

# Onward



## Customer Annual Report 2023

Your customer Annual Report this year covers the work Onward has done to provide you with good quality homes and improved services. It recaps our new Corporate Plan, which we launched this year and is called The Onward Difference. Our objective is simple; enabling you to be your best, in a home you love and a place you are proud of. In this report we give you some examples of the things we are doing to make this a reality for you, rather than another corporate soundbite.

Spending £75m to improve and repair homes shows where our focus has been. This investment will help us to keep your home smart, warm and dry. No one should have to put up with a damp home, or the presence of mould, so please continue to tell us if you find any. Our new approach to tackling damp and mould is proving successful and we aim to be in your home within 5 days of a problem being reported. We are also investing heavily in training so our colleagues have the right skills, knowledge and confidence to listen to you properly and make sure problems are resolved.

Information is included on our performance so you can see how well we are doing compared to 12 months ago. There are welcome signs of improvement in our repairs service, with more repairs fixed within our target timescales. We know there is some way to go to making this a truly excellent service and plans are in place to deliver further significant improvements. Overall, the number of complaints we have received has risen. We are sorry for when we have got it wrong and we are determined to use your feedback to do better in the coming year.

We understand that the cost of living keeps rising for our customers. Although inflation is beginning to fall, prices remain sky high, for everything from heating to food and clothing. Our financial inclusion team has continued to provide advice and support this year, putting money back into customer pockets. We have also continued to be active in our communities by supporting local groups and activities, helping people engage with their neighbours and enjoy their local area.

With another difficult winter ahead for many, please be assured that we will listen to and support all of our customers. Please reach out to us if you need any assistance.

## Reporting back on our Corporate Plan.

Every housing association has a plan that explains what sort of landlord it wants to be and what it will deliver. This year, we published our new Corporate Plan.

We call our Plan 'The Onward Difference' and it sets out the positive difference we will make by enabling people and communities to be their best. We will do this by providing homes that you love, in places you are proud of and by working with partners to go beyond housing and invent new ways to do more.



**Bronwen Rapley,**  
Chief Executive



***Our Plan has five themes to enable us to achieve these aims. These are:***

**ENABLING:** Helping people take control of their lives and neighbourhoods

**ENVIRONMENT:** Reducing carbon by making our homes warm, dry and comfortable

**TECHNOLOGY:** Using modern technology and better data to improve customers' experiences

**LISTENING:** Being a listening landlord that is easy to contact, responsive and a human presence

**COLLEAGUES:** Learning how to do a better job for our customers and an employer people love working for

***In this year's Annual Report we give you an update on what we have done to deliver results for customers on each of these themes.***



Our highlights from the last 12 months:

# The Onward Difference

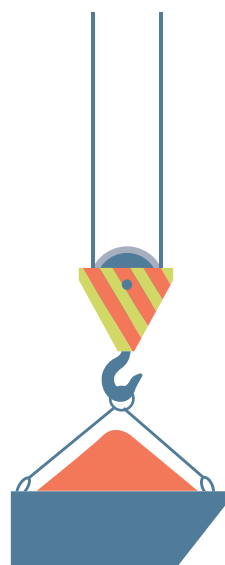


Launching 'The Onward Difference', our new Corporate Plan following consultation with our customers and colleagues.



# A<sup>1</sup>

Keeping our **A1** credit rating, so we can easily borrow money to invest in customer homes.



Building **308** new homes, enabling people to put down roots in their communities.



Publishing our first report on sustainability performance.



Securing **£6.8m** for energy efficiency and other improvements to homes in Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Lancashire.



Investing a total of **£75.7m** into improvements and repairs to our customers' homes.



Improvements to customer homes to make them warmer, drier and less expensive to heat.

# ENABLING

Helping people take control of their lives and neighbourhoods.

Over the past twelve months, we have built a total of 308 homes across our communities in the North West.

## New affordable homes

Over the last twelve months, we welcomed residents to our new development at Spring Street, Hyndburn, which includes one and two-bedroom apartments for affordable rent and shared ownership. Over in Hattersley, Greater Manchester, we are also making significant progress on delivering 161 new affordable homes for local people on three neighbouring brownfield sites at the heart of our community. We have also started on site for a further 400 homes.

## The Onward Academy

This year also saw the launch of The Onward Academy, which will support training and employment opportunities for our customers. As part of this, we have worked with partners at the Learning Foundry to provide work experience within Onward to a group of 16-24 year olds, helping them towards their CIH Level 2 Qualification. This is just the first phase of the programme and this year we will be engaging with new partners to find more ways to enable our customers fulfil their aspirations.

## 1st Call

Based in Accrington, our 1st Call team offers a range of services for residents across Lancashire, including one-to-one support around health and wellbeing, employment and training and financial advice. In the last year, the team has responded to 5,713 enquiries and enabled 120 residents to gain full time employment.



# ENVIRONMENT

Reducing carbon by making our homes warm, dry and affordable.

Last year, Onward secured £1.3million from Wave 1 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to deliver major energy efficiency improvements to 132 bungalows in our Murdishaw neighbourhood. Since then, we have been working closely with the community to deliver this work, which will make homes more sustainable, energy efficient and comfortable in the future. The work is due to be completed later in the summer.



In March, Onward was successful in securing £6.8million from Wave 2.1 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. The funding will be used to deliver energy efficiency improvements to around 600 homes across Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Lancashire and is another important step on our journey to provide more sustainable homes for our customers in the future.





# TECHNOLOGY

Modern technology, great experiences and a landlord that is easy to contact.



One of the aims of Digital Onward is to use technology to improve customers' experiences and make interactions with us easier. Many customers do not have access to technology, so our Digital Customers workstream is designed to tackle this and help customers enjoy the opportunities that technology brings.

To date, we have launched a digital customers group to gain a better understanding of the challenges customers face around access to technology. As part of this programme, we have secured low cost data and hardware, such as tablets, that will be made available to customers by application to our new Onward Connect Fund. We have set up three hubs in our communities that will offer support and training to customers to improve their digital skills. Our Digital Onward programme is seeking to use the best of technology to help us run our business well and to serve you, our customers more effectively.



## LISTENING

Proper listening, real results and a human presence locally.

We were deeply shocked and saddened by the tragic death of Awaab Ishak in his family home in Rochdale. From 2021, we began taking a completely new look at how we identify and respond to damp and mould in our customers' homes. Our refreshed approach begins with listening to customers, recording information accurately and treating cases promptly.

In many cases, a long term fix to damp and mould means that work must be done on the building. So this year we established a Complex Disrepair Team able to treat more complicated cases more quickly. Our Customer Services Team has also had refreshed training, and we are developing predictive analytics to enable us to get ahead of damp and mould in our customers' homes.

### Consulting on our Plan

In May 2022, we launched a consultation with our customers and colleagues on our new Corporate Plan, 'The Onward Difference'. The Onward Difference is the positive difference we will make by enabling people and communities to be their best by providing homes they love, in places they are proud of and by working with partners to go beyond housing and invent new ways to do more.



# COLLEAGUES

Always learning how to do  
a better job for our customers.

This year, we launched a multi-skilling programme for our colleagues in Onward Repairs, developing their skills across a range of areas to help them provide a better service for our customers. To date over 30 operatives have received multi-skilling training in up to three additional skills and received accreditation from Burnley College.



Our Aspiring Leaders Programme is also developing colleagues by creating opportunities for them to progress in their careers. 27 colleagues have now completed this programme with six going on to secure their first line management position. A further 2 programmes are planned for 2023 to continue the development of talent and career progression across Onward.



## The Onward Board.

In the last twelve months, we have welcomed three new non-Executive Directors to the Board. Tina Kokkinos is an experienced Board Member and her experience includes various roles at JPM, HSBC and Coca-Cola and most recently as Chief Operating Officer at a FX FinTech start-up.



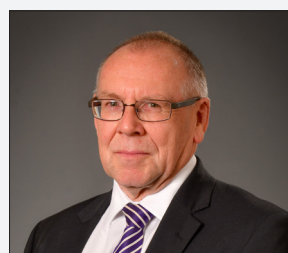
Tina Kokkinos

Diana Hampson joins us with extensive experience in estate management from The University of Manchester where she has been the Director of Estates and Facilities since 1997. Finally, Karl Tupling has forty years' experience in housing and regeneration and has held senior roles in local government most recently as Director of Market Places and Partners at Homes England.



Diana Hampson

Our new Non-Executive Directors bring a wealth of expertise and will help us run Onward on your behalf. More details on our Board members can be found online at [www.onward.co.uk](http://www.onward.co.uk)



Karl Tupling

## OUR CURRENT BOARD MEMBERS

**Tim Johnston**  
Chair

**Bronwen Rapley**  
Chief Executive

**Rachel Barber**  
**Dena Burgher**  
**Wyn Dignan MBE**  
**Mike Gerrard**  
**Diana Hampson**  
**Kate Jones**  
**Kieran Keane**  
**Tina Kokkinos**  
**Sandy Livingstone**  
**Matt Saye**  
**Karl Tupling**



# Key facts & figures – how we are doing.

These numbers show how we have performed this year compared to last year. Improvements include the number of repairs completed within our target timescales. Areas where we need to do better include how long it takes to relet a home after it becomes empty.

In the last twelve months we have seen a lot more demand for our services, in particular for repairs. There are a range of reasons for this, from bad weather to greater awareness of the problems caused by damp and mould. Whatever your problem is, we encourage you to report it immediately so we can sort it out as quickly as possible. In response to higher demand, we have increased resources available to our repairs and other services, which have completed a much higher volume of work than the previous year.



|                                              |      |         |         |
|----------------------------------------------|------|---------|---------|
| Rental income                                |      | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
| Proportion of rent collected from customers  | 100% |         | 99.2%   |
| Proportion of overdue rent owed by customers | 5%   |         | 5.1%    |



|                                                                               |           |         |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| Lettings & turnover                                                           |           | 2021/22 | 2022/23   |
| Average days to relet an empty home                                           | 29.1 days |         | 30.3 days |
| Average days to relet an empty home (excluding sheltered and supported homes) | 27.9 days |         | 30.2 days |



|                                    |         |         |                                 |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Repairs                            | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | Target                          |
| Completed within target timescales |         |         |                                 |
| All repairs                        | 79%     | 81.5%   |                                 |
| Emergency repairs                  | 94%     | 93.5%   | response within 4 hours         |
| Urgent repairs                     | 74%     | 73%     | response within 5 working days  |
| Routine repairs                    | 76%     | 80.9%   | response within 20 working days |



|                                                  |       |         |         |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------|---------|---------|
| Keeping you safe                                 |       | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
| Homes with a valid gas safety certificate        | 99.9% |         | 99.3%   |
| Homes with a valid electrical safety certificate | 92%   |         | 97.5%   |
| Homes with a complete fire risk assessment       | 99%   |         | 100%    |

## INVESTING IN YOUR HOME.

Last year we installed...



**1,093**  
Doors



**984**  
Heating Systems



**1,026**  
Kitchens



**939**  
Bathrooms



**1,114**  
Windows



**245**  
Roofs



**759**  
Boilers

## Our performance.

We don't always get things right the first time, so learning from complaints gives us an opportunity to continue to improve how we deliver our services.

Over the last year, our number of complaints has risen, but we have resolved most of these within our target of ten days. We continue to focus on improved communication with complainants and putting learning outcomes at the heart of our complaints process, explaining what action we have taken to learn from customers' experiences.



This table summarises our performance on complaints:

| Performance indicator                    | 2021/22 Performance    | 2022/23 Performance    | Difference |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------|
| Number of complaints received            | 1,027                  | 1,380                  | + 34%      |
| Complaints closed within 10 days         | 95%                    | 90.2%                  | - 4%       |
| Average time taken to resolve complaints | Average 8 working days | Average 9 working days | 1 Day      |
| Number of complaints upheld              | 67%                    | 76%                    | +9%        |
| Number of customer compliments received  | 509                    | 459                    | -10%       |
| Complaints per 1,000 properties          | 33.6                   | 45.5                   | +35%       |

### THE THREE MAIN THINGS YOU HAVE COMPLAINED ABOUT.

Your top reasons for complaining to us will help us focus on improving where we need to.



Time taken to complete repairs  
(**466** 2021/22, **516** 2022/23).



Inaccurate and inadequate  
information being provided  
(**66** 2021/22, **151** 2022/23).



Property condition or damage  
(**91** 2021/22, **146** 2022/23).

## Our plans to improve.

Whilst we are disappointed to receive more complaints than we did last year, we are using your feedback to make our services better. We have a clear idea of where we need to improve and have plans in place to get better and reduce the number of complaints we receive. Our plans include:

- A new approach to identifying and resolving problems soon after you report them, so we can sort them out quickly and you don't need to complain.
- Delivering customer service training to all our colleagues, so they have the skills, knowledge and confidence to help you with problems big or small.
- Improving how we handle informal complaints by setting up new regional teams that aim to resolve matters at the first point of contact.