

customer strategy



believe
housing



A vertical decorative image on the left side of the page. It shows a green indoor plant with long, thin leaves hanging from a wooden shelf against a light pink wall. At the bottom, a portion of a grey textured sofa is visible.

contents

4 **introduction: responding to a changing world**

6 **strategic context**

8 **our corporate plan**

10 **our customer strategy objectives**

11 a) Understanding our customers and their needs

13 b) Embedding a customer ethos

16 c) Delivering a great experience

22 **measuring success**

25 **summary**

26 **appendix one: tenant satisfaction measures 2024/25**

27 **appendix two: customer strategy action plan**

1.

introduction: responding to a changing world

‘We live in challenging times’ is an overused phrase but one that has had particular resonance for our customers and the housing sector in recent years.

The impact of the pandemic was felt long after life returned to normal; and many of us felt that things were just starting to settle when the war in Ukraine began, triggering an energy and cost of living crisis.

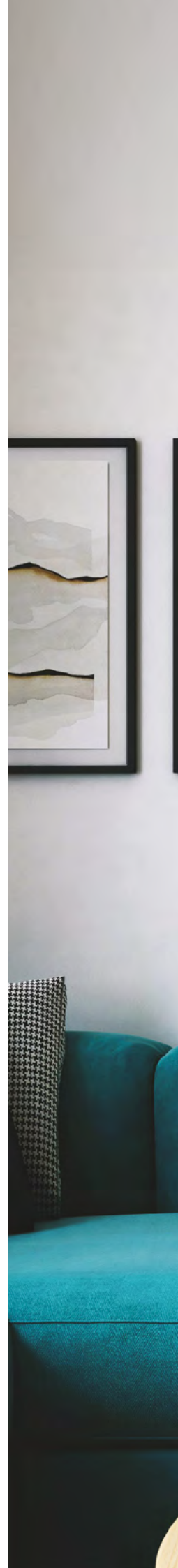
It is hard for everyone to comprehend the number of ongoing and sustained challenges we all face. Many of us have not experienced anything like this before. Delivering our vision of life without barriers has become a bigger challenge but one that has never been more important that we rise to.

Our customers are our number one priority. They are why we exist as a business and who we serve.

We understand that it takes more than four walls and a roof to make a home. A healthy and secure home in a pleasant, safe neighbourhood are at the core of what we aim to deliver. But they are not the only things that we provide to support our customers to live their lives without barriers.

Our services and support are what make our homes great places to live, enabling customers to fulfil their potential. We improve our customers’ lives by providing healthy and affordable homes and enhancing our communities.

This Customer Strategy sets out how we understand and respond to our customers’ needs by delivering great services. These services reflect the diversity of our customers and their situations in a way that is simple and straightforward, through relationships that are built on mutual trust and respect.





strategic context

Social housing has come under close scrutiny in recent years, particularly following the tragedies at Grenfell Tower and the death of Awaab Ishak, highlighting issues within the sector that demonstrate a lack of customer focus.

This has prompted a renewed national emphasis on consumer regulation, safety and standards. Recent changes have included:

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 – containing the government’s expectations of social housing providers in respect of transparency and accountability, regulation and consumer standards, outlined below.

The Regulator of Social Housing’s consumer standards – the standards that all registered providers must meet when delivering services to their customers. New, more detailed standards were introduced in April 2024, along with a tighter inspection regime and accountability framework to hold landlords to greater account in service delivery and ensure that they are hearing the voice of their customers.

The Housing Ombudsman’s statutory Complaint Handling Code – also introduced in April 2024, which all landlords must comply with. It sets out the Housing Ombudsman’s expectations for complaint handling and learning from complaints, with the ultimate aim that this will result in better service delivery for customers. The Housing Ombudsman is also taking a much more proactive approach in identifying poor practice and publishing research into key areas for customer service improvement. This includes recent reports highlighting attitudes, respect and rights, and knowledge and information management.

Building safety – following the Grenfell Tower tragedy and the highly publicised cases of damp and mould, there has been an increased focus on keeping people safe in their homes. Awaab’s Law, named after the two-year-old boy who died as a result of respiratory problems caused by mould, will introduce statutory timescales for addressing damp and mould problems in social housing. The Building Safety Act also sets out new ways to make buildings safer and give tenants more rights, powers and protections.

The other major factor that continues to have significant impact on customers and housing providers has been the cost of living crisis.

The Better Social Housing Review – the National Housing Federation and Chartered Institute of Housing’s joint review looking at how the sector is responding to these challenges and recommendations for the future.

The other major factor that continues to have significant impact on customers and housing providers has been the cost of living crisis. Increases in energy costs have been driving price rises that have affected all of us over the last two years. However, the impact has been greatest on people with the lowest incomes, which includes many of our customers.

The economic outlook remains uncertain and further challenges will continue to impact our customers for the foreseeable future. As well as continuing to provide advice and support on income maximisation and energy use reduction, the crisis has reinforced the need to improve the energy efficiency of our homes, ensuring healthy and affordable homes but also reflecting our commitment to sustainability and protecting our planet for future generations.



3.

our corporate plan

Our commitment to customers is woven through our vision and values. It underpins how we do business and is intrinsic to our Corporate Plan and front and centre in our colleagues' behaviours.

It sets out how we aim to achieve our vision of life without barriers for our customers.

It includes our core purpose, which is focused on our customers and how we all work together to deliver for them:

“We improve our customers’ lives by providing healthy and affordable homes and enhancing our communities”.

At believe housing we all agree to do the right thing for our customers, for our colleagues, and for our business.

If we look after our colleagues, they work together for the good of our customers. If we focus on the right things for our customers, this gives us a sustainable business. If our business is secure, we can better meet current and future customer needs.

Our Corporate Plan is underpinned by a number of corporate documents that support the delivery of our objectives and link and impact across each other to support the delivery of better services for customers.



Our business plan is our long term, strategic financial plan, setting out our 30-year investment and spending plans and how these will be financed. The plan sets out how we will achieve our objectives while maintaining our financial strength and stability for the foreseeable future.

Our Asset and Place Strategy ensures that we continue to deliver high quality homes that meet people's needs. Our place-based approach means that we look at the wider needs of our communities and neighbourhoods and not just individual properties in isolation. This includes understanding our customers' experiences of living in their homes and communities.

Our Green Plan reflects our recognition that we have a responsibility to protect our planet for future generations by reducing carbon emissions and helping to limit the effects of climate change. Our ambitious Green Plan includes reduction targets for our homes, our business and our people. This also has considerable benefits for existing customers struggling with the costs of heating their homes.

Our Development Strategy 'More homes, better places' has set out our approach to developing new homes that meet the needs of our current and future customers, ensuring a sustainable future for our business as well as our neighbourhoods. A priority for this year has been to review this strategy, setting out our longer-term ambition for how we will continue to deliver new homes and great places that people want to live in.

Our Moving Forward programme is a collection of projects to improve our systems and processes and develop new ways of working to deliver better experiences and outcomes for our customers.

The Believe in People Strategy sets out our workforce development plan, including supporting and equipping our people with the skills and knowledge to deliver great customer experiences. Our recently agreed corporate behaviours framework supports the delivery of our ambitions by setting out how we work together to deliver for customers. They set out what is expected of all of us, a clear framework that articulates believe housing's approach to delivering for our customers.



For our customers, we aim to:

- Provide services that have the biggest impact in supporting them
- Create thriving, safe and sustainable places and homes that people want to live in.

This Customer Strategy sets out how we will deliver these objectives; great services that support our customers and provide homes and communities that people want to live in.

4.

our customer strategy objectives

We have worked with customers and colleagues to develop three strategic objectives to support the delivery of our Customer Strategy:

- Understanding our customers and their needs.
- Embedding a customer ethos.
- Delivering a great customer experience.

Our improvement plan is framed around these objectives, setting out our vision for improving our understanding of customers and their needs, how we meet these and deliver a great customer experience with the services, homes and communities we provide.



The Housing Ombudsman published its 'Spotlight report on attitudes, respect and rights', which stated:

“more than half of [social housing] households will include someone with a disability or long-term illness and 40% of social tenants report issues with mental health compared to 16% of owner occupiers.”

Our customers also reflect this level of health need, which has implications for not just the services and homes we deliver but how these need to be delivered.

a) Understanding our customers and their needs

County Durham

About 99% of our homes are located within County Durham, a large local authority area with a population of more than half a million people. 97% of residents identify as white and there are relatively high levels of deprivation in the county, with mixes of relatively affluent communities living alongside areas of relative poverty.

Income and employment levels are relatively low compared with the rest of England and health

outcomes are particularly low. However, more positively, access to housing and services is some of the best in the country, although this is within the context of a national housing crisis.

believe housing has 18,256 homes with more than 22,000 tenancies. Our understanding of our customer profile is one of the areas that we want to improve during the life of this Customer Strategy, but broadly:

- 60% of our tenants are women, 40% are men
- 50% of our households have only one person living in them
- 25% of our households are couples
- 25% of our households are families
- 15% are single parents
- 10% are two parent households living with their children
- About 70% of our households contain people of working age
- 30% are retired
- About two-thirds of our customers are on Housing Benefit or Universal Credit for some or all of their housing costs
- A significant proportion of our customers do not have access to the internet or use digital services.

As well as our 22,000 tenants, there are also another 5,400 applicants for housing who we have processed to go on the county's housing register, Durham Key Options. This is about half the total on the county's register.

Of the customers applying for housing with us through Durham Key Options, about 20% are existing believe housing tenants. Overall, just under half of the applicants on the register are adequately housed, while the rest, 55%, have some level of need that means that they have been awarded priority for rehousing. Of these 5,400 applicants that we have processed, 60% earn less than £15,000 a year. Nearly all of our applicants for housing, many of whom will go on to live with us, earn less than the county average wage of £32,000.

As well as customers who access our homes through Durham Key Options, we also let Rent to Buy homes through a separate process. All of these applicants must be in work when they apply for a Rent to Buy home and on average are on higher incomes than our social and affordable rent customers. They make up about 2% of our customer base.

Many of our customers are older or have medical or health needs that affect their ability to live independently. Many of our homes are bungalows, suitable for older people and many have adaptations for people who are disabled. Last year, a quarter of our lets were to people who needed an adapted property.

Managing and using our customer data

As well as improving the collection of information about our customers and their needs, we also need to improve the way that we manage and use this information. This is not just about our customers, but also about their homes and their experiences of living in them.



Improved data management and using this data to inform and shape our delivery of homes and services will:

- Support the delivery of improved services to individuals, through development of a single view of our customer, with relevant information accessible to enable all colleagues to reflect customer needs and preferences in the services we deliver and the way we deliver them.
- Ensure customers only need to 'tell us once', with confidence that this information will be held to support the delivery of appropriate services, sensitively and in confidence.
- Enable us to carry out better analysis of our customer and homes data and make more informed decisions that help shape service delivery and development.
- Enable us to deliver more predictive services and support, using artificial intelligence (AI) and data analysis for more seamless customer experiences and more proactive, preventative services.

Understanding our customers and their needs - our priority projects:

Developing customer profiles

Develop a greater understanding of our customers, their characteristics and needs to better inform our planning and strategic decision-making.

Smart homes project

Using sensors, technology and Internet of Things (IoT) to improve our customer experience, improving our understanding of our homes and how our customers live in them.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

Quarterly collection of the suite of TSMs set by the Regulator of Social Housing and using these to understand our customers' views of our performance, over time and compared with others.



b) Embedding a customer ethos

One of our core values is to do the right thing for our customers. This doesn't just mean delivering great services and homes to customers, but how we deliver them.

We aim to treat all our customers fairly, politely and with respect.

We aim to communicate information that is relevant and useful in a clear, accessible and timely manner, to enable our customers to enjoy living in their homes and neighbourhoods safely and peacefully.

We aim to work in partnership, based on mutual trust, respect and clear understanding of our customers' rights and our respective responsibilities.

We recognise that while we aim to work together with our customers in this way, that much of the responsibility for achieving this lies with us. Doing the right thing for our customers means that we work hard to address any imbalance and create a partnership of equals between us and our customers.



Listening and learning

One of the important ways that we demonstrate that we live our value of doing the right thing for our customers is by listening to their feedback. We listen and learn from this feedback to improve services and reflect on what customers tell us.

We collect customer views in a number of different ways, including satisfaction surveys, focus groups and tenant meetings, and through third party advocates such as local MPs and councillors.

We want to make sure that we are hearing from the broadest range of our customers and are already making progress in reviewing

and improving our approach to capturing and acting on feedback.

Complaints are an important element of our approach to learning from customer feedback. We know that sometimes we don't get things right and, as well as addressing this and making it right for the customer, we need to reflect on what went wrong and what we need to learn from this to avoid it happening again.

Part of this learning relates to how we manage the complaints process itself and this is an area where we are making significant changes and improvements already.

Diversity and meeting different needs

Our approach to providing homes and services ensures that we do what we can to make sure that we aren't, inadvertently, one of life's barriers. We deliver homes and services that are relevant, appropriate and meet people's needs, enabling them to enjoy living in their home and community and sustain their tenancy.

believe housing is committed to reflecting the diversity of the community and ensuring

the inclusion of people from different backgrounds. We do this by providing homes and services that are relevant, responsive and sensitive to different needs and provide choice for current and future customers.

This area is a priority for further development over the life of this strategy. We will deliver our tailored services project to improve how we respond to differing needs as well as improving the information we hold and how we use this.

Our colleagues

The key to delivering a great customer ethos is our people. Our colleagues are the ones that put into words and actions what our strategies and policies set out. It is through what we actually do and how we do it that customers judge our performance.

We know from our regular customer surveys and feedback received through compliments that our colleagues are living our value of doing the right thing for our customer. This feedback says repeatedly that in the majority of our interactions we treat customers pleasantly, politely and with respect, and that as individuals we are helpful and often

go the extra mile. However, we know there is always room for improvement. Sometimes, the way that we work, our systems and our interactions with each other do not always result in the best outcomes or experiences for our customers. This is an important element of our Corporate Plan with a number of projects aimed at addressing this to improve our customers' experience.

The behaviours work that has been developed as part of our Believe in People Strategy, one of our key corporate projects, is an important element in developing our customer ethos.

Embedding a customer ethos - our priority projects:

Believe in People Strategy

Ensuring our colleagues are supported and equipped to deliver great services to customers.

Tailored services offer

A suite of projects that will enable us to deliver services that reflect different customer needs and improve our customer experiences.

Complaints improvement plan

To improve our handling of the complaints process and increase customer satisfaction with the way we deal with complaints.



c) Delivering a great experience

At the heart of our offer to customers is delivering healthy and affordable homes that people feel safe in and communities that they feel proud to be part of.

Our approach to managing our homes and neighbourhoods focuses on our customers, their needs and expectations and considers how people live in and experience their homes and neighbourhoods. We believe people's homes and neighbourhoods should provide a safe and comfortable place that facilitate people living life to the full and must not represent another barrier that people need to overcome.



Good to great

We know from customer feedback that levels of satisfaction with our services, our homes and neighbourhoods are relatively good.

We compare well with others and customers are mostly happy with what we deliver. However, we cannot be complacent and need to remain committed to delivering more and better for our customers.

We will meet changing customer needs and expectations while ensuring that we meet statutory and regulatory requirements. Our commitment to continuous improvement and investment in our colleagues, systems and processes will take us from good to great experiences for our customers.

Listening to our customers

Over recent years we have reviewed and reflected on what customers have been telling us as we developed our Moving Forward project and operating trials, developing new ways of working to deliver better outcomes for customers.

From our Moving Forward research, learning from complaints and customer perception surveys, customers told us that:

- We do well with straightforward service requests but start to fall down when things get complex or involve more than one team.
- Sometimes our communication with customers is poor.
- It's not always easy to know who in our organisation is dealing with an issue and we don't make it easy for customers to navigate our service areas.
- Our responses are not always timely and our delivery timescales could improve.
- The complaint handling process needs to improve.

Reflecting on this feedback and that from colleagues and other stakeholders we have agreed projects that support the delivery of our customer objectives and that address this feedback from customers:

- Simpler processes.
- Better communication.
- Improved resolution at first point of contact
 - Customers only need to tell their story once
 - Fewer handoffs between teams.
- Better coordination of delivery across teams.





Delivering a great experience

Digital services

Access to well-designed, accessible digital services is transforming our lives, allowing us to carry out transactions at a time and place to suit us.

However, we recognise that digital services are not for everyone and are not suitable for all services or interactions.

Many of our customers can't or don't want to access services digitally and, even for those who do, we know that complex or personal issues are better done with a real person. We are committed to providing a range of service options for customers, ones that all deliver a great customer experience, with consistent outcomes no matter how customers contact us.

We will use our data to understand our customers' communication preferences and use these to tailor our service delivery. Our digital experience will enable customers to carry out a wide range of transactional services, seamlessly and with confidence, at a time that suits them, using AI and other predictive analytics to maximise efficiency and consistency. This will free up our colleagues to deal with more complex or sensitive issues.

We will offer a similar seamless and high-quality experience for customers who don't access our services digitally, through their preferred communication method, supported by our systems and processes to deliver a great experience at first point of contact.

We offer a good range of digital services at present with good levels of take up and user satisfaction. Our app and portal are well established and well-used, and nearly all applicants for housing apply and bid for properties online. However, we know that the pace of change is particularly fast in this area and that we need to continuously improve our digital offers and further explore the potential of AI to meet customer expectations and deliver a great digital experience.

Digital service delivery improvement is a key priority for us in our corporate projects to improve systems and processes.

Investing in our customers and communities

Our commitment to supporting our customers and enhancing communities is reflected in our community investment programme.

Our investment helps by building capacity and supporting the delivery of community-based services and infrastructure, directly delivering on our commitment to enhance our communities.

Our employability project supports customers with training and employment opportunities, addressing barriers that might exist, providing advice, support and opportunities. Helping people access work and training not only helps them sustain their tenancy it also has significant positive impact on participants' mental health, benefiting them, their families and communities.

We delivered £5.37m of social value in 2023/24 through our activity supporting local voluntary and community groups, investing directly back into our customers and their neighbourhoods. For every £1 we invest, it generates £21.44 of social value benefiting our customers and communities.

We delivered £5.37m of social value through our community investment programme in 2023/24

Our commitment to investing in customers and communities is also reflected in our approach to empowering and enabling customers, supporting them in developing the skills and knowledge needed not just to sustain their tenancies, but make the most of life's opportunities and live life without barriers.



Healthy and affordable homes in places that people want to live

At the heart of our offer to customers are homes; healthy and affordable homes that people feel safe and secure in and that are part of communities that people feel proud of.

Our core housing management and frontline services are the foundation of the delivery of our customer offer. Our neighbourhoods, income, repairs, customer hub and other teams are the face of our business, to our customers and our communities, all contributing to our vision and core purpose.

A major factor in a healthy home is the health of the people within the home. Mental health, financial issues and isolation contribute significantly to the health of a household. We provide services to customers to support them in difficult times, including our Urgent Support Team in times of crisis, and our sustainment and localised neighbourhood services to assist people when they need support with everyday issues.

Our policies on antisocial behaviour, domestic abuse and safeguarding ensure our teams provide comprehensive, responsive support in times of need. These are areas of increased activity for our teams given the retraction of services provided by statutory agencies following years of austerity.

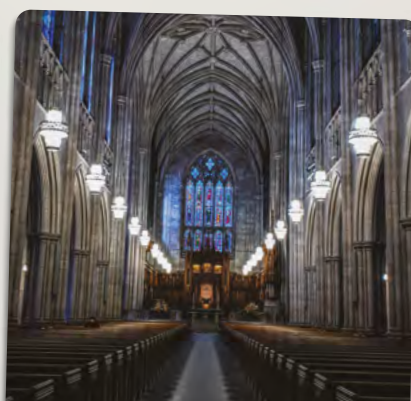
We know that our repairs and maintenance service is viewed by customers as the most important service we deliver and is their highest priority. The pandemic posed a number of challenges for us, and its effects were felt long after many other areas of life started to get back to normal. The cost of living crisis, labour and supply shortages alongside heightened awareness of issues such as damp and mould have also impacted on our ability to meet customer expectations.

Our repairs project began in 2023, using customer and colleague feedback to identify areas of improvement and opportunities to deliver better services and outcomes for customers. Improvements identified within the project include root and branch review of our processes and a new IT system dedicated solely to repairs and maintenance.

Our Compliance Team, working within both assets and repairs, ensure the health and safety of our customers. They make sure we meet our statutory and regulatory responsibilities to keep our customers safe while respecting their rights and never losing sight of the fact that this is their home.

Delivering a great customer experience - our priority projects:

Systems and processes	Simplified customer journeys and processes, informed by insight and data, with the right systems that best support the effective delivery of our services, including an improved self-service offer.
Future operating model	A new operating model informed by our Moving Forward trials to deliver services that better meet customer demand and expectations.
Repairs and maintenance	A repairs and maintenance service delivery model that can meet increasing demand delivers to standards that our customers expect.
Asset and Place Strategy	A dynamic asset management strategy based on reliable data and customer insight, providing a long-term view of the investment required to meet future standards and changing expectations.
Longer-term development ambition	Our Development Strategy. Agreeing our medium-term plans to deliver homes and places where people want to live and setting out our longer-term ambition.
Green Plan	How we plan to meet our decarbonisation targets and become a net-zero business by 2050.



5.

measuring success

We will monitor our progress in delivering our Customer Strategy through the suite of performance measures that are set by the Regulator of Social Housing, the 22 Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).

These will enable us to track our progress over time, from our current benchmark, but also enable us to compare our performance objectively against others.

We also assess our compliance with the regulator's consumer standards each year and will continue to do this and address any gaps.

Publication of our TSMs each year will also enable customers to see how we perform, increasing transparency and accountability.

Attached at appendix one are the TSMs for quarter one, quarter two and quarter three 2024/25.

These will be supplemented by other business metrics in our corporate scorecard.



We have agreed a comprehensive set of improvement projects that will deliver a step change in our ability to deliver our vision for our customers



We believe in life without barriers





6.

summary

Customers have always been our focus and this strategy reaffirms how we plan to take their experience from good to great as we navigate these challenging times together.

We believe in life without barriers; this means ensuring that we support our customers by providing healthy and affordable homes and enhancing our communities.

But it also means that we must do everything that we can to make sure that we aren't, inadvertently, one of the barriers that our customers must overcome.

We have agreed a comprehensive set of improvement projects that will deliver a step change in our ability to deliver our vision for our customers. They reflect our commitment to mutual respect, inclusion and to services that reflect the different needs and the differences of our customers.

We believe in life without barriers.

appendix one: tenant satisfaction measures 2024/25

Tenant Satisfaction Measures	2024 (Q1)	2024 (Q2)	2024 (Q3)
TP01: Overall satisfaction	78.6%	79.3%	78.6%
TP02: Satisfaction with repairs	78.4%	77.5%	76.3%
TP03: Satisfaction with time taken to complete the most recent repair	72.0%	74.8%	74.1%
TP04: Satisfaction that the home is well maintained	77.2%	77.0%	76.3%
TP05: Satisfaction that the home is safe	83.1%	83.8%	83.1%
TP06: Satisfaction that believe housing listens to tenant views and acts upon them	70.9%	70.1%	69.7%
TP07: Satisfaction that believe housing keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them	77.2%	76.6%	76.4%
TP08: Agreement that believe housing treats tenants fairly and with respect	84.7%	84.0%	83.7%
TP09: Satisfaction with believe housing's approach to handling complaints	32.8%	35.8%	33.5%
TP10: Satisfaction that believe housing keeps communal areas clean and well maintained	70.4%	76.1%	76.2%
TP11: Satisfaction that believe housing makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods	71.5%	72.1%	72.2%
TP12: Satisfaction with believe housing's approach to handling antisocial behaviour	62.7	64.5%	64.3%

Repairs completed within target timescale:
Emergency: 97.7% **Non-emergency: 89.6%**

Gas safety
checks:
99.9%

Fire safety
checks:
100%

Asbestos safety
checks:
100%

Water safety
checks:
100%

Lift safety
checks:
100%

appendix two: customer strategy action plan

Action	Lead	Completion date
Understanding our customers and their needs		
Developing customer profiles	Executive Director of Governance and Strategy	July 2025
Tenant satisfaction measures	Executive Director of Governance and Strategy	Ongoing
Smart homes project	Director of Assets and Development	May 2026
Embedding a customer ethos		
Believe in People Strategy	Executive Director of Culture, Technology and Transformation	March 2025 (Action plan review)
Tailored services offer	Director of Neighbourhoods and Customer Experience	April 2025
Complaints improvement plan	Assistant Director of Strategy and Insight	April 2025
Delivering a great customer experience		
Systems and processes	Executive Director of Culture, Technology and Transformation	March 2028
Future operating model	Executive Director of Culture, Technology and Transformation	March 2026
Repairs and maintenance	Director of Property Repairs	September 2025
Asset and place	Director of Assets and Development	May 2026
Longer-term development ambition	Director of Assets and Development	March 2029
Green plan	Director of Assets and Development	July 2026



Call: **0300 1311 999**

Email: **hello@believehousing.co.uk**

Visit: **www.believehousing.co.uk**

Coast House, Spectrum 4,
Spectrum Business Park, Seaham, SR7 7TT



believehousing



believehousing