

Social Impact Report

BE THE DIFFERENCE



Hightown

2019/2020

Contents

- 3 Our impact at a glance
- 4 Introduction
- 5 What we do
- 6 Homelessness prevention
- 9 Homes for Cathy
- 10 Supporting residents to maintain their tenancies
- 14 Giving back to our local communities
- 16 Achieving better outcomes for vulnerable people
- 20 Creating a sustainable environment
- 22 Summary



Our impact at a glance



221 rough sleepers supported by our outreach service

Our annual turnover **£85.5m**

637 people accessed impartial advice & support to manage money

We support over **780** service users across **86** schemes

51% planned move-ons from Open Door shelter into other accommodation
42% of properties let to homeless households

2,800 number of rental properties in EPC Band B or above

Over **£115,000** recovered in welfare payments

#Give.

We raised **£7,000** for Hertfordshire Mind Network



Welcome



Hightown Housing Association's Social Impact Report for 2019/20

As a charitable housing association that has operated for more than 50 years, we understand that creating homes and communities does not end when the building work is complete. We are also in a unique position to make a positive difference to the wellbeing of individuals and families and make a meaningful contribution to society as a whole.

This report sets out to summarise our social impact in terms of the outcomes that our services, policies and projects deliver for our residents, service users and the wider community.

Compiling the report has been a challenge in that there are so many wonderful individual examples of the tangible differences our work has made to people's lives. For simplicity, we have focused on five key areas where we believe our social impact is greatest:

- homelessness prevention
- supporting residents to maintain their tenancies
- giving back to our local communities
- achieving better outcomes for vulnerable people
- creating a sustainable environment

I hope you enjoy reading about our work. If you would like to learn more about Hightown, do drop us an email at communications@hightownha.org.uk.

David Bogle, Chief Executive

What we do

Hightown's mission of building homes and supporting people is founded in our origins as one of the grassroots housing providers formed in the 1960s. Since that time, we have remained true to our social purpose, building as many homes as we can at below market rates and offering a wide range of housing and support for people who are vulnerable and/or disabled.



Today we own and manage 6,835 homes and have an annual turnover of £85.5 million, employing over 1,000 staff. Our care and supported housing division encompasses 86 projects. We operate mainly in Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire but also have affordable housing in Bedfordshire, plus care and support projects in Berkshire, all within an hour's travel of our central office in Hemel Hempstead.

We pride ourselves on being an agile, 'can do' organisation that can move quickly in response to changing local housing and support needs. In 2019/20 we built 477 new homes, fulfilling our strategic objective to maintain a three year rolling average of at least 400 homes a year.

We also continue to develop new and innovative models of care and support, helping service users to live with confidence, independence and choice.



Our outreach service supports rough sleepers.

Homelessness Prevention

Preventing homelessness is central to Hightown's social purpose. By developing new homes of the right size in the right areas, quickly and cost effectively, we contribute directly towards the government's ambitious targets to keep homeless families out of temporary accommodation. Moreover, our temporary and short-term supported accommodation services play a vital role in reducing the number of rough sleepers, acting as a stepping stone for people to move towards a secure future away from the streets.

As a critical partner to local authorities, we play a crucial role in co-producing and co-delivering local homelessness strategies. We also continue to support local authority housing teams to implement the new legal duties assigned to them in the landmark 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA), which has put an onus on homelessness prevention and relief. The new legislation gives people facing homelessness access to meaningful help and requires public bodies to refer anyone at risk of homelessness to their local authority. Although as a housing association we are not bound by this duty, we have pledged our support by agreeing to the National Housing Federation's voluntary 'Commitment to Refer'.

As a Homes for Cathy member, we benchmark our housing policies against the group's nine commitments. In terms of tenancies, this means avoiding blanket and inflexible practices around nominations and eligibility, and considering applicants' unique history and circumstances. In 2019/20, this approach meant we let 192 general needs homes to

homeless households or those threatened with homelessness.

Working alongside the local charity Open Door St Albans we run the Open Door night shelter, a drop-in service that provides 12 beds for up to 28 days, free lunchtime meals, laundry facilities, support with housing, benefit and employment applications, and advice on health and wellbeing. Our team of outreach workers engages with rough sleepers in the St Albans and Dacorum districts to build their trust and help them access vital services.

In addition to Open Door, our seven temporary and short-term supported accommodation services provide a safe environment for homeless people as they move towards independent living. Meanwhile, our Young People's Housing Service (YPHS) – which includes a dedicated service for unaccompanied asylum seekers – offers a lifeline for teenagers and young adults who might otherwise end up on the streets or sofa surfing, helping them access education and employment opportunities and learn life skills for the future.

In summary, our homelessness prevention outcomes in 2019/20 included:

42% of properties let to homeless households

221 rough sleepers supported by outreach services

165 people given a bed at the Open Door shelter

54 average weekly hours spent on rough sleeper outreach

369 people accessing the Open Door meal drop-in service

51% planned move-ons from Open Door shelter into other accommodation

16 art sessions at the Open Door shelter

2 average monthly referrals by Open Door to NHS mental health services



Mitch

Housing First Service

As part of our long-standing commitment to ending homelessness, we recently launched a new 'Housing First' service to help people with complex issues and needs, to move off the streets and on to a more stable future. Launched in October 2019, the service provides affordable housing with tailored, intensive support to enable people to access the help they need. A fundamental principle of the service is that properties are provided with no pre-conditions, only a willingness to maintain the tenancy.

Mitch is one of the first people to benefit from this new approach. Having spent a year living in a tent and using the services of our Open Door shelter, he moved into a local authority property in February 2020 and is supported on a daily basis by Hightown's Housing First co-ordinator, Fran.

"Life was very tough before. I felt like I'd lived a life of empty promises, so it was quite a big shock to actually

be given a property. Fran has been amazing. She helps me with everything, making sure I do things on time, such as paying my rent and bills. She genuinely cares and is always just a phone call or text away if I need her. That personal attention makes a difference," says Mitch.

Now settled in his new home, Mitch is busy making it his own. A housing grant has helped him kit out the property with furniture and other household items and with support from Fran, he has plans to decorate and start doing some gardening.



He adds, "I'm getting some structure in my life. I'm taking part in a special boxing programme to get fit and my next goal is to take up a trial position in retail, which I hope will lead to a permanent job."

Through the Housing First service, Hightown will help a total of 18 people with multiple and complex needs to break the cycle of instability that leads to rough sleeping.

CASE STUDY

Unaccompanied Minors Scheme

Hightown's unaccompanied minors team works closely with Hertfordshire County Council and the Refugee Council to provide immediate accommodation and support to young asylum seekers. Our support workers are among the first people they meet in the UK. Having provided a safe place for them to live, it falls on the team to cater to their basic needs and help them adjust to life in the UK. The support given covers many aspects, including registering the young people at college, accompanying them to healthcare, legal and Home Office appointments and providing practical help with shopping, budgeting and learning to cook - all with a focus on developing life skills and independence for the future.

One such young person is 17 year-old Mazin, who fled civil unrest in his native Sudan. Since joining Hightown's scheme in October 2019, Mazin has embraced every opportunity to learn and integrate, despite speaking no English when he first arrived. Coming back from his first day at college, he amazed staff by greeting them with a cheery 'Good afternoon, how are you?' and over recent months has taken part in all of the various activities on offer at the scheme, from games and movie nights to homework sessions, cooking lessons and workshops in subjects such as sexual health and internet safety.

**Mazin**

Mazin has continued attending college and is studying Maths and IT alongside ESOL (English as a second language). In fact, he loves learning English so much that he devotes his spare time to listening to the English websites recommended by his college tutors, alongside typical teenage pursuits such as cycling and the gym. He particularly enjoys cooking and eating with the other young people who live in the scheme.

Like his peers, Mazin has high aspirations for the future and would like to turn his love of fixing things into a career as an electrician or mechanic.

He has nothing but praise for the support he has received from Hightown staff:

"The staff are so helpful...they have helped me so much I can't even describe it."

Hightown Operations Manager Philippa Gardner, who oversees the service, says: *"We're so proud of Mazin; from day one he has shown such a positive attitude towards assimilating to his new life and has become a confident young man who is ready to face the world."*

Hightown is a founding member of the Homes for Cathy group, an alliance of housing associations and charities united by a common aim to end homelessness. During 2019/20, the group's membership has grown to over 100 organisations, each concerned with finding solutions and developing best practice around the nine Homes for Cathy commitments, a set of aspirational pledges drawn up by the group in consultation with the homelessness charity Crisis.

Hightown maintains a pivotal role in the Homes for Cathy group's day-to-day running, steered by a dedicated committee of housing sector leaders. The past year has seen the launch of a successful programme of Homes for Cathy regional workshops hosted by members, bringing together agencies and stakeholders in various parts of the UK to explore local approaches to ending homelessness. Meanwhile, the Homes for Cathy annual conference has gained a reputation as a not-to-be missed event, attracting in excess of 150 delegates, from housing association board members through to professionals delivering frontline services. The Homes for Cathy website continues to provide a source of inspiration through which members can share and learn about best practice - the site attracted nearly 10,000 visitors in 2019, nearly treble that of the previous year.

Going forward, a collaboration with Housemark - the housing sector's data collection and analysis body - will enable Homes for Cathy to measure its members' impact and contribution to ending homelessness.

"Housing associations are already housing and supporting thousands of homeless people, but we believe they have the skills, experience and resources to do more; for example, developing temporary housing units, offering short-term help with rent payments, appointing tenancy sustainment officers or partnering with local homelessness charities."

David Bogle, Chair of Homes for Cathy



Supporting residents to maintain their tenancies

Financial Inclusion Service

Hightown's Financial Inclusion Officers provide a comprehensive service and support residents who are experiencing financial hardships. With the help of our specialist team, residents can claim the correct benefits, maximise their income, prevent the build-up of debts and avoid eviction. This enables them to take control of their finances, stay on top of their budgeting and improve their quality of life.

The team covers a wide array of areas, from eligibility for welfare benefits, to help with tribunals. What's more, the team offers budgeting advice, including looking at reducing utility bill costs, plus signposting residents to charitable debt advice agencies such as PayPlan and StepChange.

In the last financial year, the Financial Inclusion Officers

received over 600 referrals and assisted residents to obtain just over £125,000 through the provision of Personal Independence Payments Care and Mobility, Discretionary Housing Payments, Universal Credit, Utility Grants, Charity Grants, Housing benefits and Council tax refunds.

"Working as a Financial Inclusion Officer is an enjoyable, sometimes challenging but ultimately rewarding experience. I help residents with their benefits and budgeting queries. What may start as a simple straightforward referral, i.e. how do I apply for Universal Credit, can lead to finding out that residents are choosing between buying food and heating their home. Being able to alleviate people's fears and increase their financial wellbeing makes the job fulfilling." Donna Bradshaw, Financial Inclusion Officer



In 2019/20, our Financial Inclusion Officers supported residents with the following:

637 people accessed impartial advice and support to manage money

111 face-to-face appointments were delivered to provide financial and welfare advice

550 people were able to clear arrears on rent accounts and avoid eviction

503 home visits were carried out

£115,000 recovered in additional welfare payments

£3,000 secured in grants



Mick

Mick lives in a two bedroom house and was affected by the bedroom tax for some years. He has also been suffering with ill health. Our Financial Inclusion Officer applied for Personal Independence Payment on his behalf due to his deteriorating health (as he was constantly in and out of work) and he was awarded low rate care and mobility. He received a backdated payment of £1,308.

As a result of the help from our team, Mick was awarded a total of £5,303 from Discretionary Housing Payments as he had rent arrears. He was struggling to maintain living in his household, so the Financial Inclusion Officer worked with St Albans District Council and referred him to the Housing Options unit. He agreed to downsize and moved into one of our care and supported housing services.

Paul

Paul became homeless after losing his home and business. He had been rough sleeping for seven years, which was a very difficult period for him as he had always been independent. He was offered a home by Hightown which he was thrilled about, as this meant he was able to rebuild his life.

Paul received a variety of support from our Financial Inclusion Officer such as, applying for Universal Credit so he could pay his rent. He also received help with completing forms for council tax support. Having been homeless for such a long period, Paul did not have basic knowledge of utilities, so our Financial Inclusion Officer set up his bills for him and arranged for these to be paid in line with his monthly Universal Credit payments.

"I am incredibly thankful to Hightown for giving me a home and for the support received from the brilliant staff. It feels wonderful having a place I can call home and it has made my mum happy knowing that I am doing well."

Julia

We recently supported Julia who was going through a particularly challenging period. She has severe mental health problems and lacked confidence as she had struggled to engage in support services.

Julia's disability benefits had stopped as a result of her failing to complete and return her documents to the relevant service. Consequently, her day to day benefits had also been reduced. Our Financial Inclusion Officer assisted Julia in completing her review forms and providing medical evidence so that her benefits could be reinstated. The Financial Inclusion Officer also supported Julia to apply for help with the bedroom tax as she had a spare room.

With the support from our staff, Julia received a back payment of both disability benefits and Discretionary Housing Payments for help with her rent. This resulted in Julia being relieved from a great deal of stress. She was appreciative of the support she received from Hightown.

Tenancy Sustainment Officer

In May 2019, we introduced a new role within the Housing team – a Tenancy Sustainment Officer. The establishment of this role is part of Hightown's commitment to Homes for Cathy to help prevent evictions. In addition, the role is also to help new residents settle in their home and to assist existing residents to successfully sustain their tenancies.

The Tenancy Sustainment Officer provides added support for a caseload of residents who are experiencing difficulties and are not certain where or who to seek help from. We ensure that our residents are treated with dignity and respect at all times when they contact us for support.

Our dedicated Tenancy Sustainment Officer goes above and beyond to provide a high standard of housing advice and guidance, and delivers a diverse range of support including:

- Signposting residents to suitable organisations with specialist knowledge such as a community mental health team
- Helping residents to understand their tenancy agreement and how to manage their tenancy
- Signposting residents in need of white goods and furniture to charities and local organisations
- Supporting residents to improve and maintain the condition of their home
- Issuing foodbank vouchers to residents who are facing financial difficulties
- Supporting and signposting residents who are seeking employment or training opportunities
- Applying for grants on behalf of residents

Since starting the role, our Tenancy Sustainment Officer has received over 250 referrals, 229 new residents and 38 existing residents, with each resident receiving the best possible outcome for their case.

The white goods, furniture and other necessities acquired for residents last financial year cost just over £4,000.

Items	Costs
Furniture	£892
White goods	£1,955
Toy bank	£35
Food parcel	£130
Other - bike	£50
Other – baby bits	£30
Other – travel	£477
Other – removal vans	£440
Other – emergency top up	£15
	£4,024



Chloe Baxter

Tenancy Sustainment Officer, said:

"My primary role as a Tenancy Sustainment Officer is to prevent homelessness and to support households in their homes. Being able to empower residents to live an independent life and to successfully sustain their tenancy gives me real satisfaction. I'm always on hand to assist residents with whatever problem they may have, which can vary from issuing foodbank vouchers, to helping a resident replace a stolen bike needed for work, to furnishing their home. Our residents are always extremely grateful for the assistance they receive, however small, and regularly report positive feedback."

Case study – Jasmine*

Jasmine was previously living in a mother and baby unit with her daughter. She transitioned into a beautiful permanent property with Hightown just in time for Christmas. As they were living in the mother and baby unit, Jasmine did not have any furniture, nor the means to provide basic furniture for her daughter.

Being aware of her situation, the Tenancy Sustainment Officer issued foodbank vouchers to help meet Jasmine's most immediate needs and referred her to a few organisations who were able to supply the necessary furniture for the baby. Hitchin Volunteer Army, Olive Branch Network and Dacorum Community Trust donated a baby cot, mattress, baby bedding, clothes, in addition to baby wipes and nappies. Jasmine was overwhelmed with the help and donations she received.

*Name changed to protect identity.

Case study – Joe

Joe moved into one of Hightown's properties in August 2019, and shortly after his dad tragically passed away. It was an exceptionally difficult time for Joe. He couldn't afford to buy new furniture and had the responsibility of organising funeral arrangements for his dad.

With everything happening at once, our Tenancy Sustainment Officer was available to support him throughout his bereavement and to obtain furniture for his home. Our Tenancy Sustainment Officer found an organisation that could potentially help Joe with funeral costs, for which he was very grateful. He received additional support with applying for single person council tax reduction and our Tenancy Sustainment Officer directly contacted Affinity Water to arrange for Joe to be set up on a low income tariff. The Officer also relayed information regarding Joe's rent and funeral payments to his Housing Officer, as he was struggling to do both. Joe is now in a much better position and thanks Chloe, the Tenancy Sustainment Officer, for all she has done.

"I really cannot thank Chloe enough for all the support I received during that emotional time. Chloe went the extreme mile to help me. I was laid off work and was therefore struggling financially. Unbeknown to me, Chloe had arranged for a delivery of food from a local foodbank which was very welcoming. She proceeded to send me links to improve my job search. In all honesty, Chloe has been a star. I'm so much more informed of everything I need and this is all due to Chloe. I'm now back working and feel a lot better for my future and Chloe is a huge reason behind this."

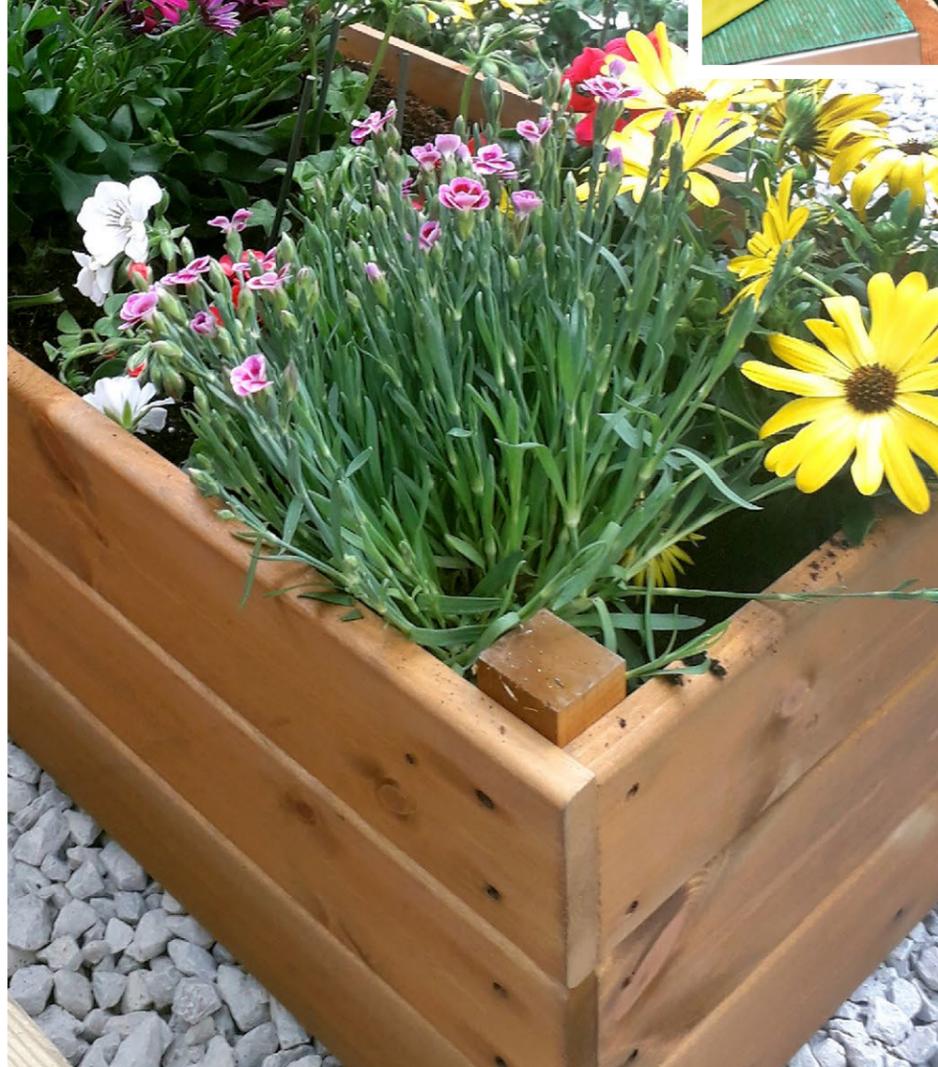
Giving back to our local communities

Staff at Hightown regularly give back to local communities by volunteering for organisations as part of our annual staff conference.

At our annual conference in May 2019, staff got involved in various activities such as showing off their green fingers by helping out with gardening tasks at the Sunnyside Rural Trust in Hemel Hempstead and the Gadebridge Scouts Association. Staff also worked with the Canal & River Trust to dig up weeds and paint a stretch of canal running through the town.

As well as this, staff often raise money for our nominated charity, Hertfordshire Mind Network, through various fundraising activities across the year. Some of these fundraising activities include wreath making, a charity quiz night and bake sales. In total, Hightown raised an astounding £7,000 for Hertfordshire Mind Network, which will help the charity to continue to provide the necessary support for those accessing its services.

The generosity of the staff does not stop there. Hightown donated 61kg of food and household essentials to DENS charity in Dacorum over the festive period to help local people struggling. Most recently, staff donated personal and beauty items weighing over 27kg.



Caroline McGoohan, Fundraising Manager at Hertfordshire Mind Network, said:
"As a local mental health charity, Hertfordshire Mind Network are delighted to have been partnered with Hightown for the last 18 months. The fundraising activities have been a real inspiration and it is great to see a team of enthusiastic and committed staff wanting to make a difference in their local community. On behalf of the clients, volunteers and staff at Hertfordshire Mind Network, I would like to say a big thank you for the money they have raised so far! Their donations will allow us to continue supporting more people in the local community experiencing mental ill health. We look forward to the partnership developing further over the next 18 months!"

Achieving better outcomes for vulnerable people

Growth Tree & Digital Innovation



Growth

2019/2020 saw the roll out of the Hightown Growth Model across all services within care and supported housing. The simple model enables staff to work with service users, identifying their support needs and their goals and then, through regular reviews, assess their development or 'growth' against those goals – in six areas:

- Communication
- Feelings & relationships
- Managing finances
- Physical health
- Mental health
- Responsibilities, living skills & safety

This new style of service users' assessments makes improved use of technology and great use of mobile devices to record support sessions.



Over 106,000 support notes have been written since it went live!

The change involved all staff, and their involvement with the project has led to ongoing improvements and developments. The assessments are evolving dynamic documents that have gained support from our partners during inspections and contract monitoring visits.

The Crossings, one of our registered care services in Buckinghamshire, recently received an 'Excellent' rating, following their Provider Assessment Review (PAMMS) from Buckinghamshire Council.

When reviewing service users' assessments, it was noted "Good, clear and concise positive risk assessing. This has helped the service users make decisions, achieve goals and retain independence and skills."



Wellbeing

As well as supporting service users with practical support, their wellbeing is at the heart of everything we do. We were delighted to hold our first county-wide wellbeing event in August 2019. Over 150 staff and service users from across Buckinghamshire came together to take part in lots of activities. These ranged from physical activities such as football, to mindful activities including arts and crafts, as well as enjoying karaoke, a disco and music provided by a group made up of both staff and service users.

Our colleagues from local organisations provided information stands promoting a wealth of wellbeing initiatives and services including MIND, Chiltern Music Therapy and Inclusion Un-Limited. Service users benefited from socialising with each other and the feedback was so positive that we plan to repeat the same format again.

"The Bucks Wellbeing event was designed to impact and inspire individuals with different abilities, but in a very inclusive way. Wellbeing is crucial to the way we deliver our support services. It is so important that our staff are performing at their best, mentally and physically, as this has a positive ripple effect on the people in our care."
Head of Care & Supported Housing in Buckinghamshire, Sebastian Moh.

It's not always possible to do things on such a large scale, so there have also been smaller events throughout the year across all three counties, not least the numerous Christmas parties, games nights and football tournaments that promote social interaction and building relationships.

More health-conscious events have been targeted towards areas in which service users often need more support – such as healthy eating events and oral health campaigns – during which the service users not only engage and learn but also improve their health and wellbeing at the same time.

Hightown supports over 780 service users across 86 services



Service User Involvement

It's paramount that our service users are involved in the delivery of support at Hightown, that we understand their needs and listen to their feedback, in order to help us achieve better outcomes for the organisation and the people we support. Consequently, we have a range of service user involvement initiatives that are growing in value every year.

Mystery Shopper

A group of volunteer service users have designed a programme of mystery shopping visits whereby they visit services in order to assess them on a range of three things: health and safety, service user involvement, look and feel. The supported service users arrive unannounced and interact with staff and service users, obtaining evidence and feeding back their findings to help improve the experience of service users in all settings.



Service users act as mystery shoppers.

CASE STUDY

When we think about achieving positive outcomes, the sky has been the limit for one service user at one of our mental health services in Buckinghamshire.

Charlotte

Moved into Culverton Court three years ago having struggled with self-neglect and hoarding. Initially she refused to engage with staff or other service users but through the support and structure provided, Charlotte

began to engage and take care of herself. The hoarding stopped and she became involved in the service, even being elected as the service users' representative having run a successful election campaign and securing a landslide victory!

Charlotte's amazing outcome is just one of the many positive stories to come from our mental health services in Buckinghamshire, which is why they were shortlisted for 'Best Supported Housing Landlord' in the UK Housing Awards 2020.

Janet*

Even in tragic circumstances a positive outcome can be possible. One young service user at a learning disability service in Hertfordshire moved to us after having been the victim of a serious sexual assault and acid attack. Not only did she have physical scars but the psychological impact was significant too, affecting her behaviour and relationships.

Charlotte began going out into the community unsupported. It was during one of these trips to town that she picked up a leaflet about learning to fly. She worked out that if she budgeted she could afford the lessons, and having planned the travel and transport options in order to get to the airfield, she is now successfully attending flying lessons regularly.



Voice Box

This panel of service users have proved they can turn their hand to anything, regularly taking part in the recruitment of care and supported housing staff, reviewing new policies or procedures, presenting at Hightown's annual staff conference, even taking part in training videos. Most recently, the panel has asked to attend a Board meeting. This initiative has given service users a real voice at Hightown, their opinion is sought-after and valued.

Complaints Scrutiny

We view complaints as an opportunity to review our actions and to improve where necessary. Complaints received in care and support are reviewed by our service user complaints scrutiny group who not only consider the original complaint but also the actions taken by Hightown in response. To be able to view Hightown from a service users' perspective has proved invaluable.

These initiatives not only assist Hightown but also give service users the opportunity to learn new skills, build new relationships and genuinely make a difference. This will continue in the future, with new ideas including a service user newsletter and involvement in organising wellbeing events.



Service users review complaints and the actions taken.

She has been supported by Hightown for over six years, moving to more appropriate accommodation as she gained greater independence and learnt new life skills of managing finances, relationships and her own health and wellbeing. In spring 2020, she signed her tenancy agreement ready to move to general needs accommodation and is now a proud mother of two young children. She has demonstrated resilience, personal growth and never taken her eye off the goal of becoming a mother. An inspiring young woman!

Peter*

Sometimes a positive outcome can be achieved despite ailing health. This has been the case for one

service user at Portman Close in Bracknell. This is a learning disabilities service, so when one service user was diagnosed with dementia, the concern was that he would have to move to alternative accommodation. This would not only have been a significant upheaval for him having lived there for many years, but also for his partner who is also a service user at Portman Close.

The staff team, determined to find a solution that was person-centred, all took part in dementia training, so they can now help and support both the service user and in turn his partner, who is seeing the person she loves changing.

They have enabled him to stay in his home with his partner and have stepped up to the

increased support needs, giving this service user and his partner the most positive outcome they can.

The Service Manager for Portman Close, Malgorzata Wilczko, said: *"The training helped the staff and the other service users learn how to interact with the issues relating to dementia and has enabled everyone to understand how to help and provide support."*

Support for Hightown service users is not provided just by the care and support staff. We have leads for resident involvement, domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour and tenancy fraud to provide a comprehensive service to residents.

*Name changed to protect identity.

Creating a sustainable environment

Reducing our impact on the environment and providing homes that are comfortable and economical to run, are key priorities for Hightown.

Investment in energy efficiency and water saving measures

We are committed to reducing fuel poverty and recognise the potentially life-changing impact to residents in enabling more manageable energy and water bills. The design of the buildings and the specification of the heating systems installed in our new developments results in an average energy efficiency rating (EPC) of band B for our new homes. Hightown's approach is to ensure high levels of fabric efficiency (this is known as 'Fabric First') in new buildings so that less heat is needed to keep the home warm. As a result, the average SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) rating of a Hightown property has increased to 80.1.

In addition, Photo Voltaic (PV) panels, where appropriate, and water saving measures are designed into new homes, for example dual flush toilets, water saving shower heads and the provision of rain water butts.

For our existing homes we have worked hard to reduce the number of homes that have an energy efficiency rating of Band D. At the end of the financial year we had just 43 buildings awaiting works to increase their energy EPC to a minimum Band C. We have achieved this by including in our annual repairs programmes energy efficiency works, such as boilers, heating, door and window replacements and insulation works in order to help provide affordable warmth. In 2019/20 we invested £739,000 on these measures.

The Board's strategic plan currently aims to achieve homes with a minimum EPC rating of Band C. Once this has been achieved the expectation is that a programme of works will continue to move existing homes to Band B.

When we build new homes on Hightown owned sites we agree travel plans with local authorities that look to promote sustainable travel options. We provide residents with information about public transport, with travel vouchers and in one case a car share scheme.

We have publicised to residents the availability on

Our energy efficiency programme has resulted in:

2,800 number of rental properties in EPC Band B or above



80.1 average SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) rating of a Hightown property

130 number of new boilers installed

21 number of window replacements carried out

£50 average annual household energy bill saving resulting from energy efficient windows



Photo Voltaic (PV) panels are designed into new homes

our website of the carbon footprint calculator so that they may think about how they can reduce their contribution to emissions.

Future plans

Following the government's announcement that gas boilers may not be fitted from 2025, an "After Gas" report has been commissioned so that consideration can be given to what alternative heating systems can be installed going forward.

We have been installing electric vehicle (EV) charging points on new developments and will continue to do so. We have an ongoing research project into EV charging and the management of charging points.

We intend to continue to raise awareness amongst our residents and staff about what they can do to contribute to reducing emissions, through making guidance available on our website and through community engagement

and involvement events. We are working in partnership with other agencies, such as 'Sustainable St Albans', to raise awareness and offer support to people who want to make a difference.

In our care and supported housing services we encourage service users to consider their environmental impact and explain to them ways to reduce this. We will produce accessible guidance and resources to share information and raise awareness of this issue.

Summary

This report shows how seriously we take our mission - 'Building homes. Supporting people'. It highlights some of the fantastic work we've carried out in the last financial year, from adapting the Housing First initiative, to introducing a new Tenancy Sustainment Officer role, to rolling out Hightown's growth model which enables service users to gain better independence and move forward with their lives.

Over the last financial year, we delivered 477 additional new affordable homes, bringing our total number of homes owned and managed to 6,835. We are meeting our objective of building 1,000 homes over the next two years. Here at Hightown, we provide more than just a place to live, we create vibrant communities where our residents can thrive.

We have experienced successful financial performance and growth over the last year. Our annual turnover was £85.5 million and our operating surplus was £20.5 million, which demonstrates we are

delivering good value for money. We have also been awarded an A3 investment credit rating by Moody's Investors Service.

Our high performance was reflected in the annual external benchmarking assessment conducted by HouseMark, as the results reveal that we continue to deliver affordable new housing whilst keeping our overheads to one of the lowest in the sector.

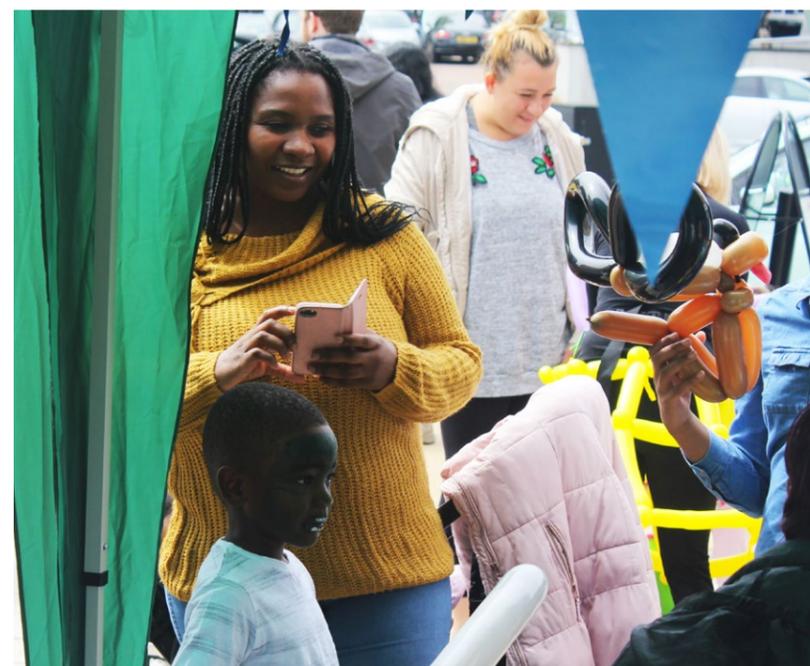
Despite the many challenges our care and supported housing services may encounter, we are committed to providing exceptional care whilst contributing to the improvement of the lives of

our service users. Five of our care and supported housing services in Buckinghamshire were rated 'Excellent' by Buckinghamshire Council for the first-class care staff provide.

As you can see from our report, we are committed to ending the homelessness crisis within the communities we serve. This is demonstrated with the introduction of Housing First, our homeless shelter, Open Door and seven temporary and short-term accommodations. In addition to this, the work our Financial Inclusion and Tenancy Sustainment Officers carry out also plays an integral part as they help our residents to avoid eviction and successfully sustain their tenancies.

Hightown works collaboratively and effectively with an extensive network of stakeholders to ensure objectives are successfully achieved.

We have grown our services to meet local demands and we are extremely proud of the impact our homes and services have on the lives of the people we support.





Want to find out more?

If you would like more information about anything you have read in this report, you can contact us in the following ways:

Email: communications@hightownha.org.uk

Call: 01442 292 300

Hightown Housing Association, Hightown House, Maylands Avenue, HP2 4XH

Follow us:

