 to £13,600 which, overall totalled £48,950.

Projects included:



In partnership with RISE, over 500 residents of our retirement schemes were provided with activity packs to help stay fit and healthy.



Choppington Together provided a Covid safe trip to santa for local children.

Community Grant funding is currently available. Please get in touch if you know of, or are part of a community group, charity or partner agency that has an idea for a community project that will enhance the lives of our residents and their communities.



Berwick Stadium Trust bought sports equipment and picnic benches so that families and friends could safely enjoy watching the games at Old Shielfield in Berwick.

Contact our Customer Engagement Team at customer.engagement@bernicia.com or call **0344 800 3800**

Supporting employment

Employability projects

We can help you with employment support. Our **North of Tyne Working Homes** and new **Durham LINKCD** employability projects can help you get the necessary skills for going into employment, along with practical assistance and support with travel costs, childcare and clothing for interviews.

100% of participants have received support with their CV

18% of participants have gained employment through our projects

To find out more about employability support contact: employability@bernicia.com

Or call **0344 800 3800** and ask to speak to one of our employment advisors.



Learning Hives

Join the many learners at Bedlington, Ashington and Newbiggin Learning Hives who last year virtually accessed...

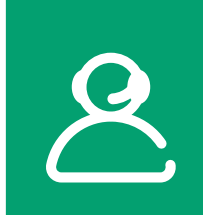


...almost 4000 support sessions

...2751 learning and employability skills sessions

212 people took steps towards employment

32 people were invited to interviews, more than 56% gained employment



Your customer experience



We want to make sure you can access our services easily and they are available at times to suit you.

Accessing services

We have introduced new features on MyBernicia, enabling you to take more control of your tenancy and do things like reporting repairs and booking appointments. This is on top of what's already available, such as being able to check your rent balance and transaction history and make payments at any time that is convenient for you.

MyBernicia is now available by an app which can be downloaded from your devices' app store. You can register for your MyBernicia account on the app or by visiting my.bernicia.com

If you would prefer to speak to us in person our advisors are on hand to take your enquiry. Last year we handled 109,527 calls with 72% answered within 40 seconds.

Introducing MyBernicia mobile app

Last year saw an increase in sign ups to MyBernicia of over 73%, we now have over 2400 registered users.

After you told us that using your phone or tablet to do business would be more convenient we've developed the MyBernicia app. Our app can now be downloaded from your app store.

We will be raising awareness of our digital offer and hope you sign up to use MyBernicia to reap the benefits of managing your tenancy whenever you want.



Customer feedback

We love to hear from you and receive your feedback on the services we provide. We offer a range of ways to give feedback and make your views and opinions known.

Last year we received over 2000 pieces of valuable feedback which included:

1523 compliments

179 comments

329 complaints



Almost 60% of complaints were resolved at first point of contact and 97% resolved at first stage

From hearing your voice, listening and learning from your feedback we adopted and implemented the following changes:



Text messaging

Changes have been made to when you receive text reminders for repair appointments. Instead of the evening before, we'll now remind you of your appointment 48 hours before we're due. This will give you time to change if it's no longer convenient. You'll still receive a reminder on the day too.



Buying your home

We will advise you of the transfer agreement which details your service charges when buying a home from us. Your solicitor receives this information and should also make you aware of the details of the transfer.



Floor covering

We have instructed contractors to take photographs of your floor coverings, when working in your home. This is to make sure your home is respected and protected.



Reminders

We have reminded colleagues and contractors of policies, procedures and standards we have in place. This is to make sure our promises to you are delivered consistently.

Last year we told you that we had to undertake a self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. This is now complete and published on our website.



Involving you

Your say... services your way

Last year during the Your say, services your way campaign we asked you for your views, opinions, and feedback on the services we provide, whether we're focusing on the right things and, if not what should we be doing differently and what your priorities would be.

Over the following pages we'll cover the results and how we have listened and used what you told us to develop 'Our Promise' with involved tenants.



Your Home



Your Neighbourhood



Your Rent and Charges

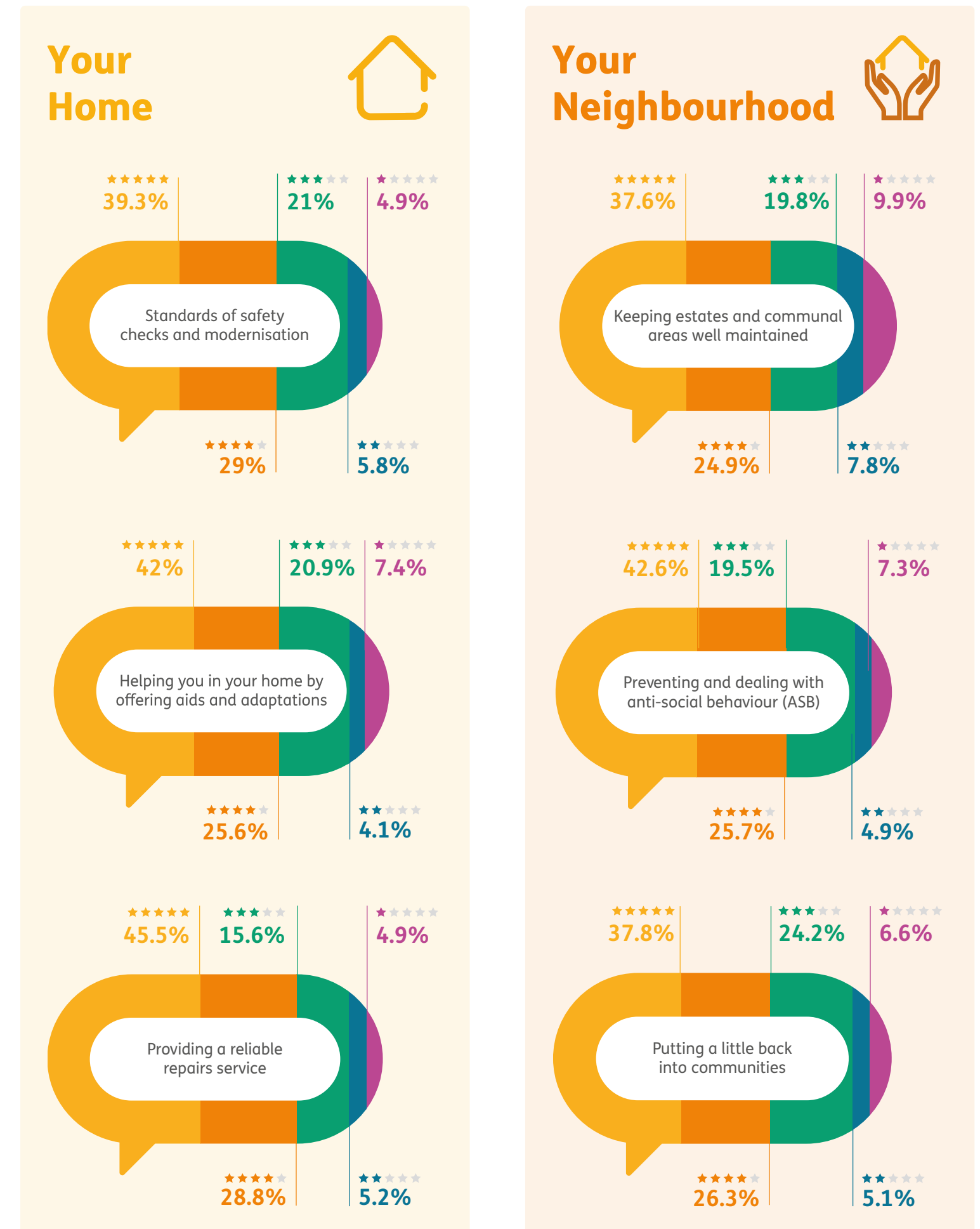


Your Tenancy

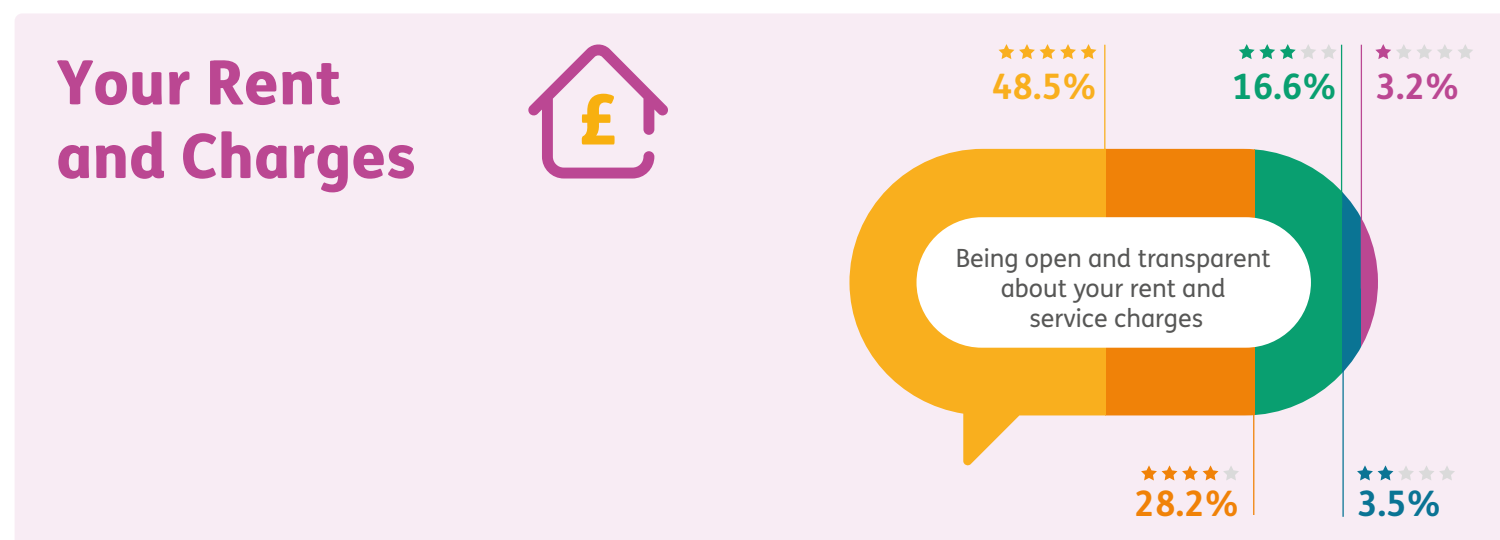
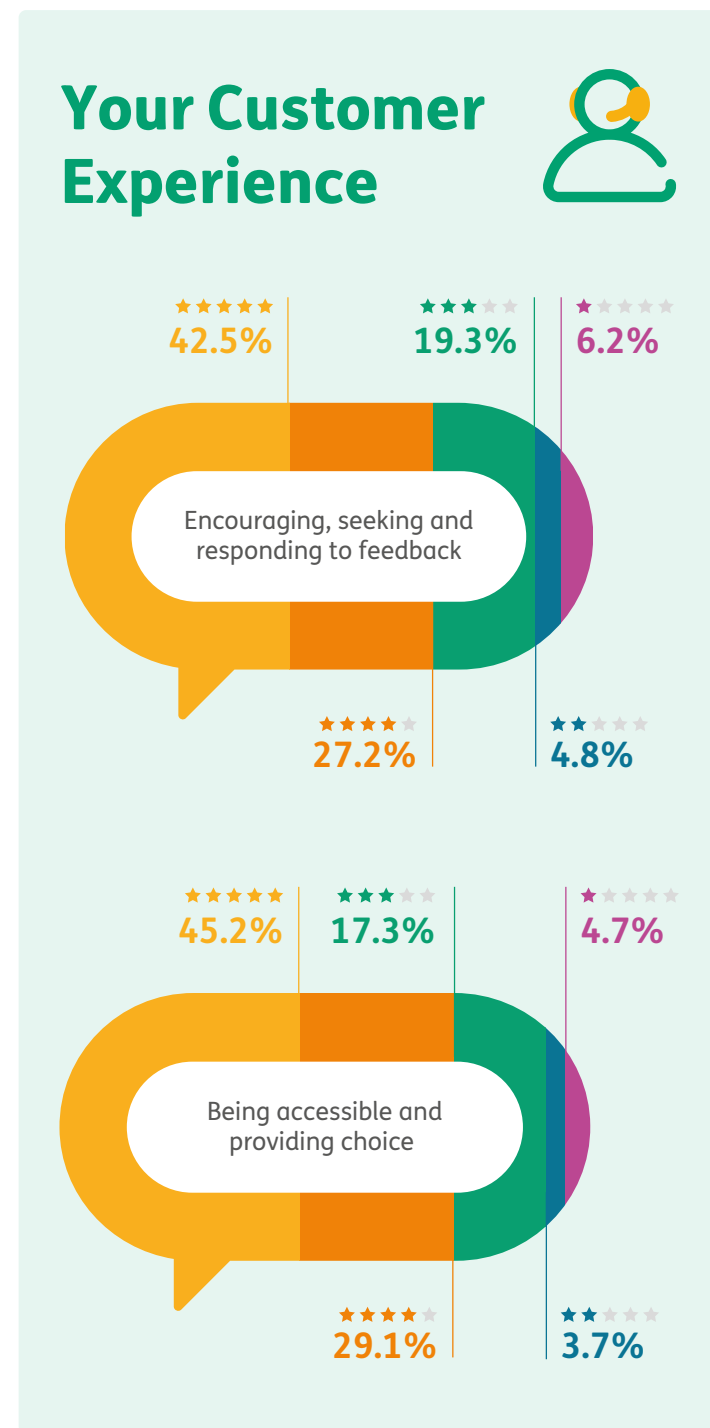
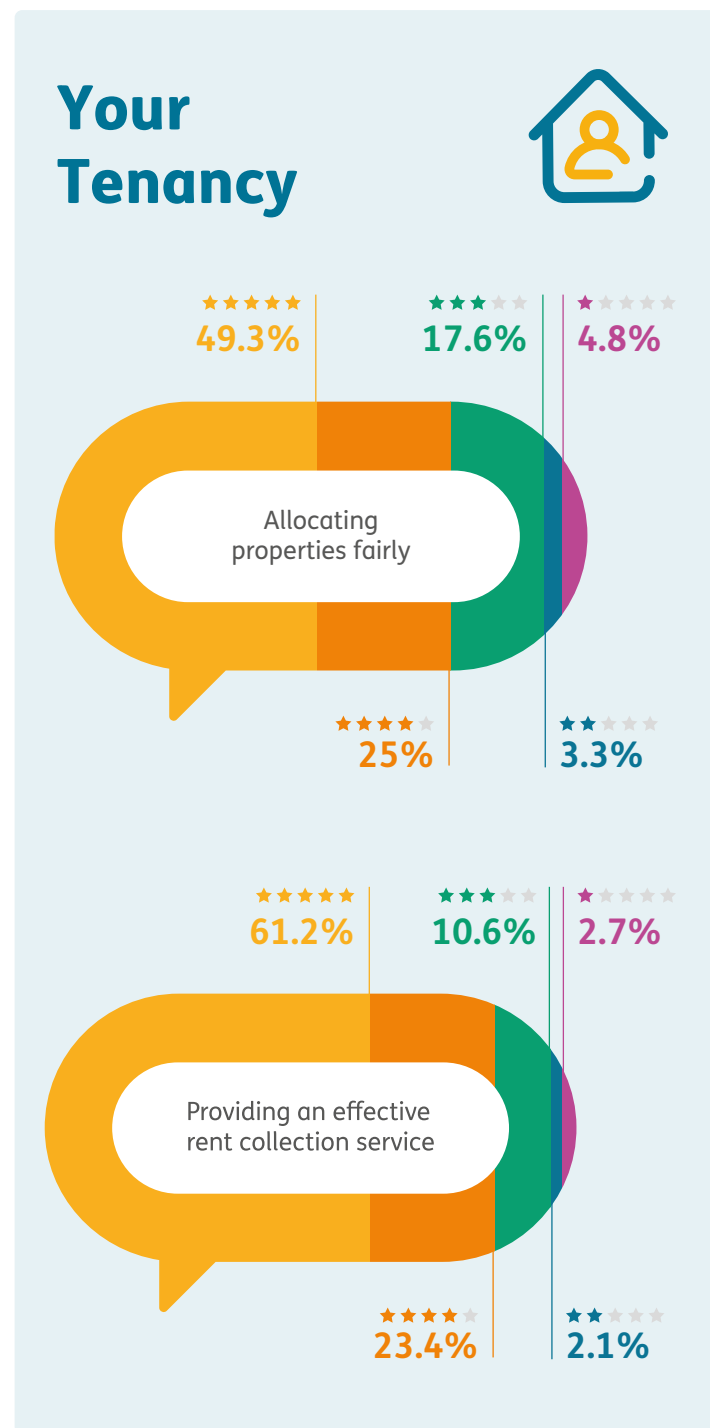


Your Customer Experience

We asked if our service standards focus on the right things. This is how you rated us:



KEY: 5 stars ★★★★★ is focusing on the right things and 1 star ★☆☆☆☆ is not.



Whilst its great to see that the majority of results show that we are focusing on the right things, there was also lots more feedback and ideas on where you told us we can improve.

KEY: 5 stars ★★★★★ is focusing on the right things and 1 star ★☆☆☆☆ is not.

Making our promise...

You had your say, about services your way.

We've listened to what you told us and now want to set out 'our promise' to show you that we care, want to do our best for you and will be held accountable for what we do.

But more importantly, you know what to expect and what to do if we don't meet a promise we've made to you.

Working with our involved tenants we have developed our promise based on communication, getting things right first time, treating you as an individual and being visible.



Your Customer Experience

A customer experience that lets you know we care about you.



Your Tenancy

A fair process for letting properties and support to help manage your tenancy.



Your Home

A quality and reliable repairs service. A place to call home which makes you feel safe and secure.



Your Neighbourhood

A neighbourhood that is well maintained, clean and safe.



Your Rent and Charges

Rent and charges that are easy to understand, affordable and provide value for money.



Keeping our promise

Being accountable to you, through openness, honesty and transparency.



Your Customer Experience

A customer experience that lets you know we care about you...

...our people will be friendly, helpful, respectful and flexible to your needs.



To make sure it's easy to do business with us, we'll:

- Provide a range of easy and simple ways for you to contact us and ensure that your most popular enquiries can be self served online 24/7
- Always treat you with respect, take time to understand your enquiry and be polite and courteous in our response
- Aim to deal with your enquiry quickly and effectively at the first point of contact. If we are unable to solve it right then, we'll get back to you within an agreed time to keep you updated
- Keep you informed if something goes wrong and aim to resolve your issue as quickly as possible.

To show you we care we'll:

- Train, develop and empower our people to put you first
- Provide a complaints service that is easy to access and simple to understand
- Learn from your feedback and let you know what happened as a result of it
- Ask you about and understand your needs so we can make reasonable adjustments to tailor our services to suit you
- Ask you about your experience as a customer
- Apologise when something goes wrong.

Your Tenancy

A fair process for letting properties and support to help manage your tenancy...

...making it easy to understand the allocation and letting process and how we can support you when you're living in your home.



In this respect we'll:

- Provide clear information about how homes are allocated
- Carry out checks to ensure applicants are eligible for rehousing
- Offer support and advice to help you manage your tenancy
- Promote aids and adaptations that are available to help make life easier in your home.



Your Home

A quality and reliable repairs service...

...that's easy to access and gets repairs done right first time wherever possible.



To do this we'll:

- Provide easy and simple ways to report repairs
- Let you know as soon as possible if we can't make an agreed appointment or what happens next if we can't complete a repair at our first visit.

A place to call home...

...which makes you feel safe and secure and where you are proud to live.

In doing so we'll:

- Listen to your concerns about your property and provide advice or take action
- Undertake planned improvements and let you know when work will take place at your home
- Agree, with our involved tenants, a Bernicia modernisation standard
- Make sure all our health and safety responsibilities are fully met.

Your Neighbourhood

A neighbourhood that is well maintained, clean and safe...

...which enables you to enjoy the community and place where you live.



In achieving this we'll:

- Be clear about what our responsibilities are on your estate and what are the responsibilities of others
- Work with you and partners to maintain and improve the appearance of your neighbourhood
- Have staff that are visible and accessible on your estate or at your scheme
- Not tolerate anti-social behaviour and will have effective processes to both prevent and deal with this.



Your Rent and Charges

Rent and charges that are easy to understand, affordable and provide value for money...



...offering you simple ways to pay, view your account and being open and transparent about how your rent is calculated and spent.

To make this happen we'll:

- Provide choice on how you pay and how you can view or obtain your rent statement
- Let you know how your rent and service charges are calculated each year
- Every year, tell you how your rent and service charges are spent.

Keeping our promise...



... by being accountable, to you through openness, honesty and transparency.

So you can challenge and hold us to account we'll:

- Publish quarterly performance information including customer satisfaction and feedback
- Produce and publish an annual report
- Publish our statutory accounts and value for money statement
- Produce more detailed standards for key services so you can check against these
- Make all our policies and procedures available.

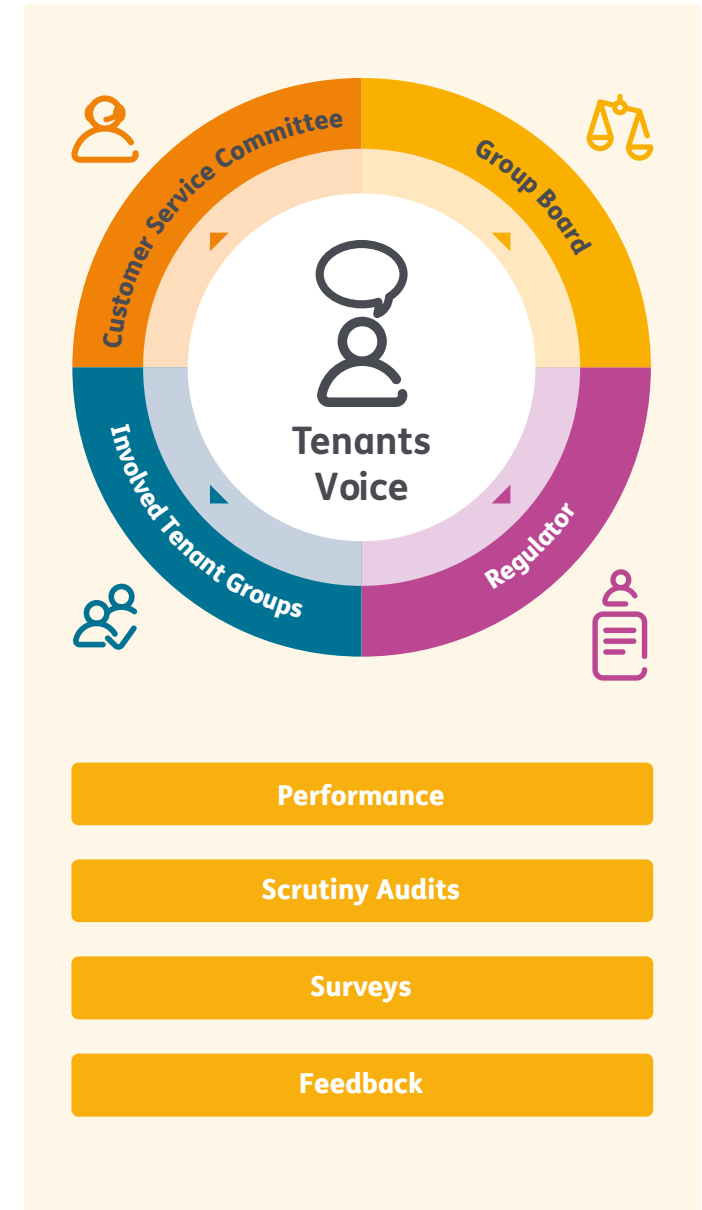
Your voice

In our last review we told you about the work we had planned to strengthen and amplify your voice across our business.

We are pleased to report that our new framework for doing this is well developed and almost fully in place. A key piece of work was the, Your say, services your way, campaign which was designed to make sure we are delivering what's important to you and how we do things that continue to meet your needs and expectations.

Our involved tenants will remain integral in holding us to account, but this can only be done by taking into consideration the wider/quieter voices of our tenants. We do really need you to continue to tell us what you think, need and expect. We like to hear when we've done things well, but more importantly when we haven't.

Our involved tenants are in the process of formalising their position within our governance structure and will become a strategic panel that feeds into our Customer Services Committee and ultimately Board. Tenants also sit on our Customer Services Committee.



Get involved

Getting involved in your housing service can make a real difference to your community and the services you receive.

There are lots of ways to get involved no matter how much time you have. We really value your input. You just need to be:

- A Bernicia customer
- Enthusiastic
- Interested in being at the heart of Bernicia
- Keen to make a difference to how we deliver our services

Why get involved?

- Have your say about how we deliver your services
- Learn more about us and what we do
- Gain new skills, knowledge, and experience to boost your CV and help you get a job
- Meet new people
- Improve your confidence

How do I get involved?

Whatever your time commitment allows, there are lots of ways you can get involved and have your say. This might be completing a survey, or providing a feedback comment or compliment or becoming a member of one of our involved tenant groups.

If you are interested to know more contact us on **0344 800 3800** or email customer.engagement@bernicia.com



Making sense of the money

Financial overview

Bernicia manages 14,000 homes, we are a not for profit organisation which means any surplus we make is reinvested in existing homes and services and building new homes. Below is an overview of what we collected and what was spent during the year.

What comes in	£000's	What goes out	£000's
Rents	55,312	Salaries	9,714
Service charges	6,206	Routine maintenance	9,602
Water rates commission	350	Planned maintenance	2,701
Other income	2,215	Major repairs	8,706
Sale of internal services	139	Housing management	5,131
Surplus on the sale of assets	1,282	Overhead costs	5,471
Office rental income	165	Other costs	580
Income	65,669	Loan interest charges	6,315
		Expenditure	48,220
		Cash Surplus*	17,449

*£5m from the surplus has been used to repay some loans early.

2020/21 turnover was £70,955 million

How each penny in every pound was spent:



We aim to keep rents affordable, average rent in 2020/21 was £77.81



Performance - how did we do?

Our year in numbers

Maintaining our performance, delivering our investment plans and continuing with good customer service continued to be priorities for the year. Here's what our year in numbers looked like:

Our homes

	20-21	Target
New homes started on site*	148	219
New homes completed*	78	93

*Covid did slow down our new build programme but this has and will continue to pick up

£13.1 million was spent on new homes* in 2020-21

Repairs

	20-21	Target
Repairs completed	60,030	-
Appointments made and kept	94.56%	92%
Emergency repairs attended to within 24 hours	99.72%	99.5%
Satisfaction with our repairs service	92.55%	92%

Planned maintenance

Due to Covid-19 we focused on carrying out external and health and safety related works which included:

Fire detection installed	89 blocks	£1,09 million
Fire compartmentation works	29 blocks, 526 properties	£575,000
Sustainability works	93 garages	£225,000
Health and Safety improvements to Balustrades	134 properties	£90,000
Cavity wall clearance and insulation works	116 properties	£350,000
Roof coverings and canopies fitted	421 properties	£2,55 million

All properties continue to meet Decent Homes Standards
Our internal modernisation programme will re commence during 2021/22.

Feedback

Number of learnings from complaints	181	-
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Income

	20-21	Target
Rent collected	100.02%	99%
Current rent arrears	3.83%	3.9%
Rent lost through empty properties	2.12%	2.25%

Lettings

	20-21	Target
Properties relet	1055	-
Average time taken to relet a property	54.9 days	42
<small>*Lockdown and success in re letting long term empty properties affected average times</small>		
% of new tenants satisfied with overall lettings service	93%	93%

Health and safety

	20-21	Target
Properties that had a valid gas safety certificate at the end of the year	99.87%	100%
Properties with electrical inspections within timeframe	99.98%	100%
Water hygiene inspections carried out	100%	100%
% of Fire Risk Assessments undertaken	100%	100%
Communal areas re-inspected for asbestos	99.38%	100%

Benefits to our tenants and communities 20-21

Invested in community initiatives	£48,950	16 Grants
Additional income and grants secured for tenants	£83,246	
Covid support calls made	3122	-
Aids and adaptations installed	186	
Aids and adaptations permissions granted	100	



Review of 2020/21 - how did we do?

Who best to tell us, than our involved tenants - here's what they said...

We couldn't begin our review without reflecting on the year that 2020/21 was. We started the year in total lockdown and saw many changes during the year in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that Bernicia had to make quick and sometimes difficult decisions to make sure we all were kept safe. For much of the year personal contact was restricted and we've still not been able to meet as a group face to face. However this didn't stop us doing what we normally do, albeit differently, so once again we're well placed to give our annual overview of how Bernicia has performed.

Home

Tough decisions had to be made about repairs and improvement works. The pandemic not only impacted on Bernicia operations but also on contractors and suppliers.

Twice during the year, non-essential repairs had to be suspended which was the right thing to do. All emergency repairs continued as did servicing and health and safety inspections but with the right PPE, safe systems of work in place and adjustments for those who were shielding, self isolating or suffering from COVID-19.

Major improvements were limited mainly to external work. However, a good level of investment was still made as a result of revising the programme to redirect work to where it could be done safely.

Bernicia remains on track to honour its commitment to continue to invest in existing homes and services and to build new homes. Work on new builds continued and we've seen development progressing and brand new homes coming into management, which is fantastic.

Throughout the year we've had access to good quality information, including health and safety, which provides the assurance that homes continue to be well maintained, tenants are kept safe and legal requirements have been met which was vitally important as we all spent so much time at home during periods of lockdown.

Tenancy

We're pleased to confirm that good performance has been achieved and maintained over the last year. Again, services were affected by the pandemic especially the period when no house moves could take place. As soon as Bernicia could relet empty properties it did so efficiently, making sure that people in need of housing were helped to move into their new homes quickly and safely.

Inevitably, people faced greater hardship as income was reduced or lost and additional costs were incurred through being at home more. It's evident that Bernicia has worked with and supported those facing hardship which is shown in good performance for rent collection and arrears levels. It has been and continues to be challenging times.

We received a wide variety of performance information during the year which has allowed us to monitor financial performance and the support available to both new and existing tenants.

We've closely followed government legislation and rules to protect tenants during the pandemic and are especially pleased that performance has been maintained without the ability to take court action.

This shows that different relationships have emerged between Bernicia and its tenants during the last year. In this spirit we'll continue to grow our positive relationship with Bernicia to help make sure tenancy sustainment remains a priority.

Neighbourhood

As we all spent more time at home our neighbourhoods and surrounding areas became even more important to us. We understand that the pandemic did impact on maintenance programmes but on the whole estates and areas were well looked after.

We were pleased to see Bernicia continued to deal effectively with anti-social behaviour. At the peak of the first lockdown, reports of anti-social behaviour rose significantly and again it's reassuring that the tools available, particularly injunctions, were used to stop and prevent serious incidences of unacceptable behaviour.

Bernicia continues to make a real difference to tenants and communities through investment in added value initiatives. Community grants albeit lower than previous years were awarded to support health and wellbeing

initiatives and regionally, money was redirected from the Bernicia Foundation to local authorities to help those affected by the pandemic.

We really enjoy and value being part of the decision making process and seeing the outcomes of the projects that are funded by Bernicia. It's always encouraging and pleasing to hear the feedback and appreciation of the groups and residents that have benefitted.

Despite the fact that community venues had to close and people could not meet face to face, Bernicia continued to offer employability support. Inevitably numbers were limited but some fantastic work was still done. Coming out of lockdown it's brilliant that Bernicia and its partners will be there to help people regain the confidence and improve skills needed to find or move closer to work.



Customer experience

We've all had to adopt new and different ways of communicating and getting what we need over the last year.

From the outset of lockdown Bernicia clearly communicated changes to service delivery to all tenants. Decisions were made swiftly to mobilise home working for staff and to ensure essential services continued to keep people and property safe. The extra time created from the reduction in service levels and customer demand was redirected to make over 3000 check in and chat calls.

Despite the challenges and changes, customer satisfaction remained high and there was some lovely compliments made by people who said staff had gone over and beyond to help.

We continue to monitor all feedback and can report that complaints were dealt with swiftly, trends were monitored and changes were made. We assessed Bernicia's approach to complaints against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and are pleased to confirm, apart from a few minor amends and considerations, we did well against this.

We were delighted that the, Your say, services your way, campaign took place. This demonstrates that Bernicia is fully committed to listening to and putting into action what tenants have said.

In summary

It's been a year that we couldn't ever have imagined.

Working differently during this time and as we come out of lockdown, we'll reflect to see how this experience can be used positively to shape future service delivery. Bernicia has made significant progress with its digital offer and we've been instrumental in testing and trialling the improved tenant portal and new app which will be of great benefit to people who want to and can use online services.

In concluding the review of 2020/21 we are confident that through our involvement and

the information made available to us, Bernicia has performed well and has fully complied with the Regulator's Consumer Standards.

People have been kept safe, homes have been maintained, neighbourhood services have been delivered, properties have been allocated fairly, rent has been collected and customers, including ourselves, have remained at the heart of service delivery.



Priorities

During 2021/22 we have plans to:

- Develop and implement a customer excellence charter
- Finalise and embed new, agile ways of working for our staff
- Implement the final pieces of our new engagement and co regulatory framework
- Increase investment in estates and neighbourhoods, and where feasible do so through self-serving models that capitalise on social inclusion and employability initiatives
- Outline our plans for the future through the development of our 2022/26 Housing Strategy
- Undertake a deep dive review of tenant engagement and scrutiny arrangements
- Carry out a retirement housing review
- Grow our development in new homes, with 196 starting on site and 187 completions.

Thank you, we hope you have enjoyed reading your annual review. If you've any comments or questions we'd love to hear from you.

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