



Heart
of Medway



Annual Report

2020-2021

About this report

This annual report is for you, our customers. It tells you how we've performed over the past year against our 2018-21 Strategic Plan.

Our customers are at the heart of everything we do and we work hard to provide great services.

This report shows the impact we've had on our customers, what we're doing well and where we need to improve.

We hope you enjoy looking back on 2020-21 and hearing some of our stories from what was an extraordinary year for us all.

It was an extremely challenging year but a lot of what we did put us in a good position to continue to support our customers and their communities through the recovery of COVID-19.



In 2020, we were providing and managing

838 homes



for over 2,095 people



Chair's Foreword

I'm delighted to be able to present to you this review of my first full year as Chair of Heart of Medway Housing Association.

'Unprecedented' is a word that has been used many times in the last 18 months but there's no better word to describe what we all faced in 2020-21, and indeed continue to face.

Our work during the year was dominated by the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic as we adapted our ways of working in order to be able to continue to deliver essential services while keeping people safe and

supported. Restrictions, which were in place for almost the entire year that this review covers, meant that the health, safety and wellbeing of our customers and colleagues were, and of course continue to be, our absolute priority.

While it's true to say that 2020-21 was one of our most challenging years, it was also a year that we can be extremely proud of.

We quickly redeployed our colleagues to be able to work remotely and digitally; we mobilised our services to make sure we were able to carry out essential and emergency repairs and we reached out to our most vulnerable customers who were most affected by the pandemic.

Our Foyers continued to operate successfully throughout lockdown with round the clock cover, and the service received good Quality Assessment Framework ratings following an inspection by Medway Council.

While there were no new properties completed during the year, £18 million was spent on sites that will provide 146 new units in 2021-22. I'm also proud to say that 100% of homes met the Decent Homes Standard.

I'd like to thank our colleagues who showed great resilience, commitment, and an unquestioning willingness and ability to adapt their way of working in order to meet our customers' needs; our partners who worked with us to support our community; and most importantly, I'd like to thank our customers for their patience and understanding at a time when we all had to make significant changes to the way we live and work.

**We know that some of the challenges remain as we
continue to deal with the fallout of the pandemic but
I'm confident that the changes we made in 2020-21
have prepared us well for what lies ahead.**



Lord Roy Kennedy

Chair of the Heart of Medway Board

Supporting customers and our community during the COVID-19 pandemic

March 2020 will be remembered for the start of the COVID-19 lockdown when we had to respond quickly and transform the way we work.

Our colleagues pulled together in a fantastic team effort to make sure we were still able to provide essential services to customers, while making sure the most vulnerable in our communities were supported.

We began a programme to call all of our customers aged 70 and over to check on them and find out what support they needed during the first lockdown of 2020. We made more than 900 calls in total.





This morning I received a phone call from mhs homes.

I was so surprised to get the call. A nice young lady asked me if I was ok and said that the call was because I was a vulnerable age and did I need anybody to get my shopping. She also said I could phone even if I wanted to talk to someone. How very lovely, what a nice girl and what a great surprise.



mhs customer



Not only that, we teamed up with Age UK Medway and provided funds for their meals on wheels service to enable them to deliver food to vulnerable people in the community.

As the pandemic continued and it become more and more apparent that partnership and team working were needed to support our community.

We provided six drivers and vans to deliver the food parcels and our colleagues were proud to be able to make a difference to the lives of vulnerable people in our community.

When Medway Council called for volunteers to help deliver food parcels to 6,000 high risk local residents, we were quick to respond.

Priority one:

To be a great landlord

During 2020-21:

Rent arrears

Our rent arrears have increased since 2019-2020 from 4.62% to 5.21% at year end 2020-21.

2020-21 has been a tough year financially for many of our customers due to many being put on furlough or being made redundant.

We've seen an increase in the number of customers claiming Universal Credit. We're working with these customers to manage their rent arrears.



As at 31 March 2020

15% (127/835)

of customers were claiming UC

As at 31 March 2021

22% (183/823)

of customers were claiming UC

Manage tenancy issues with successful outcomes



We helped households manage tenancy issues with successful outcomes.

The majority of these issues were about:



Helping to resolve antisocial behaviour



Supporting customers through domestic abuse



Making sure customers receive the correct benefit entitlements

Antisocial behaviour (ASB)

We resolved 15 reports of antisocial behaviour.

We experienced an increase in reports of ASB during May and June 2020 which was during the first lockdown period. During the same period, there was a national increase of 10% in ASB cases. The number of reports have since reduced and we're continuing to work on resolving the remaining reports.

The most common ASB reports included:



Verbal/harassment/
intimidation/
threatening behaviour



Drugs/substance misuse/
drug dealing



Noise

Homeless allocation

The Kent's Local Authorities' street counts and estimates show that 101 people were sleeping rough in Kent in a single night in autumn 2020.

31.03%

of our homes rented through Homechoice went to a homeless household during 2020-21.

We believe that decent housing is a basic human right and we'll continue working with local agencies to make sure we're supporting the homeless.

31.03%



Abandoned calls

More than 62,000 calls came into our call centre during 2020-21. Of these, 21,206 (34%) were abandoned by our customers.

This isn't acceptable and we've been working to improve our performance.

**These are figures for the whole of mhs homes group.*

Foyers

Our Foyers give young people a safe place to call home so they can get the support they need to live independently.



68.7% of young people

in our Foyers were in employment, education or training at the end of March 2021.

However, our teams are continuously working to get more of our young people into employment, education or training.

19-year old Logan was in foster care before moving to our Endeavour Foyer in September last year, and began his new career almost immediately after.



A lot has changed since I moved in, for the good.

I've gained more independence and it's allowed me to experience what it's like to live on my own. I got a job as a motor vehicle apprentice three days after moving in and I've been working ever since. I can learn about the ups and downs that come with living by yourself. I want to experience all of it so that's why I moved here.

Logan



Repairs



100%

We're extremely proud to say that **100%** of our homes met the Decent Homes Standard by the end of **March 2021**.

During 2020-21 we:



Spent £640,000

on maintaining and improving our estates.



Invested £667,000

on our existing homes to make sure they're safe and secure for the future.

Carried out approx. 1,089 repairs to our homes.

88% of these were completed right first time.

 Our target is 89%



We aim to complete repairs within 10 days,
but it took us an average of 14.5 calendar days.

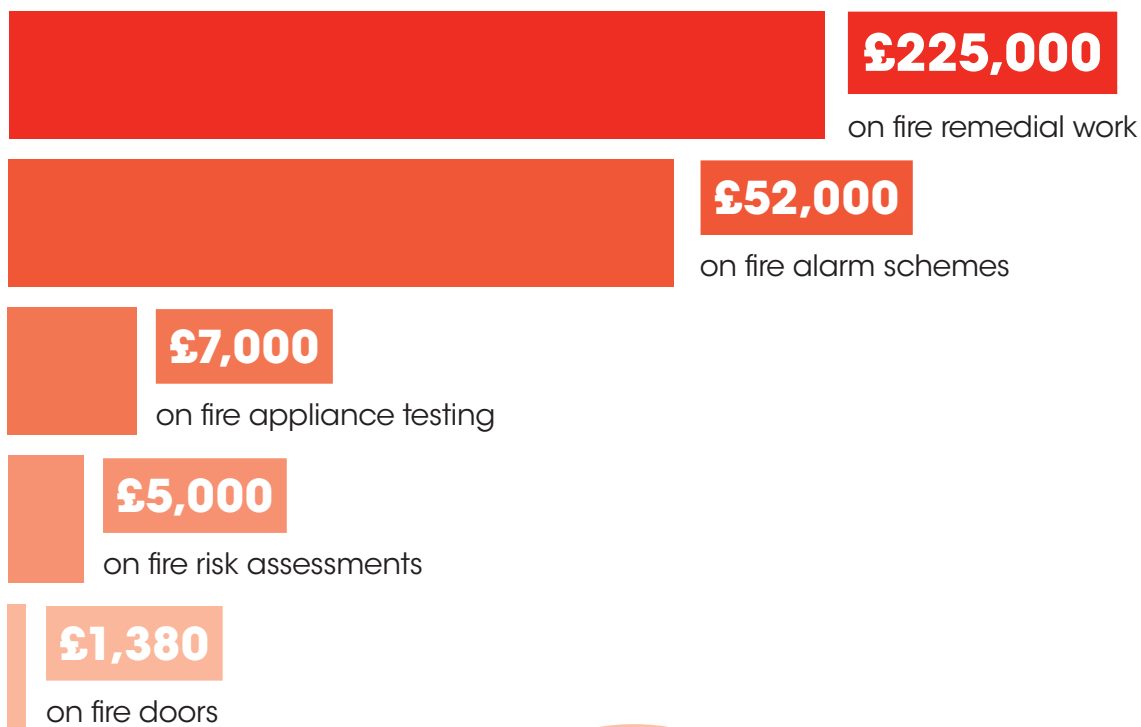
Our team is working on how we can reduce this.

During 2020-21, while the country was in lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions were in place, we operated an urgent, emergency, essential repairs only service to make sure we were able to carry out these repairs.

Fire safety

Our customers' safety is our absolute priority.

We've spent £290,380 on fire safety works, including:



We're planning to spend another £310,000 on
fire safety in 2021-22.

Connecting with customers through technology



75.97% of customers are registered with My Account, with 55.43% of customers actively using it to manage their tenancy.

We've continued to improve My Account so customers can manage their tenancy 24/7.

Some of the improvements include:



Being able to create a direct debit
(this is currently only available for customers not in arrears)



Checking when their estate was last maintained, communal areas cleaned, and health and safety checks were completed



Applying for and tracking their mutual exchange

Customer satisfaction

During 2020-21, 263 customers completed a customer satisfaction survey – this is 31% of our customers.

The survey focused on customer satisfaction across various services we provide. We always like to hear feedback from our customers, both good and bad. While we want our customers to have a good experience with us, we know we don't always get it right and hearing about these occasions means we know where we must make improvements.

Here are a few of our customers' comments:

“ You have always been kind and understanding. ”

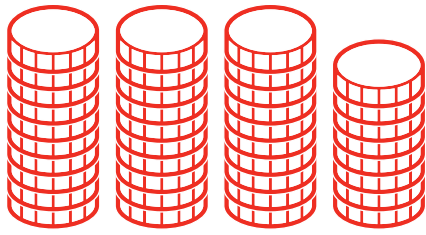
“ Always been helpful and if anything is needed they get to it right away. ”

“ Not listened to. ”



63.50%

are satisfied with the overall service we provide



82.99%

**are satisfied their rent
provides value for money**



71.43%

**are satisfied we provide a
safe and secure home**

“ Hard to get hold of anyone to discuss any issues I have. ”

**“ Seems impossible to get anybody out to do repairs
that are needed. ”**



70.08%

are satisfied we're easy to deal with



78.57%

are satisfied with the quality of their home



56% **are satisfied with our repairs and maintenance service**



36.51% are satisfied with their communal area
and upkeep of the grounds

46.65% are satisfied with how we handle reports
of antisocial behaviour



36.62% are satisfied with how we handle
their complaints

47.3% are satisfied with our online services



75.66 % are satisfied with their most recent
call to us

**“ Long waiting time when calling, nobody ever calls back
when you need them to do not very easy to deal with. ”**

**Looking at these results, we know we need to improve in
multiple areas.**

Our colleagues will be working with our new Customer Experience Group, which will be set up in July 2021, and our existing Customer Scrutiny Panel to provide customers with a better and consistent service.

We're also launching our service standards to customers too. These will tell all of our customers what they can expect from us.



Our service improvements

2020-21 was an unusual year for us all.

While focusing on the changes we needed to make to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, we continued to improve our services so they're better for all our customers.

Here are just some of the improvements we made:



Worked with some of our partners to demonstrate **safety features** such as **smoke alarms** in customers' homes



Added new features to **My Account**, including the ability for customers to see when their estate was **last maintained** and **manage and track** mutual exchanges



Improved the way our **Estates Team** work so they can do more whilst in your area, including **raising repairs**



Made plans to launch a new **Customer Experience Group** in 2021



Created a new role for a **Customer Engagement Officer** to work with customers on **improving our services**



During the year, our Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) also reviewed and gave us recommendations to improve multiple services and areas of the business. Here are some of their recommendations.

Customers' experience during the COVID-19 pandemic:



Keep customers updated on changes to colleagues delivering services in the community



Consider how technology can be used to continue offering services, like virtual tours of new homes



Use the notice boards to remind customers of key information



Continue calling elderly customers and review the list to make sure all vulnerable customers are supported

Using My Account:



Add more functionality and key information relevant to individual homes



Run a campaign to get more customers signed up and using My Account



Allow customers to book more than one repair per visit

Complaints

We've resolved **53 complaints** from customers.

We take all complaints seriously and we're continuing to review and improve our complaints process to make sure they're dealt with quickly, and customers are kept up to date throughout.

67%

**of the complaints we
received were logged through
My Account.**



**The average time it took us
to resolve a complaint was**

8.25 days

 **Our target is seven days**
67.3% met this target

Our average time is below the **10 day target** time set by the **Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code**, but we'll continue working to make sure we hit our target.

Priority two:

To meet the housing crisis locally

During 2020-21 we:

Started on site to build 100 new homes.

With the closure of building sites for several months due to the pandemic, we're proud of what we've been able to achieve.



**This is an investment of £17,122,751 and a total
investment of £22,015,176 over the three years of our
Strategic Plan 2018-2021.**



67 households
moved into one of
our homes.

It took us on average, 31.5 days
to turnaround our empty
properties so they're ready for
new customers.




Target: 20 days




Actual: 31.5 days

This is not acceptable.

We know we need to improve.

In 2021-22 we'll be setting up a project team to look at this process
so we can take meaningful action to improve this.

Jade's story

One of those people we provided a new home for was 21-year old Jade. She moved into one of the apartments on Brunswick Street in February with her partner and their one-year old daughter, and was delighted with her new home.





**Life's been great since we moved in,
the apartment's lovely – nice and quiet too!**

I love the bedrooms, they're so spacious and all in all there's plenty of room for me, my partner and our baby daughter.

The location is perfect because my mother and my father-in-law are close by, I can walk to work and so can my partner. We're literally in the middle of everything we need to be.

Before we were here, I lived with my partner at his Dad's house with the baby in a single bedroom. So we've gone from having three in a bedroom to three in a whole flat which is amazing.

Life's now less stressful because we've got our own environment and we can do things when we want to do them – it's really nice.



Jade



Priority three:

Be financially strong and lean

Our annual turnover for 2020-21 was ££5.7 million. Our turnover is always reinvested back into providing safe and sustainable homes, and improving our services and communities.

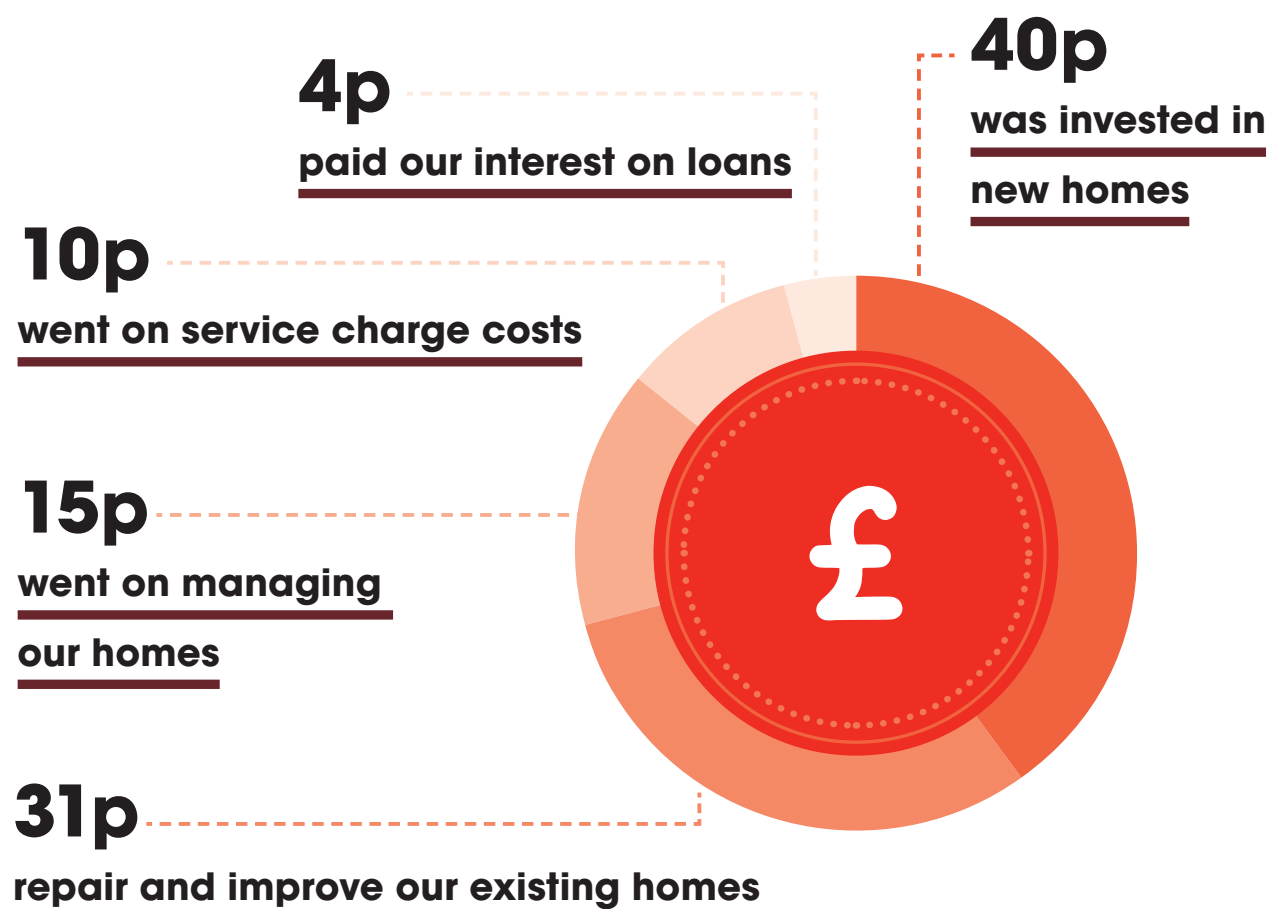
Like most organisations, we were financially impacted by the COVID -19 pandemic and our annual turnover is a decline compared to the previous year. As a financially strong organisation, this impact was minimal but did mean we were able to support our customers to make sure they had the essentials needed to live.



Where our income came from:



For every £1 of our income:



How we compare to other housing providers

We're constantly trying to improve our services to you, and we use data provided by Housemark to compare how we're performing, in key areas, with other housing associations across England.

Housemark is a data and insight company for the UK housing sector and is jointly owned by the National Housing Federation and the Chartered Institute for Housing.

We want our customers to be happy with the level of service you receive so we're sharing this information with you too.

Date period 2020-2021	How other HAs perform on average	Our performance
Current tenant arrears as a percentage of the annual rent debit*	4.08%	5.21% Below average
Average number of calendar days taken to complete repairs	14.5 days	13.4 days Below average
Percentage of responsive repairs completed at the first visit	90.6%	87.8% Below average
Average re-let time in days (standard works) *	50 days	31.54 days Above average

*This data is only reported for General Needs and Sheltered Living customers

Looking ahead

Our plans for the future

**As we enter a new three year Strategic Plan,
our focus will be on:**



Providing safe and sustainable homes



Being a caring and visible landlord



**Focusing on the customer's voice and
community leadership**



Having organisational resilience and agility

You can find out more about our performance and future plans by reading:



Our Strategic Plan 2021-2024



Our Financial Statements

You can also keep up to date with what we're doing throughout the year
by signing up to our customer newsletter.

We hope you found our annual report interesting.

If you have any comments on how we can improve it, including if there's any other information you'd like to see, please let us know by emailing communications@mhs.org.uk

**If you'd like easier access
to some of our services,
sign up to**

My Account

**It allows you to manage
your tenancy online 24/7.**



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mhs.org.uk

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