

SANDWELL ANNUAL REPORT FOR TENANTS

20
24

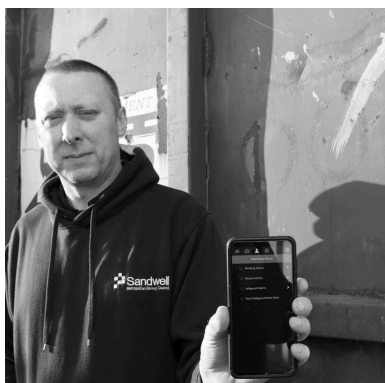
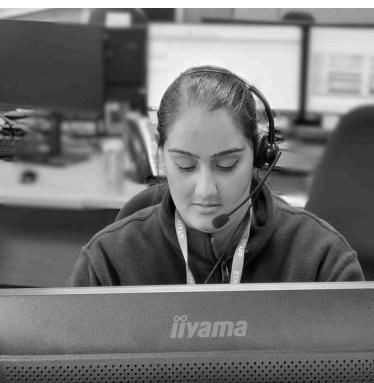


Table Of Contents

01

A Word From ...

An introduction from Councillor Smith and Alan Lunt to the Annual Report for Tenants.

02

Our Stock and What We Spend

Looking at how many properties we look after and what we spend overall

03

Investing in Your Home

Looking at how we have invested in our homes as well as adaptation for disabled residents

04

How We Handle Repairs

How many repairs we have completed and in what time.

05

How We Measure Your Satisfaction

Looking at the results from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures

06

How We Listen to You

How we deal with your complaints and what action we have taken from feedback methods

07

How We Improve Our Community Together

Dealing with anti-social behaviour, Home Checks and how to get involved

07

How We Tackle Housing Fraud

Looking at what the fraud team have been investigating and what actions it have taken

08

How We Keep Your Home Safe

What things have we been doing to keep you safe in your home



A WORD FROM ...

Councillor Vicki Smith

Sandwell Council's Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Dear Tenant,

As the newly appointed Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development, I am eager to engage with you and learn how we can continue enhancing our housing services.

Our commitment is to provide you with a high standard of service and quality homes. We are actively working on building new houses while also investing in our existing properties to make them safe, energy-efficient, and welcoming.

This report outlines the progress made over the past year, and I would like to extend my gratitude to my predecessor, the housing team, and especially you, our tenants, for your valuable feedback. Your input is crucial as we strive for continuous improvement, and I look forward to listening to you in the year ahead.

Alan Lunt

Executive Director - Place

Dear Tenant,

I am delighted to be able to contribute to my first Annual Report, having been appointed Executive Director Place, with overall responsibility for housing, in May of this year.

Our tenants will know that the last few years has been a period of significant change for the council. We emerged from government intervention during April 2024, with the Government and our auditors reassured that the council is now moving forward positively. We now have a new Chief Executive and leadership team, a new Cabinet following Mays local elections, and a new found sense of positivity and determination to be an excellent council, led by our elected councillors but with a strong focus on delivering high quality customer care.

We know we have some significant challenges in housing – the new 'Consumer Standards' regulatory framework requires that we listen more to our tenants, have better data on the condition of our homes and provide responsive and accessible services as a landlord. Our regular engagement with tenants tells us we need to be better at communicating and we know we have to improve our response to ensuring our homes are safe and well maintained for our tenants and leaseholders. We are working closely with the Regulator of Social Housing to improve our performance and our desire is to be a high quality, responsive and caring social landlord, who listens to it's tenants and leaseholders. I hope that this Annual Report is the start of a positive journey towards achieving that objective and I look forward to the delivering the significant improvements that we need to serve you more effectively.



CLLR. V SMITH

Handwritten signature of Vicki Smith in blue ink.



A. LUNT

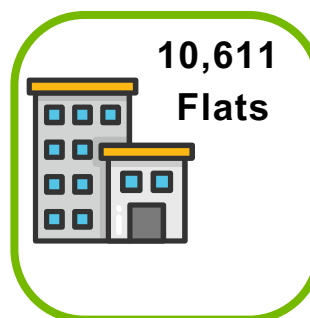
Handwritten signature of Alan Lunt in blue ink.

OUR STOCK AND WHAT WE SPEND

At the end of the financial year our housing stock consisted of **27,053 properties***.

5,042 of our existing tenants are on our Housing Register waiting list, making up 29% of the list.

We have established a new task force called the best use of stock team to help tenants in overcrowded or under-occupied homes to move to more suitable accommodation.



* These figures exclude the private finance initiative area of Harvills Hawthorn - more information can be found at www.sandwell.gov.uk/hawthorn-fields

Right to Buy

176 homes were sold under Right to Buy. £13 million of income was generated from homes sold, whilst providing £11.8 million in discounts for our tenants.

Right to Buy helps tenants to buy their homes at a discounted rate. For more information visit;

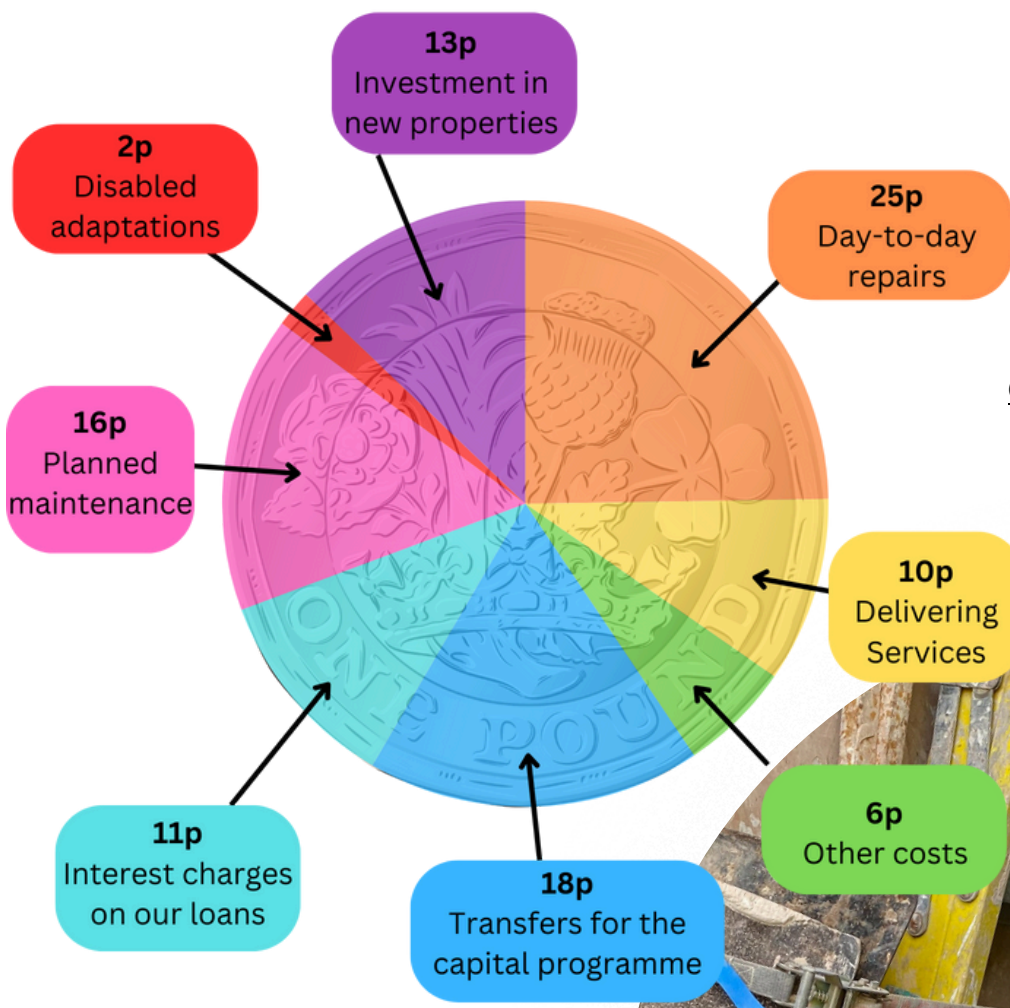
www.sandwell.gov.uk/buyingyourhome



FOR EVERY £1 COLLECTED, WE SPENT...

At the time of publication of this annual report our 2023/24 financial accounts were not finalised. This report provides an overview of our income and expenditure in the 2022/23 financial year.

In 2022/23 we collected approximately £132 million of income, rent and service charges are our main source of income. We also received capital finances from the sale of properties via the Right to Buy scheme, government grants, and some borrowing.



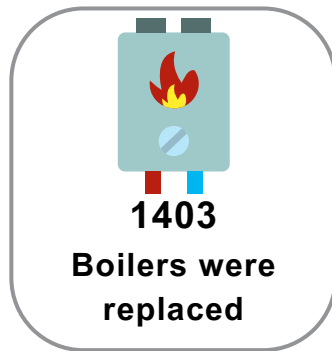
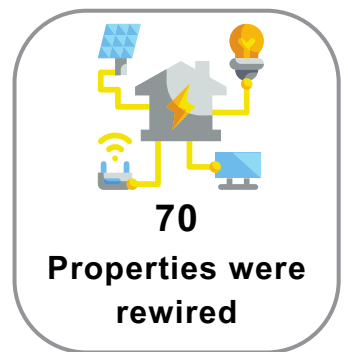
Other costs - Important services delivered by other parts of the Council, but paid by your rent.



INVESTING IN YOUR HOME

We invested **£58 million** in refurbishments and improvements, **£1.3 million** of which was spent on building new homes.

Our improvement programme invested in a total of 8,775 homes. This included doing improvements to our empty properties before they are let to tenants.



ADAPTATIONS

Our adaptations service helps tenants to live independently by improving accessibility through use of ramps or widening doorways, replacing baths with shower facilities.

We adapted a total of **148** homes.



HOW WE HANDLE REPAIRS

in 2023/24



114,334 Responsive repairs were completed

A responsive repair is undertaken in response to a report of a fault, such as a broken boiler, as opposed to a planned repair such as an annual gas boiler service

41,918 emergency and urgent repairs completed.



88%

of emergency and urgent jobs were completed on time.

On time emergency jobs are completed within 24 hours and on time urgent jobs are completed within three working days.



Over 1390 homes were repaired and relet.

22 days was the average to complete all types of repairs

Non-urgent repair such as fencing, plastering and internal doors make up most of the back log



BEST QUALITY

95% of our tenants were satisfied with the completed repair and the service they received when asked via text to rate the most recent repair between 1-10

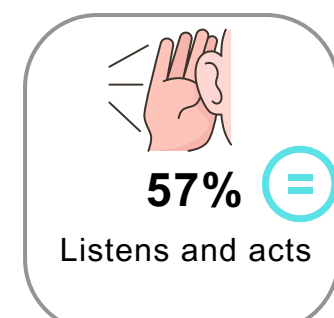
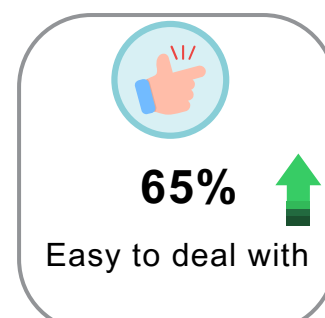
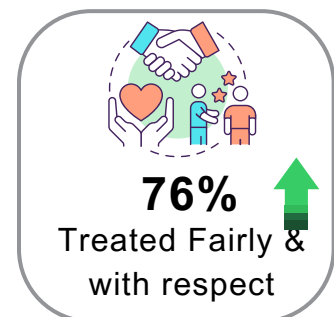
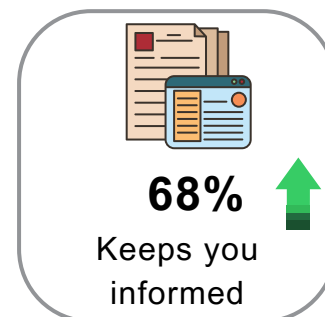
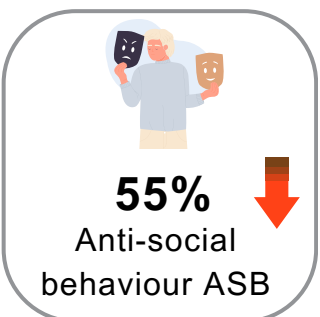
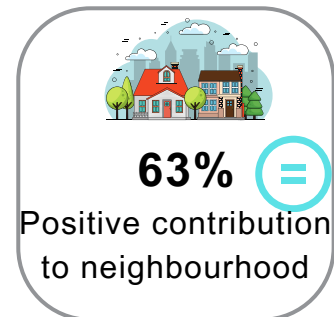
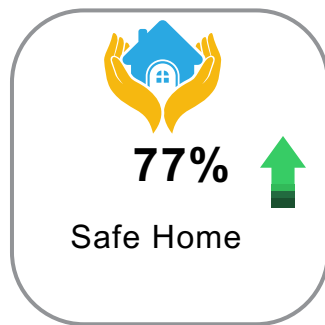


HOW WE MEASURE YOUR SATISFACTION

We commissioned an independent research team to survey a sample of tenants so that we can see what is going well and what isn't. This is known as TSM (Tenant Satisfaction Measures) We have used these findings to help us to improve the quality of services we deliver to you.

Sandwell's results were above average compared to other similar sized local authorities. You can find our more by visiting our [website](#).

↑ Improved compare to last year
↓ Underperformed compared to last year



HOW WE LISTEN TO YOU

Following the findings of the survey, we have consulted with tenants across the borough to help shape the actions we are taking in response to the survey findings.

The tenant satisfaction survey highlighted several key themes, and areas of improvement, such as:

TENANCY AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT

YOU SAID

- You didn't feel listened to and found it difficult to speak to someone
- Our communication with our tenants wasn't good enough



WE DID



- We have invested in a new telephone system which is due to launch 2024
- We have launched a pilot in Tipton which gives tenants a scheduled time and date for a call back from their housing officer this is due to roll out borough wide shortly.
- We have developed a lift breakdown process - to keep tenants informed when their lift has developed a fault

COMPLAINTS AND SERVICE FAILURES

YOU SAID

- You said our response to handling complaints wasn't good enough.



WE DID



- Created a Housing Resolutions Team to investigate and resolve customer complaints - identify learning opportunities

YOU SAID, WE DID

COMMUNICATION AND TENANT CONFERENCE

YOU SAID

- You asked for additional information to be sent out around rent increases
- Our communication with our tenants wasn't good enough



WE DID

- We sent out rent increase guidance with the notification to change rent letters, created a webpage and have trained our Housing Hub team to answer the most frequently asked questions.
- We launched the Tenant Conference at The Hawthorns - providing a platform for tenants to learn about changes in Sandwell Housing and share their views
- We Organised a 'Meet the Housing Ombudsman' event in January 2024, senior managers were present to listen to tenants, leaseholders, and community members.



ASSET MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT

YOU SAID

- You said you weren't happy with the length of time it takes to complete a repair



WE DID

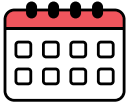
- Cleared a back log of 1100 Damp & Mould Visits
- Added resources to clear all emergency and urgent appointments
- Created a Damp and Mould register to monitor and follow up on tenants issues



COMPLAINTS

66% of Stage 1 complaints were closed within 10 days

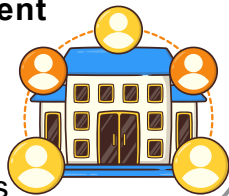
The total number of complaints were **604**
Upheld - **41%**
Partly upheld - **33%**
Not upheld - **26%**

 Average days to close: **13 Working days**

Complaints by Service Area (Stage 1)


- 72%** of complaints were for **Asset Management and Improvement**
- 21%** of complaints were for **Tenancy and Estate Management**
- 4%** of complaints were for **Community Safety**
- 1%** of complaints were for **Income Management**
- 2%** of complaints were for **Other***


**Lettings, Housing Hub, Customer Services*



The Housing Ombudsman


The Housing Ombudsman has received 34 cases about our housing and repairs service. *



 **15** cases have been completed
17 cases have ongoing investigations
2 cases have on-going actions to be completed

5 cases were found as having no fault
A total of **12** maladministration's were received between 5 cases
1 case being severe maladministration

**The length of time it takes the Ombudsman to investigate cases means they may not always be received and closed within the same financial year.*



HOW WE IMPROVE OUR COMMUNITY TOGETHER

We are want to make sure all residents enjoy their right to peace, quiet and security in their neighbourhood.

We recognise that anti-social behaviour can have a severe effect on the well-being of residents and that we want to take action to minimise it.

The top 3 categories of anti social behaviour (ASB) were;

- Verbal abuse
- Criminal activity
- Noise nuisance

550 Cases were closed in 23/24



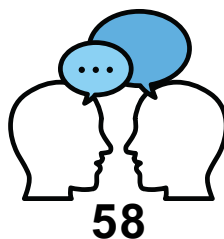
133

Resolved by Multi-agency/partnership working



119

Resolved by Warning letter



58

Resolved by offering advice/mediation

HOME CHECKS

We introduced **Home Checks** in September 2021, with the aim to ensure that we hold all of the correct information for the household, to offer support and guidance to tenants and to check on the condition of properties and gardens.

In 2023/24 we



Completed **6,504** Home Checks with our tenants.



Referred **196** tenants to our **money advice service**.



90 smoke alarm repairs logged.



Referred **476** tenants to **Welfare Rights**.



Identified **184 incidents** of hoarding.

In total around **43%** of our current tenants have received a Home Check within the last three years.

For more information visit
www.sandwell.gov.uk/HomeCheckFAQ



TENANT & LEASEHOLDER SCRUTINY GROUP

WHAT IS THE TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER SCRUTINY GROUP (TLSG)?

The Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group (TLSG) are a selected group of tenants and leaseholders from across Sandwell, who volunteer their time and experience to help improve services for all council tenants and leaseholders.

The group is made of eight tenants and two leaseholders.

The TLSG look at issues affecting tenants and leaseholders and make recommendations for improvement. The key to the group is that the TLSG acts as a 'critical friend' to SMBC to achieve better performance and improved outcomes, whilst enabling the voice of Sandwell's tenants and leaseholders to be heard.

The group is made up of people from different backgrounds, ages, and ethnicities, all with their own varied life skills.

DID YOU KNOW?

“We currently have a vacancy for a council tenant!”

The group meets with the assistant directors of Housing Management and Asset Management and other senior officers quarterly to discuss housing issues.

The TLSG submit reports to Sandwell Council's Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board for their consideration.

The Home Checks service has been scrutinised and a number of recommendations made to try and improve the experience for tenants.

The Housing Hub and Contact Centre have been scrutinised, resulting in a faster response time and a more tailored service

The TLSG also contributed to a review of the Leaseholder Handbook, where a number of recommendations were accepted and implemented into the updated handbook.

Since the group was launched in December 2021, the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group have volunteered 1,400+ hours, to improve service quality for tenants and leaseholders.

The areas currently being scrutinised, include the quality of housing stock and Sandwell's delivery of Housing Consumer Standards.



TLSG Sept 2024

TENANT AUDITORS GROUP

The Tenant Auditors Group are a group of volunteers from across Sandwell who undertake audits of various services. They produce a report based on their findings and meet with senior managers to make recommendations which will improve the service.

The group currently has seven members from a range of backgrounds.

In the last 12 months the group have undertaken several audits leading to a range of recommendations and changes:

Building and fire safety

- Making the risk assessment documents easier for people to read and understand
- Tenants in high rise blocks have been prioritised for Home Checks
- Introduction of specific timescales for future fire risk assessments

Repairs complaints

- Improved method for reporting complaints online
- Customers to have a single point of contact and confirmation of agreed works
- Customer service training being delivered to officers

The group are currently auditing the way we handle ASB.

If you're interested in joining the Tenant and Leaseholders Scrutiny Group or Tenant Auditors Group, contact us via comm_partnerships@sandwell.gov.uk or 0121 569 2537



HOW WE TACKLE HOUSING FRAUD

The **Counter Fraud Unit** is responsible for carrying out investigations into areas of suspected or reported fraud and misconduct. Both pro-active and re-active work is undertaken to detect, prevent and investigate fraud across the wide range of services offered by the council.

Completed investigations - Financial Year 2023-24	
Completed investigations	186
Prosecutions	12
Housing applications cancelled prior to allocation	19
Housing properties recovered	30
Housing priority status removed	2
Right to Buy purchases cancelled	1

The prosecutions contained within the table included matters relating to council tenancy subletting, direct payments, blue badge fraud and a Covid business grant. Tenancy Fraud also has links to anti-social behaviour and has an impact on the demand for social housing, waiting lists and the cost of emergency accommodation on the council.

VALUE OF FRAUD FOR COMPLETED INVESTIGATIONS - FINANCIAL YEAR 2023-2024



*Using the Cabinet Office's calculation methodology

YOU CAN REPORT ANYTHING SUSPICIOUS TO US!

The council operates a zero tolerance on fraud and corruption, all instances are investigated and the perpetrator(s) dealt with in accordance with the Counter Fraud Policy.

Online: www.sandwell.gov.uk/council/report-fraud

Email: fraud_investigation@sandwell.gov.uk



HOW WE KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE

Your safety is one of our top priorities. It is our duty as your landlord to ensure that you can live safely in your home. All landlords must meet legal and regulatory requirements in relation to the big six compliance areas.



Fire safety

55.6%

of all fire risk assessments completed.



Asbestos

100%

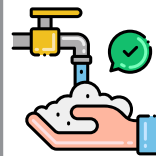
of our legally required asbestos managements surveys completed.



Electrical safety

95%

of properties have a current, valid safety inspection report for electrical installation.



Water Hygiene

100%

of buildings have an up-to-date risk assessment.



Gas safety

99%

of properties have a valid Landlord Gas Safety Record.



Passenger lifts

100%

of passenger lifts have a valid safety inspection report.

Fire Risk Assessments are undertaken in line with the Fire Safety (England) Regulations Order 2005. From April 2023 all high-rise buildings are assessed every 12 months. You can also scan the QR code on the bottom of the Building Safety Notice to access Fire Risk Assessments.

We want to ensure that you are as safe as you possibly can be from the dangers of smoke and fire.

Housing Hub

We have a dedicated team of housing specialists who are here to answer your questions and can support you with using online services.

CONTACT US

housing_hub@sandwell.gov.uk or
call 0121 368 1166.

Struggling with your rent?

Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

Rent First

**LET US
HELP
YOU!**



Disrepair Scam



We are aware that customers are being contacted by companies who claim to specialise in disrepairs. Many of these companies are exploiting vulnerable customers, using underhand methods to entice customers to make a claim.

They may contact you directly and encourage you to make a claim against your housing provider. Some of these companies pass your details onto a 'no-win-no-fee' solicitors for a profit. They may not always be acting with your best interest at heart, and quite often they will take most of any compensation awarded..

Please speak to us first!

You can book a repair online at [MySandwell](https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/my-sandwell) or please call **0121 569 6000**. If you need a repair in an emergency outside office hours, please call 0800 844 112.

Supporting Sandwell

We are offering a free and confidential service:

- Benefits and debt advice
- Energy advice
- Help with budgeting
- Employment support
- Help to get online

www.sandwell.gov.uk/supportingsandwell



If you have any feedback about the Annual Report for Tenants, please email: tenants_report@sandwell.gov.uk

If you would like to get involved please call us on **0121 569 2537**. You can also complete a short survey to express your interest.

<https://forms.office.com/e/8QL19ARBWy>

