

Our Environmental, Social and Governance Impact

ESG Report 2023/24





Who we are

We are a charity that delivers services to support communities through housing, employment and education services. We began life in 1999 out of the large-scale voluntary transfer of properties previously owned by West Lindsey District Council. Since then, the organisation has grown significantly. Today, we develop new homes, provide housing and related services, deliver community regeneration and provide education, wellbeing and employability support, operating across 26 local authority areas.

We deliver an active new development programme across our areas of operation, and we continue to invest in our existing estates and communities. All that we do is focused on our vision to be there to support people when they need us.

We own and manage nearly 8,000 properties to rent or lease, including a growing portfolio of low-cost home ownership and supported products and more than 1,600 student accommodation bedspaces in Nottingham and Sheffield.

As part of our Group, we have two subsidiaries focused on providing education, wellbeing, skills, and employment: Riverside and CLIP. These services are available to all tenants and wider households within our housing areas of operation, primarily in Lincolnshire, with hubs in Gainsborough, Market Rasen, and Mablethorpe.

Riverside supports people with skills and assistance to gain employment, progress at work, and live independently through family intervention and life skills. CLIP focuses on specialist support through education, mental health support through wellbeing services, and lifelong learning and life skills. These subsidiaries work to deliver significant impact in the communities we serve through funded programmes, community cafes, and drop-in services, engaging thousands each year and helping communities to thrive.

Introduction

This is our second Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) report as a group – and one that shares our impact Group-wide on these important areas.

Following adopting the Sustainability Reporting Standard for social housing in 2023 we continue to assess and measure our ESG impact against this standard, and this forms the basis of this report.

We have a strong track record of delivering impact for our customers and the wider communities in which we operate. We have continued to grow our offer so that we can provide more services and help more people in our communities. And that we do this in a sustainable way.

As a charity we ensure that we do all we can to deliver our services in the most environmentally and socially driven way but that we also hold ourselves to strong governance standards too.

It has been a busy year – one that has focused on preparing for the future following the launch of our new corporate strategy in late 2023. We've proactively joined our teams together and focused on how we can support each other. By bringing group activities together we're not only able to drive efficiencies, but also improve our sustainability and environmental impact by reducing duplication and streamlining our approaches across business units.

We are conscious of our environmental impact and continue to be focused on achieving EPC C or above for all of our homes. We are also making plans for our delivery sites and wider support hubs to ensure these properties reduce their environmental impact – both in the buildings themselves and how we deliver services.

Our social impact has always been a measure of success for us each year – and this year is no exception. We've grown our community-based services to meet community need and made investments and plans for the future to ensure we continue to deliver and support where people need it most.

The Group continues to have strong governance arrangements in place and an embedded internal controls framework. And we take pride in ensuring this is a constant within our day-to-day operations.

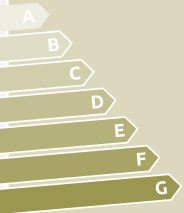


Unless otherwise stated all data and narrative reflected activity during 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. For our social outcomes, where we talk about our education and skills work through CLIP and Riverside, this is based on our last academic year 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024.

Our Environmental Impact

2023/24

Environmental

Key: ■ positive variance ■ negative variance ■ no impact variance

Criteria	Measure	2023	2024	Change
Distribution of EPC ratings of existing homes (those completed before the last financial year). 	% of Homes rated A	0.01%	0.10%	↑ 0.09%
	% of Homes rated B	11.50%	12.44%	↑ 0.94%
	% of Homes rated C	43.81%	46.83%	↑ 3.02%
	% of Homes rated D	37.85%	35.36%	↓ 2.49%
	% of Homes rated E or worse	4.46%	4.67%	↑ 0.21%
	% of Homes without an EPC rating	2.29%	0.60%	↓ 1.69%
Distribution of EPC ratings of new homes (those completed in the last financial year)	% of Homes rated B	100.00%	100.00%	↔ 0.00%
What retrofit activities has the housing provider undertaken in the last 12 months in relation to its housing stock? 	Loft Insulation	3	228	↑ 225
	Cavity Wall Insulation	10	62	↑ 52
	Windows	13	4	↓ 9
	Doors	117	131	↑ 14
	Air Source Heat Pump	2	45	↑ 43
	Gas central Heating	250	101	↓ 149
Scope 1, Scope 2 and Scope 3 Green House Gas emissions 	kg CO2e	Scope 1: 490 kg CO2e	Scope 1: 382 kg CO2e	↓ 108 kg CO2e
		Scope 2: 471 kg CO2e	Scope 2: 542 kg CO2e	↑ 71 kg CO2e
		Scope 3: 60 CO2e	Scope 3: 53 CO2e	↓ 7 kg CO2e
Scope 1, Scope 2 and Scope 3 Green House Gas emissions per home	kg CO2e/home	Scope 1 (per home): 0.082 kg CO2e	Scope 1 (per home): 0.064 kg CO2e	↓ 0.018 kg CO2e
		Scope 2 (per home): 0.079 kg CO2e	Scope 2 (per home): 0.091 kg CO2e	↑ 0.012 kg CO2e
		Scope 3 (per home): 0.010 kg CO2e	Scope 3 (per home): 0.009 kg CO2e	↓ 0.001 kg CO2e

Our Environmental Impact

The net zero carbon target for housing in the UK is part of the broader national goal of achieving net zero carbon emissions across all sectors by 2050. For the housing sector specifically, this means that by 2050, all homes, both new and existing, must be retrofitted or built to achieve zero carbon emissions.

Our Asset Management Strategy outlines our Commitment to achieve net zero in line with the governments deadline, and details a phased approach as to how we will get there. This includes our approach to improving the building fabric, services and our move from near zero to net zero, alongside a recognition that to deliver on this target we will need to train and support our colleagues, partners and of course our tenants to ensure they are ready for this move.

Key milestones include:

- **EPC rating of 'C' or above by 2030:** By 2030, all rented homes must have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 'C' or higher to meet energy efficiency standards.
- **Phasing out fossil fuels:** The government plans to phase out the installation of new gas boilers in homes by 2035, promoting the use of low-carbon heating solutions such as heat pumps – which we have built into our new developments specification where we are able.
- **Retrofitting existing homes:** The vast majority of existing homes (around 29 million across the UK and we have around 7,000 of these) need to be upgraded to meet low-carbon standards, which includes improving insulation, installing energy-efficient windows and doors, and adopting renewable energy sources.

Our Asset Management Working Group, which includes members of our Board, has met regularly to build on the work we did last year. We have focused on improving the energy

efficiency of our properties, particularly those that are hard to heat or treat. Currently, 12% of our properties have an EPC rating of A or B, 45% are rated C, 39% are rated D, and 4% are rated E or below. We have focused on works to increase the EPC rating of our properties this year. In 2024/25, we plan to continue to invest to improve the energy efficiency of our homes and other high-priority properties.

Our current Asset Management Strategy runs from 2021-2026 and we have already achieved 38 of the 40 destination statements we identified when the document was launched. Our next strategy will have a shorter timeframe, covering the period 2027-2030. This 3-year approach reflects the rapidly changing environment we have operated in over the last 5 years. The pace of change has been startling, and we think a shorter strategic focus will help us to set more meaningful targets that reflect our immediate environment. The 2030 end date also better reflects current net zero carbon target dates, a clear area of focus for our organisation over the next three years.

Our SAP scores are regularly updated as we continue to deliver and develop EPC surveys. The data from these surveys is analysed using Intelligent Energy software to guide our future investment decisions. Over the last 12 months, we have completed 571 retrofit projects, including 228 properties with loft insulation, 62 with cavity wall insulation, 4 with new windows, 131 with new doors, 45 with air source heat pumps, and 101 with gas central heating. We are committed to continuing this work as part of our five-year plan.

We recognise the importance of addressing climate risks, such as increased flooding, drought, and overheating. These risks are integrated into our business continuity management processes and detailed in our Business Continuity Plan. We regularly test these plans through both simulated exercises and real-time events.

Our work to develop our Sustainability Policy continues and we have outlined our commitment to community development initiatives, including enhancing green spaces and promoting biodiversity in our existing properties.

Our tenants continue to feel the financial impact from rising energy costs, and we've taken action where we can to help reduce these. We've delivered on 571 improvements

which will reduce the cost of heating the home, these improvements include loft and cavity wall insulation, new windows, doors and central heating. And we continue to support our tenants with help to manage damp and mould in their homes. We managed 804 cases over the past year and only 25 escalated cases – which is testament to the supportive nature of our process.

Added to this, we've invested £125,000 in Caistor to improve community and communal areas at Plough Hill, Horsemarket and Lindum Court.

We continue to work on our strategies and policies around environmental management including managing pollutants, waste management, and water management.



Actions in 2023/24:

Work started to develop and broaden our policies around environmental and waste management. This work is still ongoing to ensure it best captures the full group of activities, and not stay too focused to one particular area of the group. This will be completed during 2024/25 and will ensure we focus our energies where it has impact – not just for ourselves but for our customers too.

Much of our focus has turned to building safety and damp and mould this past year – to ensure our tenants have a home that is safe and secure. All work in this area has been completed with our environmental impact in mind.

A huge amount of work continued during the year to make improvements to our homes and ensure these improvements supported our energy efficiency scores and helped our tenants save money. Additionally we have focused on long term planning for our delivery sites to ensure they are as energy efficient as possible – making long term asset decisions to best effect our operational delivery but also environmental impact.

WHAT NEXT?

Actions for 2024/25

1. Procurement exercise completed for our new fleet – to include environmental efficiencies
2. Core group environmental policy in place, including water management
3. Deliver investment plan for loft insulations and cavity wall insulations to reduce tenants energy bills
4. new delivery sites live in market rasen to increase energy efficiency for our CLIP and Riverside training teams

Case study

Partnership works:

Working with our energy works partners Baxter Kelly and The Warmfront Team, we have made significant strides forward in our work to bring all of our homes up to at least EPC C by the Government's 2030 target. Over the two financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26, this partnership will deliver an additional £1.25M of funding sourced via both ECO4 and the Great British Insulation Scheme to improve the thermal efficiency of our properties by retrofitting cavity wall insulations and ventilation and reduce our customers' fuel bills by over £700 per year.









Our Social Impact

2023/24









Social

Key: ■ positive variance ■ negative variance ■ no impact variance

Criteria	Measure	2023	2024	Change
 Rent compared to the relevant Local Housing Allowance (LHA)	% of LHA rent	78.14%	78.00%	↓ 0.14%
	General Needs	5033, 83.77%	5025, 83.09%	0.73% ↓
 Share, and number, of existing homes (owned and/or managed) completed before the last financial year	Intermediate Rent	26, 0.43%	26, 0.43%	↓ 0.02%
	Affordable Rent	691, 11.50%	739, 12.22%	0.78% ↑
	Supported Housing	7, 0.12%	6, 0.10%	↔ 0.00%
	Housing For Older People	251, 4.18%	252, 4.17%	0.04% ↓
	Outright Sale	11, 11.00%	12, 9.92%	↓ 1.32%
 Share, and number, of new homes (owned and/or managed) that were completed in the last financial year	Affordable Rent	48, 48.00%	56, 46.28%	2.84% ↓
	Shared Ownership	33, 33.00%	49, 40.50%	↑ 8.94%
	Social Rent	8, 8.00%	4, 3.31%	4.77% ↓
	% of homes for which all required gas safety checks have been carried out	100%	100%	↔ 0.00%
 Describe the condition of the housing provider's portfolio	% of homes for which all required fire risk assessments have been carried out	100%	100%	↔ 0.00%
	% of homes for which all required electrical safety checks have been carried out	99.90%	99.89%	↓ 0.01%
	What % of homes meet the national housing quality standard?	100%	100%	↔ 0.00%




Social (continued)

Key: ■ positive variance ■ negative variance ■ no impact variance

Criteria	Measure	2023	2024	Change
 <p>What are the results of the housing provider's most recent tenant satisfaction survey?</p>	% Satisfaction - Tenants	76.00%	78.79%	↑ 2.79%
	% Satisfaction - Riverside	100%	88.24%	12% ↓
	% Satisfaction - CLIP	97.60%	96.32%	↓ 1.28%
	% Satisfaction - Students	not recorded	<i>not recorded</i>	
 <p>What arrangements are in place to enable residents to hold management to account for the provision of services?</p>	Tenant base engaged in your voice activities	10%	17.20%	7.20% ↑
	Customers engaged through panels, groups and events	853	1117	↑ 264
 <p>In the last 12 months, in how many complaints has the national Ombudsman determined that maladministration took place?</p>	Ombudsman Determinations	0	2	↑ 2
    <p>What are the key support services that the housing provider offers to its residents?</p>	Entering Work	240	285	↑ 45
	Into Education	428	376	52 ↓
	Support in Wellbeing	2905	3683	↑ 778
	Total Tenant Households Helped	562	1207	645 ↑
 <p>What other services does the group offer and how successful are these in supporting their customer groups?</p>	Student Accommodation	1027	983	↓ 44
	Shared Ownership	33	42	9 ↑
	Outright Sale	11	8	↓ 3
	Adaptations	375	139	236 ↓

Social (continued)

Key: ■ positive variance ■ negative variance ■ no impact variance

Criteria	Measure	2023	2024	Change
<p>What positive impact do these key support services have on the communities in which it works?</p> 	Entering or in Work	240	285	↑ 45
	Gained Qualifications	41	121 (provisional)	80 ↑
	Volunteering	0	9	↑ 9
	Support in Wellbeing	2905	3683	778 ↑
	Total People Helped	3502	5928	↑ 2426
<p>What does the housing provider do to ensure wider VFM by accessing other funding streams to offer more services that customers have identified?</p> 	Bid Wins	7	21	14 ↑
	Total Draw Down of External Funding	£1,285,956	£1,264,033	↓ 21923
<p>Describe the housing provider's community investment activities, and how the housing provider is contributing to positive neighbourhood outcomes for the communities in which its homes are located</p> 	Community group sessions supported through our community bases	264	260	4 ↓
	Community action days held	4	47	↑ 43

Our Social Impact

We are committed to ensuring that our customers feel safe and secure in their homes. All tenancies we grant are either Assured Shorthold Tenancies, which convert to Assured Tenancies after 12 months, or they start as Assured Tenancies. We have a suite of policies to handle any tenancy breaches, providing a consistent approach to help people thrive and succeed in their tenancy. Additional bespoke support is available through our Supporting Foundations team for those who need it.

This year, we have expanded our plans to develop our stock portfolio by exploring new delivery streams, such as supported accommodation in partnership with local authorities. One of the highlights of this progress is the Bowling Green Road development in Gainsborough where we are introducing our 'Live Well' concept, supporting people to live independently and feel part of a community. This concept was approved by our Board in 2023 and will be live early 2025 as the development draws to a close. Live Well will be delivered across 60 one and two bed apartments initially however it is envisaged this will grow as we develop more older persons housing in the coming years.

Our wider services such as our student accommodation has supported a total of 983 young people as they progress with their futures, offering a caring, home from home environment with a clear focus on customer experience and engagement. We've also helped 50 people step onto the property ladder with 42 shared ownership and 8 outright sales. And provided 139 people with much needed adaptations to their home, helping people to live independently and remain in the home they love.

Customer engagement

Customer satisfaction is central to our success, and we prioritise it in all our activities. We always put people first – and part of that is ensuring we listen to our customers in all areas

of delivery, helping us to do better, develop new things and invest in our communities in the way people want us to. Over the past year, we have seen clear improvements in satisfaction levels, with our average satisfaction rate reaching an impressive 78.79% (rolling 12 months). We conduct quarterly surveys of our housing and employability services through an independent organisation. For our student customers, we use the GSLI survey to benchmark with other university services. This data helps us create a rolling picture of satisfaction and perception insights, which we use for benchmarking through Housemark annually. This ongoing analysis allows us to enhance and improve our services throughout the year.

Listening to our customers' voices at all levels is crucial. They experience our services firsthand, so it is important that they are able to hold us to account. Since 2018, we have adopted the Together with Tenants standard and successfully implemented our Your Voice approach. This includes six core ways for tenants to get involved, and we use the same framework informally across our wider business units. A customer voice panel scrutinises our work and reports directly to our Group Board with their findings and recommendations, ensuring customers are able to challenge us on everything we do, hold us to account and help us to continue improving our services. Additionally, all our Board reports reference the customer voice and are required to evidence how customers

have been involved in determining the content and recommendations.

Before making any group-wide service changes, we consult with our customers to ensure their input is considered. This has been vital in designing new apartments, developing courses at CLIP and Riverside, and shaping the services provided by our wellbeing connectors. In September we held a community engagement day at Market Rasen, to gather local feedback on a proposed social enterprise development called Grange Farm. This was a really successful event, capturing the views of over 100 local residents and partners.

We take customer feedback seriously, which is why we have a Learning from Feedback group that reviews all responses at stages

one and two. They identify learning points, which are then fed back and monitored to ensure promised actions are completed. This past year, several key 'you said, we did' activities have been implemented across the group as a result of this feedback. This includes learning that identified training needs which have been delivered through a series of roadshows. We have also reviewed various procedures as a result of complaints including the inspection process following customers own remedial works in a property. We've had two Ombudsman determinations, of which one confirmed that maladministration took place. The learning from this was already implemented and embedded as part of the revised Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code.

Case study

Your voice month:

Last June we ran a month of activity centred around customer engagement – our Your Voice month – to put our customers at the heart of what we do and ensure we continue to listen, engage and respond to feedback. We ran different activities including scrutiny workshops, focus groups and opportunities for customers to join us on neighbourhood action days. Through this we achieved a 140% increase in the number of tenants signed up to Your Voice, from 10 to 24, and following surveys being sent to 3,300 tenants signed up to My Acis, we received 168 responses, of these 56 were keen to find out how they become more engaged in the digital groups.

As part of our ongoing Your Voice activity, we proactively asked customers to get involved in our Neighbourhood Estate Management Policy. We delivered this in a video format and received over 100 responses. And later in the year, we built on this further through recognition activities during our Acis Fest-ive programme and Big Connect event to help our customers feel valued and welcome.

We gained further significant insight into how our customers and our people would want our services to grow and evolve – We engaged almost 5,000 people in our consultation – with almost 1,000 people feeding in their thoughts directly help us drive and shape our new corporate strategy '2030 – getting there together' which launched December 2023.

Our communities

We want our communities to be healthy, thriving places where people have access the services and support they need to help them, when they need it. This means we get involved in lots of different ways enabling us to have lasting impact for generations to come.

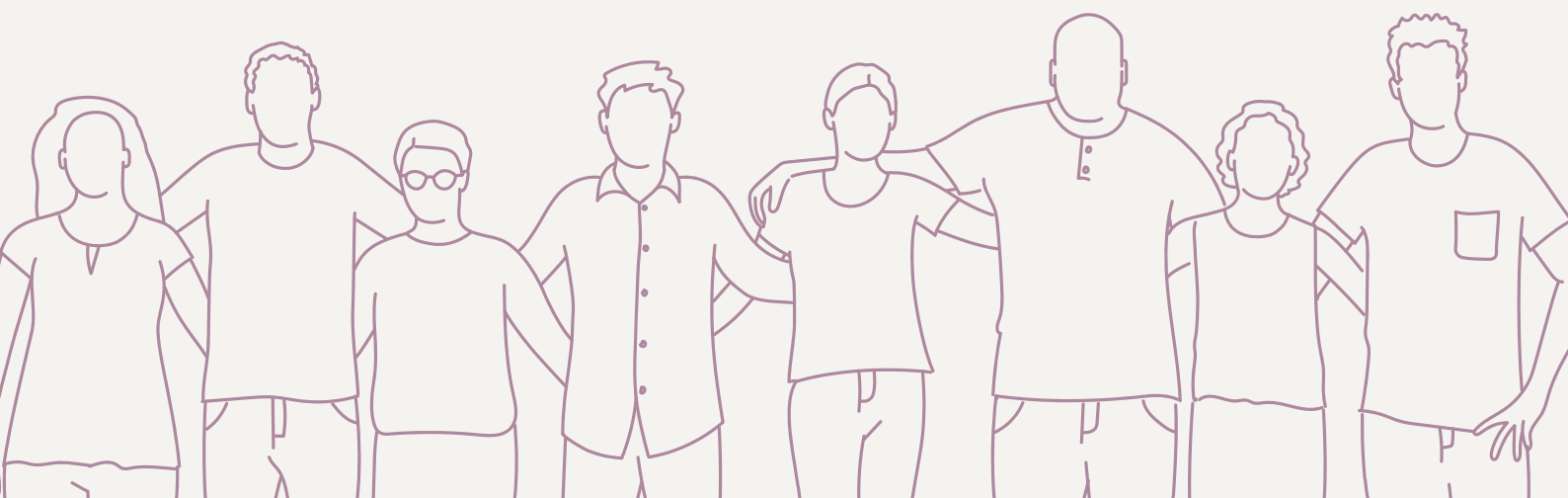
Ensuring the safety of our customers when they're with us is critical, and we've made significant investment this year in safeguarding. We've implemented a new system, and rolled out training to everyone who works with young and vulnerable people, from both our housing and education and skills business units. We've also set up a new steering group to make sure we can develop consistent practices across the group and gain strong assurance for governance of our safeguarding matters and statutory commitments. By doing this, we can be confident our teams identify and act on safeguarding concerns, getting the right help and protection to people when its needed.

In addition to developing training for our teams, our people services team has worked closely with CLIP and Riverside Training to provide support for schools and deliver careers events. CLIP and Riverside are also part of a county-wide programme to raise aspirations of children and young people living in our communities. And our provision for young people has grown and developed ready for the academic year 24/25 to offer a programme that meets our local community need. Giving us a real focus and social impact in our communities.

We've delivered tidy days in a number of our communities to help our customers remain proud of the place where they live. We've visited Market Rasen, Saxilby, Beckingham and Newlands Court to make improvements, which were well received by residents. And additionally our grounds maintenance contractors have key contractual requirements to support enhancing green spaces in our communities.

We also spent time recognising our customers and their incredible commitment to their communities. Joining us for The Big Connect, we were able to share stories of how our customers are investing their time to make where they live better places for the people who live there, setting up vital services for people who just need someone to talk to, or making a weekly dinner for local residents to ensure they get a good meal and some company. On several occasions our teams have supported this activity to happen, either through helping to raise funds, setting up formal groups, making donations or promoting what's happening. We know this collaboration is making a real difference in our communities. You can see more of these videos on our website.

We've worked over the last year to deepen our understanding of social value measurements and standardising these measures across our group operations. This is now ready to be rolled out across the group so we can truly capture consistently everything we do.



Case study

Catherine Everatt, a member of our People Services team, took advantage of her paid Acis volunteer day. She decided to spend her day contributing to an engagement event at Newlands housing in Gainsborough. On a sunny day, last October, Catherine joined a group of other volunteers to give the communal courtyard a much-needed spruce up.

Armed with all the necessary equipment provided by Acis, Catherine got to work sanding and painting benches. Her efforts, along with those of her fellow volunteers, transformed the courtyard into a more welcoming and pleasant space for residents to enjoy.

Looking back on her experience, Catherine added, "It was really good to give something back. Doing something so hands-on was great because I could actually see the impact I made during my day."

Case study

One of our communities where we have a large number of homes is the Park Springs estate in the Gainsborough East ward. This area sees high levels of deprivation, worklessness, ill health and child poverty and is a key area for us to work with partners to help meet the needs and challenges of this community.

We own a community centre in the heart of this estate. Working closely with West Lindsey District Council and a host of other partners, we provide community based activities and support. Last year this included 240 community group sessions which included youth clubs, free sport sessions for children, a community café run by a local school, volunteer forums, mental health workshops, support group, wellbeing groups, traveller groups and a Muslim prayer group. We also held a Christmas crafting event for the whole community which engaged many from the local area.

By working with partners in this way, we are able to ensure we deliver the services the community needs, have a wider route to engagement and consultation to ensure we continue delivering to need, and are able to provide long term, sustainable impact this community.



Delivering value through our business units:

Housing

We want all our tenants to feel safe in their homes, and to be comfortable in their communities.

Our focus this year has been heavily on safety. We've been looking closely at our systems, processes and procedures to make sure we're set up to meet our customers' needs from a safety point of view, whether that's physical safety or emotional safety.

In the 23/24 year, we've started 496 new lets of our properties, which includes 65 new-build homes. We've made referrals for tenants to our wider services across Acis Group so customers can access the support they need, but unfortunately we've also had to manage 17 evictions. Of these, we provided extensive support for 16 tenants with rent arrears, doing all we could to prevent the need to go down the eviction route. We know however that by referring our tenants to our other group provision, we've prevented countless other evictions. An example here is our supporting foundations team who have provided support for tenants where they need it, contributing to our tenancy sustainment rate of 95.3%.

Although we've increased security for more properties this year than last where we have had reports of domestic abuse cases, we've been focusing on early intervention to avoid formal intervention where necessary. But we are seeing cases becoming more complex. We've had an increase of 19 to 37 cases which have been involved in multi-agency risk assessment conferences. Further support has been provided through our safer communities and supporting foundations teams.

We've been developing our antisocial behaviour interventions in Sheffield, working with the police and increasing our use of CCTV in areas where it's practical, as well as doorbell cameras. While contributing to reduced antisocial behaviour, these measures are also increasing customer satisfaction.

Education and Skills

Across Education and Skills, which covers our activities in CLIP, Riverside, and Acis Students, our key area of focus has been around generating community activity and connection, and developing our centres as places where people can thrive. Our centres are based in the hearts of communities that need these types of support and services, and by increasing awareness and usage, we can be there for more people when they need us. This will also allow us to make an even greater impact for the local community.

We're widening our reach too, by running engagement workshops across all our areas for people who need support for various challenges, but don't know where to go. Through our own provision, and our network of partners, we can begin to signpost people to the help they need.

Over the course of the last year, we've helped almost 6,000 people from across our communities through our CLIP, Riverside and Acis Students delivery. We know that indirectly this has a positive impact for our tenants through community cohesion, volunteer led support groups and activities as recognised during our Big Connect and provides early support for young people who will become our tenants in the future. Over 400 people have been helped to progress positively, either in work, education or volunteering and over 3,500 to improve their wellbeing. Of the tenant households within areas where we operate our wider education, employment and wellbeing services, 44% of those households have engaged in our services provided by CLIP and Riverside.

We ran a number of activities across CLIP and Riverside for National Numeracy Day in May, including baking, estimating games, and budgeting, among others – supporting people with numerical and financial skills, both essential skills as the cost-of-living

crisis continues to take hold. We saw huge take up, engaging nearly 100 people in each centre on one day. We offer ongoing numeracy courses, having delivered 29 in total, engaging 104 learners - and this is set to continue throughout 2024/25 too.

We've developed a project to engage communities around dementia, its challenges and impacts not only on the people living with the disease, but also the people who care for them. We're using the project to help establish local groups with other housing associations, particularly around Mablethorpe. Next year, we aim to establish a similar project for people with autism, as we've identified a need among many of our communities.

By delivering services as part of a group, we can attract external funding to ensure value for money. During 2023/24, we continued to raise funds from a wide range of external sources, securing over £1,264,033 to support almost 6,000 people. These funds primarily support the delivery of essential core services around wellbeing, education and employment, and are often provided through CLIP and Riverside.

We've been working on developing our wellbeing offer for students, and looking at how we can focus on early intervention before someone reaches crisis point. We're making good strides and this has helped us with ensuring we offer what students need.

We've also helped students to settle into short-term accommodation, supporting them on their university journey and enabling them to access higher education where they may not otherwise have been able to.

We've also run DIY SOS-style projects with our own teams in all our centres this year. The outcomes have been to ensure a more consistent and welcoming customer experience, but also to embed our Acis Way of working across newer areas of the group. These actions help to instil a mindset that while we are a group of companies, we're one organisation and we're ultimately here to help our people when they need us. And our centres need to provide the tools and environment for our colleagues to deliver the best support and provision possible for our customers.

Case study

Eleanor was introduced to Riverside after seeing a Facebook advertisement for Maths and English courses. Eleanor had left school and didn't have a job but had a dream to work in childcare. She also lived with Dyslexia which meant it was more challenging for her.

She needed to get her functional skills grades in order to get on a level 3 Early Years Educator course to be able to work in a childcare setting, so she enrolled onto a new programme delivered through Riverside called Steps.

Clip and Riverside also supported supported Eleanor with her Maths and English. Just before Christmas she was able to get an interview at Tesco's for a temporary role. This was her first job and it gave her a lot of confidence.

In May we are over the moon to hear she was successful in her interview and started work in a local nursery fulfilling her dream of working in childcare.

Claire's story

A partners view:

Small support – huge impact!

Claire understands how important it is to give people time and space to talk if they want or need to. She said, "It's amazing what a difference just giving someone five minutes can make. And a lot of people in Gainsborough are struggling at the moment. At Night Light Café, we just sit and talk, we drink tea, we play games, do some colouring and things like that. It's really relaxed and there's no pressure when people walk through the door. If you want to come in and have some company but you don't want to talk to anybody, you don't have to. You can just sit there and drink your tea, go on your phone, see what's going on around you, there's no pressure, it's whatever works for that person who walks through the door."

Claire has had lots of support to help her to connect with others in the community too. Her most recent idea was to have a 'warm rail' where people in Gainsborough could access donated items like coats, blankets, jumpers and so on, for free, to help them keep warm during winter. She was connected with another lady who wanted to set up a warm space, so they could bring the two things together.

With some Warm Space Funding, Claire was inviting the community to keep warm from September 2023, along with Lorraine, our Community Connector and part of the CLIP team. The funding also meant that the team could offer simple hot meals. Claire told us, "It's just simple stuff, like beans on toast or crumpets or whatever, but it means people can come down, grab some hot food, stay warm for a couple of hours and have a cuppa and a chat if they want to. It can make a lot of difference for a lot of people, as even if you're working at the moment, there isn't a lot of spare cash. So it's good to know you can get out and see people and it won't cost anything."

"When I came up with the idea of a warm rail, space was made at the bridge and connected me with a lady who wanted to run a warm space, so the warm space and rail at CLIP's The Bridge building began. Volunteers from CLIP help out every Sunday morning as well. I couldn't do all these things without the support and my wonderful volunteers."

Actions in 2023/24:

We have continued to build our approach to engagement and feedback. We developed and launched a new customer experience strategy during the period that covers the whole group – and within it we engaged customers to ensure our approach to service and experience meets expectations. This covers actions over the next three years to continue to put people at the centre of what we do. Our digital platform for engagement has been developed, trialled and tested. This approach will further drive engagement with our customers across the group long term.

We have re-established social value reporting and delivered training on our methodology through HACT. This has helped us develop baseline reporting systems this year, ready to recommence formal social value reporting for 2024/25. Additional customer metrics are now reported within our group wide dashboards to ensure a golden thread of insight and customer focus in all we do.

WHAT NEXT?

Actions for 2024/25

1. social value report for the group for the year
2. your voice digital platform embedded for tenant engagement
3. focus on community-based services and support – reporting on our impact in community settings









Our Governance Impact

2023/24

Governance

Key: ■ positive variance ■ negative variance ■ no impact variance

Criteria	Measure	2023	2024	Change
<p>Does the housing provider pay the Real Living Wage?</p> 	% of workforce paid above RLW	86.60%	83.20%	↓ 3.40%
	% of workforce paid above RLW (excluding kickstart or deferred wage employees)	91.60%	93.80%	2.20% ↑
<p>What is the housing provider's median gender pay gap?</p> 	% Gender Pay Gap	2.74%	13.23%	↑ 10.49%
<p>What is the housing provider's CEO:median-worker pay ratio?</p> 	25th Percentile	5.5:1	6.04:1	0.54:1 ↑
	50th Percentile	4.8:1	4.9:1	↑ 0.1:1
	75th Percentile	3.9:1	3.83:1	0.07:1 ↓
<p>How does the housing provider support the professional development of its staff?</p> 	Apprentices in Place	5	3	↓ 2

Board and Trustees

Our Board, comprising of non-executive Directors with deep expertise across various fields, continues to provide invaluable guidance and oversight to our organisation. Their collective skills span critical areas such as finance, procurement, risk management, audit, housing services, asset management, student accommodation, health, education, and community development. This broad spectrum of experience ensures we have the knowledge base to guide the growth and development of our services.

We have been successful in adding new Board members in the year with a diverse range of skills. At the same time we lost two long-term Board members that have helped steer the organisation over a number of years and who have acted as previous Chair and Vice Chair. Their contributions will be missed but we recognise and welcome our new Board members and the contributions that they can bring. We will recruit new board and independent committee members during 2024/25 to ensure continued strength and experience to lead the organisation. In the meantime however, our succession plan has been fully reviewed and accepted in 2023 and remains in place to ensure continuity in leadership.

Our Executive and Senior Management Teams were stable in the year.

Board members complete an annual Declaration of Interest form, and under our Board Member Code of Conduct and Probity Policies, they are required to declare any conflicts of interest as they arise. Our Conflicts of Interest Procedure provides a clear framework for managing declared or perceived conflicts, ensuring transparency and integrity in our operations.

Our comprehensive risk management framework is applied across the entire group, integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) risks into our broader risk

management strategies. These ESG risks are not managed in isolation but are embedded within our risk register, ensuring they are considered in all day-to-day activities.

This year we have explored how we continue to strengthen our governance structure as the group evolves. We had approval to introduce a new company – Acis Communities Limited – to the group next financial year that will focus on our wider service delivery as we continue to invest in communities at scale. This will put governance first in our approach to ensuring high standards, assurance and oversight at all levels.

Our teams

We never forget our colleagues across the Group. We're investing in our people to help them develop and professionalise, not only provide access to more opportunities for them as individuals, but also to help us offer more as an organisation to meet customer need, and build our capacity. We're doing this by strengthening our manager training, offering secondments and focusing on internal promotion.

We've given our colleagues volunteer days, so everyone who works for us can take a day of our time to give back to their communities, or a cause that matters to them. Indeed, some of our teams have chosen to use their volunteer day to make an even bigger impact for our

own customers – seeing first-hand some of the challenges faced by those we are here to help.

We have continued our commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) with robust policies that receive full Board oversight. Our employee-led EDI group, consisting of representatives from each department, has spearheaded initiatives to promote awareness and provide an inclusive working environment. In 2023/2024, we delivered several impactful awareness activities across the Group, including:

- Pride Month
- World Menopause Day
- Dementia Awareness
- Autism Awareness
- Pronouns Promotion
- Mental Health Week
- Religious Festivals

We have established an internal EDI working group and set ourselves some challenges on improving our organisational understanding of EDI and what we, as individuals, can do to support it. Kath Smart, the chair of our Board, has adopted the NHF's Chair's Challenge, a public commitment to take the Board on a journey to understand our organisational EDI position and to develop a proactive vision for the future.

Mental health remains a significant challenge for both colleagues and customers, therefore we continue to invest in the skills needed to provide this support for people when they need it. This last year we achieved the target of training 10% of our workforce as Mental Health First Aiders. We've delivered this work through our specialists in CLIP, and have exceeded the challenge set by Mental Health England for the proportion of colleagues trained, and at 10% we're higher than the national average too. Our Mental Health First Aiders are easily identifiable by their lanyards, and their contact details are accessible on our intranet.

Our senior management structure remains strong and stable. Over the past two years there has been no movement in our joint leadership team and 30% turnover of Board members due to retirement, reflecting the continuity and resilience in our leadership.

Support and wellbeing

We continue to prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of our people as part of our organisational culture. Our "Own It" Philosophy underpins an agile working environment, allowing our employees to work flexibly to meet both customer needs and personal work-life balance. This philosophy ensures that everyone, regardless of their role, has the freedom and flexibility to excel without the constraints of rigid labels or policies.

Key initiatives include:

- **Employee Benefits:** We offer a comprehensive range of benefits designed to support the overall wellbeing of our employees, including Paycare health support packages (with counseling services, discounts for health clubs, dentists, opticians, etc.), Acis Perkz for financial wellbeing, and Early Pay options to provide financial flexibility.
- **Flexible Working:** Our "Own It" philosophy continues to promote flexible working patterns, encouraging employees to tailor their work schedules to balance professional responsibilities with personal needs.
- **Fair pay:** We've reported on our gender pay gap, and published the results on our website. Our gap has reduced this past year, is better than the national average, and we're working on ways we can reduce it even further as part of our commitment to EDI.
- **Connection:** Feedback from our colleagues during 2022/23 told us how important it was for them to connect, especially in an agile working environment where many choose to work from home, are based across multiple sites and within our communities

too. Acis Festi-ve 2023 delivered a series of events during November and December to deliver on just that. It provided time for colleagues from across the group to get to know each other, share experiences and build relationships, particularly those who don't often work together. We held localised events to reduce our environmental impact too and ran shorter half-day sessions to reduce impact on day to day operations.

- **Reward & recognition:** This has been a big theme for us over the last year. Our colleagues are keen to see and hear all about the difference we are making to peoples lives. In November 2023, we delivered the Big Connect event, bringing together colleagues, customers, partners and stakeholders to share the impact we'd made during the year. We rewarded our colleagues who have gone over and above to support their customers, and those who have created strong foundations for our future success.
- **Development:** We are committed to supporting our people in their personal and professional growth. Through monthly 1-2-1 meetings, we focus on skills development and career progression. In 2023/2024, we have continued to invest in professional qualifications for our team, including three new apprenticeships—some of which are higher-level and aimed at existing team members. Our extensive range of in-house e-learning and training programs, particularly those aligned with the new professional standards in Housing, remain a focal point for ongoing development. We celebrate these successes and achievements in our new monthly update, "Movers Shakers and Career Makers."

- Additionally, we have spent over £30,000 on qualifications to support our people with their continued professional development, including five people who have achieved a professional qualification which will support them within their roles.
- And our continued focus on our people has resulted in our preparations for achieving our investors in people reaccreditation – due May 2024.

Supply Chain

Our commitment to a strong and responsible supply chain is upheld through the efforts of our corporate procurement team and property services commercial team. Social value is embedded into our contracts, yielding excellent results as our partners actively support our community initiatives. These contributions have been detailed in our social section, demonstrating the tangible impact of our collaborative efforts.



Actions in 2023/24:

Our focus on EDI has continued with the embedding of our EDI champions group wide. This is internally driven, but supported interaction with our customers too.

Our investment in our people has continued, and we have focused on enhancing promotion of our professional development activities Group-wide to showcase what we do. Work continued during the year around the housing professionalised standards, but continues in line with the timescales set out by the sector.

Work to review our corporate structure to match our growth was carried out during the year – with the approval to strengthen our approach for both our housing and education regulatory requirements.

WHAT NEXT?

Actions for 2024/25

1. Achieve EDI accreditation by end 2024
2. Launch Acis Communities Limited and complete corporate structure changes
3. Recruit new board members in line with succession plan



A tutors view:

.....
Impact assessment – Mental Health first Aid Training.

Over the past 18 months there are more than 40 members of staff who have completed the full Adult – Mental Health First Aid Training.

This means that Acis Group as an employer now exceeds the target for MHF-Aiders as a percentage of workforce set by MHFA England as an aspirational target.

By ensuring that all staff working at Acis Students have had opportunity to train, we are safeguarding our Student tenants wellbeing and able to provide assurance to their parents that choosing to use our student accommodation is right for them, as our scope of care and provision goes far beyond bricks and mortar.

By ensuring that everyone working within our Wellbeing programmes is MHFA qualified we are in a prime position to ensure that our programme participants (many of whom are also Acis tenants) are supported and sign-posted to appropriate professional help in a timely way.

By ensuring that there are qualified Mental Health First-aiders in every department and at every level in the organisation we have developed a culture where it is OK to talk about mental health and seek support for our wellbeing.

As the tutor, it has been a pleasure to work with people from across the whole organisation who want to support our tenants/learners/participants and importantly each other to maintain and improve mental wellbeing. To me, it truly demonstrates how we live up to Acis our promise 'To be there when you need us'



Conclusion

And that's it. Lots of action to make a big difference.

We have clear plans to continue doing more to help us to be there to support our customers when they need us.

And we are looking forward to seeing what the next year brings.

Find out more about our journey at www.acisgroup.co.uk



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