



# Our Impact

2023/24





## Contents

- 04 Chief Executive's foreword
- 06 2023/24 impact snapshot
- 08 Investing in homes and places
- 16 Championing people and communities
- 30 Ending homelessness
- 38 Building a greener future
- 42 Supporting independence
- 50 Creating opportunities

# Chief Executive's Foreword

Welcome to Hightown's Impact Report covering the 2023/24 financial year.

Despite the external pressures of higher interest costs and a new regulatory regime, it was a year in which we continued to deliver on our social purpose – encapsulated by our mission statement of 'Building homes. Supporting people'.

As peers in our sector scaled down their development programmes, Hightown kept building, delivering 664 new affordable homes for people in housing need. As the nation faced an escalating housing crisis, we were proud to have 'punched above our weight' as a developer, maintaining our position as the fastest growing housing association.

The value of these social homes for people living in overcrowded, unsuitable and precarious housing – and for the wider economy – cannot be underestimated. According to the Value of a Social Tenancy Model (VosT)\*, England's 4.2 million social properties deliver at least £77.7 billion a year in combined social value and economic impact. Societal benefits of social housing include higher employment, lower benefit costs, improved healthcare, reduced homelessness, reduced crime and better life chances for children.

Alongside providing affordable homes, Hightown remains committed to delivering care and supported housing (C&SH). Equally, the impact of these services on the most vulnerable people in society is huge. In terms of homelessness alone, the National Housing Federation estimates that, were it not for supported housing, there would be

an increase in core homelessness of around 41,000 people, with a further 30,000 people at significant risk of future homelessness\*\*. People experiencing homelessness account for nearly a third of our 774 C&SH service users – the housing and support they receive is crucial in preventing higher risk forms of homelessness, such as rough sleeping, and helping them move forward in their lives.

Hightown's impact extends beyond the direct outcomes we help achieve for the people we house and support – we also make a positive impact on the wider community, through placemaking, job creation and our contribution to the UK's Net Zero journey.

We continue to deliver this impact in a complex and challenging operating environment and are justly proud to have maintained our G1 status – the highest governance rating set out by the Regulator of Social Housing – putting us in a strong position to forge ahead with our vital work as a charitable organisation, with social purpose at its heart.

We hope you enjoy reading about how we make an impact in every aspect of our operations and the stories of people whose lives we have helped change.

**David Bogle**  
Chief Executive

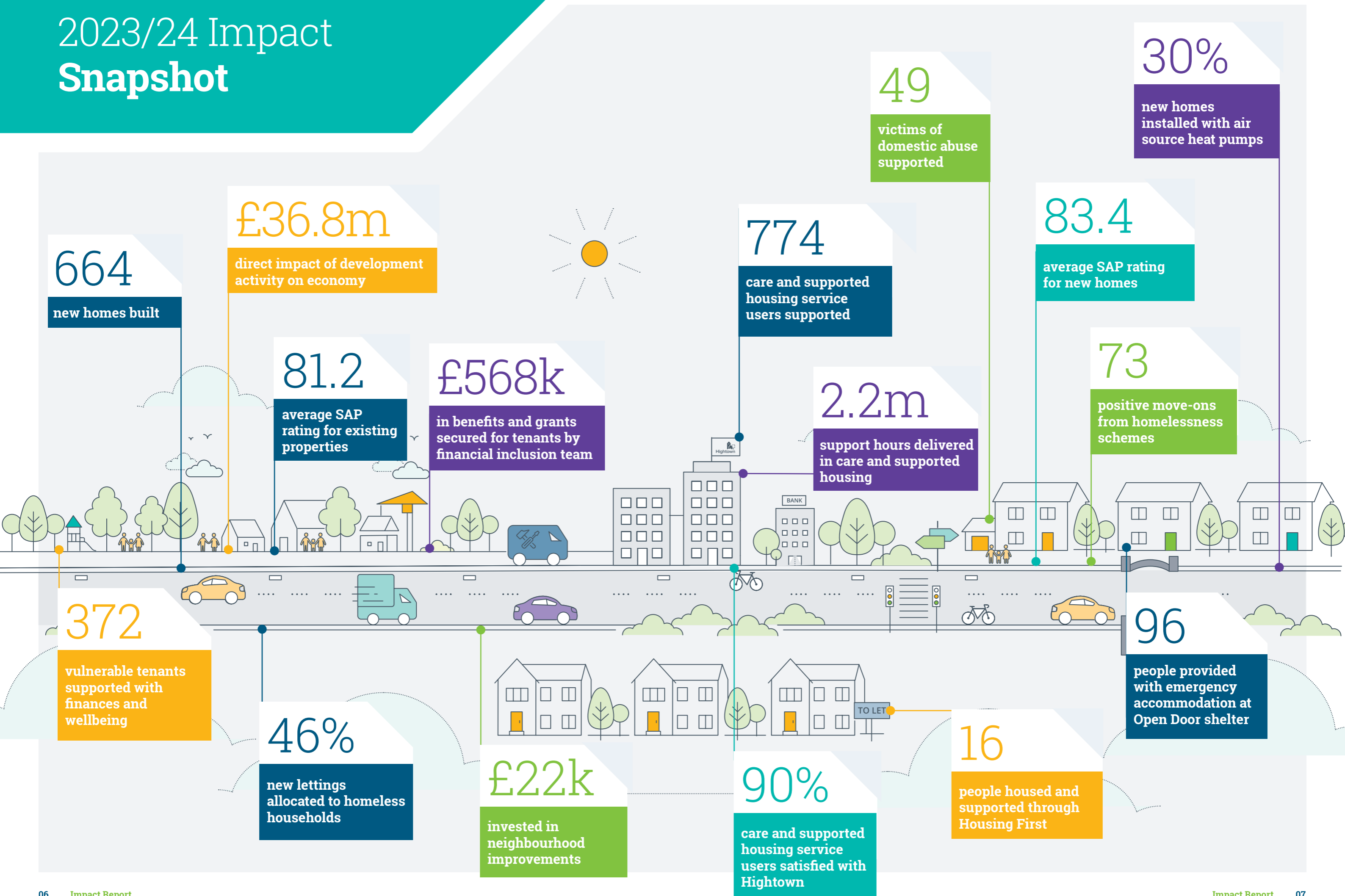
\* <https://www.thinkhouse.org.uk/site/assets/files/3006/hyde0524.pdf> P.32

\*\* <https://www.housing.org.uk/resources/research-into-the-supported-housing-sectors-impact-on-homelessness-prevention-health-and-wellbeing/>



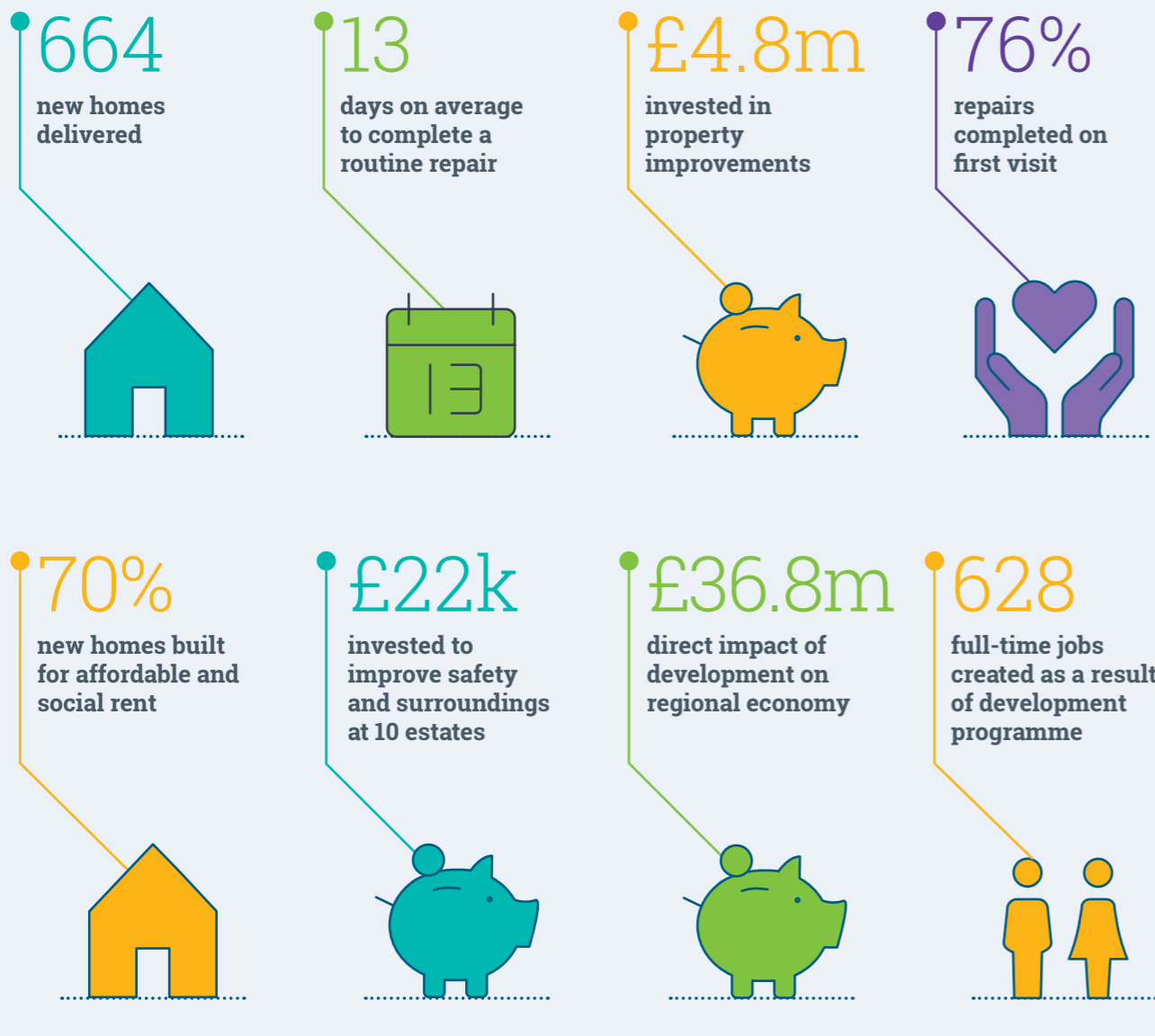
England's 4.2 million social properties deliver at least **£77.7 billion** a year in combined social value and economic impact.

# 2023/24 Impact Snapshot



# Investing in homes and places

## Highlights



At Hightown, we see maximising the number of new homes we deliver as central to our social mission. With a record 104,510 households stuck in temporary accommodation in England – costing local authorities £1.7 billion a year – our homes provide stability and security for families living in overcrowded, unsuitable conditions.

### Building new homes

Hightown built 664 new homes in 2023/24 – up 24% year-on-year and the largest number the association has built in one year. The new homes consisted of 469 for affordable and social rent, 23 for intermediate rent and 147 for shared ownership, with the remaining 25 homes for supported housing.

Based on the National Housing Federation's (NHF) local economic impact calculator, our 2023/24 investment in affordable homes had the direct impact of adding £36.8 million to the regional economy and created 628 full-time jobs.

According to research by the NHF, the development of affordable homes also leads to savings for the public purse; building 90,000 social homes – the level widely accepted as required annually for 10 years to meet housing need – would generate £31.4 billion in societal benefits, including higher employment (£8.9bn), lower benefit costs (£3.3bn), improved healthcare (£5.2bn), reducing homelessness (£4.5bn), reduced crime (£3.1bn) and better life chances for children (£2.7bn).

**More than three quarters** (76%) of the public think living in a decent quality, affordable home should be a right for everyone in the UK.

Source: YouGov polling for the National Housing Federation (2023)



## Robert's story: A quiet space to feel happy

Hightown's general needs resident Robert had experienced different forms of homelessness, such as sofa surfing, before being housed by Hightown. Sofa surfing is rarely captured by official statistics as it is a hidden form of homelessness. This makes it harder for those to get help as their situation is 'invisible', in terms of being seen by the public and in official statistics.

Robert's spiral of homelessness started when his parents' house was overcrowded, forcing him to move out. This resulted in him sofa surfing and living in a temporary hostel. With support of the staff from local homelessness charity Dens, Robert began to bid on properties in Hemel Hempstead.

Robert's new home brings many comforts to him. He can finally read in the quiet space of his own home – something he is very passionate about! The location is a bonus as it is near the town centre and local amenities. He can also relax in his lounge, catching up on his favourite TV shows such as EastEnders.

Robert is now feeling more secure and settled in his home.



The staff at Hightown were very helpful during the signing up process and answered all my questions.

This home has made me happy. I love it, I just love it. I've fallen on my feet and got back up from the bottom of the ladder.



There are over  
**37,000**  
households waiting for social housing  
in the 15 local authority areas where  
Hightown owns general needs homes.



Source: MHCLG

### Improving homes

In 2023/24, we invested £4.86 million in planned and major property improvements – up 36 per cent on the previous year – to improve the safety, comfort and environmental performance of residents’ homes. An additional £4.71 million was allocated to routine repairs (excluding voids) – up 31 per cent year-on-year, with 76.8% of repairs completed on the first visit and an average of 13 days taken to complete a routine repair.



### Building safety & quality

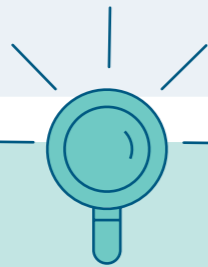
At Hightown, our residents’ safety and welfare is paramount and we have a dedicated building safety team who oversee safety standards in the buildings we manage.

In the wake of the 2017 Grenfell fire, the Building Safety Act became law in 2022, introducing ground-breaking reforms to give residents and homeowners more rights, powers, and protections to make homes safer. In line with this, Hightown is creating a robust resident engagement strategy around building safety for our high-rise buildings (seven storeys or exceeding 18 metres), reaffirming our commitment to the importance of resident communication and participation.

### Improving neighbourhoods

At Hightown, we are committed to maintaining safe, attractive neighbourhoods which our residents are proud to call home and, in 2023/24, invested £21,991 in our annual programme of estate improvement works. Following bids from residents, our Resident Voice and Scrutiny Panel agreed improvements to 10 estates including:

- Installing CCTV near bin stores
- Upgrading CCTV with additional cameras and systems
- Security lighting on a pathway to the car park, houses and bin area
- Stepping stones installed in rear garden for easier access to read meters
- Parking bay lineage and relocation of visitor bays
- Installation of security fencing.



**99.9%**  
homes with an in-date and compliant Fire Risk Assessment

**98.9%**  
homes with an in-date fixed wire (electrical safety) test

**100%**  
homes with a gas appliance with an in-date, accredited gas safety check

**100%**  
homes meeting the Decent Homes Standard

\*as at 2023/24 year end



**73.6%**  
general needs tenants satisfied with the overall repairs service from Hightown\*

\*Tenant Satisfaction Measures Survey 2024





## A placemaking story: Recovery to regeneration in Hemel Hempstead

2024 saw the completion of phase two of Hightown's Heart of Maylands development, part of the regeneration of the Maylands Business Park in Hemel Hempstead.

Hemel Hempstead is one of the original new towns and includes a series of residential areas and several business areas, the Maylands Business Park being the most significant. Following the Buncefield Oil Depot explosion in 2005, which displaced many local businesses on the park and risked its future as an economic hub, Dacorum Borough Council developed an action plan to rejuvenate the area.

This plan included a vision for the Heart of Maylands to become an attractive functional 'heart' for the wider business park, providing shops, cafes, restaurants, business services, community facilities and open spaces.

Hightown has been instrumental in the project; the association purchased the land directly, contracting to build affordable homes rather than working with a house builder to deliver affordable homes as a planning obligation.

Phase two of the project added an additional 158 affordable homes and three commercial units to the 130 homes, ten shops and space for Adeyfield Free Church delivered during phase one. The development places the new homes in a convenient location, within walking distance of local amenities, close to public transport links and with play areas for families to enjoy.

In December 2023, Adeyfield Free Church was the venue for Hightown's first ever festive open day, which brought together residents, families and Hightown's teams for an afternoon of festive celebrations, with a visit from Santa, a mobile nativity farm and carols from the church choir. The event, part of Hightown's commitment to community engagement, provided an opportunity for residents to feedback on our services.



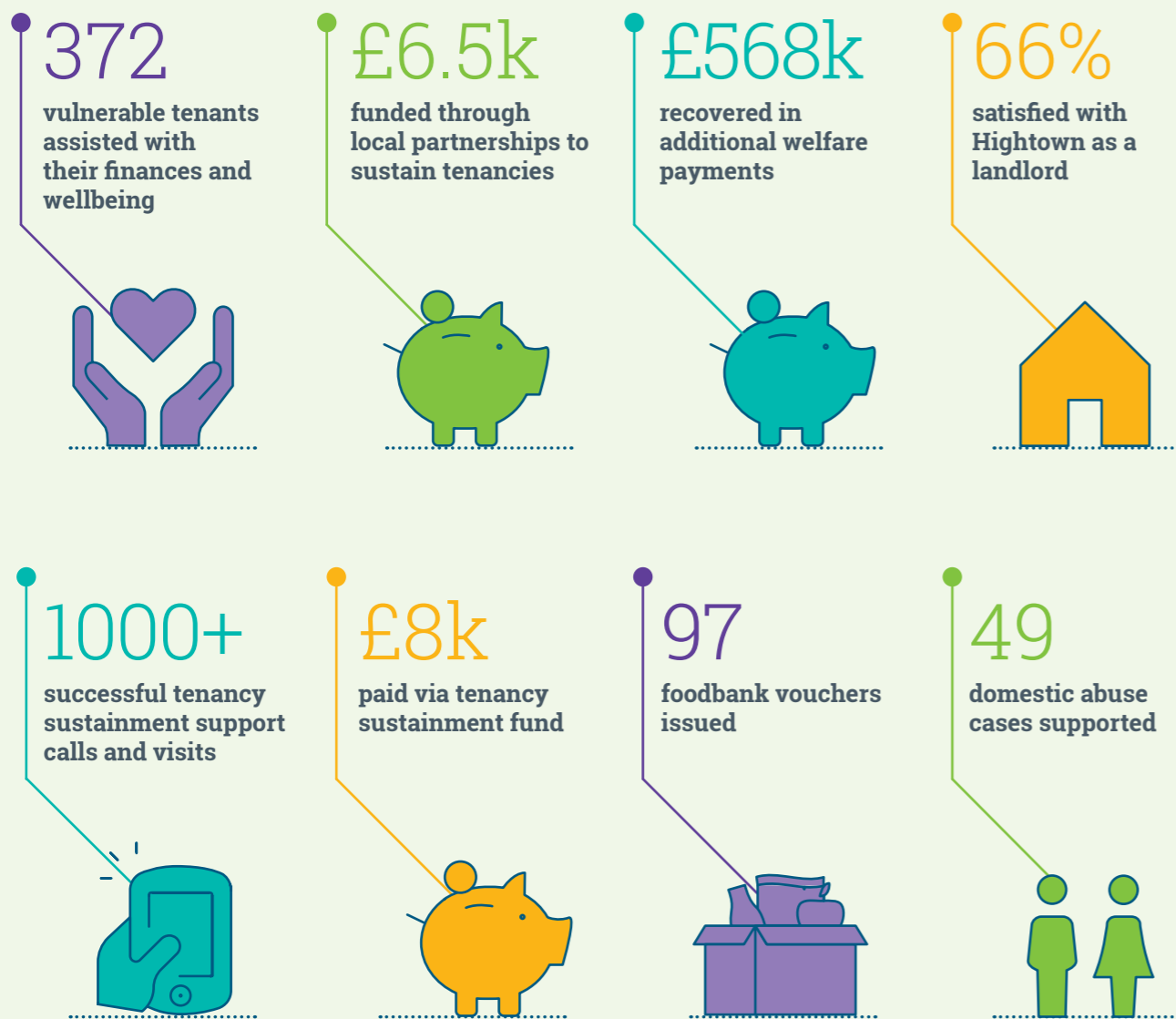
Hightown's Heart of Maylands development has delivered **288 affordable homes, 13 commercial units** and space for a local church on former brownfield land in Hemel Hempstead.





# Championing people and communities

## Highlights



Hightown's role as a social landlord is not only to build safe and secure housing – we also support our customers to thrive in their homes and communities.

As a founding member of the Homes for Cathy group, we commit to helping customers maintain stable housing, avoid tenancies becoming at risk and prevent potential homelessness.

### Sustaining tenancies

Our income recovery team is often the first port of call when a customer is struggling, with just over two thirds of tenancy support referrals coming through this team. We provide all tenants with a welcoming and person-centred approach when they are struggling to pay their rent; this has resulted in 90 compliments coming to the income recovery team this year.

Our belief in a 'court as a last resort' approach has kept the volume of general needs evictions low, with 13 this year compared to 14 in 2022/23.

Many of our customers face multiple challenges and often have experienced trauma in their lives. Tenancy support services are essential for ensuring that these customers can maintain their homes and live in stable, secure, and supportive environments. This not only benefits the individuals involved but also contributes to the wider community by promoting stability, reducing homelessness, and enhancing overall wellbeing.

The support offered by our tenancy support team varies depending on need. Examples include:

- Reducing the risk of tenancy failure through person-centred support
- Maximising income by advocating for benefits, grants, and other statutory funding applications
- Support with budgeting
- Wellbeing support
- Working with partner organisations such as adult and child social services
- Referring and signposting to furniture projects
- Energy and foodbank vouchers.

This year, we have appointed a new role, tenancy support supervisor, who has worked with the tenancy support team to expand the scope of our work and help more residents by increasing partnership working, simplifying referral and monitoring processes, and bringing teams across the association together to support customers.

“ I take the time to listen and understand residents' circumstances while being nonjudgmental, which builds a trusting relationship. This leads to honest conversations to identify residents who need additional support and to complete a referral to our tenancy sustainment or financial inclusion services. ”

Dawn, Income Recovery Officer



## Ray's story:

# Maximising income to maintain independence

With extensive knowledge of the benefits system, our financial inclusion officers are crucial in supporting tenants to maximise their incomes by assisting them in accessing welfare payments and grants.

Ray, a Hightown tenant of 20 years, first shared his worries about paying his rent with Hightown's income recovery team. Our welcoming and approachable income recovery officer, Dawn, put him at ease immediately and reassured him that support was available.

Ray was referred to Hightown's financial inclusion team, which helped him apply for Attendance Allowance. Ray says he would not have been able to do this without the support of our team due to his visual impairment:

**"That's helped me tremendously. I couldn't have done that by myself."**

Our financial inclusion officer helped Ray gather all the evidence needed for the application, such as his health summary.

He shares:

**"She pointed me in the right direction. I didn't realise you can go to your doctor and say I want my health summary. When you're claiming that makes such a difference because you can't remember what's wrong with you but it's all there and that was tremendous."**

Ray was awarded the highest band of Attendance Allowance, which has enabled him to maintain his independence despite his visual impairment by purchasing equipment such as appropriate lighting and a microwave with large, easy-to-read digits. It has also helped him to get out and about in his community more often, covering transport costs.

He says:

**"I think it makes you more independent. It gives you a little bit more money to spend on something you wouldn't necessarily spend it on."**

Now, Ray advocates for Hightown's financial inclusion services, encouraging others in a similar situation to contact the team.

**"I was really down in the dumps when Dawn came and said 'Let's sort this out'. I can't sing her praises highly enough."**



## Katie's story:

# A settled future

At Hightown, we provide our tenants with the information, advocacy and guidance they need to maintain successful tenancies.

Katie\* moved to her Hightown property after spending time in temporary accommodation. As a care leaver, Katie had lived in various foster homes; however, she managed to maintain some stability by continuing her schooling in the local area.

Moving to a local Hightown property allowed her to settle in a community that felt like home. Initially, Katie lived with her partner and small baby. Unfortunately, after a relationship breakdown, Katie found herself living in the property as a single parent, unable to keep up with the rent payments. She was in a 12-month 'starter tenancy' for new tenants and was worried about losing her home.

Our financial inclusion team was able to help Katie positively resolve Universal Credit issues and errors with her account. They helped her to understand and navigate the benefits system so that she received a full backdate of Universal Credit and correct ongoing entitlement as a single parent. Katie also received assistance with applying for Child Benefit and arranging a payment plan so she had the time she needed to clear her arrears

during her starter tenancy. With our help, Katie has recently received her assured tenancy status and is now able to keep up with the monthly rent payments, allowing her to feel settled in her community and enjoy time with her young daughter. She says:

**"It can take a really long time to get Universal Credit changed. The financial inclusion officer helped me get the arrears cleared. Everything's sorted out, and I have an assured tenancy now."**

Katie shared that Hightown's support was not just about financial assistance. The empathic approach of our team not only helped her manage her finances and clear her arrears but also significantly improved her mental wellbeing during a challenging period. She shares:

**"It really helped my mental health to talk to someone who actually knew what they were doing. She was really kind and made me feel comfortable."**

\*Name has been changed to protect identity



**I feel a real sense of achievement that I was able to assist Katie in maximising her income and keeping her tenancy secure for her family, as her early life was very unsettled. She now has an assured tenancy, which has provided her with a stable home for the future.**

Melanie,  
Financial Inclusion Officer





# Tracey's story: Building relationships

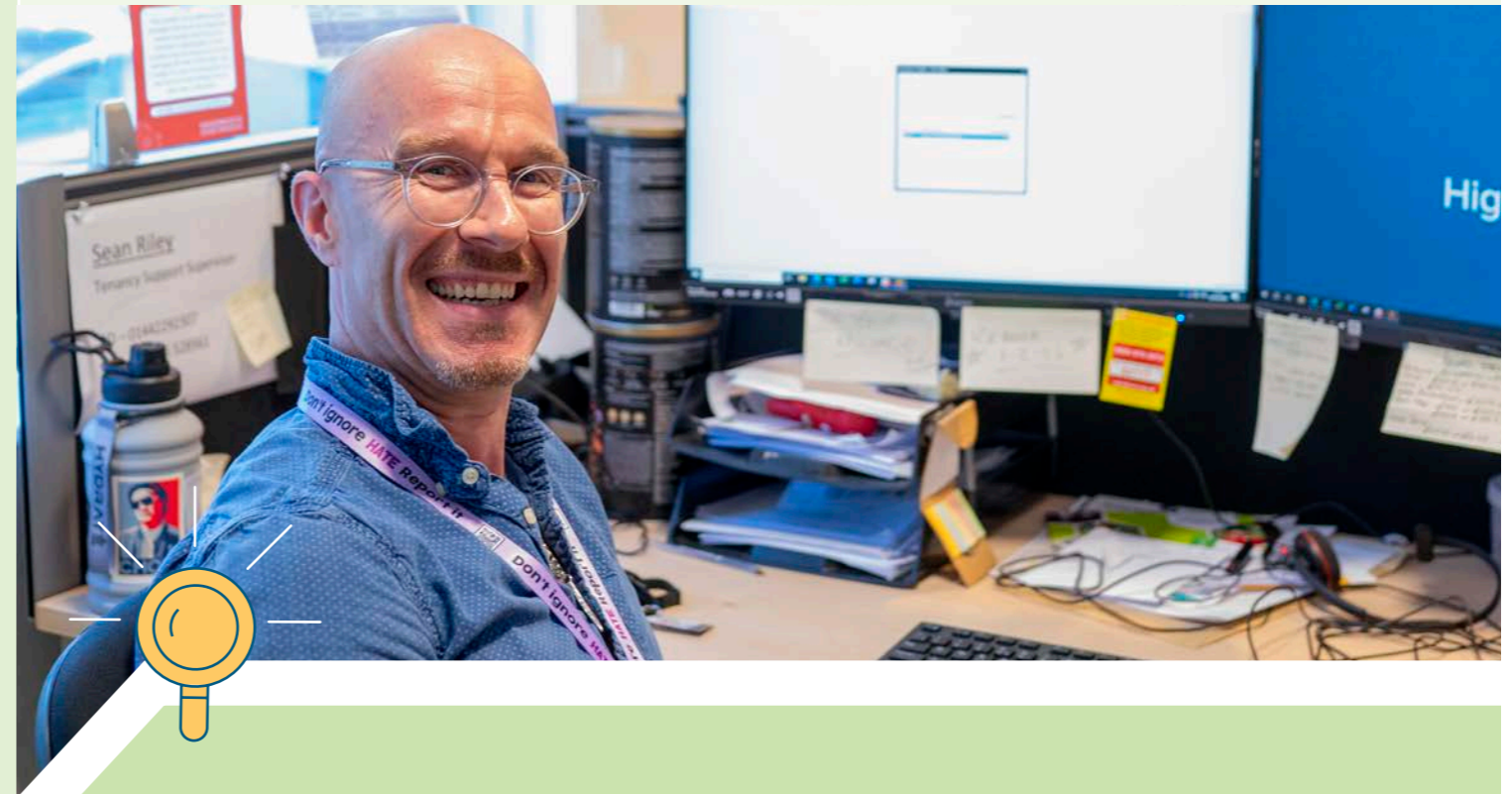
The steadfast work of our tenancy support team has led to over 90 successful outcomes being achieved in 2023/24. Due to the complexity of challenges some of our customers face, achieving these outcomes is not always straightforward and often involves smaller achievements as part of a longer journey. Our tenancy support team take a holistic approach that aims to support the individual needs of tenants by listening to their challenges and helping to make them less overwhelming.

Tracey\* was initially referred to the tenancy support team in 2022 for support with rent arrears; however, her needs were more complex and required an integrated approach. Due to her children not being in her care for most of the week after a mental health crisis, Tracey's Universal Credit no longer covered her full rent and she could not afford the shortfall. She was struggling with her mental wellbeing, suffering from addictions and was in debt with her priority bills.

Initially it was difficult for the tenancy support team to engage with Tracey, due to a lack of trust she had built up towards professionals, having been let down in the past. However, with patience, compassion and understanding the team were able to engage with her to support her in maximising her income through two successful discretionary housing payments – money from the council to help with rent – as well as assisting with flooring and rubbish removal.

Recently, Tracey's physical health has deteriorated and in 2024, having built a rapport with her tenancy support officer, she felt able to engage with other support services. She now has a mental health worker and is working with Change, Grow, Live drug and alcohol services. Support provided by our tenancy sustainment officer has enabled Tracey to see a future and to build a life for herself and her children.

\*Name has been changed to protect identity



## Alleviating poverty

Rising inflation disproportionately affected the lowest-income households in 2023/24 meaning they have fewer resources to cover energy bills and food costs. This year, we accessed the HACT Energy Hardship Fund to help 13 households struggling with energy bills.

As an authorised signatory for The Trussell Trust, we issued 97 food bank vouchers for households in financial hardship.



I think what helps is giving the tenant time, going at their pace and building that relationship. I think also being compassionate, empathetic, understanding of their situation, and non-judgemental. ”

Nicola, Tenancy Sustainment Officer

In 2023/24, our tenancy support team accessed just over

# £8,000

of Hightown's tenancy sustainment fund to help 23 tenants pay for:

- Flooring & carpets
- Furniture
- White goods
- Clearance support
- GP letters
- Deep cleans
- ID document renewals
- Access to local support groups
- Moving costs



In addition to this fund, the tenancy support team has increased local partnerships to enhance the support offered to residents, gaining £6,500 in grant funding, while recovering £568,000 in additional welfare payments to support tenants in maintaining their tenancies.



## Empowering tenants

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 was a catalyst for a new proactive approach to regulating social housing, ensuring residents can properly scrutinise their landlord and hold it to account.

Our Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel (RVSP) plays a key role in evaluating our performance and shaping Hightown's services. The RVSP's members and chair are residents. It meets every three months with Hightown managers and a member of Hightown's Board to review, scrutinise and evaluate our services, performance and policies.

In addition to formal resident involvement structures such as the RVSP, our aim is to achieve an open and meaningful dialogue with residents that can influence and shape service delivery. To make it easy for residents to give feedback, in 2023/24, we carried out a programme of door knocks, estate meet-and-greets, summer events, and our first-ever festive open day.

We have also worked hard to ensure every contact counts, gathering feedback across multiple channels, including complaints and compliments, anti-social behaviour, repairs, income recovery, tenancy reviews and tenancy support.

### In 2023/24, residents were involved in:

- Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel
- Complaints Scrutiny Group
- Contractor tender and selection
- Estate champions inspections
- Parking consultations
- Estate surveys
- Anti-Social Behaviour Scrutiny Group
- Festive open day
- Estate meet and greets with housing officers
- Anti-social behaviour door knocks working in partnership with the police
- Annual summer events on estates
- Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) action plan focus group
- Resident involvement strategy focus group
- Feedback on support for carers
- Resident and service user networking event
- Hightown website review focus group
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey
- Transactional satisfaction surveys for individual service areas (such as repairs)





# Sammie's story: Giving residents a voice

Sammie joined the RVSP after becoming a Hightown resident six years ago. As someone who loves to help people in her profession as a police contact enquiry officer, it was a perfect option for Sammie to continue helping those around her in her daily life.

One of the main changes is the opportunity to be a communicator between other residents and Hightown as she is able to understand information and processes from both sides.

She says:

"I can understand as a resident how we feel about certain things going on and I can be a voice for those who are unable to speak up, but also understand from Hightown's side so I can feedback to others."

In quarterly meetings, Sammie and other members of the RVSP discuss issues and decide where to

spend Hightown's budget for estate improvements, ensuring everyone has a fair outcome. Most importantly, they make sure all parties involved have a full understanding of the reasoning behind each decision made. Another aspect of the RVSP's work is ensuring residents' information is accessible to all readers, from the chosen colour scheme to the amount of information on one page.

Sammie says:

"It's about making it fair for everyone."

Since COVID-19, the RVSP has become more flexible for members to join the quarterly meetings, as they are now hybrid with some members attending in person and some joining online. This has proved a huge benefit for Sammie, who previously struggled to attend meetings due to juggling life with a young son, a job and living a fair distance from Hightown's office in Hemel Hempstead.

She says:

"That's the best thing about this now, they have helped to accommodate me in that way. The support has been great, and you feel valued being a part of such a supportive group as I cannot always travel down there, I can now just join online to the meetings."

Sammie believes anyone who has the time should get involved as it is worth it. She adds:

"You can see what goes on behind the scenes and you can see that even though you may be far away from the head office that you're not ignored and there is so much going on in the background that you don't even realise. You're not just becoming a member for yourself but for everyone around you too – you are creating a community in your own right."



It's hard for Hightown to ensure every single resident is heard, but at least this way people feel they're being listened to as they trust me to relay this information on their behalf. It is really rewarding to know I'm helping to make a difference to someone else's worries.



Scan to watch Sammie's story



## Learning from complaints

Hightown aims to provide excellent services to all our residents and complaints are an opportunity to learn and improve our services.

We are a member of the independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme and assess the way we manage our complaints against the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Every quarter, Hightown managers and our Complaints Scrutiny Group Panel, made up of residents, meet to review the complaints we have received, suggest measures to improve services to prevent similar complaints in the future, and identify and scrutinise any patterns or trends.

In response to their feedback last year we:

- Provided additional staff training on Hightown's complaint-handling policy and procedures
- Increased the monitoring of monthly repairs reports and how often we contact developers to ensure residents are updated appropriately
- Reviewed full information and advice to residents in response to service queries, including offering any further actions to support them in their individual circumstances, such as signposting or referrals to specialist support agencies
- Implemented a meticulous review of the tasks and actions outstanding when staff are due to leave post.

## Resolving Antisocial Behaviour

Hightown understands the negative impact anti-social behaviour (ASB) has on residents and the community and we are committed to the Government's 'Respect: ASB Charter for Housing'. We work to tackle issues head on to stop and prevent them from happening again, so everyone can live in a community where they feel safe and respected. Our tenancy agreements set out every resident's responsibilities and include a section on ASB.

Over the last year, we have continued to work to improve our response to reports of ASB and introduced a new anti-social behaviour officer role. Our ASB officer started in January 2024 and supports with investigation and resolution of issues. This includes working with our housing officers and property services inspectors and working in partnership with the police and local authority community safety teams. Hightown continues to implement our strategy to empower residents to report ASB and work together with residents and other agencies to resolve issues.

Hightown also recognises the real-life situations of vulnerable perpetrators of ASB who may have histories of homelessness, trauma and complex needs. Given their complex tenancy histories and multiple needs, these tenants are unlikely to be able to secure housing in the private rental sector and, without eligibility for social housing, would be at greater risk of the most acute forms of homelessness, such as rough sleeping, while putting pressure on other services such as healthcare.

Hightown provides vulnerable alleged perpetrators of ASB with trauma-informed, person-centred early intervention to address vulnerabilities and the root causes of ASB through our tenancy support and care and supported housing services.

### Some of the ways Hightown worked to tackle anti-social behaviour in 2023/24:

**Frequently updating residents about cases they have reported so they feel valued and listened to.**

**Being transparent about what we can and cannot do so that residents have clear expectations of us.**

**Favouring proactive actions rather than being reactive by conducting eight ASB surgeries and six door knocks across Hightown properties, reaching over 100 residents.**

**Involving residents in ASB strategy and decision-making by introducing a quarterly ASB scrutiny panel, attended by seven residents.**



“

Having attended a partnership meeting with Hightown's ASB officer, he is really proactive, and it is encouraging to see Hightown's approach to partnership working to make our community safer. ”

Peer reviewer Amy Dalton, Community Safety Manager at Dacorum Borough Council



**Research by Shelter shows that ASB is often the consequence of a more serious concern that has escalated due to a lack of any support or effective intervention.**

Source: Reframing Anti-Social Behaviour: A review of homelessness prevention good practice in Wales, Shelter Cymru



## Claire's\* story: How housing officers support safeguarding

Hightown tenant Claire\* first came to the attention of her housing officer when her neighbours reported that they could often hear arguing between her and her partner. The housing officer had concerns about the welfare of Claire and her daughter and requested information from the police under our information sharing agreement, which highlighted a list of offences for Claire's partner. Claire was allocated an IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate) after her case was heard at a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). Later, help for the family was provided under Section 17 of the Children Act (Children in Need), and a family support worker was also allocated. Throughout this traumatic time, her housing officer has supported Claire to manage her tenancy and has been part of the multi-agency support team including social services, family support, school, and probation. With the support of this team, Claire is growing in confidence, her daughter is showing achievements at school and her partner is receiving support.

\*Name has been changed to protect identity

### Meeting the needs of customers affected by domestic abuse

As a housing association, the nature of our relationship with tenants means we are uniquely placed to identify domestic abuse and support people; last year, we supported 49 cases of domestic abuse affecting tenants. Our housing officers and tenancy support team have developed their expertise in supporting victims through specialist domestic abuse training.



**In 2023/24 Hightown let 57 properties to households who were homeless because of domestic abuse, 14% of all 414 lets to homeless households.**



# Ending homelessness Highlights



As a landlord with a social purpose, Hightown believes that there is no solution to homelessness that does not involve the contribution of housing associations.

Our Homes for Cathy commitments inform our work to end homelessness and have helped embed a culture where the needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness are at the heart of our provision, policies and practice.

## Meeting local housing demand

Homelessness takes many forms, with rough sleeping just the tip of the iceberg. In England, temporary accommodation placements have more than doubled since 2010/11 to 104,510 households. In the local authority areas where Hightown manages general needs homes across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, there were 3,816 families living in temporary accommodation\*, 62 per cent with children. Last year, 46 per cent of our new lets and relets were allocated to homeless households, giving 414 families and individuals in precarious housing situations the security and stability of a decent and genuinely affordable home.

A key pledge under the Homes for Cathy commitments is for housing associations to

operate flexible allocations and eligibility policies, an objective which guides our approach to housing applications from homeless households. Applicants with a background of homelessness who do not meet affordability criteria are referred to our head of housing and signposted to our tenancy support team for advice and support with benefits, grants and budgeting. We recognise that some new tenants with a background of homelessness have complex needs and may find it challenging to maintain a tenancy; our lettings officers complete a vulnerability matrix for every new tenant to ensure they are directed to our tenancy sustainment team when they need extra help.

\* Source DLUHC, Figures for 31 December 2023.

In the 15 local authority areas where Hightown manages general needs homes, **15,397 people** were assessed as homeless in 2022/23

Source: DLUHC



## Homelessness supported housing

At Hightown, supported housing is integral to our work to tackle homelessness and we partner with councils to maximise funding opportunities to deliver supported homelessness schemes in St Albans, Hemel Hempstead, Aylesbury and Hatfield. Our homelessness provision includes a night shelter – Open Door in St Albans – services for single homeless people and services for young people, which together support around 220 people at any one time.

Research from the National Housing Federation shows that nine out of 10 supported housing residents have at least one health condition or disability, including substance misuse, mental ill-health, learning disability/autistic spectrum disorder and physical conditions, with a least half experiencing more than one of these conditions. Our supported homelessness services provide a safe environment with highly skilled staff where individuals with multiple, complex needs can access support for healthcare, daily living skills,

money management and long-term housing solutions as they move towards the next stage in their life.

Our vision is to provide impactful support services based on people's life experiences, needs and aspirations. As part of our commitment to adopting a 'psychologically informed environment' (PIE) approach across both our homelessness and mental health supported housing schemes, by the end 2023/24 we had transformed the environment of seven services following PIE principles. In addition to remodelling the physical spaces, we commissioned the charity Homelesslink, experts in the PIE approach, to ensure that our processes are effective, that all key growth areas are identified and to guide future developments.

Ultimately, our aim is for every person experiencing homelessness to make the next step to moving into secure housing when they are ready, and in 2023/24, we helped 73 service users achieve that goal.



If supported housing didn't exist there would be **41,000** people at risk of rough sleeping and **30,000** more at risk of repeat homelessness; **2,000** more people in prison and **14,000** more people accessing psychiatric care.

Source: Research into the supported housing sector's impact on homelessness prevention and health and wellbeing, National Housing Federation, 2023

## Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE)



- Relationships
- Staff support and training
- Physical environments and social spaces
- A psychological framework
- Evidence generating practice

### St Albans homelessness hub

In 2023/24, Hightown partnered with St Albans City and District Council, utilising funding via the Homes England RSAP programme to create a new homelessness hub co-ordinator role to improve access to homeless services in the locality, enhance health and wellbeing, promote employment opportunities and support the development of tenancy ready skills.

The hub co-ordinator provides support and activities for people experiencing homelessness in the city including those who access Open Door and four temporary supported homelessness schemes – Kent House, Hatfield Road, St Claire's and our newly refurbished Martin House service.

### New homelessness supported housing

Opened in November 2023, Alexandra Road is Hightown's most recent homelessness service in Hemel Hempstead. The service provides homeless move-on accommodation and a stable environment for nine single adults in one-bedroom flats. Martin House in St Albans reopened in March 2024 following extensive refurbishment and provides 16 modern, self-contained flats for single people. The spaces and service provision at both schemes embrace the PIE approach, with bright, modern decor and compassionate, person-centred support that recognises the impact of past trauma on people's wellbeing and behaviours.



Number of people completing homelessness hub activities

42  
in Q3

45  
in Q4



Scan here to learn about the St Albans homelessness hub



## Matt's story: A journey from homelessness to hope

Pets are known to decrease stress and for Matt, being able to have his dog live with him has had huge benefits for his mental health.

An Armed Forces veteran, Matt lives with the debilitating impact of complex PTSD. His dog Eddie has been fundamental to his recovery journey.

This year Matt moved into Martin House and, following 18 months apart, Eddie was able to join Matt in his new home.

Matt became homeless in 2022, after losing his business during the Covid pandemic and struggling with his mental health. After a brief period sleeping rough, he approached Open Door, Hightown's emergency night shelter in St Albans.

He says:

"My experience with Open Door was positive – the staff and facilities were great. When you're homeless for the first time you don't understand how the system works but they make sure you're well-informed."

Matt spent some time living at Hightown's Hatfield Road temporary supported housing scheme – part of the St Albans single homeless pathway – before being allocated a flat at Martin House.

"Finding out I was moving to Martin House was a great relief and the moving-in process has been incredibly positive. I wasn't sure what to expect but everything had been thought of, and I haven't had to get anything since moving in. All my needs have been met, which is brilliant.

I was absolutely blown away by the condition of the place. Everything is modern, clean and tidy – it's not institutional. Having my own private space has been a huge change. I have quite exacting standards on cleanliness and tidiness, so I have more control now and it's had a massive impact on my mood."

Matt also leads on the support he needs through regular meetings with his allocated support worker.

"Every couple of weeks, I have a regular sit down with my link worker. We go through everything in life, including any specific issues with the property or problems with benefits or health. The support has been massively beneficial. Hetul (Hightown's new homelessness hub coordinator) helped me straightaway with my CV. He then referred me to the Shaw Trust charity for employment, who were then able to deal with the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) and get me onto a veterans' employment scheme. The staff team at Martin House are warm, friendly people – the door is always open, even when it's closed. Everyone has time for you.

If you had asked me three months ago what my hopes and ambitions were for the future, it would be to get a space of my own, which I've now achieved through Martin House. Healthwise, I now feel ready to get back to work and then I hope to find a place to move onto, where I can have my son come and stay with me."

“

It's hard to explain how much difference it's made having Eddie back with me. Since I moved here my medication (for mental health) has been reduced for the first time in memory. I have flashbacks throughout the day and particularly at night. If I'm on my own in a room, it's not a good place to be. Just having Eddie as a calming influence is essential for me.

”



Scan to watch  
Matt's story



My support worker understands what young people have been through. You can trust her. She has helped me with my water bills, housing benefits and every necessity like that. That is the difference between young people's services to adults, it's the different things you have to pay for, but she has helped me adapt to it and I think I have done very well.



Scan to watch  
Brendan's story



## Brendan's story: Finding independence

Brendan has been a part of Hightown's services since finding himself homeless at 16 years old after his parents thought it was in their best interest to move him out of the family home. Having spent four years in a shared home where he lacked privacy and his own space, Brendan was ready to move on to our new Alexandra Road service.

The move-on accommodation offers people who have experienced homelessness short-hold tenancies for up to 36 months and, with staff on-site Monday to Friday, the support provided is invaluable to residents like Brendan.

Brendan has been able to settle and enjoy his new surroundings. As an avid gamer, he is looking forward to upgrading his gaming set-up to help make his space feel like a home. He likes being alone and has come to enjoy cleaning his flat, listening to music, going for walks around Hemel and seeing friends.

Having a stable and secure home has made a huge difference to Brendan's life and has helped him find his feet. He is now applying for jobs and looking forward to securing and starting a job in the next couple of months.

### Putting homelessness on the national agenda

Hightown is a founding member of Homes for Cathy, an alliance of around 120 housing associations, local authorities and charities united by their aim to end homelessness.

Hightown has embedded the Homes for Cathy commitments – a set of homelessness pledges developed with Crisis – across its general needs housing and C&SH operations and policies. Hightown CEO David Bogle is the group's chair and Hightown also provides ongoing administrative, communications and member engagement support.

Hightown's membership of Homes for Cathy and adoption of the Homes for Cathy commitments has helped to maintain a strong culture of

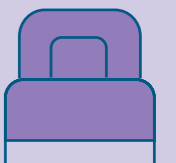
homelessness prevention within the association, fostering a better understanding of the needs of homeless people and their barriers to housing, together with a strong appetite to work internally and with external partners to offer solutions.

As a result of on-going campaigning and communications activity, the Homes for Cathy group has maintained a strong 'voice' within the housing sector and with parliamentarians; highlights during 2023/24 included meetings with former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Housing and Homelessness), Felicity Buchan, Daisy Cooper, deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats to discuss the group's aims and a national conference, attended by 100 housing professionals.



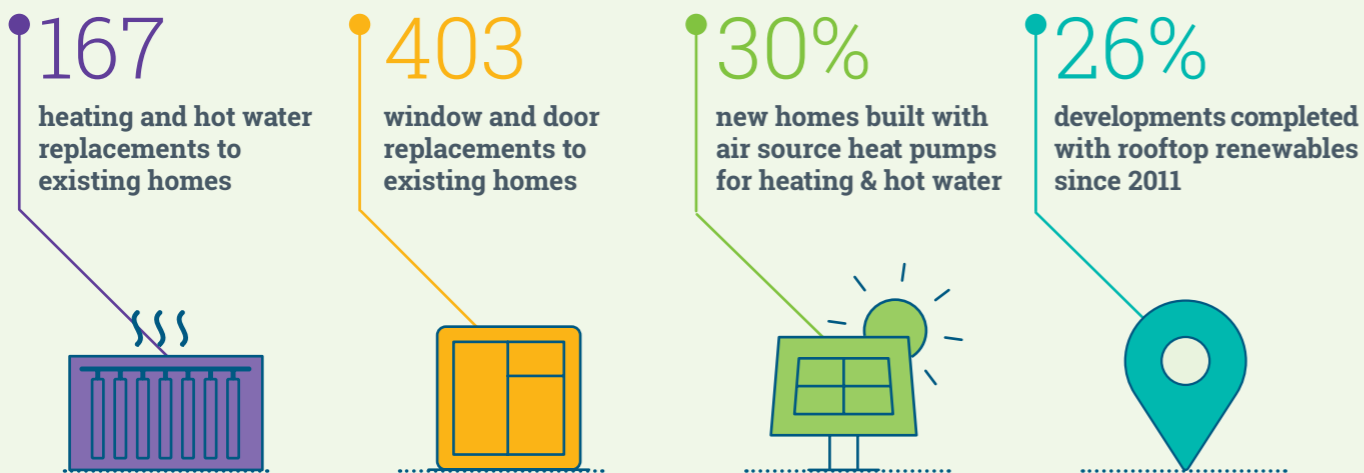
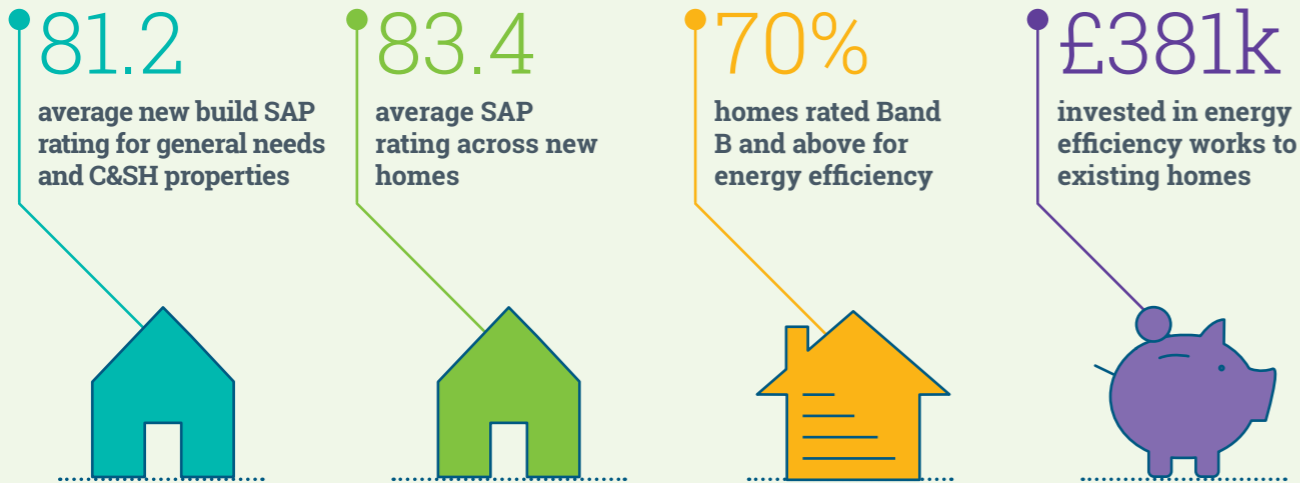
Through the Open Door night shelter and drop-in, we provided emergency overnight accommodation to

96 people



# Building a greener future

## Highlights



Housing associations play a critical role in the UK's collective journey to net zero – according to research by the National Housing Federation, the direct burning of fossil fuels to heat space and water in homes account for 13% of the UK's total carbon emissions. The Climate Change Committee recommends that by 2035, the emissions from existing homes should be around half today's levels. At Hightown, we are taking all the steps we can to help eliminate our share of direct, regulated carbon emissions produced by the the homes we build and manage.

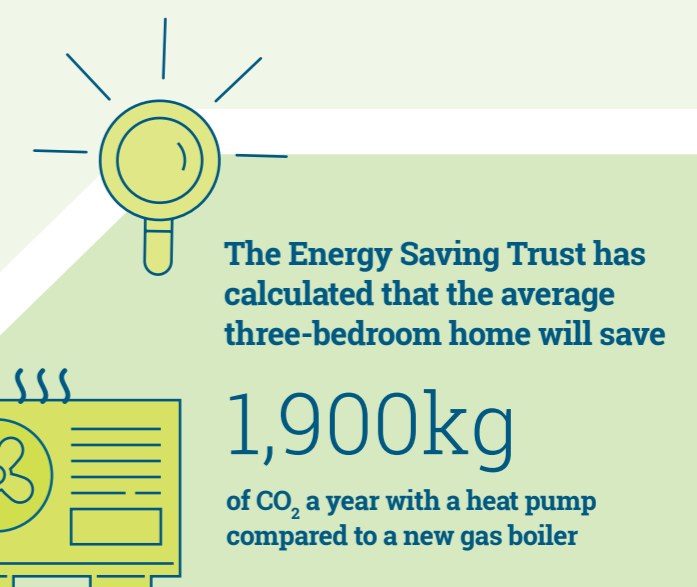
### Sustainability in development

A key strategic objective for Hightown is for all the new homes we develop to score a minimum of EPC Band B; in 2023/24 we achieved this for all new builds, representing 90% of all the new properties we delivered – 598 in total. The remaining 68 new properties rated below Band B were primarily within converted older and non-domestic buildings, including single bedroom care and supported housing flats at Alexandra Road and Martin House and affordable housing at Charter Court, a former office block.

For all new build properties, we adopt a 'fabric first' approach to achieving sustainability, through high insulation and air tightness. Where possible our land-led developments – where Hightown leads on the construction – aim to meet the proposed Future Homes Standard (FHS) specification that will become mandatory in 2025. The FHS aims to decarbonise new homes by focusing on tighter building fabric standards, improving heating, hot water systems and reducing heat waste, including using air source heat pumps. Meanwhile, we have continued to explore ways to meet the FHS through design and build package deals, for example through partnering with contractors using modern methods of construction.

2023/24 was a milestone year for Hightown in terms of delivering new homes with low carbon energy systems; 30% of new homes were constructed with air source heat pumps, which use about three times less energy to generate the same amount of heat as a traditional oil or gas boiler. Looking ahead, we remain committed to installing low carbon energy systems on Hightown-led developments and to prioritising section 106 schemes offering sustainable energy solutions.

We also take steps to reduce carbon emissions through green transport, incorporating electric vehicle charging points on new estates where possible and building in sustainable locations close to community and commercial facilities and near existing public transport links. Our Maylands Phase 2 site of 158 homes – our biggest development to date – provides 40 electrical charging points for EV vehicles.





### Improving energy efficiency in existing homes

Because most Hightown properties have been built in the last 15-20 years, the carbon emissions from Hightown homes are much lower on average than those of other social landlords. All but 32 homes (16 general needs and 16 care & supported housing in Band D) are Band C or above, with 70.4% of homes at Band B and above. Plans are in place to retrofit all our Band D properties by 2025 to improve their energy performance.

Each year, depending on the funding available, we plan to upgrade insulation in Band C properties as they become void to improve energy efficiency. Our long-term ambition is to convert both void properties and existing homes to all-electric with air source heat pumps, meaning that once electricity from the grid is wholly renewable, these homes will be zero carbon.

In the meantime, we have continued to invest in energy saving works across our existing property portfolio; in 2023/24, we allocated £381,000 to updating central heating systems and replacing doors and windows to make homes warmer and greener.

### Green offices

Hightown's central office in Hemel Hempstead generates renewable energy through photovoltaic roof panels; in the 12 years since installation, these have saved 157 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Our staff kitchens have water-saving Zip taps and in 2023, all light bulbs in the building were replaced with energy saving LEDs, reducing energy consumption by an estimated 78%.



We are reducing energy consumption by **78%** by replacing our office lighting with environmentally friendly LED tubes



## Nick and Lucy's story: A greener home

Nick and Lucy moved into their shared ownership home – a two-bedroom house at Hightown's Heart of Maylands phase two development in Hemel Hempstead – in December 2023.

Lucy fell in love with the bright, modern property the first time she saw it. The property's heating and hot water is supplied by an individual air source heat pump, which works by transferring heat from the air outside, boosting it to a higher temperature and feeding it into the wet central heating system, heating the rooms through radiators.

As well as being an environmentally heating option, an air source heat pump can save £225 on heating an average three-bedroom home annually when compared to a new A rated boiler\*.

Nick says:

"When we first moved in, it took us a couple of days to realise how it's all linked, what sort of temperatures to have on, how the air source heat pump itself works and the costs involved."

Now the couple have got used to how the system operates, they appreciate its positive benefits.

\*Source: Energy Saving Trust



It's something I'd advise anyone to have if they can. The main difference is that we've been able to have the heating on for longer at a cheaper cost. The trick is to have it at a constant temperature, as opposed to keep turning it up and down. The true benefit of the air source heat pump is that it does save you money – it's definitely a good investment.



Scan to watch Nick and Lucy's story

# Supporting independence

## Highlights



Good-quality supported housing provides a lifeline for those in society who most need support, allowing them to live safely and independently in their communities. At Hightown, we run 89 care & supported housing (C&SH) schemes for people with a range of support needs and circumstances, from complex needs to individuals who require minimal assistance, including mental or physical disabilities or mental health problems, refugees, care leavers and people experiencing homelessness.

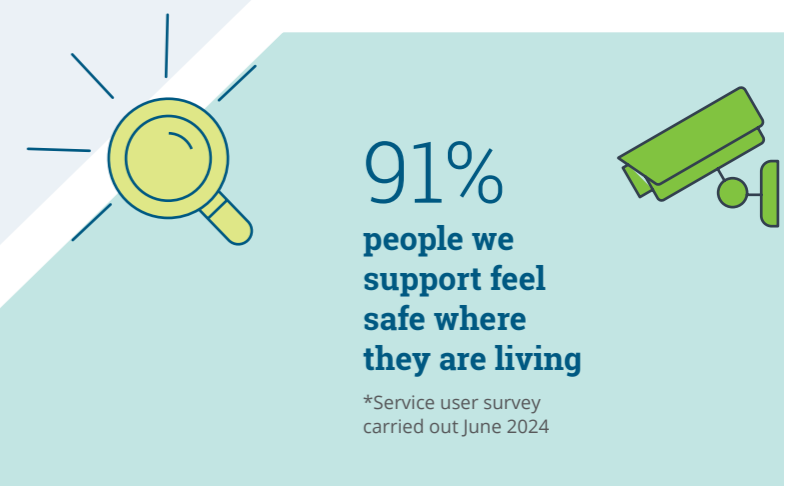
Despite pressures within the supported housing system – particularly around the lack of long-term funding for housing-related support – we remain committed to providing cost-effective services with no compromise on standards and safety and to growing and developing our adult and young people’s homelessness provision.

We base our approach to quality care on continuous self-assessment and regular monitoring, as we believe that having the highest quality care and accommodation is an absolute right of every person we support. We use a strength-based, person-centred approach to support, focusing on ‘what’s strong, rather than what’s wrong’; our staff actively encourage the

people we support to understand and fulfil their full potential, promoting self-reliance and self-help to maximise independence and quality of life.

Our suite of electronic reporting tools enables us to evaluate our approach and evidence our commitment to continuous improvement, allowing staff to monitor and review service user activities and track progress towards achieving goals.

Our ambition is to grow and develop services where funding from our commissioning partners ensures financial viability and stability.





Increasingly, the values of co-production are being viewed as a way of developing services or agreeing decisions jointly that are innovative in meeting people's needs.

Source: Developing our understanding of the difference co-production makes in social care, Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2022



“

Today's workshop was interactive. I had the opportunity to help shape Hightown's services and it's a great feeling to know that my input will make a difference. It's fantastic working with Hightown and meeting members of the Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel. ”

Brendan, VoiceBox member

## Co-production

Hightown works hard to involve the people we support both in their own care and in the way the service and the department is run, following the view of 'nothing about me without me'. Our ethos is based around sharing power with the individuals who use our services, to shape the look and feel of our schemes. We achieve this through our VoiceBox group, a team of 20 dedicated volunteers who regularly come together to review and scrutinise Hightown's care and supported housing services.

In 2023/24, the VoiceBox group had the opportunity to collaborate and share learnings with Hightown's Residents' Voice & Scrutiny Panel (RVSP); our first joint networking event was held in September, followed by a joint workshop to review our website and complaints leaflet.

The VoiceBox group was also recognised for its success by the Great British Care Awards, winning the co-production category at the Eastern regional awards in November and achieving a place in the national finals.

Here's how Hightown's VoiceBox group shaped our services in 2023/24:

- Reviewed Hightown's care and supported housing strategy
- Produced a seasonal Your Voice newsletter for service users, by service users
- Took part in a Q&A session with decision makers at the Homes for Cathy homelessness conference, highlighting the value of co-production in designing services
- Recruited care and supported housing managers
- Worked in partnership with our general needs Resident Voice and Scrutiny Panel (RVSP) to collaborate on ideas and good practice
- Reviewed Hightown's new website and complaints leaflet to ensure they were inclusive
- Completed mystery shop visits at various schemes, giving feedback as an expert by experience on topics such as activities and health and safety.



Scan to learn more about VoiceBox

“

It was lovely to hear what the VoiceBox gets involved in and it shows what an amazing joy it brings to everyone within VoiceBox. The workshop gave a sense of hope and friendship and a chance for people to make new friends. I learnt a few new things about Hightown and the services they provide. ”

Tahlia, Vice-Chair of Hightown's Resident Voice & Scrutiny Panel

## Psychologically-informed environments

At the heart of the challenges faced by those experiencing homelessness and mental health issues is a need for understanding and support that goes beyond the basics. It's about recognising the impact of trauma, the weight of past experiences, and the strength it takes to move forward.

Our homelessness and mental health schemes continue an important journey towards embracing psychologically-informed environments (PIE), placing understanding and empathy at the foundation of the services we deliver.

As Hightown navigates this journey, we've identified key areas to focus on, like making sure services have a strong PIE identity, improving policies by ensuring they are trauma-informed, ensuring a stable and skilled team and updating training to keep everyone learning and growing.

Working in homelessness and mental health services can sometimes result in staff

experiencing secondary trauma, where they are affected by what they see and hear from service users. Ultimately, this can lead to burnout and staff feeling hopeless, depressed, stressed, uncreative and frustrated in their roles. The PIE approach includes giving our frontline staff the space to reflect, learn and care for their own wellbeing through reflective practice sessions with trained experts and clinical supervision. We actively invite staff members to ask for help and build in time to reflect as a team, as well as encouraging everyone to do things they enjoy, so that their own basic needs are met too.

Following the rollout of PIE training in our homelessness services, our mental health supported living staff are currently undertaking PIE and trauma-informed learning modules, to enhance their understanding of the key principles and working practices.

## A safe space for migrant children

In 2023, five per cent of UK asylum applications came from separated migrant children. Since 2017, Hightown has provided housing and support for 16-18 year-olds arriving in the UK with no parent or guardian, offering a safe space for young migrants who have fled their home countries to escape war, poverty and human rights abuse. In 2023/24, we supported 41 young people as they adjusted to a new life in the UK, across four dedicated schemes.

Many of the young people who arrive with us have endured terrible trauma in their home country, including torture, sexual violence, loved ones killed and homes destroyed, and the impact of these harrowing experiences cannot be underestimated. Each young person joins us with varying needs, so we use a person-centred, psychologically informed approach to put the correct support in place and provide a safe, nurturing environment in which they can begin to recover.

“ Many of the young people who are in our services have come from hugely different backgrounds and cultural ‘norms’, so it is important for our support team to help them develop an understanding of the local culture, whilst still embracing their own cultural background. ”

Dannielle Read, Operations Manager, Young People's Housing Service



## Abdelkadar's story: Seeking sanctuary

Seventeen-year-old Abdelkadar has a smile that can light up a room. However, it's a smile that belies the challenges he has endured in his short life.

Abdelkadar arrived at Hightown's separated migrant children service in November 2022, having left his home country of Eritrea. Like other young asylum seekers housed by Hightown, he travelled across many countries to reach the UK, spending nights outside before finally making the treacherous journey across the Channel.

“When he first came to us, Abdelkadar was very shy, apprehensive and lacked confidence. We have worked hard to build his trust and have seen a massive change in his emotions, mood and the way he expresses himself – it's like looking at two different people,” says scheme manager, Sahdia Hussain.

Abdelkadar has been supported by Hightown to develop independent living skills, access education and hobbies such as kickboxing and encouraged to follow his religious and cultural customs, including attending mosque and buying Halal food. His English has improved dramatically and, having recently received a positive asylum decision, he has been able to apply for a provisional driving license and travel documents.

“Over time we have seen him grow as a person and become more independent,” concludes Sahdia.



The best thing about living here is the people who work here – they're very nice. I plan to continue at college and get my Level 3 ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) qualification. In the future, I'd like to get a good job and get married and have a family. Right now, I hope to become a mechanic but I could change my mind! ”



Scan to watch  
Abdelkadar's  
story





## Ross's story: Adapting to changing needs

Ross, who has autism and sensory processing issues, has lived at Hightown's learning disability service, The Trees, since 2011. His health has deteriorated over time and now aged 47, he suffers from osteoporosis, which has affected his mobility and made him more susceptible to injury.

Staff at The Trees have had to think creatively to find activities for Ross that give him the freedom he enjoys, while accommodating his sensory needs and limiting his risk of injury.

He loves swimming – going two to three times a week – and one of his favourite pastimes is visiting the local recycling centre.

Chris Barrett, Hightown operations manager, says:

“The support we provide is very personalised – it’s about putting service users in the middle of everything. All decisions are made with their best interests at heart, asking them what they want and tailoring their support around that.

For people with autism and sensory needs, it can be years and years before small, incremental differences (in behaviour) happen. Sometimes, we can go forward and then suddenly go back again. For example, an activity may overwhelm Ross one day, then he can be fine with it the next day. It’s therefore important for staff to find a balance and know where he is on a scale of nought to ten, ten being ‘I’m really not comfortable and I’m not going to cope’. Quiet, one-to-one activities are better for Ross, so we’re looking into the possibility of mini golf.”

Ultimately, Ross has the final decision over what he wants to do.

“If he doesn’t like something he’ll tell us. It’s about trying new things but listening to what he’s saying to us.”

Staff at the scheme have regular training on autism and behavioural issues and have worked proactively with Ross to improve challenging behaviours and support his mental health.

“The difference in Ross from when he came here to how he is now is amazing. At his previous placement he didn’t leave his room for a year. At The Trees, he wants to go out every single day. He’s happier to try new things.”

Chris attributes this to increased one-to-one time with his support workers, which the team has been able to achieve by altering staff rotas.

She adds:

“Recently his auntie and uncle visited and couldn’t believe the change in him. Normally he would take himself off to his room but he stayed and chatted all day, was very sociable and really enjoyed himself. He’s never done that before.”



“

I like living at the Trees because I go for drives and swimming. I like recycling. Staff look after me. I am happy.

”



Scan to watch  
Ross's story

“

They’ve just supported Ross in every way possible. The minute he came here, he just flourished. He’s a lot more independent. He just likes the life that he leads here.

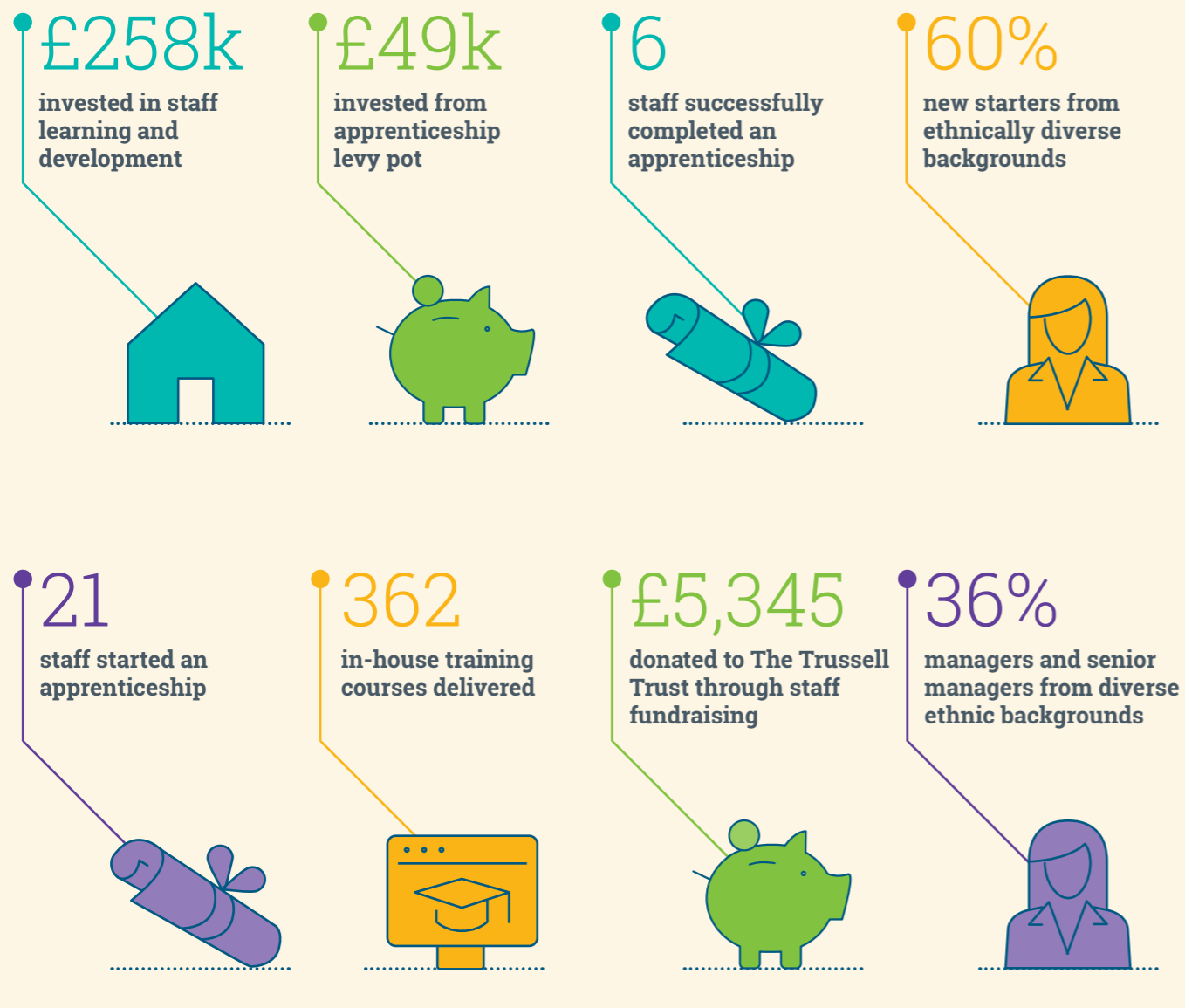
”

Danny and Angela, Ross's parents

# Creating opportunities

## Highlights

At Hightown, our culture aligns with our values and social purpose – to be supportive, inclusive and responsive and share an ambition to learn and develop for the benefit of residents and service users. This is reflected in our aspiration to maintain high-performing teams who feel happy, supported and have opportunities to grow.



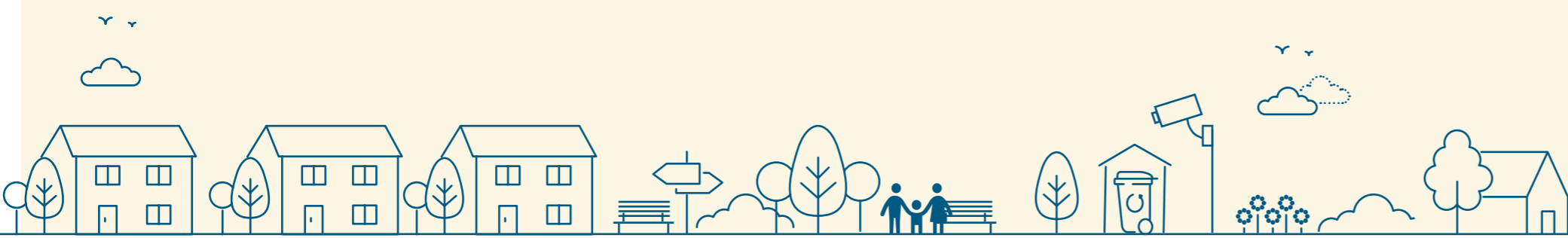
### Learning and development

In 2023/24, we invested £258,000 in staff learning and development, an uplift of 13 per cent year on year. We also allocated £49,000 from our apprenticeship levy pot, providing flexible, defined pathways for career development.

As the Building Safety Act 2022 brings about transformative change in the housing sector's responsibilities around building safety risks, we have continued to upskill our asset management staff to ensure we get building safety right; in 2023/24 damp and mould training was delivered for both technical and non-technical staff, specialist Fire Risk Assessor qualifications were achieved by seven members of staff and seven people completed Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) qualifications. We have also supported a further

three members of staff through professional development in project management and building surveying. Our first housing apprenticeship was also started and is proving successful.

In care and supported housing (C&SH), we enhanced our training offer with seven additional courses within mental health services and homelessness to help staff to better meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of the people we support. We also established 'Oliver McGowan' training for all C&SH colleagues, training named after Oliver McGowan, a young man whose death shone a light on the need for health and social care staff to have better skills, knowledge and understanding of the needs for autistic people and people with a learning disability.





## Equality, diversity and inclusion

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are integral to housing associations' work and to excellent governance. We want to ensure our leadership is diverse and that, as a workplace, we embrace equality and inclusivity to reflect the diverse communities we serve. We are taking proactive steps to achieve this through our EDI plan which incorporates three key areas: residents and people who use our services, our leadership and our staff. In 2023/24, we made progress by:

- Reviewing our resident and service user involvement strategies to ensure we promote engagement opportunities and the voices of resident and service users from underrepresented communities.
- Reviewing the data we hold on residents and service users and putting in place plans to improve levels of data.
- Engaging with national EDI groups and networks at senior level.
- Carrying out a self-assessment against the five areas set out in Social Housing Equality Framework, using the results to inform future EDI planning.
- Delivering in-person EDI training to senior managers, with plans underway to offer training to all managers.
- Ensuring key policy writers undertook equality impact assessment training.
- Undertaking equality impact assessments on key policies affecting staff, residents and service users.
- Holding an EDI networking lunch and publishing a series of articles spotlighting protected characteristics on our staff intranet.
- Carrying out annual ethnicity and gender pay gap reviews and EDI data analysis of residents and staff and reporting to our Board on progress against action plans.

“

The support of Hightown will help food banks within our network continue to provide emergency support, while we work together in the long term to build a country without the need for food banks.

Thanks so much. ”

Emma Revie, Chief Executive,  
The Trussell Trust

## Championing wellbeing

At Hightown we believe in the importance of staff wellbeing and use the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' – connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give – to support colleagues to find balance, build resilience and boost mental health and wellness. In 2022/23, our team of wellbeing champions put on a programme of wellbeing activities for staff, including a step challenge, a Couch to 5k group, meditation and 'Keep Learning' sessions covering diverse topics, from public speaking to stress management.

As part of our wellbeing ethos, every three years Hightown colleagues are invited to vote for a charity to support that aligns with our own social purpose. Our nominated charity for staff fundraising is currently anti-poverty charity, The Trussell Trust, and since 2022 staff have raised £5,345 towards its nationwide foodbank network and ongoing campaigning work through events including a Christmas raffle and a quiz night.





## Rachel's story: Leading the way with an apprenticeship

Rachel, scheme manager at Hightown learning disability service The Elms, is now completing a Level 5 apprenticeship in Leader in Adult Care after finishing a Level 3. Upon completing Level 3, Rachel progressed to become a scheme manager, and her current apprenticeship will give her a better understanding of her role and responsibilities as a manager and leader.

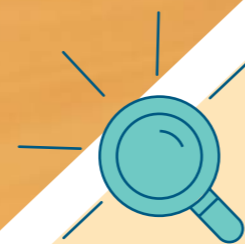
Rachel describes why she decided to complete an apprenticeship.

"I am someone who loves to learn, progress, and improve. I am passionate about professional development and know that with the right mentality, support, training opportunities, knowledge, and behaviour I will achieve this and be better equipped in my role."

For Rachel, undertaking an apprenticeship has proved a positive experience. She has found that buddying up with another manager who she has worked with previously has been helpful in clarifying the course content and the expectations of assignments. The Level 5 apprenticeship has also allowed her to understand how much she does day-to-day without even noticing and has provided her with the right set of tools to take her role further.



Personal development is so important not just for your role but also for yourself. My current assessor has been great, and even when discussing assignments and giving feedback, has given me ideas to put into practice at my scheme already. I know there is so much more to come, and I look forward to it.



80

staff members have successfully completed an apprenticeship since 2018





Hightown House, Maylands Avenue  
Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP2 4XH

[www.hightownha.org.uk](http://www.hightownha.org.uk)



Hightown Housing Association Limited  
Co-Operative and Community Benefit Society Registration No. 18077R  
Regulator of Social Housing Registration No. L2179