

Our year –

April 2020 to March 2021



A word from our Managing Director, Tina Drury

The financial year 2020/21 will of course go down in history as one of the strangest and most challenging for people and organisations the world over. Having said that, it's also been a time that pushed us to step out of our comfort zones and work differently, and this led to some really innovative approaches and efficient service delivery.



Throughout the worst months of the pandemic, what has really struck me is the resilience shown by both our customers and our staff. Despite the world changing so significantly in such a short space of time, the YHN community has dusted itself off and pulled together, working in partnership to ensure the most vulnerable were taken care of.

Many of the people living in our homes have gone above and beyond to help neighbours and those in their wider communities, from simple things like shopping for others who were isolating, to applying for YHN funding to set up activities and support services to make sure nobody felt alone.

Any organisation is only as good as the people who work for it and I have been truly impressed by our staff. Some had to change roles almost over night as we prioritised our services in those early, uncertain days when the world tried to get to grips with what it was really facing. Some faced unprecedented levels of demand and were forced to quickly adapt to additional pressures on their services at a time when they had to work from home, often while attempting to be teachers to their children at the same time.

Our staff are human beings with their own lives and vulnerabilities, but they have been remarkable throughout this time. New approaches to housing those in need quickly and efficiently were introduced without hesitation, our production line at Palatine Beds actually beat its own records despite working with reduced numbers of staff due to self-isolation and, our Employability Team managed to buck the national trend and find successful candidates for all of the Kickstart roles they recruited to. We even completed over 50 new build homes!

I am incredibly proud to have worked for YHN throughout this most testing of times, and I know that our customers and our staff will continue to make me so as we progress through the next stage of the pandemic into a more normal life.

I am thankful to all of you who have come on this journey with us for the patience and understanding you have demonstrated as we've navigated this public health crisis, and I look forward to working with you all as we face a more positive future.

Best wishes,

Tina Drury, Managing Director of YHN

Introduction

Every year, we produce an annual report so that we can share details of our performance with our customers and leaseholders. It's nice to look back on what we've achieved every 12 months and to show you the breadth of the services we provide, as many people won't have a reason to engage with all of them.

We hope you find this information interesting and useful – if you would like to discuss any of it in more detail please contact us on 0191 278 8600 or send us a message via our website, www.yhn.org.uk.

The statistics

REPAIRS

YHN is responsible for carrying out repairs to the properties it manages to make sure they remain in a good, comfortable condition.

Unfortunately, the pandemic meant we couldn't always deliver the same service that we have done in previous years, as we had to protect our staff and vulnerable customers. We have continued to respond to emergencies though, ensuring that nobody would be left without heating, water or electricity, and that their homes remained structurally sound.

Number of responsive repairs plus average time taken to complete and total cost



18,152

Number of emergency repairs

32,006

Number of urgent repairs

19,658

Number of routine repairs

7,045

Number of external repairs

4.04 days

Average time taken to complete repairs

£10.2m

Total cost of repairs

ALLOCATIONS

We allocate properties through the Tyne and Wear Homes portal, which is what is referred to as a choice-based lettings process. People who are new to social housing can use this to find a home, as well as existing customers of ours who are looking to move.

There was a period of time when we were unable to move people into new homes unless it was an emergency, but that didn't last too long, and we continued to support house moves throughout the majority of the pandemic.

Total number of allocations and property types



11

bedsits

128

bungalows

1,014

flats

503

houses

33

maisonettes

1,689

Total number

RENT

The money we collect in the form of rent goes into a pot that we call the Housing Revenue Account. This money is reserved for improvements and projects that specifically benefit our customers. We also support those who struggle to pay their rent, but we work with them to help them pay, as it's important we bring in as much as possible for the benefit of everyone.

£108,716,891

The total amount of rent collected



Amount collected in percentage terms - 100.23%

(this means we collected rent arrears on top of what we were due to collect within the financial year)

INVESTMENT IN HOMES

We never stop investing in homes. With over 26,000 properties to manage, of varying ages, there is always somewhere in need of an upgrade. We plan investment to ensure that money is spent fairly across the city and that it is directed to where it is most needed at any given time.

£33,564m

Total amount invested



£18,308m

Amounts spent on lifecycle improvements (kitchens, bathrooms, boilers etc)



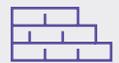
2,539

Number of fire doors installed



58

Number of new build homes completed



JOBS

We have a number of support services as we believe a housing provider should provide more than just the physical building for someone to live in. Our Employability Team has grown over recent years as we have expanded to work with multiple partners to help get our customers into work. We take many customers on ourselves, to work across the organisation, and also with other local employers, ensuring there's lots of choice for jobseekers.

2,012

Number of people supported by the Employability Team

20

Number of people starting Your Homes Your Jobs placements

18

Number of people attending pre-employment courses

237

Number of referrals into service

1,568

Number of people who engaged with jobs fairs and other events (primarily held digitally)

33

Number of people working on Wise Steps programme

101

Number of people on Working Homes programme

35

Number of Kickstarters taken on (including ones supported into other businesses)



KEEPING NEIGHBOURHOODS SAFE

We know that one of the most important things for making people feel proud of where they live is how we respond to antisocial behaviour (ASB). Everyone has the right to feel safe in their home and wider community, and we are always working with people who report ASB and those who are accused of it, to get good outcomes for everyone involved.

3,699

Total number of ASB cases reported

1,796

Number of cases of physical harm



311

Number of cases of environmental harm

1,592

Number of cases of community harm

COMPLAINTS

In September 2020, we launched our brand-new Customer Experience Team. The purpose of the team is to improve the experience of the complaints process, including resolving complaints in a timely manner and using the learnings to improve services. Some key achievements are:

- Self-assessed against the Ombudsman's new code and achieved compliance
- Removed the third stage of the process so that its easier for customers to access the Ombudsman

402

Number of formal complaints reported

229

Number upheld

37

Number partially upheld



CONTACT CENTRE

The Contact Centre has played a key role supporting customers during the pandemic, with demand increasing by 61% in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20. This has included maintaining the provision of emergency repairs and setting up the City Lifeline in partnership with NCC. The Lifeline has supported customers with a range of needs from financial support for businesses to food for the most vulnerable.

61%

increase in demand during the pandemic



SUPPORT SERVICES

Our Ostara service provides personal alarms to vulnerable people across the city and links them to our 24-hour response centre. Throughout the pandemic, many vulnerable people had to remain in their homes for months at a time and our service provided a vital lifeline when they fell or felt unwell. It also offered fantastic peace of mind for their families.

3,096

Ostara customers

6,634

Number of Ostara emergency responses



Ostara

2,292

private accounts

433

condition of tenancy accounts

371

Business to Business customers

NFS

The Newcastle Furniture Service (NFS) provides furniture packs to those living in homes managed by YHN as well as some other housing organisations around the country. The need for furniture, including white goods such as fridges and cookers, rose during the last financial year and we were happy to be able to deliver such vital resources to many people in need.

NFS

47

Other organisations supplied with furniture



During 2020/21 NFS won four new clients:

- Middlesbrough Council
- Sunderland City Council
- Gentoo
- Sutton Housing Partnership

ISO 9001 & ISO 14001 (environment)

accreditation retained

PALATINE BEDS

YHN owns and manages a mattress production company that has been trading for over 100 years. It's a supported business, meaning that the majority of its staff members have a registered disability, and it regularly smashes its own production targets. Individual mattresses are available for sale to the general public and Palatine has contracts with larger organisations like hotels and the Ministry of Defence to produce in bulk.

PALATINE BEDS

quality craftsmanship

November 2020 produced over

3,000 units

in a month for the first time



Overall production record for the year

34,400

(first time over 30,000 units)

12

staff supported with Access to Work grants



During 2020/21 Palatine Beds won three new clients:

- Sheffield Council
- Engie Services
- Reserve Forces and Cadet Service

ISO 14001 (environment)

accreditation retained

The Covid challenge

No review of 2020 and early 2021 would be complete without many references to the Covid-19 pandemic obviously, and ours is no different.

Here's a snapshot of some of the things we did to support our most vulnerable customers and those facing financial hardship:

- We redeployed 123 members of staff to support our most critical services at the start of the first lockdown.
- We focused lots of work on homelessness prevention, including setting up an emergency housing panel with Newcastle City Council and other partners so that we could quickly identify available properties for those in need. This and many other measures played a huge part in helping to support our local authority's aim to end rough sleeping in the city and this work was recognised internationally by the UN through their World Habitat awards scheme, which is only given to four projects per year.
- NFS became a crucial resource for many supported by this panel and lots of our other customers. The lockdowns made having key furniture and white goods even more important – with social distancing rules meaning customers were not able to go outside and use other services, such as laundrettes, take away services or visit family and friends who might have supported with food and washing. NFS carried out 1,385 emergency deliveries to elderly/vulnerable customers from 23rd March to 30th June 2020.
- We changed the focus of our income team (i.e. the one responsible for bringing in rent) from collection to connection – with the aim being that everybody would be in a more positive financial position once restrictions eased. While the Government temporarily paused evictions based on rent arrears, we were determined to do as much as possible to reduce the chances that our customers would still be facing the threat of this once that was lifted – when the courts reopened, only four of the original 67 cases progressed to the hearing stage.
- We also provided thousands of customers with financial advice and supported many of those to make Universal Credit claims.
- We made tens of thousands of welfare calls to check on our most vulnerable customers and make sure they had everything they needed while some local services weren't operating as usual, and many customers were unable to leave their homes.
- Our Contact Centre set up the City Lifeline in partnership with Newcastle City Council to support customers with a range of needs from financial support for businesses to food for the most vulnerable. The demand for the contact centre in 2020/21 increased by 61% compared with 2019/20.
- We delivered an average of 500 food parcels per week to support those self-isolating and those struggling financially, including to those identified as in need of support due to school closures. We also redeployed some of our staff to deliver medical supplies to customers in need.
- We delivered a response to 999 calls on behalf of North East Ambulance Service through our contract with the Newcastle/Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group. Our telecare system, Ostara, helps to provide an improved emergency response service to non-injury fallers, and, in doing so, reduced pressure on the ambulance service at a time where demand on their service was high.
- Our Employability Team not only supported lots of customers through the Working Homes scheme, which looked at all of their barriers to paid employment and provided grants for childcare and other support, but also became a Kickstart Gateway. Kickstart is one of the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak's, plans to get people back into work and we're the only housing provider across the country to be a Gateway – which means we're not only taking on our own staff, but also working with other local businesses to help them recruit young people who have been claiming Universal Credit.
- We launched a £10k Community Spirit Fund to help community groups with their own responses to Covid-19.

The future

We entered the next financial year in April of 2021 like many other organisations and, indeed, people, did - with a cautious hope that things were changing for the better.

While remaining ready to act immediately should the pandemic lead to further restrictions that would impact our customers, we were optimistic about YHN's ability to return to some kind of normality, with less focus on a crisis response and more focus on rebuilding for the future.

Many of our staff have returned to their usual roles and we have worked our way through the backlog of non-emergency repairs that we were unable to complete during lockdown. While many of our teams continued to work directly with customers throughout the successive lockdowns, many others who largely only spoke to them by telephone are now meeting face-to-face and are regularly out and about on our estates.

We are working on a programme of clean up events across the city, often involving staff from across the organisation and local councillors, as well as some local businesses and residents, to make sure our customers feel proud of the amazing places where they live.

We know that some areas have become a little less loved over the last year or so, but we also know that this pride will soon return once our communities are shown some affection.

We have taken stock of the fantastic work that our teams did throughout the worst parts of the pandemic and put them forward for awards in honour of this - we have been shortlisted for four so far, with the results of two expected very soon. Whatever happens with those, we know there is much to celebrate about the people who work for us; they help to put us in a really positive position as we work with Newcastle City Council and other partners to help the city recover from one of the most testing times we've all lived through.

We hope that things continue to improve for our customers, our city, and for the global community. We have learned many valuable lessons since March 2020, and we remain in a brilliant position to act on these should we ever need to again.



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A company controlled by Newcastle City Council.

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