

Barnet Homes Annual Review



2022-23

01 Welcome from our Chief Executive

Tim Mulvenna

Welcome to our 2022-23 annual review for Barnet Homes residents. This review looks back at our performance against the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).

These TSMs have been introduced by the Regulator of Social Housing, and must be collected by all social housing providers in England and Wales. They help us build a picture of how we are serving our residents, and how we can continue to improve our services in the future.

This report covers our overall resident satisfaction, as well as our performance in each of the five TSM areas:

- Keeping your property in good repair
- Maintaining building safety.
- Respectful and helpful engagement
- Effective handling of complaints
- Responsible neighbourhood management

The last year has been a challenging one for Barnet Homes and the social housing sector in general. The cost of living crisis has affected us all, but an increase in raw material costs, coupled with rising interest rates has meant our services have become increasingly more expensive to deliver.

Together with the effects of Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and a tough market for recruiting new staff; we acknowledge that some of our TSMs are not at the level we look to deliver.

But we are committed to delivering fantastic services to our residents and will continue to work as hard as possible to increase overall resident satisfaction.

I'm happy to share our performance against these key Tenant Satisfaction Measures with you here, as we strive to continue to deliver great service to our customers.

Tim



02 Keeping your property in good repair

The social housing sector has been focused on treating cases of damp and mould in residents' homes, and Barnet Homes is no different in prioritising this work. We have established a Healthy Homes Team, which will invest over £2m in identifying and treating cases of damp and mould in residents' homes.

If you spot signs of damp or mould in your home please report it to us immediately, even if the problem only seems to be small. To report damp or mould, please contact our Customer Contact Team on 020 8080 6587 or by emailing talktous@barnethomes.org.

When we launched the new Healthy Homes Team, Ryan Bolton, The Barnet Group's Head of Repairs and Estates said "This £2m investment in our homes shows that we are committed to making our residents' homes the best possible place to live. We have a detailed action plan to tackle damp and mould in homes, which we are now working on."

Homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard - 0.42%

Ensuring our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard is extremely important to us, as this standard gives us a benchmark to ensure that all our homes are fit and safe for our residents to live in.

We are proud that the vast majority of our homes (99.58%) reach the Decent Homes Standard, and we are committed to ensuring the remaining 0.42% reach this standard over the coming year.

Satisfaction with repairs - 64.4%

Repairs completed within target time-scale - 74.0%

Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair - 61.9%

Since bringing our repairs service back in-house in 2020, we have continued to strive to provide a service which meets our residents' needs. Repairs are the main reason the majority of our residents contact us and we are committed to increasing the level of satisfaction with our repairs service.

Unfortunately, this year our overall satisfaction has fallen short of our target. There are many external factors which have affected our service, including Brexit, the war in Ukraine and a shortage of raw materials. The biggest impact on our service has been an increased difficulty in recruiting repairs operatives. We have introduced improved terms and conditions and retention bonuses for repairs staff, which we hope will go some way towards meeting the recruitment shortfall.

03 Maintaining building safety

Our top priority is keeping our residents safe and healthy in their homes. Since 2019 we have invested £72m in fire safety to ensure our properties continue to be safe for generations to come. These works included the installation of improved fireproofing, sprinklers and fire detection systems. These works have taken place in our tower blocks, and our care homes and sheltered housing schemes where some of the most vulnerable people in our community live.

Gas safety checks completed - 99.99%

We are proud of our gas safety check record, which ensures residents are safe from any faults in their gas systems. We have routinely achieved 100% compliance with gas safety checks. This year we have fallen short due to some no-access issues with residents. We are working closely with these residents to ensure safety checks can take place and they can remain safe in their homes.

Satisfaction that the home is well maintained - 65.8%

Recognizing the importance of feeling secure within our residents homes extends beyond routine checks; it encompasses the overall safety of the living environment. We employ various measures to ensure residents feel protected, prioritizing the attentive consideration and response to their concerns. Among the prominent concerns voiced by residents is the security of front entrance doors in their respective housing blocks.

To address this issue, we have installed new front door entry systems, particularly on the Grahame Park Estate. We have also increased our collaborative working with the local Safer Neighbourhoods Team on the estate to continue our work making Grahame Park a great place to live.

Our rolling plan of major works, as well as our responsive repairs service ensures that our homes continue to be well-maintained.

Satisfaction that the home is safe - 71.7%

Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, the Government introduced the Building Safety Act and Fire Safety Act. These two acts will ensure that residents remain safe in their home, and Barnet Homes is committed to following them to the letter.

Barnet Homes' Building Safety team is now in place and is working to meet the requirements of the Building Safety Act. They are actively engaging with residents across Barnet Homes' housing stock; providing more 'traditional' resident engagement, but also using new technologies such as Internet of Things connected devices in communal areas as cutting edge software to provide 3D mapping of buildings.

04 Respectful and helpful engagement

Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them - 69%

In early 2021, our Performance Advisory Group underwent a transformation, evolving into our comprehensive Resident Board. This board represents the pinnacle of involvement, requiring a significant commitment from its members, yet offering an exciting and rewarding opportunity for residents.

The Resident Board is accountable to The Barnet Group Board, as well as to tenants and leaseholders residing in properties managed by Barnet Homes. It will continue to play a crucial role in overseeing our operational performance, influencing strategic priorities and policies, and providing recommendations to The Barnet Group Board.

Within its membership, the Resident Board now includes a Group Board Director who not only chairs the Resident Board but is also a resident. These structural changes aim to foster a closer relationship between the two boards. Eamon McGoldrick, Chair of the Barnet Group Board, expressed his enthusiasm, stating, "I am absolutely delighted that The Barnet Group has established a Resident Board. It is essential to have residents' views at the core of our decision-making processes.

The Resident Board will bring significant value by assisting in monitoring day-to-day service delivery and ensuring that the residents' voice is heard in every decision made by the Group Board."

The Resident Board's scope is comprehensive, covering a range of topics discussed with the Barnet Homes management team, including resident satisfaction, safety and assurance, the Customer Experience Programme, repairs and gas, complaints, anti-social behaviour, and building and fire safety.

Interacting with residents and responding to your perspectives is a crucial aspect of our approach to delivering services for you.

To reinforce this commitment, we collaborated directly with residents to collaboratively develop our Resident Engagement Strategy. This strategy emphasizes the various ways in which residents can collaborate with us to shape and enhance the services we provide.

It is essential for residents to feel that their feedback is heard and acted upon. We provide a spectrum of engagement

opportunities, ranging from more casual involvement to direct participation in activities such as procurement, serving on interview panels, and inspecting and assessing the quality of our housing.

05 Effective handling of complaints

Satisfaction that the we listen to tenant views and acts upon them - 49.5%

Listening to feedback from our customers is crucial to continue to make improvements to our services and better serve our community.

One of the most effective ways we can do this is by responding to complaints and acting on them. Here are some examples of how we have changed our services in responding to complaints.

You said: we were not responding to right to buy queries fast enough.

We: recruited a new senior housing officer to focus on right to buy performance and we started working more closely with Barnet Council's legal team which is involved in the process.

You said: you were experiencing difficulty getting through on the phone or staying connected to our Customer Contact Team.

We: worked with our IT provider to put in place a fix for the IT issues. We continue to test the system to make it more stable and improve residents' experience.

You said: we were not always keeping you updated often enough about the progress of your Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) case.

Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling complaints - 31.5%

We: undertook a review of our ASB officers' casework, and managers also discussed with officers in their monthly one-to-one sessions the need to ensure timely contact with residents with an open ASB case. We appreciate that all residents who report ASB expect timely communication, and because of your feedback we are reviewing our ASB processes and are also recruiting a new ASB officer to support the team in tackling all allegations of ASB.

You said: it sometimes takes too long for some areas of work to be completed

We: carried out a focused exercise on our recruitment strategy for plastering and carpentry, as we had some resourcing issues in these areas. Whilst plastering is still a challenge nationally, our waiting time for carpentry appointments reduced significantly.

You said: Surveyors do not always follow through on promises, leading to you having to chase us to get the works completed.

We: rolled out a new pre-inspection process, including manager audits to ensure commitments are met.

Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect - 67.5%

You said: staff in the Repairs service aren't always keeping you updated about appointment changes and repair delays

We: have introduced weekly monitoring of repairs appointments that are rescheduled and have taken action to reduce the volume of appointments that are moved. Where an appointment has to be moved, members of our Planning team now try to contact customers by phone at least twice before the appointment is rescheduled. Where repairs have been delayed due to unforeseen circumstances, a member of our Customer Contact Team has been making outbound calls to customers to keep them updated about progress.

You said: too many appointments were being rearranged without notice, and on occasion, jobs were double booked.

We: analysed our processes for booking jobs and are planning to identify where jobs are raised twice. We are also reviewing whether the same trades are raised on multiple jobs, so that we can try to consolidate them and give residents one appointment rather than two or three.

06 Responsible neighbourhood management

Satisfaction that the landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained - 57.7%

Our caretakers are there to keep your estates clean and tidy. They take great pride in their work, and treat your homes like their own.

Working with residents, we have created service standards which will shape how our caretakers work, and make residents aware of the levels of service we strive to deliver, as well as holding our teams accountable.



Public art arrives at Grahame Park

We partnered with Global Street Art for an exciting project, transforming some of the walls around the Grahame Park Estate into public art galleries. The project gave world-class artists who were looking for places to paint murals the opportunity to share their work on the estate.

Pictured above.

Asset Management Strategies launched

The right of our residents to live in a decent home that is safe, healthy and fit for purpose is at the heart of everything we do. Our new Asset Management Strategy, launched in summer 2022, sets out how:

- we understand the condition of residents' homes
- we continue to maintain homes to ensure they are safe, energy efficient and provide a healthy fit for purpose living environment
- we improve our estates to make them great places to live

07 Launching our Customer Experience Strategy

In 2022 we launched our new Customer Experience Strategy, which will take us through to 2024. Barnet Homes residents played a key role in shaping the focus areas of the new strategy.

The goals of the strategy are to have:

1. Easy to access, responsive services
2. Compassion for vulnerable customers
3. Customer excellence central to all we do

Why these goals?

Our engagement with customers, colleagues and a review of insight such as complaints showed us that:

- Lots of customers have a 'right first time' experience but some customers find it difficult to get the advice and assistance they need. Issues include long wait times when calling us and delays receiving responses to emails, having calls returned or having their repair or issue fully resolved.
- Customers who have gone through traumatic experiences may find it difficult to contact us when they need assistance so it is really important that we help in the right way when they do contact us. Some vulnerable customers that we assist need additional support to navigate our services such as

- completing forms and applications.
- Whilst we regularly receive positive feedback about our people and services, sometimes our customer care falls short and we don't always fully consider customers when providing services or when we plan and communicate changes that will affect customers.

What will we focus on first?

We have developed a supporting action plan for the Customer Experience Strategy, the progress of which will be regularly reviewed by customers and senior managers. Our key focus areas and activities for the first year (September 2022 to August 2023) are outlined below under each goal.

Goal 1. Easy to access, responsive services Our focus areas for the first year will be to:

- Have more Customer Service Officers and more Operatives working on gas repairs during the colder months when we have higher demand
- Improve our systems to minimise issues for customers such as calls not connecting or being cut off
- Give teams tools to resolve customer requests quickly and provide customers with updates where these will be helpful including when we know there will be a delay or other issues
- Introduce call recording for all customer contact teams to regularly assess our customer care and the advice we provide
- Increase our presence on estates and improve our responsiveness to estate issues including those regarding cleanliness and communal repairs
- Provide residents with the ability to:
 - report their repair and book a repair appointment online
 - check planned future works to their home or block
- We also want to provide tenants and leaseholders with the ability to check their balance online.

Goal 2. Compassion for vulnerable customers

Our focus areas for the first year will be to:

- Provide training and improved guidance to teams who regularly assist vulnerable customers to improve how we engage with and support vulnerable people and people affected by trauma.
- Improve our communications with vulnerable customers, including our housing advice letters and the communications that we send about rent arrears.
- Set up a specialist Domestic Abuse Team to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness because of domestic Abuse.

Goal 3. Customer excellence will be central to all we do

Our focus areas for the first year will be to:

- Introduce customer care principles that all teams and contractors work to, focused on what customers have told us is important
- Introduce regular customer focus groups to better understand how we can improve customer experience on an ongoing basis
- Create opportunities to involve customers more when we are planning and communicating changes and events that will affect them
- Create more opportunities to hear about the experience of the people supported by Your Choice (Barnet)
- Address recurring issues that cause problems for customers such as rescheduled appointments for repairs.

What impact will these changes have for Customers?

We have a suite of measures to assess the impact of the changes on customers and the people that we support. These include:

- An increase in overall satisfaction with our services
- More customers agreeing that we treat them fairly and with respect
- More customers satisfied that we are easy to deal with
- Less complaints about customer care
- Less complaints about repair delays and other delays
- Improved call and email response wait times

08 Housing Options is ten years old!



A lot of work has taken place to turn Housing Options into the high-performing homelessness and lettings service that it is today. We want to look back on some of the key moments of the last 10 years of Housing Options, and to reflect on where the service is currently at.

Key moments so far:

April 2012 Barnet Homes takes over the Housing Needs & Resources service from London Borough of Barnet (LBB), and re-brands it as Housing Options.

October 2012 Let2Barnet is launched, our private lettings service that helps housing applicants to find suitable accommodation in the private rented sector. In the past seven years, Let2Barnet has let 4,735 suitable, affordable homes to housing applicants, preventing many households from needing to move into temporary accommodation.

August 2013 The Welfare Reform Taskforce (WRTF) is set up. Now re-branded as BOOST, the service provides employment support, training and welfare benefits advice to Barnet residents. In the past 5 years, BOOST have supported almost 2,000 residents into work.

2015 Housing Options secured funding to set up our own women's refuge, and we launched the Domestic Violence and Abuse One Stop Shop in the same year. The One Stop Shop's multi-agency approach helps

survivors of domestic abuse to receive the support that they need all under one roof.

April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act requires local authorities to provide homelessness prevention assistance at an early stage, and to help homeless households to obtain accommodation to relieve homelessness where prevention was not possible. In mid-2022, independent auditors concluded that Housing Options is compliant with the new Act, giving the service the highest grade possible.

2018 Housing Options developed in-house services for single homeless applicants and created a Rough Sleeper Team who work with partners such as Homeless Action in Barnet and Together in Barnet to provide a range of support services to people who are sleeping rough.

2020 the service continued to support housing applicants during the pandemic – working from home and in the office in a Covid-secure way, and housing rough sleepers safely through the government's 'Everyone in' initiative.

Where we are now?

This is a challenging time for residents and for local authorities. We are seeing an increase in applications for housing assistance, due to the cost-of-living crisis, with the courts again processing evictions from the private rented sector, and with international conflicts leading to an increase in refugees who need our help. Additionally, private sector rents have increased by 16% this year, and the supply of properties across London has reduced by 35%, which makes it very difficult for people to afford to live in London.

We are doing our very best to support our residents at this difficult time, by:

- Building and buying more suitable affordable homes - for example by delivering almost 600 homes so far through Opendoor Homes, and spending £1.3m to adapt properties to make them medically suitable for households' needs.
- Supporting households to move out of temporary accommodation (TA) into longer-term properties. The number of households living in TA is at its lowest level for more than 10 years.
- Bidding successfully for new funding. We have been awarded £7.5m to buy 55

studio properties to support residents who are sleeping rough, and awarded £250k to set up a dedicated Domestic Abuse Team.

- Through our new Customer Experience Strategy, we will focus on improving support for our more vulnerable customers – for example by helping people to engage with our services, and delivering 'trauma-informed' training to our front-line staff-members.

