

Annual Report

2023

CONTENTS

2 | Chair Report

4 | CEO Report

6 | Our Customers

13 | Our Homes

21 | Our People



Chair Report

The Board and everyone at Almond HA has worked hard over the past year to respond as positively as possible to the Cost of Living challenge that has faced individuals and organisations alike.

In spite of the external challenges, the organisation has enjoyed another year of strong performance and it has been pleasing to see the support that we have provided to our customers during the year both directly and by working in partnership with local agencies.

We remain committed to our Business Plan priorities to deliver excellent Homes and Services and to have a positive impact on local communities. Whilst this has in no doubt been made more challenging given the economic climate, we continue to prove our resilience and commitment as an organisation and are well placed to deliver against these priorities for our customers.



Whilst we have customer representation on the Board this is an area that we are keen to strengthen. We would very much welcome interest from customers who believe they can help us to focus on the right things and I would encourage you to contact the team at Almond HA to find out more about how you could participate.

I would like to thank my fellow Board members, Almond HA colleagues, and all our customers for their continued support.

My best wishes to each and every one of you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adam Turner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Adam Turner



Homes, people and communities to be proud of.



Striving to improve life experiences and opportunities.

CEO Report

In a year in which the Cost of Living has impacted on most households across the country we have focused on providing help to our customers, whilst at the same time ensuring that we minimise the impact of the economic climate on service delivery as much as possible.

Our work to support customers over the year included the establishment of The Big Living Room within our office, which provided a warm space for the community and in particular for those who were finding it hard to meet heating costs during the winter months. The space also allowed us to host events with other groups and organisations, which were very well attended.

We were successful in obtaining over £67,000 of funding from Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA). As part of our Almond Cares scheme, this funding was used to provide items such as floor coverings, curtains, air fryers and warm bedding. Additionally we assisted tenants with fuel and food vouchers and purchased food that was distributed via Craigshill Community Fridge.

In total we were able to provide over 1000 types of assistance to support our customers through our Almond Cares programme.

Across the majority of our services we have continued to achieve good performance. From the 13 indicators that are benchmarked across the sector, 10 of these (76%) are above the most recent Scottish average data. Additionally, 14 out

of the 25 indicators that we measured last year showed improvement at year end for 2022/23 from the previous year.



Ensuring that our customers have a warm and comfortable home which is well maintained will always be a priority for us. In total last year we completed 9,767 responsive repairs at a cost of £1.26 million and invested a total of £4 million in planned maintenance such as kitchens, bathrooms and windows etc.

We remain determined to deliver every day against our mission statement Homes, people and communities to be proud of and to continue to work positively towards our vision of Striving to improve life experiences and opportunities.

I would like to express thanks to our Board, colleagues and the various partners with whom we work for their continuing support. Thanks also to those customers who have helped inform our priorities by providing us with feedback, and for those who haven't yet got involved I would encourage you to do so. Your input is extremely valuable.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in white ink on a yellow background. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'John Davidson'.

John Davidson

Our Customers

Following our profiling survey completed last year, we have continued to seek feedback from our customers with the aim of delivering a proactive and personalised service where possible. This year, we have opened The Big Living Room, hosted a range of community events and provided support to our tenants through our Almond Cares programme and our Tenancy Sustainment Service.

We are committed to developing our service in a way that meets the needs of our customers and are always looking for more customers to get involved in providing feedback. We were pleased to welcome back our tenant focus group for in-person meetings this year and we have worked on developing our tenant consultation group.

THE BIG LIVING ROOM

With the cost of living crisis and the high increases in energy prices, we decided to open our office during the winter months for people to drop in, have a cup of tea, use our internet or talk to us about anything we could do to help during these difficult times. HomeAid West Lothian kindly provided comfortable furniture and we named the area The Big Living Room.



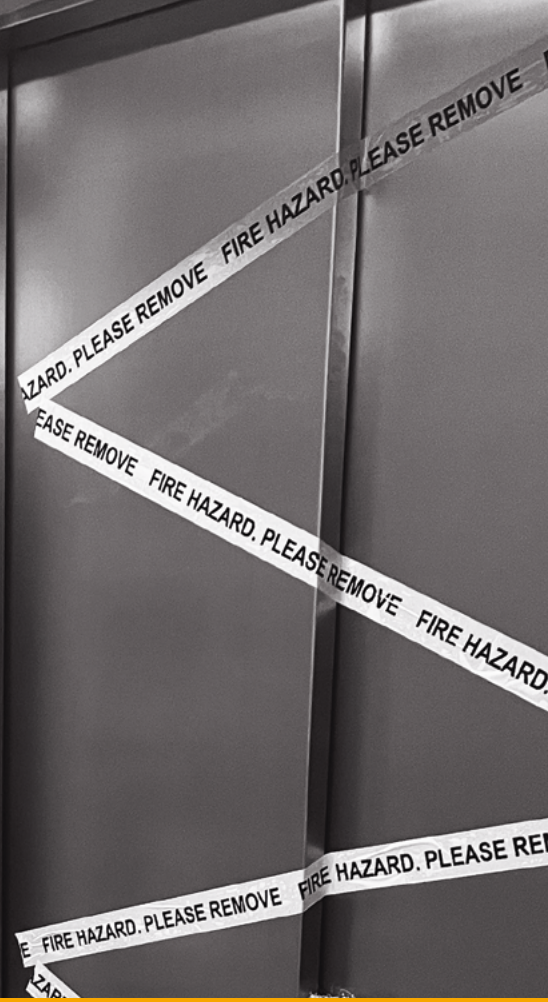
This area was open throughout the day for our customers and the wider community if they wanted to get out the house and save on their energy bills. We also partnered up with West Lothian Foodbank to host a drop-in service within The Big Living Room, which supported local residents with easier access to the Foodbank service, as it minimised the distance that local people needed to travel to collect food.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

As well as providing a warm and comfortable space throughout the day, The Big Living Room also hosted a number of community events throughout the winter months.

In October, Craigshill Growing Together Project organised a Halloween Movie Night. Local groups including Spark, West Lothian Youth Action Project and The Conservation Volunteers worked together to create a fun and engaging event for families in the local area. The event included crafts, games, toasting marshmallows, a children's movie and a Halloween supper.

The Ultimate Winter Ready Event took place in November for our customers and the wider community. This event was organised with a range of local organisations, all working together to help mitigate the increased costs of living and help households get ready for winter. We were pleased to see 85 people in attendance, where they received a range of advice, information and resources to help them through the winter months and beyond.



Over 80 people attended each community event held in The Big Living Room.







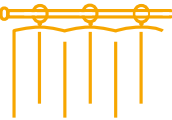

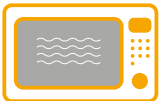
In December, we held a Christmas Open House as part of our Operation: Happy Christmas campaign. This was the first Christmas event back in our offices since the Covid-19 lockdowns and we welcomed 83 children and families into The Big Living Room for an afternoon of arts and crafts, music and dancing, refreshments, a visit from Mickey & Minnie plus a visit from Santa.

ALMOND CARES

Throughout the winter months, we were successful in being awarded two funds from the SFHA to assist our customers with the cost of living crisis. Over £55,000 in grant funding was secured from Social Housing Support Fund plus an additional £12,000 from Winter Hardship Funding. This funding, alongside our investment of £40,000 enabled us to support a number of tenants through our Almond Cares programme by sourcing a range of items, including:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Carpets/flooring</i> | <i>Warm bedding</i> |
| <i>Thermal curtains</i> | <i>LED light bulbs</i> |
| <i>Hot water/heat packs</i> | <i>Thermal clothing</i> |
| <i>Air fryers</i> | <i>Community fridge donations</i> |
| <i>Food vouchers</i> | <i>Top up fuel vouchers</i> |

This funding allowed us to distribute a total of:

	266 FOOD VOUCHERS
300 ENERGY VOUCHERS	
	62 CURTAINS/ FURNISHINGS
48 FLOOR COVERINGS	
	126 APPLIANCES

TENANCY SUSTAINMENT SERVICE

This year, we welcomed a new in-house Tenancy Sustainment Service. It was designed to provide support and assistance to any tenant who may be struggling in their home.



Our Tenancy Sustainment Officer, Joss, has a good understanding of our tenants and the local area after working with Almond HA for the past 5 years. The service has provided support with sourcing furniture and appliances for tenants in need, assisted tenants when applying for grant funding, signposted to relevant support services in the area and more.

We are pleased to have supported 49 customers through this service since it started in September 2022.

FOCUS GROUP

Our tenant focus group met in person this year for the first time since the various Covid-19 lockdowns. It was great to see everyone again and the group quickly got back into the swing of things meeting our Chief Executive, John Davidson in person and reviewing our performance. The focus group meets approximately every couple of months to discuss our services, provide feedback on how we are performing and suggest any ideas for improvement. We are always looking for new members so please get in touch if you are interested in joining the group.

CONSULTATION GROUP

Our tenant consultation group has been growing throughout the year and we're pleased to have reached almost 200 participants. Those who have signed up for the consultation group answer short questions from time to time about our services. These questions are sent in text or email questionnaires which makes it a quick, easy and informal way of providing feedback and helping

to shape our services. This year the consultation group reviewed the customer journey for allocations, which resulted in a change to how the online application can be found on the West Lothian Council website. They also reviewed our opening hours which resulted in a change to the Thursday drop in sessions.

Apart from the obvious benefit of helping to shape our services, participants are also automatically added to our quarterly tenant draw, where they are in with the chance of winning £250 worth

of shopping vouchers. We are pleased that so many of our tenants are part of this group and we would love for more people to get involved. Please get in touch if you would like to join the group.





Almost 200 people have joined our tenant consultation group.



Our Homes

PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

Over the course of the year, we invested over £4 million on planned improvements within our stock. This included almost £500,000 on cyclical works such as painting and gutter cleaning, as well as gas and electrical safety checks.

High levels of inflation and supply change issues following the pandemic resulted in increases to the cost of projects of up to 14%. This increased cost, alongside rising energy costs and feedback from customers who were experiences draughts, resulted in us prioritising the replacement of windows and doors, with some of these works being carried out earlier than we had originally planned. We replaced windows in 72 properties and doors in 80 properties at a cost of over £635,000.

We replaced 158 boilers (including 82 full heating systems) over the course of the year at a cost of over £483,000. We continue to fit highly efficient gas condensing boilers which offer the most cost effective means of heating for our customers.

We are planning a project for the coming year which includes increasing insulation and installing Air Source Heat Pumps to allow us to trial this technology.

The EESSH2 standard (Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing v2) is currently being reviewed by the Scottish Government to align it to their net zero targets. We will continue with our fabric first approach and develop our EESSH2 strategy after the Scottish Government has developed the appropriate standard.



We started a programme of roof replacements which will continue throughout the coming years. At 31st March, 22 properties had new roofs, including replacement of flat roofs with pitched to reduce ongoing maintenance costs.

REPAIRS

We carried out 2730 emergency repairs and 7037 reactive repairs at a cost of £1.26 million. This was less than the year before when we were still tackling the backlog of repairs created during the various Covid-19 lockdowns. Delivering reactive repairs has continued to be a challenge as, like

many others in the sector, our repairs contractor has been struggling to recruit and retain the appropriate number of trades operatives.

We have continued to perform well delivering emergency and urgent repairs however there has been a decline in performance delivering routine repairs which we are working hard to address.

Over the course of the year, we let 113 properties and there were 30 mutual exchanges. The costs of preparing properties for re-let was in the region of £344,000.





22 ROOFS
£480,000

152 WINDOWS & DOORS
£635,000

134 FENCES
£480,000

69 KITCHENS
£330,000

72 BATHROOMS
£380,000

RENDER
TO
4
TENEMENTS

158 BOILERS AND HEATING
£483,000



We distributed 40 condensation packs this year.

As well as repairing and maintaining homes, we also maintain significant areas of landscaping throughout our stock, and this comes at a cost of over £286,000 annually. We also invested £119,000 in tree works and landscaping improvements this year.

We completed over 500 stock condition surveys throughout the year. The surveys included a particular focus on damp and mould, as we were aware of the increased risk of condensation as a result of customers not heating their home as much as they did previously due to increased energy costs. We have utilised our website and social media channels, as well as more traditional methods of communication, to ensure customers contact us to make us aware of any damp or mould issues they are experiencing.

We distributed condensation packs to support our customers to manage condensation in their home. While we have dealt with isolated cases of damp and mould, overall the number of incidences found was low. This information will be utilised in the coming year to develop a programme of ventilation upgrades where required.

DEVELOPMENT

Following the completion of the Polbeth development last year, tenants moved into their new homes in early May 2022. At recent visits for property inspections residents indicated that they were enjoying their new homes.



This year, we worked with Rock Trust to convert a former seven bed care home into an office base and affordable housing for young people. Where possible, existing materials were re-used to ensure the refurbishment was as sustainable as possible, in line with both companies sustainability aspirations.

Delivering new homes during a period of high interest rates and high inflation is incredibly

difficult. We are continuing to work on progressing a specific project that was in the pipeline but with high levels of expenditure required within existing stock, we are not actively seeking new development opportunities in the short term.

We will, of course, continue to monitor the feasibility of delivering new homes and will respond accordingly.





Our financial records can be accessed on request.



ALMOND
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

We strengthened our aim of becoming a modern employer.

Our People

With our Hybrid Working Policy firmly established, providing a better work life balance for our team and strengthening Almond HA's aim of being a modern employer, we have also remodelled our offices. All of the team are now situated on the same floor, in a new modern space, which provides an improved environment for collaboration between our teams.

The above approach has also freed up our ground floor. Our aim is to utilise this for the benefit of the local community and to enable us to implement our Community Impact Strategy particularly with regard to training and employability, working in partnership with local agencies.

The past year also saw us make some changes to our Management Team with the aim of enabling

increased focus on customer engagement, business improvement and People and Culture across the organisation.

As noted in the Chair Report we remain committed to our business plan priorities to deliver excellent Homes and Services and to have a positive impact on local communities.

The focus and changes outlined above contribute to our ability to deliver, in what are challenging times, and coupled with a team who remain determined to provide excellent services we are confident that we will continue to improve our service offer and your experience of being an Almond HA customer.





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