



£75 shopping
voucher!
Competition on page 17

Futures in focus

| Autumn 2024

Welcome to your Autumn edition of Futures in Focus



Autumn officially started on 22 September, but if we're being honest it feels like Autumn arrived long before that, or did it even go away since last year?

This edition we offer advice on keeping safe in your home, including dealing with damp and mould, electrical safety and crime prevention. We also share the ten customer pledges we've made to better support our customers and communities and how we're learning from your feedback to improve our services.

Head to page 17 for our latest spot the difference competition and your chance to **win a £75 shopping voucher.**

If you have a story to share, or would like support with a community project, then please get in touch with us at **communications@futureshg.co.uk**.



Stand-up Sharon

Futures' resident comedian is back, and she's been working on some new material to share with you. Hecklers are allowed. Email **communications@futureshg.co.uk** with your best (family friendly) jokes and join Sharon in our next magazine.

***"What's a tree's favourite song in autumn?
Don't stop be-leafin'."***

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Want the latest breaking Futures news?

Follow us on social media! Join us for #MythBusterMonday, #TopTipTuesday, #ThankyouThursday and other non-alliterative news and updates.



@futureshousing



Futures Housing Group



We've ex-d X (Twitter). We're no longer using X/Twitter so please follow us on Facebook instead.

‘Futures in the community’ news

We love giving back to the community and thinking of new ways to offer support.

One work experience week and 3,000 toy bricks

Futures offers a variety of work placements each year to introduce young people to the world of social housing and the career opportunities available.

Year 10 pupil Ja-Anne joined colleagues in July to shadow and learn about a range of different roles. This included visiting homes to inspect work that we had carried out, seeing how our work planners organise the diaries of operatives and plan jobs, and a meeting with Travis Perkins, one of our key suppliers, discussing innovation in the products we use.

One job Ja-Anne wouldn't have been expecting to do during her time with us was handing over 3,000

toy building bricks to a local community group. The bricks were part of an activity at a recent training event at Futures and Kyra Thompson, our Resource & Materials Coordinator, came up with the idea of donating them to a local community group.

Infinite Wellbeing in Heanor was the happy recipient of the donation. This is a safe space with something for people of all ages to enjoy. Because they have a large play area for children and regular holiday clubs and youth events, we knew the bricks would come into good use at their community centre.



Kyra said:

It's a nice feeling to know the toy building bricks will be used by children who come and play at the community centre, and it was great to bring Ja-Anne along to see how important giving back to the community is for housing associations.

Showing our Futures Pride

We were delighted to be invited to two Pride events over the summer, celebrating the LGBTQ+ community with fun-filled days in the sunshine – yes, the sun did show its face on both days!

We held a stall at Daventry Pride in the Park in June and went to Pride in Belper in August, where we got to take part in the parade as hundreds of happy faces lined the streets to wave as we went by.

We asked the crowd two questions using our graffiti walls – **“What does Pride in your community mean to you?”** and **“How can your community feel more inclusive?”**

We were blown away by the responses and we're proudly displaying our bright rainbow boards at Futures House, our office near Castle Donington, so our team members can find out more!

It was especially great seeing so many young people get stuck in and come up with some really thoughtful answers. These have given us lots to think about as we continue our work in the community. Most adults took a few moments to consider what they wanted to write, whereas the young people knew straight away what to say.

Sophie Harding, Community Engagement Project Delivery Officer at Futures said: ***"It was great to attend Pride and meet so many different people and organisations finding out what pride means to them in their community. The event has given us some fantastic ideas about how we can help our communities to be as inclusive as possible."***



Picnic and litter pick events

We held two 'picnic and litter pick' days on Lovatt Drive in Langley Mill this summer, together with some of our key partner organisations.

The events was organised after customers shared concerns about increased antisocial behaviour in the approaching school holidays. Because of this we invited several local partners, including Derbyshire Police, to signpost and work with the young people to deter them from ASB.

There's a big, secluded green space for kids to play on at Lovatt Drive, and coaches from Derby County Community Trust brought along bags full of sporting goodies, including football, badminton kits, swingball and Nerf darts.

Community development organisation, Sporting Communities, brought their mobile youth van where kids could talk with their officers while having some friendly competition on the Xbox. We were also joined by community group Infinite Wellbeing. Amber Valley

Borough Council's Community Safety Partnership team, Derbyshire Fire & Rescue's Youth Officer and Councillor Alex Stevenson, who kindly dropped off eight bins for customers to fill with rubbish which he then collected at the end of the day.

Our grounds maintenance team also helped clear up the area, and at the end of the afternoon everyone got stuck in with a group litter pick to make their community tidier.

We'd also like to thank Asda in Langley Mill and the Co-op who donated the picnic food!

Hannah Albrighton, Communities Housing Officer said: ***"It was great to see that the areas were still tidy at the second event thanks to all the hard work with the litter picks that we did at the first event."***

"I'd like to thank everyone who came along, especially all the organisations that each brought a different, but valuable skillset to help the children and community."

Ten pledges for our customers

As part of our plans to work even harder to listen and respond to what our customers tell us, we've launched a new customer engagement strategy which clearly sets out why and how we will do more to take account of customer views.

The strategy was put together with the help of our Insight Committee, which is a formal part of our governance structure and has a majority of customer members.

Some of the things we've pledged to do more of under the strategy include being out and about in communities more, increasing our partnership work and setting up a network of 'community champions' to lead the way in getting involved.

Key to the strategy are ten customer commitments that set out exactly what people can expect from us in the future.

You can view a short version of the strategy as well as the new commitments [on our website here](#). And to find out about new ways of helping to influence our work, [click here](#).



Setting out our performance and achievements



We're pleased to share a suite of three reports showing our performance and achievements over the last financial year.

Our annual report is hosted on a dedicated website and features many highlights, including building 227 new homes, cutting our average call wait time to five minutes or less and keeping our top G1/V1 ratings from the Regulator of Social Housing.

We've also published our third environmental, social and governance (ESG) report and latest financial report, which go into more technical details about our finances and the work we've done for the environment, society and around governance.



[Visit our annual report website](#)



[Read our ESG report here](#)



[Read our financial report here](#)



Stand-up Sharon






"What do you call a small pepper in late autumn? A little chilli."

Benefit changes could mean a chilly winter for some...

As autumn is only just getting started, it may feel premature to start thinking about the winter. But if you're one of our older customers and finding it hard to make ends meet on the money-front, there is recent news you need to be aware of.

The Government has announced new restrictions on the Winter Fuel Payment that, according to the Charity Age UK, could leave up to two million pensioners worse off this year. For some years now this automatic top-up payment for pensioners gave up to £300 to help cover higher heating costs in the winter for older people. Now, only those of pension age who get means-tested benefits will get the extra payment. So to qualify for the money this year you need to be born on or before 22 September 1958 and receiving one or more of the following benefits as of the week 16-22 September:



-  Pension Credit
-  Universal Credit
-  Income Support
-  Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
-  Income-related Employment and Support Allowance.

If you fit into this category you can still expect to get £200 towards your bills or £300 if you are over 80. Otherwise you will be worse off than in previous years.

If you're going to be affected by this change and worried about making ends meet, our tenancy support team may be able to help. They can ensure you're receiving all the benefits you're entitled to and help you explore other ways of topping up your income and managing your household budget. And we're encouraging people to speak to us sooner rather than later when winter bills begin to bite. Give us a call on the usual number, 0300 456 2531 or fill out the **[contact form at the bottom of this website page](#)** to get the ball rolling.

You also have until **21 December** to submit a backdated benefit claim and still be eligible to receive the Winter Fuel Payment.




Keeping **safe** in your home

Your home is your safe place – and we want to work with you to make sure that it stays that way. Over the next few pages we've got some top tips about making sure you're protecting yourself and your family from harm.

Damp and mould

As we head into the winter months the weather will turn cooler and wetter which increases the chance of seeing damp or mould in your home. We take damp and mould seriously and if you find that it is appearing in your home frequently or is severe please get in touch, so we can look at your property and make sure we are doing all we can, together, to address the problem.



Visit [The Help Hub](#) to find out more about managing damp and mould in your home.

There are some things you can do to prevent mould from growing and spreading:



Put lids on saucepans, switch off kettles as soon as they boil and use extractor fans.



Wipe down damp surfaces with a dry cloth.



Avoid drying clothes over radiators, or open the window while clothes are drying.

Is it time to put the heating on?

We get a big increase in reported boiler repairs in October and November every year – which is usually because people are turning on their heating for the first time after the summer, and noticing that it's not working. Find some time to test out your heating – even if it's just for ten minutes! – before you need it.







Every check counts

Gas Safety Week takes place in September every year. This year, the Gas Safe Register had a clear message for everyone – check, check and check again!

Remember – we'll arrange a gas safety check with you every year, to make sure your home is in top shape and keeping you safe. We know it can be tricky to co-ordinate around everything else you've got going on, but please do let us in or rearrange if the date we've offered isn't convenient. It's not just a legal obligation – it's an essential safety measure to make sure you and the people you live with aren't at risk of harm.

Another important check is one you can do on your own doorstep – that anyone working on gas in your home is Gas Safe registered. You can ask to see their Gas Safe ID card and check the back to make sure they're qualified to do the work you're expecting.

You can also check your own gas appliances for warning signs of a problem which can include:

-  Lazy yellow or orange flames instead of crisp blue ones.
-  Black marks on or around the appliance.
-  A pilot light that keeps going out.
-  Too much condensation in the room.

If you spot any of these signs, contact us or a Gas Safe registered engineer.



One final check you can do is make sure your carbon monoxide alarm is working. Press and hold the test button until the alarm sounds. It can take up to 20 seconds to respond – but if it still isn't working, try new batteries and check it again. Contact us if it still doesn't respond to the test button.

Have you got a fire safety plan?

We know it can be uncomfortable to think about, but it's important to know what your family needs to do if you have a house fire. If you live in a property with a communal area, we'll be writing to you with more information about how we're keeping your building safe. It's important to read this carefully so you understand what you need to do if the alarm sounds.





If you live in a standalone property, you should come up with an emergency plan. This outlines how you and any family members would get out of your home if there was a fire, and it means that you can act quickly and safely in an emergency.

You can find some helpful hints and tips on creating a plan and speaking to the people you live with about it from Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service: www.derbyshire-fire.gov.uk/safety/at-home/escape-plans

Hopefully, you'll never have to use it – but it's always better to be safe than sorry.

The buzz on electrical safety

We use electricity from the moment we wake up to when our head hits the pillow – and even in between! It's easy to forget how powerful and potentially dangerous it can be, so make sure you're following these top tips to avoid electrical accidents in your home:

-  Nearly half of all severe electric shocks happen during DIY. Make sure you take precautions, like checking for cables and shutting off power, before you start any work – and if you've got any electrical work that needs doing, get a professional in. Don't forget, you need our permission to do any significant alterations to your home – and we'll ask for evidence that work has been done safely and in line with any legal requirements.
-  Don't overload sockets, and don't coil or daisy chain extension cables. Check electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/overloadingsockets to check that your sockets are safe.
-  If you vape, you should keep an eye on your batteries for damage and make sure you're only using the charger that came with your vape. Don't charge it overnight, and unplug it once it's fully charged.
-  You should also be careful with charger cables for phones, tablets and other electronic devices – wherever possible, stick to the ones provided by the manufacturer, or approved alternatives.

Check out the Electrical Safety First website for more information on staying safe with electricity in your home.

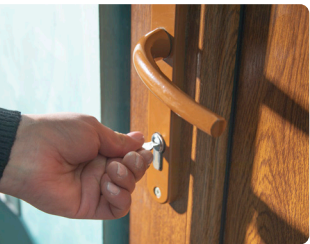
Burglaries

Being burgled is much more than the loss of valued possessions. As well as the financial impact it can have and the potential loss of things with great sentimental value, for most people it's also an invasion of their personal space. This can leave a lot of people feeling vulnerable or violated.

While increased security such as good locks and alarm systems can help to keep intruders at bay, they can be expensive and out of reach for many households. But if you can afford this sort of protection do remember to use it. An alarm that's left switched off or a door on the latch while you nip to the shops can still leave you at risk.



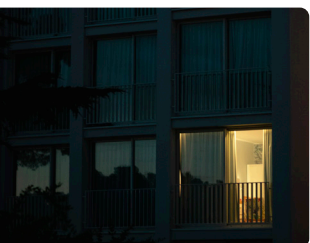
If you can't afford to invest in making your home more secure there are still things you can do to discourage burglars. Here are a few low cost or free tips to help:



Simply remember to check that windows and doors are properly closed and locked when you go out. Even if you're in a hurry or just going to be away for a few minutes – this will discourage or block a casual thief.



Keep valuables out of sight if possible. Don't leave watches, jewellery, mobiles and other portable electronic devices in view of people looking in through windows. 'Out of sight, out of mind' as they say.




Leave a light and possibly a radio or other sound source on when you go out in the evenings. Low energy bulbs cost pennies to run and if a burglar thinks someone is at home they may avoid your property. Adding a timer if you are going to be away for a few days can also give the impression your home is occupied.



Talk to your local police for further crime prevention advice and look out for free tagging days when officers will add invisible tracking codes to your valuables to help get them back to you if they are stolen.

Bikes, cars and other vehicles

While burglars can get inside a house and steal the contents, removing the home itself is thankfully impossible. But transport is moveable by design so at risk of simply being taken away.



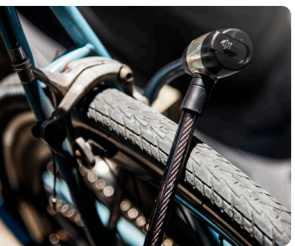
Here are some simple steps to help make sure your bike, car or motorbike isn't an easy target:



Modern cars are thankfully harder to steal than older vehicles thanks to electronic keys and immobilisers, but that doesn't mean determined thieves will always be kept at bay. Remember to lock your vehicle after use and store your key somewhere safe. Sophisticated thieves can use special devices to make a copy of electronic keys by intercepting the signals they send out. You can buy cheap wallets and key cases that block these signals and reduce the risk.



If you have an older car with a traditional key ignition, think about a steering wheel or handbrake lock. While these can be expensive, look at second hand websites such as e-bay and you might find a bargain to help make your car more secure.



Bike are at much higher risk of being stolen. While a lock is an extra cost, it may still be cheaper than forking out for a new bike if you're unlucky. And while it may be annoying to fit, it's still worthwhile even if you're just popping into the shop. You can also take advantage of free 'property tagging' days organised by the police when they will add invisible tracking information to increase the chances of getting your bike back if it's stolen.

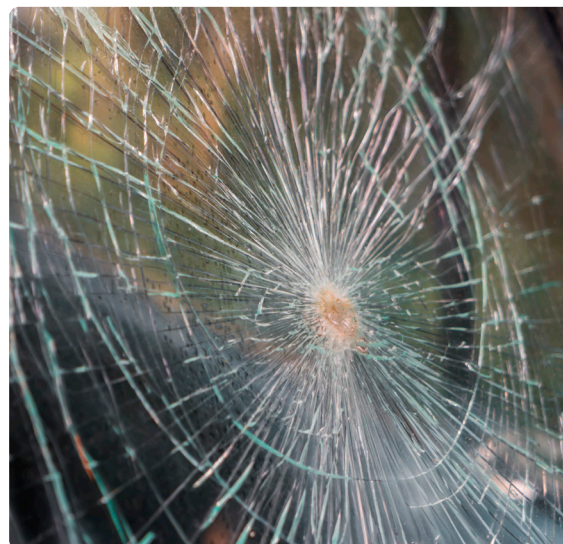


Leaving cars and bikes parked in busy areas can reduce the risk of theft as many villains won't want to be seen in action by passers-by.

Antisocial behaviour

We're committed to helping prevent, manage and resolve antisocial behaviour (ASB) so that customers can feel safe, happy and secure in their homes. We work closely with other agencies such as the police, local authorities and Community Safety Partnerships. We all have different responsibilities and powers, so by working together we're better placed to tackle ASB, mitigate and resolve it.

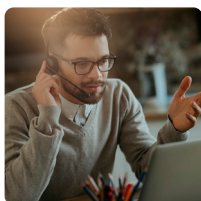
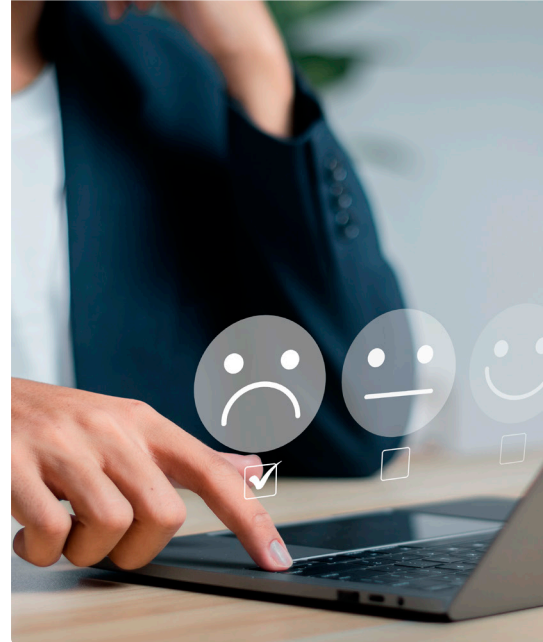
In most cases there are things you can do to help resolve the issue or dispute yourself. We have tips and advice on our website on how to approach this. If you're still finding it difficult to resolve the issues or need more support or advice, our Communities team are happy to help. To find out more information and report ASB to Futures, [click here](#).



How we're learning from complaints

We always appreciate feedback from customers, good and bad. If we're not told when we've got things wrong, then we can't do anything about it. And positive feedback lets us know we're on the right track. We continually strive to improve our services to ensure we're delivering the best customer experience, and listening and taking on board customer feedback plays a huge part in this.

Here are just a few of the changes we've made recently in response to complaints we've received:



Customers told us they felt as though they were out of the loop in what can sometimes be a lengthy process for subsidence insurance claims. We now have dedicated people to monitor and track the insurance claim, as well as Customer Liaison Officers who work with the customer and provide more regular updates. These two teams meet regularly and there is frequent communication with the insurance company to ensure progress is tracked but, most importantly, to make sure customers are kept in the loop.



We've made a new card that operatives will hand to customers when we come to measure windows for replacement. This is because customers weren't always aware they needed to have already cleared the area around the window before the operatives come to replace them.



When our repairs team meet each month we now share customer feedback with our operatives to help them think about how customers may be affected, particularly in relation to follow-on works when we need to visit



All operatives now wear shoe coverings during planned work that causes dust or mess. A reminder for shoe coverings has been added to the operative's mobile device.



We've started a major piece of work to fully review and transform our customer service processes. This includes improving how we handle each interaction with customers and ensuring clear communication about the progress of customer queries.

Did you know we contact everyone after their complaint is resolved with a survey about their experience? We listen to all feedback as it helps us make improvements, and we'd like to share some positive comments from people who've had a good experience with our process.

Thank you for your quick response in this matter after talking to lots of different people. You dealt with it very efficiently and professionally, and [were] very fair and listened to me.

Communication is paramount. Thank you for all your help.

I'd just like to say I am very happy with the way you dealt with my complaint. I feel that you listened to my concerns and did not fob me off. You acted promptly and got things sorted for me. Thank you.



You can give us feedback, whether that's a compliment or a complaint, by phone, email, letter, webchat, social media channels or through our customer portal My Account.



However you contact us, please make sure you include your full name, address, date of birth and a contact number or email address, along with the details of your feedback. This will help us to support you much more quickly and effectively.

Looking for inspiration to be healthier?

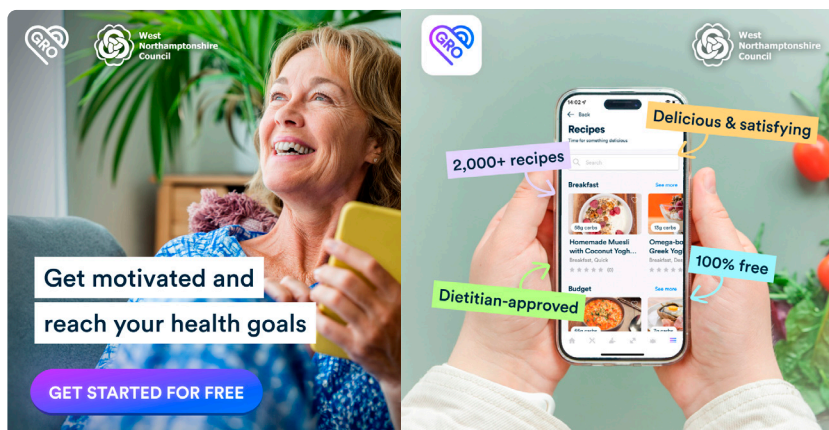
If you live in West Northamptonshire and would like some free support with getting healthy and losing weight, then you may be eligible for the Gro Health programme through West Northamptonshire Council.

The service includes a structured 12-week support programme, recipes and meal plans, meditations, exercises and more to help you lose weight, improve your health and reach your goals.

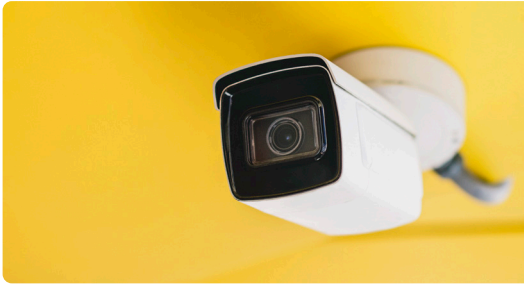
To be eligible you must:

-  be 18 years old or over
-  live in West Northamptonshire
-  have a BMI of 30 or over, or a BMI of 27.5 or over for adults from black and ethnic minority communities






For more information and to apply, visit [West Northamptonshire Council's website here](#).



CCTV at your home



As a Futures customer you can install CCTV at your home if you want, unless you live in flats or shared accommodation - you don't need our permission. There are a few conditions you need to be aware of though – some from Futures and some from the Government. The same terms apply to smart doorbells which include a camera.

-  Cameras can only be fitted at the boundary of the property and must not directly overlook another home.
-  You should position them in a way that limits the view only to a specific area that you need to monitor.
-  You should respect your neighbours' privacy. We will not get involved in privacy disputes or complaints about CCTV – these need to be referred to the Information Commissioner's Office or the police.
-  Customers must also follow Government privacy guidelines about CCTV. You can find these at <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01803/>
-  You can also get further guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office at <https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/domestic-cctv-systems/>

Your views on tackling domestic abuse

If you've experienced any form of abusive or harmful behaviour from someone you live with, love or care about, such as a partner or family member, then West Northamptonshire Council would like to hear from you in an online survey.

The Council has partnered with an independent organisation, Davis and Associates, to run a survey which will help them to understand the needs of people who have experienced domestic abuse – you just need to live or work in West Northamptonshire and be over 16 to take part.

The survey is anonymous and should take around 15 minutes to complete. It asks you questions about your views and experiences of domestic abuse, the type of support that might have been helpful and your experiences with any services you accessed in

West Northamptonshire.

To complete the survey by the deadline of 18 October, please click [here](#).

Making sure that people aren't being abused or neglected is an important part of keeping all our customers safe. If you're experiencing domestic abuse or are worried about a family member or friend, we have more advice on our website. This includes where to go for support, how to make a safety plan and how to spot signs of domestic abuse. Visit our website [here](#) for more help.

Measuring up

To make sure we're listening to and acting on what our customers think about us and our services, we've been researching customer views for many years.

You've probably been contacted by one of our research companies and asked to take part at some point. But this kind of practice has varied across different landlords, so it's been hard for customers to get a clear view of how theirs compares.

This changed in April 2023 when the Government introduced the national Tenant Satisfaction Measures. This is a set of 12 questions that all housing associations now have to ask their customers. And the research has to be done in a standard way to allow direct comparison. Futures adapted its research programme to fit and in June this year – a deadline set out by the Government – we published our first set of results on our website (see <https://tinyurl.com/3ss7uhfw> for the full findings).

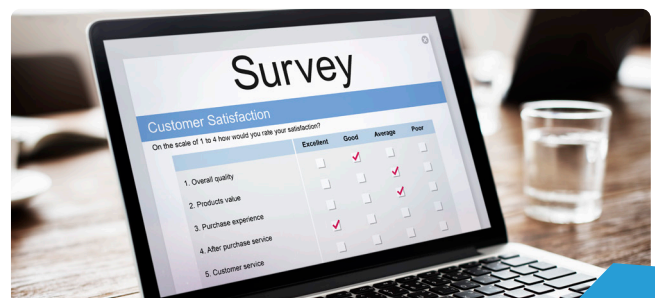
Overall the picture is positive and we compare well with many other housing associations but the new approach has also helped identify some areas where customers think we can do better.

Three quarters (74.4%) of our customers said that they were satisfied with our overall service which is

good to hear and we continue to be fully compliant with all the legally-required safety standards for our homes. And while around eight out of ten (77.6%) customers said they are satisfied with our repairs service generally – we score less well when it comes to how quickly we carry out repairs, with fewer than seven out of ten (69.3%) people saying they were satisfied.

Other areas where you think we do less well include how we contribute to neighbourhoods, manage antisocial behaviour and look after communal areas. And while most customers think we do a good job of keeping you informed and treating you fairly, you also told us we could do better in listening to customer views and handling complaints.

While these measures are new and have given us a slightly different view than other research we have carried out – we're taking the findings very seriously and have plans in place to look at how we can do better in areas of concern. Recent changes include a new approach to managing antisocial behaviour cases and publishing a brand new customer engagement strategy.



A big thank you to everyone who takes part in this and other surveys. Your views do matter and truly influence how we work.



Stand-up Sharon

*"Why is it so easy to trick a leaf in October?
They fall for anything."*

Ocean House

We're pleased to announce that work to extensively refurbish and remodel the former Mountbatten House on the Southbrook estate in Daventry is almost complete.



Ocean House – renamed in response to a local community vote – is now home to 21 one and two-bedroom flats to support couples, families and single people. The first new residents are expected to move in soon.

Thanks to major investment in the building's sustainability, it now achieves the highest Energy Performance Certificate rating of A, making the homes more comfortable and cheaper to heat. Each flat benefits from high heat retention storage heaters throughout and solar panels on the roof. The storage heaters are better insulated than standard models, saving more heat for when needed, and the solar panel system will prioritise using 'free' electricity to cut electricity bills for residents.

The 21 homes will be available for people on the housing register in West Northamptonshire. Check back soon when we will announce the eligibility criteria and how to apply.

Sarah Wyke, Director of Housing at Futures said:

Mountbatten House didn't really meet the needs of the local community and sadly there was a history of crime and antisocial behaviour so a big change was needed. That's why we decided to completely reconfigure and refurbish, including improved security and lighting, to make it more suitable for couples and small families who we think will help to build a stronger local community.

The work has taken longer than expected thanks to the pandemic and some issues with the building that we uncovered along the way. More importantly though, we decided to go 'all out' and invest in multiple upgrades to make this a bigger and better asset for the community and those who live there for years to come. A big part of this has been greatly improving its energy performance so it will not only help the people who will live there, but the planet too."



Stand-up Sharon

"Why did the tree decide to start taking art classes? She wanted to branch out."

Spot the difference

£75 shopping voucher prize!

Email communications@futureshg.co.uk and tell us how many differences you can find, along with a short description of each one, for a chance to win a prize of a £75 shopping voucher! The competition closes on 1 November. You must be a Futures customer to enter. To read the full terms and conditions [click here](#).





@futureshousing



Futures Housing Group



www.futureshg.co.uk