

# Sandwell Council's Annual Report for Tenants 2023



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Dear Tenant,

As the newly appointed Cabinet Member for Housing and Built Environment, I look forward to meeting many of you and hearing your views on how we can continue to improve our housing stock.

We are working hard to ensure you get the excellent service you deserve from the council. We are building new homes and are committed to investing in our existing homes to make them safe, energy-efficient, and welcoming places for you to live.

This annual review highlights a number of areas where we have seen improvements over the last year, and for that I would like to thank my predecessor Councillor Charn Singh Padda, Sandwell Council's housing team, but most especially you, our tenants, for getting involved, letting us know where we have done things right, but also and very importantly for letting us know where we can improve.

I look forward to listening to you throughout the coming year.



Councillor Laura Rollins  
Cabinet Member for Housing and Built Environment



Dear Tenant,

I hope you will find this report interesting and informative. It follows last year's annual report and is based on what you have told us you want to know about.

The world of council housing is changing and we take our increased responsibilities very seriously. As well as feeding back to you on repairs, improvements and refurbishments, we now also need to measure how satisfied you are with your home and the council as a landlord. The results of the tenant satisfaction survey 2022 are in and you will find the headline data in this report.

We welcome your feedback on this report and any other aspect of our service.  
Happy reading.



Gillian Douglas Director of Housing



# Our housing stock and what we spend

At the end of the financial year our housing stock consisted of 28,098 properties. This includes **1,567** bungalows, **653** maisonettes, **14,916** houses and **10,962** flats. These figures include 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)

4,426 of our existing tenants are on our Housing Register waiting list, making up 36% of the list. Increasing demand for properties resulted in some delays to registration of applications but we plan to automate the process more this year to reduce waiting times. We are also establishing a new task force to help tenants in overcrowded or under-occupied homes to move to more suitable accommodation. We will report on the outcome of this work.

## Right to Buy

275 homes were sold under Right to Buy. £21 million of income was generated from homes sold, whilst providing £17 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](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/buyingyourhome)

## What we spend

At the time of publication of this annual report our 2022/23 financial accounts were not finalised. This report provides an overview of our income and expenditure in the 2021/22 financial year. In 2021/22 we collected approximately £123 million of income from rent and service charges, which is 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.

Every pound spent in 2021/22 was spend on:

- 2p - home adaptations for disabled tenants
- 12p - interest charges on our loans
- 18p - transfers to the capital programme to deliver major refurbishments e.g. to high rise blocks
- 23p - day-to-day repairs
- 9p - staffing costs
- 1p - contribution to the reserves pot for future improvements
- 13p - building new council homes
- 6p - other services e.g. grounds maintenance, tackling anti-social behavior
- 16p - planned maintenance and improvements to homes.

We have published our Housing 30 Year Business Plan which sits alongside the council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The plan seeks to provide an average investment of approximately £37,000 per property over a 30-year period.

A capital programme has been identified with over £140 million investment over the next four years on existing council homes; with £8 million external grant funding applied.

The work will include:

- Improving our high-rise flats
- Providing Adaptations for disabled tenants
- Replacing boilers
- Delivering energy efficiency improvements
- Undertaking refurbishment and regeneration projects
- Expanding our CCTV system.

The plan builds upon previous financial planning, considers the challenges facing us and the current investment needs of our stock. For more information visit [www.sandwell.gov.uk/HRA-BusinessPlan2](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/HRA-BusinessPlan2)

## How we invest in the quality of your home

We invested £54 million in refurbishments and improvements, £13 million of which was spent on new homes and buying properties.

Our improvement programme invested in a total of 6,462 homes. As part of our improvement programme and works to improve empty properties:

- 649 windows were replaced
- 6,688 front and rear doors were replaced
- 347 roofs were replaced
- 121 properties were fully rewired
- 95 bathrooms were replaced
- 353 kitchens were replaced
- 2,103 boilers were replaced
- 32 central heating systems were installed.

### **Adaptations**

Our adaptations service helps tenants to live independently by, for example, improving accessibility through the provision of ramps and widening doorways for wheelchair users, replacing baths with shower facilities, and providing level access bathing and sleeping facilities.

£5 million of assistance was provided to fund major adaptations to 354 of our homes.

327 homes were adapted for adults and a further 27 homes were adapted for children to help increase their independence within their homes.

- 36 homes received lifts or hoists only
- 157 homes received bathroom adaptations some of which may include lifts
- 161 homes received bedroom or bathroom extensions and other adaptations including ramps, door widening internal alterations including safe spaces, changing tables, wash and dry toilets.

This year we are simplifying the way adaptations are provided by introducing a new process and removing the need for tenants to apply for grant assistance. For more information visit [www.sandwell.gov.uk/homeimprovementagency](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/homeimprovementagency) or call Sandwell Enquiry on 0121 569 2266.

## How we handle home repairs and energy efficiency

In 2022/23...

- 112,866 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.
- More than 4,300 emergency/ urgent repairs were completed per month.
- 97% 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.
- 1,558 homes were repaired and re-let.
- 16.7 days was the average time to complete all types of repairs. Non-urgent repairs such as fencing, plastering and internal door improvements make up most of our backlog.

We know that delays in delivering these repairs are the biggest source of tenants' dissatisfaction. We are undertaking a service review to improve productivity and the service you receive.

Do you need to request a repair? Many tenants regularly use the MySandwell portal to request repairs at [my.sandwell.gov.uk](http://my.sandwell.gov.uk)

When a repair is done, we send a text message survey to tenants to collect feedback to help us improve our service. 95% of our tenants, that responded to the text, were satisfied with the completed repair and the service they received.

## **Energy Efficiency of Homes**

We are carrying out energy efficiency works on a number of our homes, so they meet the minimum standard of having an Energy Performance Certificate of C by 2030. Since February 2019, we have invested in 4,000 homes to improve their energy efficiency by replacing roofs, doors and windows and installing roof and external / cavity wall insulation.

We are rolling out stock condition surveys to get a detailed understanding of the condition of your home and its energy efficiency rating. This information will help to inform our housing investment strategy and will let us know where the homes that need the most investment are.

## **Energy saving tips**

For tips on how to reduce your bills and be more energy efficient visit [www.sandwell.gov.uk/energysavingtips](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/energysavingtips)

## **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**

100% of our high-rise buildings have a fire risk assessment in place. These identify where action is needed and ensure there is a clear evacuation route. 95% of actions identified were completed on schedule.

### **Asbestos**

97% of blocks of flats have an up-to-date re-inspection for asbestos-containing materials. We will complete the remaining 16 asbestos surveys this year.

### **Electrical Safety**

88% of properties have a current, valid safety inspection report for electrical installation. In June 2022, we notified the Regulator of Social Housing of our position and plans to ensure we are fully compliant before the end of 2023. We are concentrating resources on completing missing and older Domestic Electrical Installation Condition Reports, with a target of achieving 100% compliance.

### **Water Hygiene**

100% of buildings have an up-to-date risk assessment and planned maintenance is carried out on a regular basis. Out of all our buildings, 71 require a water hygiene risk assessment to be carried out to protect residents.

## **Gas Safety**

98% of properties with gas appliances have a current, valid Landlord Gas Safety Record. At year end we had 442 addresses where it had not been possible to gain access. We are taking action to allow us to complete the gas safety works to keep tenants safe.

## **Passenger Lifts**

100% of passenger lifts have a valid safety inspection report.

## **Keeping your home free from damp and mould**

In December we reviewed our records and identified some homes where damp and mould appeared to be a significant issue. We reported our findings to the Regulator of Social Housing setting out plans to resolve these issues and address newly emerging cases. We have since completed 1,272 surveys, identified, and carried out treatment of mould in 396 properties and completed reviews with residents to highlight any additional actions needed.

Our Damp and Mould taskforce are committed to tackling cases of damp and mould. Initial damp and mould assessments are carried out by a qualified surveyor to identify the best course of action, such as repairs and improvements to ventilation or carrying out a fungicidal wash. Please inform us if you notice any damp or mould in your home at [my.sandwell.gov.uk](http://my.sandwell.gov.uk) or call 0121 569 6000

## **Help us to help keep you safe- give us access to your home when we need it**

There are times when we need to access your home to carry out mandatory safety inspections, essential maintenance work or servicing to your gas and electrical appliances to keep you and your family safe.

You can help us to keep you safe by allowing our staff and certified contractors to enter your homes. Council staff always carry ID and we will try to give you as much notice as possible. If you have to cancel your appointment, please contact us as soon as possible so we can rearrange it.



# How we involve you as a tenant

It is important to us that you are heard and that you have the opportunity to play an active role in decision making and improving the services we offer to you. If you would like to find out more about our tenant involvement projects, please email [Comm\\_Partnerships@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:Comm_Partnerships@sandwell.gov.uk) or call 0121 569 2537

## **Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group benefitting all tenants and leaseholders in Sandwell**

Our Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group hold us to account when delivering housing and repairs services.

- There are eight council tenants and two council leaseholders in the group.
- The Home Checks service has been scrutinised.
- The group contributed to a review of our Leaseholder Handbook.
- The Housing Hub and Contact Centre have been scrutinised resulting in a faster response time and a more tailored service.
- Since the group was launched in December 2021, they have given 1,300 volunteering hours to improve the quality of services our tenants and leaseholders receive 1,300 volunteering hours.

“We would like to thank all the tenants who participated in the Home Checks survey that we led on. This work has contributed to a number of recommendations that were presented to the council’s Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board, to ensure the visits are more tenant focused”.

## **Tenant Auditors group launched...**

Sandwell’s Tenant Auditors Group (TAG) was formed in early 2022 and is an independent group of tenant volunteers who undertake audits of our housing service and aim to ensure Sandwell tenants have a voice. The group has also been working alongside Sandwell Community Information and Participation Services (SCIPS) to strengthen tenant engagement across the borough and were part of our internal recruitment process.

In early 2022, the Tenant Auditors received training. Their first audit, focusing on the termination of tenancy process, was completed in October 22. Several of the group’s recommendations were agreed and will be implemented this year. A recommendation already implemented is that the termination of tenancy online form clearly states the process can’t be stopped once the form is submitted. The Tenant Auditors are currently undertaking their second audit, looking at fire safety in high rise blocks. Looking forward, the group will be looking at the repairs process.

# How we measure your satisfaction

We commissioned an independent research team to survey tenants so that we can see what is going well and what isn't. This is the first survey we have carried out using these questions and the findings will help us to improve the quality of services we deliver to you.

A sample of tenants were identified and 1,112 took part either online or by telephone.

- 68% Satisfied with overall services
- 76% Satisfied that Sandwell Council provides a home that is safe
- 72% Agree that Sandwell Council treats them fairly and with respect
- 77% Satisfied with overall repairs service
- 74% Satisfied with time taken to complete most recent repair
- 73% Satisfied that Sandwell Council provides a home that is well maintained
- 63% Satisfied that Sandwell Council makes a positive contribution to their neighbourhood
- 57% Satisfied with Sandwell Council's approach to handling anti-social behavior
- 31% Satisfied with Sandwell Council's approach to complaints handling
- 65% Satisfied that Sandwell Council keeps them informed about things that matter to them
- 57% Satisfied that Sandwell Council listens to their views and acts upon them
- 65% Satisfied that Sandwell Council keeps communal areas clean and well maintained.

We have consulted with groups of tenants across the borough on the findings of last year's tenant satisfaction survey. The sessions focussed on key themes that emerged from the survey findings and identified actions we can take to improve the services we deliver. Talking to our tenants complemented the findings of the tenant satisfaction survey, highlighting what good tenancy management and service delivery look like to you.

We will undertake another independent tenant satisfaction survey this year. This gives our tenants the chance to share their views on our performance and feedback about what is going well and how we can improve our services to you. We look forward to hearing your feedback and will use it to improve the services we deliver.

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

## How we listen to you

At the end of March, 69% of complaints regarding housing and repairs were responded to within ten days. 42% of stage one complaints were related to delays in service delivery, incomplete work, or late appointments. 21% were related to how we communicate and the information we provide.

Our housing and repairs service received 209 compliments and 924 complaints. The number of complaints we received in 2022/23 saw a 59% increase on the number of complaints received last year. We encourage our tenants to let us know when something has gone wrong or if you are dissatisfied with a service.

### **Learning from your complaints we have:**

- Introduced a new mandatory complaints e-learning training package for all staff across the council involved in stage 1 and stage 2 investigations. This will have a positive impact on the way we handle complaints.
- Delivered training to our rents officers to better support tenants with former arrears.
- Reinforced the importance of contacting tenants when appointments need to be cancelled.
- Worked with our engineers to improve the service you receive when repairing and replacing boilers.
- Collaborated with the Housing Ombudsman to share best practice processes and procedures regarding noise nuisance complaints.

The Housing Ombudsman investigated 7 complaints about our housing and repairs service, which was fewer than last year. 19 other enquiries were considered to be premature complaints after initial investigations. Of these 7 investigations in 2 cases fault was found, in 2 no fault was found and 3 are still with the Housing Ombudsman awaiting their final decision.

### **Tenant & Resident Associations in Sandwell**

Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs) are led by local volunteers and represent tenants and leaseholders. TRAs hold us to account and work alongside us to make sure tenants' voices are heard. There are several registered TRAs across the borough:

- Bilston Road TRA
- Essex Avenue TRA
- Hamstead Village TRA
- Rowley Community Group
- St Mary's House TRA
- Tibbington TRA
- Trinity House Gardens TRA

As part of our grant agreement with Sandwell Community Information and Participation Services (SCIPS) to support TRAs across the borough, in 2022/23:

- 2 bespoke training sessions were delivered to support TRAs
- 102 meetings were supported with 7 TRAs involving 301 residents
- 1 new TRA was established, with 1 more in development

For more information on existing groups, or if you are interested in establishing a new TRA please contact SCIPS at <https://www.scips.org.uk/tras> or call 0121 544 1230

## How we improve our community together

### **Anti-social Behaviour**

The top 3 categories of anti-social behaviour (ASB) were verbal abuse, criminal activity, and noise nuisance. 508 cases were opened and 562 live cases were closed.

In 2022/23:

- 122 cases were resolved by warning letters
- 116 cases were resolved by working with local partner organisations
- 60 cases were resolved by informal discussion

### **Home Checks**

Since being introduced in September 2021, a total of 3,546 Home Checks were completed by March 2023. A Home Check is a visit to your home by a Housing Officer to ensure that we hold all the correct information for the household, to offer support and guidance and to check on the condition of properties and gardens.

11% of current tenants have received a Home Check within the last three years and we are working to complete a proactive Home Check with all our tenants.

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

Actions resulting from Home Checks being carried out include:

- 338 referrals made to Welfare Rights
- 131 referrals made for Money Advice
- 284 tenants identified as feeling isolated and offered support
- 1,384 home fire safety checks complete
- 84 cases of hoarding identified
- 80 smoke alarm repairs logged

## Recycling at High-Rise Flats

Working with our Waste Management team and our contractor Serco, we identified that the current recycling provision at our high-rise blocks often contained non-recyclable materials.

A pilot took place earlier this year on the Kenrick Park Estate where new recycling bins were provided. We also sought residents' views on what would encourage them to recycle more:

- The new bins made it more difficult to contaminate the recycling by using a new style lid, with a smaller hole to prevent larger objects such as black bags being deposited.
- We found out more on how we can support all our residents to recycle.
- More information and signage have been provided to residents on how to recycle.
- A comparison carried out before and during the pilot demonstrates a significant increase in the volume of recycling and lower levels of non-recyclable materials.

We are now looking to roll this out to other estates. We would like to thank the residents of Kenrick Park Estate who continue to make use of their new recycling facilities.

## What to look out for

### Building Safety in high-rise blocks

Let us know your views on the safety of your home and communal areas.

- We will continue to visit all residents in our high-rise blocks to hear your views on the safety of your home and communal areas throughout the summer. We look forward to meeting you and hearing your views!
- Your feedback will feed into a building safety strategy which is specific to your block.
- To find out more contact our Building Safety team at [building\\_safety@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:building_safety@sandwell.gov.uk) or call 0121 569 5087.

### Housing Hub

We have set up a dedicated team of housing specialists who are here to answer your questions and support you with using online services to help you to carry out tasks independently.

- The Housing Hub has 30 specialist officers and 3 Housing Hub Co-ordinators who are available to help answer any housing or tenancy queries you may have- all staff have been given in depth training to help them to provide you with the answers that you need.

- Our aim is to answer your questions straight away rather than you having to wait for a call back. In 2022/23, we resolved 57% of the calls we answered, without the need for a call back, and aim to increase this to 80%.
- Contact us at [housing\\_hub@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:housing_hub@sandwell.gov.uk) or call 0121 368 1166.

## **Undertaking refurbishment works on our blocks of flats**

We continue to invest in our existing housing stock and develop new homes.

- Work to the Lakes on the Lion Farm Estate, Alfred Gunn House and Darley House will upgrade flats, improving their quality and appearance. We will install insulation, new windows, improve the entrances and the surrounding landscape to provide more comfortable and inviting homes for our residents.
- 71 new affordable homes will also be developed as part of major refurbishment projects.

## **Meet the Housing Ombudsman**

Our tenants can attend a session to chat with the Housing Ombudsman.

- We will be arranging a 'Meet the Housing Ombudsman' session that you can attend in Autumn 2023.

## **How to stay informed and contact us**

We know many of our residents are struggling due to the increased cost of living. We have a range of support and advice available to support you at [www.sandwell.gov.uk/supportingsandwell](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/supportingsandwell)

Welfare Rights helped 1,028 tenants referred by our Income Management Team arranging housing benefits, energy grants, council tax benefit and much more; helping tenants access the financial support they are entitled to.

You can report a repair using your MySandwell account. Log in or register for a MySandwell account if you don't already have one at [www.sandwell.gov.uk/repairs](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/repairs)

We encourage tenants who can do so to create a MySandwell account, the portal can be used to carry out transactions like making payments and requesting council-wide services.

## **Benefits advice**

You can contact the Welfare Rights advice line on 0121 569 3158 or go to [www.sandwell.gov.uk/welfarebenefits](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/welfarebenefits)

## **Universal Credit**

For advice and support if you are applying for or receive Universal Credit go to [www.sandwell.gov.uk/universalcredit](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/universalcredit)

Our Tenant Handbook has lots of useful information about your home and information about the services on offer to you. You can access the handbook at [www.sandwell.gov.uk/tenanthandbook](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/tenanthandbook)

For housing repairs call 0121 569 6000  
For all other enquiries call 0121 368 1166

Our rents team is here to support you. To contact the rents team, call 0121 737 5148

If you would like to get involved with our tenant involvement projects please email [Comm\\_Partnerships@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:Comm_Partnerships@sandwell.gov.uk) or call 0121 569 2537

If you have any feedback about the Annual Report for Tenants, please email [tenants\\_report@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:tenants_report@sandwell.gov.uk)