

A place  
to  
call  
home



*Annual Report 2020/21*





**376**  
**STAFF**



**11,362**  
**HOMES**  
*managed*  
*by FCHO*

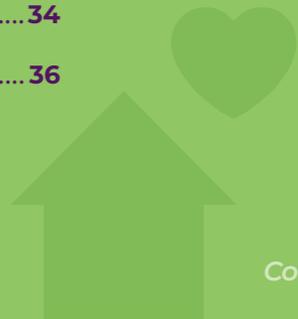
# Welcome to FCHO

**Take a look at how we make a real difference**

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*“Putting our customers first is at the heart of everything we do at FCHO.”*

Donna Cezair, CEO



# Wow... what a year it's been!

Hello and welcome to First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO)'s annual report for 2020/ 2021 – and wow what a year it's been!

We are Ron Smith and Jean Mira, and we are FCHO customers and part of the FCHO Board.

As we look back over the last 12 months in this report, we reflect on how hard the period has been, and continues to be. So much has happened, changing the lives of so many people.

During this time FCHO has had to change what we do and how we do it to meet Covid restrictions whilst continuing to support our customers. Throughout, our focus has continued to be on improving lives and being an excellent landlord.

With the help of colleagues and customers, who joined in with recruitment, our organisation welcomed our new [CEO Donna Cezair](#). Donna has over 30 years' experience in the housing sector. She began her career as a housing officer and has worked her way up. She is passionate about providing great homes and services in great neighbourhoods for all customers and is already having a really positive impact since her arrival.

Here is a snapshot of our work during this time.

We hope you enjoy reading our annual report and don't forget your feedback and opinions are important to us, the Board and to all teams within FCHO. We are listening, and you can help shape how things are done and make a real difference to help us improve lives.

Thanks

Ron & Jean



Ron Smith:

*"I'm very proud of what FCHO has achieved for our customers over the past twelve months. Despite all the challenges of the pandemic, our customers and improving lives in Oldham have been front and centre of our work.*

*From safely delivering repairs, carrying on with investment work to improve homes, making sure important support services are there for our customers who need them, to looking after our neighbourhoods and continuing to grow the number of new homes we are building, our teams have worked incredibly hard to deliver our services.*

*I joined the Board to make sure customers have a voice and I'd encourage you to get involved in opportunities and help make a difference in your neighbourhood."*



Jean Mira:

*"This was a year like no other and the Board quickly adapted and moved our meetings online to make sure FCHO's governance continued to be upheld. The pandemic hit Oldham hard and I'm proud that we stayed strong, together and focused on supporting our customers through this very difficult period.*

*Colleagues from across the organisation put everything into keeping the business going, delivering services for our customers and making a difference at a hugely challenging time; it truly was a whole business approach."*

# Hello & Welcome

| Our customer Eileen from central Oldham



# Your Voice

Hi, we are Kendall and Jess from Bardsley and we are part of the FCHO Customer Voice Panel (CVP).

There are 48 other customers on the panel, which was set up in August 2020. We work in partnership with FCHO to ensure we are at the heart of everything they do.

We help make sure any services and schemes that they develop support and benefit FCHO customers directly, as well as our local neighbourhoods and Oldham as a whole.

We've been FCHO customers for around two years and joined the CVP to help FCHO get better at listening to their customers. We've been involved in interviews for the newly appointed Chief Finance Officer and policy reviews for fire safety; Equality, Diversity and inclusion (EDI); and complaints policies. Already we've seen big improvements in the way things are done and that's very encouraging and makes us want to carry on being part of it.

We know, and FCHO has acknowledged, that some customers feel that they are not always listened to. We want to change this and so does FCHO, which is why they set up the CVP so they can hear our views.

**More about the Customer Voice Panel.**

## Together with Tenants Charter

Putting you at the heart of everything we do, strengthening our relationships with you and giving you more of a voice is so important to us, which is why in February we signed up to the National Housing Federation's (NHF) charter.

This charter was drawn up by the NHF after speaking to lots of social housing customers and housing providers. It sets out what you can and should expect from us as your landlord and how you can hold us to account when we don't get things right.

## Neighbourhood Champions

Twenty two customers who are passionate about their area and home and wanted to get involved in improving our services joined this new scheme, which we set up this year. They keep an eye on areas such as communal cleaning in blocks, ground maintenance and other services we deliver, with a view to making them better for you and making your area a great place to live.



**48** on our **CUSTOMER VOICE** people **PANEL**

Get in touch if you would like to make a difference and join the CVP or become a Neighbourhood Champion, we'd love to have you onboard.

**22** Neighbourhood CHAMPIONS



## Supporting you in the pandemic

We're really proud of the role we played in assisting our customers and helping to keep key services and support going through the pandemic.

We continued to deliver our services in the best ways possible, many digitally or over the phone. We set up office-based colleagues to work from home, ran courses online and equipped our frontline colleagues with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including branded face masks, gloves and sneeze guards in vehicles to keep them and you safe.

We made welfare calls to 5,047 of our customers who were over 70, or possibly vulnerable or isolated during the initial lockdown to make sure they were safe and well.

# 5047 WELFARE CALLS

made during first  
Covid-19 lockdown

Making sure they had enough food to eat; helping with financial problems; supporting customers' wellbeing or just having a good chat were some of the ways colleagues supported them during the calls.

A number of our colleagues and customer volunteers also swapped their usual day jobs to help support Oldham Council's critical frontline services in the borough, to ensure that the most vulnerable residents got the help they needed.

In addition to continuing to run our affordable food service for those in need, members of our Community Impact Team supported 'virtual hubs' across the borough and set up two satellite branches of Oldham Foodbank in South Chadderton and Shaw and Crompton. Our colleagues were among the army of volunteers helping to co-ordinate support for people who were unable to leave the house or didn't have a trusted friend, neighbour, or family member to help them.

Arranging deliveries of emergency food and essential personal and household items to people and helping them to access key services and support, were just some of the things they were on hand to help with at this difficult time.

Fifteen members of our staff volunteered with Age UK Oldham to support its telephone befriending service for older people, set up to help combat loneliness and deliver groceries to older people in the area who needed help.



# Supporting you

We celebrated the 100th birthday of one of our customers, May, and delivered a hamper to her, safely from outside her home.



**We continued to award grant money to local community groups through our Respect Our Community Awards (ROCA) scheme to help people through the pandemic.**

| Our customer Danny from St Mary's

## Respect our community Awards (ROCA)

This year we have funded a number of community projects through our ROCA (Respect our Community Awards). Recipients of ROCA funding included the Salvation Army, which set up doorstep 'singo bingo' sessions, and High Crompton Park Friends, who organised a socially distanced vegetable garden.

We launched a dedicated 'Coronavirus updates' page on the FCHO website, sent out newsletters to you and updated our social media messages daily to keep you in the know about the latest advice and information on our services.

Robin Bissell, Trustee at Diggle Community Brass, said:

*"We're a new organisation and the ROCA money helped us purchase equipment so we could play safely outside under*

*the Christmas lights and provide some much-needed entertainment for the local community."*

During the pandemic we also went to see some of our wonderful customers. Safely observing socially distancing measures, a local photographer captured some beautiful 'lockdown porchraits' of 27 groups of family and friends, which truly captured lockdown life in Oldham. As well as marking a significant moment in history, everyone who took part also received a professional photo with their loved ones leaving them with great memories and something to treasure forever.

Our brilliant 'lockdown porchtrait' customer stars are featured throughout this report. Including Danny, opposite, whose photo won a coveted regional award.

Emma Davison, FCHO Chief Operations Officer said:

*"The overall health and wellbeing of our customers and colleagues was, and continues to be, our top priority during the pandemic. The overwhelming response from our colleagues was that they wanted to be involved in the community in which we work, which is testament to their dedication and generosity. I'm so proud of them and our customer volunteers who were able to provide the extra support our communities needed."*

**£282,000**  
**FOOD SHOPPING**  
**savings** for our  
customers

## It's all about you!

Resident from our Alt neighbourhood, Alan Tupman, made his own piece of history in March, by naming a street at our new housing development there.

Out of 145 competition entries received from people across the borough, Mr Tupman's suggestion of 'Pear Tree View' was chosen as the winner of our street naming competition by an independent panel of judges. His street name will be displayed when the development is completed in August 2022 and he also won a tablet device.

Three of our brilliant customers won hampers with an array of local goodies worth more than £150 after taking part in our festive competition. We know that Christmas was a hard time for many, so we wanted to spread some seasonal cheer.

Susan Howarth from Shaw, Lesley Berry from Greenfield and Frederick Shires from central Oldham, were all winners.

Lesley said:

*"Wow, I am absolutely over the moon. I never win anything, so this has made my day! Thank you so much."*

**5**  
**AFFORDABLE**  
**FOOD CENTRES**  
in Oldham



**8133**  
**FOOD PACKAGE**  
**DELIVERIES**  
through  
**THE BREAD &**  
**BUTTER THING**

All about you!



# Affordable food

TBBT customer Emma with her daughters Layla and Evie, from Royton

## Support for you... our affordable food service

We know that some customers' circumstances changed due to the impact of the pandemic and lockdown that took place. Many of you have been unable to work, have had to isolate or have been placed on furlough, resulting in financial pressures, and this year, more than ever, many customers have needed our support.

Our affordable food service, The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT), which offers quality food packages for a small contribution, has been a lifeline to many people.

For just £7.50, customers' shopping bags are filled with a minimum of £35 worth of items made up of quality fresh food and store cupboard staples from supermarkets. Those with larger families have the option to pay £15 for a double order too.

The service helps increase the amount of disposable income in your pockets, so you don't have to choose between buying food, paying bills or buying other essentials.

To meet the increasing demand, in June we opened our fourth TBBT hub in Holts, followed by our fifth in February at Bethesda Church in Royton, making affordable food now available five days a week.

**366**  
**AFFORDABLE**  
**FOOD PACKAGES**  
delivered during  
pandemic

Pam uses the TBBT to feed herself and her family, Pam says:

*"I usually work as a sign language interpreter but I'm furloughed at the moment due to Coronavirus. I began volunteering at TBBT and I really enjoy going because it gives me something to do, but it also gives me access to amazing, high quality food which is enabling me to feed my whole family of five for as little as £15 a week!"*

*I just can't believe the quality and quantity of the food you receive and financially, it's saving me so much money each week."*



**156**  
customers  
SUPPORTED  
INTO WORK

# Help into work

✓ **118**  
TRAINING  
SESSIONS  
delivered

**541** YOUNG  
PEOPLE  
provided with  
WORK ADVICE

## Helping customers into work

Helping our customers find work or accessing training, development or volunteering has been particularly important this year. It's been tough due to lockdown and many places physically closing to work remotely or furloughing colleagues, but our Directions Team rose to the challenge! They delivered training sessions and provided work advice online and co-ordinated safe and secure volunteering opportunities and work shadowing for many people.

One of them was Simon, who was supported by the team after losing his job and suffering with low confidence. He needed an opportunity to really showcase his skills and prove to himself that his mental health wasn't

a barrier to him getting into paid employment, so we organised a placement with our Neighbourhood Services team.

*"I had an incredible time on placement and my experience will undoubtedly help me with my career."*

Fast forward to today and Simon has gained a professional qualification in Environmental Health and is looking forward to a successful career in the field.

*"I would like FCHO to know just how instrumental that nine-week placement was for me and the ongoing impact their work has for people in a similar position as me. The experience has stood me in good stead for my chosen career path and I'd like to say thank you."*

**90**  
WORK  
EXPERIENCE  
placements  
organised

**143** Volunteer  
opportunities  
arranged for customers

In November nine apprentices joined us to kick start their careers in construction and engineering.

We worked with several North West-based contractors who are delivering work for us, to take on the trainees, enabling them to gain valuable skills and get a head start in their future professions. Joinery, bricklaying, plumbing and gas engineering are among the trades they have been getting on-the-job experience in and learning while they earn.

Aaron, who is 36 and from Failsworth, is on the apprenticeship scheme with our gas contractor, Sure.

*"I left school at 16 and joined the forces for 15 years. When I left I wanted to re-train to get new skills to improve my job prospects and an apprenticeship was right for me."*

*Throughout my apprenticeship I've been part of Sure's gas installation team and I've been lucky enough to work with one of our most experienced engineers, learning from him and getting hands on practise I wouldn't have otherwise gained."*

# Money matters

Coronavirus didn't stop our Community Impact Advisor, Annarosa from improving lives in Oldham as she helped one of our customers erase nearly £3,000 worth of debt!

Our customer, who is a single parent originally from Zimbabwe, now lives in Oldham with her two children. She works as a self-employed tutor helping non-English speaking children with school work, but hasn't been able to work since lockdown began.

Annarosa assessed her financial situation, helped eliminate her debt and immediately signed her up to The Bread and Butter Thing affordable food service at our Wallshaw Street Hub. She also referred her to our Directions Team who has been helping her explore some different employment routes during lockdown.

**£265k**  
of DEBT  
WRITTEN OFF  
or BENEFITS  
CLAIMED  
after our support

## Care Leavers Pledge

This year we joined other housing associations across Greater Manchester (GM) to sign up for the GM Care Leavers Covenant Pledge.

We've agreed that we will do everything we possibly can to address inequalities care leavers face when coming out of the system.

Every year 2000 young people leave the care system in Greater Manchester, often without any support structures to help them in life. We will make sure that care leavers have a choice of home and our homes meet their needs.

Through our Directions Team and wider Customer teams, we are committed to helping them into training, further education and employment and will act as role models and mentors for them.

[More information on our pledge.](#)



# Financial support

Our customer Imtiax and her daughter Imam, from Moorside

**86%**  
CUSTOMERS  
SATISFIED  
with their repairs

**90%**  
SATISFIED  
with the  
OPERATIVE

# Your home & neighbourhood

Despite the pandemic and the lockdown, services, maintenance and investment works continued to be delivered.

**£13m** spent on  
**MAJOR  
REPAIR WORK**  
on our homes

## Where we have invested in your home



## Safety first

We know that feeling safe, secure and comfortable in your own home is a big priority for you, which makes it a big priority for us.

As part of our work to continually improve your homes and provide high quality, safe places for you to live, we're investing £6M in fire safety work which we've started to carry out on our blocks of flats, and which will continue over the next 18 months. This will include new fire doors; work to contain and stop any fire spreading, should it occur in our homes, plus sprinkler systems; new bin chutes; and upgrades to bin stores.

[Read full details on our Fire Safety Investment Programme.](#)

**24,926**  
COMPLETED  
**REPAIRS**  
reported by  
customers

**£4.03m** spent on these  
**REPAIRS**

**90%**  
COMPLETED  
ON TIME

**85%**  
FIXED  
first time

## Investing in your home

*“When you’re walking down the road and you look up, the building looks great – very pleasant and much cleaner. They’ve done a really good job on it. I think it’s a million times better and the end result was worth it.”*

Christine Lowe, resident  
of Littlemoor House

This year we continued with our stock condition survey programme which covered over 3000 of our homes. This involved us collecting information on our homes and their condition which has then fed into our long-term investment programme and improvement works.

This year we have spent £12.9m on major planned improvements on our homes, including replacing roofs, doors, windows, bathrooms and kitchens.

We’ve also spent an additional £4.3m on responsive repairs to your homes that you have reported to us. A further £2.7m was invested in homes that became empty in the year in order to bring them up to a standard to be re-let.

Our customers living in Littlemoor House and Montgomery House, are now benefiting from energy efficient homes with a fresh new look, thanks to a £2.6m refurbishment programme undertaken at the high rise blocks.

# Continually improving

# Your neighbourhood

**388**  
reports of  
**ANTISOCIAL**  
behaviour

**451**  
customers had  
**REPORTS**  
**RESOLVED**



We love our neighbourhoods, and we are passionate about making a difference and working together to build vibrant and safe communities where you love to live too.

This can be achieved by creating places where people treat each other with respect, consideration and behave in a way that is socially acceptable.

We know that when this doesn't happen, it can have a huge impact on your lives and the lives of others, and antisocial behaviour and fly tipping are some of the main concerns you have.

We have dedicated teams who deal with any issues in your neighbourhoods so please do contact us.

In February our Neighbourhood Co-ordinator Lisa worked with Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for an operation in Coldhurst to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Lisa joined officers on patrols around the area following a recent rise in ASB-related crime and incidents by youths who live in the Coldhurst and St Mary's neighbourhoods.

Lisa said:

*"The purpose of the patrols was to flood the area with a joined-up presence of local law enforcement teams and provide reassurance to members of the local community."*

*It was really useful to accompany GMP in this operation and target some of the troubles that have been ongoing in the area."*

**£42k**  
awarded to  
**COMMUNITY**  
**PROJECTS**



**We know that improving the green spaces where you live is also important to you.**

We've invested £10,000 in planting trees this year in FCHO-owned green space to help make your neighbourhoods more attractive now and in years to come. This also improves air quality and helps to reduce our environmental impact.

When a green-fingered customer from Littlemoor had her community garden vandalised and plants stolen by heartless thieves in June, we stepped in.

Along with local business, Booths Garden Centre, we donated plants, pots, soil and planters to get the garden growing again.

Anita, who has been tending the garden since 2019, said:

*"When I saw that the plants and pots had been taken, I was so sad, because how dare they just walk through and just take things like this? When I was told that new plants and pots were being donated, I cried because I didn't expect it. It was wonderful. Thank you very much – it means a lot."*

**£10k**  
invested in  
**PLANTING  
TREES**

in our neighbourhoods



# Green spaces



**84**  
**HOMES**  
*built & rented*

# New homes, new futures

We know there is a huge shortage of social housing nationally and in Oldham, and we are committed to building new high quality, modern homes to help ease the housing crisis for local people and make sure you have a home which matches your needs that you can call your own.

This year we have built 84 fantastic new homes in Werneth, Middleton, Royton and Failsworth, all providing affordable housing which have had a positive impact on the lives of our customers.

Customer Shanayde said:

*“We had a two-bedroom house in another part of Middleton, and space was tight for seven of us. I’ve been applying for bigger properties for five years without success and when Maz our Neighbourhood Co-ordinator told us I’d got this new home, I cried because I was so happy. My eldest son, who is autistic, will have a proper bedroom and my little girl has finally got her own room. There’s great space outside in the garden to enjoy the summer and it’s in a good spot for schools. It’s so big and such a nice house – it’s just perfect for us.”*

**96** Homes  
**BEING BUILT**



## **The planet**

**We are absolutely committed to tackling climate change and this year we are developing a new Sustainability Strategy, our roadmap to providing sustainable and affordable homes, whilst minimising our environmental impact.**

We are implementing greener ways of working, including cutting the carbon footprint of our existing and new homes through solar panels and innovative storage systems, boosting biodiversity in neighbourhoods by planting wildflowers, trees and ‘Bee bombs’, swapping petrol powered machinery for battery operated options, and upgrading our van fleet to more sustainable vehicles, amongst other things.

**We know that there’s much more work for us all to do and we are on it!**



## ***Our flagship development - West Vale***

**Located close to Oldham town centre, West Vale is set to be our new sustainable development right in the heart of Oldham.**

The currently empty Crossbank House and Summervale House tower blocks will be demolished and replaced by a range of high quality, affordable new homes in a vibrant neighbourhood where people, families and businesses can thrive.

Lots has been going on over the last year, from disconnecting the services, removing asbestos along with building the new substation that will support the new homes. In terms of the new development we've applied for planning permission and have been progressing the development design with our preferred contractor. We've been speaking to local people and stakeholders throughout this to get their input at every stage. They have had their say in areas including the design of the homes, parking provision and traffic management, how the homes will be allocated, heated and recreational space, which is great.



# West Vale



## ***When we don't always get it right***

**We want you to love living in one of our homes and neighbourhoods. However sometimes we know we don't always get it right and you may not be completely happy with the service we provide.**

It's important that you let us know if this is the case so we can improve and make things better for you and other customers.

We've made it as simple as possible to for you to raise issues. You can contact us in a number of ways to make a complaint and get it resolved. When we are dealing with you, we will give you timely advice and keep you informed at all stages. We have a group of customers who help us learn from complaints at a monthly meeting, helping us make sure the same problems don't happen again.

**Let us know if you are not happy with our service.**



# Talk to us



## **Big thank you**

We would like to say a **BIG** thanks to all our customers, colleagues, volunteers, partners, Board members and friends who we have worked with and who've supported us throughout the past year - we really couldn't have done it without you.

We know it's been a tough one, but we've all pulled together to help and support each other and we've made it through!

Here's to hoping 2021/2022 will bring better times for everyone. We've got lots to look forward to, including a brand new three-year corporate plan where we have some BIG ideas on doing even more to improve lives and create homes we are proud of, so watch this space!

# Thank you



# About us

we manage  
**11362**  
HOMES

**100%**  
of RENT  
COLLECTED

How every  
**£1** of  
your rent  
is used



## How happy are you?

LANDLORD SATISFACTION  
**83%**

REPAIRS SATISFACTION  
**86%**

NEW TENANCY SATISFACTION  
**85%**

BLOCK CLEANING SATISFACTION  
**69%**

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SATISFACTION  
**66%**

CALL CENTRE SATISFACTION  
**86%**

**5047**  
**WELFARE**  
**CALLS**

made during first  
Covid-19 lockdown

**48** on our  
CUSTOMER  
VOICE  
PANEL  
**people**

**376**  
**STAFF**

**4750**  
customers on  
**UNIVERSAL**  
**CREDIT**

**22**  
Neighbourhood  
**CHAMPIONS**

**257** **44%**  
**COMPLAINTS** /SUPPORTED

**£282,000**

**FOOD SHOPPING**  
*savings* for our  
customers

**5**

**AFFORDABLE**  
**FOOD CENTRES**

*in Oldham*

**366**

**AFFORDABLE**  
**FOOD PACKAGES**

*delivered during*  
*pandemic*

**8133**

**FOOD PACKAGE**  
**DELIVERIES**

*through*  
**THE BREAD &**  
**BUTTER THING**

**156**

**customers**  
**SUPPORTED**  
**INTO WORK**

**541** **YOUNG**  
**PEOPLE**  
*provided with*  
**WORK ADVICE**

**90**

**WORK**  
**EXPERIENCE**

*placements*  
*organised*

**£265k**

*of DEBT*  
**WRITTEN OFF**  
*or BENEFITS*  
**CLAIMED**

*after our support*

**118**

**TRAINING**  
**SESSIONS**

*delivered*

**143** **Volunteer**  
**opportunities**

*arranged for customers*

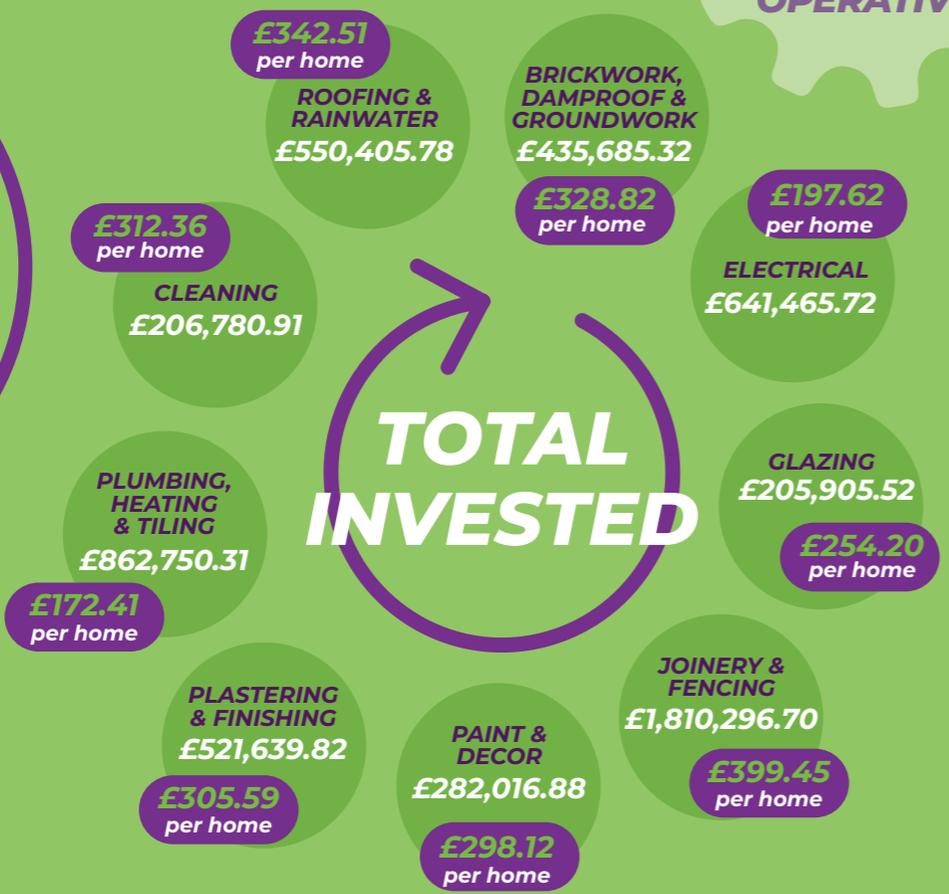
**£13m**  
spent on **MAJOR REPAIR WORK**  
on our homes

**86%**  
CUSTOMERS  
SATISFIED  
with their repairs

**90%**  
SATISFIED  
with the  
OPERATIVE

Where we have  
**invested**  
in your home

**TOTAL INVESTED**



**£42k**  
awarded to  
COMMUNITY  
PROJECTS

**£10k**  
invested in  
**PLANTING TREES**  
in our neighbourhoods

**24,926**  
COMPLETED  
**REPAIRS**  
reported by  
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spent on these  
**£4.03m REPAIRS**

**85%**  
FIXED  
first time

**90%**  
COMPLETED  
ON TIME

**84**  
HOMES  
built &  
rented

**96** Homes  
BEING BUILT



## *In memory of Zerg*

In October we said goodbye to our much-loved friend and colleague Zerg Raja, who sadly passed away after a very short illness.