

# 2022



## ANNUAL REPORT

Almond achieved 96% sustainability score for tenancies,  
helping people to stay in their homes longer.

## CONTENTS

01	CHAIR REPORT	p2
02	CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT	p4
03	OUR CUSTOMERS	p6
04	OUR HOMES	p12
05	OUR PEOPLE	p20



# 01 CHAIR REPORT

Having taken up the reins as Chair of the Board in September 2021, I am pleased to be writing this report at a time when we have been able to return to a more normal way of life.



I am equally pleased that both the Board and I continue to benefit from the experience of my predecessor, Martin Joyce, who remains a valued Board member.

This year has seen the organisation establish our Business Plan for the next three years. It outlines how we intend to deliver continued improvement in service delivery to our customers and ongoing investment in both our homes and colleagues.

We are determined to provide our customers with services which are flexible and responsive to their needs, but we are also mindful of the very difficult financial challenges which many customers are facing. Our plan is therefore one that we believe can deliver desired improvements to our services while ensuring continued value for money and support for any customers who need extra help.

Alongside the creation of our plans for the next three years, we also established a vision and mission statement for Almond. We believe our vision statement '*Striving to improve life experiences and opportunities*' conveys the part we want to play in the community over future years.

I believe that we are well placed to achieve our ambitions and would like to thank my fellow Board members, Almond HA colleagues, and all our customers for their continued support during my first year as Chair.

My best wishes to each and every one of you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Adam Turner'.

Adam Turner



Striving to improve life experiences and opportunities.





Homes, people and communities to be proud of.

## 02 CEO REPORT



I am pleased to note that this year has seen the continued delivery of strong performance across the majority of service areas.

Building on our interim improvement plans from last year, we have now established our three-year Business Plan for 2022 to 2025.

In addition to the key priority areas of Homes, Services and People, we have also established improvement strategies covering Digital, Sustainability and Development of new homes.

Both the overarching Business Plan and supporting strategies are aimed at delivering improved customer service and increasing the positive impact that Almond HA plays in the wellbeing of the local community by exploring and developing local training and employment opportunities.

At a time when the financial pressures faced by our customers are as severe as has been seen for many years, our plans aim to ensure both improved service delivery and increased support being provided to those who need it.

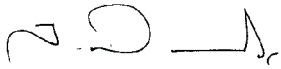
By modernising how we deliver services, we believe we can enhance customer service and free up resources to focus on activity which has a greater impact in areas where there is the greatest need.

Alongside the establishment of our mission and vision statements, we have also agreed our values with our Board and colleagues. Importantly, it will be these values which guide how we do things, as much as what we do. Such values will also guide how we interact with our customers and while I hope that the experience of dealing with Almond HA is a positive one, we are keen to hear when we get things wrong so that we can continually learn and improve.

I would like to express thanks to our Board, colleagues and the various partners we have worked with over the past year for their continued support and positive can-do approach. Moving forward, we are keen to involve more customers in our journey and would encourage anyone who is interested in providing feedback or getting involved in shaping our work to get in touch.

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

Best wishes,



John Davidson



## 03 OUR CUSTOMERS

In last year's report we advised that we would be looking at the development of a three-year improvement strategy for customer care. We identified that alongside the development of this longer-term plan, we would also implement some interim measures to improve our services. These measures included reviewing our telephone services, office access and digital services, as well as getting to know our customers better. By knowing our customers better, we can ensure that our team receives the necessary training and tools to deliver a great service and even anticipate customer needs.

We are pleased to report that we have made good progress against each of these during the past year. We have recently received a report which summarises the information provided by customers via the profiling survey. Thank you to those who completed the survey (over 50% of our tenants). Analysis of this information will allow us to tailor service delivery and wider service provision to the needs of our customers. Where appropriate, this will inform how we contact individuals and it will allow us to support groups of tenants who have identified specific challenges they are facing. Any customers who have not yet completed the survey can contact us to provide the relevant information and allow us to tailor our services to their needs.

Feedback we have received from customers this year aligns with previous information which identified digital and telephone access as their preferred method of contact. Having established an improved telephone system we are now working on a project to introduce a new Customer Relationship Management system which will give colleagues the information they need to be able to answer most customer enquiries at the first point of contact. It will also ensure that we can track enquiries more effectively and respond within an agreed timescale. As well as focusing on our telephone system and digital access, we also reviewed our office opening hours this year and changed these based on customer feedback.

Building on the work above, our Customer Care Strategy outlines how we will continue to focus on improving the customer experience. A fundamental part of this approach is ensuring that we listen to the views of our customers about how we could do better. Customers who have signed up to our consultation group will have received survey questions via our new text system. This is providing us with valuable feedback on an ongoing basis, letting us know when we are doing well and when we could do better.

Throughout the past year, we continued to demonstrate our commitment to being more than just a “bricks and mortar” landlord by helping tenants who faced greater challenges than they anticipated. Our Welfare Benefits Advice service, run by The Action Group for Almond HA tenants, worked hard to assist 146 households with financial difficulties. The service generated almost £300,000 in income for our tenants through a variety of means: helping with appeals; new claims; backdated awards; budgeting advice; and energy suppliers. With the cost of living becoming more of a challenge, this service will continue to offer assistance to those in need.



Drew McLellan

As well as the Welfare Benefits Advice service, our customers had access to a Tenancy Sustainment Service provided by Housing Options Scotland. Assisting 140 households with things like securing furniture, white goods, floor coverings, internal decorations, mental health support, assisting with mobility and accessibility issues, energy suppliers and support for moving home, they handled a variety of challenges which can often overwhelm anyone in a moment of crisis. The service received positive feedback from users, with 100% of respondents saying the service had helped them and they would recommend it to others or use it again.



### INVESTING IN OUR COMMUNITIES

We are proud to have engaged with and invested in our communities through the uncertainties of the past year to help sustain and strengthen the local neighbourhoods, by delivering projects and services with long-lasting positive outcomes. By working collaboratively, we know that together we can achieve more for local people. We also know from working with local groups that there is an abundance of enthusiasm and ideas out there, so to help bring these to fruition we were delighted to provide 19 groups with funding. Each project and activity will help communities where our housing stock sits. Activities include cooking on a budget, digital devices, mental health and wellbeing, food provision for struggling households, school uniforms and counselling. We remain committed to supporting and collaborating with local residents and groups to identify gaps in provision and help them to secure grant funding.

**97% of our customers calling to make a payment said staff were friendly and helpful.**





Our contractors supplied wood to create raised beds in Rowan Grove Community Garden.

Growing Together is one of many projects that we have helped community members to secure funding for. Under the guidance and expertise of the West Lothian Youth Action Project staff, 14 young people transformed an unused piece of AHA land behind Rowan Grove into a wonderful new garden for the whole community to enjoy. It was a huge task, but the sense of pride and achievement of the young people involved has been quite simply amazing. Young people who were disengaged from school even before Covid-19 took hold had understandably struggled during lockdown and as restrictions eased, being able to work alongside staff from the West Lothian Youth Action Project proved a lifeline for them. They designed and built a huge array of planters, different sizes, shapes and some with added seating and a pergola. Residents, young people and children from three local schools all worked together to plant up the new raised beds and are now enjoying picking the fruit and vegetables.





There has been some really positive feedback from local residents about the Growing Together project and it has encouraged a flurry of planting activity across the Craigshill community. Residents have been sharing and dividing plants which they have then planted in shared spaces in their streets. A variety of open sessions have been held at the community garden, encouraging local people to visit the gardens and pick the vegetables and fruit. The new garden hosted themed storytelling sessions for local families, with an appearance from The Gruffalo, Peter Rabbit and The Tiger Who Came to Tea. The sessions were organised as part of our Imagination Library initiative and encouraged local people to visit the new gardens and help themselves to the freshly grown produce. Additional grant funding was secured to extend the Growing Together project to March 2023 and saw the introduction of an additional partner, The Conservation Volunteers. An extension to the garden area is planned alongside a calendar of weekly activities for the whole community to enjoy.

## TENANT PARTICIPATION

In addition to the delivery of our customer care strategy, we are in the process of refreshing our approach to tenant participation. This is part of a wider strategic review to identify how we ensure greater community impact, including how we can provide training and employment opportunities. Central to achieving success in this area includes engaging effectively with our customers in ways that are suitable for them. Good news or bad, it is vital that our customers share their opinions on how we are doing and what services we should be providing. We want to continue to give customers the opportunity to provide feedback using traditional methods such as group meetings and drop-in services, but we also recognise that technology can offer a quick and easy way for people to engage and share their views with minimal effort.

We will contact all tenants as we develop our approach, but in the meantime, we ask any tenants who are interested in helping us to improve our services to get in touch.



**Dolly Parton's Imagination Library posted 1128 books to children of our tenants this year at no cost to the families.**





# 04 OUR HOMES

Throughout the past year we have invested £3M on planned improvements within our properties. Post pandemic our contractors continued to face significant issues as a result of labour shortages, supply chain issues and rising costs. This aside, we delivered the majority of our planned works which included new kitchens, bathrooms, boilers and windows. In total we completed the following:

**236 BOILERS AND HEATING**  
**£446,194**

**83 BATHROOMS**  
**£327,896**

**66 WINDOWS & DOORS**  
**£435,836**

**76 KITCHENS**  
**£332,329**

The legal requirement for smoke detectors to be upgraded by the end of February 2022 was met, with the systems having been upgraded over a number of years to ensure our stock was compliant with the new standard by the deadline.

There were some changes to the outside of properties too. Render was replaced on seven blocks and 14 houses at a cost of £442,075, ensuring the blocks concerned remained watertight and had a fresh new look. Significant improvements were made to fencing in Craigshill, with 111 homes benefitting from new fences at a cost of £289,044.

The year ahead will see us deliver more of these component replacements and develop our future programmes to ensure we are continuing to deliver high-quality works while achieving value for money for this expenditure.

Over the last year we spent £2.775M on repairs. This was 40% higher than the previous year and a result of repairs not being reported during periods of restrictions. Historically, we have always used two reactive repairs contractors but in October 2021, one of these contractors advised us that they intended to withdraw from their contract. Following negotiations with Response Maintenance Services (Scotland) Ltd, they agreed to take on the other contract which means they now deliver reactive repairs across all areas. They have, and continue, to face significant challenges in recruiting trades people to expand their team to the required level and it is likely that the impact of this will be seen into 2022/23.



Work to improve the quality of data we hold in relation to our stock continued over the year. Over the next 12 months we intend to identify works required to improve the thermal efficiency of our properties and reduce their impact on the environment. In the last year, 21 properties had Photo-voltaic panels installed, 10 with battery storage.



Our cyclical programme of works ensured that almost 25% of Almond properties have had external painter work carried out over the year. Gutters were also cleaned in 50% of properties by our subsidiary company, Almond Enterprises.

Safety remains our top priority with gas, electrical, ventilation and fire safety checks carried out across all our stock, along with 334 winter checks for households aged 65 or over.

Alongside the winter checks, we delivered a Christmas campaign this year to support our tenants in their homes. We provided winter wellbeing packs for those who received a winter check. These packs included some essentials to help tenants through the winter months. We also asked tenants to nominate a neighbour to receive a festive gift hamper. This gave tenants an opportunity to say thank you to the people in the community who go above and beyond to help make life easier for others. We also supported the community to put on some fantastic activities and events, including a festive storytelling session with Mickey and Minnie at Rowan Grove Community Garden.







All residents affected by the Katherine Street fire have been found suitable homes and will remain in these until the works to the Katherine Street block are complete.

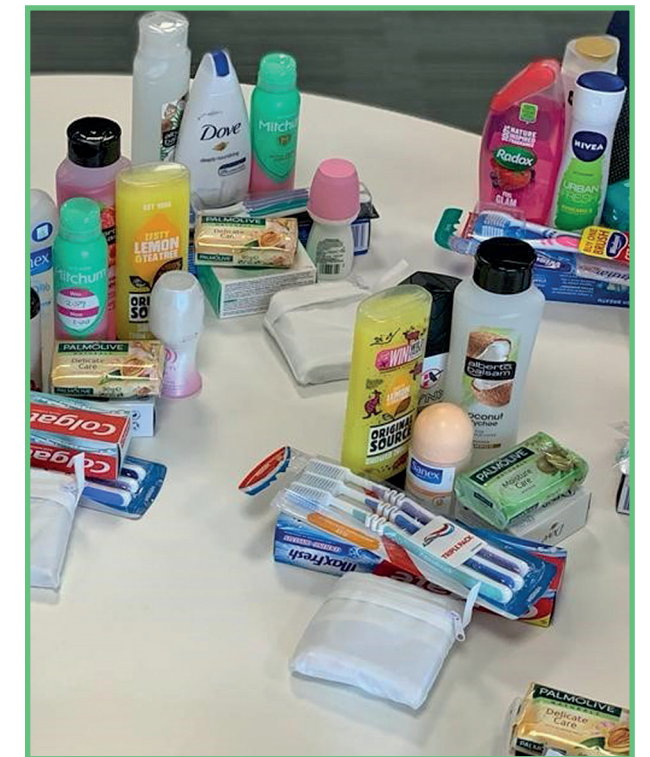
## KATHERINE STREET

A devastating fire occurred on the evening of 27th January this year at our block of flats on Katherine Street. Our team worked around the clock to ensure residents had accommodation in the immediate aftermath of the fire. Initially, twenty-five households were left with only the clothes they were wearing. Following safety checks and re-instatement of services, ten households were able to return to their undamaged homes. The remaining tenants have been found suitable homes, either in Almond or West Lothian Council properties, and will remain in these until the works to the Katherine Street block are complete.

A fantastic community response supported those affected. The Tower Bar was quick to offer its premises as a community hub and as donations started to pour in, the staff team at The Tower Bar devoted time and worked alongside community volunteers to organise and distribute emergency items such as clothes, food, toiletries and vouchers.

Transform Craigshill Community Action Group, local groups, companies, organisations and individuals contributed their time, as well as donating goods and money to help those affected. The community response is a testament to the strength and resilience of the people living in Craigshill.

We are working closely with our insurers to progress the works to the Katherine Street block. It is likely that work will not be completed until early 2024.





## DEVELOPMENT

Work commenced on our new homes at Polbeth in late summer 2020 and continued through the financial year of 2021/22. The 18 cottage flats and seven houses were completed by late March 2022.

Two properties among our existing stock were also bought during the year, with the support of Scottish Government grants. These will be refurbished to ensure they meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.



We have invested £3M on planned improvements this year.





**Our financial records can be accessed on request.  
Please contact the Association for more information.**

## 05 OUR PEOPLE

As a result of the pandemic, we moved to home working in 2020-21 which has presented many benefits to both employees and the way in which we deliver our services.

Following feedback and consultation with both our colleagues and our customers, we implemented a Hybrid Working Policy this year, which provided the benefits of both home and office working. This approach supported improved customer service, a better work-life balance for our team, and strengthened our aim of being a modern employer.

Having established our vision, mission and values, we became clear on what kind of organisation we are striving to be, which in turn allows us to shape our culture and purpose. Our values are lived on a daily basis by our team and they are also directly aligned with providing excellent customer service. We firmly believe that when employees are happy, motivated, trusted and supported, they will deliver excellent customer services.

We have introduced an appraisal process supported by a dedicated ICT platform to help us ensure that our values are at the forefront of what we do and that we continually demonstrate them, both in terms of how we interact with each other and in terms of how we deliver services to our customers.

We have introduced a new approach to feedback and would encourage customers to let us know when we are getting it right as well as when we could do better.

A key theme running throughout this year's annual report is the establishment of our mission and vision statements alongside our values and behaviours. This was a key piece of work for us this year and our approach ensured that we engaged with key stakeholders at Almond as part of a consultation involving all colleagues which encouraged honest conversations about what we want for the future of Almond. It was no surprise that the importance of customer service and support was central to the discussions, and we hope that our mission and vision statements make clear the focus that we have on delivering for our customers.

We recognise that culture change is an ongoing journey and we are pleased with the progress we have made so far. We are confident that we have a team that is determined to provide excellent services and we recognise that how we do this is as important as what we do. We look forward to another year of improvement for our organisation and the services it delivers.





ALMOND  
  
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

44 Etive Walk, Craigshill, Livingston EH54 5AB [www.almondha.org.uk](http://www.almondha.org.uk)

Registered as a Scottish Charity No SC031696  
Registered as a Scottish Property Factor No PF000181

Registered with the Scottish Housing Regulator No HAL 285  
Registered with the Financial Conduct Authority SP2471R(S)