



Customer Annual Report

2021-2022

**Abri**

Creating communities,
empowering lives

Introduction

It's been two years since we became Abri and we've been building on our foundations to deliver a great service to our customers. We know we don't always get it right, but we will keep listening to our customers, and continue to make the changes needed until we do get it right all of the time.

We believe that we're approaching this work from a good foundation of positive progress:

- we invested in and expanded our responsive repairs and planned works team
- we've introduced a specialised customer care team, covering our repairs and maintenance service
- we're two years into our five-year £15m community investment, which focuses on employment, empowerment, and health and wellbeing activities in our most deprived areas
- we held eight listening workshops across our operating area, focussing on challenges our customers faced – the overarching theme was our customers simply want a good service

We recognise that the last 12 months have been difficult for many people. For lots of reasons. A rapid increase in energy costs, particularly the wholesale price of gas, has been a key driver of inflation. UK petrol and diesel prices have also hit their highest levels on record, driven by a sharp rise in global oil prices. While we don't have any control over the rising costs, we have and will continue to signpost customers to useful resources to help those struggling with their bills.

We're pleased with the good work we've done over the last year. But we recognise that there are always areas to improve. Part of this means being much more transparent in how we work, listen to and act on requests from our customers.

Our new housing services strategy, Customers First, will drive our response to the proposed new consumer standard (from 2022) and focus on five areas, and we've used these five themes to shape our Customer Annual Report:

1. keeping our properties in good repair
2. maintaining building safety
3. effective complaints handling
4. respectful and helpful customer engagement
5. responsible neighbourhood management

We know that the basic building blocks of customer satisfaction are a great, well-maintained home, backed up with a highly effective housing management and repairs service. If we combine this with clear communication and knowledgeable people on the ground who are empowered to make decisions in the best interests of our customers, then our customers will get the high-quality service they need and expect.

Above all, we will listen and better communicate our approach and the challenges we face, unashamedly telling our story of making a positive difference to people's lives and to our communities. We might be a big organisation, but we'll never lose our local touch.



Ralph Facey
Executive Director of
Operations

Our Resident Scrutiny Group

Resident involvement is one of many ways that Abri listens to and works with our customers to improve and shape our services. We want to make sure we hear and listen to our customers. We need to make sure that what we hear is heard throughout Abri and that our customers have the chance to influence our services and policies and be confident that we're acting on your views.

Abri's Resident Scrutiny Group (RSG) is made up of 18 customers and run by the independent Chair, Kevin Williamson. The group aims to provide constructive criticism on the services that Abri provide and is responsible for holding us to account for its decisions and actions.

Over the last year, RSG has completed two scrutiny review reports focused on what customers said were their priorities.



1. Repairs report

The Repairs report was led by a project lead from the RSG. They started by reviewing different topics such as:

- Allocations of works and waiting times
- Efficiencies of services
- Use of sub-contractors
- Communications with customers

It was found that timescales of works are longer than they should be and this was due to the pandemic. The RSG plans to continue monitoring the timescales of works in order to determine if this is reducing as the pandemic eases.

The RSG also recommended that action is taken to reduce the number of jobs being assigned to subcontractors, as this could create higher cost efficiencies for Abri.

The RSG highlighted that there needs to be better data to gain performance insights about 'getting it right first time' as this was identified as a highly important factor for customers.



2. Sustainability report

Like the Repairs report, the Sustainability report was also led by a project lead from the RSG. The process they undertook for this report included:

- Reviewing Abri's documented approach to sustainability
- Reviewed information from other Housing Associations about sustainability and compared this to our approach
- Meeting with colleagues across the organisation to discuss each element of sustainability at Abri.

Out of this review, the RSG recommended that Abri creates a fuel poverty action plan, so we can know which of our customers are fuel poor or are likely to become fuel poor.

They also recommended that Abri looks at short-term fixes such as providing water butts and installing LED lighting in communal areas. It was noted that Abri should consider switching empty properties to a green energy tariff.

Next steps

Many residents are facing a challenge to their living standards that is without recent precedent. As a 'critical friend', RSG will continue to provide customers with real influence over how Abri develops, delivers, learns and improves; so that where it can, it can lean into these headwinds together. RSG is currently looking into ASB, which will be the next review to come from the group.

Our reviews and scrutiny activity are led and delivered by residents. Every spring we consult all Abri's customers about what they want their scrutiny group to review in the coming year. This year we had around 800 responses, which identified programmed maintenance, value-for-money, communications and complaints handling as top priorities.



We'll be sharing our full plan for 2022/23 shortly, as well as regular progress reports in the coming months.

Kevin Williamson
Independent Chair of the Resident Scrutiny Group

Our Corporate Strategy: Achieving Together 2020 – 2025

Abri's first ever corporate strategy Achieving Together was formally launched in 2020. In 2022, we refreshed our corporate strategy and created a dedicated set of eight priorities to help shape our thinking, our actions, and our identity. Of course, there are corporate priorities that will be ever present, such as ensuring our services meet our customers' needs and our commitment to help build new homes.

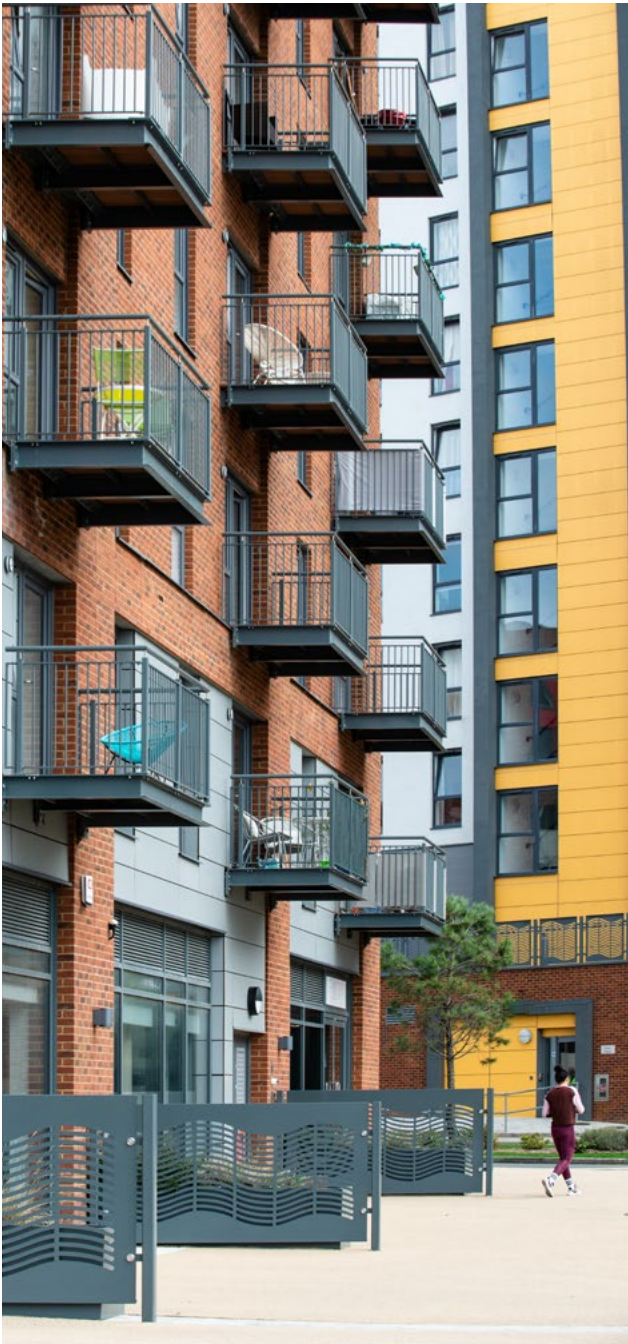
Everything we do is powered by three core beliefs:

- everyone has the right to a safe, warm and sustainable home
- homes and communities are places to belong, grow and thrive
- equal opportunity must exist for communities so everyone can have improved life chances

Our shared beliefs help us to work together, in depth and over the long term, with our partners and customers. We support what we do with outstanding customer care and comprehensive, responsive and accessible services.

Above all else, we work with our customers on the basis of equality, trust and respect. Every area of our business is inspired by this ongoing partnership. We are dedicated to creating communities and empowering lives.





Abri's eight strategic priorities:

1. build more homes;
2. invest in our homes;
3. get really good at customer service;
4. create thriving communities;
5. make all of our communities more inclusive;
6. create a great place to work;
7. manage our business to the highest standards;
8. climate crisis: creating a sustainable future

Our priorities are just one of the ways we measure our performance, ensuring we're delivering for our customers and enhancing communities.



Corporate Strategy Refresh

March 2022



Our performance

Tenant satisfaction measure

Our performance

Keeping our properties in good repair

- **25,000** repairs carried out
- completed **123,000** responsive repairs
- **92.37%** of our repairs were completed on-time, with a total spend of **£33m** (repairs and cyclical).
- spent **£22m** on our planned works programme
- delivered **497** new kitchens, **367** new bathrooms

Maintaining building safety

- Fire Risk Assessment compliance **100%**
- **£3.9m** cladding project investment
- **110** blocks surveyed
- Gas Compliance **99.98%**
- **25,276** gas services
- **18,237** gas repairs
- **9,806** of electrical inspections completed

Effective complaints handling

- Post repairs customer satisfaction **81.9%**
- **47%** of complaints were closed at the first point of contact
- On average, it took **19.59** working days to resolve formal complaints (Stage 1) – this is within Abri's extended service level agreement
- **62%** customer satisfaction with our handling of complaints
- **8%** of complaints escalated to Stage 2, where a customer was dissatisfied with Abri's initial response
- We received **20** formal investigations from the Housing Ombudsman

Tenant satisfaction measure

Our performance

Respectful and helpful customer engagement

- Our income team made over **60,000** outbound calls to support customers in financial crisis
- **3,618** involved customers taking part in meetings, consultations, and sessions in the community
- **3,750** responses to our Pet Policy, Safer Lives and service improvements consultations

Responsible neighbourhood management

- **100%** of our Partnership Living support and care providers were rated as good or great
- **97%** of our customers living in our housing for older people were supported to establish and sustain their capacity to live independently
- Our Welfare and Benefits teams worked with our customers to secure them an additional **£3.2m** in income
- Let **144** market rent properties to customers with an average let turnaround time of 21 Days
- Responded and supported **402** new reports of domestic abuse
- Dealt with **886** new anti-social behaviour (ASB) cases
- Our tenancy sustainment team supported new customers and achieved a **98%** success rate for first 12-month sustainment
- Let **1,815 homes** (1,459 relets and 356 new builds)
- Supported **385** mutual exchanges

Our Impact

Social Value generated: **£5m**

500 people into employment or better jobs

£570,000 funding leveraged

236,000 calls answered/received

97% of customers living in housing for older people supported to live independently

£3.2m income secured by our Welfare and Benefits teams for our customers

98% success rate for first 12-month tenancy sustainment.

£65,000 of community grant funding to **47** organisations

£590,000 Partnership Funding for local projects

Social value

Social value is a term for capturing the full net value an organisation provides to society. This can include how an organisation supports the local economy, for example by helping local people into employment or buying from other local businesses; or activities that provide other benefits, such as promoting opportunities for disadvantaged groups or reducing waste.

Another way to think of it is as a social and environmental return on investment. For every £1 you generate, how many pounds in wider value are created for society?

Abri's social value generated has increased by over £1m to £5m in 2021/22.

Community investment

In the financial year 2021/22, key achievements include 500 people into employment or a better career, £65,000 community grant funding distributed to 47 local organisations, £570,000 external funding leveraged to support programme delivery, and £5m social value generated.

We've also referred 1,161 customers for training and support, developed partnerships with 10 employers across our community investment zones, and delivered 13 Abri Work Academies. This has enabled 127 people to undertake training, with 78 securing employment with the employers, 19 securing work elsewhere, and eight securing volunteer roles.



Between June 2021 and March 2022, the community team delivered 26 Community Empowerment interventions, engaging 912 people and 85 health and wellbeing interventions engaging a total of 3,264 people.

We awarded £590,000 Partnership Funding to 27 organisations across seven of our eight community investment zones. This funding is for our partner organisations to deliver projects that will support our Community Strategy core priorities – health and wellbeing, employment or empowering the community.

This year, projects have included, improving green spaces and neighbourhoods, provision for youth activities, emotional and practical support and guidance for families and individuals, improving work ready digital skills and connecting community resources.

Six have come to a natural end during the financial year, and have impacted the community by contributing to reduced summer youth ASB, improving wellbeing and reducing isolation by connecting people to activities in their area, reducing anxiety and stress by providing information and guidance on topics such as

homelessness, bereavement and parenting, connecting people to our employment services, and supporting positive action during periods of poor mental health, relationship breakdown and addiction recovery.

To support the delivery of our community investment plans 25 partnership consortiums are now established across all eight Community Investment Zones. In December 2021 our Round About Café in Mansbridge was refurbished to include a community pantry to support the local community. The café and pantry re-opened in January helping customers facing rising costs of living by accessing food for a fraction of the cost of supermarkets and reduce local food waste. By March 2022 the pantry had 94 members.

Our performance against the proposed Tenant Satisfaction Measures

The Regulator of Social Housing recently consulted on a new set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) as proposed in the government's Social Housing White Paper. The Social Housing White Paper outlines what social housing residents should expect from landlords such as Abri and enable customers to hold their landlord to account and understand how they are performing. We encouraged our customers to respond to the consultation. We did this through Abri's Resident Scrutiny Group and through a survey on the customer portal.

The proposed tenant satisfaction measures are intended to provide a set of clear, comparable metrics on issues that matter to customers. They cover the five principal themes of the white paper: keeping properties in good repair, maintaining building safety, effective complaints handling, respectful and helpful tenant engagement and responsible neighbourhood management.

We've used the five proposed TSM themes to shape our Customer Annual Report and have tracked our current performance against them.

1. Keeping properties in good repair

Why is this important?

Investing in our homes is one of our eight corporate priorities, after all, a safe, warm and decent home is a basic ingredient for a good life. We're also alert to changes in compliance and will be proactive in relation to new legislation, making sure our homes remain safe and that they meet or exceed all relevant regulations. We will continue to engage directly with our customers to ensure we understand their views about the things that matter most in their homes and the shared spaces around them.

We have embedded procedures that align with government guidance and social housing regulations to make sure our customers are treated fairly. Our procedures provide customers with the opportunity to get involved with the management of their tenancy and holds us, as landlords accountable for our actions.

What have we heard

Understandably, our customers want choice, and want to be heard, when it comes to how we're making repairs and improvements to their homes. This year our post repair customer satisfaction was recorded at 82.1%. We want to put customers at the heart of the service we offer so that we learn from what our customers tell us and act on their feedback. To do this we'll be using and implementing real-time customer feedback through new technology, and we've already made some customer-focussed service improvements.

YOU SAID:

"Why do I have to wait so long for my repair? And why can't jobs be completed first time?"

WE DID:

We've recruited more than 120 trade operatives this year which means we've added 23% more operatives to our workforce. This means we'll be able to respond to repairs and complete planned works more quickly with a bigger team.

And we've implemented a new van stock solution to support more first-time fixes.

In addition to increasing the size of our repairs team, we've allocated 1,500 repairs and 70 empty homes to external contractors to reduce customer wait times. Our aim to resource more jobs for more customers delivered by our own team this year, so we're less reliant on contractors or partners.

We've also introduced a specialised customer care team within our repairs and maintenance service to review all of our customer contacts and how we can improve. We've also delivered customer service training to more of our frontline tradespeople to set higher expectations and offer a consistency experience.

Professional, competent colleagues

We know that the speed with which we carry out repairs is of the utmost importance to our customers. Because of this, we realised that we needed to grow our trades team. Although recruiting skilled tradespeople has been tricky this year - not just for us, but for everyone. It's meant we've had to rely on external contractors a little more than we would have liked.

But by increasing our recruitment activities and advertising in our communities, we've welcomed more than 120 new faces to our maintenance team. This puts us in a better place to deliver on offering more services from our own team.

We've faced challenges in accessing materials, too and have been working with our procurement partners to offer the best opportunity to be able to complete works on our first visit and to readily source the materials we need for our future works.

We want to ensure that every contact with our customers is a positive one. To make this happen we've introduced a specialised customer care team, covering our repairs and maintenance service, to review all of our customer contacts and improve on what we already do.



Disrepair

This year our focus has been on tackling disrepair. These are structural things like exterior damage, water heating, toilets, basins, baths, and anything considered a health and safety risk. We've been tackling the root cause of dampness and mould in our homes, especially where it's appeared because of structural failure. This could be due to a leaking roof or damp-proof course, or defected heating or extraction.

We know that the buck stops with us and we take full responsibility for maintaining decent, comfortable homes. But what we don't want is for our homes to have fallen into disrepair simply because we haven't been made aware of any issues. We were also aware that the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns may have contributed to certain issues not being resolved as quickly as we would have liked.

This is why we've launched a campaign designed to help unearth more cases of disrepair at our homes before they get any worse. This will help us make sure that our customers' homes remain in good condition.

As part of this, we invested an additional £1.4 million to improve the standard of our homes. This spend has been put towards communal decoration and maintenance programmes, carrying out deep cleans, and in some places, steam cleaning, to improve the appearance of some of our blocks. And these funds will also be put towards improving the standard of decoration of many of our Independent Living schemes too.

Maintaining quality homes and quickly identifying and addressing any issues causing disrepair, damp or mould will continue to be a top priority of ours.

CARLTON ROAD NORTH

We took on the management of properties in Weymouth that are in a conservation area affected by special controls. We overcame the planning obstacles to complete full internal communal area decorations at eight of these buildings and upgraded all of the communal floor coverings. In total, we invested more than £85,000 in this programme of work.

ORCHARD HOUSE

We completed a full internal redecoration of communal areas at Orchard House, an independent living scheme in Alton. As well as decorating communal spaces like the lounge and games room, we repaired any damaged handrails and corridor doors, as well as cleaning all of the UPVC windows before replacing the carpets at the scheme. We invested nearly £70,000 to complete the works to modernise the building and offer a brighter communal space for the residents living there.

SAWYERS CLOSE HEATING UPGRADE

In February 2022, we started our heating replacement programme at 192 homes at Sawyers Close. The upgrade involves installing new, more efficient storage heaters into every flat. These heaters are fitted with a digital programmer allowing customers to have better control over heating their home. To make sure we got it right for our customers we held a heating information event to talk about the programme of work. More than 40 households attended, and we've regularly kept all customers up-to-date on the project progress.

What's next for 2022/23?

In 2022/23 we're creating a repairs and maintenance service that is consistent with our customers' expectations. Alongside this, through our learning and development and Housing Professional of the Future programme, we'll continue to shape, develop, and support our housing management team, prioritising empathy, housing knowledge, and a desire to get the best outcomes for our customers.

From 1 April 2022, Travis Perkins will become our building materials supplier, City Plumbing will become our plumbing and heating materials supplier, and Rexel UK will be our electrical supplier, for our teams to exclusively source materials.

Our enhanced relationships with all three suppliers will mean we can improve the quality, efficiency, and overall performance of our supply chain, offering us better value for money.

By having the same material suppliers, we will be able to standardise our offer to our customers across our geography. This will mean we'll be able to introduce one Abri van stock system for all our trades colleagues, too. We're confident this will also reduce our carbon footprint and bring about the opportunity to use more sustainable materials.

2. Maintaining building safety

Why do we do it

The safety of our customers is our highest priority, it's why we're committed to engaging our customers in a transparent and inclusive way throughout any fire and building safety works.

We've established a fire safety steering group to manage our risk-based approach to building and customer safety. This group responds to the Fire Safety Act, draft Building Safety Bill, Social Housing White Paper and the Grenfell Enquiry (Phase 1 and 2).



CLADDING PROJECTS - LINDEN & BRYON, SLOUGH

We completed a full building safety audit for Linden and Byron House, which are home to over 200 customers living in 96 flats. This led to a cladding replacement programme and a number of subsequent upgrades.

We replaced the cladding on these two high-rise buildings which are over 18m in height. We've engaged an experienced contractor who has specialised in using non-combustible cladding and insulation replacements. Their work is also independently checked by a specialist consultant, Keegans, to make sure it meets safety standards. In addition, the buildings have been fully inspected by Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service and, for as long as it was necessary to ensure customer safety, we implemented a Waking Watch 24 hours a day.

At the same time, we replaced all the windows on both buildings. This will help to reduce heating costs for customers and decrease carbon emissions. We've upgraded the fire alarm system, as well as the heat and smoke detection system, within each flat. This is networked direct to the fire service which means they'll be able to get to our customers much faster if needed. A chair evacuation system has also been installed, along with new LED emergency lighting in the staircases and corridors.

We've kept customers informed through webinars, letters, emails, text messages and a recently installed digital notice board. A team of staff were available throughout the project to answer questions. To make it easier for our customers, we also had a direct email address where they could send in questions. We issued regular cladding, housing and community updates and surveys asking for their feedback, as well as having a Resident Liaison Officer assigned to each building.



Fire safety

In the financial year 2021-2022 we've been upgrading our buildings, which includes replacing fire doors. This protects the rest of the building from the spread of fire and smoke. We do this to save lives.

We have a duty to follow the fire safety obligations to make sure fire doors are subject to a suitable system of maintenance. We've changed fire doors for the safety of our customers, so that in the event of a fire the doors will help stop the fire from spreading. They're also easier for our customers to use.

Electric and gas compliance

Every year our repairs and maintenance team test and service gas supplies and appliances for our tenants across the region, as required by law.

This year we carried out 25,276 gas services, which means all homes with gas appliances that need to be checked have a valid gas certificate.

Our gas team achieved 99.98% gas compliance. Our team also carried out 9,806 electrical inspections, with 78.3% properties within a five-year programme.

What's next for 2022/23?

Legislative recommendations have informed our Fire Delivery Programme for the next four years. As part of this we're continuing to work on cladding projects at our High-Risk Residential Buildings (HRRB), including at Mulvany Court, Berry Court and Park Reach.

We strive to maintain 100% compliance with our fire risk assessment key performance indicators.



3. Effective handling of complaints



One of our eight strategic priorities is to get really good at customer service which links to how we can effectively handle complaints. Our performance is regulated by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code which was introduced in July 2020 setting out good practice that allows landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. Following a review, the Housing Ombudsman has updated the Code to strengthen provisions to support a positive complaint handling culture. The changes took effect from 1 April 2022, and landlords have until October 2022 to be compliant.

In response to this, Abri will be completing a self-assessment against the new Housing Ombudsman Code during quarter one of the new financial year. We'll publish the result on our website, offering customer assurances on Abri's compliance with the Code and best practice complaint handling. Any learnings from the self-assessment shall be considered. An action already underway includes the introduction of a complaint handling related objective for all Abri colleagues.

What we did in 2021/22

We were able to increase the amount of complaints closed at the first point of contact throughout the year, and we hope to maintain this going forwards into 2022/2023. We responded to complaints faster and within our extended service level agreement. We hope to improve on this further. The quality of our written responses has also improved, as evidenced by the majority of customers being satisfied with the outcome of their Stage 1 complaint. We also held monthly meetings with customer facing teams, providing visibility of our complaint performance and agreed service improvement opportunities to reduce customer dissatisfaction going forwards.

In February 2022, Abri began a pilot of an automated digital survey solution. We now only ask about the handling of the complaint, in a one-question approach. We've made sure that every customer is given the opportunity to feed back on their complaint experience by using an automated survey solution, instead of manually contacting only a sample of customers. We'll continue with this pilot and gather more insight into how we can demonstrate best practice complaint handling.

We created Customer Complaints Panels, an independent panel made up of volunteer involved customers. Our Stage 2 complaints process lets the customer choose if their concerns are reviewed by a senior manager within Abri, or the Customer Complaints Panel. The panel then review the complaint and make recommendations to Abri to put things right.

What have we learnt?

We know that improvements can always be made in our complaint handling, including keeping customers up to date on our progress investigating their concerns and this is our priority for the coming year.

Our 'Know Our Customer' panel listens to our customers' feedback and involves them to identify key areas for improvement by using customer satisfaction data. An action plan is now under continual review to improve our services and our customers' journey with us, and we're pleased that we've been able to not only improve our complaint handling process, but also increase the size of our trade teams to reduce repair waiting times.

What's next for 2022/23

Continuous improvement, working better with our colleagues to understand the problems our customers face.

Abri will move to one set of integrated systems, providing the opportunity to improve the quality of data gathered about customer complaints and the root causes of issues. We'll then continue working to improve our service offering.



4. Respectful and helpful customer engagement

Why is this important?

One of our corporate priorities is to create thriving communities and empower lives. Customers are the experts on where they live, so it's key that Abri listens and engages with customers. Abri must also comply with the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard (TIE Standard), which has been established by the Regulator of Social Housing. It's there to make sure our customers are treated fairly and that their voices are heard. That's why we're working with our customers to drive the continuous improvement of our services, ensuring they can have influence and be involved in the organisation. Our Voice of the Customer framework and resident involvement ensure customers can shape Abri's services and influence change.

Performance

We've engaged with over 3,000 involved customers during 2021/2022. But we know we can do better. Our resident involvement review started in February 2022 and will see us changing our offer based on what our customers, colleagues and research tells us. We'll be sharing how we'll be changing our offer based on this in the autumn.

Over the last financial year, customers have been involved through:

- Resident Scrutiny Group
- Customer Complaints Panel
- Resident Involvement Review Group
- Youth Sustainability Group
- Voice of the Customer panels (Know our Customer, Safer Lives Panel, Thriving Communities)
- Your Voice
- Online consultations
- Coffee and chat sessions

And lots more

GETTING BACK OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY

We've been getting out into our communities and holding community action days and coffee and chat sessions with customers, local partners and teams from across Abri. These provided a chance for our customers to come and chat to us about what's happening in their area, what their concerns and interests are, and how we can support our customers and their communities to bring about positive change. In Salisbury, we held a coffee and chat session with Wiltshire Police, Selwood Housing, Community First and the parish council.

It was a chance for us all to chat with the local community and find out what matters most to our customers. The police tagged bikes, CAP (Christians Against Poverty) gave financial advice, health and wellbeing coaches, employment and housing teams were available. These will be held regularly.



What have we done?

A. Listening workshops

We reached out to our customers in November 2021 to ask them what they thought of our service and make sure our priorities still matched those of our customers. We ran eight listening workshops across the areas where we have homes. Conversations were focused on the challenges customers are facing, how Abri can help tackle these challenges, what Abri does well, and what Abri can improve on. In total, 75 customers provided feedback through the workshops. In addition, 539 Independent Living (IL) customers responded to a survey about services in their schemes.

The overarching theme that emerged from the sessions and the IL survey was that customers simply want Abri to deliver a good service. Customers feel that it takes too long to complete a repair, resolve a complaint, and address defects. And customers weren't being updated about what was happening with their repair/complaint. The feedback was used to refresh our corporate strategy (launched March 2022) and shape the housing services strategy, Customers First, which will be launched in 2022.

B. Consultations and policies

Service improvements

We have continued to involve customers in shaping new initiatives and reviewing progress against our Community Investment Plan (CIP) delivery plans. At the end of 2021, 150 residents took part in consultations to shape new services.

Pet policy

We wanted to create a pet policy that supports customers having a pet but also make sure it's the right decision for everyone. So, we asked customers a set of questions to help make sure we created a policy that they agreed with and is flexible, suiting every situation and type of customer. We had 2,563 customers take part in the consultation. We used all of the feedback to draft a pet policy that we think is fair for everyone. It addresses customers concerns, considers the benefit having a pet can bring and also considers government guidance.

Safer Lives consultation

Our Safer Lives panel aims to keep customers feeling safe in their homes and communities by reviewing safety related customer feedback and improving services from these findings, and using our business intelligence to identify hotspots for investment in safety services and working with partners to support initiatives. In June 2021, 1,037 customers helped us understand how we can make our homes and communities safer, through our Safer Lives consultation. Broadly, customers felt safe in their homes, but feedback highlighted that there is work to be done around anti-social behaviour, which we are taking steps to tackle. All the feedback has been used by our Safer Lives panel to create action plans that address the concerns raised.

Tenancy agreements

We reviewed our legacy tenancy agreements to ensure we adopt the best from each to meet our customers' needs. And we carried out an external review from the panel solicitor to make sure we meet industry best practice. We received feedback from a customer group on our proposed changes to gather their views on the changes we were proposing.

Tenant satisfaction measures

We asked customers to help shape our response to the Regulator of Social Housing on their proposals for tenant satisfaction measures. The measures are being designed to help customers hold their landlord to account, as our performance will be judged against them.

The white paper included 22 proposed satisfaction measures across five themes:

1. Keeping properties in good repair
2. Maintaining building safety
3. Effective complaints handling
4. Respectful and helpful tenant management
5. Responsible neighbourhood management.

Most customers who responded to our survey on the measures strongly agreed or agreed with the proposed tenant satisfaction measures. And they strongly agreed or agreed that they would provide customers with the information that they want about Abri's performance.

The full consultation response from the government will be published in the summer (2022), with the new requirements coming into force from 1 April 2023.

C. Voice of the Customer (VOC)

Our Corporate Strategy outlines a commitment to listening to customers to drive improvements throughout the organisation. In July 2021 we simplified our VOC framework with three committees – Thriving Communities, Safer Lives and Know your Customer.

Thriving Communities consists of five residents, who have steered development of plans for each Community Investment Zone and regularly visit customers and organisations in our Community Investment Zones to understand and monitor progress against the Community Investment Plan (CIP) for the area. They have approved £65,000 of community grant funding to community groups in the financial year 2021-2022.

And they established the Resident Involvement Review Group (RIRG) to look more specifically at customer involvement. RIRG commissioned a third-party provider to carry out the triennial resident involvement review. The aim of this review is to ensure that we improve the way we listen and involve customers and ensure compliance against the TIE standards and future legislation proposed in the Social Housing White Paper. The outcome of the review will be reported in the autumn of 2022.

What's changed?

The feedback from the eight listening sessions and Independent Living customer survey was used to underpin the Corporate Strategy Refresh and proposed Housing Services strategy. We continue to regularly engage customers via our resident involvement offer and will be updating our offer based on customer engagement later in 2022.

Housing services strategy – Customers First

Our new housing services strategy, Customers First, will re-establish a powerful sense of local ownership and accountability for improving services to customers, homes, and neighbourhoods. This programme will put our frontline colleagues right back at the centre of our organisational design. We'll improve our connection with communities and elected representatives, listen, and better communicate our approach and the challenges we face.

As part of improving the way we listen to customers we appointed a new 'live feedback' research partner. This digital feedback platform was implemented towards the end of 2021 and will deliver significant improvements to the current survey methods used across the business. We have in addition appointed a new STAR satisfaction survey partner (IFF).

And we work closely with local groups and resident's associations to listen to and respond to their concerns.

RESIDENT'S GROUPS

Residents groups can help customers foster a sense of pride and bring the community together on issues that affect them. Importantly it gives them a voice. Something that we're passionate about supporting.

Kieran Jones, Community Development Officer at Abri, worked with residents in April Square, Portsmouth, and local councillors, to set up April Square Resident's Association (ASRA). Six residents have signed up so far and have already made big improvements. They worked together to get funding from the police to block off the cut ways which were being used for fly tipping.

Rick Hallmann, Chairman of ASRA, said: "Resident's associations can really bring the community together and give them a united voice along with opportunities to fund raise and improve the street.

"People living in inner cities often feel isolated and if they have mental health problems, this can be even more of a problem. Reassuring everybody that they and their opinions matter can only be a healthy thing.

"It also gives the residents a feeling of security because they will personally know their neighbours as friends and know they have support should there ever be an issue."





Our priorities for 2022/23

Resident involvement review

In April 2022, we completed our consultation on how customers would like to be involved in shaping Abri's services, and which areas of the business they'd like to be involved in. We will be using the findings from this, our consultation with colleagues, and industry research, to propose a new resident involvement offer for our customers. This will be shared in the autumn of 2022, when we will be launching a campaign to increase representation on our customer panels and involvement options.

Area panels

As part of changing our customer involvement offer, we will be introducing four area scrutiny panels. These panels will be made up of customers who will be able to make suggestions for improvement and help shape and change the services we provide. We will launch this campaign in 2022 alongside our new housing services strategy, Customers First.

Consulting with our customers, partners, colleagues and local organisations remains a fundamental part to our community investment and engagement work. So, we'll also continue to build partnerships with local organisations and authorities so that we can better respond to the changing needs of the community, facilitate conversations, and feedback what our customers are saying to us.

5. Responsible neighbourhood management

Why and what is it?

We exist to create thriving communities and empower lives. It's our central mission and one we fully believe in. And part of this is making sure that customers feel safe and happy in their homes and neighbourhood. We have a zero-tolerance approach to abusive, discriminatory and violent behaviour in our communities. That's why we have dedicated teams to support customers with community safety matters, as well as helping them maintain their tenancy and support them with their finances.

Inclusion and belonging are a top priority for Abri. While we have made some good progress, we can and will do more starting with our first annual Inclusions and Belonging report that we published in March 2022 ([read the report here](#)).

This report helps hold us accountable to the objectives we set ourselves for the next year. It also shows us how far we have come already and what we can be proud of at Abri. In 2022/23 we will be collecting EDI data from our customers so that we can better understand where we need to improve or adjust our services to meet need and also plan for the future and implementing our Safer Streets action plan.

Performance

- 100% of our partnership living support and care providers were rated as good or great
- 97% of our customers living in our housing for older people were supported to establish and sustain their capacity to live independently
- Our Welfare and Benefits teams worked with our customers to secure them an additional £3.2 million in income
- We let 144 market rent properties to customers with an average let turnaround time of 21 days
- We responded and supported 402 new reports of domestic abuse
- Anti-social behaviour (ASB) reports continued tracking up towards the end of the year, but year on year is down.
- Dealt with 886 new ASB cases this year
- Our tenancy sustainment team supported new customers and achieved a 98% success rate for first 12-month sustainment
- We have let 1,815 homes this year (1,459 relets and 356 new builds)
- We have supported 385 mutual exchanges

A. Inclusive communities

We know that some of the communities we serve are disproportionately disadvantaged. We think that inequality exists when society, organisations and people don't embrace diversity and fail to be inclusive. In our communities and places of work we value everybody without prejudice. We want to make a meaningful contribution to improving inclusion and equality of opportunity for our customers.

We have a clear plan to strengthen our protected characteristic data for our customers and however customers interact with Abri, we will ensure that we have looked at their route into our organisation through an EDI lens and have done all we can to create an inclusive environment. We will make sure that we have thought about EDI in both the design and delivery of all our services. We recognise we have a lot to do, but by making diversity and inclusion one of our eight corporate priorities, we can ensure we report a positive step change by 2025

SUPPORTING YOUNG SEND PEOPLE INTO AVON AND SOMERSET CONSTABULARY

We're working with local employers, schools, colleges and support agencies to secure supported employment opportunities and outcomes for our young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Somerset.

We are also working with Avon and Somerset Constabulary to break down barriers to participation and creating an incentive to engage and create innovative supported employment pathways.



B. Customer safety

The safety and wellbeing of our customers and communities is important to us, which is why we took the opportunity to respond to the Government's Violence Against Women and Girls call for evidence, in relation to the work we do to support customers who are experiencing or at-risk of domestic abuse.

HELPING CUSTOMERS FIND A SAFE HOME WHEN EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE

Miss C moved into an Abri property to escape domestic abuse from her ex-partner. She told us that much of the relationship had been abusive, including physical, verbal, and sexual abuse, as well as controlling and coercive behaviour.

Miss C was very worried that her ex-partner would come looking for her. If he found her, she was scared that he would assault her, and that it could possibly lead to her being killed.

She was terrified of agencies releasing information to her ex-partner, and so she was hesitant to allow them to become involved.

She decided to flee the property and she didn't feel safe enough to return. She was completely isolated with no friends or family nearby and needed a lot of emotional and practical support.

We referred Miss C to a domestic abuse service, and helped support her in applying for housing with the local authority. We provided supporting letters to request higher banding. Our Financial Responsibility team looked at her finances and helped her apply for a Discretionary Housing Benefit Payment, which would support the moving process.

She successfully found a new home and said how thankful she was for someone listening and believing her when she spoke about the abuse she had experienced.

This year we launched our Safer Streets action plan, which sets out to improve the level of safety among both our colleagues and customers. We also launched a bespoke piece of research into women's safety and following this our community safety and tenancy compliance teams, who support our customers experiencing domestic abuse, have received specialist training to help keep people safe at home.

ADDRESSING HATE CRIME IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Michael lives with his partner Bobby. The couple got in touch with us after they heard neighbours using homophobic language about them and graffitiing on their garage.

They contacted the police as well as our teams. We installed additional security measures and worked with the Police to help keep them both safe in their home by granting permission to put up CCTV to point onto their property to help catch who was responsible for the graffiti.

Fatima got in touch with us after her neighbours were causing lots of noise and flicking cigarette butts down onto her property. When she approached her neighbours, they told her to “go back to her own country”. After fleeing a dangerous home country, it was particularly distressing for her and her family to hear those comments from their new neighbours.

So Fatima got in touch with us and the police and we were able to work together to keep her family safe. We made a victim support referral, as well as taking a stand against the abusive behaviour of our neighbours to take a stand against the hate crime using our tenancy enforcement powers.

C. Customer investment

We're two years into our five-year £15m community investment, which focuses on employment, empowerment, and health and wellbeing activities in our most deprived areas. It has positively promoted community cohesion during an exceptional public health crisis and economic downturn.

Consistent with our stated aim to 'go where the need is greatest', we've defined eight Community Investment Zones (which contain 13 neighbourhoods). These zones reflect the communities where many of our customers, face some of today's most challenging issues. We've created bespoke Community Investment Plans (CIPs) with a flexible response to emerging needs for those neighbourhoods (take a look at the plans [here](#)). Here is where our customer voice is so important, listening to what our customers need, and adapting what we deliver in our communities based on their feedback, partner organisation feedback and our own research. This is even more crucial during the cost of living crisis.

By prioritising our employment service, focusing on supporting our customers to access better employment opportunities, gain new skills and explore their full potential, we have helped customers take back financial control of their lives. Paired with a strong focus on empowerment activities, working alongside customers to ensure they have a real say in how their communities develop and thrive, we can actively play a part in the government's 'levelling up' agenda, creating communities where people want to live. We believe in the power of communities and will continue to listen to our customers about how to support, maintain and develop the places in which they live.

ABRI WORK ACADEMIES

Our Abri Work Academies (AWA) helped 95 people into work and 136 to access training in 2021/22.

They see us work in partnership with employers, across a range of sectors including sales, customer service, care, construction, logistics and event management, to fill vacant positions. We offer employment support and training, and participants get to meet the employer too, to find out more about them.

We've held 11 AWAs across Portsmouth, Gosport, Windsor, Slough, Southampton, Whitehill & Bordon, Alton and beyond. We've worked with local companies, and some big names too, including Legoland, Tesco and Victorious Festival (pics below).



LOVE TO PEDAL



The Love to Pedal project has been running across our extra care schemes in South Somerset and Dorset. It provided seated pedalling group activity developed and funded by Somerset Activity Sports Partnership (SASP) and was set to videos from well-known local walks of different levels. It provided opportunities to share stories and relive experiences following the isolation of lockdowns. This project was enjoyed for both the exercise and the social opportunity. Love to Pedal aimed to improve the health and wellbeing of older adults, invigorating them to take charge of their health through safe, low impact and easy-to-access exercise.

Residents have enjoyed it:

"It gave me time to relax and enjoy the other people for company and a chat"

"The company and doing something together was the best bit"

"It was enjoyable and great to be able to socially get together"

"I enjoyed it and would like to do it again; I could not use my feet but did it with my hands"

Our Independent Living colleagues, who helped support the project, highlighted the recognised improvement in residents' physical ability and mobility confidence as the project progressed.



D. Tenancy sustainment

Our teams signpost customers to access additional support around money management. This year our team has supported 840 new customers in the first year of tenancy and 161 customers at risk of losing their tenancy. We supported families for help with items such as mattresses and bedding, furniture and white goods, and food and fuel vouchers preventing £155k of appliance poverty.

Income recovery

Many of our customers have money worries, and the challenges of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis have brought these even more to the fore – but we offer support to help customers feel more in control of their financial wellbeing.

Rising cost of living

We know that many of our customers have struggled to keep up with their household bills, especially due to rising inflation and the higher cap on energy prices brought in this year.

While we don't have any control over the rising energy costs, we have and will continue to signpost customers to useful resources to help those struggling with their bills.

What's next for 2022/23?

Our working group and action plan to prepare for the introduction of the Social Housing White Paper has been reviewed, we have established a good state of preparedness for the introduction of the Consumer Standards. This will be further enhanced in 2022/23 as we implement the new housing services strategy, Customers First, which includes a focus on:

- New and demonstrably effective management responses to the issues that reduce community wellbeing, such as ASB, litter, and poorly maintained shared spaces.
- Redirecting existing resources to actively sustain the tenancies of those who are most vulnerable to the effects of fuel poverty and other rising living costs.

Partnership Living changes being made

We've developed an action plan to improve the service areas our customers were most unhappy with. This includes more 'right-first-time' fixes, and how we can improve the management of our cancelled repair jobs.



MAKING OUR HOMES SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE FOR OUR CUSTOMERS

A fire risk assessment was carried out at one of our Partnership Living properties, and it was found that some changes needed to be made to create a safe path from the bungalow to the fire meeting point. Our Partnership Living team visited the property and the customers shared some feedback how the garden could be even more accessible. The grass area was very bumpy which meant you couldn't push a wheelchair on it, cutting off parts of the garden to our customers.

There were other problems like the doors opening inwards which made it challenging to push a wheelchair out of. We arranged works to be done so that the customers could fully use and enjoy their garden. A new slabbed path was made, the doors were changed to open outwards and extra handrails were added around the garden. All these changes made the garden so much more accessible, and our customers no longer have to miss out because of their disability, making the customer feel safer in their home.

Independent Living service redesign

In response to customer feedback, we're exploring ways to align and improve our services to make sure we continue to provide a high quality, consistent experience of housing management and housing related support services for our residents.

Our wider customer focus

Everyone deserves a place to call home, we are passionate about helping to solve the national housing crisis, which is why we're always looking to do more. Our customers are at the heart of all that we do, so as well as meeting the needs of customers who rent our homes, we're also focusing on providing really good service for people who are looking for affordable ways onto the housing ladder.



Help to Buy

As one of Homes England's three Help to Buy agents, Abri has helped 350,000 households secure their own home under this government scheme. We are proud of the work we have done to support Homes England to help more families own their first home, especially during a period of unprecedented demand.

After an exceptionally busy first year, we have now seen Equity Loan (EL) volumes stabilise towards the latter part of this financial year. Demand for Affordable Home Ownership (AHO) schemes has continued to be high with an average of 5,978 applications received per month in 2021/2022. We currently have 94,846 registered applications for AHO. We ended the year meeting all of our key performance indicators with 99% customer satisfaction* and strong net promoter scores.

Our Help to Buy Contact Centre received over 81,000 calls, the team processed nearly 16,000 EL applications and over 71,000 applications were received for the AHO schemes (Shared Ownership and Rental). In April 2021 to March 2022, we had just over 15,000 Equity Loan completions.

Shared Ownership

Abri has been able to offer a range of homes to buyers throughout the south and south-west of England from small to large houses and apartments. Shared Ownership has helped to meet their needs by offering a more affordable route to home ownership. We helped 299 buyers move into their new homes last year and we also helped 188 of our customers buy more of their homes through staircasing.

We've also moved quickly to introduce the new Shared Ownership model, which has changed the minimum initial share that buyers can purchase from 25% to 10%. This more flexible approach allows buyers to benefit from buying a smaller share and making the first step on the housing ladder more manageable. Furthermore, the ability for buyers to staircase by 1% means they can more easily increase the equity in their home. The introduction of a ten year period, from the date of the lease for any repairs to the external fabric of the building and any structural repairs inside the home, also gives buyers added assurance that their home is covered.

To help our customers with their Shared Ownership journey we launched our new Abri Homes website, a sector-leading digital platform for information and guidance on home ownership, with intuitive tools such as a user-friendly interactive map highlighting availability of our new homes, and useful budget calculators to help understand how much a customer may be able to afford. It has already attracted over 21,000 new visitors enabling us to help more customers on their journey to finding a new home.

RECENT GRADUATE CHLOE FINDS HER DREAM APARTMENT

After finishing university, Chloe returned to her family home in Alton, Hampshire. When she got a new job, Chloe decided it was time to find a place of her own and was pleased to discover that Shared Ownership was available in the area she wanted to live in. Chloe now owns a two-bedroom apartment at Pembers Hill Park in the peaceful village of Fair Oak.

"When you've just graduated, owning a home feels like it's almost impossible.

"Having grown up in a market town, Southampton just felt too big a place to call home, so I widened my search area and discovered the Pembers Hill Park development in Fair Oak. I looked online and very reluctantly dismissed it as I didn't think I'd be eligible for Shared Ownership.

"I didn't have a lot of funds saved up, but I'd seen case studies and testimonials from other buyers talking about Shared Ownership, so I decided to enquire about it. I'm so glad I did. The Abri Homes team was able to talk me through my options and point me towards mortgage advice.

"I feel really lucky – it's a dream to own a home. I love being able to style it all myself and really make it my own!"

FIRST TIME BUYER SECURES HER NEW HOME WITH SHARED OWNERSHIP

Rebecca decided that it was the right time to purchase a property on her own. Having spent a number of years living in the region, she was pleased to find out there was a Shared Ownership scheme available, just around the corner from her previous address. She now owns a two-bedroom house at the Abri Homes Foxglove Meadows development in the bustling village of Hutton.

“When you’re looking to move out into a house of your own, finding somewhere that you can call your own becomes even more important to you. The familiarity, security and sense of belonging that comes with having your own space was the main driver for me when I was looking for my new home.

“Shared Ownership is something I’d never considered before but was an ideal option that allowed me to get on the property ladder for myself. I’d looked at other places on the open market nearer to Bristol, but would have had to have bought a smaller apartment, with limited outdoor space. By buying through Shared Ownership, I’ve got the benefit of having all the small touches and the quality that goes into a new build. I didn’t have to do anything to my new home when I moved in.

“The finish of the home is immaculate. The attention to detail here is amazing and I’m so proud to call this home mine. I did my research, and that, backed up with the support from Abri, has made all this possible.”



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