



Opening Doors

A STAFFORD AND RURAL HOMES MAGAZINE FOR CUSTOMERS



Local Hero Ken makes garden bloom

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Welcome

This is a special edition of your customer magazine. Firstly because it is time for our annual review and you will find information about our performance in an exceptional year, in the centre pages.

This is also the last time that we will be publishing three separate magazines for customers of Stafford and Rural Homes, Severnside Housing and South Staffordshire Housing Association. In a great example of the savings that establishing Homes Plus will bring, we will be launching a brand new magazine next year with news and important advice for all our customers, wherever you live.

You can learn more about Homes Plus on page three.

The last year has been a period of extraordinary challenge. As you will see in our annual report, our teams worked tirelessly in difficult circumstances to deliver the best possible services and support for you. In many cases, that has meant doing things differently. We moved quickly to offer employment and money advice over the phone, virtual viewings and tenancy sign-ups to help people move home and COVID-safe practices for repairs and essential safety checks in your home.

While we focused on maintaining essential services, we didn't lose sight of the goals in our corporate plan and of the commitments we made when our expanded Group came together. Despite all the difficulties that

we faced, we continued to build much-needed homes, provide more care and support for older people, give our customers a bigger voice in the decisions that we take and offer fantastic apprenticeship and employment opportunities for local people.

Our achievements were the result of support from community partners and from you, our customers. This was a year when we pulled together to stay safe and look after each other. Our Local Hero initiative began in lockdown and showcases the amazing contribution of some of our customers. We love to celebrate these great neighbours and you can read about three of them in the following pages.

I hope that you find plenty to interest you in this magazine.

Les Clarke

Executive Director of Housing and Care



Important information: Christmas closure

We will close for Christmas on Friday 24 December and reopen on Tuesday 4 January 2022

Our usual emergency repair service will operate throughout this period. You can contact us by calling **0800 111 4554**. You may encounter longer wait times than normal during the busy Christmas period. To help us keep wait times to a minimum, please remain on the line if you can and we will answer your call as soon as possible.

Please note: we will not respond to email, online forms or messages to our Facebook and Twitter accounts while we are closed. We will aim to respond to those enquiries within five working days, after we reopen on Tuesday 4 January.

You can make online rent payments or check your account at any time by logging into the **MySARH** portal or calling **0800 111 4554**.

Care and support

If you receive personal, planned care from Care Plus then this service will continue as usual. If you have any queries, please contact a member of the team:

Care at Home Staffordshire **01785 312102**
Care at Home Shropshire **01743 285250**



Homes Plus

Our new chapter begins



Soon, you'll start to see something different about us. We will have a new name and a whole new look to serve you better.

Following the customer consultation which took place earlier this year, landlords Stafford and Rural Homes, Severnside Housing and South Staffordshire Housing Association and are joining together to become **Homes Plus**.

Our new name makes it clear that the provision of **safe and well-maintained homes** will define us as an organisation. It is also a reminder of our drive to do more, providing **essential Plus services** like employment and money advice as well as support and investment for our communities.

Your home, rent and tenancy will not change as a result of our new name and services will continue to be delivered through local offices. We will be introducing some convenient new ways for you to get in touch with us, including a new freephone number and a Homes Plus website. There is no need to worry, though. If you forget our new number, the existing one will work just fine and

we will take you straight to our new website if you visit www.sarh.co.uk.

Our vision to make a positive difference to homes, lives and communities is just as important and our values are unchanged. As **Homes Plus**, we will continue to work closely with involved customers and ensure that your voice is heard in the decisions that we take.

Working together as one landlord will help us to achieve even better value for money, so that we can do more to make a positive difference. **Homes Plus** will invest in improvements and repairs to our 18,000 properties, deliver even better care and support services for older and vulnerable people and build the affordable homes that families and neighbourhoods need.

SARH is becoming Homes Plus



Homes Plus. The people you know, the services you trust.

Green-fingered **Ken** makes Care Plus courtyard bloom



A resident of one of our retirement living communities has been hailed a hero after he spent weeks transforming a shared courtyard into a productive garden filled with flowers, vegetables and fruit.

At the start of this year Ken Smith (pictured on the cover of this magazine) spotted the potential for a paved courtyard at the heart of the community to become a colourful outdoor space where residents could start to get together again, safely. He designed a plan for a new garden and neighbours chipped-in to buy plants and equipment.

Soon, the new garden was filled with colour from hanging baskets and planted containers. Space was also found for fruit trees, herbs and vegetable plants, along with a greenhouse for chillies and tomatoes.

“It’s been a lot of work but people got involved in the project, helping me to weed and keep the area looking its best and giving our garden furniture a bright new facelift,” says Ken. “The cold spring meant that we had a slow start but the garden has taken shape and it’s been lovely to see people enjoying it in the sunshine. We will be producing lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, which will be harvested for anyone to use.”

Ken was named a Local Hero by retirement living officer Sharon Allen: “Ken has made such a positive difference to our community,” she said.



“He has created a lovely outdoor space that has become very important to the residents. He’s an ambassador in our community and a great neighbour who is always willing to help.”

We visited the courtyard to meet Ken and some of his fellow gardeners and to pass on a surprise chocolate treat for the Local Hero.



Speak Up

As a responsible landlord, the safety of our customers is our priority.

We want to make sure that you know how to get help and advice if you’re worried about a possible safeguarding problem in your neighbourhood.

Safeguarding means protecting the rights of an adult or child to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. Abuse and neglect can take place

at home or in a public place and can take a lot of different forms, including domestic and sexual abuse, physical, psychological and discriminatory abuse, human trafficking and slavery.

It’s often difficult to identify abuse or neglect but if you are in any doubt, always Speak Up. You can report a safeguarding concern to your local council:



www.staffordshire.gov.uk

Tel: 0345 604 2719

www.telford.gov.uk

Tel: 01952 385385

Surprise for Local Hero Neil

Stafford and Rural Homes customer Neil McKay was taken by surprise after members of his local community told us about their good neighbour.

Residents of a close-knit neighbourhood in Stafford explained that Neil's help began in lockdown and now continues with errands, support and help for vulnerable people.

We invite our customers to celebrate great neighbours using the online Local Hero form which can be found on each of our landlord websites. Choosing from these nominations, we send surprise 'thank you' chocolate gifts.

"It is our mission to make a positive difference and with 18,000 customers, our residents are doing that every day, in communities throughout Staffordshire and Shropshire," said Chief Executive Sarah Boden. "We love to hear about Local Heroes like Neil and are delighted to thank them, on behalf of their neighbours."

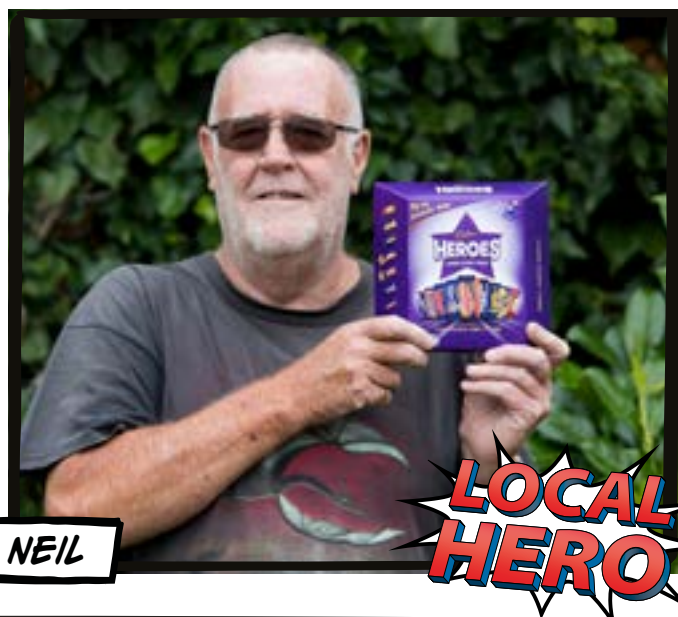
Neil, who moved in to the community in 2019, reached out to neighbours at the start of lockdown in 2020. Realising that elderly residents were unable to leave their homes, he circulated menus from a local bakery and arranged deliveries. Soon, he was providing reassurance

by telephone and doing small jobs in people's gardens.

"He always wants to help," said his partner, Lynne. "He's such a kind person and everyone around here knows that they can get in touch with him if they need anything.

"Every neighbourhood should have a Neil!"

We were delighted to get together with his neighbours to thank Neil for all that he does and to pass on a chocolate treat.



DO YOU KNOW A LOCAL HERO?

If you know about one of our customers who is making a positive difference in your neighbourhood, tell us about them. Go online and search for Local Hero on our website or complete this form and post it in an envelope to the address below.

Name of your Local Hero:

Tell us what they are doing to make a positive difference:

.....
.....
.....

Is your Local Hero a Stafford and Rural Homes tenant? Yes No

Your name:

Your address:

Are you happy for us to contact you for more details about your Local Hero? Yes No

Your phone number: **Your email address:**

Please post your completed form in an envelope to:

Local Hero, SARH, 1 Parker Court, Staffordshire Technology Park, Beaconside, Stafford, ST18 0WP



In these continuing unprecedented times, we know that many people are facing uncertainties about jobs, health and money.

If you are worrying about how you will pay your rent and manage your bills, don't let things get on top of you.

Talk to us today.

There are things that we can do to help.

- Talk to us for **money advice** to help you avoid debt and keep your home secure.
- Talk to us for **benefits advice** to help you make a claim and ensure that you receive the support you need.
- Talk to us for **employment advice** with training, coaching and volunteering opportunities to help you find work.

For friendly, practical and helpful advice please complete our online referral form at www.sarh.co.uk/talk-to-us. You can also call us on **0800 111 4554**.



Last year, the team achieved money savings of nearly **£1,616,500** for the customers they supported across our Group.

Free and confidential employment and money advice

Whether you need help to get into work, support to get online or advice to get your finances back on track, our employment and money advice team is on hand to guide you.

Our specialist team offers:

- Advice on how to maximise your income and reduce your weekly household bills, along with managing debt.
- Welfare benefit checks, including Universal Credit.
- 1:2:1 support.
- Help to get back into work, from CV writing to job searching, through to interview.
- Training and support that can help you develop new skills or build on those you already have.
- Assistance to find work placements, apprenticeships and volunteering opportunities, along with signposting to programmes such as the Prince's Trust.
- Grant funding to help you gain new qualifications.
- General housing advice and help to complete housing applications.

"Vicky gave me a confidence boost and helped me to understand what you can achieve if you stick at it. She was very understanding and helped with a PIP, Universal Credit and ESA appeal."

You can book your 1:2:1 slot at one of our local weekly sessions by visiting our website www.sarh.co.uk/help-and-advice or you can call **0800 111 4554 to find out more.**



Mark Pragg, neighbourhood manager at Housing Plus Group (left) is pictured with Monkmoor Bowling Club member Richard Saunders and one of the club's younger bowlers

Bright future for bowling club thanks to funding boost

A Shropshire bowling club which began when a group of players set an ambitious target to restore a historic bowling green in Monkmoor six years ago, has been backed by our My Community fund.

Monkmoor Bowling Club applied for sponsorship from the fund, which supports projects making a positive difference to homes, lives and communities.

The new chapter in the life of Monkmoor Bowling Club began when a group of friends discovered that a piece of land next to a local pub had once been a hugely popular bowling green. The friends – some with a bowling history, others new to the game – set about bringing it back to life.

“We were told that the club used to be one of the biggest in Shropshire and a lot of people said they used to bowl there as children”, explained club member Richard Saunders. “We found photographs showing players standing on an immaculate bowling green. It was hard to imagine looking at the ground then, but we were determined to bring it back to its best.”

Five years later and after a lot of back-breaking work on the part of the dedicated volunteers,

the green is on its way back towards its previous immaculate condition and the club is fielding a couple of teams in a local league as well as welcoming new members keen to try the sport for the first time. It is proud of its environmental credentials, too. Grass cuttings are composted by a community allotment and rain water is harvested to keep the playing surface green.

“There is a lot of interest in the area, with people stopping by when we’ve been working, to ask about getting involved in the sport,” said Richard. “It is starting to look really good now but there is so much more we want to do. The support from the My Community fund is fantastic. It’s going to help us make the club area safe and accessible for everyone and will allow us to meet the needs of new and experienced bowlers of all ages.”

“We were really impressed by how much the club has accomplished in a short space of time,” said Housing Plus Group Chief Executive Sarah Boden. “The club members have worked incredibly hard to achieve their vision. It is now a growing club, open to everyone and an asset for the community.”

Our people: meet voids and lettings team leader, Joe Sproston



Joe Sproston has worked in housing for 13 years, first for Stafford and Rural Homes and then for Housing Plus Group following the merger between the neighbouring organisations.

“Job satisfaction is really important and for me, that comes from being able to help other people. I grew up in Stafford and when I finish work at the end of each day, I know I’ve made a positive difference in my own community.”

Having stepped-up to a role with more responsibility in 2020, Joe has become a voids and lettings team leader covering the Stafford area. It’s his team who help people and families find a home that meets their needs. They also make sure that affordable housing for which there is such a huge demand in this area, is made available as soon as possible after a tenancy ends.

“I’ve had quite a wide range of roles, beginning on reception where I was the first person that people

met when they visited our office. I’ve enjoyed everything I’ve done and the great thing is that Housing Plus Group very much recognises the talent and contribution of people who work here. I’ve been encouraged to develop my career, given opportunities to progress and even won awards.

“We’re a large Group now, with 18,000 homes and with almost 1,000 employees we are one of the leading not-for-profit housing providers in the area but there is still a really strong family feeling.”

As a father of four including twins, Joe and his wife Clare know all about the importance of family.

“At one point we had four children under the age of four. Customers got to know me and would often ask how we were coping. Life is certainly busy and we have our hands full but it’s a good way to switch off.”

“I grew up in Stafford and it’s good to be in a job where I’m making a positive difference in my own community.”

Elliott’s cycle challenge to help the homeless

It’s our mission to make a positive difference to homes, lives and communities. We try to do that every day and our colleagues like to get involved in local fundraising and volunteering.

Neighbourhood officer Elliott Davies certainly went the extra mile, when he cycled more than 70 miles from Shrewsbury to Barmouth to raise money for the Shrewsbury Ark homeless service.

The ride was the idea of Elliott’s 11-year-old nephew Barney, who tackled the long route alongside his dad and Uncle Elliott.



“Since Barney was eight, he’s been passionate about raising money for the Shrewsbury Ark, raising more than £700 through sponsored silences, making and selling loom band jewellery and organising bring and buy sales,” explained Elliott. “I’m very proud of Barney and was inspired by his dedication so I decided to join his challenge.”

The family of fundraisers aimed to raise £1,000 for the Shrewsbury Ark, a charity which works with homeless and vulnerable people in one of our communities. Its day centre provides vital facilities including showers, laundry and hot meals. It also has an outreach programme which supports rough sleepers.

Having set off from Shrewsbury, the trio completed an arduous day’s cycling before taking a break in a local B&B and setting off again to reach Barmouth the following day.

“Together, we smashed Barney’s target and raised £1,460 for a fantastic cause. It made all those hills worthwhile!” reported a saddle-sore Elliott.

Annual report 2020/21



Welcome

The word 'unprecedented' was used a great deal in this year, as all of us adjusted to living and working very differently at a uniquely challenging time.

Strong leadership, dedicated colleagues and the resilience acquired through a period of sustained growth meant that we were able to maintain essential services and protect our staff during an extended crisis.

At the same time, we successfully harmonised our landlord services following the merger between Stafford and Rural Homes and Housing Plus Group, ensuring that customers receive the same quality of service, wherever they live. That work has continued, with our One Landlord vision.

In a year when so many families were experiencing financial difficulties, I am pleased to see that our debt counselling services more than doubled the savings achieved for customers in this year. The support put into place for customers also resulted in a reduction in rent arrears in this period. We saw increases not only in the number of people living in our retirement living communities but in the hours of domiciliary care we were able to deliver.

And of course, our care provision expanded considerably, with the purchase of The Sandford Nursing Home.

With construction sites closed for part of the year, we nonetheless maintained our commitment to build much-needed affordable homes, investing £22.6m in development projects.

There was significant investment too, in our repairs service. Work totalling more than £30m was carried out, safely, in customers' homes and while planned maintenance work was paused in lockdown, the property team flexed their resources to carry out crucial safety checks.

We found new ways of working – introducing virtual viewings and socially distanced sign-up processes that helped people find a new home.

It is important to recognise that, in this year of crisis, our people excelled in ways that might not be reflected in this annual report. They supported and kept each other safe. They made thousands of reassurance calls to vulnerable and isolated customers, they volunteered their time and learned new ways to connect.

Our vision to make a positive difference to homes, lives and communities was undoubtedly fulfilled in this year.

Gareth Evans
Chair, Homes Board

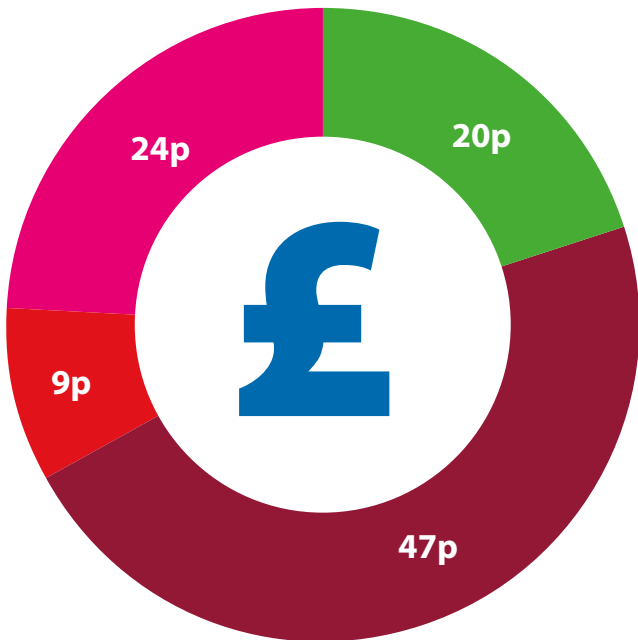


Making a positive difference Homes, lives and communities

How your £ is spent*

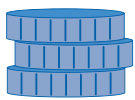
The government sets the level of rents we can charge and we work hard to ensure that the income we receive is well spent and gives value for money.

How each pound of your rent is spent:



Management and services	20p
Capital investment	47p
Interest payable on loans	9p
Maintenance and repairs	24p

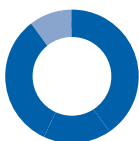
Value for money



We spent **£29.8m** with **521 suppliers**...

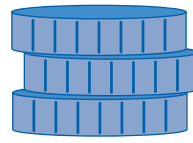


...**198** (38%) of which were **suppliers** in Staffordshire and Shropshire.



89% of customers feel their rent provides value for money.

Your tenancy*



Current rent arrears are **2.41%**

We made a commitment to keep rent arrears below 3%



We let **493 homes** including **75 new builds**

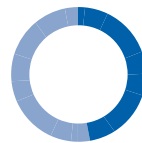
We undertook **990** communal block fire safety inspections.

376 no access cases for gas and electrical inspections were dealt with successfully.

991 starter tenancy and follow-up telephone calls were carried out.

36 tenancy agreement changes were made, including mutual exchanges.

Customer services*



47% of all calls were answered within 30 seconds.



We answered **55,092 calls** from you.



More than **39,000 people** visited the SARH website to find an answer to their question.



We had **846,963 page views** on our website.



2,295 people follow our social media account.

Please note that an asterisk * against a section heading indicates that this data refers to **SARH's performance**. All other data is for Housing Plus Group.

Ron's a lockdown hero

In these challenging times, a huge positive has been the way that people have supported each other. The anxiety and worry of coronavirus has brought out the best in many of us and the loneliness of social distancing has drawn neighbours closer together.

We love hearing great news about how our own customers are stepping-up to make a positive difference. Whether they are keeping in touch with vulnerable neighbours, collecting shopping and medical supplies for others, working in vital frontline roles or lifting the spirits with beautiful garden displays, they're our local lockdown heroes.

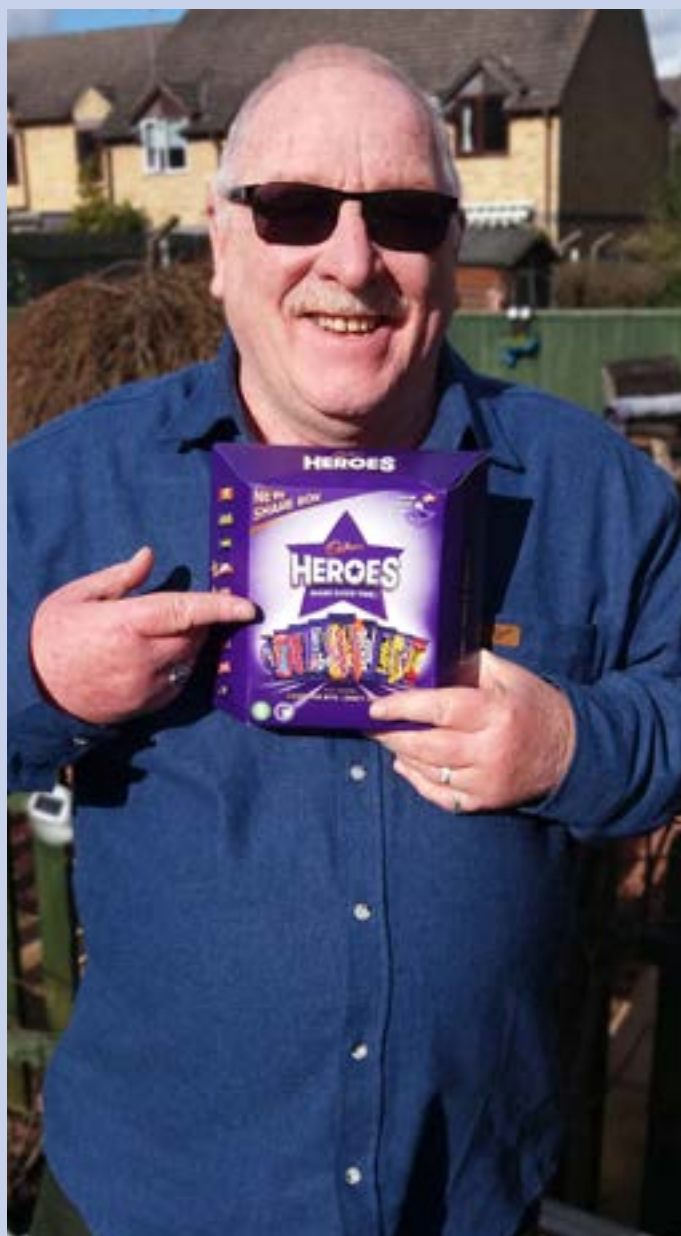
One of these lockdown heroes is Gnosall resident, Ron. A seasoned volunteer, Ron has been everything from a jovial Santa to an enthusiastic tour guide. In recent months, though, he's been calling on his experience as a bingo caller to hold sessions over the phone.

Supporting the award-winning BeConnected project in Stafford borough, Ron's telephone bingo sessions have brought some very welcome laughter into the lives of people who can often experience particular feelings of loneliness at this time.

"We're sometimes so busy laughing and chatting that we forget the bingo!" he admits. "Friendship is about giving something back and making people realise, they're not alone. In normal times it means a lot but in lockdown, that sense of isolation has been so much harder for a lot of people.

"I enjoy getting involved and if I can be there for a chat and make someone laugh then I feel as though I've achieved something."

One of those who have been taking part in Ron's telephone bingo sessions is Christine, from Stafford. She told us how important they have been for her during lockdown: "Living on my own, I found lockdown very hard. It's terrible when you don't see anyone. Ron makes us all laugh and reminds us about the lighter side of life. It's made such a difference."



Ron says: "I'm lucky to live somewhere with a really strong sense of community and we look out for each other. Little things can make a difference. During the first lockdown at Easter, I left chocolate eggs on the doorsteps of my neighbours and if we're going shopping, we phone round to see if anyone needs anything."

Do you know a Local Hero?

We love hearing great news about how our customers are stepping-up to make a positive difference.

www.sarh.co.uk

Feedback*



157 compliments were received.



256 complaints were received.

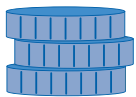


241 resolved at Stage 0



15 escalated to Stage 1

Customer support



Our Employment and Money Advice (EMA) team achieved money savings of **£1,616,492** for our customers.



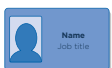
568 customers were supported by the EMA team, helping them to reduce debt, maximise income and budget efficiently.



Our debt counselling service helped customers make savings totalling **£30,566**.



28 people secured volunteering, work placements or were supported into education and training.



11 people were helped into employment.



Through our partnership working with the Prince's Trust and Wolverhampton College **9 young people** received life skills training and support.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)*

We are committed to helping customers experiencing ASB.



We dealt with **126 new cases of ASB**.



7 cases resulted in us taking legal action...



...including **7 injunctions**.



109 environmental ASB cases were also resolved, which included fly tipping and abandoned vehicles.

Involving and empowering our customers



100 involved customers have been recruited...



...giving us a total of **372 involved customers** across the Group.



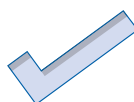
Our 372 involved customers regularly share their views to help us improve services.



4,876 surveys were carried out to get customers views on our services.



The Scrutiny Group volunteered **244 hours** of their time to give feedback on our services.



15 actions were implemented from their recommendations...



...in **four key projects.**

You said, we did.

You said:

Customers told us they were unhappy with the way we handled complaints.

We did:

We have established a centralised complaints team with dedicated officers to reduce the time taken to respond to complaints and to improve communication. This has resulted in a **9% improvement** in the time taken to answer a complaint and has seen satisfaction levels with complaint handling **rise by 31%**.

You said:

Customers would like better information when reporting ASB and an explanation of what to expect throughout the process.

We did:

We have **updated the information on our website** to make it clear how you report anti-social behaviour and we've included an overview of what you can expect as your complaint is progressed. We have also added this information to all our customer welcome packs.

You said:

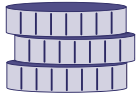
Customers wanted to see an overall improvement to the repairs service.

We did:

We have listened to the views of our customers through surveys and complaints. We have also worked with our Scrutiny Group to dive deeper into the things that matter to our customers and understand how our services can be shaped to provide an even better experience.

Your home

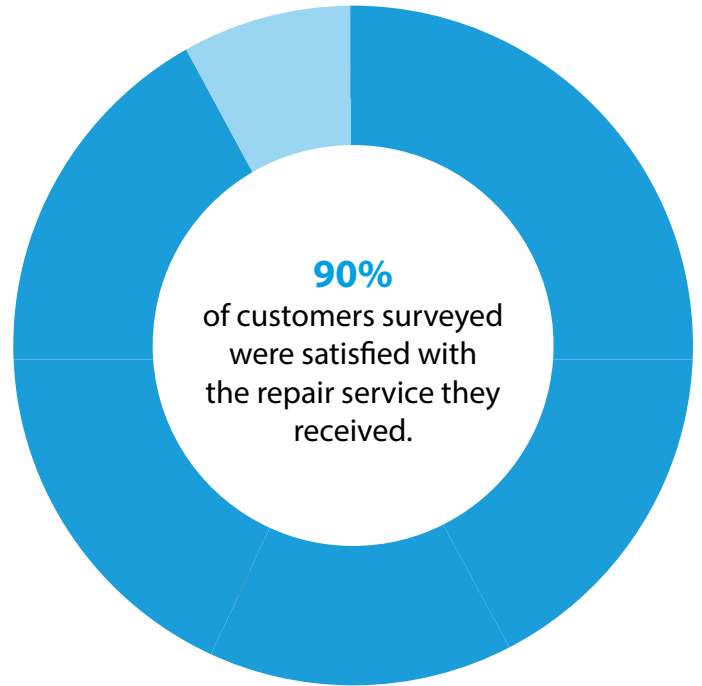
Well-maintained homes



We spent more than **£30,000,000** repairing, maintaining and improving homes.



32,984 property repairs were carried out.



30,248 safety first inspections were carried out at customers' homes.



80% of responsive repairs were completed within target time.

Improving homes

£5,329,000 of our total budget was spent making planned improvements to our homes.



282 new kitchens were installed.



378 new bathrooms were installed.



507 new boilers were installed.



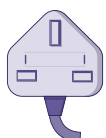
On average **97% of waste** was recycled...



443 new doors were installed.



...stopping **150 tonnes of waste** from going to landfill.



127 homes were rewired.

During 2020-21, COVID-19 had a significant impact on our routine repair timescales and the delivery of our home improvements programme.



Working together to stay safe during unprecedented times

Coronavirus restrictions haven't stopped us from ensuring our customers remain safe in their homes.

Clearly, we've had to look at new ways of working but essential safety checks have continued throughout lockdown and this has only been possible by working in partnership with customers while taking practical steps to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

Alongside a successful information campaign, these steps have helped us ensure compliance with government legislation on mandatory gas checks, electrical testing and fire risk assessments.

The measures we've taken are included in an eight-point plan that's followed whenever an operative visits a customer's home and have certainly been well received.

John, a customer who lives in Stafford, said his recent visit from an engineer went very well and the contractor was quick and polite, and worked



with him to ensure they maintained a safe distance from each other.

This thorough approach provides additional peace of mind for customers, especially those who may be particularly vulnerable or have members of their household in an 'at risk' category.

All these sensible steps have been backed up by our 'Help us keep you safe' campaign, which includes online guides and leaflets to help customers understand the approach we're taking, along with investment in 'Gas Tag' technology which collects real-time data about the gas boilers and appliances in all of our homes.



For the latest COVID-19 guidance, visit www.sarh.co.uk

Care and support

When we recruit for many of our roles, we value personal qualities above specific experience. People who are caring, dedicated, collaborative and determined to make a positive difference can very quickly become part of Care Plus.

Those qualities really came to the fore last year as we saw frontline staff continue to provide great care and support, safely and with courage.

Our domiciliary care teams worked day and night to provide close personal care enabling people to live safely and in some cases die at home with the people they love. The retirement living team quickly adapted to working very differently, providing reassurance, advice, clear communication and practical help to 2,000 residents who were among the most vulnerable in our communities.

Our telecare team faced huge challenges, too. Some of the only staff unable to work remotely during lockdown, they maintained a 24:7 emergency response in what they described as “Relentless and exhausting” weeks in our offices.

And as we focused on support for customers and colleagues, we didn’t lose focus on our growth agenda.

During this year we purchased The Sandford, our first nursing home, in the wonderful setting of Church Stretton. As well as beautiful building, we gained a team of dedicated caring nurses and care staff some of whom have worked at The Sandford for many years. The home and the staff team there are hugely respected by the local community and The Sandford makes a great addition to the Care Plus offering.

We continued to prepare for the opening of Wren House, which will increase the specialist supported housing provision available in Stafford and saw work progress on The Burgesses in Kinver.

We also completed a successful integration process following following the merger between Stafford and Rural Homes and Housing Plus Group. During 2020-21 we harmonised our services across Staffordshire and Shropshire and re-structured to deliver efficient, effective, caring services throughout our operational area.

Les Clarke
Executive Director
of Housing and Care



Retirement living



We have **54** retirement living communities.



2,381 customers live in our retirement living communities.



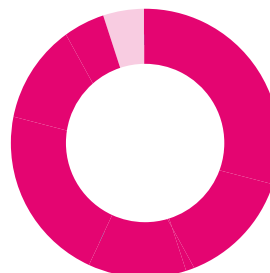
We helped **892 customers** maintain their independence in Shropshire through our support service.



13,389 people attended our wellbeing activities.



2,288 wellbeing activities were organised in our retirement living communities and extra care schemes.



95% of customers said they are happy with our retirement living communities.



Care Plus acquires Shropshire nursing home

Care Plus completed the purchase of a south Shropshire nursing home, extending the wide range of support services available to customers.

The Sandford Nursing Home provides accommodation for up to 35 residents in the market town of Church Stretton.

During Victorian and Edwardian times the town was known as 'Little Switzerland' because of its stunning landscape and became a health resort favoured by people looking for rest and relaxation. We are excited to offer residential care for our customers in this beautiful setting.

Les Clarke, Executive Director of Housing and Care said: "We are warmly welcoming the team working at The Sandford into the Care Plus family. They will continue to provide the high standard of care and support that is so important to residents and their families.

"As life expectancies increase and more of us live to old age, we want to offer people a wider range of support to live their best life. The purchase of The Sandford allows us to provide more choice - from

the reassurance of telecare support to purpose-built retirement living communities, high quality care in your own home and residential nursing accommodation."

The purchase follows our 2019 investment of more than £1m to improve the standard of housing and facilities for older people living independently with access to support in their own home. It is part of our commitment to making care and support available to more people in our communities, which will continue with the completion of new retirement apartments at Wren House, in Stafford and The Burgesses, in Kinver.

Join Care Plus at this exciting time. For opportunities to become part of our fast-growing success and to make a difference to the lives of older people in Staffordshire and Shropshire, see our current vacancies

www.care-plus.org.uk/jobs

Domiciliary care



We delivered **99,694 hours** of care and support.



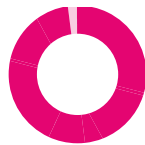
We provided around **1,833 hours** of specialist, domiciliary care per week.



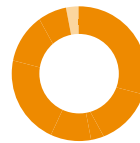
Telecare service



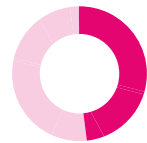
134,802 telecare calls were answered.



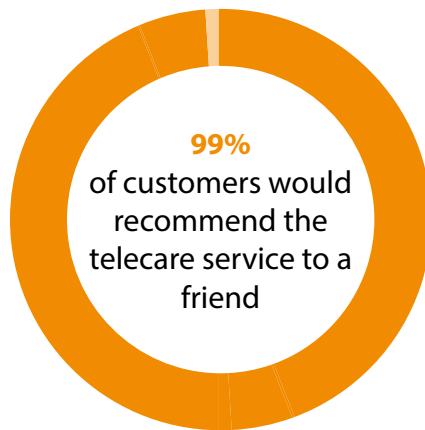
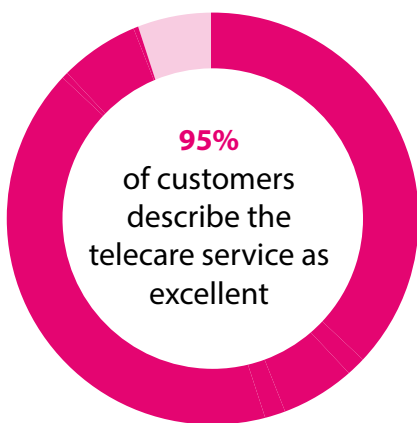
98% of enhanced telecare referrals and assessments, where customers have complex and urgent needs, were completed within 48 hours.



96.97% of calls were answered within 60 seconds.



48% of basic telecare installations were completed within five days of first contact.



New homes



We completed or acquired
191 homes



128
for social rent



63
for shared ownership sale

Locations



42 homes in Stafford



26 homes in South Staffordshire



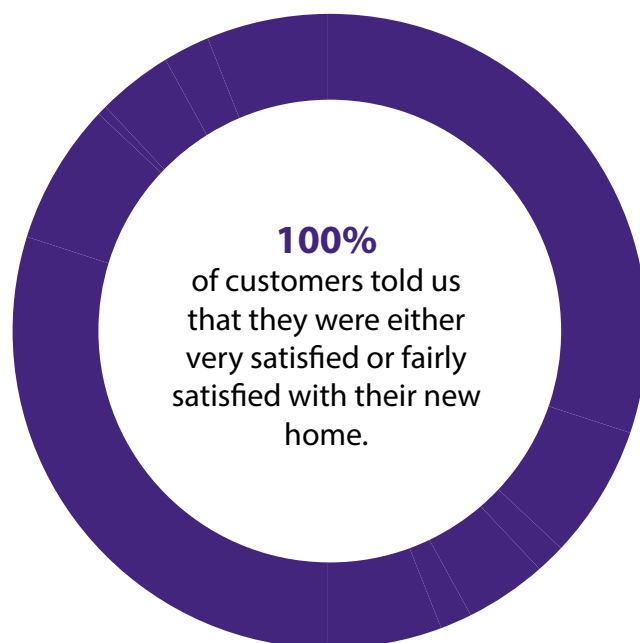
6 homes in Cannock Chase



56 homes in Shropshire



61 homes in Telford and Wrekin



How did we do?

Share your feedback on our annual report to be in with a chance of winning a £25 shopping voucher.



What did you think of our annual report? Your feedback will help us improve the way we present this information in the future and could even win you a £25 shopping voucher.

Simply answer the following questions and return the survey to us at the address below or if you prefer, you can complete the survey online on our website:

www.sarh.co.uk/annual-report-2021

1. How easy did you find the annual report to read and understand?

- Very easy Somewhat easy Indifferent
 Somewhat difficult Very difficult

Comments

2. How successful do you think the report is in providing an insight into our performance?

- Very successful Somewhat successful Indifferent
 Somewhat unsuccessful Very unsuccessful

Comments

3. What did you enjoy most about the report?

- Stories Performance figures/
information Other (please provide
further details)

Comments

4. Are there any suggestions or improvements that you would like us to take into consideration when creating next year's report?

Comments

5. To enter the draw to be in with a chance of winning a £25 shopping voucher, please share your details:

Name

Address

Please return your feedback in an envelope to **Annual report survey, Freepost SSHA** by **Friday 29 October 2021** to be in with a chance of winning a shopping voucher.

Community safety

The safety and wellbeing of our customers is always our top priority. We understand that Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) can have a significant impact on people's mental health and sense of security, as well as harming the local community.

After listening to customer concerns, we've launched a new dedicated community safety team to make it easier for you to report incidents and to ensure that these reports are acted on quickly.

The team works with our neighbourhood officers, local councils, police and other agencies to reduce incidents of ASB and improve community safety and has already successfully:

- Secured seven ASB injunctions
- Concluded a longstanding ASB case
- Obtained two eviction notices

"The heart of our work is providing homes and essential services to our customers", explains community safety manager, Julie Harvey, "But sometimes we have to make difficult decisions and evict tenants for the benefit of other customers."

ASB Awareness Week

The official community safety team launch, coincided with a national ASB Awareness Week, organised by community safety specialists Resolve, to bring together people and organisations from across the country to take a stand against ASB and make communities safer.

Rebecca Bryant OBE, Chief Executive of Resolve, explained: "We need to change the way we think about ASB. It is not low-level crime. It devastates the lives of victims and communities and can be a precursor to more serious crime."

Our community safety team leader, Emma Cooper was named Practitioner of the Year at this year's Resolve awards, which were announced during ASB Awareness Week.



The annual awards shine a light on the contribution of tenants, housing officers, ASB practitioners and their partners, to tackling crime and making a difference across the UK.

Emma was thrilled to accept the award as she believes that resolving ASB changes lives and has a beneficial impact on families, friends and neighbourhoods.

"It can be hugely daunting for someone to appear in court but I know how important it is for the judge to hear from them in person, to understand the way that ASB is affecting their daily life", explains Emma.

"I can produce documented records, tell the judge about the number of times that police have been out to a particular address, show that we've followed all the processes and taken every possible action. **Nothing is as powerful, though, as giving a voice to the victim.**"

How to report ASB

If you experience ASB, you can report it 24:7 on our website – www.sarh.co.uk/asb. You can also read more about what is - and isn't - classed as ASB, get advice on dealing with issues and find details of other organisations who can offer help and guidance.

Please remember that if you are in immediate danger, you should always call the police on **999**.



Fire safety

SARH works with residents to keep tenants and visitors safe in our buildings.

Fire safety in communal areas is a priority for us and for our customers. A fire here could spread between homes. It could make it more difficult for the emergency services to reach you and might prevent you from leaving the building in an emergency.

In line with our legal responsibilities, we undertake fire safety assessments, fire door checks and fire proofing maintenance at all our apartment blocks and communal buildings on a periodic basis, to make sure that the buildings remain safe.

What do we mean by communal areas?

Communal areas are places in your building that other people share. We're referring to areas outside your front door – like landings, entrance lobbies, corridors, meter cupboards, lifts, open walkways and balconies.

Keeping communal areas clear

Communal areas must be kept clear at all times. If a fire broke out in your building, there should be nothing in these areas that could:

- ▶ Stop you escaping quickly
- ▶ Prevent emergency services reaching you or your neighbours
- ▶ Give off toxic smoke or gas when burning
- ▶ Explode in high temperatures – such as non-safety glass in picture frames or ornaments
- ▶ Cause fire to spread more quickly



If you live in a building that has communal areas, you can help us to keep you, your family and neighbours safe.

Fire doors

Fire doors form part of the fire protection of your building. No alteration or replacement of doors should be made without our written consent. Please do not interfere with or remove any door closing mechanism and never prop open a fire door.



Communal cupboards

Cupboards in communal areas must not be used to store any combustible items such as tumble dryers and electrical appliances or other flammable materials, for example, large amounts of cardboard.



Barbecues, fuel containers gas bottles and motorcycles

These pose a significant fire risk and their storage or use are prohibited in apartment blocks or communal areas.



Rubbish

Discarded rubbish can be highly flammable. It is a breach of your tenancy to dump rubbish. If rubbish is discarded by you or your visitors, you will be charged for its removal.



Mobility scooters

These must be stored and charged in your own apartment, not in communal areas.



Smoking

We operate a no smoking policy in all communal areas. This includes the use of e-cigarettes.



Our people: meet trainee fire door fitter, Tom Reynolds

Tom Reynolds joined us just weeks before coronavirus was declared a pandemic. As a driver, it was part of his job to deliver some of the new kitchens and bathrooms being fitted in customers' homes in Stafford.

"Things changed very quickly," he remembers. "The country went into full lockdown in March 2020 and I was furloughed in the summer. It was an anxious time for everyone but even as a new employee, I knew that the Group was looking after me.

"A few weeks later I was able to get involved in some of the fire safety work that was taking place. I was going into communal buildings, making sure that the right signage was there to help keep the residents safe.

"I really enjoy my job. It's hands-on work as part of a great team. It's important to me that I'm doing something worthwhile, helping to keep people safe."

"Soon, I was asked if I'd like to become part of the team fitting new fire doors. I took two courses, backed-up with on-the-job training.

"Now, I'm working all over Staffordshire and Shropshire, fitting fire doors in apartment blocks and retirement living communities. I really enjoy my work. It's hands-on, which I like and I'm part of a great team. If I need help, I know I only have to ask. It's important to me that I'm doing something worthwhile, helping to keep people safe."



Safety checks

SARH has important legal duties and obligations to ensure you and your family are safe in your home.

By law, we must carry out safety checks and it's a condition of your tenancy that you give us access to your home to carry out this essential work.

Our safety first checks include:

- ▶ Gas servicing and repairs
- ▶ Electrical installation checks and associated repairs
- ▶ Solid fuel and oil central heating servicing and repairs
- ▶ Managing asbestos
- ▶ Solar PV roof panel inspections
- ▶ Un-vented cylinders



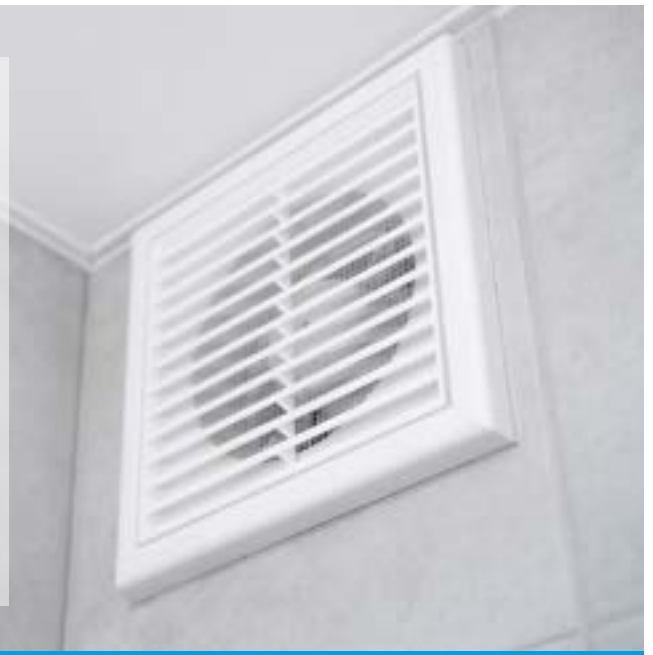
- ▶ Fire doors
- ▶ Fire risk assessments – in communal areas and sheltered schemes only
- ▶ Stair lifts and hoists

When we need to carry out safety work or inspections we will contact you and let you know when we, or one of our contractors, will visit your home.

Every year, missed pre-booked appointments cost thousands of pounds - money that could otherwise be spent making more home improvements.

If you need to change a safety check appointment please contact our customer services team on **0800 111 4554**.

Cutting condensation and giving mould the brush off



Condensation is a nuisance, but it can be avoided and the good news is that it is very rare for it to indicate any kind of building defect.

Condensation is particularly common in rooms like kitchens and bathrooms. It happens when warm, moist air reaches cold surfaces like windows or walls.

If severe condensation is ignored, it can become a major problem in your home.

In a property of two people, approximately **23 pints of moisture** can be added per day, through breathing, showers, baths, boiling kettles, cooking and washing dishes.

Fortunately there are some easy steps you can take to cut condensation:

- ▶ Keep your home warm to avoid cold surfaces. Condensation is worse in buildings which are constantly heating and cooling.
- ▶ Place lids on saucepans when cooking to reduce steam in the kitchen.
- ▶ Try not to dry clothes on radiators or racks indoors. If you have to do this, use the bathroom. Open a window to allow air to circulate and close the door to that room.
- ▶ If you use a tumble dryer, make sure it is vented to an open window or through an outside wall to stop moisture spreading through your home. If your dryer has a built-in condenser, make sure that the filter is cleaned and cleared regularly.
- ▶ When you are cooking or bathing, use an extractor fan or open a window and keep the door closed. Keep the extractor fan on or the window open for about 20 minutes after you have finished (with the door closed).
- ▶ Leave trickle vents (the slotted vents in your window frames) open when rooms are occupied - even in the winter when your heating is on. These vents provide constant ventilation which removes water vapour.
- ▶ Don't use paraffin or Calor gas heaters.
- ▶ Leave a gap between your wall and the back of free-standing furniture like wardrobes or cupboards. Try not to overfill cupboards, wardrobes and drawers so that air can circulate around the contents.
- ▶ When condensation appears, wipe it away. Ventilate moisture and wipe-away condensation.
- ▶ Use moisture traps, available from most DIY stores, in affected rooms for a big reduction in condensation.

Positive ventilation units

To help you manage condensation we install positive input ventilation equipment to homes when we fit a new kitchen or bathroom. This equipment continually operates to force moist air out of the home before it has the opportunity to condense on surfaces.



If you notice mould in your home, you should treat it straight away to stop it from spreading and causing damage. You can do this by sterilising the affected area with a suitable fungicidal wash (available from most DIY stores), following the manufacturer's instructions.

Have I got damp or is it condensation?

Is the problem on north-facing walls, in the corner of a room, in cupboards, behind furniture or under work surfaces?

This is usually the result of condensation, where there is little air movement

Can you see water droplets on windows or water pooling on window sills?

This is condensation

Can you see mould looking like black spots along the edges of your skirting or ceilings?

This is condensation

Is there a clearly defined damp stain?

This might be penetrating damp or a water leak – you need to report this to us

Can you see a 'tidemark' on ground floor room walls, extending to around 900-1000mm above the floor surface?

This is uncommon and sounds like rising damp – you need to report this to us

Are you covered?

What would you do if you lost everything because of a fire or flood in your home?

As your landlord, it's our responsibility to insure the building in which you live. Buildings insurance covers the cost of repairing damage to a property's structure, as well as replacing things like pipes, cables and drains.

This insurance does not include your personal possessions.

It's your responsibility to arrange home contents insurance, which can cost just a few pounds a week, to cover your belongings from accidental damage and fire, flooding and theft.



Please visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk for further guidance.

MyVoice Volunteer to get involved

My Voice offers you a range of opportunities to share feedback on our services, influence the decisions that are made about your home and improve the way that we work.

Customer feedback is regularly sought through a range of measures including surveys, complaints, feedback and our customer-led Scrutiny Group.

Getting involved

You don't need any previous experience to get involved, just enthusiasm and a desire to make a positive difference. It's also a great way to meet new people, gain valuable volunteering experience and boost your work-related skills.

Whether you have just an hour to spare or more, there is something for everyone - you can join our customer-led Scrutiny Group, share your views by completing online surveys or tell us what you think over the phone and by email.

It's really easy to get involved - you can:

Complete an online form on our website – www.sarh.co.uk/MyVoice

Email the customer voice team - MyVoice@housingplusgroup.co.uk

Call your local customer voice team on **0800 111 4554**



Scrutiny Group members join new national panel

Involved customers David Spruce and Julia Stonehouse have been appointed to the Housing Ombudsman's new national Resident Panel.

The panel will help develop the work of the ombudsman as well as ensuring a stronger voice for tenants. More than 600 tenants applied to join the panel, with 100 chosen to represent a cross-section of landlords in the Housing Ombudsman scheme.

David is deputy chair of our Scrutiny Group, a panel of customers who review performance and propose improvements to our services.

"Housing Plus Group has recognised the breadth of knowledge that exists among its tenants and through the My Voice platform provides opportunities for customer involvement at every level," explained David. "My experience on the Scrutiny Group has prepared me very well for this national role.

"The new Resident Panel is about **listening to customers, learning from each other and promoting excellence.** It will also ensure that the voice of tenants is clearly heard in the response of the ombudsman to complaints received by housing associations across the country."

Julia Stonehouse combines her role as an involved customer, with a demanding full-time job. She

has been part of the Scrutiny Group for the last six years and has also been appointed to the Housing Ombudsman's new national Resident Panel.

"For me, it's about doing something that helps other people," she explains. "I've definitely gained a lot of confidence from being an involved customer and I know that we are helping to improve services. That was what encouraged me to apply for the new Housing Ombudsman panel, although I didn't expect to get very far. I was surprised and delighted to hear that I'd been accepted."

Les Clarke, Housing Plus Group Executive Director of Housing and Care said: "When our new Group came together in 2019, we promised to listen to customers and went on to launch My Voice. This provides a range of channels for feedback including the Scrutiny Group where David and Julia have been doing such excellent work."



Our people: meet care and support worker Kizzy Murphy



Kizzy Murphy is a care and support worker, with Care Plus. She works in the community, providing high quality care to people in their own homes. Kizzy recently returned to work after having her second child and says it feels great to be back.

"I joined Care Plus around seven years ago. Before then I'd worked in a dementia home and although I enjoyed that, I was ready for a change. Now, I deliver at home care and support. It's great because I'm helping people to live independently, in their own homes. I like the fact that every day is different, I'm getting out into the community and getting to know people and their families.

"I'm very much part of a team. I was on maternity leave during the pandemic last year and I missed my colleagues; I wanted to be there to support them. It feels great to be back and after a couple of days it was as though I'd never been away. I think that this experience has brought us even closer together and it has definitely helped the public understand the importance of our work.

"I love my job. When I go home at the end of the day, I know I've made a difference."

"Before I had my children I worked full-time, as a team leader. Now I want to work part-time and Care Plus helped to make sure that my career fits into my new life. That's the good thing about being part of a big organisation, there are always opportunities to take on more responsibility or to move into a different area. We have lots of training, too, in specialist areas like diabetes care and mental health. There is always more to learn.

"In my role, we spend a lot of time with people. It feels good to know that I'm making someone's life easier. People are able to live independently in their own home, with care and support tailored to their needs. The things that matter most don't change. They are happy and their families say that we take the worry away - especially as they can also choose our 24:7 telecare and lifeline service with the extra reassurance of immediate help at the touch of a button. I love my job. When I go home at the end of the day, I know I've made a difference."

Looking for a new challenge?

careplus

There has never been a better time to join Care Plus

We are one of the largest care providers in the area and we do things differently because we are here for people, not for profit.

Right now, we're growing. We're offering even more care and support for older and vulnerable people and creating outstanding career opportunities for caring professionals.

If you are

- ▶ an **experienced care worker** looking for new challenges
- ▶ someone **new to the sector** who is ready to make a **positive difference**
- ▶ a **Registered Nurse** looking for responsibility as well as reward

...there's a role for you at Care Plus.



Check out our current vacancies at
www.care-plus.org.uk/careers

There's a reason for the **plus** in Care Plus. It's there because we can do so much more for you and your family.

careplus

- ▶ Great Care Plus technology - **24:7 telecare and lifeline reassurance**
- ▶ **Support** to take the chores out of everyday life
- ▶ **Wellbeing support** to help you get more out of life
- ▶ Great care with a smile - **personal care to help you live independently**
- ▶ **High quality nursing home** to take life easy, in luxury
- ▶ 54 **retirement living communities** in Staffordshire and Shropshire



Find out how we could put the **plus** into your life at www.care-plus.org.uk

COVID-19 update

Government guidance has changed. However, SARH will be keeping COVID-secure working practices in place. We believe that this the safest decision for our customers, staff and communities.

For regular updates on our services please visit the dedicated coronavirus area on our website – www.sarh.co.uk/covid19

Useful contact numbers:

- **Customer services**
0800 111 4554
- **Gas leaks**
0800 111 999
(National Gas Emergency Service)
- **Health and sickness help and advice**
111 (NHS Direct)
- **Police 101** (non-emergency)
- **Refuse collection**
01785 619000
(Stafford Borough Council)
- **Street lighting**
0300 111 8000
(Staffordshire County Council)
- **Street cleaning**
01785 619000
(Stafford Borough Council)
- **Personal concerns, worries and troubles**
116 123(Samaritans)
- **Theo Clarke MP**
Stafford
020 7219 3000
theo.clarke.mp@parliament.uk

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