

LOOKING BACK, WITH AN EYE TO THE FUTURE.



BERN^UICIA

ANNUAL
REVIEW
2022/23

NEWS & FINANCE

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COMMUNITY



“We look back at the past with an eye very much into the future.”

JOHN JOHNSTON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

A warm welcome to our review of 2022/23.

We couldn't begin our reflection of 2022/23 without acknowledging the affect the soaring cost of living has had, and continues to have, on many people's lives and circumstances.

Heating homes and buying basic commodities have seen unprecedented price increases, forcing people to make difficult choices in prioritising spend from very often, low or limited incomes.

We know times are difficult. Our business has not been exempt from adverse market and economic conditions which has made us even more determined to provide the services that tenants need and expect and, to reach those who need us most.

Despite tough times we have managed to achieve some good things that have delivered the right outcomes for tenants, their homes and neighbourhoods and wider communities.

An In Depth Assessment by the Regulator of Social Housing resulted in the highest grades for governance and financial viability being retained. This evidences and provides the confidence that we are financially sound and well managed.

Listening to tenants makes a huge contribution to being a strong organisation. It helps us make the right decisions on what to invest in. The first call on finance is, as always, core services and existing homes. However, we are able and committed to doing more. This includes providing new homes and adding value, where we can, in communities and across the North East region.

Involved tenants make sure we do listen and, that what is being said is factored into plans and priorities which ultimately produce tangible outcomes that add value and benefit. As always, we are unconditionally grateful to involved tenants for their oversight and scrutiny across housing services.

We hope you read on to take a look back over 2022/23 and that you can see many things that did make some big differences, but equally the smaller things that had just as much impact.

We're not simply a housing company, we're a people company.





Your home.

Repairing and maintaining your home

With just over 14,000 properties across the North East, we carried out 67,571 responsive repairs to homes and repairs on over 1,000 empty homes ready for new tenants to move in. We spent **£16.4 million** on improvement works and built **116 homes** at a cost of **£11.1 million**.

Performance highlights



95.43% of appointments made and kept



99.38% of emergency repairs completed within 24hrs



88.04% of tenants satisfied with the repairs service

Planned repairs

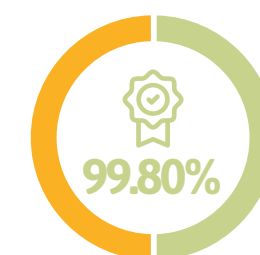
Continuing to invest in existing homes to provide you with safe, secure and warm housing remains a high priority.

£16.4 million was spent improving homes and surrounding environment last year, this included circa **£5.3 million** on building safety and £1.5m on retrofit works, which help to reduce energy consumption and emissions, also bringing benefits of a more comfortable and healthier home with lower fuel bills.

237 kitchens, 204 bathrooms, 705 new heating systems were fitted. **519** properties benefitted from new **upvc doors and windows**. Our retrofit work included replacement / upgraded insulation to 79 properties, 21 air source heat pumps and 15 Photo Voltaic Panel (Solar panels) systems installed.



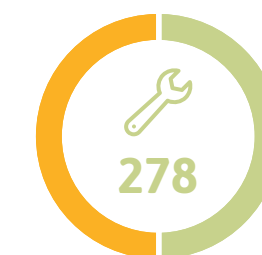
100% of homes meet the Decent Homes Standard



properties had a valid gas certificate at the end of the year



permissions granted for disabled facilities grant



aids and adaptations installed

Keeping you safe

Work continued in 2022/23, to keep homes and communal areas safe, resulting in **13,970 gas safety checks, 3619 electrical checks, 264 fire audits, 241 asbestos inspections and 1968 water hygiene samples, 504 lift system checks** being carried out. We also now conduct inspections of the condition of electrics within properties on a five year cycle which was previously every ten years.

Tenants were supported with the installation of **278 aids and adaptations** which were all carried out within our service level agreement of 28 days, with installs taking on average 17.22 days. We also provided permission for works identified for 217 disabled facilities grants.

INVESTING IN MORE NEW HOMES.

We continued to invest in new homes at a cost of **£11.1million**. It is great to report that we started on site with 141 and completed **116 new homes** which tenants are now benefitting from. We're slightly behind target on starts on site due to factors such as delays in planning decisions, but these remain within the pipeline for 2023/24, with material and labour shortages delaying completions.



invested in
new homes



Supporting you and your tenancy.

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

Allocating homes

Tenancies end for a number of reasons and when they do there is always a cost due to repairs, rent loss, re-letting etc. We also want to get these properties ready as quick as possible so we can allocate the home to a new tenant. Last year 1092 properties were re-let, with **89.56% of new tenants being satisfied with the lettings service.**

2022/23 Priority update

As an identified priority for 2022/23, we carried out a review of our voids and lettings process with involved tenants. From this we have made operational changes and are looking to further reduce the length of time taken to get the property ready to relet.

We also reviewed our approach to allocations to ensure that when a customer is looking for a home, the application process is clear and easy to access. To do this we engaged with the applicants on our waiting list and also heard from some new tenants to find out about their experience. We will use this valuable feedback to develop our approach going forward.





Supporting you in your home

We want to make sure that new tenancies get off to the best possible start and also existing tenancies are sustained. Our Intensive Housing Management team continued to offer help, advice and support to both new and existing tenants to help manage their homes.



2022/23 Priority update Retirement housing review

Last year, one of our priorities was to implement the recommendations and actions from Retirement Housing review. We are pleased to let you know that changes have been made to the housing structure and staff roles, robust marketing strategy has been developed and produced. Key partnerships with local authorities, have been strengthened, which we will build upon going into 2023/24 to create a modern and vibrant service offer. You will see our retirement offer of schemes and bungalows delivered under Bernicia Living.

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 higher cost of living and greater financial difficulties.



YOUR HOME IS PART OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD AND WIDER COMMUNITY.

Supporting you in your neighbourhood

Your home is part of a neighbourhood and wider community. Its cleanliness and safety of where you live, the prevention and tackling of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and the promotion of social and environmental wellbeing are essential factors to help communities thrive.

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



562 anti social behaviour cases were reported and responded to



37.4 average days to resolve a case



99.82% of cases were successfully resolved



Circa **300** estate inspections carried out



3 ASB cases related to hate crime

Community investment fund

Another year of continued investment to support local projects, initiatives and community groups through our Community Investment Fund, saw grants provided from **£195 to £14,300**, overall totalling **£69,849**

Performance highlights



average grant awarded



project applications received

Some of the projects benefitting included:

A memory lane dementia-friendly group, linking isolated rural communities in Northumberland.

Newcastle United Foundation Berwick Kicks sessions, providing free provision, and life changing experiences for young people aged between 11-19 years old.

Berwick Community Trust and the Here for You project providing employment and training advice, and a lifeline for residents experiencing a range of challenges due to the cost of living crisis.

A warm hub and supporting Newbiggin Heritage Partnership to deliver this important project.

Litter picking equipment for a residents group in Durham to support them in their community activity days.

Open for applications:

For projects and initiatives that will enhance the lives of residents and communities;

Contact: Customer Engagement Team,
customer.engagement@bernicia.com
or call 0344 8003800

Your community.



Adding value.

Employability

Our Employability team has focused on building relationships with businesses, charities, agencies and local communities. It has provided support to help people with barriers to work and prepare for and access jobs.

Focusing on the themes of: aspiration, skills and jobs.

Aspiration

We have tailored employability support, helping people to understand their opportunities and addressing some of the barriers that stand in their way.



1500 school children received employability support and advice



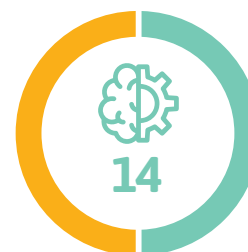
2 long term placements secured, after building relationship with a special needs school.



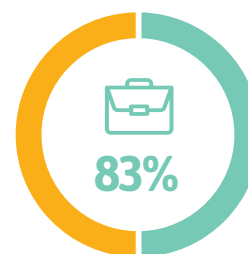
70 young people have accessed programs providing construction skills, basic education skills, and job readiness training for those struggling to engage in school or who have become NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training).

Skills

The employability team have delivered a blend of projects to help people get the skills they need to access work opportunities.



Apprenticeships



of attendees on New Start Program successfully gained full time employment



people with basic training skills



people accessed employability support and guidance sessions, including CV writing and interview technique

Jobs

Focussing on addressing barriers that prevent people from accessing opportunities.

Many projects deliver training with links to employers, so that beneficiaries have guaranteed interviews at the end of the programme.

Project with AkzoNobel has seen 12 people who faced barriers to employment work though a bespoke programme of job preparation, with four moving into available roles and others finding work in the area.



people have received the bespoke support and training they need to enter the job market



people into jobs – through targeted support, supporting people into industries with vacancies

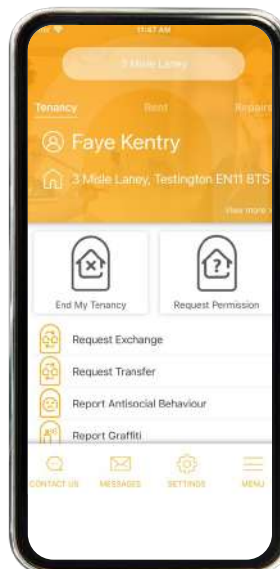
Your customer experience.

It's important to us that you can contact us in ways and at times that are convenient to you.

Contact us

Telephone remains one of the most popular ways for you to contact us. We answered just under 100,000 calls, with **76.8%** of these being answered within **40 seconds** against our target of 75%.

Can't speak to us during normal business hours? You can access your account or book a repair through MyBerncia.










Customer feedback

Tenants are at the heart of everything we do. We love to hear when things have gone well and also when we could have done better. This helps us to put things right, do better in the future and shape new ways of working.

Making complaints easier:

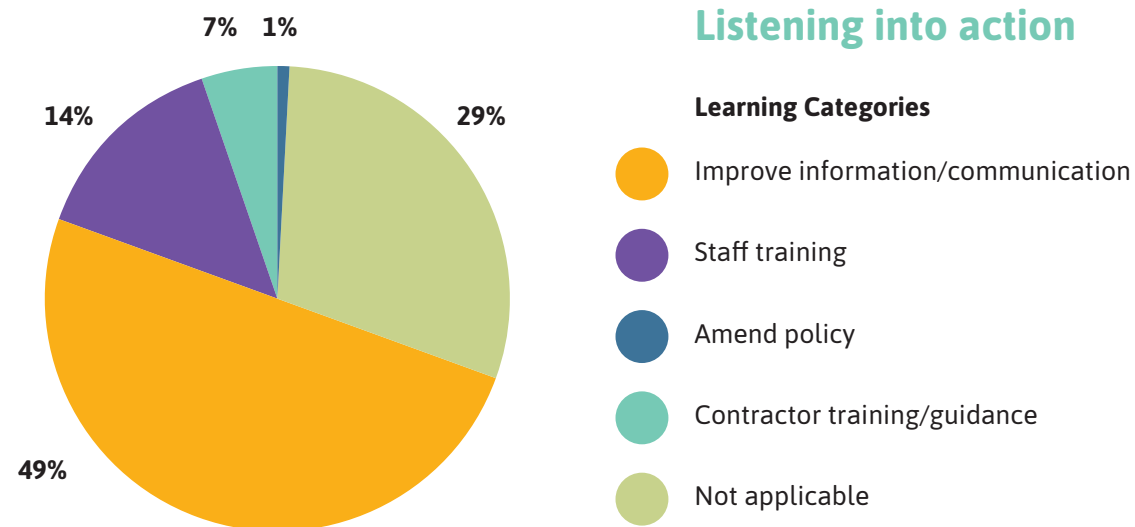
Working with involved tenants and Customer Services Committee we have reviewed our complaints process. The changes identified will come into effect in 2023/24, and include:

-  Moving from a 3 stage to a 2 stage complaints process
-  Reducing the overall time to handle your complaint through the complaint stages
-  Full policy and procedure review
-  Customer Service Excellence training for all colleagues
-  New Complaints system – helping us to use your feedback to make positive changes

We've self-assessed our new complaints service against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, to make sure we comply with it. You can see the full self assessment by visiting the complaints and compliments section of our website at www.bernicia.com

Performance highlights:





From listening and learning from feedback, we have reviewed and acted upon what you told us:



You said

Communication is an area which featured highly within feedback, from not receiving a call back after an enquiry or being provided with an update for an ongoing situation.

Why am I having to wait so long for a repair appointment?

I've been allocated a home, why is it taking so long till I sign up and receive my keys?



What we're doing

We're investing in both people and system:

- We've started to implement a new CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system. This will support visibility of customer enquiries and provide reminders to staff
- All staff have gone through Customer Service Excellence training, to improve the customer experience.

We've undertaken a review of the repairs journey and are identifying actions to drive greater efficiencies within this process which will increase capacity for repair appointments.

Whilst we have not been unaffected by market conditions such as labour and supply shortages, we are aware of actions we can take to improve this for customers.

A review has been undertaken with involved tenants and as a result of this:

- Clear roles and responsibilities identified for Estates Services and Void Teams
- Restructure of operations
- Performance measures and service standards re-evaluated and agreed.

The Tenant Voice Panel.

The Tenant Voice Panel has had a busy year, strengthening and making sure the tenants voice is heard loud and clear across our business.

The Tenant Voice Panel is instrumental in the everyday scrutiny and monitoring of our performance as well as making sure we comply with regulatory requirements are fundamental to their work, scrutinising, challenging and holding us to account on what matters to tenants.

As well as the above fundamentals, the Tenant Voice Panel has been key in reviews and projects covering:



Voids

Involvement in the management of vacant properties found that by repositioning resources and making changes to processes, there are things that will help reduce the time properties are empty.



Allocations

Involvement in the review of allocations brings forward options to ensure that demand for property remains healthy, and applying for a new home is easy, inclusive and simple.



Damp, Condensation and Mould

Involvement in the consolidated response to damp, condensation and mould ensures the issue is given the priority and attention it requires to ensure homes are safe and healthy environments for tenants.

2022/23 Priority updates

The results from STAR survey have been included in the Customer Service Excellence action plan which will see us focus on enhancing services, ensuring these are customer focussed and centric to everything we do.

We commenced collection of information as part of our 'Getting to know you better' campaign, which will help us to understand your needs and deliver services which reflect these. If you have not participated already, you will be receiving a survey from MMC who are conducting the survey on our behalf.

Getting involved

Feedback from our neighbourhoods and communities helps us to do better and shape new ways of working. We'd love to hear from you.

To get involved please call the Engagement Team on **0344 800 3800** or email **customer.engagement@bernicia.com**

Ways to get involved



Community investment - you can be an involved customer by meeting to consider applications received or be a successful applicant for the Community Grant



Feedback group - meeting to discuss trends arising out of complaints, satisfaction surveys and other feedback every quarter and scrutinise how we use this information.



Tenant Voice Panel - meets to review and scrutinise operational performances for services across the organisation.



Surveys - completing one of our short surveys provides useful insight to help us deliver great services and make improvements to meet your needs.



Making sense of the money.

2022/23 turnover was **£78.077 million**



Following In Depth Assessment:
Retained V1 and G1 rating



Maximising income and making the best use of resources means we can provide services that are relevant to, and valued by our tenants, stakeholders and communities.



What comes in:

£000's

Rents	58,756
Service charges	6,714
Water rates commission	388
Other income	2,308
Sale of internal services	163
Surplus on the sale of assets	2,703
Office rental income	166

Income

71,198

What goes out:

£000's

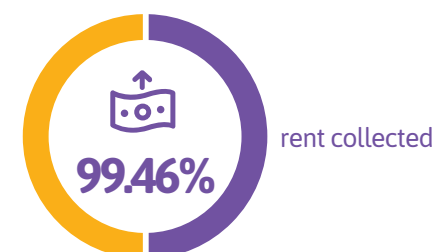
Salaries	11,302
Routine maintenance	13,724
Planned maintenance	3,541
Major repairs	12,970
Housing management	6,423
Overhead costs	5,805
Other costs	1,037
Loan interest charges	5,580

Expenditure

60,382

Cash Surplus

10,816



How each penny in every £1 was spent.

Salaries	19p
Routine maintenance	23p
Planned maintenance	6p
Major repairs	21p
Housing management	11p
Overhead costs	9p
Other costs	2p
Loan interest charges	9p
Total	£1.00



Involved Tenants' Review of 2022/23.

Undertaking an annual review provides a fantastic opportunity to look back over the past year. As with our lives, it's only when we stop to reflect that we have a true appreciation of the positive contribution involved tenants make in championing the voice of customers and making sure Bernicia delivers the promises it has made.

Throughout the year we've contributed to service reviews of allocations and lettings and the management of vacant properties. Additionally, we've been involved in customer journey mapping of the repairs service and even met with the Regulator of Social Housing about the new proactive approach to consumer regulation.

Long before the news broke about the tragic death of Awaab Ishak, we were busy working on a consolidated approach to tackling damp, condensation and mould. We'll continue to play an important role in monitoring performance in this area.

As well as our projects, business as usual continued with the scrutiny of performance and tenant feedback, which again makes us well placed to comment on Bernicia's performance, culture and relationships with tenants during 2022/23.

All of this work took place while we transitioned to our formal Tenant Voice Panel, chaired by Sheila Capuano, which alongside our Customer Feedback Panel sits firmly within Bernicia's governance structure.



Home.

Whilst we can't remember a year that hasn't been challenging, 2022/23 was certainly near the top. The repairs and maintenance service was no exception, facing difficult times through both legacy and new issues. The soaring costs of materials and the scarcity of labour, coupled with backlogs caused by adverse weather and COVID-19, placed immense pressure on responsive and planned repairs.

Then, just as there appeared to be a slight improvement in market conditions increased awareness of damp, condensation and mould resulted in higher call volumes placing additional pressures on resources

Resources had to be redirected to meet shifts in demand which, inevitably, resulted in longer waiting times for non-urgent repairs and the turnaround of vacant properties. However, we are pleased there was no need to suspend any services.

Despite these challenges, Bernicia managed the impacts on, and expectations of, tenants.

This is reflected in good performance relating to emergency repairs, appointments made and kept and satisfaction levels.

As always, the health and safety of tenants and their homes remained paramount. A real collaborative approach is used to make sure necessary checks and inspections are undertaken within timescale but, importantly, with customer care at the forefront of delivery.



Tenancy.

The cost of living crisis has affected everyone, but this has and continues to be particularly hard for low income households.

A good home is fundamental to wellbeing and we've been absolutely clear that Bernicia must continue to help tenants live well in their homes. Performance shows Bernicia has worked with tenants facing difficulties paying their rent through empathy, advice and signposting. Rent collection and arrears levels and the lower number of evictions demonstrate what this approach has achieved.

The work of the Intensive Housing Management Team has supported many tenants to sustain their tenancy. This was achieved through practical advice and guidance, the use of flexible support budgets and securing personal financial gains. A helping hand, at the right time can make a really big difference.

We know Bernicia is financially strong and we are pleased to report that appropriate funds have been made to support tenants facing hardship.

Operationally, longer relet times continued to be a focus for us. Whilst we can't overcome the difficulties market conditions impose, our review of the management of vacant properties found that by repositioning resources and making changes to processes there are opportunities to help reduce the time properties are empty.

Our involvement in the review of allocations brings forward options to ensure that demand for property remains healthy and applying for a new home is easy, inclusive and simple.

Neighbourhood.

This is the first year of new grounds maintenance arrangements. A larger proportion of this work is now carried out by the in-house team and, stronger contractor management arrangements are in place for the remainder.

Our work continued throughout the year in setting up performance measures and targets in this area, and designing information for tenants so that we are clear what services, and to what standard, we can expect for maintaining communal and landscaped areas.

There has been a decrease in complaints and an increase in positive feedback about communal landscaping this year which shows that the arrangements are having a positive impact.

We are really pleased to learn that the Estates Team was supplemented by six 'New Start' participants, five of whom went on to permanent employment. Three of which joined the in-house team.

Good work continued throughout 2022/23 in preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour. Through performance information we have evidence that tools, such as injunctions and enforcement, are effectively used in serious cases. We also have assurance that tenants are respected and supported during cases which can, sometimes, require real bravery and courage to come forward with evidence.

Dealing with anti-social behaviour often involves safeguarding and we know that the correct policies and procedures are in place, and adhered to, to protect children and vulnerable adults.

It would be remiss not to mention the good work of the Community Investment Panel who have allocated funds to support cohesive community activities and projects.



Customer experience.

We've all changed over the last two to three years. Like everyone tenants want value for money, easy access to services and quicker delivery. In doing so, tenants consistently reaffirm their wish to be treated as individuals.

Given the challenging times, quicker delivery hasn't been an easy expectation to meet, particularly with regards to repairs which is the most used and important service to tenants.

To fully understand the end-to-end repairs journey, we've been involved in a mapping exercise that identified which processes do and don't provide a good customer experience. This forms a blueprint for improving the way we do things now, but more importantly informing the design of a brand new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that will be built around customers and colleagues.

This is part of a Customer Service Excellence programme which also includes colleague refresher and enhanced training.

Complaints continue to be an extremely valuable source of feedback. In dealing with complaints, it's consistently apparent that customers want a speedy, outcome focused resolution. In response to this we have, in collaboration with the Customer Services Committee, reviewed and revised the complaints process from three stages to two. We look forward to the implementation of this along with the introduction of a new case handling system being built as the first module in the new CRM system – Salesforce.

Overall, in 2023, through solicited and unsolicited feedback, we've heard close to 12,000 customer voices.

We welcome the introduction of the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures and the intention to introduce proactive consumer regulation, both of which will strengthen landlord's accountability to tenants and build greater relationships and trust.

IN SUMMARY.

Looking back over 2022/23 we're confident that Bernicia continues to meet whatever challenges come along as well as having the determination and resilience to minimise the impact of these on tenants and customers.

Through the information we have available and can request, we are able to confirm that Bernicia has delivered against its service standards and continues to meet regulatory requirements and expectations during 2022/23.

In conclusion, people are safe in their homes, homes are well maintained, estate and neighbourhood services are delivered, properties are allocated fairly, rents are collected and customers remain at the forefront of decision making and service delivery.



Priorities:

We've included updates on priorities identified for 2022/23 within the relevant sections: here's where you will find them:

Your home

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

Your tenancy

- Carry out a review of our voids and lettings process
- Transform and future proof our approach to allocations
- Implement recommendations and actions from Retirement Housing review

Your customer experience

- Review results of STAR survey and develop action plan
- Carry out a review of customer information 'getting to know you better'

Here's our priorities for 2023/24 we have plans to:



Continue our development in new homes with **229** starting on site and **88** completions.



Commence with collection of Tenant Satisfaction Measure data



Implement the marketing strategy for Bernicia Living brand



Prepare for new regulation



Implement the new void process



Undertake procurement process for key services (Major works, ground maintenance and cleaning)



Begin to implement the new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system

How to contact us

Online: www.bernicia.com

Email: contact@bernicia.com

Phone: 0344 800 3800

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



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