

Environmental, Social and Governance Report

2023/24



great
places
HOUSING GROUP

Introduction

by Mike Gerrard - Chief Financial Officer



Welcome to our ESG Report for 2023/24. As we enter the 2024/25 financial year, we are excited to pursue our ten-year ambitions. Our interim Corporate Plan for 2023-24 outlined our 10-year ambitions centred on stability, collaboration, and ambition. This focus continues in our new plan, 'Here for our Customers,' which will guide us for the next three years. This plan aims to tackle challenges and enhance our service for customers, homes, and communities, shaped significantly by customer feedback.

Despite ongoing inflationary pressures in supply chains over the past twelve months, we effectively manage our homes and strive to provide excellent service. Increased demand for our services, driven by customer and regulatory expectations regarding repairs and maintenance, has also impacted costs.

We remain committed to our Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) responsibilities. This year's Sustainability Report, part of our commitment to the Sustainability Reporting Standard for Social Housing (SRS), incorporates new requirements from SRS v2.0, focusing on net zero commitments, damp and mould management, and equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

In relation to our environmental efforts, we are reviewing our Carbon Management Strategy to achieve net zero by 2050, with a target for all homes to reach EPC C or better by 2030. Currently, 82% of our customers' homes meet this standard. Additionally, we are enhancing the Richmond Park local heat network in Sheffield through a £3 million project, partly funded by the Government's Heat Network Efficiency Scheme, improving energy efficiency for 299 homes and giving customers better control over heating costs.

Building safety remains a key focus, as we have continued to assess our buildings and carry out works to respond to the changes in legislation. The past year has seen us invest c£3.5m on safety enhancements as well as continuing to develop our long-term plans for remediation works. We have communicated evacuation arrangements to customers in our apartment blocks, and are developing individual engagement plans for our higher risk high-rise buildings.

Listening to our customers has been a key priority over the past year as we prepared for new regulatory requirements under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act. We have established robust systems to collect and report on Tenant Satisfaction Measures, ensuring our performance meets customer needs. Our new Customer Committee, alongside the 'Insight' Customer Scrutiny Group, will provide valuable insights from customers, enhancing accountability between the Board and our service delivery.

A significant development in the past year has been the rollout of our self-serve repairs feature, allowing customers to book and manage their own repair appointments through the MyPlace portal. This gives them greater choice and autonomy, which we hope will boost satisfaction. Additionally, customer feedback informed our decision to bring all communal caretaking services in-house, following the successful launch of our in-house grounds maintenance service last year, ensuring greater consistency in service.

As a socially responsible organisation, we continue to prioritise our customers' health and wellbeing through support offered through our nine community centres, financial resilience offer and tenancy coaching services. Our Hardship and Community Resilience Fund helps individuals and community partners tackle ongoing economic challenges, with affordability remaining a key concern for our Board amid the cost-of-living crisis and government rent caps.

We are also enhancing our Aareon QL housing management system by integrating customer and property data. These improvements will enhance data quality, including its profile information to support us to deliver a better service and meet the diverse needs of our customers and effectively utilise resources to address sector challenges.

We remain committed to addressing the housing crisis through our Affordable Development Programme. In 2023/24, we delivered 490 new affordable homes and sold 214 for shared ownership. We began this financial year with around 2,000 homes on site, the highest in our programme's history, and have an additional 850 homes in planning, with over 700 more in the pipeline for the next year.

We retained our G1/V2 status following our recent inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing, receiving a C2 grade against the new Consumer Standards. Our V2 viability rating reflects ongoing risks in our operating environment, and our G1 governance rating demonstrates strong governance and financial management. Our credit ratings from Moody's (A3) and Fitch (A+) reaffirm our solid balance sheet and performance despite inflationary pressures.

The C2 grade highlighted strengths in service delivery and areas for improvement. We are using this opportunity to enhance our services, with planned improvements included in our corporate plan for 2024-27, 'Here for Our Customers,' which we shared with the Regulator during the inspection.

Our Board has undergone significant changes over the past year, including the appointment of Mervyn Jones as Chair in January 2024. Mervyn brings extensive housing sector experience, having previously served as Chief Executive at Yorkshire Housing for over a decade. He joined Great Places' Board after the merger with Equity in March 2020, succeeding Tony Davison, who led the organisation through substantial growth and key developments from December 2013.

Emma Mountford became Chair of the Cube Board in September 2023, following David Robinson's departure. Her background as a Founding Director of the Vesta Group enhances our expertise in property development. We welcomed seven new board members at the start of the year: Nicki Clegg, Matthew Hemmings, Ted Pearce, Simran Soin, and Keith Ward to the Group Board, with John-Paul Case and Dean Clegg joining Cube Homes.

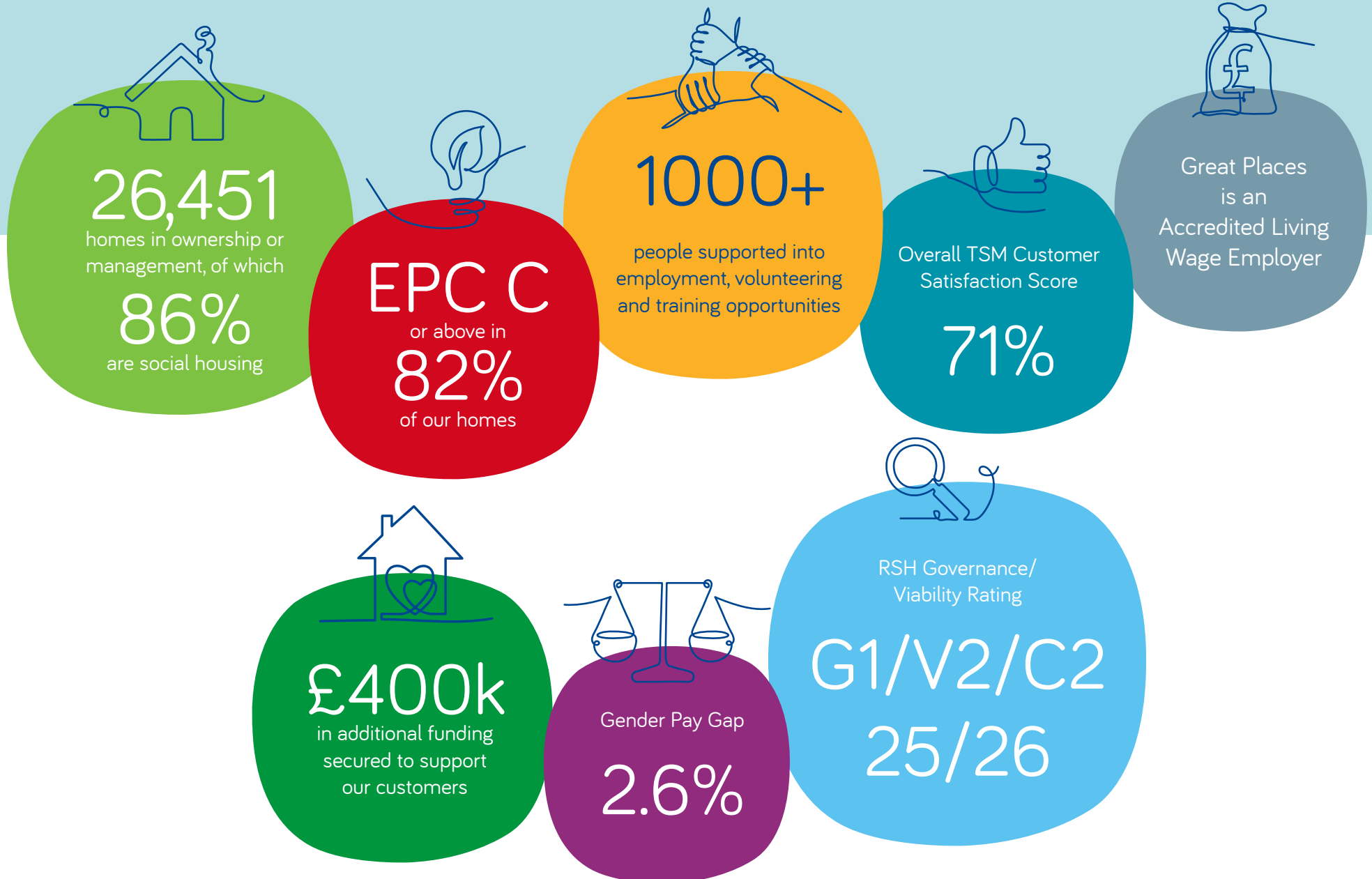
In June 2024, we bid farewell to CEO Matt Harrison, who served for 10 years and contributed over 30 years to Great Places. We thank him for his dedication and leadership.

I'm pleased to share our latest report, reflecting on our achievements and our commitment to addressing sector challenges, investing in our homes and communities, and enhancing services for our customers.

Mike Gerrard



ESG at Great Places: Key Headlines 2023/24



Our Report Structure

'The UN Sustainability Reporting Standard is a set of common goals that demand investors, governments, businesses and society do more to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure people enjoy peace and prosperity.' (UN Transforming our world the 2030 agenda for sustainable development September 2013).

As part of our commitments under the Sustainability Reporting Standard for Social Housing providers must produce an annual update, to include the three high-level areas of this report, 'Environmental, Social and Governance.' Each include information taken from a set of themes aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



ESG Area	Theme	Alignment with UN Sustainable Development Goal	Page Reference
Social	Affordability and security	No poverty Reduced inequalities	7
	Building safety and quality	Sustainable cities and communities	8
	Customer voice	Sustainable cities and communities	9
	Customer Support	Sustainable cities and communities	15
	Placemaking	Sustainable cities and communities	19
Environmental	Climate change	Climate action	21
	Ecology	Life on land	24
	Resource management	Sustainable cities and communities	25
Governance	Structure and governance	Peace, justice and strong institutions	27
	Board and trustees	Peace, justice and strong institutions	29
	Staff wellbeing	Decent work and economic growth	31
	Supply chain management	Responsible production and consumption	33



Social

Affordability and Security

This theme looks at the extent to which the housing provider provides long-term homes that are genuinely affordable for people on low incomes.

	New Homes completed in 2023/24
Social rent	34
Affordable rent	296
LCHO (low-cost home ownership)	160
Total	490



The number of properties that Great Places owns or manages is **26,451** in the year ending 31 March, 2024, of which **86%** are social housing.

How does the Housing Provider offer security of tenure for customers?

We believe that having a secure home is important for both our customers and our business. Great Places offers starter tenancies to people who have had similar types of tenancies before. After completing the starter period, customers can upgrade to an Assured Tenancy, which offers the best security. Those who had a Secure or Assured Tenancy before April 2011 will also get an Assured Tenancy. We use different agreements for supported living and new properties to meet their specific needs.

On average, we charge rents at **92%** of the Local Housing Allowance and only **69%** of private rents. The table below shows analysis for the five local authority areas where we have the most homes.

Local Authority	Number of homes	Average current weekly rent	Rent as % of LHA	Rent as % of market rent
Manchester	2,110	£107.23	69%	56%
Salford	2,078	£109.95	70%	59%
Sheffield	2,024	£102.69	83%	67%
Oldham	1,080	£107.80	93%	67%
Blackburn with Darwen	1,033	£106.30	93%	76%

Building Safety and Quality

This theme looks to assess how effective the housing provider is at meeting its legal responsibilities to protect customers and keep buildings safe.



Customer safety remains a key priority.

In the past year, we have continued to prioritise building safety and carry out a comprehensive programme of assessments on our buildings and works to respond to the changes to building safety legislation. We've invested £3.6m in the last 12 months, on a range of safety enhancements including the installation of smoke and fire detection systems, as well as continuing to develop and deliver our plans for remediation works.

This is reflected in the following key headlines:

- **99.99% (2022/23 – 100%) of our homes have an up-to-date gas inspection and service certificate.**
- **100% of compliant fire risk assessments completed (2022/23 100%).**
- **99.88% of our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard (DHS)**
- **97.35% of electrical safety checks completed in customers' homes (2022/23 96.6%)**
- **92.72% of lift safety checks completed (2022/23 91.9%)**
- **100% of asbestos and legionella checks completed (2022/23 100%)**

We aim to meet our customer engagement commitments, including communicating evacuation arrangements to customers in our apartment blocks and providing regular building safety reminders. Working with customer involvement colleagues, the Building Safety Team has also started to implement its comprehensive consultation programme with customers in all our high-rise residential buildings over 18 metres, to develop individual customer-led Building Safety Engagement Plans for these priority buildings.

We have continued looking at steps to ensure we address issues related to the quality of our existing homes, particularly addressing issues of damp, mould and condensation. We have continued to implement a range of measures as part of our ongoing Living Conditions project launched in late 2022 to help mitigate these issues. This includes the introduction of a programme of follow-up assessments of all damp works completed in the last 12 months, additional colleague training and support resources and policies for colleagues and customers.

How many cases of damp and mould have been reported that require action? In 2023/24, 2,906 cases of damp, mould and condensation required action.

What percentage of the housing providers portfolio does this account for? These cases related to 9% of our total portfolio of 26,451 homes.

CASE STUDY

Drones help Building Safety Team get a clear picture at the Vibe

With Building Safety a key focus for Great Places, for our high-rise residential buildings, the Building Safety Team used drone technology to create a digital model of one of our buildings, the Vibe, in Salford. This enabled us to capture vital information about the building to give us a clearer picture of the crucial safety information we need to comply with changes in building safety regulations and store this electronically. The inspection involved a remote-controlled drone which ascended each external elevation of the building to take pictures. Following this, the images were converted into diagrams providing a digital plan of the building.

Commenting on the project, Tony McMahon, our Head of Compliance and Building Safety, said:

“By using drone technology, we were able to create detailed digital models to give us a clear picture of the crucial information we need to be able to provide as part of the new Building and Fire regulations and store it electronically. It is a game-changer for our building safety planning and will help to ensure we have a clear picture of our buildings that we can share with the Regulator, customers and other stakeholders.”

Customer Voice

This theme seeks to assess how effective the housing provider is at listening to and empowering its customers.



Great Places understands the importance and value of listening to and using the voice of our customers. We engage with our customers on a variety of topics and by using a co-design approach we look to ensure that we understand what is important to them. Customer feedback is then used to review services and make improvements.

We understand that 'getting involved' is a personal choice, and so offer a range of ways customers can be involved, whether they want to answer a one-off question about a very local service or apply to join our Customer Committee alongside Board and Exec Directors. As such we ensure our consultations are engaging, and we're clear how customers' feedback has been used to influence our services. To encourage as broad a group of customers as possible are involved in any consultation, we use a range of methods and offer incentives for participation. We use customer information to understand the group we are trying to engage to offer appropriate consultation methods that work best for them, and when communicating feedback.

To further embed the customer voice in shaping and improving our service and customer experience, the past year has also seen the launch of a new Customer Committee. Made up of up of nine members (seven customer members and two non-executive members from the Great Places Board, one of whom acts as Chair), this committee aims to add additional value by providing lived experience and expertise directly from customers within our governance structure to influence the way we do things.

Since January 2024, almost 2000 customers have given their views on three critical business areas; 'Here for our customers' corporate priorities, Customer Experience Strategy and our Customer Voice Strategy.

Great Places' digital customer engagement platform, Our Voice, has also provided us with a valuable additional channel in which to engage with our customers. This has provided additional opportunities for our customers to share valuable input on a variety of topics that can be service specific or local to their area. This helps us to co-design our services and listen to, act on and respond to customer feedback. Recent campaigns we have run include:

- Understanding what customers feel is important when investment works are being carried out in their homes
- Future planning for our key anchor neighbourhoods
- Consultations for local Resident Engagement Strategies for Building and Fire Safety

We share feedback from consultations with all customers through our communications. Those who participated receive tailored updates on what changes have been made or will be made based on their input. The customer involvement team is now collaborating with various service teams to retest services that have been redesigned or re-procured based on recent feedback.

In 2024 Great Places' services were assessed by the Regulator of Social Housing who commented:

"Great Places provides a wide range of opportunities for tenants to influence and scrutinise its strategies, policies and services. There are clear arrangements in place through which Great Places hears from tenants. There is also evidence that feedback from tenants has directly and positively impacted service delivery. Great Places has provided appropriate assurance that it makes effective use of its performance data to shape services and provides a range of information to tenants to support effective scrutiny."



Our 'Insight' Customer Scrutiny group was formed in April 2014 and gathers feedback and reviews Great Places' services regularly. The group is autonomous and free to scrutinise which service areas it feels are a priority and report its findings directly back to our Board. It has completed reviews for a range of areas across the business over the years.

The group engages directly with customers and colleagues, conducting in-depth reviews through surveys, workshops and customer calls. Its findings are communicated via a dedicated page on the Great Places website, complete with informative video presentations. Additionally, Insight keeps our customers informed through regular monthly e-newsletters and our customer magazine, 'My Great Place,' which is now published three times a year.

In addition to meetings, customers can support scrutiny reviews by completing tasks from home, taking part in guided visits to observe or provide feedback about their experience of a service. A dedicated scrutiny page is also planned for the Our Voice platform. Customers will find detail of upcoming scrutiny topics, be able to suggest ideas for future scrutiny, or provide feedback on a service transaction, which will inform scrutiny reviews. The Our Voice page also sets out outcomes following a scrutiny review. Insight receives an update from colleagues in the business six months after a scrutiny review, so they can monitor progress against the action plan and see how this is supporting a better service for customers.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, Insight has reviewed the following services:

- Customers' satisfaction with new-build homes
- Communications to inform customers about damp, mould, and condensation
- Support to customers around the rising cost of living
- The management of our communal spaces at our schemes/neighbourhoods



Quotes from members of the Insight Committee on their involvement

"I help with scrutiny because I don't want to waste all the knowledge and experience after retiring from a lifetime of working. Being involved enables me in some small way to be a voice for other customers and help shape and improve the service overall."

Ruth, Insight member (South region)

"I have been involved with the Insight group for six years. It's great to be part of a team of customers whose role it is to be a critical friend to Great Places and be part of the customer voice to help improve service delivery, through our various organisational reviews. It has been very interesting to learn of the various aspects required to run a housing association in the North West. It is always good to know that the Trustee Board members not only value our input, but also listens to Great Places' customers."

Sylvia, Insight member (North region)

"Having worked as an Insight member for some years, I find it very interesting, worthwhile and satisfying. It's all about taking a questioning and critical look at services for customers, and then being positive and precise in our feedback to Great places."

"We're able to influence beneficial changes - we know this because we have scheduled feedback from the service teams we examine. For example, after examining the management of communal spaces, we recommended that the service look to make better use of a mobile digital technology system to improve services. As a result, real improvements are taking place, and we are updated from time to time about progress."

Stephen, Insight member (South region)

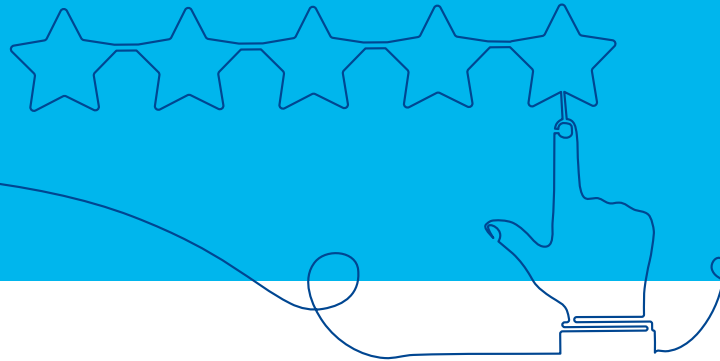
"Being involved in the scrutiny process is really rewarding as we're involved from selection of a service to review, to the completion of any recommendations, and we suggest how using our findings might improve customer satisfaction."

"Service colleagues return to update us of changes made and the hopeful effectiveness of them. It remains a collaborative endeavour. If they are able to devise different, better ways to deliver a function, that's a welcome option to consider. By updating to us, it offers the chance to debate about options and feasibility. Making changes on a semi-formal basis maintains a recorded timeline with notes about prompts, methods and reasoning. Any information to reference is always helpful."

"The flexibility and joint suggestions assist in creating an exercise to be proud of."

Bev, Insight member (South region)

Measuring Satisfaction



Customer satisfaction remains an important and high-profile performance measure at Great Places and has been one of our Critical Success Factors since these were introduced in 2014.

As mentioned in last year's report, in preparation for the introduction of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) by the Regulator of Social Housing in April 2023, we took the decision to move away from using the Institute of Customer Service methodology we had used previously. Instead, we introduced a perception-based survey in line with the new regulatory requirements, conducting a pilot in partnership with research agency TLF, surveying over 1000 customers in the year. The result of the initial pilot saw overall satisfaction with the services Great Places provides at 69%, and our Board set an overall satisfaction target for 2023/4 of 70%.

Our TSM results for 2023-2024 showed that we exceeded our target overall satisfaction score target of 70%.

Great Places reports all its TSM results to our Board and Customer Committee and shares these with leaders across the business and with our customers. We have also carried out on a number of deep dives to understand what drives customer dissatisfaction. These deep dives, which have investigated responses to TSM questions about our complaints and repairs

services, layer a range of information over the TSM scores given by customers. This has included details of complaints made, and repairs jobs raised by respondents. Deep dives seek to identify trends in customer satisfaction with Great Places based on a range of factors, including property type and age, household make-up, ethnicity and diversity information. Customer comments given alongside the TSM scores are also analysed to identify trends and areas of focus for service areas. Deep dive results are likely to form part of an ongoing agenda for Customer Committee to enable them to monitor any changes in TSM scores following any service improvements.

As a learning organisation we use robust continuous service improvement measures, Service Excellence Groups and projects to focus on improving our customers' experience by listening to, and acting upon, their feedback.

We have also reported service improvement activity to our customers through our new Annual Complaint and Service Improvement Performance which is also published on our website [here](#) and shared in our regular customer publications.

Some of the recent service improvements include:

- The implementation of new online complaints handling training to 750 of our colleagues to ensure maximum impact regarding culture and embedding good practice when it comes to effectively handling customer complaints.
- Changes to our Anti-social Behaviour Policy and Procedures, to improve right-first-time delivery for customers due to effective triage via our Customer Hub and improved record keeping and case monitoring.
- Improvements to our Adaptations Policy based on customer feedback to ensure clearer guidance for colleagues and customers and to reflect the Knowledge and Information Spotlight report and consumer standards.
- Other policies that have evolved particularly linked to complaints include the Customer Feedback and Remedies and Resolution policies- revised and relaunched to align with the Housing Ombudsman's Code, our Service with Respect Policy and Vulnerabilities Policy.

Handling Customer Complaints



Our Customer Feedback Team's robust complaints handling processes ensure that we look at the lessons that can be learnt from complaints and compliments, and how we can share examples of best practice around our services.

We believe in accountability and transparency, which is why we openly share data on complaints through our magazines, digital bulletins and website. During the 2023/24 period, we observed a continued rise in the number of complaints. Despite the challenges we have continued to encounter in the past financial year—particularly the continuing pressure on our repairs service—we remain committed to resolving any issues and providing excellent service to our customers.

Total complaints from April 2023 and March 2024 were 1,852 (this included stage 1 and 2) compared with 921 in the same period last year.

Of the 1,852 complaints the majority (93%) were dealt with at the first stage of complaints process, with only 129 (7%) being progressed to Stage 2.

	Number of Housing Ombudsman Service referrals	% of total complaints	Service failures upheld	Maladministration upheld
2023/24	22	1.1%	14	22
2022/23	17	1.8%	5	4

Between April 2023 and March 2024 Great Places has had 22 cases dealt with by the Housing Ombudsman service (HOS). Of those 22 cases the HOS made 51 orders which are their findings relating to cases. It is also important to note that due to the complexity of some cases an individual case may have a number of orders and findings. The HOS determined 22 cases leaving 9 cases to be determined. For 2023/24 the HOS found 22 instances of maladministration.

In response to the learning from complaints, Great Places has updated its Customer Feedback Policy and shared it with customers through publications, highlighting how customer feedback has influenced and shaped services and improvements. We have also introduced a new Remedies and Resolution Policy, and the customer feedback team has been strengthened which has included case reviews for all stage 2 complaint cases and HOS determinations. Great Places also published its Annual Complaint Performance and Service Improvement report in line with the HOS code. Customers can review complaint performance and service improvements made in [this report](#).

The Top 3 areas we received complaints around from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 were:

Repairs
831
(45%)

Customer Experience
378
(20%)

Compliance/
Gas related
346
(19%)

CASE STUDIES

Spotlight on involving customers with diverse needs

Great Places offers Independence and Wellbeing (supported) accommodation for customers with a range of needs. It is essential that we hear what is important to those customers.

Bespoke consultations held in the last 12 months have helped to inform the retender of services commissioned by Local Authorities, and the level of services offered to customers living in those homes e.g. procurement of provider of temporary colleagues (agency) and provision of manned security services.

Alongside these scheme specific consultations, we have also used a range of methods to engage Independence and Wellbeing customers in our wider corporate consultations, including corporate priorities and customer experience.

These have included coffee mornings and meetings in communal areas, door knocking and interviews in person and by phone.

To meet customer needs over the last 12 months we offered digital and non-digital communication and met language needs with translations.



Spotlight on development and new homes

Customer feedback told us that limited information provided to customers about their new home and defects repairs not being attended to within timescales were a source for dissatisfaction. The impacts of this include inconvenience for customers taking unnecessary time off work and customers not being able to use elements of their home as needed, leading to frustration and disappointment.

As a result, the Development Team has reviewed its model and has strengthened its Customer Care Team and introduced new processes. We now have a dedicated Customer Care Team that takes greater ownership of the customer journey in advance of a new home completing, to a customer moving in and in the weeks immediately following move in. Early feedback is that this has had a positive impact, with new home customer satisfaction improving by 8% in six months. Customers can now access information about their new home before moving in through our digital home user guides; poorly performing defect contractors are held to account more; and alternative contractors are set up to step in where our defect contractors let our customers down

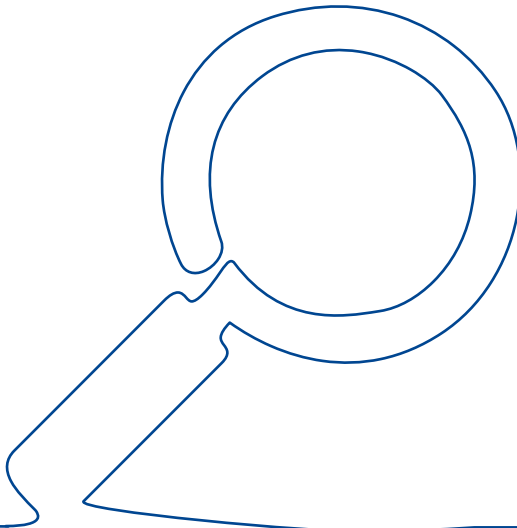
Spotlight on customer communications

We have looked to develop our communications based on customer feedback, working with our Digital Readers' Group over the last 12 months.

In response to customers asking for more local news we have developed regional information in our magazines, with copies posted to our non-digital customers.

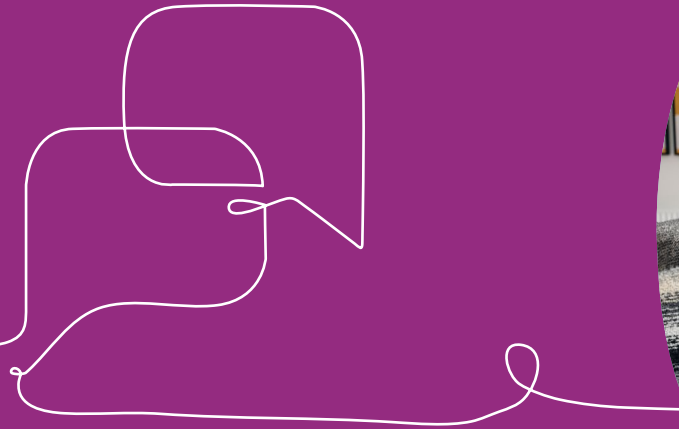
Our new Z-cards share the latest need-to-know information and are distributed by our customer-facing colleagues to the customers they interact with. Our web pages have been regularly updated following feedback from customers.

We are currently looking at tech solutions to improve our local communications via hybrid mail, instant messaging solutions and technology that will allow for more tailored communications with specific groups of customers.



Customer Support

This theme seeks to assess the effectiveness of the initiatives that a housing provider runs to support individual customers.



Great Places provides more than just affordable homes. Through our profit-for-purpose model, we are committed to investing in our communities and helping our customers to live well. We continue to work with partners to end homelessness through initiatives including Greater Manchester Housing First and the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme, alongside delivering a range of commissioned support services through our Independence & Wellbeing teams. We provide support to Great Places customers struggling to sustain their tenancy through our Tenancy Coach service.

Our Greater Together Foundation comprises a further £350k of Great Places and supply chain contributions to funding streams that support community groups, as well as direct financial relief for customers.

Last year, our in-house employability team helped more than 1,000 customers into work, training and volunteering opportunities, and allowed around 30 people to take their first steps towards self-employment through our Boss-It programme.

As an organisation rooted in social purpose, Great Places is committed to investing money and resources into our communities and we provide a range of support for customers, focussed on promoting economic inclusion, and independent living. Our dedicated Community Investment Team has a comprehensive offer for customers, providing choice and opportunities for personal and career development

Community initiatives in partnership with Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSE) organisations in our neighbourhoods help us to reach thousands of residents with services from English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), befriending, and social enterprise development. We connect customers to statutory services and help them to play a role in their community with volunteering opportunities, through our network of seven community centres. Last year, our Funding Partnerships service drew down more than £400k of external funding for our community partners, helping to build their capacity and resilience.



From 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024:

We supported over
1,000
people into
employment, training
and volunteering

30
customers were
supported through
our Boss-It Self-
employment
programme

£400k
was secured in external
funding to support
customers

Supporting our customers through difficult times

The effects of the rising cost of living continue to have an impact on our customers and we continue to make significant efforts to support them.

Our Tenancy Coach Support Service aims to empower customers to sustain their tenancies, prevent homelessness, develop their resilience and independence and allow them to thrive in our communities. We support and signpost customers to work with local partner services who can provide specialist knowledge and expertise. The service also supports our most vulnerable customers including those with complex needs, mental and physical health conditions, substance addictions and those facing poverty or financial hardship.

In the last year the service:

- Received 538 referrals
- Achieved a 95.3% average sustainment rate for customers who exited the service six months previously
- Ensured an 92% average tenancy sustainment rate for customers who exited the service 12 months previously
- Secured £79,281.32 in financial returns for our customers
- Generated £756,138.80 in social value
- Supported 158 customers with complex needs

Our Financial Resilience Services Team, regulated by the FCA, supports around 400 customers annually with complex debt and energy affordability issues. It helps our customers maximise income, reduce outgoings, and develop effective financial management strategies. Last year, it helped customers secure £179k in additional support. Ongoing promotion of the service empowers customers with the guidance and advice needed to manage their finances in what remain challenging times.



CASE STUDY - Nicola's Story

Nicola was initially referred to our tenancy coaching service after getting behind on her rent payments. Following an initial joint visit with her Neighbourhood Services Manager (NSM), the Tenancy Coach arranged a follow-up meeting to support Nicola with her council tax payments and financial concerns. Following this, the Nicola stopped engaging and did not return any calls or texts. The NSM later made contact to explain there had been a safeguarding case opened for self-neglect and mental health concerns.

Following safeguarding concerns, the NSM contacted the mental health crisis team and helped to facilitate the allocation of a social worker. Nicola subsequently had a care package put in place and the social worker contacted Nicola's sister to also involve her in Nicola's support. The Tenancy Coach attended an initial joint visit with the social worker when Nicola's mental health was still poor, her flat was in a bad state, and she was clearly very distressed. We agreed at this point that she was not ready to engage with tenancy coaching but the social worker would recontact once she improved.

Nicola's mental health improved following the initial safeguarding referral and her presentation and cleanliness of the flat are now much improved. Due to elements of the safeguarding case, there was to be no male lone working with the customer, so we completed tenancy coaching sessions once a week when Nicola's sister was also present. The Tenancy Coach has since supported Nicola to reset her bank accounts, pay off arrears of over £1000, set up payment plans for other debts, and she has also been referred for energy debt support with New Ground. She has also been supported to contact DWP to review her needs.

Nicola's case highlights how our Neighbourhoods Team and Tenancy Coaches work together to support customers, identify support needs and complement the work of social workers, carers and mental health practitioners. It also highlights that despite complex customer needs, we can still make progress in these circumstances and help to maintain the tenancy for customers like Nicola using a person-centred approach.

CASE STUDY - Mark & Tracy's Story

Our Financial Resilience Team provides essential support for customers facing the rising cost of living, navigating benefits, and budgeting advice. Recently, they assisted Mark and Tracy (names changed), a couple in the North Region struggling with rent and utility bills.

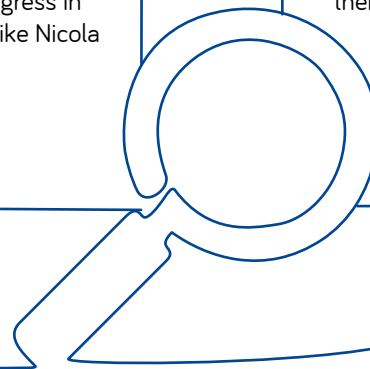
As advisor Cara Chisholm explains, "Tracy's health issues and Mark's part-time work left them in debt and unsure how to cope. They were claiming Universal Credit (UC) but couldn't access their journal to verify their payments. I escalated this issue with the Jobcentre to help them."

Tracy had applied for Personal Independence Payments (PIP) but hadn't been advised to request a Work Capability Assessment, which could increase their UC. Cara guided her on this process and helped them open a new bank account despite their poor credit rating. They completed an Income and Expenditure Form to assess their debts and expenses.

When they reconvened, access to their UC journal was resolved, allowing them to apply for a United Utilities water grant, resulting in a £930 reduction on their bill and lower future payments. They also received Council Tax support, reducing their bill by £681. Tracy was awarded PIP, and their UC was adjusted to reflect her disabilities.

Additionally, the couple needed essential items like beds and a baby carriage, which were provided through the Household Assistance fund. They were also advised on managing debts with creditors.

Thanks to the Financial Resilience Team, Mark and Tracy improved their financial situation and cleared their rent arrears, with their account now in credit. Their story highlights the vital support available to customers often unaware of their options.



COMMUNITY INVESTMENT CASE STUDIES

Great Places Teams Up with Commandos

Great Places partnered with the Wyre Neighbourhood Policing Team and the Commando Intervention Scheme to support young people in the Wyre area. This initiative, led by a former Royal Marine Commando and registered with Lancashire County Council, aims to instil the values of the Royal Marines in local youth.

The four-week course focused on the 'Marine Ethos' to enhance participants' social, emotional, and educational development, helping them make better choices and succeed in school and beyond. The first group, from Fleetwood High School and Millfield High School, gathered in Thistleton's woodland area to set up an outdoor campsite.

Participants learned survival skills, teamwork, communication, building shelters, lighting fires, and cooking. Catherine Reynolds, Neighbourhood Services Manager for Wyre and Over-Wyre, noted, "We collaborated with the Neighbourhood Policing Team and the Commando Intervention Scheme to engage young people identified by their schools as disengaged from education, particularly in areas affected by youth-related anti-social behaviour."

The first session was well-received, and it's hoped that the young people gained valuable skills for their home and school lives.



Inspiring women – CHAI Project in Oldham

Great Places recently donated £11,000 to the Oldham-based CHAI Project. Standing for Care, Help and Inspire the project aspires to achieve this through their work in the community, helping and inspiring people to make a difference.

The funding supported the development of a Digital Skills project to bridge the digital divide, assisting with digital poverty and allowing women to be more independent. This supported women to access essential services, such as benefit information, employment support and medical records while utilising digital skills to reduce social isolation.

The Digital Skills project was delivered in seven groups in school venues and each group had 15 women attending. This was over six workshops per group using PowerPoint presentations plus printed manuals. The training was delivered in English, Urdu, Bangla and Arabic by bilingual CHAI members.

Participants who completed the course received a tablet and certificate at a celebration event which was held for each group.



Great Places Donates £2,000 to Blackpool's HIS Provision Mobile Food Pantry

Great Places has donated £2,000 to HIS Provision's Mobile Food Pantry in Blackpool, supporting vital services for the community. The organisation, with centres on Raikes Parade and Central Drive, uses the funds to provide food, clothing, furniture, and other essential services.

Celebrating its 10-year anniversary, HIS Provision assists around 300 people weekly through its mobile shop, which visits five locations across Blackpool and will soon expand to seven, along with a delivery service for elderly and disabled residents.

Director Jackie Kemp expressed gratitude for the donation, stating, "It helps keep our services running. We aim to support people with dignity, and all proceeds from our sales go back into the community, funding food parcels and free family meals."

The mobile pantry has gained popularity, and in partnership with the National Literacy Trust, they will introduce books for children to enjoy with their parents. With a network of supportive organisations, they provide essential items like school uniforms and starter packs for families in need.



Placemaking

This theme seeks to highlight the wider set of activities that housing providers undertake to create well-designed homes and places that meet local needs and provide great places for people to live and enjoy.



Placemaking is central to Great Places' mission, particularly in our five anchor neighbourhoods and seven community centres. Our Regeneration Project Director leads comprehensive neighbourhood planning, focusing on future masterplans for areas with high housing density. This role enhances existing efforts and establishes a roadmap for achieving measurable outcomes for our customers and communities.

Current plans, being updated with input from customers and stakeholders, outline our commitments across community investment, development, assets, and housing management.

Additionally, our Place and Regeneration Team connects customers to local opportunities and partners with the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprises (VCSE) sector. In 2023/24, we secured £400,000 in funding for support services. Our supply chain partners also contributed over 300 hours of community support, along with 450 hours of apprenticeship experience and 37 weeks of work experience for our customers.



CASE STUDIES

Our journey with Emmaus Salford towards community wellbeing

Great Places has partnered with Emmaus Salford to support the local community, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing Cost-of-Living crisis. In 2023, Emmaus received £7,000 from our Greater Together Fund, enabling them to meet the rising demand for essential services.

Lucie's Pantry, a social supermarket, provides affordable food and household items to over 600 households. Emmaus also runs a furniture store offering upcycled second-hand furniture and a school uniform hub that redistributes uniforms to families in need.

The charity supports up to 25 individuals experiencing homelessness, providing a stable home and fostering personal growth through participation in social enterprises. Companions receive tailored support to build resilience and skills for a positive future.

Emmaus has formed partnerships with HMP Risley to repair and sell bicycles and RHS Bridgewater to grow food for community meals.

Inspiring futures with Manor Park Primary School

In early 2024, Great Places Housing Group, alongside Sure Maintenance and Bowker Sadler Architecture, hosted an event for Year 5 students from Manor Park Primary School in Knutsford. This initiative aimed to spark interest in careers in housing and provide hands-on experiences.

Building on the success of the Raising Aspirations Project from 2022/23, the event showcased Great Places' commitment to community engagement and fostering relationships between businesses and schools. Students participated in various activities, including using equipment, testing infrared thermometers, trying on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and filming interviews in a podcast room.

The Raising Aspirations Project has been extended throughout the academic year, with planned visits to local businesses like Amelia Knight and Manchester Airport, aimed at broadening students' horizons and enhancing their understanding of career opportunities. The 2022/23 impact report showed a 44% improvement in students' self-assessment scores, reflecting increased self-awareness and resilience.

Teachers Mrs Smith and Ms Bisson noted, "The children had an amazing morning exploring different skills and jobs. They were engaged and excited to learn about the world of work." Rebecca Banks, Community and Partnerships Manager at Great Places, expressed enthusiasm for the project's success, highlighting its positive impact on students and the importance of nurturing essential life skills for a bright future.



Environmental

Climate Change

This theme seeks to assess how the activities of the housing provider are impacting on climate change and how they are mitigating the physical risks of climate change.



Great Places works hard to reduce the impact of its communities and day-to-day operations on the environment. Our cross-organisational Carbon Management Team is reviewing our Carbon Management Strategy which will look to reduce our environmental impact across the business and focus on the following key areas where our emissions are the greatest for our journey to net zero over the long term.

Our retrofit work programme remains an important part of our Great Places' work to meet the environmental commitments outlined in our Corporate Plan. Great Places targeted 3,500 homes that fell below an EPC C rating and is committed to getting these to this standard by 2030. The team remains focused on improving the energy performance ratings to a C across all our homes. In the past 12 months this has seen us reduce the number of homes with a rating below C from 3,386 to 3,071. With the support of £1.4 million in funding from Wave 2.1 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, work is progressing to make energy-efficiency improvements in another 396 of our homes in Greater Manchester and Sheffield to improve their EPC rating to C rating. The work is planned to be completed in the next 12 months.

EPC ratings for our existing homes (As at March 2024):

- A - 88**
- B - 5885**
- C - 8747**
- D - 2832**
- E - 231**

95% of all homes built in 2023/24 achieved a minimum of EPC B.

Great Places is prioritising its Heat Networks, with a new Heat Network Manager and Metering and Billing Co-ordinator appointed to prepare for upcoming Ofgem regulations. Upgrades to the Richmond Park Heat Network in Sheffield have begun, supported by government funding covering 50% of costs. In partnership with Fairheat, these upgrades will enhance plant rooms and equipment in 299 properties, aligning with government goals for 20% of homes in England to use heat networks to achieve net zero.

These improvements aim to increase heating efficiency and give customers better control over their heating and hot water costs. Additional funding has been secured for optimisation studies at Hutton Lodge and Elk View Court to enhance performance and reduce expenses.

In response to high energy costs, applications for government support under the Energy Bill Discount Scheme have been made to lower heating costs for communal and district networks. New, fixed-price energy contracts have also been secured for two years for gas and three years for electricity.

To enhance communal energy billing, a programme for smart energy meters is underway, alongside plans to verify meter readings and reduce estimated bills. Energy surveys and feasibility studies are planned to improve energy efficiency in communal spaces, aiming to cut costs and carbon emissions.



Scope 1, 2 and 3 Greenhouse Gas emissions

Great Places uses the Carbon Workbook calculator and methodology developed by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to establish its carbon footprint for the financial year.

Great Places Housing Group Carbon Emissions 2023/24

Scope	Source	Carbon Emissions (CO2e)
Scope 1	Great Places directly used gas consumption, fleet consumption, fugitive emissions	2,643.3
Scope 2	Electricity consumption, 3rd party district heating consumption	123
Scope 3	Existing stock energy consumption, new build, grey fleet, electricity transmission and distribution, 3rd party district heating distribution	80,514.5
	Total emissions	83,280.9

Mitigating climate risks

Mitigating risks of overheating and flooding across our housing and land portfolio is an integral part of Great Places' sustainability plan. We are committed to meeting this challenge and providing solutions to alleviate these risks.

When designing new developments, flood risk and overheating are key considerations in our housing and estate design. All our new homes are built to limit risk to flooding to the least severe category of flood zone 1. This is achieved by raising the floor level of homes or leaving areas of site with increased flood risk as public open space.

Surface water is discharged from site via routes and discharge rates as agreed with the local flood authority and statutory water authority; where required discharge rates are attenuated using oversized pipes, crates, swales or balancing ponds/basins.

To reduce surface water run off we have used permeable paving tarmac. Green roofs have been identified as an opportunity to reduce discharge rates through natural attenuation of rainwater whilst also contributing to a reduction in overheating risk and an increase in bio-diversity net gain.

All new homes are also designed and constructed to mitigate excessive or unwanted increases in room temperature.

This is achieved through appropriate design and construction for each home's orientation, glazing extents and site constraints. Development sites utilise solar shading, improved glass specification, and ventilation strategies, which do not adversely impact safety, security and wellbeing. Other design considerations made for each site's specific requirements are noise levels at night, pollution, and protection from falling. Mechanical cooling is only adopted where mitigation of overheating cannot be achieved via air circulation and extraction. Overheating risk mitigation is demonstrated in accordance with the methods defined in Building Regulations Approved Document Part O 2021.

Our Employers Requirements call for the use of dynamic modelling, which involves building the development in a 3D model through a software called IES, which allows more data to be assigned to the file to assess the risk of overheating. We have established that this is the best route to assess each home on each site to ensure the data and mitigation measures are as accurate as possible.

Great Places values our customers' role in achieving environmental sustainability.

Our teams and website offer advice on reducing and efficiently using energy in a range of formats to suit people's needs. Our website includes home energy-saving guides, links for operating heating systems and new technology, and a dedicated advice page on damp, mould, and condensation. Customers can also request user guides.

For customers moving into our new-build properties, our Customer Care Team provides a comprehensive home user guide (HUG) with information on home features, operating mechanical ventilation and heating, and waste disposal. This is supplemented with an in-home demonstration on managing the home and internal environment and a follow up visit to ensure everything is going smoothly. Customers are also provided with supplemental guides include boiler care, repair reporting, lawn care, and drainage advice to prevent blockages.

CASE STUDY - Stalybridge Police Station

In August 2022, Councillors Dave Sweeton and John Taylor from Tameside Council joined our Chief Executive and members of our Development Team and Watson Homes to officially launch the £5.1 million redevelopment of the former Stalybridge Police Station site into a specialist supported living scheme.

The project provides 24 one and two-bedroom flats with on-site care from the Tameside Adult Social Care Team. Originally built in 1968, the police station served the community for 37 years before being demolished to make way for these new homes, funded in part by Homes England and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

Environmental sustainability was a key consideration. As part of the construction, the existing foundations of the police station were tested and reused, with the aim of reducing the project's carbon footprint. The development features low-carbon technologies, including air source heat pumps for each apartment, resulting in EPC B ratings and Environmental Impact ratings of A.

The Edel Hot Water Heat Pump system collects energy from the air to heat water, while balanced mechanical ventilation with heat recovery optimises airflow with minimal energy loss. Each apartment is equipped with electrical panel heaters, video intercoms linked to the on-site care team, and two electric vehicle charging points in the communal car park. Enhanced safety features include sprinklers and fittings for future adaptations, ensuring a supportive living environment for residents.



Ecology

This theme seeks to assess how the housing provider is protecting the local environment and ecology.



Great Places works to ensure our communities have green spaces and that we enhance the biodiversity in these areas in excess of minimum planning Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements. This requirement is established within our design guidance and Employers Requirements.

We deliver increased biodiversity through the following hierarchy:

1. Avoiding biodiversity loss
2. Minimisation of impact
3. Restoration of habitat delivered on site
4. Delivered in the immediate community
5. Offsetting through Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Bank/ offsite contributions as last resort

We carry out a preliminary ecological appraisal and a subsequent BNG assessment for each development site to establish the extent of biodiversity impact as a result of developing the land.

When considering the investment required and maintenance any associated payments are factored in. Landscaping is specified in conjunction with our in-house grounds maintenance team to provide native species which will suit locations and context.

Physical interventions on and near homes are included where suitable and appropriate such as bee and swift bricks, hedgehog runs, bat boxes, Sustainable Drainage System (SuDs) habitat, clover or moss lawns instead of lawn grasses in communal green spaces.

Reducing pollutants

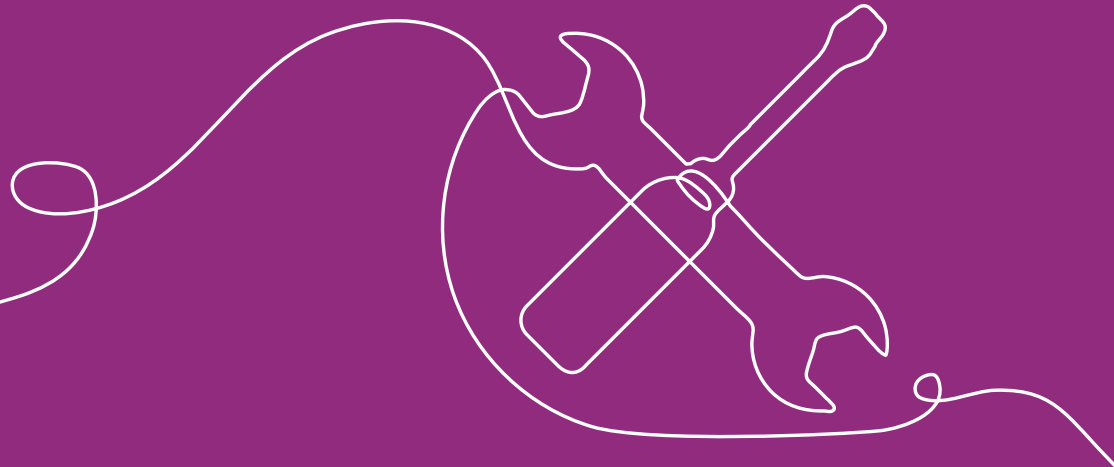
To ensure our environmental impact is reduced we have worked to tackle pollution within the following key areas:

- Great Places' new developments comply with pollution legislation and no reportable pollution incidents have occurred at any of our developments in the last year.
- All parking areas linked to SUDs are designed with fuel and oil separators to prevent contamination of watercourses.
- Our building services systems are serviced and maintained in accordance with manufacturer recommendations to ensure they are performing effectively and efficiently.
- We have carried out extensive conditions surveys over the last year to ensure internal environment conditions within our customers' homes are effectively managed to limit the likelihood of damp and mould formation.
- Deleterious materials are excluded within our Employers Requirements.
- Site investigations are robustly defined within our Employers Requirements to ensure any site contamination is known prior to construction works commencing and suitable remediation strategies are in place to limit the potential for material harm occurring from disturbance or displacement.



Resource Management

This theme looks to establish the extent to which the housing provider has a sustainable approach to materials in both the construction and management of properties.



Sustainability in the supply chain

We work with consultants and contractors to ensure specifications meet the sustainable materials requirements as previously required by the Code for Sustainable Homes. All timber used on our developments is legal and sustainable with FSC or PEFC certification.

We are developing a strategy to increase the use of responsibly sourced materials for development, refurbishment, and replacement of assets, with materials currently specified for robustness and longevity to mitigate the effects of weather, wear, and reduce frequency of replacement and waste. The Development Team reviews material specifications for all sites to deliver a minimum of 10% of construction material from reused and recycled content. This is recorded through development documentation.



Waste management

Our design team works from project inception to identify possible sources of waste at the construction site, to ensure the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) hierarchy is followed.

Development contractors implement, monitor and manage construction waste with a Site Waste Management Plan (SWMP). The SWMP is monitored regularly to ensure that construction waste is re-used, repurposed and recycled, ensuring waste to landfill generated is less than 5%. Development managers work with consultants and contractors to provide and maintain KPI reporting data for waste going to landfill from each site. We work with site construction teams to target a zero waste to landfill outcome.

Water management

We are developing the strategy for good water management, to reduce domestic water use and demand to our homes.

We have trialled leak detection sensors combined with automatic shut-off valves to reduce the impact of catastrophic escape of water within homes, with a view to incorporating this technology in new homes for the coming year. We are planning to do this for stock in operation, and we already seek to reduce water demand for new-build homes as follows:

- Showers – water efficient showerheads can save more than a third of water, and the energy to heat it.
- Toilets – dual flush toilets should have a maximum flush of six litres to comply with the Water Fittings Regulations.
- Appliances – where installed we specify energy and water efficient washing machines and dishwashers.
- Taps – aerators add air into the water, reducing water use by 30%.
- Gardens – we promote the specification of drought-resistant plants and mulch.
- Total consumption - we target 110 litres of water used per person per day, with 125 litres maximum.
- Water utilisation calculations are completed for schemes by the consultant team to ensure we deliver within this target range.



Governance

Structure and Governance



This theme seeks to assess the housing providers overall structure and approach to governance.

Great Places Housing Group Limited is a registered housing provider and the parent company of two others: Great Places Housing Association, a not-for-profit with charitable status, and Plumlife Homes Limited. Both Great Places Housing Group and Great Places Housing Association operate as 'profit-for-purpose' organisations, reinvesting surpluses into new homes and community development.

As a Registered Provider, we are regulated by The Regulator for Social Housing, maintaining the highest Governance rating of G1 and a Financial Viability rating of V2, as confirmed in our September 2024 inspection. We also received a C2 grade under the new Consumer Standards.

The housing sector faces challenges such as rising inflation, interest rates, and a cost-of-living crisis. Despite a financial regrade in December 2022, the regulator found us financially robust, capable of managing various risks, including those related to our development and sales programmes. Our C2 grade reflects both strengths and areas for improvement in service delivery. This has informed our new three-year corporate plan, 'Here for Our Customers,' which we shared with the Regulator during the inspection.

Great Places adheres to the National Housing Federation Code of Governance 2020 and has not faced any adverse regulatory

findings in the past year regarding data protection or other compliance issues.

Customer feedback is gathered through our Customer Scrutiny Group (Insight), which conducts independent reviews. Review findings and recommendations, along with Tenant Satisfaction Measures, Complaints Reporting and wider customer satisfaction findings are reported to the Board and shared with the customer committee.

Starting in 2023/24, we established a Customer Committee, comprising two Non-Executive Directors and up to seven remunerated customer members. This committee reviews key policies and provides direct feedback to the Executive Team, with its activities reported to the Board.

Risk Management



At Great Places, we recognise that risk management, whether this relates to positive (opportunity) or negative (threat) risks, is not only a regulatory requirement but is an integral part of everyday business. Our Code of Governance gives the Board ultimate responsibility for establishing, overseeing and reviewing systems of internal control and establishing and overseeing a risk management framework. This involves approval of our Risk and Assurance Strategy, agreeing our Risk Appetite Statement and ensuring that all decisions are made in line with this statement. Detailed scrutiny and evaluation of the risk management and internal controls framework are delegated to the Audit and Assurance Committee and the terms of reference reflect this duty, linking closely to the internal and external audit provision, and the assurance provided by internal and external specialists as required.

Risk management and assurance are complementary processes linked to the effective governance of the organisation. Risk management provides assurance to the Board that all material threats to the business have been identified, evaluated and mitigated. Mitigations may involve treating the risk to lessen

the likelihood or impact, tolerating the risk as an unavoidable matter, transferring the risk to a third-party specialist, or terminating that activity that triggers the risk. Assurance sources provide confidence that controls are adequate and effective, and that mitigation plans are proportionate and offer good value for money. Our approach has matured significantly in recent years, with the Board and the Audit and Assurance Committee pivotal in driving risk management. This is framed around the three lines of assurance model and pulled together via our Assurance Map. Our risk management process is framed around three key stages: risk identification, risk assessment and risk mitigation.

The financial threats to the organisation brought about by the current operating and political environment require a sound, strategic approach to risk management. We continue to use sensitivity and stress testing, including multi-variate tests, to model scenarios which push us out of our tolerance limits or challenge our financial “golden rules,” using control measures and mitigating activities to address these. Board is pivotal to these discussions and the determinations made around financial mitigation strategies.

ESG Risk management

Any risks that fall under the ESG remit are reflected in our corporate risk register and monitored monthly by our leadership team. Risks are owned at Director level, and Board are sighted at every meeting on the control framework and plans for further mitigation activity. Where appropriate, risks in this space will also be covered under our ‘three lines of defence’ approach to assurance and picked up in the internal audit programme.

The risk register identifies the control framework in operation to mitigate risks, and any further actions that are planned to reduce either the likelihood of the risk crystallising, or the impact to the organisation should that happen.

Board and Trustees

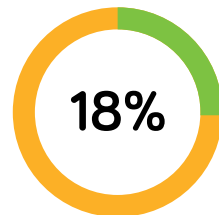
This theme seeks to assess the quality, suitability and performance of the board and trustees.



4/11 Great Places Housing Group Board members are female



2/5 Executive Team members are female



18% of Great Places' Board members have a disability



56 is the average age of Great Places Housing Group Board



52 is the average age of the Executive Team



2/11 of the Great Places' Board members identify as multicultural

The Group Board had 11 members from the 1st April 2024, 10 are non-executive directors (91%) and one executive director (the Chief Executive). The roles of the Chair of the Board and the Chief Executive are held by two different people.

Since adopting the NHF Code 2020 Code of Conduct and in line with best practice, all new non-executive directors are appointed for a maximum term of two three-year terms. Three non-executive directors left the Board in 2023-24 (a turnover rate of 33%).

Declarations of interest are a standing agenda item at the start of every Board and committee meeting and a register of interests is maintained and published on our website in line with the Code of Governance. If an interest is declared, the Board member may be asked to not participate in any vote on a given item and not contribute to any discussion on that item.

Three committees report to the Board. These are the Audit and Assurance Committee, the Customer Committee and the Remuneration and Appraisal Committee, as well as a subsidiary Board for Cube Homes Limited. Each Committee and subsidiary Board has membership which includes Group Board Members. The Audit and Assurance Committee includes members with significant relevant senior housing professional experience within its membership.

Our external auditors, Beever and Struthers, have been in place since November 2021, with Sue Hutchinson as our Lead Audit Partner. A policy regarding the independence of the external auditors is reviewed annually.

The Remuneration and Appraisal Committee has a wide range of responsibilities, including Board succession. A succession plan is provided annually to the Board and the Remuneration and Appraisal Committee.

The Customer Committee also has a wide range of responsibilities specifically in relation to customer-facing services, policies and strategies – ensuring that these are developed and designed with the customer voice in mind.

The Board's effectiveness is independently reviewed every three years with the latest triennial independent review being carried out between December 2023-February 2024. The review carried out by Altair included board effectiveness and remuneration and found that the organisation has robust governance arrangements in place.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) of board members and senior management

Our Recruitment and Selection policy for colleague appointments has a dedicated section outlining the expectations relating to EDI and ensures that we don't discriminate against anyone on the basis of protected characteristics, or wider characteristics. Great Places undertakes regular monitoring of equal opportunities data in respect of applications and appointments. Where data analysis indicates improvements may be required, Great Places commits to taking action to address these, which may include (but isn't limited to) additional training, changes to policy or process or positive action.

At Board level, there is a Recruitment, Succession and Development Policy, which includes a specific section on EDI. As well as ensuring that nobody is discriminated against – this policy along with the Statement of Preferred Board Composition – aims to ensure a Board which is reflective of our customer base and the communities we serve and actively seeks to ensure there is a diverse board in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability as well as diversity of thought and lived experience.

36% of the Board are female, 18% are from an ethnically diverse background and 18% have a disability. None of the Board are residents, although we do have six residents sitting on the standing committee. Four identify as Christian, five with no religion, one as a Buddhist and one as 'other.' The Board ages range from 39-69 and the average age of the 11 Board Members is 56. The average tenure of the non-executive directors on the Board is just over three years – largely due to there being four new non-executive directors who have recently joined the Board.



Staff Wellbeing

This theme seeks to assess how staff are supported and how their wellbeing is considered.

At Great Places, staff wellbeing is a top priority and integral to our vision of 'Great People.' We are dedicated to the health, wellbeing, and engagement of our colleagues, supported by our people strategy and various initiatives.

In our latest staff survey, we achieved an engagement score of 87%, with 88% of colleagues feeling included and able to be their true selves at work.

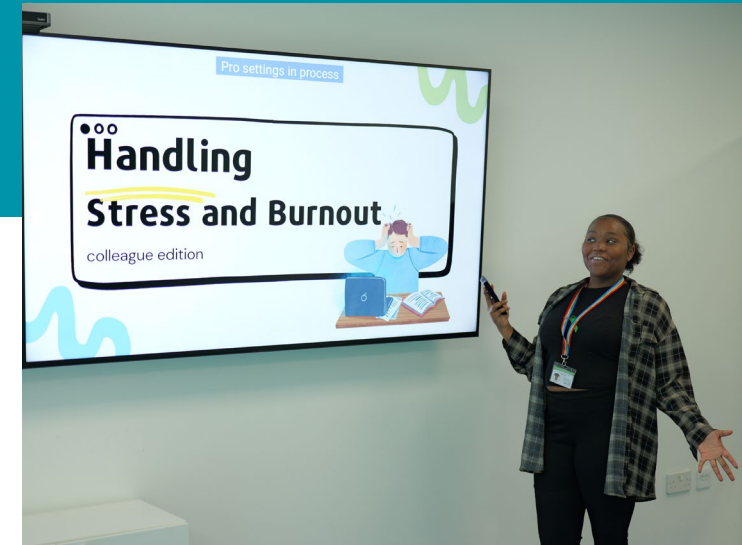
To foster a positive work environment, we have set targets to enhance colleague wellbeing amid challenging conditions. Our ongoing health and wellbeing programme empowers and educates staff, making Great Places a healthier workplace. In the past year, we have expanded our wellbeing offerings including:

Marketplace and Wellbeing Hub: An internal platform providing access to benefits and discounts from hundreds of retailers.

WPA Healthcare Cash Plan: Covers dental, eye care, and therapies, with options for family inclusion. It also offers 24/7 counselling and GP services.

Learning and Development Events: The 2023/24 programme featured:

- Regional Recognition Days to celebrate colleague achievements.
- Yoga sessions and Cycle to Work Day with breakfast and bike checks.
- Workshops on mental health and self-care.
- A 100 Miles in March challenge.
- An Active Listeners Group to promote wellbeing.
- Rockfit fitness classes and Wellbeing Toolbox Talks.
- A Wellbeing Road Map for field-based teams.
- A Wellbeing Action Planner for managers.
- A partnership with MIND, aiming to raise £30,000 over two years.
- A team of 40 colleagues raised £4,000 in the Manchester 10k.



Great Places' approach to pay



Great Places is an accredited Living Wage Employer and pays a Real Living Wage to all colleagues, including apprentices.

Our apprentices are paid the Real Living Wage of **£12.00 per hour**

We're accredited with the following:

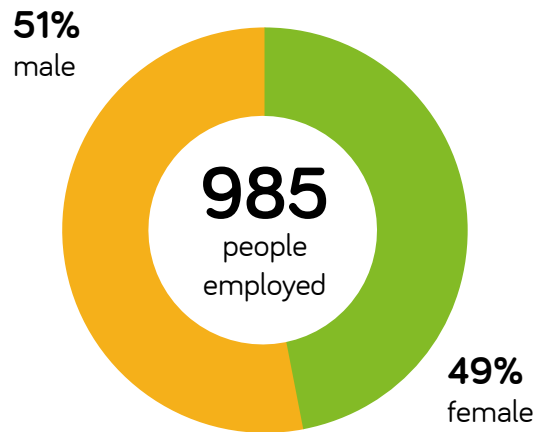


Gender pay gap

As at March 2024

UK gender pay gap (ONS 2023): **14.3%**
Great Places Housing Group's gender pay gap (mean is) **2.6%** (2022/23 - 3.9%)

We employ 985 people, 49% are female 51% are male.



CEO worker pay ratio

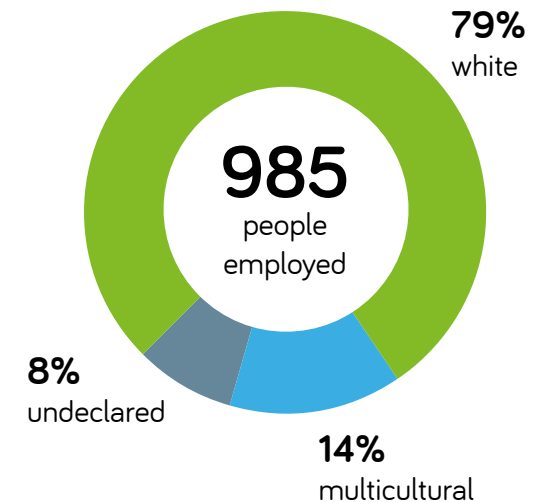
CEO: median average pay ratio - 6.3:1 (2022/23 6.2:1)

Ethnicity pay gap

As at March 2024

Median: 18.7% (2022/23 18%)
Mean: 18.3% (2022/23 21.5%)

We employ 985 people, 79% identify as white, 14% as multicultural and 8% did not declare their ethnicity.



Supply Chain Management

This theme seeks to assess if the housing provider procures responsibly.



Delivering a pioneering approach to social value is a key priority, influencing our contracts and service delivery. Social value is integral to our procurement process, evaluated through:

Responsible Business Questions: Assessing suppliers on fair pay, equality, diversity, and net zero planning, aligning with our aim to “Work with the Right Businesses” which reflects the social value generated by supporting businesses with positive CSR practices and policies.

Social Value Pledges: Suppliers commit to specific activities that generate social value, such as donations, local volunteering, job creation, and apprenticeships.

To evaluate and report social value we use an adapted version of the National TOMs (Themes, Outcomes and Measures) This allows us to quantify impact with monetary proxies. While effective, we recognise its limitations, such as oversimplifying complex outcomes. Therefore, we are exploring alternative reporting methods, including case studies and stakeholder feedback.

A social value specialist monitors pledge delivery, collaborating with contract managers and our Community Investment Team to maximise local benefits. Social value extends beyond housing developments; for example, our security supplier Samson donated wellbeing packs to Women’s CHAI project in Oldham, and Sure Maintenance supported career activities in primary schools.

Last year, our social value achievements included:

- **Over £35,000 in donations to community partners**
- **471 weeks of work experience and apprenticeships**
- **27 new full-time jobs**
- **285 hours of volunteering**

As an example in December, we launched our annual Cheery Christmas campaign, allocating funds from our supply chain to assist customers struggling to afford Christmas celebrations due to the cost-of-living crisis. This initiative provided supermarket vouchers and funding for meals and activities in our independence and wellbeing schemes and community centres.

The 2023 campaign supported a total of 865 customers, including 316 families who received 151 vouchers, while 549 individuals in 20 of our schemes benefited from funding. This project was funded by suppliers Emmanuel Whittaker, John Southworth, and Moffat & Riley as part of their social value commitments.

Additionally, we hosted a careers day for primary school children at our Didsbury head office, where various departments set up stalls to showcase career opportunities in housing. Suppliers Sure Maintenance and Bowker Sadler also participated, reinforcing their social value contributions.

Throughout the financial year, our supply chain has provided extensive support to our customers and communities, offering not just financial assistance but also time, expertise, and resources.

Socially Responsible Resourcing

We incorporate environmental sustainability into our procurement processes, with one of our four social value aims being to ‘Reduce Supply Chain Carbon Footprint.’ While our approach to social sustainability is ambitious and largely effective, we acknowledge the need for improvements in environmental considerations. Our Carbon Management Team is currently reviewing our Carbon Management Strategy to address these areas.

We regularly assess suppliers on their carbon management plans and their willingness to develop one during the contract period. This question is included in all responsible business evaluations, unless it poses a barrier for small to medium sized enterprise (SME) bidders. We also evaluate suppliers based on the percentage of their fleet that consists of electric or hybrid vehicles.

Additionally, we encourage suppliers to commit to training their employees in carbon literacy, which can reduce individual carbon footprints by about 10% and enhance environmental awareness in decision-making.

While we consider environmental factors in procurement specifications, the absence of a dedicated person for environmental sustainability means that it relies on stakeholders to prioritise these aspects for each contract. As part of our sustainability strategy review, we are exploring ways to integrate environmental sustainability more firmly into our procurement processes.

While we continue to face many challenges, we remain committed to delivering for our customers and communities, and keeping the promises outlined in our Customer Commitments.

We hope you found our report interesting and that it demonstrates our commitment to improving our ESG performance and reporting on this transparently.

If you are an investor and have any questions or feedback, please get in touch with treasury@greatplaces.org.uk. If you are a customer, please contact communications@greatplaces.org.uk

Please don't print this document unless you need to!

Great Places Housing Group includes three registered Housing providers:

Great Places Housing Group:

Co-operative and Community Benefit Society
(FCA) No 30045R
Regulator of Social Housing No L4465

Great Places Housing Association:

Co-operative and Community Benefit Society
(FCA) No 19564R
Regulator of Social Housing No L1230

Plumlife Homes Limited:

Co-operative and Community Benefit Society
(FCA) No 23202R
Regulator of Social Housing No SL3224

Registered Address for the Group:

Great Places Housing Group
2a Derwent Avenue
Manchester
M21 7QP

great
places
HOUSING GROUP

