



**Grand Union
Housing Group**
Customer Annual Report
for 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

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Welcome

Welcome to our 2024 Customer annual report.

This report provides highlights from the last year about the homes and services we provide, including:

- **where we've built more new homes**
- **how we've helped to create stronger communities, and**
- **what we've done to support people to have better lives.**

We're proud to be celebrating our 30th anniversary this year. From our small start in 1994 with just under 3,000 homes in mid-Bedfordshire, we now have 29,000 customers living in over 13,000 homes across Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire.

Thank you to all of you who provide us with your valuable feedback. We hope that this report will show that we are listening to you and how we plan to improve what we do.

If you have any feedback about this report, please email pr@guhg.co.uk.



Investing in your home



Repairs, maintenance and money spent

We understand how important repairs are to you and we're working on improving this service.

In 2023/24 we carried out **29,831** repairs. We spent **£42.3m** on home improvements and repairs which included:



homes with new windows and doors



new kitchens



new boilers installed



new/upgraded central heating systems



new bathrooms/wet rooms



properties received high level works and upgrades



homes were fitted with highly efficient air source heat pumps



electrical testing jobs completed

Improving our repairs

We are working hard to improve our repairs service and make it more resilient. Here's how:

- We have further increased the size of the team as we know that customers give excellent feedback about our operatives when they arrive and do the job.
- We have expanded our operating hours, meaning customers can now pick an appointment for repairs between 8.30am and 6pm.
- We're going to introduce video technology to help us see what issues may be in your home. This will help us to fix things first time and reduce the need to visit your home to do an initial inspection.
- We're looking at a new IT solution for our repairs service, ensuring that it works for both our colleagues and our customers.
- We're looking to make further improvements to MyGUHG, our customer portal. This includes a new app on Android and Apple devices.
- We're looking into the reasons behind appointment failures so we can fix the root cause of those problems.
- We are also working on a better way of matching our resources against demand to further reduce the time it takes us to do repairs.

Operative on way

We've introduced a real-time mapping and messaging service for customers with a repair appointment booked in. This means that once the operative's on their way to you, you'll be able to see their name and how far away they are.

Your safety

We carry out annual checks on your homes to make sure they are safe. These checks will look at gas, electric and fire safety.

Here's how our compliance levels looked on 31 March 2024:



99.96%

Homes with an in-date gas certificate



100%

Buildings with an in-date fire risk assessment



98.19%

Homes with an in-date electrical certificate (within five years)



100%

Legionella risk assessments



98.34%

Asbestos domestic surveys

Investing in your community



Healthier communities

We want to create places where our customers can be healthy and happy.

Our Health & Housing Coordinator is focused on healthy neighbourhoods. They work in partnership with Public Health to improve customer access to public health services.

- Our Health and Housing Partnership with Peabody and the shared public health team in Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes City councils was shortlisted for two awards.
- Our multi-agency hub hosted 20 public health services for over 600 visitors.
- They held quarterly health check-ins in four different locations, which have been popular in our neighbourhoods.
- We have also developed a project to respond to concerns about asthma, damp and mould. Project Adam will help connect data on asthma, identified by health professionals, with us as the customer's landlord, so we can tailor our help accordingly.

Supporting young people

Our Youth Participation Coordinator, Nicola, works in partnership with a range of external agencies.

You can find out more about Nicola on our [website](#)

“One young person recognised me some years later and said: ‘If it wasn’t for you, my life would have been really messed up.’ So sometimes there are instant results, and sometimes it’s years later when I see it in people.”



Antisocial behaviour (ASB)

We work with our customers and local communities to provide a safe, secure and clean environment for you to live in.

- Our website provides an ASB ‘toolkit’, which helps customers work out what is (and isn’t) antisocial behaviour and gives steps to take to resolve issues yourself.
- Customers on Voice took part in a survey to gather feedback on our updated Antisocial behaviour policy. Almost 90% of customers that took part agreed that the policy was written in a way that was easy to understand. There was also an increase in agreement that the customer obligations are clear, with 88% of respondents agreeing with this statement.
- Our **Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM)** scores were published in June. Satisfaction levels for our approach to dealing with ASB has increased by 8% to 38%. In the last year we increased the size of our Successful Tenancies team, who have worked really hard with the police and local authorities to tackle instances of ASB. You can read all our TSM scores on **page 19**.

Listening to you

We know how important it is to listen to you and act on what you say. We've been working hard to better understand you and actively listen to your feedback.



Rant&Rave

Rant & Rave is a text message and email platform that allows you to provide feedback on our service. We received **6,605** customer responses through rant and rave in 2023/24. You've given us a satisfaction score of X/5.

Voice

In 2022 we launched Voice, our customer feedback platform. Voice is totally anonymous and lets you give honest thoughts and opinions via polls, discussions and surveys.

During 2023/24 we've had:

570
customers
actively using
Voice

16
surveys with **22%**
average response rate

8 forums
17 polls



Using your feedback to improve

The feedback you share on Voice is used to improve our services. Here's a selection from the last year.

Sustainability language – We wanted to make sure everyone was able to understand us when we talk about sustainability. We now avoid using technical language where possible as Voice users told us they prefer us to use more descriptive language.

Digital handbook – We asked Voice members for feedback on a proposed digital handbook which would be provided to customers when they moved into their new home.

Our website – We shared examples of our proposed new website layout and asked Voice members for feedback on the look and feel. Our new website is now live.

Rent review letters – We asked members to review our new rent review letters which were designed to be easier to understand and more accessible.

Our new Corporate Plan – Voice users helped us to shape our Corporate Plan for 2024-27 via two surveys. The first was to help us understand what makes a house a home. The other was to review our priorities for the new plan.

Customer Annual Report – Voice users helped us to better understand what they wanted from a Customer Annual Report so we can ensure it is designed to suit their needs.

Social media – Voice users helped us to better understand whether our customers are getting the most out of our social media posts. We've used this information to improve the content we post.



New appointment times

Following feedback from Voice members we now offer appointments between 8.30am and 6pm.

The available slots are:

- 8.30am to 6pm (all day)
- 8.30am to 1pm (am)
- 10am to 2pm (school run)
- 1pm to 6pm (pm)

Keeping you informed

We try to keep you informed in lots of ways:

- Our **website** contains lots of useful information about the services we provide and support we offer. We update the web pages regularly, as well as share our latest news. We've recently reviewed our website to make it more accessible and easier to understand.
- We have a **Facebook page** where we publish news and useful information about our services. We used Voice to ask you about social media, to help us shape future content.
- We send out regular **customer newsletters** by email. These include the latest news from our website, and other relevant information that may impact you. To make sure you receive this, please let us know if you change your email address.
- **MyGUHG** is our customer portal that is available 24/7. It provides you with easy and secure access to your account, as well as self-service options. You can use it to pay your rent, check your rent statement, request repairs and check on their progress. Find out more at my.guhg.co.uk.
- **Voice** is our anonymous customer feedback platform. You can take part in polls, surveys, discussions and be completely honest about how you feel about us. You can get involved as much or as little as you like, and when it's convenient for you. We also use Voice to tell you key news and information. If you've not signed up yet, you can at voice.guhg.co.uk.

Complaints

We understand how important it is to provide you with a consistent, quality and respectful service. We're investing in training for colleagues to help us achieve this. We are also continuing to review our services. This is to make sure that we consider individual needs.

We always try to get things right but know that sometimes we can get it wrong. We value your feedback as we use it to improve our services.

We have a dedicated Complaint Resolutions team and over the past year we've added extra resources to this team to ensure a single point of contact where possible, when customers do need help resolving complaints.

Supporting customers

We don't just provide homes; we offer a range of services to help support you.

Supported living

Our Partnerships colleagues work in partnership with specialist care providers to help customers who have learning difficulties. The team visit our specialist schemes on a regular basis and support customers and their support providers with ongoing tenancy and accommodation issues.

“I find my job really rewarding. I get to see someone, who's not able to live in the community, live safely and securely in a home that meets their individual needs.”

Chris, Partnerships Coordinator (Special Projects). You can read more about Chris on our website



Wellbeing support

Our Wellbeing & Support team provides short term support to customers who are experiencing a crisis - this could be due to mental or physical health, hoarding or substance dependency.

In 2023/24 the team supported **489** customers.



Independent living

We provide apartments and bungalows for over 50s with support offered through Life24. Our service is tailored to individuals' needs and ensures peace of mind for our customers and their families.

Life24

Life24 is a unique telecare and personalised support service for people of all ages. It enables independence and peace of mind.

Our Life24 service is available across Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire and is focused on visiting customers within independent living. Customers can choose from a range of support options and receive face-to-face or telephone contact.

Through this service, we are able to support customers who are struggling with daily living by working in partnership with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies.

667
personal alarm systems installed in 2023/24.



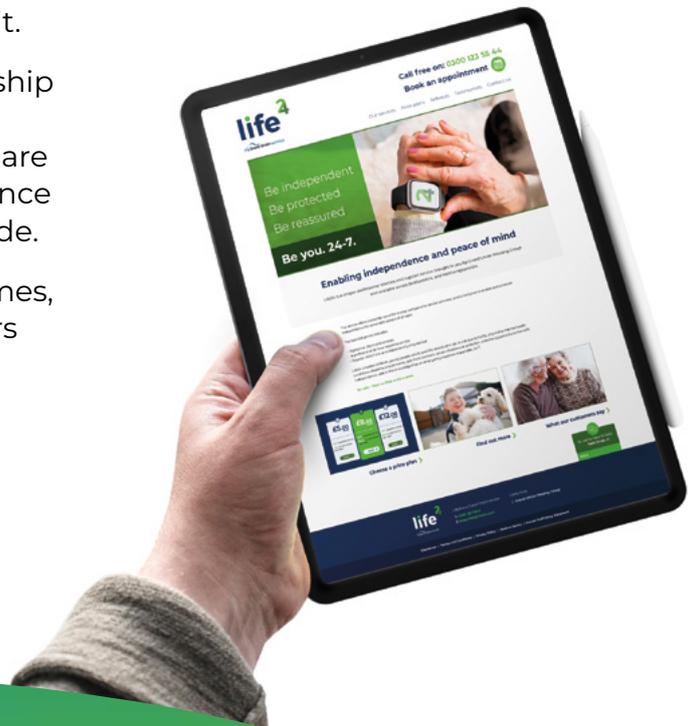
Extra care

Our extra care schemes help customers to live independently in their homes, but with additional support from our Life24 service, should they need it.

In our extra care services we've developed partnership forums where customers can feed back about the services provided and influence change. Meetings are now well established and run monthly at both Quince Court, Sandy, and Chamomile Gardens, Biggleswade.

As well as these two Bedfordshire Extra Care schemes, we also have a specialist dementia scheme: Flowers House in Bletchley, Milton Keynes.

Our Life24 and Extra Care colleagues collectively completed over **66,000** wellbeing checks during the year, ensuring our most vulnerable customers remained safe and well in their homes.



Domestic abuse/ safeguarding

The Domestic Abuse & Safeguarding team support our four domestic abuse (DA) refuges as well as colleagues and external professionals around concerns relating to our customers. They co-ordinate activities across Grand Union teams and liaise with local authority staff.



142
DA referrals made for customers



4
colleagues offered DA support



372
safeguarding referrals made for customers

Money and debt advice

Whilst the economic environment is still challenging, we continue to provide advice and practical support to our customers.

Our Financial Wellbeing team provides two different services – welfare benefits advice and Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) authorised debt advice. Welfare benefits advice deals with all aspects of benefits from checks, claims and appeals. Debt advice is a holistic approach to a financial situation, advising debt options including insolvency and helping customers take their chosen option forward.

In the last year there were:



1,171

Welfare Benefits referrals

110

Debt Advice referrals

We secured **£3.4m** in extra income for our customers through welfare benefits advice.

During the year, we also launched our Customer Support Fund, to help customers in food and/or fuel poverty, with £123k spent by the end of the year. This fund also helps customers who cannot afford furnishings, white goods or flooring, as well as clearing rent arrears for vulnerable customers needing to move or who would otherwise face eviction.

An additional **£4.8k** was awarded to customers from our Financial Wellbeing Support Fund to some customers working with this team. This was mainly to meet food and/or fuel poverty need.

“The advisor made the application process easy and made me feel comfortable all the way through. This eased my embarrassment at having to ask for help and advice for the first time.”

“I don’t like asking for help at all, but it was lovely to hear a friendly voice and reassurance, but also knowing there is help out there and I’m not on my own.”

“The advisor was the most helpful, friendly, kind and thoughtful person that I’ve ever met and I thank her from the bottom of my heart. I could not have managed without her.”

New homes

Building more homes is a key part of what we do at Grand Union. Last year we had another great year as we built **264** new homes:

**157**

for rent (including social rent and affordable rent)

**107**

shared ownership homes

Here are some of those we've built:

24 homes at
Croyland Road, Wellingborough:
six for social rent and 18 shared ownership



59 homes across two sites
Overstone Leys, Daventry:
46 for affordable rent and
13 shared ownership



7 homes at
Little Staughton, Bedfordshire:
three for social rent and
four shared ownership



6 homes at
Morby Road, Earls Barton:

three for affordable rent and
three for shared ownership



20 homes at
Saxon Court, Towcester:

all shared ownership



31 homes at
Ashwood Green, Houghton Regis:

nine for social rent and
22 shared ownership



As well as building new homes, we bought nearly **140 affordable homes** in North and West Northants from Clarion Housing Group.

And 36 new homes at Towcester Grange, bringing us to a total of **95 completed homes** on this site with Persimmon Homes.

Sustainability

We're committed to becoming a more sustainable business and know that we have a responsibility to make a positive impact on the environment, as well as our customers, colleagues and partners.

Improving energy efficiency

By 2030 we are aiming to get all our homes up to EPC C. An EPC rating tells you how energy efficient a property is. Having a better EPC rating means lower heating and energy costs.

To do this we need to carry out work to some of our homes to make them more efficient and bring them up to EPC C.

In 2023/24 we retrofitted 203 homes, the works included:

10

homes received cavity wall insulation



93

homes received loft insulation



17

air source heat pumps installed



2

high retention storage heaters installed



80

homes had solar PV installed



1

home had external wall insulation



631

EPC surveys undertaken in the year



279

retrofit assessments completed



Other works carried out:

In total, £1.7 million was spent on all retrofit works (including surveys, assessments, installations and certifications).



Wildflowers at Chamomile

We have planted wildflowers at Chamomile Gardens, one of our housing schemes in Biggleswade. Wildflowers can help to improve biodiversity. After this trial we are hoping to roll this out to other areas.



Our TSM score

Every year we collect feedback from customers about how we're doing and then publish the results as part of our Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs). These measures are important to us because you give us an honest and true picture of the service you receive from us. We can then use this information to improve what we do and how we do it.

To make sure we heard from as many people as possible we conducted the survey in three ways:

- **Voice, our anonymous customer feedback platform**
- **Phone**
- **Email**

Because questions are based on your experience over the past year, not all questions were asked to all respondents. For example, if you didn't raise a repair during the last year, you weren't asked about your satisfaction with our repairs service.

Our 2024 Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) results:



Overall satisfaction



Satisfaction with repairs service



Time taken to complete your repair



Provides a home that is well maintained



Provides a home that is safe



Listens to your views and acts upon them



Keeps you informed



Treats me fairly and with respect



Approach to complaints handling



Keeps communal areas clean / maintained



Makes a positive contribution to your neighbourhood



Approach to handling antisocial behaviour



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