

BERNIA



**Tenants' Annual Review  
2021/2022**



# Welcome to our review of 2021/22

Another year has passed and it's that time again when we take a look back at what has happened and been achieved during 2021/22.

We started the year with great positivity fuelled by the easing of lockdown restrictions. Not only was this a time of great optimism but one of challenge in catching up on things that had been delayed or deferred whilst we all kept safe.

Despite the legacy of things like tackling repair backlogs and dealing with labour and material shortages and rising costs, we still managed to do a lot of amazing and important things.

Most importantly, we continued to listen to you and worked hard to further cement your voice at the heart of our business.

To do this we continued to use what you told us in the "Your Say, Services Your Way" campaign. Your voice speaks right through the 'Promise' we've made to you. In tandem with introducing new ways of working, we've refreshed the customer service skills of colleagues to make sure you get the best experience when doing business with us.

We're delighted that an independent review by national experts, TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service), confirmed that we are a forward thinking organisation that has good arrangements in place to listen, hear and act upon what you are telling us.

On a more formal note, membership of our Customer Services Committee has been increased with the

appointment of a further Independent Member who is a tenant. This means three tenants now sit on this Committee. Our involved tenants have rebranded as the Tenant Voice Panel and continue to play a vital role in our governance structure which includes a stronger relationship with the Customer Services Committee and ultimately Board.

As always, our absolute priority has been to keep you safe in your home by undertaking checks, tests and inspections of systems and installations, and carrying out thousands of emergency and responsive repairs.

Our major works programme concentrated mainly on fire safety but towards the end of the year, more general modernisation work recommenced.

Our development programme continued with new affordable homes being built or started on site.

Our desire to do more continues, so much so that we decided to publish a new Corporate Strategy a year early. This is another ambitious plan that sets out our commitment to listen and deliver exceptional services and invest in your homes and communities.

Again, we do hope you enjoy our review. It hasn't been an easy year as we started to recover from the impacts of the pandemic which, we are under no illusion, will continue into our new year both in terms of challenge but also opportunity.






## Your home

### Repairing and maintaining your home

Safe, secure and warm housing creates happy, healthy homes where people and communities can thrive.

Last financial year, we spent £11.7 million carrying out over 66,000 responsive repairs to our 12,600 homes across the North East, and repairs on over 1,000 empty homes ready for new tenants to move into.

### Performance highlights:

-  • 98% of appointments made and kept
-  • 99.7% of emergency repairs completed within 24hrs
-  • 88.5% of tenants satisfied with the repairs service

## Planned repairs

Almost **£13 million** was spent improving homes last year. The start of the year focus remained mostly on fire safety and towards the end of the year, general modernisation works recommenced. This resulted in **58 new kitchens**, over **60 new bathrooms**, and **401 new heating systems** being fitted.

### Performance highlights:

-  • 58 new kitchens installed
-  • 60 new bathrooms installed
-  • All of our properties meet the Decent Homes Standard

## Keeping you safe

Last year, we carried out 14,355 gas safety tests, 3,875 electrical tests, 245 fire audits, 279 asbestos checks, and 1,968 water hygiene checks. We spent £83,380 on servicing safety equipment, such as fire alarms, emergency lights, smoke vents, doorguards, refuge points and fire extinguishers. 368 aids and adaptations were installed to help people live more comfortably in their homes.

### Performance highlights:

-  • 99.69% properties had a valid gas safety certificate at the end of the year
-  • 143 permissions granted for Disabled Facilities Grants
-  • 368 aids and adaptations installed





# Investing in new homes

Last year we invested £22 million in building new homes. We completed 167 new homes with a further 107 starting on site. Rosebrough, located in Cramlington, the latest addition to our Retirement Living portfolio, now provides fabulous apartments and facilities for 48 new tenants.

## Performance highlights:



• This year we invested £22 million in new homes



• 167 new homes completed



# Your tenancy

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

## Allocating homes

Last year, 1,040 properties were re-let, with 83.46% of these being let on first offer. 94.82% of new tenants were satisfied overall with the lettings service.



### Performance highlights:

- 94.82% of customers were satisfied with the letting service

## Rents

We set our rents in line with government regulations. Prevention and the management of rent arrears is a priority for us, as tenants face harder times and greater financial difficulties.

- Last year we collected 99.5% of rent payable
- Average rent £79.11

We actively encourage tenants to share their concerns with us so we can signpost to good support and advice services.

## Supporting you in your tenancy

Maximising your income and providing tenancy support.

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

### Performance highlights:



- 423 referrals for support were received



- 442 cases closed



- 74% of cases closed had a successful outcome



- £184,919 was secured by the team in financial gains for tenants





# Your neighbourhood

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

We continue to positively tackle anti-social behaviour, making sure the things that matter to you are dealt with to make you feel safe in your home and neighbourhood.

## Performance highlights:



• 504 anti-social behavior cases were reported and responded to



• 96.5% of cases were successfully resolved



• 9 ASB cases related to hate crime



• 469 Estate Inspections carried out

# Supporting individuals into employment

We continued to support individuals into employment through our North of Tyne Working Homes (NoTWH) and Durham LINKCD employability projects. Here we help individuals get the necessary skills for going into employment, as well as providing practical assistance with things like travel costs, identification, childcare and clothing for interview.

To find out more about employability support contact: [employability@bernicia.com](mailto:employability@bernicia.com) or call 0344 8003800 and ask to speak to one of our employment advisors.

“North of Tyne Working Homes helped me write up my CV and supported me with interview advice.”

## Performance highlights:



• 100% of participants received support with their CV



• 70% of participants have gained employment through our NoTWH and LINKCD projects



# Your community

## Community Investment Fund

We continued our commitment to support local projects, initiatives and community groups through the ongoing availability of our Community Investment Fund, providing grants from £200 to £13,600, overall totalling £69,215.

## Some of the projects benefiting included:

- Play equipment for children at Bedlington Nursery, supporting their learning.
- Branded clothing for Year 6 pupils of Brandon Primary School
- Entertainment and lunches for local communities and retirement housing schemes.

## Performance highlights:



• £1,384 average grant awarded



• 50 project applications approved

The Community Investment Fund is open for applications for projects and initiatives that will enhance the lives of residents and their communities. Contact our Customer Engagement Team: [customer.engagement@bernicia.com](mailto:customer.engagement@bernicia.com) or call 0344 8003800.



# Learning Hives

Last year at our Ashington, Bedlington and Newbiggin Learning Hives we can report:



• 1,693 sessions on learning and employability were delivered



• 1,794 visits were made



• 455 learners took steps towards employment



• 22 learners were invited to interviews. More than 59% 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.

## Customer feedback

Tenants are at the heart of everything we do. Your feedback helps us to do better and shape new ways of working.

### Performance highlights:

-  • Last year we received over 3,000 pieces of valuable feedback.
-  • 2,597 compliments
-  • 96 comments
-  • 371 complaints
-  • Overall 95% of complaints were resolved at first point of contact and first stage

# Your voice

From listening to your feedback, we have reviewed and acted upon what you told us:

## You said:



"We'd like to see an improvement to the landscaping maintenance on our estates."

## What we're doing:

We have re-tendered the ground maintenance contract with the involvement of Bernicia tenants to focus on the standard and what matters to you. This has resulted in an enhanced ground maintenance team to carry out works to shrub, beds, trees throughout the year across our estates.

## You said:



"We want you to be more visible in our communities."

## What we're doing:

We have introduced flexible working arrangements for colleagues, along with the introduction of mobile working technology so they can do their work more agilely – not having to do the paperwork back in the office means they can spend more time out and about with you.

## You said:



"Why can't I change a repair appointment that I originally arranged myself on MyBernicia."

## What we're doing:

We've updated MyBernicia so not only can you report a repair but you can also change the appointment you have already made, if it's no longer convenient.



# The Tenant Voice Panel & customer engagement framework

We are pleased to announce our new framework to strengthen and amplify the tenants voice across our business is fully in place.

The Tenant Voice Panel, made up of Bernicia tenants from across the North East, has been formalising their position within our governance structure and appointing to key positions of Chair and Vice Chair. This along with identifying the information they need from ourselves to monitor services and hold us to account.

The Tenant Voice Panel members will be instrumental in helping us to continue developing services that are customer focused, across a range of activities including:

-  • commissioning and actively participating in scrutiny reviews
-  • contractor monitoring and procurement
-  • self-assessing our service against the Regulator's consumer standards and Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code
-  • supporting us in reviews of key service areas such as repairs, voids and lettings
-  • interpreting information from surveys such as STAR and audit review findings
-  • scrutinising our performance and holding us to account

# Our Promise



Our Promise developed from what you told us was important to you, and working with our involved tenants, shows you that we care, want to do our best for you and will be held accountable for what we do.

Our Tenant Voice Panel will be scrutinising information and holding us to account ensuring we meet our regulatory requirements and performance targets. Hearing the wider tenants voice through feedback about

the services we deliver helps to reinforce and provide direction on what your priorities are and what you would like services to look like.

Underpinning Our Promise, we have developed a range of our service leaflets which detail what you can expect from us across our main areas of service. These can be viewed online at [www.bernicia.com](http://www.bernicia.com) or if you prefer a paper copy please contact us 0344 800 3800.

## Getting to know you better

You told us that you wanted to be treated as an individual. For us to do this effectively, we need to 'get to know you better'. We will be getting in contact through an organisation acting on our behalf called MMC. They will send you a survey to confirm information we already hold about you and to provide information we do not yet have.

This will include confirming the date of birth we have for you along with contact information, and asking about your preference for how we communicate with you. Also about any support or health needs, and your household income. This information will help us to deliver more tailored services and provide information to you which is relevant to your needs.

Look out for your personal invite to take part and as a thank you, have the opportunity to be entered into a prize draw.

**What we know:**

• 43% of lead tenants male

• 54.5% of lead tenants female

• 53% of tenants 50+ years.

• Less than 1% tenants under 20 years

### For example:

**Support/health needs:**  
If there are any adjustments required to make it easier for you when we deliver a service to you

**Household income:**  
To signpost you to services or make you aware of any initiatives or support which you may be eligible to receive

You can have peace of mind that we will handle and process your data in accordance with Data Protection Legislation, storing this securely and reviewing it so we only hold the most up to date information for you.

## Making sense of the money

### Financial Overview:

As a G1 Governance-rated social housing provider, we must operate as a compliant, efficient and effective landlord. Our intention is always to be well governed, financially resilient, operating effectively, responsibly and investing wisely to fulfill our social purpose.

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	56,055	Salaries	10,980
Service charges	6,268	Routine maintenance	10,897
Water rates commission	350	Planned maintenance	2,962
Other income	2,384	Major repairs	13,538
Sale of internal services	141	Housing management	5,201
Surplus on the sale of assets	2,059	Overhead costs	5,431
Office rental income	171	Other costs	287
<b>Income</b>	<b>67,428</b>	Loan interest charges	5,751
		<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>55,047</b>
		<b>Cash Surplus</b>	<b>12,381</b>



2021/22 turnover was £72.931 million



# How each penny in every £1 was spent

Salaries	20p
Routine maintenance	20p
Planned maintenance	5p
Major repairs	25p
Housing management	9p
Overhead costs	10p
Other costs	1p
Loan interest charges	10p
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1.00</b>





# Review of 2021/22 - in the words of involved tenants

**Looking back over 2021/22, we must mention that this began with the phased easing of COVID-19 restrictions which provided great optimism of a return to a new normal.**

Whilst lockdown and the ensuing restrictions didn't stop our business as usual, it was good to, again, start meeting face-to-face with each other and Bernicia colleagues.

Throughout the year, we've scrutinised performance including customer feedback, undertook an assessment of Bernicia's compliance against the Regulator's Consumer Standards, and met with Bernicia's Executive Team to agree our annual priorities and debate the rent increase. This, as always, puts us in an excellent position to give our view of how Bernicia has performed during 2021/22.

## Home



**It's been great to see Bernicia restart its modernisation programme and resume a full repair service. As well as investing in existing homes, Bernicia has continued to fulfil its commitment to build more much needed new homes. Despite the emerging challenges of material and labour shortages, and rising costs, Bernicia has continued to perform well on delivering planned improvements, responsive repairs and new builds.**

We saw Bernicia respond to the unprecedented damage and disruption caused by storms Arwen, Barra and Malik. These events required immediate action to make properties safe and longer term planning to repair and reinstate structures damaged. We are aware of the huge number of homes affected and have confidence that Bernicia has worked in a planned and efficient way to carry out the work caused by the storms. Major events, such as storms, cannot be predicted therefore it was inevitable that normal service delivery was impacted.

Neither the pandemic or the storms distracted Bernicia from its health and safety obligations. This is evidenced in the information we receive on servicing and inspections. Therefore, we are assured that tenants remain safe in their homes and legal requirements have been met.

## Tenancy



**Good performance has been achieved in collecting rent and keeping arrears under control.**

The slower turnaround of re-letting properties has been monitored closely and we understand that the ability to re-let certain properties quickly has become more difficult. This is particularly evident in retirement housing schemes, where people are still cautious about moving into apartments with communal facilities. Bernicia has undertaken research and has a plan to promote the quality and benefits of living in its retirement schemes.

We continue to see a steady increase in Universal Credit cases as people's circumstances change. The removal of the £20 uplift in October 2021 undoubtedly was difficult to manage for UC claimants. We can see that Bernicia colleagues have worked hard to support tenants through difficult times whilst protecting the income streams needed to deliver the services we rely on.

Bernicia's Intensive Housing Management Team continued to provide the extra support needed by some to help manage their home and robust arrangements are in place to safeguard children and vulnerable adults.

## Neighbourhood



**From the "Your Say, Services Your Way" campaign it was abundantly clear that the appearance of neighbourhoods is vitally important.**

We are really pleased that Bernicia has listened and that we have been involved in reshaping the delivery of grounds maintenance services. This includes being involved in the decision to insource more work by increasing capacity in Bernicia's internal Estate Services Team, and in the retendering of the remaining work. Going forward we will work with Bernicia to monitor the performance of the internal team and contractors.

Bernicia continues to take anti-social behaviour extremely seriously and has robust processes and partnership arrangements in place to prevent and tackle this.

We continue to administer a Community Grant Fund, which gives us the opportunity to support projects and initiatives and see the difference our help has made.

## Customer experience



**We know good customer service is dependant on how we feel before, during and after we do business with Bernicia.**

This will only be achieved if Bernicia listens, hears and acts on what tenants and customers are saying and feeling.

We can evidence that Bernicia has a range of ways of hearing the tenant voice and has processes to capture information that helps deliver services to meet individual needs and preferences.

During the year, independent tenant engagement experts, TPAS, undertook a deep dive review of Bernicia's involvement and engagement arrangements. The outcome of this validates our view that Bernicia is a listening organisation that puts tenants at the heart of service design and delivery.

We know that Bernicia doesn't get everything right, but it learns when things go wrong. We also know that Bernicia isn't complacent and has ambitious plans to make the customer experience easier and simpler and get more things right first time.

## In summary



**In concluding our review of 2021/22, we are confident that Bernicia has risen to unprecedented challenges effectively and has never lost sight of being a customer focussed, listening organisation.**

Through our involvement, the information we have available to us and particularly our review of Bernicia's compliance with the Regulators' Consumer Standards, we are confident that Bernicia continued throughout 2021/22 to deliver against service standards and meet regulatory requirements and expectations.

Again, people have been kept safe, homes have been maintained, estate and neighbourhood services have been delivered, properties have been allocated fairly, rent has been collected and customers, including involved tenants, have remained left, right and centre of service delivery and decision making.





## Priorities:

During 2022/23 we have plans to:



- Continue our development in new homes, with 277 starting on site and 135 completions



- Carry out a review of our voids and lettings process



- Transform and future proof our approach to allocations



- Review results of STAR survey and develop action plan



- Implement recommendations and actions from Retirement Housing review



- Carry out a review of customer information 'getting to know you better'



# How to contact us

**Online:** [www.bernicia.com](http://www.bernicia.com)

**Email:** [contact@bernicia.com](mailto:contact@bernicia.com)

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**Letter:** Bernicia Group, Oakwood Way, Ashwood Business Park, Ashington NE63 0XF



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