



ANNUAL REPORT 2024





CONTENTS

CHAIR REPORT **2**

CEO REPORT **4**

OUR CUSTOMERS **6**

OUR HOMES **10**

OUR PEOPLE **14**

OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY **16**

CHAIR REPORT



I am pleased to provide my annual overview of the year as Chair of Almond HA and am proud to report on another year of positive work and focus on supporting tenants.

Our overall service performance remains an area of strength and again in comparison to the wider sector the services we provide compare very favourably across most areas. Providing a consistently high level of service is something that Almond HA has a long and proud history of and as we move forward will remain a core focus.

On a more challenging note, the year has also seen some unexpected issues emerge, not least, in December, the discovery of increased risk associated with Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in some of our properties. Having reacted quickly to assess the scale of the issue, it is inevitable that responding appropriately to the discovery will bring additional cost pressures to the business.

We will continue to keep those tenants affected informed and we will work hard to make the process of any required

remedial work as smooth as possible for each individual home.

With 2023 being the penultimate year of our existing Business Plan we continued to focus on the delivery of excellent Homes and Services and on having a positive impact on local communities. You will note within the report details regarding continued significant investment in our homes as well as wider community work.

The year also saw us conduct an updated tenant satisfaction survey, which, like many other landlords in the sector, saw a drop in overall satisfaction with the services we provide. In analysing the results and feedback, a key element highlighted is a need for us to ensure that we give increased focus to the overall quality of our homes, both in terms of an efficient and responsive repairs service and regarding investment to ensure that our homes meet modern day aspirations.

2024 will see the delivery of the final year of our current Business plan and as such our thoughts will also turn to planning for the next Business Plan period from 2025 onwards. In addition to incorporating the key themes from the satisfaction survey we would very much welcome your thoughts on what you believe should be the areas of focus. Alongside discussions with our Tenant Focus Group and via other customer consultation

methods, we would welcome any feedback from you using our normal communication channels.

I would like to thank my fellow Board members, Almond HA colleagues, and all our customers for their continued support. In particular I would like to thank Neil Tulloch, who very recently left the Board, for his significant contribution.

Finally, 2024 sees Almond reach the significant milestone of 30 years as a Housing Association.

We have been marking the occasion in several ways over the year so please continue to look out for details of how you can get involved.

My best wishes to each and every one of you,



Adam Turner



CEO REPORT



During the penultimate year of our business plan, I am pleased to report on the positive work carried out by our team and the impact it has

had on our customers and communities. Throughout what has been a busy and challenging year, we have continued to achieve high performance across the business, ensuring our customers, homes and people are at the centre of everything we do.

Customer Focus

As a community-based Housing Association, a key part of our work is supporting both our tenants as individuals and the wider community.

This year saw us maintaining such an approach in several ways including allocating homes in a timely manner, securing funding for

our tenants and local community projects, ensuring we understand our customer needs to provide the best possible service and actively seeking feedback to improve where possible.

In line with my summary of performance last year it is great that this year's report can again point to sustained positive operational performance. A total of 25 out of the 36 (71%) indicators that we measured last year showed improvement at the end of 2023-24.

We have been reviewing new ICT systems this year and during 2024-25 we will work on the implementation of a new system which will make the process of interacting with us easier and more efficient.



Investing in our Homes and Communities

We acknowledge that we have work to do to continue to deliver both the homes and services that you expect and that we wish to provide. Like many landlords in the sector our most recent tenant satisfaction survey results showed a decline, particularly relating to our repairs service / quality of our homes and wider estate environment and therefore the development of our new Business Plan from 2025 will have these areas as a key focus.

Ensuring that our customers have a warm and comfortable home which is well maintained will always be a priority for us and in total last year we completed 9594 reactive repairs at a cost of £1.49M and invested a total of £4.7M in planned improvements such as boilers, bathrooms, and windows.

Your feedback however strengthens the need for us to do more. In addition to addressing the challenge of the identification of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in 249 of our homes, we know that our future planning needs to be informed by a greater understanding of which properties may require additional attention. This approach will ensure that we have homes which will meet the needs and aspirations of current and future tenants.

Investing in our People

In all the above we continue to place a focus on investing in our people and ensuring Almond HA is a rewarding place to work. We have an

excellent group of people who have the skills, energy and commitment to enable Almond HA to continue to grow and improve. Our Hybrid working model continues to work well and we recently launched a 9-day fortnight trial to further improve work life balance. We have also delivered organisation wide training on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and have developed a values framework to ensure that we all adopt an approach which is positive for both colleagues and customers. As we strive to deliver excellent customer service our belief is that this can only be achieved by having colleagues who feel supported and motivated to give their best. I would again like to express thanks to our Board, colleagues, and the various partners with whom we work for their continuing support and to Board members for ensuring that we remain ambitious and focused on continual improvement. Thanks also to those customers who help inform our priorities via our various feedback methods. If you have not yet got involved, I would encourage you to do so. Your input is extremely valuable.

Best wishes,



John Davidson

OUR CUSTOMERS

Allocating our Homes

Almond HA continues to play its role in the prevention of homelessness in West Lothian. Although we have over 2500 properties, we only had around 80 become available last year for re-let. It is positive to have a low turnover of properties, but it does mean that those listed as needing a home with us can have a considerable length of time to wait. Of those we allocated in 2023-24, half of them went to our homeless group with the remainder going to existing tenants, general needs, medical needs, and referrals such as West Lothian Women's Aid. More than ever, it is important we can re-let our properties as quickly as possible. This is because there is a very high demand for Almond HA homes, with over 5000 people on our housing list.



Helping our tenants

We work hard to secure external grant funding and assistance for our tenants. Last year we applied for and received funding of £7,500 from Royal Bank of Scotland and £40,000 from Energy Action Scotland. In addition to this, we were successful in achieving another year of grant funding from Scottish Government Investing in Communities Fund for the Growing Together project in Craigshill. This project works with residents to engage with the environment through activities, workshops, projects and events to enhance and benefit the area of Craigshill.

We also had our own assistance programme called **Almond Cares** which in conjunction with the grant funding we received, helped tenants with several things when they were faced with challenges around energy or food poverty.



Almond Enterprises Ltd is a subsidiary company of Almond HA and donated £30,000 which was used for the Almond Cares project this year.

This was also the second year of our Tenancy Sustainment Officer pilot post and we will continue this service going forward. To date the tenancy sustainment service has directly assisted 83 customers on a range of issues including child welfare issues, hoarding, flooring and furniture poverty, food and fuel insecurity, mental health concerns and more. The case work is intensive and beyond the scope of a standard housing officer workload. Everyone that worked with the service has to date sustained their tenancy.





Our partnership with The Action Group around Welfare Benefits advice continued and perhaps unsurprisingly in the face of the cost-of-living crisis, the service was as busy as ever. Over the year, the project has worked with 158 distinct households, and generated £327,428 in additional income for our tenants.

Customer care visits

Following on from our customer profiling exercise, which was put in place to better understand our tenants needs, we began a new customer care visit programme. The intention around these visits is to check in with our tenants, particularly if we have not spoken to them in a while. During the visit, we ensure we have up-to-date information, check on the property and find out if the tenant needs our help with anything. These visits started at the end of 2023 and by April 2024, we had carried out over 150 visits and in many cases we were able to assist tenants in continuing to enjoy their home.



Customer Feedback

We carried out a full Tenant Satisfaction Survey in 2023-24 to get feedback on our services. The area most commented on in regards to improvements was the repairs service. Over the next year we intend to consult with tenants around how this service looks with a view to identifying future improvement. More information on the results of the survey can be found on our website www.almondha.org.uk/tss

We will continue to invest in our stock with more than £5.8M planned in investment for 2024-25. We are also about to embark on the installation of a new Housing Management System to improve how you can interact with us. In our Business Plan, we set out to ensure our customers have access to our services with minimal effort and this will support customers in

terms of reporting repairs and other important services such as viewing rent balance, current details, housing applications and more. Finally, we carry out regular service specific surveys and we are pleased at the level of positive feedback we have received from these. After you call into Almond HA you may receive a text message from us asking about the service you received.

A total of 97% of customers who responded to the survey said that staff were friendly and helpful during the call. We would like to increase our response rate so please complete any service survey we send as we appreciate your feedback and are always looking to improve.



OUR HOMES

Homes to be proud of

Maintaining, repairing and upgrading our properties is a priority for Almond HA. With over 1500 of our 2551 properties having been built in the 1960's and 1970's, this often includes significant works such as roofs and full property rewires. Overall, £6.9M was spent in

maintenance related costs this year. We continue to prioritise works to improve the thermal efficiency of our homes. We invested £4.7M in planned and cyclical maintenance. The works completed in 2023-24 included:



● **41** ROOF REPLACEMENTS

● **60** BATHROOM REPLACEMENTS

● **64** EXTERNAL WALL INSULATION UPGRADES

● **17** CENTRAL HEATING INSTALLATIONS

● **329** PROPERTIES HAD CYCLICAL PAINTING CARRIED OUT

● **170** WINDOW REPLACEMENTS

● **138** DOOR REPLACEMENTS

● **33** BOILER INSTALLATIONS

● **95.65%** OF TENANTS WERE SATISFIED OR VERY SATISFIED WITH PLANNED MAINTENANCE WORKS





Preventing Damp and Mould

Tackling issues with condensation, which can result in damp and mould, remains a priority for us and we have been using social media, stock condition surveys, winter checks and

customer care visits to ensure we are identifying any cases that have not been reported to us. Condensation packs are being provided to customers and in a small number of more complex cases, we installed environmental sensors which allow us and our customers to monitor and address air quality and humidity.

Keeping our customers safe

Keeping our customer safe is another priority for us. Over the course of the year, we completed 3059 Gas Safety Inspections at a cost of £123,142. There were also 720 electrical checks completed at a cost of £63,594. These are required every 5 years and confirm the wiring is safe and when it should be replaced. This data has identified that a programme of rewiring should be undertaken and we have commenced this by rewiring properties at void to minimise impact on customers. A total of 1,333 stair inspections have also been carried out by Housing Officers throughout the past year.

Blackburn

Towards the end of the year partial demolition commenced as the first stage in the redevelopment and regeneration of the Mill Shopping Centre, adjacent to the Blackburn Partnership Centre and Scotmid Store at Ash Grove, Blackburn.

We are delighted to be part of this local area regeneration and have agreed a design and build Contract with G Dunbar & Sons to construct 20 much needed 1 and 2 bedroom flats for rent on part of the site.

Although not part of our development programme, a small number of new commercial retail units are being developed by G Dunbar & Sons. This follows consultation over a lengthy period with existing retailers, local community representatives and West Lothian Council to ensure that local needs and aspirations were addressed within sustainable redevelopment.



Katherine Street

In late 2023, we appointed McTaggart Construction to deliver the fire reinstatement and refurbishment work at Katherine Street and works commenced on site in November 2023. The building was completely stripped back to the shell before work commenced on installing the new highly insulated walling system to allow the internal refurbishment to begin. We look forward to works being completed in early summer 2025.

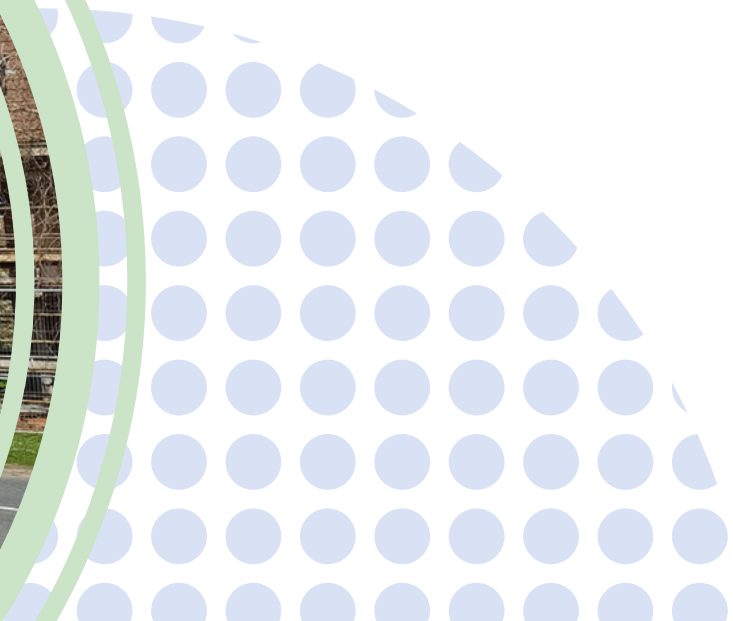
Reactive Repairs

Over the year we carried out 2541 emergency repairs in an average of 2.43 hours. This was fewer emergency repairs than the last 2 years which may be the result of a mild winter and the ongoing investment we make in our stock.

There were 7053 non-emergency reactive repairs completed which is more than the previous year and with a slightly greater average time (12.83 days). This increase in average time was primarily a result of a significant backlog of repairs as we went into the financial year of 2023-24. Our Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) throughout the year suggested an improvement in the service being provided.

Delivering repairs has remained a challenge this year and it has been highlighted in the most recent tenant satisfaction survey. The challenges stem from struggles to source labour and, although costs have stopped rising as fast as they did the previous year, they remain high. The cost to deliver the reactive repairs over the year was £1.49M.

We delivered landscape maintenance at a cost of £267,192. This includes grass cutting, pruning shrubs and litter picking with the bulk of the service being delivered over the summer.



Voids and Mutual Exchanges

There were 78 properties let during the year and 32 mutual exchanges. Void properties were turned around in just under 20 days and at a cost of £311,160.

Sale of 7 Properties in Unfactored blocks

We took the decision to sell 7 flats in blocks where we did not Factor due to the inability to maintain common areas to the same standard as blocks where we are the Factor. We bought 2 properties on the open market among stock we currently own and customers moved in following works required to bring them to a lettable standard.

RAAC

In October 2023, we instructed Structural Surveys of 7 flat roof bungalows which had been built using Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) to form the walls and roofs.

The outcome determined the panels to be in good condition but the proposed cycle of 3 monthly inspections and concern from residents resulted in the decision being taken to rehome customers while options for replacing the roofs are considered.

We went on to identify another 242 properties containing RAAC along with 18 common closes. In all but one block of flats the RAAC had been encapsulated under a pitched roof since the early 1990's when the works were carried out by Livingston Development Corporation (LDC).

Surveys of this stock commenced in February 2024 and it is likely that any work required as a result of the surveys will commence in late 2024. This discovery has undoubtedly caused concerns for our customers and neighbouring owned stock and we will continue to keep those affected updated.



OUR PEOPLE

This year has seen us progress with our People Strategy, ensuring that we continue to build an environment where colleagues can be supported to grow and develop. Through this approach, we are driving high performance across the organisation to enable colleagues to provide the very best services for our customers.

It has been a busy and engaging year for our team as we focused on increasing our knowledge and awareness around Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and firmly established our principal values in all our working practices and relationships. Insightful and refreshing workshops for the whole team has enabled a greater understanding of how we are working as an employer and as a service provider, and how we can improve our communications, processes and procedures.



Our managers also participated in a number of Inclusive Leadership workshops to develop further and progress our work to improve our fairness, equity and engagement.

**WORKING
TOGETHER**
**OUR
VALUES
WORKS**
OPEN TO CHANGE
SOCIAL
RESPECT
KINDNESS

We have had a particular focus on bringing our values to the forefront ensuring we are working positively within these through all our interactions. Along with our internal process improvement sessions, we are finding potential efficiencies and improvements to provide excellent Homes and Services, while positively impacting local communities.



Our hybrid working model continues to allow flexibility, along with the benefit of a 9-day fortnight trial to promote wellbeing and balance to positively impact our teams.

Looking ahead to the coming year we are further investing in our team development to work towards the Customer Service Excellence standard and will continue with our internal improvement workshops to help us recognise where improvements and efficiencies can be made. This will be pivotal, along with our team's commitment and dedication, to contribute to our ability to provide the highest standard of customer service and ensure engagement as an Almond HA customer is a positive one.

"Our financial records can be accessed on request"



OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY

This year, we're proud to celebrate 30 years of Almond Housing Association. We've come a long way since we first started in 1994, originally running management services for Livingston Development Corporation (LDC), to winning the tenant ballot and becoming one of the largest independent Housing Associations in Livingston.

With over 2500 properties, our 30 year history has seen us grow and develop, providing quality housing for rent and injecting millions of pounds into the local economy through our housing management, development and maintenance work. We are incredibly proud of the work we have achieved over the years and the experience we have gained in building homes and communities to be proud of.

In September 2020, we welcomed our new Chief Executive, John Davidson, who has been building on the great work done by George Webster. Following George's retirement, John has worked with the team to develop our vision, mission and values, and continued to ensure customers are at the heart of everything we do.

As always, we encourage tenants to get involved and provide feedback to let us know how we're doing. This helps us to continually improve and ensure we are providing good quality customer service.

As we take a moment to look back at Almond's history and how far we have come, we are also looking forward to the coming years and our future plans for the Association.







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