



Annual Report to HBC Executive Board

October 2021

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 There have been changes to the operating environment such as the rent reductions announced in 2015 and the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in 2020/21. As the environment changes, we will continue to monitor performance to gain assurance that the impact of those changes is being effectively managed and mitigated.
- 1.2 Rather than just respond to changes in our operating environment we have worked hard to try to influence policy as it is being developed. This has been at a local, regional, and national level.
- 1.3 Some of our key organisational achievements for 2020/21 include:
- Launched refreshed digital platforms including new website, customer portal and customer app.
 - Launched our new placeshaping strategy and our first neighbourhood project, 'Destination Ditton'.
 - Completed the construction of an additional 92 new homes. This has taken the number of new homes built and acquired since stock transfer to almost 1,400.
 - Achieved No 1 Housing Digital provider award.
 - We have achieved our rent arrears and void targets and cleared our repairs backlog, despite the challenges of Covid-19.
- 1.4 We enjoy a strong strategic relationship with HBC, and we continue to be represented and play an active role in contributing towards the Council's strategic priorities including homelessness, care leavers, regeneration, crime and disorder and health.
- 1.5 Our Direction (OD3) is a framework for how we run the organisation. There are six priorities. Each priority has a clear strategy which sets out the why, how and actions to March 2022, financial implications and the associated KPI's. Underpinning everything is our corporate vision: "Improving People's Lives".

- 1.6 We are now entering the third and final year of OD3. Building on the strong foundations that have been put in place we have embarked on the development of our new corporate strategy from April 2022. We have had a meeting with the Council's senior management team to better understand our individual priorities and seek ways in which we can work together.
- 1.7 Customers remain at the heart of all that we do, we will continue to innovate, maintain a strong focus on our homes (and build new ones), and further strengthen our brand and reputation as a landlord of choice in Halton and beyond.
- 1.8 The priorities for 2021/22 take account of a range of drivers including changes in the external environment including the Social Housing White Paper, the Together with Tenants Charter, the new NHF Code of Governance (2020), the Future Homes Standard, building safety and economic recovery post the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Introduction

Operating Environment

- 2.1 Whilst performance is strong, there have been changes to the operating environment, such as the rent reductions announced in 2015 and the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in 2020/21. As the environment changes, we will continue to monitor performance to gain assurance that the impact of those changes is being effectively managed and mitigated.
- 2.2 Rather than just respond to changes in our operating environment we have worked hard to try to influence policy as it is being developed. This has been at a local, regional, and national level.

Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic

- 2.3 As well as serious implications for people's health, Covid-19 has significantly impacted businesses and the wider economy. We have responded well to the challenge presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and received positive feedback from key stakeholders including Halton Borough Council (HBC).
- 2.4 Throughout the year, we continued to consider the principal risks and uncertainties resulting from the pandemic. Some headline risks that continued to be addressed include:
- Our seamless transition to working from home largely because of our well-established flexible working agile culture. We have developed our future ways of working as we transition to the 'new normal'.
 - Emergency repairs and key compliance works continued throughout the lockdown period. An almost full range of services was resumed from 1st June 2020. The backlog in repairs has been cleared.
 - Only one of the two development sites was shut down for a short period of time. There were delays on sale completions on only a small number of homes, but all were either sold or reserved by 31st March 2021.

- Additional monitoring of rent arrears was introduced. The debt recovery team and welfare benefits advisors worked closely with customers to maximise take up of benefits and establish affordable payment plans. We outperformed our rent arrears targets by the year end, and we reduced our provision for bad debts at the year end.
- No customers were evicted from their homes during 2020/21.
- We have offered 149 properties to vulnerable customers, as direct matches to reduce homelessness. We have also been successful in submitting a funding bid to MHCLG for capital and revenue funding with HBC to support rough sleepers and homelessness in Halton which includes funding to refurbish two of our longer-term void properties.

Our Direction (OD3)

2.5 Our Direction (OD3) is a framework for how we run the organisation. There are six priorities. Each priority has a clear strategy which sets out the why, how, targets to March 2022, financial implications and the associated KPI's. Underpinning everything is our corporate vision: "Improving People's Lives".

2.6 Our six priorities are:

1. **Customer Focus** - Customers are our key focus. We will listen to their views, understand their needs and preferences, and deliver services that are accessible, high performing and provide value for money. We will be a pioneer for innovative service delivery using insight, digital and Artificial Intelligence, whilst ensuring our visible presence within our neighbourhoods.
2. **Places to be Proud Of** - We will keep our customers safe and continue investing in our existing homes to make sure they are fit for the future and that we minimise our environmental impact. We will build on our role within our neighbourhoods, working with partners to tackle the challenges they face and create places to be proud of.

3. **Growth and Diversification** - We will continue to grow and diversify our business, developing a whole market housing offer which meets a range of needs including those of older people and those starting out on the housing ladder. We will grow our commercial arm, OSUK to generate profits which help protect our business and subsidise our social housing activity.
4. **Healthy Organisation** - We will deliver all of this through our people. We will create an environment where colleagues are valued and listened to, and where they have a strong voice which shapes our future direction. We will recruit and retain people with the right skills, but more importantly the right behaviours to help us deliver our plans. We will invest in our leaders, our people and our IT and create a healthy organisation where everyone can do a great job in an innovative, collaborative, and agile business.
5. **Well Governed & Financially Viable** - Our plans can only be delivered if we maintain our strong foundations. This means being as efficient and productive as we can be, maximising our income and delivering great performance. It means being well governed, compliant with regulatory and legal requirements and having the financial capacity to fund our plans.
6. **Brand and Reputation** - We will build on our brand and reputation with our customers, our colleagues, local partners and within the sector. We will be the first choice for people looking for a home within the borough and beyond and a partner of choice for those who invest in our neighbourhoods and provide services to our customers. We will continue to be regarded in the sector as a forward thinking, innovative housing provider.

2.7 We are now entering the third and final year of OD3. Building on the strong foundations that have been put in place we have embarked on the development of our new corporate strategy from April 2022. We have had a meeting with the Council's senior management team to better understand our individual priorities and seek ways in which we can work together.

2.8 Customers remain at the heart of all that we do, we will continue to innovate, maintain a strong focus on our homes (and build new ones), and further strengthen our brand and reputation as a landlord of choice in Halton and beyond.

- 2.9 The priorities for 2021/22 take account of a range of drivers including changes in the external environment including the Social Housing White Paper, the Together with Tenants Charter, the new NHF Code of Governance (2020), the Future Homes Standard, building safety and economic recovery post the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 2.10 Over the last 12 months we have delivered several significant achievements and outcomes. We have a strong brand and reputation which we will build on with our customers, our colleagues, local partners and within the sector.
- 2.11 Our key priorities for 2021/22 include:
- Customers are our key focus. We will deliver services that are accessible, high performing and provide value for money.
 - We will keep our customers safe and continue investing in our existing homes.
 - We will continue to grow and diversify our business.
 - We will create an environment where colleagues are valued and listened to.
 - We will be well governed, compliant with regulatory and legal requirements and have the financial capacity to fund our plans.
 - We will build on our brand and reputation with our customers, our colleagues, local partners and within the sector.

3 Customer Focus

- 3.1 Customers are our key focus. We will listen to their views, understand their needs and preferences, and deliver services that are accessible, high performing and provide value for money. We will be a pioneer for innovative service delivery using insight, digital and Artificial Intelligence, whilst ensuring our visible presence within our neighbourhoods.
- 3.2 We have signed up to the NHF Together with Tenants Charter and continue to strengthen the customer voice with a range of online opportunities for customers to engage including virtual complaints and repairs forums.

3.3 Our key achievements for 2020/21 include:

- Through listening to our customers and using our insight we have developed our Customer Contact and our Customer Voice Strategies.
- We have created new Neighbourhood and Customer Experience directorates to create more capacity to focus on both the customer and place and deliver a more visible presence within our neighbourhoods.
- We have appointed a new Chair and Vice Chair of the Customer Forum
- Completed a self-assessment against new Housing Ombudsman Code of Guidance to demonstrate compliance.
- Launched refreshed digital platforms including new website, customer portal and customer app.

4 **Places to be proud of**

4.1 We will keep our customers safe and continue investing in our existing homes to make sure they are fit for the future and that we minimise our environmental impact. We will build on our role within our neighbourhoods, working with partners to tackle the challenges they face and create places to be proud of.

4.2 Our key achievements for 2020/21 include:

- We have continued to demonstrate excellent performance in the management of health and safety compliance.
- We have developed our strategies for Asset Management, Environmental and Sustainability and Placeshaping.
- Our first neighbourhood project, 'Destination Ditton' has been launched.
- Raised our profile through representation on boards including Building Better, Runcorn Town Fund, Northern Housing Consortium (NHC) and Riverside College.
- Set out our Social Value Strategy which has been approved by Board.

Social Value and Placeshaping Strategies

- 4.3 As a housing association we are an anchor institution within our neighbourhoods. We are an employer, builder, partner, and place maker. We are at the beating heart of communities across Halton – and we are here to stay.
- 4.4 Our Social Value Strategy links closely with both our Placeshaping and Environmental and Sustainability strategies. It aims to improve the conditions of life for the residents of the areas in which we own or manage housing stock by tackling inequalities arising from:
- Homelessness
 - Health
 - Income
 - Fuel and food poverty
 - Digital exclusion
 - Employment opportunities

Destination Ditton

- 4.5 The “Destination Ditton” project brings together Halton Housing customers, residents of Ditton and local and national partners, Halton Borough Council, Job Centre Plus, Department for Work and Pensions, Riverside College, Power in Partnership (PiP) and Ormiston Chadwick Academy to name a few, all seeking to create lasting improvements, bring communities together and create opportunities for all age groups.
- 4.6 Earlier this year we asked customers and residents, what improvements they wanted to see in Ditton, through several surveys and engagement events.

- 4.7 The findings of both exercises have been pulled together into a plan which will be delivered throughout 2021 with four key themes and areas of focus for the programme, including: green and open spaces, supporting employment opportunities, education and training and health and wellbeing.
- 4.8 Several projects have been identified, with a number already underway including:
- Supporting high school children with online learning by funding and providing 50 laptops. Halton Housing is also providing school uniforms for customers who are in financial hardship.
 - Partnering with several local volunteer groups to help tackle food poverty and supporting the launch of a mobile community supermarket, which will provide low-cost quality food.
 - Providing interview experience to young learners at Power in Partnership (PiP), in support of their 'work ready' programme.
 - Funding DJ lessons and bicycle repairs and maintenance workshops

Sustainability and the Environment

- 4.9 We aim to reduce the environmental impact of our activities. To achieve net zero carbon, we will progress innovative options to decarbonise our existing housing stock, focusing on our lower performing homes and minimise the environmental impact of our maintenance activities and travel. We will work with customers to reduce fuel poverty; consider how environmental and sustainability becomes an increasing factor in our decision making; and invest in our communities to increase biodiversity and access to quality green space to create thriving places where people choose to live.

5 Growth and Diversification

- 5.1 We will continue to grow and diversify our business, developing a whole market housing offer which meets a range of needs including those of older people and those starting out on the housing ladder.

5.2 Our key achievements for 2020/21 include:

- We approved the development of 215 new affordable homes across three schemes – 110 for rent and 105 for shared ownership.
- Completed the construction of an additional 92 new homes. This has taken the number of new homes built and acquired since stock transfer to almost 1,400.
- All homes developed for sale have been sold and all shared ownership homes have either been sold or reserved.

5.3 We are going to build and acquire 1,000 additional new homes for rent, sale, and shared ownership over the next five years.

6 Healthy Organisation

6.1 We will deliver through our people. We will create an environment where colleagues are valued and listened to, and where they have a strong voice which shapes our future direction. We will recruit and retain people with the right skills, but more importantly the right behaviours to help us deliver our plans. We will invest in our leaders, our people and our IT and create a healthy organisation where everyone can do a great job in an innovative, collaborative, and agile business.

6.2 Our key achievements for 2020/21 include:

- We launched and are delivering our Leadership Matters training and development programme.
- The implementation of the Driving Our Future change programme has continued at pace.
- Completed a Stakeholder Survey and developed a subsequent action plan.
- Achieved No 1 Housing Digital provider award.
- Achieved the Investor in People (IIP) gold standard and achieved the health and wellbeing award.

Transformation

6.3 We are undertaking the second year of the “Driving Our Future” change programme. The deliverables will include:

- Trialling a range of innovative new products designed to enhance efficiency and deliver improved services to customers
- Enhanced day-to-day repairs systems, processes and working practices.
- An enhanced telephony system and redesigned customer reception area based on customer feedback.

7 Financially Viable and well governed

7.1 Our plans can only be delivered if we maintain our strong foundations. This means being as efficient and productive as we can be, maximising our income and delivering great performance. It means being well governed, compliant with regulatory and legal requirements and having the financial capacity to fund our plans.

7.2 Our key achievements for 2020/21 include:

- We have achieved our rent arrears and void targets and cleared our repairs backlog, despite the challenges of Covid-19.
- We have achieved the highest possible regulatory rating (V1 G1).
- We have appointed a new chair of OSUK, our commercial subsidiary, and four new Board Members.
- Conducted a review and self-assessment against the Social Housing White Paper
- Conducted a review and self-assessment against the new National Housing Federation 2020 Code of Governance and the actions identified have started to be addressed.

8 Brand and Reputation

8.1 We will build on our brand and reputation with our customers, our colleagues, local partners and within the sector. We will be the first choice for people looking for a home within the borough and beyond and a partner of choice for those who invest in our neighbourhoods and provide services to our customers. We will continue to be regarded in the sector as a forward thinking, innovative housing provider. We were judged first in the list of UK Digital Landlords by Housing Digital.

Key Partnerships

8.2 We recognise we have an important role in investing in and tackling the challenges faced by the place in which we operate. Examples of our achievements include:

- Several projects aimed at engaging with young people and reducing anti-social behaviour in the area.
- Work with Riverside College to engage adults in improving their skills and employment prospects.
- Recruited three placements under the government's Kickstart scheme and six additional apprentices making it 11 apprentices in total
- Donation of 50 laptops for digitally excluded children attending Ormiston High School.
- Work with the Halton Employment Partnership to promote schemes for the unemployed to our customers.
- Work with HBC and other partners on initiatives to engage customers in health and wellbeing initiatives.
- Initiatives to improve access to affordable food via community shops.
- Engagement with third sector partners on initiatives to alleviate loneliness.
- Green space projects to enhance open spaces on the estate.

8.3 We have signed up as an early adopter of the ESG Sustainability Reporting Standard. Our first ESG report will be published in Autumn 2021.