# Sandwell Annual Report for Tenants 2023/24

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## 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 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 have been a period of significant change for the council. We emerged from government intervention in 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 May's 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 improve communication and responses to ensure 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. I hope this report marks the start of a positive journey towards achieving that objective.

## Our Stock and What We Spend

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

* **14,310 Houses**
* **10,611 Flats**
* **654 Maisonettes**
* **1,478 Bungalows**

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

Housing Register
5,042 of our existing tenants are on the 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.

## Financial Overview

At the time of publication, the 2023/24 financial accounts were not finalised. This section provides an overview of the **2022/23 financial year**:

* **£132 million** of income collected (rent and service charges being the main source).
* Income was also generated from the **Right to Buy scheme**, government grants and borrowing.

### Right to Buy

* **176 homes** were sold under Right to Buy.
* **£13 million** of income generated from sales.
* **£11.8 million** in discounts provided to tenants.

Right to Buy helps tenants purchase their homes at a discounted rate. For more information, visit:
[www.sandwell.gov.uk/buyingyourhome](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/buyingyourhome)

## Investing in Your Home

We invested **£58 million** in refurbishments and improvements, including **£1.3 million** on building new homes.

### Key Achievements:

* **15 new builds.**
* **6,221 external doors replaced.**
* **691 windows replaced.**
* **295 kitchens replaced.**
* **61 bathrooms replaced.**
* **1,403 boilers replaced.**
* **34 central heating systems replaced.**

Adaptations:
Our service has made **148 homes** more accessible for tenants with disabilities. This included:

* **131 bathroom adaptations** (e.g replacing baths with shower facilities).
* **8 other adaptations** (e.g ramps, door widening).
* **19 homes** received lifts or hoists.

## How We Handle Repairs

### Repairs Completed:

* **114,334** responsive repairs completed.
* **41,918** emergency and urgent repairs completed.

### Performance:

* **88%** of emergency and urgent jobs were completed on time.
	+ On-time emergency jobs: within 24 hours.
	+ On-time urgent jobs: within three working days.

### Relet and Repairs:

* Over **1,390 homes** were repaired and relet.
* **22 days** was the average time to complete all types of repairs.

### Satisfaction:

* **95%** of tenants were satisfied with their completed repairs when asked via text to rate the most recent repair between 1 and 10.

### Backlog:

* Most of the repair backlog consists of non-urgent repairs, such as fencing, plastering and internal doors.

## How We Measure Your Satisfaction

We commissioned an independent research team to survey a sample of tenants, known as the **Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM)**. The findings help us improve the quality of services. Sandwell’s results were above average compared to other similar sized local authorities.

### Satisfaction Results:

* **Overall Satisfaction:** 74%
* **Safe Home:**77%
* **Repairs (last 12 months):** 76%
* **Time taken for the last repair:** 70%
* **Communal areas clean:** 66%
* **Positive contribution to the neighbourhood:** 63%
* **Anti-social behaviour (ASB) handling:** 55%
* **Complaints handling:** 28%
* **Keeps you informed:** 68%
* **Listens and acts:** 57%
* **Easy to deal with:** 65%
* **Treats you fairly and with respect:** 76%

## **How We Listen to You**

## You Said, We Did

### Tenancy and Estate Management:

* **You said:** Communication with tenants wasn’t good enough.
* **We did:** Invested in a new telephone system launching in 2024. Introduced a pilot in Tipton for scheduled callbacks from housing officers, due to roll out borough-wide. Developed a lift breakdown process to keep tenants informed when lifts fail.

### Complaints and Service Failures:

* **You said:** Our response to handling complaints wasn’t good enough.
* **We did:** Created a Housing Resolutions Team to investigate and resolve customer complaints and identify learning opportunities.

### Communication and Tenant Conference:

* **You said:** You asked for more information about rent increases.
* **We did:** Sent out rent increase guidance with notification letters, created a webpage and trained our Housing Hub team to answer the most frequently asked questions. Launched the **Tenant Conference** at The Hawthorns, providing a platform for tenants to learn about changes and share their views.
* **You said:** Communication with tenants wasn’t good enough.
* **We did:** Organised a **"Meet the Housing Ombudsman"** event in January 2024, where senior managers listened to tenants, leaseholders and community members.

## How We Improve Our Community Together

### Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB):

* The top three categories of ASB in 2023/24 were:
	+ **Verbal abuse**
	+ **Criminal activity**
	+ **Noise nuisance**
* **550 ASB cases** were closed in 2023/24, resolved through:
	+ **133** Multi-agency/partnership working
	+ **119** Warning letters
	+ **58** Advice/mediation

We want to ensure all residents enjoy peace, quiet and security in their neighbourhoods. ASB can severely affect the well-being of residents, and we take action to minimise it.

### Home Checks

We introduced **Home Checks** in September 2021 to ensure we hold accurate information about households, offer support and guidance to tenants and check the condition of properties and gardens.

In 2023/24, we:

* Completed **6,504 Home Checks**.
* Referred **476 tenants** to Welfare Rights.
* Referred **196 tenants** to our money advice service.
* Logged **90 smoke alarm repairs**.
* Identified **184 incidents** of hoarding.

Approximately **43%** of current tenants have received a Home Check within the last three years.

### How We Tackle Housing Fraud

The **Counter Fraud Unit** carries out investigations into areas of suspected or reported fraud. Both proactive and reactive work is undertaken to detect, prevent and investigate fraud across the wide range of services offered by the council.

**Completed investigations (2023/24):**

* **186 completed investigations**.
* **12 prosecutions**.
* **19 housing applications cancelled prior to allocation**.
* **30 housing properties recovered**.
* **2 housing priority statuses removed**.
* **1 Right to Buy purchase cancelled**.

**Value of fraud for completed investigations (2023/24):**

* **£61,560**: Value of housing applications cancelled.
* **£53,457**: Value of Right to Buy discount recovered.
* **£2,790,000**: Value of housing properties recovered.

You can report any suspicious activity via the following:

* **Online:** [www.sandwell.gov.uk/council/report-fraud](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/council/report-fraud)
* **Email:** fraud\_investigation@sandwell.gov.uk

## How We Keep Your Home Safe

### Compliance and Safety Measures:

As your landlord, we are responsible for ensuring your home is safe. This includes complying with legal and regulatory requirements related to safety.

### Key Compliance Areas:

* **Fire Risk Assessments** are conducted in line with the Fire Safety (England) Regulations. From April 2023, all high-rise buildings are assessed every 12 months.
* **Fire safety: 55%** of all fire risk assessments completed.
* **Gas safety:** **99%** of properties have a valid Landlord Gas Safety Record.
* **Electrical safety:** **99%** of properties have a current, valid electrical safety inspection report.
* **Asbestos management:** **100%** of required asbestos surveys have been completed.
* **Water hygiene:** **100%** of buildings have up-to-date risk assessments.
* **Passenger lifts:** **100%** of lifts have a valid safety inspection report.

Your safety is one of our top priorities, and we aim to ensure you are as safe as possible from dangers such as smoke and fire.

## Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group (TLSG)

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

* The group consists of **eight tenants** and two **leaseholders**.
* They act as a **'critical friend'** to the council, aiming for better performance and improved outcomes while ensuring tenants' and leaseholders' voices are heard.
* The group meets with senior officers quarterly to discuss housing issues and submits reports to the **Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board**.

### Did you know?

The group is made up of people from different backgrounds, ages and ethnicities, all with their own varied life skills. We currently have a vacancy for a council tenant.

### TLSG Key Contributions:

* Reviewed the **Home Checks** service leading to recommendations for improvements.
* Scrutinised the **Housing Hub and Contact Centre** resulting in faster response times and a more tailored service.
* Contributed to a review of the **Leaseholder Handbook** leading to accepted and implemented recommendations.

Since December 2021, the TLSG has 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 Council’s delivery of the Housing Consumer Standards.

## Tenant Auditors Group (TAG)

The **Tenant Auditors Group (TAG)** consists of volunteers from across Sandwell who undertake audits of various services. They produce reports based on their findings and meet with senior managers to make recommendations for service improvements.

* The group currently has **seven members** from a variety of backgrounds.
* In the last 12 months the group has undertaken several audits leading to key recommendations including:
	+ **Building and fire safety:**
	Simplified risk assessment documents for easier understanding and prioritised Home Checks for tenants in high-rise blocks.
	+ **Repairs complaints:**
	Improved the online method for reporting complaints, provided a single point of contact for tenants and delivered customer service training for officers.

The group is currently auditing how we handle **anti-social behaviour.**

**ss**.If you’re interested in joining the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group or Tenant Auditors Group, contact us at comm\_partnerships@sandwell.gov.uk or call **0121 569 2537**.

## Disrepair Scam Warning

We are aware that some customers are being contacted by companies claiming to specialise in disrepairs. Many of these companies are exploiting vulnerable customers, using underhand methods to entice them into making claims against their housing provider.

* These companies may pass your details on to **'no-win-no-fee' solicitors** for profit.
* They may not always act in your best interest and often take most of any compensation awarded.

Important:
If you are experiencing disrepair issues, please **speak to us first** to avoid falling victim to such scams. You can book a repair online at **MySandwell** or call **0121 569 6000**. For emergency repairs outside office hours, please call **0800 844 112**.

## Supporting Sandwell

We offer a **free and confidential service** to assist with various challenges:

* **Benefits and debt advice**
* **Energy advice**
* **Help with budgeting**
* **Employment support**
* **Help getting online**

For more information, visit:
[www.sandwell.gov.uk/supportingsandwell](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/supportingsandwell)

## How to Get Involved

If you would like to get involved with any of our tenant initiatives or provide feedback on this Annual Report, please contact us at:

* **Email:** tenants\_report@sandwell.gov.uk
* **Phone:** **0121 569 2537**

Alternatively you can complete a short survey to express your interest by visiting:
<https://forms.office.com/e/8QL19ARBWy>

## Housing Hub

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

* **Email:** housing\_hub@sandwell.gov.uk
* **Phone:** **0121 368 1166**