

2021-2022



# ANNUAL REPORT TO TENANTS



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*Councillor Cathy Martyn*

# FOREWORD

*Swindon Borough Council's  
Cabinet Member for Health  
Inequalities and Housing*

Listening to your views to improve our delivery, and to focus on your priorities, is our prime concern as a landlord.

I want to thank everyone who gives us feedback on the services we provide to tenants and leaseholders. Swindon Borough Council remains committed to working in partnership with you to continue to shape, strengthen and improve council housing services by putting you at the heart of everything we do. Your views influence how we plan and deliver our services.

This report details the work we do in partnership with you and the great work you do here in Swindon. Thank you.

***Welcome to this year's Annual Report to Tenants. The following pages tell you how we have delivered the Housing service and gives you an idea of the work we have been doing.***

# GREETINGS

*from your Tenant Scrutiny Panel*



The following report shows how well Swindon Borough Council (SBC) Housing has performed in their duties as our landlord.

As tenants, it's important to feel empowered and have a say in the services which affect our lives. Luckily that's where the Tenant Scrutiny Panel comes in.

We review the Council's Housing performance every three months, and if we feel a particular area needs a more in-depth investigation we review performance and report back to both Housing and tenants on our findings and recommendations. In the coming year, we plan to make this practice open to as many tenants as possible by inviting tenants to participate in reviews. Look out on the SBC Housing Facebook page or in the Tenant Focus newsletter for our upcoming reviews.

You can sign up to the monthly Tenant Focus newsletter by going to [www.swindon.gov.uk/newsletter](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/newsletter).

If you would like to get involved or for more information please contact us at: [tspswindon@outlook.com](mailto:tspswindon@outlook.com)

# LETTINGS



Your Lettings Team helps to provide Council homes to people on the Council housing waiting list. They organise the advertising of vacant properties, provide advice to people around how to secure a Council house, they assist those in priority housing need sometimes directly matching them to a suitable property.

Lettings also manage the allocation of sheltered housing for those over 60 or in some circumstances over 50, as well as carrying out enhanced checks and reference requests for properties to be let as 'sensitive' (there are restrictions as to who can be shortlisted for these properties).

**If you would like to find out more please visit:**

[www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20151/council\\_housing/1009/how\\_our\\_choice-based\\_letting\\_system\\_works](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20151/council_housing/1009/how_our_choice-based_letting_system_works)

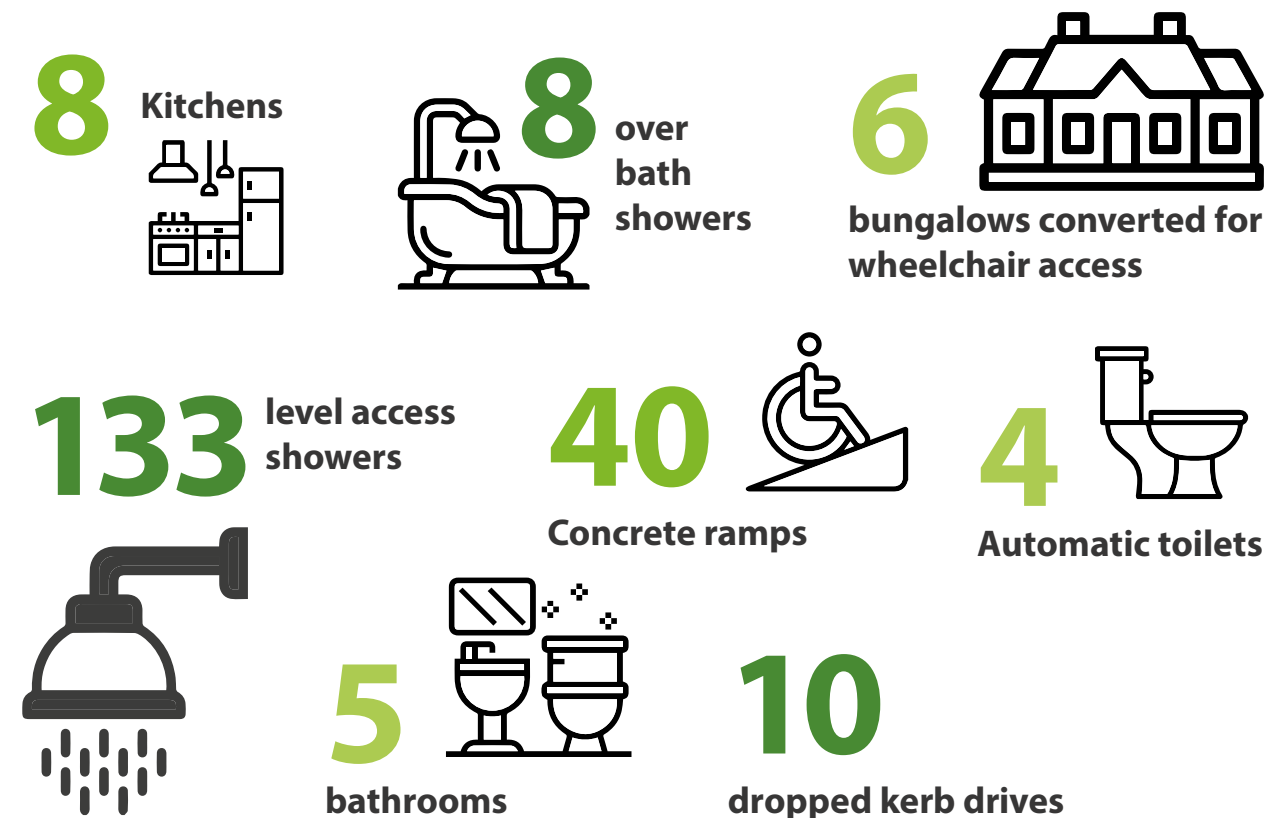


# LETTINGS



No of properties owned by Housing	<b>10,228</b>
Average time taken for re-lets standard vs target	<b>28.40 days versus target of 20 days</b>
Total no of re-lets for 2021 -22	<b>357</b>
Mutual exchanges	<b>72</b>
Number of people on housing register at year end	<b>6,631</b>

## MAJOR WELFARE ADAPTIONS COMPLETED



# TENANCY SERVICES



Your Neighbourhood Housing Officers help tenants to maintain their tenancies: they review the tenant rent accounts, offer support to tenants who are struggling to pay, they investigate and support tenants experiencing anti-social behaviour, amend tenancies when circumstances change and respond to general tenancy enquiries. To find out more please visit:

[www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20056/council\\_tenants/274/neighbourhood\\_wardens](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20056/council_tenants/274/neighbourhood_wardens)

This year the neighbourhood housing teams dealt with the following:

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) cases	<b>525</b>
ASB cases resolved/closed successfully	<b>289</b>
Evictions as a result of ASB	<b>0</b>
Injunctions to perpetrators of ASB	<b>13</b>
Rent collected (target/actual)	<b>95.87% vs 97%</b>
Rent arrears at year end	<b>£1,113,532</b>
No. of evictions as a result of rent arrears (Eviction ban in place for most of 20/21 due to Covid-19)	<b>0</b>

*If you are struggling to pay your rent, or would like advice on benefits or budgeting please contact your housing officer.*

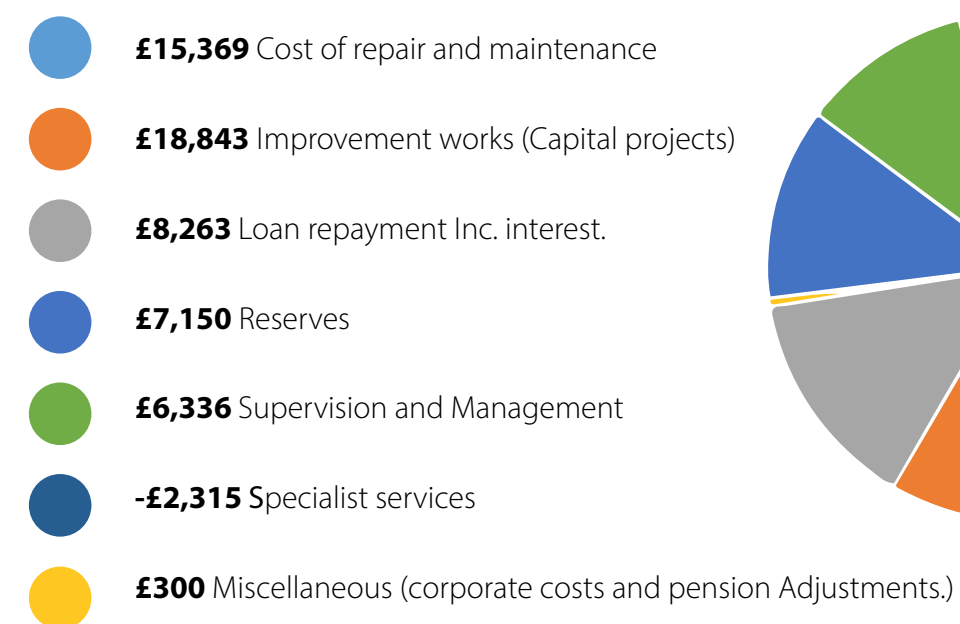
# FINANCE



The rent we collect from all of our tenants is used to provide the Housing service, this is how we spend it.

## HOW WE SPEND YOUR RENT (£MILLIONS)

We collected **£53,946 million** in rent this year this is how we spent it:



*Housing does not receive or provide funds to, the wider Council Tax funded services.*

# NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDENS

Three Neighbourhood Wardens teams provide a service to all general purpose housing tenants in the Borough. Their main role is to improve the quality and safety of our neighbourhoods.



Fire checks completed in the communal areas in blocks of flats	7,002
Occasions where we cleared items that tenants were unable to do for themselves	895
Instances of fly tip dealt with	2,166
Vacated properties cleared	668
Garage inspections	610

The Neighbourhood Wardens are a valuable resource for our communities and regularly receive compliments from tenants, such as:

*“Can I just say a huge thank you to the wardens for picking up (rubbish) so promptly. I was up the hospital and when I returned the stuff had gone. I really wasn't expecting it to go today as I've only just asked. I'm really happy I don't have to worry about it now. They do amazing work and I hope you all know you are appreciated.”*

To find out more about your neighbourhood warden service please visit: [www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20056/council\\_tenants/274/neighbourhood\\_wardens](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20056/council_tenants/274/neighbourhood_wardens)

# HOMELINE



Homeline is a home response service operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for both tenants and residents of Swindon.

The service is designed to assist the elderly and vulnerable to live independently in their communities. Homeline officers are first aid trained and practised in the use of lifting equipment. Our vehicles are equipped with defibrillators which officers are trained to use.

To find out more about this service please visit: [www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20011/adult\\_social\\_care\\_and\\_support/438/homeline](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20011/adult_social_care_and_support/438/homeline)

This year saw the Homeline team continuing to operate in a challenging environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The team adopted a range of measures to protect tenants and make sure a safe service was provided during this time. Despite these challenges, which required the wearing of facemasks, aprons and gloves, as well as sanitising equipment to an enhanced level, the team attended all requests for help including calls from a number of COVID-19 symptomatic tenants.

Over the year, the team lifted or assisted on average eight times per day, with customer falls. The response time to calls for assistance within 45 minutes (our target) was met on 98 per cent of occasions.





# DELIVERING NEW HOMES FOR TENANTS



The Housing Strategy and Development team are responsible for the provision of new social housing for SBC Housing. They do this through purchasing properties from the open market, including buying back ex-Council homes.

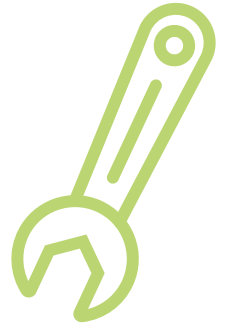
They also work with residents to bring empty properties back into use, and they manage right-to buy applications. This year the team received 143 right-to-buy applications, a 3 per cent increase on the previous year. The team acquired 32 homes, 20 for general needs and 12 secured through additional Government funding for Rough Sleepers through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme.

Phase 1 of the Queen's Drive development has been completed, with Phase 2 well underway to provide affordable homes.

We also committed to buying a further six homes at Bradbury Park from Persimmon, which increases the number of affordable homes. They will be available in the autumn of this year.



# REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE



Our Repair Teams are responsible for fixing your home when something goes wrong. However, there are some jobs that are the responsibility of the tenant you can find out more here: [www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20056/council-tenants/1093/council housing handbook/4](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20056/council-tenants/1093/council-housing-handbook/4)

If you feel confident there are some useful videos on our website that guide you through minor repairs that you can do yourself, please visit this page: [www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20056/council-tenants/506/request a housing repair](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20056/council-tenants/506/request-a-housing-repair)

We respond to repair emergencies at any time of night or day. These should be rung through to the Contact Centre on 01793 445500.

**Did you know that you can report your own repairs online and book an appointment too?**

**There are now over 7,300 tenants registered for 'My Housing Tenancy', where they can arrange a repair, change their contact details or view their rent account. 28.40 per cent of tenants raised their own repair online up from 19.4 per cent the previous year. Why don't you give it a go – it's simple, all you have to do to create an account is register. You will need your tenancy reference number (found on letters sent by Housing or on your rent card) and your date of birth, please visit: [ww2.swindon.gov.uk/oa.live/ibxmlpr.p?docid=register](http://ww2.swindon.gov.uk/oa.live/ibxmlpr.p?docid=register)**

**([swindon.gov.uk](http://swindon.gov.uk)) to register for your account.**

# REPAIRS PERFORMANCE



Tenants surveyed said they were satisfied with the repair carried out by SBC.	<b>89.40%</b> (target is 95%)
The average time it took SBC Housing to complete repairs. Our target is 10 days.	<b>21.70</b>
Surveyed tenants said they were satisfied that SBC Housing completed their repair right first time.	<b>76.70%</b> (target is 80%)
Completed repairs this year (April 2021 to March 2022)	<b>38,516</b>

## MISSED APPOINTMENTS

Help us to save your money.

10% of repair appointments were missed because the tenant was not at home.

Missed appointments cost, on average, £130 each. If you can't make an appointment please go online to reschedule it or call us to cancel.

# MAJOR WORKS TO YOUR HOMES



We have other property teams who carry out planned maintenance to your homes and also the capital team who carry out works to the structure and exterior of our buildings.

This year we installed:

New bathrooms/wet rooms	<b>352</b>
New heating systems	<b>267</b>
Renewed gas central heating cylinders	<b>2</b>
Upgraded gas central heating boilers	<b>47</b>
New UPVC windows to houses	<b>293</b>
New UPVC windows to communal properties	<b>101</b>
External doors fitted	<b>114</b>
Communal blocks of flats – doors renewed	<b>9</b>
New kitchens installed	<b>324</b>
Amount of blocks of flats had roof replacements (1 block = 1 replacement)	<b>32</b>
Homes with new roofs	<b>140</b>
PV solar panels installed	<b>54</b>
Consumer units renewed	<b>2</b>

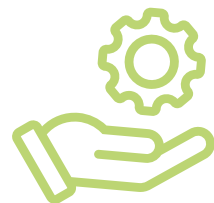


# MAJOR WORKS TO YOUR HOMES



Government funding allowed us to install solar panels to over 50 of your homes. To date, we have fitted panels to over 50 roofs. We've received positive feedback from you, and one tenant in particular reported a significant reduction in energy bills after installation.

# TENANT ACADEMY AND TENANT VOLUNTEERS



The Business Development team works with tenants on a variety of Housing related projects. Tenant Liaison Officers support tenants when they are having major works done to their homes, or provide advice and help if a repair is not carried out to a satisfactory standard. Tenant Academy Officers advise tenants on a range of training, employment and educational opportunities. Tenant Participation Officers work with tenant groups, whether they are volunteering in their communities or acting in a more formal capacity to review the Housing service. We all gather feedback on how tenants view the service SBC Housing delivers.



# THE TENANT ACADEMY



This year the Tenant Academy (TA) continued to support tenants with Greenlight to Housing, a pre-tenancy training scheme:

## **Greenlight to Housing, Pre-Tenancy training.**

The Greenlight to Housing pre-tenancy course was created to help applicants who are bidding for a Swindon Borough Council property so they can understand all the different aspects of having their own tenancy. TA delivered 5 face to face sessions to 23 applicants, covering the following: understanding your tenancy, bidding on a property, how to budget effectively, the Tenant Academy offer and basic repairs.

In January 2022, we launched our online learning for tenants and applicants currently bidding for housing. Alongside the pre-tenancy training, we have given learners access to other online courses that we created specifically for our tenants. 82 Learners went online and completed 284 courses:

- **74** Completed the Pre-tenancy E-Learning Module.
- **82** Completed, 'Be the Change', an E-Learning package supporting Tenants who want to reduce their carbon footprint
- **76** Completed, 'Loan Shark Awareness', how to identify a Loan shark and safe alternatives for borrowing money.
- **56** Completed a DIY course on what to expect in your new property, what changes you can make and how to decorate.

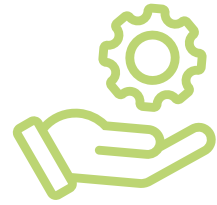
Feedback about the courses and support offered by TA has been positive, such as:

- *"I did Greenlight because I know it helps me get nearer to getting a Council place to live, but I did not realise all the help that the Council can give me when I am moving and when I have moved into my home. I am pleased that I have done the course and have information that I can use" DP*
- *Carla said about the 'Be the Change' course, "I enjoyed the course and would rate it 4 out of 5. It was very informative and easy to understand."*

Since November 2021, the TA team has been working with Crosslight Advice UK, Adult Community Learning and the Wiltshire and Swindon Credit Union to deliver budgeting courses for tenants. We delivered a face-to-face budgeting course to 5 tenants, supported 3 with online budgeting courses and worked directly with 2 applicants on the housing register, helping them to maximise their income and budget effectively. A further 20 tenants attended courses to improve their skills, the courses included cookery, a traineeship in childcare, Step into Employment and CV writing.

TA also worked with The National Training Academy helping tenants and staff to develop their understanding and increase their personal development. Ten courses include Adults & Children's Safeguarding, Food hygiene and Health and Safety were completed by six tenants.

# WORK EXPERIENCE



We also offered work experience to a young person from Horizons College. Having them work with us on lots of different projects has been rewarding for both the student and for us.

## Here's what they said about their time with us:

*"I chose the council since it fit my goals to get an office-type job need."  
"I have been working with the Tenant Academy since March 2022. I have learned how to use Chromebooks efficiently, how to behave in an office environment and I've improved my confidence in the workplace. I've loved the social attitude of the team and would work there again."*

**If you want to find out more about the Tenant Academy please scan this code with your smartphone's camera:**



The TA arranges training for staff to gain a housing qualification and supports our apprenticeship programme.



**9** Staff completing a housing qualification in 2021/22



**1528** Tenant Facebook followers



**10** completed their Level 3 Housing Apprenticeship (9 currently employed as level 3 apprentices)

# THANK YOU

**700+**

hours of tenant volunteer time

Through Street Reps activities, Community Café, TASH officers and members, the Safe & Sound group and those who gave feedback on the Allocations Policy review - thank you for your contributions - your feedback is valuable to us. Also thank you to the Tenant Complaints Panel who have reviewed three complaints over the year - making recommendations on how we could improve our service to tenants.

# STREET REPS



Tenants have been working with us to give us their feedback on how we deliver the housing service, reviewing areas of the Housing service and supporting their communities through:

The Swindon Street Reps continued to volunteer in the community through the ongoing pandemic restrictions, they reinstated the Penhill Community Café at the John Moulton Hall. The Reps provide a cup of tea and a biscuit or two and a friendly face for those that come along to chat and collect surplus food. The Penhill café runs for two hours on Tuesday afternoons, open from 1pm.

Reps have been volunteering in Stratton and Penhill picking up litter and helping the Parish and Neighbourhood Wardens, they have reported fly tipping and graffiti which was then removed. The Reps have supported their neighbours by signposting them to useful sources of information. The Reps continued to take part in our virtual Facebook café, set up at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to allow us to keep talking. The Junior Reps helped the adults with litter picking and gardening – a credit to their communities.

The Community Café has now restarted in Stratton, we will be supporting this – look out for more information in our Tenant Focus newsletter. Sign up now on our website: [www.swindon.gov.uk/newsletter](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/newsletter)

If you would like to join the Street Reps or are interested in setting up a group in your community please contact Nick Brock on 07881281845 or email [nbrock@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:nbrock@swindon.gov.uk)



# TENANTS ASSOCIATION OF SHELTERED HOUSING



## Helping promote the rights of all SBC sheltered housing residents

TASH is an organisation run by the residents living in sheltered housing, giving us a voice to express our concerns and try to resolve issues raised by residents and present them to Swindon Borough Council Housing. When we took on our new roles earlier this year, myself as Chair and Keith Andrew as Vice-Chair, we faced a very difficult job; how to build a new, re-invigorated TASH. Due to COVID-19 TASH had almost become a non-functioning group, we tried hard to keep it running but all meetings had to stop. Since then with our hard work, including the help of our consulting officers, we have rebuilt TASH.



Chair – Sharon (right) Vice-Chair – Keith (left)

We attended Homeline Roadshows to give a presentation to the residents to promote our brilliant organisation and get more residents to join us, making our voice even louder. We have been successful in our projects, and have also seen the Council deciding to increase the number of Sheltered Housing Officers. We felt that the Housing Review was wrong, reducing their numbers not only put more work on the current SHOs but also would be detrimental to residents.

We continue to support residents in their homes and currently we are looking at:

1. Improving parking facilities with better signage and clear blue badge spaces and, if possible, a new parking scheme.
2. Getting SBC Housing to look at some of its facilities contracts to include better window cleaning, new windows/doors and bathroom fitting.
3. To obtain the views of every resident on the recent proposal to extend the current pets in sheltered housing policy to potentially include a cat or a dog.

We would like to ask any resident thinking about joining TASH to contact us so that we can invite you to our meetings. These are held at the Civic Offices, transport will be provided if you need it.

For more information please get in touch with either myself:  
**Email:** [tashswindon@aol.com](mailto:tashswindon@aol.com) | **Tel:** 07711880069 or  
**Keith Andrew, Email:** [tash4salzgitter@gmail.com](mailto:tash4salzgitter@gmail.com)  
**Tel:** 07583506523

**Sharon Hunting** Chair of TASH



# SAFE & SOUND



Safe and Sound is a group for tenants living in properties with shared communal areas such as flats. The group meets monthly on line and discusses all aspects of safety with regards to high rise and communal living. The topics discussed cover our legal duties and issues important to tenants. If you live in a building with indoor communal space and would like your voice to be heard please **email [nbrock@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:nbrock@swindon.gov.uk) to find out more.**





# TENANT SCRUTINY PANEL

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It's been a busy year for us at Tenant Scrutiny Panel. In March 2022, we met online with fellow scrutineers and interested social housing tenants from Tenant Participation Advisory Service Wales. We delivered a presentation on the need for scrutiny, the process of investigation, and why it's important for tenants to be involved. If you would like to see more slides from our presentation please let us know.

## WHY IS SCRUTINY IMPORTANT

- **Scrutiny gives you the ability to participate in overseeing services delivered by the Council**
  - **The object of this is to ensure transparency, value for money, adherence to policy, and relevance to tenants**
  - **It is important to have tenant involvement as they are people directly affected by the policies and services**
  - **It also gives tenants the opportunity to initiate positive change where they feel it is necessary**
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# TENANT SCRUTINY PANEL

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## **Investigation: Contracted Services**

This year, the Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) investigated the Council's provision of extra contacted services: grass & hedge cutting, insurance and garages. We looked at whether the services provide value for money, and if they are efficient, cost effective and transparent. A summary of our findings will be published in a future edition of Tenant Focus, a copy of our full report will be available on request. The full report is sent to senior managers in Housing; we will follow up on our recommendations in six months.

## **In memoriam**

In June, this year we sadly lost our TSP Chair person, Phil Matthews. Phil was dedicated to his role in fighting for the rights of fellow tenants. TSP was often described as the Council's best kept secret, but, in his years as Chair, Phil worked hard to raise the profile of Tenant Scrutiny with tenants, the Council, and with other agencies such as Tpas, The Housing Ombudsman Service, The Adult Health, Social Care and Housing Scrutiny and Overview Committee, and many more. An avid Monty Python fan, he often joked that "Nobody expects the Scrutiny Panel!" as the Council often perceived us as popping out of the woodwork to scrutinise their services! Thanks to Phil that's no longer the case, not only are we are expected but our feedback welcomed. He will be sorely missed by all of us and we promise to keep his legacy going.



## **Complaints**

For over seven years, the TSP has been the Independent Complaint Panel for Stage 3 Housing complaints. Taking our role very seriously, we were committed to making sure things were put right for tenants where they had gone wrong. It was a privilege to work on these cases and some of the findings and recommendations we made as part of complaint resolution directly influenced our scrutiny work ensuring positive change for all tenants.

## **There's a place for you in Scrutiny**

We are broadening our approach to scrutiny reviews and we need your help! Our upcoming review topics will be published in tenant media, newsletters and Facebook, and by invite to you, our fellow tenants, to join us. It's important to have tenants involved in the Housing services we receive as they directly affect us! As you've read through this report you may have questions on how the Council runs and delivers services or suggestions for improvements, your input would be valuable to us.

**To find out more please contact us at [tpswwindon@outlook.com](mailto:tpswwindon@outlook.com)**

We look forward to seeing you.

# REFRESH

We had 10 applications for Refresh and were able to deliver 4 of these, 4 have been carried over into this year and two were refused because they did not meet the criteria. Refresh has provided soil, benches and planters for communal gardens and wildlife areas and equipment for tenants to accompany the Tenant Academy online courses. If you have an idea that will refresh your community in some way you can apply for funding to support your project. Please visit: [www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20056/council\\_tenants/275/apply\\_for\\_funding\\_to\\_refresh\\_your\\_neighbourhood](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20056/council_tenants/275/apply_for_funding_to_refresh_your_neighbourhood)



Refurbished planters courtesy of Refresh.

We support a Housing Facebook page and produce a monthly newsletter for tenants to keep them updated on what's new in housing – if you would like to contribute an article to this or have ideas for content please email us: [getinvolved@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:getinvolved@swindon.gov.uk)

If you are interested in volunteering opportunities we may have a space for you. To find out what that space looks like please email us [getinvolved@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:getinvolved@swindon.gov.uk) to find out more. We are always interested in new ideas so please speak to us. We can help with some expenses and equipment too.

# HOUSING COMPLAINTS

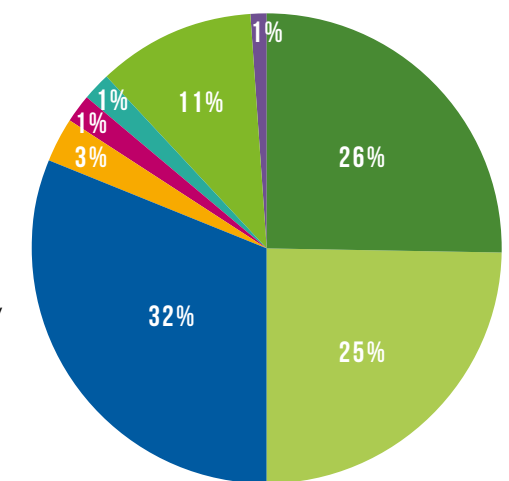


Tenant feedback is important to us, we regularly monitor the complaints we receive and review our responses to see how we could improve the service we deliver to you. To find out more about our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint please visit: [www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20022/contacting\\_us/463/complaints\\_and\\_feedback](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20022/contacting_us/463/complaints_and_feedback)

The Housing Ombudsman Complaint's Handling Code sets out the requirements for all housing landlords. Like all other housing landlords we have to complete a self-assessment and measure what we do against the standards set out within the Housing Ombudsman's Code. The self-assessment for Swindon is on the website and the link is: [www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/6838/housing\\_complaints\\_self-assessment\\_report\\_-\\_december\\_2021](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/6838/housing_complaints_self-assessment_report_-_december_2021)

Total no. of complaints received	<b>369</b>
Service Level Agreement (SLA) Stage 1	<b>Resolved within sla 347 not resolved in SLA 36</b>
Stage 2	<b>All 28 Resolved within SLA</b>
<b>94% of complaints were resolved within the required timescale</b>	

- Damage to property/vehicle
- Failure to deal with customer issue
- Failure to deliver a service
- Failure to deliver a service in a quality or timely way
- Incorrectly raising complaint instead of a request for service
- Issues with system or technology
- Other
- Poor treatment of a customer by SBC staff or contractors



# HOUSING COMPLAINTS



## Reasons for Complaints:

General repairs and minor adaptations	109
Repairs - Other or not sure	62
Tenancy services (housing officers and rent)	49
Damp and condensation and structural repairs	30
Gas repairs and servicing	24
External and internal planned maintenance	20
Other or not sure	17
Improvements and major adaptations	11
Customer modifications and disrepair	8
Electrical repairs and safety checks	8
Neighbourhood Wardens	7
Sheltered Housing	7
Garages	3
Homeline	3
Asbestos	2
Fire safety	2
Mutual exchanges	2
Supported housing	2
Water hygiene	2
Tenant participation	1

# THANK YOU

We would like to finish with a special thanks to the Tenant Complaint Panel who spent a lot of their time reviewing complaints in the last year. Their recommendations on how we could improve were considered along with some of the lessons we learned through our own review of our complaint handling process.

As a result, we have now put into practice the following changes:

- Making sure that tenants paying for contracted services, such as grass cutting, are aware of any changes to the service and/or cost.
- A review of the compensation policy to ensure consistency across Housing, this is now active.
- Changes to how we support tenants when they are having major adaptations made to their homes. Ensuring there is a single point of contact for updates and information.

## FIND OUT MORE

Sign up to our newsletter, **Tenant Focus**, at: [www.swindon.gov.uk/newsletter](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/newsletter) and search **Swindon Housing on Facebook**.

If you would like to find out more about anything mentioned in this report or get involved in reviewing how we deliver the housing service to tenants please email: [getinvolved@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:getinvolved@swindon.gov.uk)



