



SUSTAINABILITY REPORT 2023





Leeson Court, Towcester

Contents

Chair’s statement	4
Environmental	6
Climate change	8
Ecology	14
Resource management	16
Social and customer needs	18
Affordability and security	19
Building safety and quality	21
Resident voice	23
Resident support	26
Placemaking	28
Governance	30
Structure and governance	32
Board and Trustees	35
Colleague wellbeing	38
Supply chain management	46

Chair's statement

Welcome to bpha's third annual report focused on environment, social and governance (ESG) matters. bpha manages almost 20,000 homes, funds the development and building of new ones, and employs nearly 500 people.

In all these activities we actively seek to adopt and implement ethical, responsible and environmentally sustainable approaches and ways of working. This includes upgrading the fabric of homes, improving communal indoor and outdoor areas, working with customers and communities to improve their lived experience and in the way we carry out our daily business activities.

This has been another extremely challenging year, but we have continued to make steady progress in delivering on our environment and customer related work programmes. I would like to thank the Board, the executive and everyone working in bpha for the way they have facilitated and made good progress in achieving our ESG objectives.

With inflation driving higher costs including energy bills we continued to work with and support customers over the past 12 months. Our Money Advice Team handled more than 2,000 referrals during the 2022/23 financial year, supporting customers to claim over £1.8 million in welfare benefits they were entitled to and helping to manage £1.5 million of debt by negotiating with creditors. bpha's rent allowance fund provided nearly £400,000 to help customers prevent and reduce arrears.



We have continued to invest in increasing the energy efficiency of homes. This includes through insulating lofts, replacing gas boilers, windows, external doors and roofs. Through this work we increased the number of homes meeting the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C and above categories by 5%. 87% of all bpha homes (11,559) are now rated EPC Band C or above. All 222 properties developed during the 2022/2023 financial year are rated EPC Band C or above.

We were pleased to complete the refurbishment of the first building as part of our programme to regenerate Bedford's high-rise blocks. Ashburnham Court, built in 1953, benefited from several improvements to enhance its energy efficiency, including the installation of a new exterior, external wall insulation and high-performance window replacements. Work is well underway on a second building.

While improving the energy efficiency of homes, we have also focused on maintaining the integrity and character of the properties. We revitalised a 1911 property with the installation of floor insulation, an external wall insulation system, new windows and doors, and a smart cylinder heating system. The energy efficiency of the property improved from EPC Band F to Band C and will be used as a template for other period properties.

We have also carried out a flood risk assessment of all our properties in relation to river and surface water flooding. 99% of bpha properties are in a low or very low flood risk area from rivers and 93% for surface water. We have provided customers living near flood plains with guidance on the action to take in the unlikely event of flooding. We also alleviated overheating risks in a number of properties including through modifying the ventilation systems.

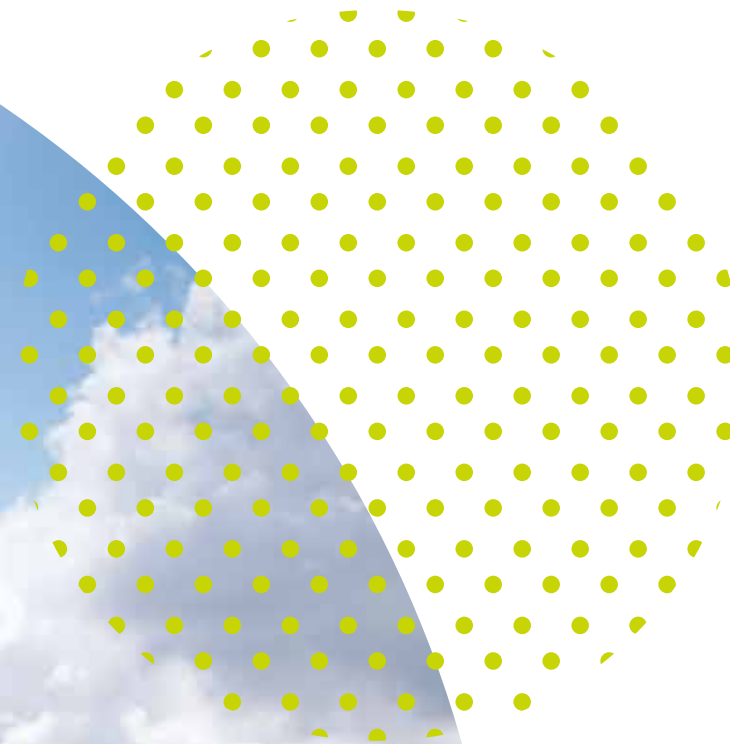
We continued to reach out and listen to customers on how outdoor and green spaces should be used, managed and maintained. Our current grounds maintenance contracts were heavily influenced by customer feedback while new developments continue to have ecological aspects prioritised.

Bringing our maintenance and repair work in-house is allowing us to have greater control over resource and waste management of these activities. We have an integrated system with our materials' supplier, Travis Perkins, that provides greater visibility over our supply chain.

We have continued to make steady progress in the two years since our first ESG report. However, we fully recognise that there is much more to do.

Dr Paul Leinster, CBE

Environmental



Decarbonising homes is an essential part of the UK's journey to net zero.

With buildings responsible for about a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions, we recognise the need to make bpha homes more sustainable.

Recent record UK summer temperatures and heatwaves and wildfires across large parts of Europe provide a stark reminder of more frequent extreme weather.

Our environmental commitments are captured in our Environment Strategy. This is updated regularly and covers five key areas – customers and communities, new homes, existing homes, colleagues and workplaces, and operations.

Summary

The opening chapter of this report explains how bpha mitigates its impact on and adapts to climate change, manages and encourages the use of green spaces, and optimises the sourcing and use of resources such as construction materials and water. Also how it reduces, reuses and recycles waste. As well as highlighting progress made, it explores some of the key challenges faced.

Oxlip House

Climate change

This theme encompasses a broad range of activities relating to climate change. In addition to detailing bpha's efforts to improve the energy efficiency of existing properties, as expressed by EPC ratings, and our approach to the energy efficiency of new builds, this section also examines our greenhouse gas emissions data, information provision to customers, and the effectiveness of climate risk measures relating to flooding and overheating.

ESG themes covered:

- C14 EPC ratings – existing homes
- C15 EPC ratings – new homes
- C16 Greenhouse gases
- C17 Energy efficiency
- C18 Climate risk mitigation
- C19 Resident information

Improving the environmental performance of bpha homes is central to our ambition to become carbon neutral.

According to the UK Green Building Council, energy usage within existing housing stock represents 48% of the country's built environment emissions. Given around 80% of 2050's building stock already exists, decarbonising our current stock is a key step towards the UK's goal to become a net zero society by mid-century.

There is also a strong financial inclusion case for addressing energy efficiency, as highlighted by the current cost-of-living challenges facing customers, who continue to be presented with high energy bills.

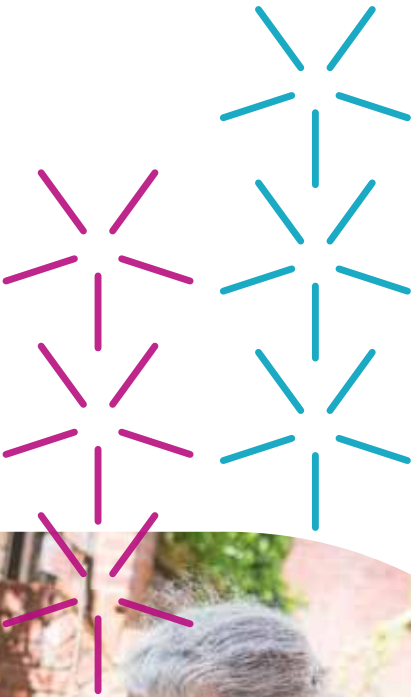
Transitioning through the EPC bands

Excellent progress has been made, which places us in a good position to meet the government's 2050 Net Zero commitments.

EPC ratings represent a key indicator of home energy efficiency. Homes are graded from A to G with A being the top EPC rating. The average for homes in the UK is D.

During the last financial year, bpha made significant strides in improving the energy efficiency of many homes. As of 31 March 2023, 87% (11,559) of bpha homes that we own and manage were rated EPC C or higher, compared to 82% on 31 March 2021. Meanwhile, the number of homes rated D has been reduced from 2,279 to 1,670.

In terms of new homes, 100% (222) of properties developed during the 2022/2023 financial year are rated EPC Band C or above.



Maria, bpha customer



Joseph Priestly Court, Daventry

Energy efficiency

Our energy efficiency programme has been a key contributor to the increase in the EPC ratings. During the past financial year we increased the insulation in 40 lofts and replaced 269 gas boilers, 1643 windows, 1050 external doors and 32 roofs.

We have also made sound progress on retrofitting loft and cavity wall insulation in customers' homes. This has been made possible by successful applications for Eco4 funding, a government scheme set up to support low-income households and to create more energy efficient homes.

We have appointed specialists to spearhead our retrofitting and upgrade work, including bpha's Head of Asset Investment and Sustainability who started in the summer of 2022.

Vista is bpha's significant regeneration programme for high-rise blocks in Bedford. Built in the 1950s and 1960s, the blocks occupy central locations within the town. Vista is transforming the external fabric of the buildings, modernising communal spaces and uplifting the surrounding grounds.

The completion of Ashburnham Court has been a significant milestone over the past reporting period. The block, built in 1953 and comprising 55 flats, is the first building to be completed through Vista.

Situated opposite Bedford rail station and on a key route into the town centre, the regeneration has given Ashburnham Court a new lease of life. Over the course of 18 months, several improvements designed to enhance energy efficiency were also made. These include the installation of a new terracotta exterior, external wall insulation and high-performance window replacements.

Internal and external communal areas have also been improved, with new lifts and a renewed district heating system, as well as an electric vehicle (EV) charging point. This is available for customers and could also be an important resource for our in-house maintenance teams, who will have EVs in the future.

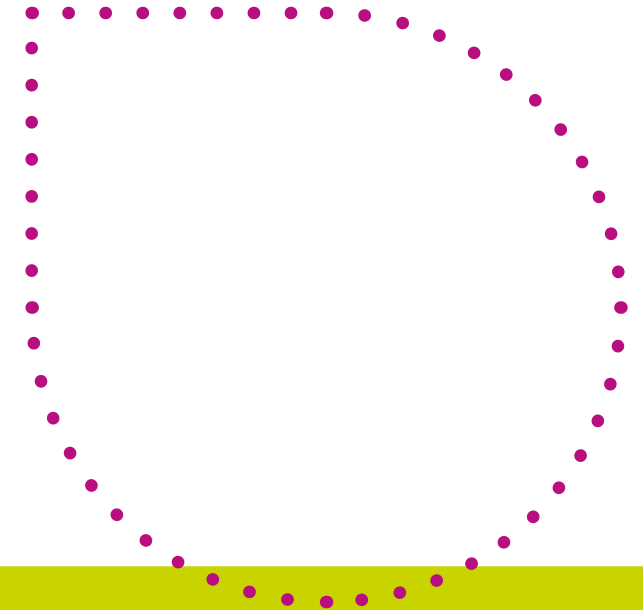
We are now regenerating Bury Court, with a similar brief to Ashburnham that will improve external insulation as well as internal and external communal areas. This is due for completion around spring 2024.

Helping customers live safely and sustainably

Improving the EPC ratings of the homes we manage is also enabling customers to consume less energy and make savings on their bills. To help customers live more efficiently and sustainably, we provide advice through our digital engagement forums and social media channels, with our Money Advice Team also on hand to offer support.

Ensuring bpha homes are protected from climate risks such as flooding and overheating is another key priority. At present, around 92% of bpha homes are at low risk of overheating. To safeguard the rest of the portfolio, including some communal areas in high-rise blocks, we are alleviating risks through measures such as modifying the ventilation.

99% of bpha properties are in a low or very low flood risk area from rivers and 93% for surface water. Surface water flooding is caused predominantly by sudden downpours. Customer living in homes that are at a higher risk of flooding are provided with guidance on mitigation measures should flooding occur.



Case study

Enhancing the energy efficiency at period properties

Although most of bpha's property portfolio is comprised of builds no more than 50 years old, we are also responsible for some period properties.

To achieve our EPC targets, it is important to upgrade these homes with energy saving features, while maintaining the integrity and character of the buildings and their interiors.

At Hurst Grove, in Bedford, we recently completed several improvements to a Georgian property (built in 1911). It is a large, red brick, solid wall, semi-detached house with a cross-gable pitched roof and large bay windows on the ground and first floors. It was previously let on a general needs tenure, with the last customers living there for more than 30 years. The property became void in 2021.

The property has been given a new lease of life while maintaining its period features. Key retrofits included the installation of new floor and underfloor insulation, an external wall insulation system with a finish made of authentic brick slips, new windows and doors, and a smart cylinder heating system.

As a result of the works, the energy efficiency rating of the property has increased from EPC Band F to Band C. Moving forwards, this project will act as a guide for other period properties.



Greenhouse gas emissions

Every year we commission SHIFT Environment, a third-party environmental consultant, to carry out an assessment of our progress towards key goals set out in our Environment Strategy.

This includes greenhouse gas emissions, which are assessed through the SHIFT sustainability model, that is adopted by more than 40 housing associations across the country. Our performance in existing homes energy efficiency is noteworthy, with 87% of properties rated as EPC band C or above. This is among the highest of the 40 landlords assessed.

A key part of our environmental management journey will be the implementation of a new management system compatible with ISO 14001. This has been drafted and is in the process of being shared and reviewed internally.

We are also beginning to engage in environmental assessment as part of the procurement process, working with suppliers to create key environmental metrics that can be monitored and targeted annually. This has started with the distribution of environmental questionnaires, which will help us build a benchmark to target further improvements.

In terms of greenhouse gas emissions for the 2022/2023 financial year, these remained largely constant versus the preceding year, rising slightly from 2.42 tonnes per home managed to 2.46 tonnes.



Russell Court, Bedford

Ecology

This section assesses how bpha works to protect the local environment. In particular, the ecology theme examines two key ways in which this is achieved – increasing green spaces and promoting biodiversity on and near homes, and managing air pollutants that may arise from construction works and maintenance activity.

ESG themes covered:

- C20 Green space and biodiversity
- C21 Strategy to manage pollutants

Due to the nature of bpha's portfolio, a large proportion of our housing is situated in urban areas where green spaces are limited.

However, we recognise the important role that the likes of parks, gardens and playgrounds have in promoting the mental and physical wellbeing of customers. These outdoor spaces also help to reduce exposure to air pollutants, noise and excessive heat.

Customers continue to be consulted and listened to on how outdoor and green spaces are managed and maintained. For example, our current grounds maintenance contracts, which now extend beyond basic upkeep of grass areas to include other tasks such as the regular jet cleaning of bin stores, were heavily influenced by customer feedback during the tendering process.

New developments continue to have ecological aspects prioritised. The award-winning Trumpington Meadows development, for example, includes extensive areas of meadows and riverside parkland. These have become established natural environments and are full of wildlife and biodiversity for the community to enjoy.

Our Community Engagement Team has also been busy promoting biodiversity, working on schemes to plant trees within schools, as well as wildflower meadows.

Our commitments around green spaces, biodiversity and management of pollutants will be further embedded in the revision of bpha's Environment Strategy.

Case study

Going green at Cootes Lane

As part of a construction contract for the development of 14 homes at Fen Drayton in rural South Cambridgeshire, considerable environmental enhancements have been included to meet the requirements of the Future Homes Standard, ahead of this becoming mandatory in 2025.

This will give bpha a working example of what works well and provide learning opportunities when the government publishes its technical specification for the Future Homes Standard. This will ensure that homes built from 2025 produce 75-80% less carbon emissions than homes under current regulations.

The homes at Fen Drayton (Cootes Lane) will meet EPC A. We are achieving high levels of performance through a more thermally efficient building fabric specification and the use of solar photovoltaic panels and air-source heat pumps. The fabric-efficiency in the homes is being achieved using highly insulated panels to construct the walls, which are manufactured off-site.

Biodiversity is also central to the project. A Construction Ecological Management Plan will ensure high standards during construction, with the scheme featuring native planting, integrated bat and bird boxes and hedgehog connectivity measures. The external lighting will minimise the effects of light pollution on the surrounding area and will protect nearby wildlife habitat. Landscaping will include a community orchard and sustainable drainage methods.

In advance of entering the build contract, an assessment was undertaken to ensure the site delivers a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain. 10% biodiversity net gain will be a requirement for all planning applications submitted from 2024.

Electric vehicle charging points and cycle parking facilities will be provided, along with a footpath that links the scheme to the adjacent village hall and playing field. bpha is also funding improvements to the village hall and play areas which are next to the site.

Together with our new customers, we will monitor the effectiveness and benefits of the environmental measures put in place.



Resource management

The resource management theme looks at how we manage materials, waste and water. It sets out our policies and actions in these areas, as well as how we engage with stakeholders to minimise our collective environmental footprint.

ESG themes covered:

- C22 Strategy for using responsibly sourced materials
- C23 Strategy for waste management
- C24 Strategy for water management

While reducing the amount of energy and resources used across homes and operations, it is equally important to make the most of the resources we do need.

This includes materials used by and sourced from suppliers. Construction, refurbishment and maintenance activities contribute the most to our environmental footprint. We now have greater control over resource management after bringing maintenance and repair work in-house.

Good progress continues to be made. An integrated system with our materials' supplier, Travis Perkins, is giving us greater visibility over our supply chain and already shows that we are diverting 98% of waste from landfill. Additionally, our office waste contractor reports that 100% of the waste it collects is diverted from landfill.

In other areas, we continue to work closely with our contractors to increase the proportion of responsibly sourced materials. This will be formalised through the Environment Strategy.

Waste management is also an important part of our ongoing Vista regeneration work. At the recently completed Ashburnham Court, we recycled parts from out of service boilers.

Through our Talking Trash programme, customers have been very active in supporting waste management best practices. For example, at the start of 2023, a resident champion was appointed in Milton Keynes to help with the issues of fly tipping and bin store management. In the Cauldwell and Kingsbrook areas of Bedford, we arranged several bulky waste collections in partnership with Big Local to support the community. Customers were involved in the scheme, which saw an estimated 20 tonnes of general waste collected at three events, along with over 30 sofas and three tonnes of metal and electrical waste.

Another sustainability priority involves meeting ambitious water management targets. We continue to share useful water management tips and information with customers as part of our plan to achieve a usage target of 110 litres per person per day in all new builds and to help reduce use in existing properties.



Social and customer needs

Housing is about people. bpha helps to ensure customers' homes serve as a foundation for families and individuals to build fulfilling lives.

Once again, the backdrop for this year's sustainability report is dominated by a difficult economic climate. Inflation remains stubbornly high, with customers facing increased food costs and energy bills.

By continuing to listen to, understand and act upon the concerns raised by customers, bpha is supporting communities as they navigate through this challenging period.

Summary

This chapter explores bpha's commitment to provide high-quality, affordable housing to people within the Oxford to Cambridge geographic area. Our responsibility as a housing provider is to contribute positively to the financial, social and physical wellbeing of customers, especially during such challenging economic times. Ultimately, we strive to work together with customers and others to build communities that people feel safe in and proud of.



Sandra, bpha customer

Affordability and security

This theme comprises several criteria which, combined, assess whether housing providers are fulfilling their pledges to supply adequate affordable housing opportunities within their catchment communities. Here, we detail what bpha does to help its customers live sustainably and securely in their homes.

ESG themes covered:

- C1 Affordability metrics
- C2 Tenure of existing homes
- C3 Tenure of new homes
- C5 Fixed tenancy agreements

The Oxford to Cambridge geographic area is home to around four million people – our job is to help make sure there are sufficient affordable home options to prevent people from being priced out of the area.

Continuing to provide affordable homes

Although energy prices are showing signs of stabilising, inflationary pressures, especially in relation to food prices, continue to squeeze the incomes of families and individuals. It remains a tough financial landscape, which makes bpha's role of providing affordable housing to communities across the region even more vital.

Currently, our portfolio is around 20,000 properties. Of these, just over 13,500 are affordable rental properties, including general housing, housing for older people, and supported housing, with a further 3,000 low-cost home ownership.

bpha's median rents are:

- Between 72.6% (one-bed) and 60.8% (four-bed) of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), with an average of 67.7% across the portfolio (compared to 65.1% in 2021/2022).
- Between 60.1% (one-bed) and 46.0% (four-bed) of private sector rents, with an average of 55.6% across the portfolio (compared to 57.0% in 2021/2022).

Inflationary pressures and the growing cost of maintaining properties have resulted in a proportionate rent increase, which explains the proportionate increase in comparison to LHA rates, which remained static. Despite this, our rent increases have remained below those seen across the private sector.

Over the past reporting year, bpha has re-let 697 homes as affordable rent tenures, and let 142 new homes. The portfolio of affordable and low-cost home ownership properties continues to grow – compared to 2021/2022, bpha has 86 more affordable properties and 56 more categorised as low-cost home ownership.

A constricted housing development and construction market has made the provision of new homes extremely challenging. As a result, the 223 (222 developed and one acquired) new homes handed over to tenants and owners is significantly down on the 307 achieved in the 2021/2022 reporting period. However, we continue to prioritise affordability with new homes, with 100% of the properties coming into the portfolio this year being in the affordable or low-cost home ownership categories.

Our security of tenure policy continues to progress – bpha no longer issues new fixed-term tenancies and has a programme of converting all agreements to assured tenancies. Apart from properties in Greyfriars (where we are reviewing long-term regeneration options), and those covered by Intermediate Rent, all our properties are let on starter tenancies which convert to assured tenancies if there are no problems in the first 12 months.

Making progress at key sites

In spite of the market challenges brought about by a combination of challenges including Brexit, the ongoing Ukraine crisis and the Covid pandemic, bpha was able to invest £53 million across various developments which will continue to drive the growth of our affordable homes portfolio.

For example, in June 2022 we completed the development of 13 properties at Balliol Road in Kempston, Bedford, comprising a mix of family homes for shared ownership and one- and two-bed houses for affordable rent. In Cambourne West, bpha is acquiring 142 affordable rent and shared ownership homes from Taylor Wimpey under s106, with 18 affordable homes already handed over in spring 2023. A further 70 affordable homes are due for handover during the 2023/2024 financial year.

In 2022 we entered the final phase of our 12-year development at Trumpington Meadows in Cambridge in collaboration with Barratt David Wilson Homes. Comprising a mix of apartments and houses, the development is made up of 476 affordable homes alongside homes for outright sale. A key feature of the development is extensive green spaces and natural environments.

Building safety and quality

This theme details how we meet our building safety and quality responsibilities for customers. Our approach to safety and quality falls into three key areas: gas safety checks, fire risk assessments and compliance with the Decent Homes Standard.

ESG themes covered:

- C6 Gas safety checks
- C7 Fire risk assessments
- C8 Decent Homes Standard

As well as our responsibility to provide affordable and secure housing for customers, bpha has a rigorous approach to safety and quality.

Managing building safety and asset compliance is a key focus. We deliver much of this work through strong and effective partnerships with our contractors, as well as developing internal competence, as has been the case with bringing repairs in-house.

Technology plays an important facilitating role by providing live information on the progress of asset safety, including all gas and fire safety checks. This ensures constant visibility and oversight.

As of 31 March 2023, 100% of bpha communal areas requiring a fire safety risk assessment have an up to date one in place, with all homes with a gas supply also having a gas safety certificate.

We are also pleased to report that all bpha’s properties continue to meet the government’s Decent Homes Standard, which serves as a minimum benchmark for us. We also recognise the challenges in the wider sector around the quality of homes, particularly issues of damp and mould. Our systems have been enhanced to ensure that any cases of damp or mould highlighted are effectively managed, monitored and reported on.

Ongoing renovation work is key to meeting and exceeding the Decent Homes Standard, as well as numerous important safety requirements. During the past reporting year, bpha, through its network of local suppliers and contractors, upgraded 466 kitchens, 329 bathrooms, 269 boilers, 1,643 windows and doors, and 32 roofs.

Case study

Making home ownership dreams a reality in Northstowe

During 2022/2023, bpha has continued its commitment to deliver nearly 300 new affordable homes at Northstowe in South Cambridgeshire.

A major new community and designed as one of the NHS England’s ‘Healthy New Towns’, the development also involves the building of major transportation infrastructure, a guided busway, new green spaces, a primary school and recreational facilities.

By March 2023, 257 homes were completed, with a further 23 completed by August 2023. The final 12 homes will commence in January 2025, with phase one set for completion in 2026.

bpha customer Josie moved into Northstowe shortly after having her first child in the summer of 2022. Initially buying a 35% share, she will acquire more over time and is saving £200 a month compared to her previous rental arrangement in Cambridge.

“It has always been our dream to own our home. We are not big earners, so to be on the property ladder is lovely.”



Josie and family, shared owners



bpha colleague, Maria

Resident voice

The resident voice theme looks into how bpha canvasses and responds to the opinions of customers. This section outlines how customers help us design services, how we embrace scrutiny, and how we respond to complaints. It will also chart how bpha performs in terms of customer satisfaction.

ESG themes covered:

- C9 Resident scrutiny
- C10 Resident satisfaction
- C11 Complaints upheld by the Ombudsman

Feedback from customers shapes and influences key decisions made by bpha.

Ensuring we provide appropriate channels and opportunities for customers to offer feedback and new ideas is paramount – this means going beyond the standard approach of surveys, reviewing complaints and gathering satisfaction ratings.

As an organisation which serves a diverse customer base with a wide range of needs, it is important to draw on a variety of mechanisms and structures through which customers' voices can be heard.

Our Customer Committee meets every quarter and reports directly into the Board to offer insight into customers' experience. The Committee is chaired by a Board member and includes representatives from the Board and Executive Team. bpha's involved customers share feedback directly with the Committee, which forms a crucial part of making decisions.



Building a customer engagement community

To ensure we obtain as wide a representation of viewpoints as possible, bpha recognises the need to provide multiple channels and mechanisms through which customers can engage with us.

The Place is our online customer engagement forum. Through this portal, customers can share their views and take part in surveys, polls, and other conversations about events and topics important to them. There are dedicated sections for customers, including for homeowners and customers in shared ownership homes. We are also due to launch a Building Safety Customer Group which will be accessible via The Place.

As well as providing opportunities for digital engagement, we continue to communicate and gather feedback from customers through face-to-face meetings, telephone calls and written communications. It is important to recognise that although digital channels provide convenience and efficiency for many customers, there is still a high demand for more traditional modes of communication. During 2022/2023, we conducted 25,000 face-to-face appointments.

Resident Inspectors are another means of giving customers a voice within bpha. A group of engaged customers, our Resident Inspectors continue to work closely with other customers to provide a valuable perspective on how to improve and shape our services. During 2022/2023, several key contributions were made, including recommendations on how to develop bpha's boiler maintenance programme and implement improvements via Project Vista. The group also carried out site inspections of our ground maintenance and cleaning contracts.

Nuri, a bpha resident living in Carlington and Resident Inspector:

"The most important role I have as an involved customer is to help bpha listen well... Customers know what is going on, we live it. We have a good knowledge of our areas and can be 100% honest in our feedback. People need and want to be heard. It's a difficult time for people and I believe this makes our feedback even more important. People are struggling and worried about rising costs. I have been homeless in the past and lived in temporary accommodation. We can provide a very real voice... Working alongside bpha, I know customers and the organisation can make a more positive difference together."

Whether it's through Resident Inspectors, the many customer groups or feedback obtained via The Place, customers continue to drive improvements.

This includes the new, more responsive in-house repairs service. Launched in October 2022, a detailed consultation exercise saw customers make 23 specific recommendations relating to how repairs are requested, carried out and tracked.

Early signs are that the new system is working well. During 2022/23, 3,000 more repair requests were made than the previous year - this indicates a greater amount of customer confidence in the service. Responsive repair tracking and appointments went live in our customer portal in 2022. By the end of this year, we hope to add the ability to report a repair and arrange a surveyor inspection.

Taking service improvements seriously

Satisfactions ratings represent another feedback metric, providing bpha with a direct indication of customers' perceptions of the standard of service that we are providing.

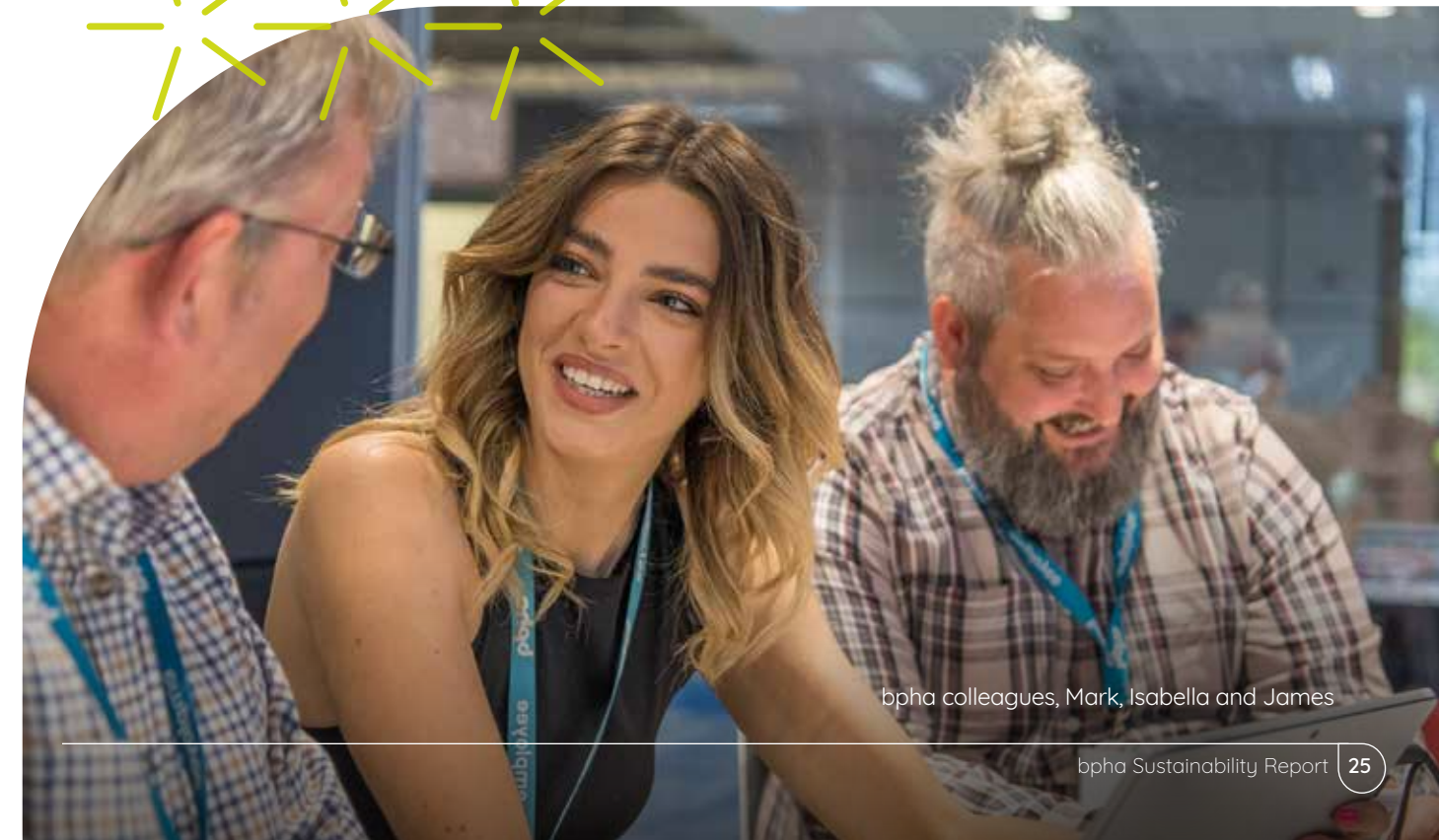
For the 2022/2023 financial year, overall satisfaction averaged 77%, a noticeable increase on the 73% overall satisfaction rating from the previous year. During the latest reporting period, one complaint was reviewed by the Housing Ombudsman and found against bpha. This related to how bpha dealt with repairs to a customer's home and the subsequent complaint.

Centralising the way in which we handle service improvements and complaints has been a key undertaking.

The Service Improvement team was set up in the summer of 2022 and oversees centralised complaints and service improvement teams as part of its remit. This provides greater visibility of how customers are feeling and we believe will help continue to improve overall satisfaction ratings.

TouchPoint surveys served as an important means of gathering feedback and making improvements. For example, a recent survey led to several improvements being made to our Independent Living services. The team: held drop ins in early 2023 at the schemes to explain the service that bpha offers, looked at customers' individual care needs; introduced communication screens to keep customers more regularly updated; and produced leaflets to explain cleaning and maintenance changes at schemes.

Working with key customer groups will remain important. This includes Resolve, which is set up to provide oversight and challenge, review complaints through customers' eyes and suggest service improvements.



bpha colleagues, Mark, Isabella and James

Resident support

This section reviews how housing associations help to improve the wellbeing of their customers through various types of support services. These services cover key categories such as income and finance management, and physical and mental wellbeing.

ESG themes covered:

- C4 Fuel poverty
- C12 Support services for customers

As economic challenges continue, bpha’s tenancy sustainment services continue to be critical to the wellbeing of customers and their ability to live independently in their homes.

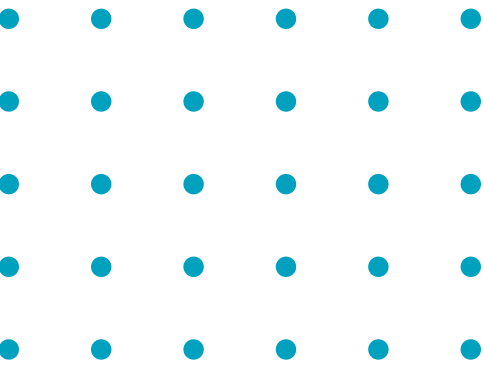
Helping customers with their finances

The work carried out by bpha’s Money Advice Team particularly continues to be of vital importance.

Supporting customers with all financial aspects of living in a bpha home, the team handled more than 2,000 referrals during the course of the year ending March 2023, helping customers claim over £1.8 million in welfare benefits they were entitled to, and supporting the management of £1.5 million of debt by negotiating with creditors.

The Money Advice Team has also provided financial support to over 100 households and helped them manage costs and bills. Our tenancy sustainment colleagues, who are trained to identify signs of vulnerability, including issues impacting financial, physical and mental wellbeing, helped 55 customers to maintain tenancies in 2022.

Another important financial support mechanism for customers has been bpha’s rent allowance fund. Established in April 2022, nearly £400,000 has helped multiple vulnerable customers to prevent and reduce arrears.



Data-driven action

Increasingly, the work carried out by the Money Advice Team and other customer support bodies within bpha is being underpinned by data.

This includes identifying and acting on cases of fuel poverty. In 2022, according to government statistics, there were an estimated 13.4% of households (3.26 million) in fuel poverty in England, up from 13.1% in 2021 (3.16 million).

Although energy prices appear to have peaked, bills are still markedly higher than they were prior to the crisis in Ukraine. This leaves many households vulnerable to slipping into fuel poverty.

Drawing on a mixture of property and personal data, including information on income and arrears, as well as gas use, bpha’s Money Advice Team works hand in hand with maintenance operatives to identify and visit vulnerable households, providing them with essential tips and tools to help them manage.

We will continue to help customers reduce their fuel bills.



bpha colleague, Michael



Lawrence, bpha customer and bpha colleague, Heidi

Supporting independent living

A significant number of customers are supported through bpha’s Independent Living services.

More than 1,200 customers live in Independent Living Schemes for over 55s. This is an integral part of the bpha offering to better reflect our purpose of creating positive, progressive living experiences for customers.

This is based on customer feedback and insight gained from sharing experiences, a key focus over the past 12 months being to get to know customers. Indeed, many over the age of 55 may still be working, and there are a variety of reasons why they choose to live in one of our Independent Living Schemes.

Making ongoing improvements will be a major priority over the next year. A popular initiative has been to bring catering in-house, with positive feedback already obtained from customers at Mill View as we plan for others.

An Independent Living customer (Betty Dodd Court):

“The staff are so friendly and good humoured, and I enjoy a brief chat with them most days. There’s a difference between what they do and what people think of as carers. I was poorly recently and stayed in my flat. Heidi, the scheme manager, popped round because she hadn’t seen me for a couple of days to check I was okay. It’s reassuring knowing that staff look out for you.”

Placemaking

The placemaking theme is about how housing provides the foundations for communities to grow – in this section, we look at how bpha contributes to the creation of places designed to promote happiness and wellbeing.

ESG themes covered:

- C13 Placemaking activities

Creating spaces that enable communities to thrive is at the heart of bpha's ethos and mission statement, which is:

“To build and maintain quality homes and thriving communities by being increasingly efficient and always considering the needs of those we house.”

To support this, we have developed a Community Hub Strategy which will underpin our placemaking and community building activities.

Our vision of a community hub is a multi-purpose centre, housed in places such as community centres or schools, that provide a range of high quality and cost-effective services to the local community.

At the Jubilation Centre in Bedford, the I-Learn Community Hub is a women's only hub which provides a safe and secure environment for women, the majority being from cultural minority communities. Gathering on Mondays, they can learn together, build confidence, socialise, address inequalities and be encouraged and empowered to access services, information and guidance.

Ralley Rahman, Founder and Chair of I-Learn:

“Since working with bpha it has enabled I-Learn Bedford to become more sustainable as a community organisation... The continuing partnership will allow us to work in the community on a varied programme of events which offer the opportunity to meet the needs of the community as well as promoting community involvement.”

Our Community Engagement Team will be influential in creating more community hubs, places that are desirable to spend time in and support the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of the people living around them. To do this we adopt a collaborative approach with customers, holding regular consultations with stakeholders to deliver positive community-wide changes and actions.

For example, one placemaking initiative has involved promoting intergenerational connections, with students from Kimberley College regularly attending bpha's Wootton Vale Independent Living Scheme to help reduce social isolation of older customers and acquire greater digital skills.

As part of the Sustainable Northstowe initiative, we have partnered with Northstowe Arts to promote a repair, reuse, repurpose and recycle clean-up event, and funded a Youth Bus for use during the winter term. Alongside this, a bpha resident has been fully trained as a youth worker to support young people engage in afterschool activities.



bpha colleague Pauline with a Shackleton School pupil

Case study

A placemaking partnership with Shackleton School

Many bpha customers have children attending the local school in Shackleton, Bedford, making it the ideal place to develop a new community hub, known as the Shackleton Family Zone.

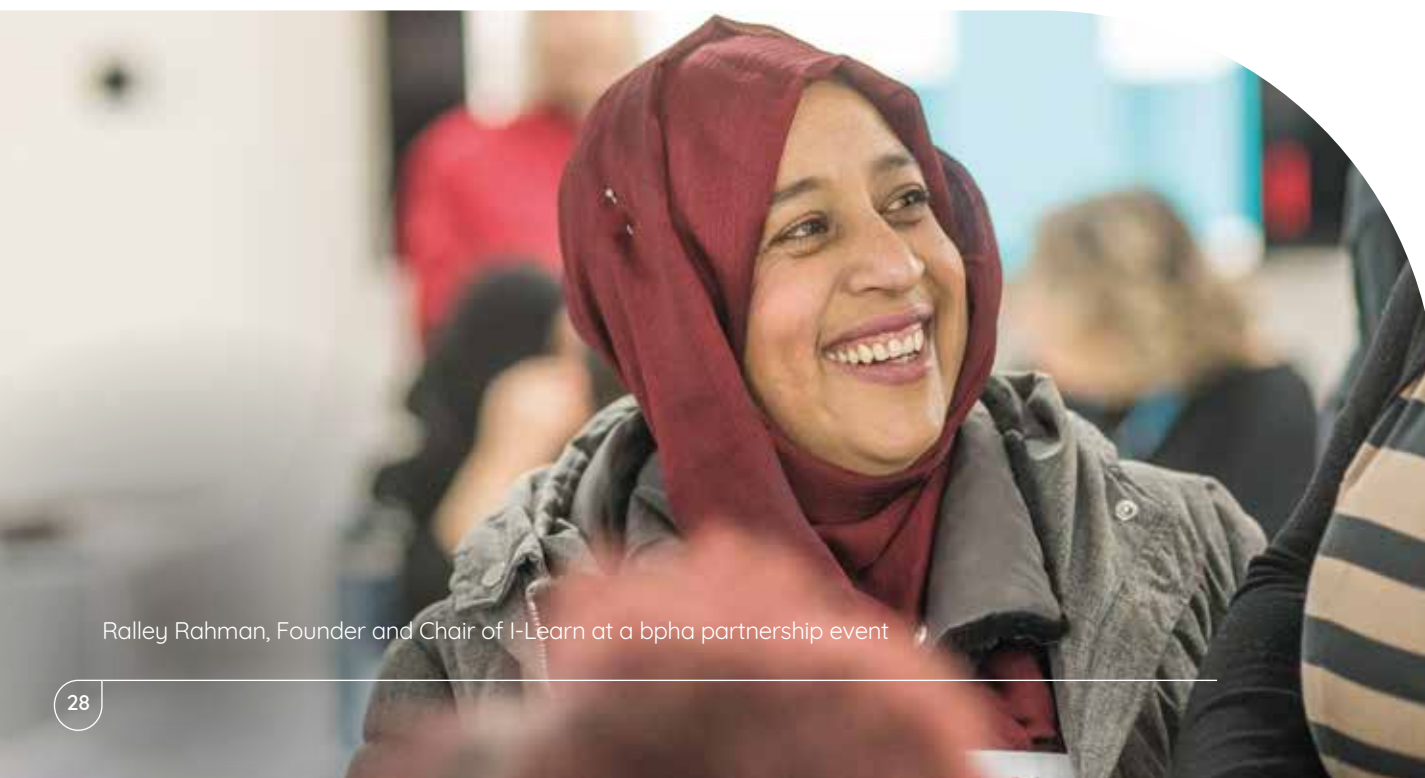
To help children catch up with reading progress, bpha volunteers have attended listening sessions. We have also connected with customers to help raise funds for the Shackleton Family Zone, and invited bpha's Money Advice Team to attend local events.

Other activities include distributing energy efficient lightbulbs, clearing gardens, planting trees and hosting healthy living events covering topics such as quitting smoking and cooking on a budget.

Such has been the success and reaction to this partnership to date, we hope this will be a prototype for future community hubs.

“Lots of our families are also bpha customers, and bpha allowed the new housing officer for our area – Amanda Horton – to attend the stay and play on a weekly basis. She was able to meet families on a friendly, relaxed basis and allowed to build relationships with them gradually. She was also able to deal with housing concerns they had in a timely fashion which built trust in her and the company. Word quickly spread and we have also held drop-in sessions in the family zone for all the community to attend if they wish to share their housing concerns. This has been a success and a regular flow of people attended, the majority of whom were not school families.”

Ben Slater, Deputy Head at Shackleton School



Ralley Rahman, Founder and Chair of I-Learn at a bpha partnership event

Governance



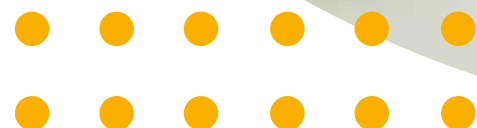
Good governance structures and procedures, strong leadership, responsible supply chain management and an unwavering commitment to the wellbeing of employees and customers underpins the social and environmental agenda at bpha.

Without these pillars in place, we would not be able to deliver the positive sustainable change covered in the first two chapters of this report.

Maintaining high standards of governance and accountability is fundamental for our Board and the wider organisation. As custodians of people's homes, we must operate with transparency, empathy and professionalism at all times.

Summary

The Governance section explores how bpha is run. It details how we ensure good governance, safeguard the wellbeing of employees and prioritise robust internal processes and accountability.



Structure and governance

This section outlines the corporate structure and governance procedures within bpha, covering essential criteria such as adherence to set codes and standards, governance gradings and approach to risk.

ESG themes covered:

- C25 Regulator of Social Housing
- C26 Viability and governance gradings
- C27 Code of governance
- C28 Not-for-profit
- C29 Organisational risk
- C30 Adverse regulatory findings

As a not-for-profit organisation registered with the Regulator of Social Housing, bpha is subject to stringent governance requirements. We recognise the importance of sound governance as a foundation which allows bpha to pursue its social and environmental sustainability objectives. This is demonstrated by the consistent adherence to the highest possible G1 governance rating.

A key component of sound governance is proving our ability to deliver on financial and spending commitments, not least because it provides confidence to stakeholders that we will be able to follow through with our strategic priorities and investments. Last year, bpha was upgraded by the Regulator of Social Housing from a V2 to V1 financial viability grading, a rating we have retained this year.

This is also reflective of bpha's approach to managing risk. At an organisational level, bpha operates with a cohesive and robust Risk Management Strategy which is reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Audit and Risk Committee.

Our adoption of the National Housing Federation's most up to date Code of Governance, published in 2020, is another important demonstration of our dedication to sound governance. Further, bpha has adopted the National Housing Federation's Code of Conduct 2022, a significant framework that underscores our commitment to act in the best interest of the organisation and its customers.

As was the case during the last reporting period, there have been no adverse regulatory findings resulting in enforcement or other equivalent action over the past 12 months.

bpha Board meeting



Oxlip House, Bury St Edmunds



Audit and Risk Committee

Ensuring bpha and its residents are in safe hands

The last two years have been defined by economic volatility and uncertainty, a period which has highlighted the importance of a sound approach to managing financial and organisational risk.

Appointed by the Board from its non-executive members, the Audit and Risk Committee focuses on risks to bpha's strategic delivery and looks ahead to anticipate future risks which may also influence our direction. The committee meets quarterly, as well as annually with the Board to consider its risk appetite and the and the principal risks. This year we have a particular focus on cyber risk.

Our annual Risk Day is an important staple in the bpha calendar.

The work of the committee helps ensure bpha continues to provide good quality homes to those who need them, delivers on environmental and sustainability priorities, improves housing supply and meets the aspirations of customers.

Board and Trustees

Accountability starts at the top. This section provides information on the demographics, ownership, experience, independence and performance of the Board. In addition, bpha operates a number of committees covering areas such as customer accountability, risk and remuneration and succession planning.

ESG themes covered:

- C31 Board demographics
- C32 Board turnover
- C33 Board tenure
- C34 Non-executive directors
- C35 Audit committee
- C36 Remuneration committee
- C37 Succession planning
- C38 External audit
- C39 Board effectiveness review
- C40 CEO and chair
- C41 Board conflicts of interest

bpha's Board is chiefly responsible for driving social purpose while maintaining high standards of governance, accountability and environmentally sustainable financial management.

During the 2022/23 financial year, the Board met on eight occasions – four of these meetings were dedicated to the delivery of operational performance, with the remaining four focused on strategy, planning and overall effectiveness.

The Board is and will always remain accountable to key stakeholder groups such as customers, employees and regulators. To do so effectively, bpha recognises the importance of having a diverse representation and embracing our 'Inclusion for Everyone' Strategy. Currently, bpha's Board comprises 10 members with an average age of 60. Of the seven non-executive Board Members, three are female, two identify as being from ethnically diverse backgrounds and one as having a disability. The Chair of the Board, Paul Leinster, is also a Non-Executive Director.

All non-executive Board members serve an initial three-year tenure with an option to extend to six years. In exceptional circumstances, tenures can be extended up to nine years (no non-executive Board member has served beyond nine years). This ensures the Board contains an optimal blend of fresh ideas and organisational experience.



bpha CEO, Richard Hill and Resident inspector, Nuri



Candleford Court, Brackley

During the two years ending 31 March 2023, turnover for bpha's Board was 10%, with one member leaving in June 2021. Turnover for the Executive Leadership Team was 0%.

Any information on conflicts of interests is published in the biographies of Board members on the bpha website. Each Board Member is required to update their declaration for any conflicts of interest at least once a year, in addition to declaring any conflicts with any agenda items at each Board meeting.

KPMG has externally audited our Group Report and Financial Statements for nine years.

Governance underpinned by committees

Committees are central to bpha's robust structure of governance. The Board operates through a committee structure, with each committee providing scrutiny and assurance on issues within its remit.

Committees play a crucial role in holding our senior leadership to account by examining and analysing different areas of the organisation, reporting findings and making recommendations to the Board.

In addition to the Audit and Risk Committee, bpha has four further committees, whose responsibilities and activities are as follows:

Remuneration and Nominations Committee:

Among the key responsibilities of the Remuneration and Nominations Committee is ensuring bpha has the skills and expertise to deliver its Corporate Strategy. With low unemployment and skills shortages hitting many sectors of the economy, it is a challenging time to attract and retain skilled employees who exemplify our values. To this end, the Committee plays a crucial role in monitoring our policies and approaches to ensure bpha remains a desirable employer with a value-led culture, development opportunities and competitive pay and benefits. This year, the Committee led the process to select bpha's new Chief Executive Officer and is also engaged in recruiting new non-executive members. It has also reviewed key policies, including the 'Inclusion for Everyone' Strategy which seeks to reduce the gender pay gap and ensure appropriate diversity and female and male representation across the whole organisation.

Development and Assets Committee:

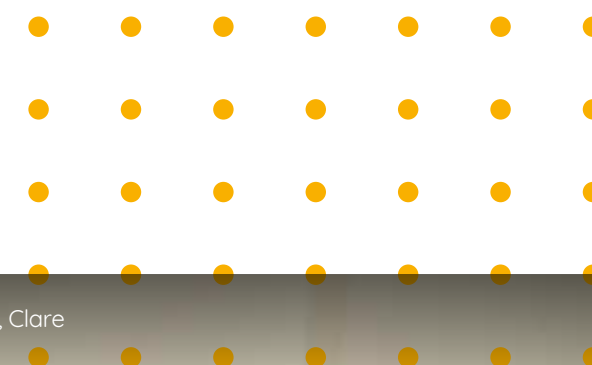
The Development and Assets Committee concentrates on the quality of bpha's housing, both in terms of existing homes and new properties being added to the portfolio. This year, a key focus has been on mitigating some of the challenges around the future delivery of new homes. Recent years have presented an array of challenges, from the Covid pandemic to more recently the competitive market, cost inflation, issues with the planning system and the focus on the management of damp and mould in our homes. The Committee also continues to provide an overview and monitor the implementation of our Environment Strategy.

Group Treasury Committee:

The Group Treasury Committee provides advice to the Board on the treasury and financial implications of the Group's corporate strategy and business plans. Every year, bpha reviews our treasury management policy, which covers risk appetite, liquidity, investments, borrowing and hedging. The committee is responsible for reviewing and recommending funding strategies to the Board which support the delivery of our long-term objectives and business plans.

Customer Committee:

The Customer Committee ensures that the customer experience is at the heart of our decision-making process. It learns from the lived experiences of customers, be they positive or negative. This involves hearing from customers directly and through formal customer insight and feedback surveys. This year, the Committee welcomed Resident Inspectors and members of bpha's Resolve Group to discuss the experiences of customers. A key Committee focus centred on bpha's work to support customers with the cost of living challenges, including through our rent allowance fund and Money Advice service.



Helen, bpha Independent Living customer and bpha colleague, Clare

Colleague wellbeing

What makes bpha a great place to work? This section is about how we approach being an employer, outlining our credentials across categories such as remuneration, promotion of wellbeing, succession and support programmes.

ESG themes covered:

- C42 Real Living Wage
- C43 Gender pay gap
- C44 CEO-worker pay ratio
- C45 Employee wellbeing
- C46 Absence

The achievements made by bpha are defined by the people who keep the organisation running on a day-to-day basis throughout all of our activities, teams and departments.

We therefore understand the criticality of supporting the wellbeing of every bpha employee. As set out in bpha's Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy entitled Working Well, it is our responsibility to provide a healthy, dynamic and rewarding employee experience, with emphasis on the financial, physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of every individual that works within bpha.

As well as the right and responsible thing to do, happy, healthy and motivated employees make for a stronger organisation that provides a better service to its customers.

Financial wellbeing

Amid an inflationary economic environment and the associated cost of living pressures, being paid a fair wage is a simple but essential way of supporting the wellbeing of our employees. bpha is a Real Living Wage (RLW) employer, with every colleague paid in line with or above the RLW hourly rate of pay. This is tracked and reported on every year.

Financial wellbeing advice is available through bpha's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). As employees continue to be faced with high bills for everyday staples such as food and energy, bpha provides financial planning advice and other money-saving tips to help their finances go further during challenging times.

Safeguarding the long-term financial wellbeing of colleagues is also important. bpha facilitates access to a generous pension scheme which is well above the statutory minimum, starting at a minimum employer contribution of 6% (employee contribution 3%) and rising to 12% (employee contribution 6%). Our pension provider, Royal London, has also held several workshops with bpha colleagues, offering useful advice on how to make the most out of pension schemes and savings.



bpha colleagues celebrating long service

Our CEO-to-worker pay ratio remains at 7:1, which compares favourably across the UK commercial sphere. bpha's median gender pay gap dropped slightly over the 2022/23 reporting period, falling from 7.8% to 7.7% and remaining significantly below the national average.

We continue to have near-term targets in place, with a fundamental objective of our Inclusion for Everyone Strategy being to reduce the gap year-on-year. Information on the gender pay gap is published and updated annually on both bpha's and the government's website.



A Great Place to Work

Beyond ensuring financial fairness and promoting financial wellbeing, we have many mechanisms and initiatives in place to support emotional, mental and physical wellbeing – these continue to evolve as circumstances change.

These policies are built on regular reviews and based on feedback obtained through surveys such as Great Place to Work (GPTW). As the world's largest and most established study of workplace excellence and people management practices, GPTW is the ideal platform for bpha to canvass what our colleagues think about working for us. Participating not only helps us understand our organisation's culture but also highlights what we are doing well and areas that need attention.

This year, we were delighted to be recognised as a Great Place to Work by our colleagues for the fourth consecutive time, with further recognition in 'Employee Wellbeing' and 'Women in the Workplace' categories. Another encouraging sign is that over 90% of colleagues chose to contribute to the survey – this ensures we generate a deep and detailed picture to inform our people-based strategies moving forwards.

Case study

A suite of wellbeing resources for employees

In the financial year 2022/23, the average number of working days lost per colleague was 10. Several factors contribute to staff sickness and time away from work, making it critical for bpha to provide a wide range of tools, resources and initiatives designed to support all aspects of physical and mental wellbeing.

The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), for example, offers a range of resources along with confidential telephone, SMS/WhatsApp, live chat and video support for colleagues and their families. All contacts are answered by a counsellor or clinically trained professional who have supported employees with stress, anxiety, relationship and family problems, loss and financial worries.

Colleagues also have access to the Wellbeing Portal, a wide-ranging digital portfolio of resources, including self-guided mindfulness and meditation sessions, a digital gym with live virtual exercise classes, and fitness and nutrition information. Expert career guidance and skills nurturing can be obtained through the portal, which also has exclusive discounts for days out, activities and retail outlets.

In addition to these two platforms, bpha provides access to several other wellbeing initiatives, including:

- Fully covered BUPA private healthcare membership, with virtual GP appointments, 24/7 access to a nurse and significant discounts for family members
- Life assurance to the value of four times the employee salary
- Half price gym membership (situated adjacent to bpha's office)
- Free eye tests
- Cycle to work scheme
- A team of mental health first aiders – colleagues who have been specially trained to spot signs of mental health issues and act accordingly
- A team of domestic abuse responders – bpha is accredited by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance.

Our mission...

“To build and maintain quality homes and communities by being increasingly efficient and sustainable, always considering the needs of those who live in them.”



bpha's Domestic Abuse Responders

Empowering personal growth

Retaining key talent, especially while operating in a tight labour market, is a major priority for bpha, making it important to offer personal growth opportunities for employees.

Our learning and development framework ensures colleagues can pursue their career objectives. All new employees go through a comprehensive induction programme, which also focuses on setting people up for success within their specific role and teams.

Access to key learning resources is also critical. Our e-learning platform is continually refined and updated with additional materials, while recent modules on project management and IT skills provide new insights for colleagues.

The scope for personal development was particularly highlighted in this year's GPTW surveys, as the following testimonials from two bpha colleagues show:

Lianne: “I have had a successful career journey since joining bpha almost 12 years ago, and the business has supported me throughout. This included achieving my CIH Level 4 and a Certificate in Leadership and Management. I transitioned from a part time Voids and Allocation Officer to Housing Officer, to Team Leader to Area Housing Manager. From there, I progressed to my first senior management appointment, Communications Centre Manager, managing a large team and reporting to the Director of Customer and Services.”

Holly: “bpha gave me the opportunity to start my career as a trainee surveyor, spending a day a week at Bedford College. This gave me the platform to achieve a permanent surveyor position where I worked with our voids team both out on site and in the office. I progressed to a Project Officer role within the planned maintenance team and was further supported to do some more career-specific learning. This time I completed a HNC in Construction Management on a part time, distance learning course. The latest stage of my journey was promotion to a Project Manager role.”



Inclusion for Everyone

Since being appointed in January 2022, bpha's equality, diversity and inclusion lead has been instrumental in refreshing and refining our inclusion initiatives.

Inclusivity is a key principle of our Equality Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) Strategy named 'Inclusion for Everyone'. This was launched in 2022 and recognises that diversity and inclusion are critical to the success of the organisation and essential to achieving our overall goals.

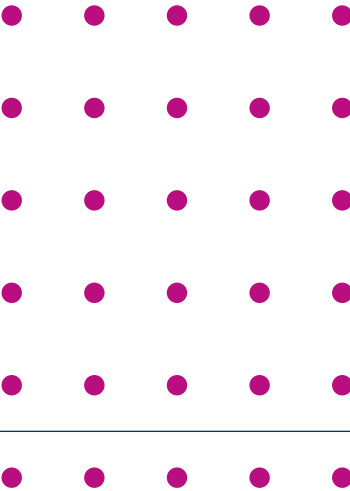
A major initiative which has brought the strategy to life has been the introduction of employee-led inclusion groups covering a range of areas, including Bee You (LGBTQ+), Carers Support, Disability, Ethnicity, Side by Side (gender equality) and Menopause Support. Comprised of colleagues across many different teams and divisions with bpha, the groups meet regularly to raise aware and suggest ways we can improve inclusivity for both employees and customers. Numerous suggestions have been adopted, such as the launch of a diversity calendar on the intranet platform and a redesign of bpha email signatures to enable colleagues to include their pronouns and name pronunciation.

bpha inclusion group member, Julie:

“I joined an inclusion group as an ally to understand more about people's experiences. Being part of the LGBTQ+ group has really made me look at everything in someone else's eyes and I realise I have taken so much for granted, not really questioning anything. I am so much more aware of how difficult it must for people in a minority to feel valued and understood. On this journey I have made some lovely connections with Bedford Rainbow and Cambridge City Pioneer Church who are doing some amazing work, supporting residents with mental wellbeing, offering creative art workshops, and generally raising awareness. Being part of the inclusion group has been much more rewarding than I thought possible.”

ED&I has also been an important focus at Board and executive level. For example, our inclusion groups are currently going through the process of selecting executive ambassadors, figureheads who will represent the groups at the senior leadership level of the organisation.

The board has also embraced the Chair's Challenge. An initiative launched by the National Housing Federation. This is a public commitment to develop a vision to become more equal, diverse and inclusive in the future.



Consolidating and communicating

Driving the development of bpha's renewed Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy, Work Well is the newly formed Wellbeing & Engagement Group, made up of representatives from engagement groups around the organisation.

The new strategy is presented in an inclusive way with an emphasis on the colleague experience.

It contains five major objectives:

1. Colleagues will share their views so we can listen, hear and respond to ideas
2. We will support colleagues to work and live well
3. We will celebrate colleagues for making an exceptional difference for customers
4. We will be transparent on our people processes
5. We will deliver consistent and inclusive leadership.

This is due to be rolled out across the organisation from the latter part of 2023.



Supply chain management

The final theme of the Sustainability Report examines how bpha collaborates to achieve positive social and environmental outcomes, taking into account how we consider and communicate our societal values to external partners.

ESG themes covered:

- C47 Procurement and social value
- C48 Procurement and environmental impact

Housing associations operate within a broad and varied value chain. We recognise the importance of positive social and environmental change through our procurement activities with partners and contractors.

During this reporting period, we have taken additional steps in how we consider and assess social value in our procurement activities. For example, we now have a member within our Project Management Team with a responsibility to report on social value. We are exploring options to implement a social value tracking tool to automate the process and ensure no stone is left unturned.

We have already seen the positive impact that a more robust approach to social value is having. The latest estates management contract, for example, contains social value features that have been implemented through direct input from bpha customers. In addition to beneficial elements such as composting sites, water butts, wildflower gardens and support on fly tipping, the contractor is also committed to providing employment and work experience opportunities, and volunteering hours to help customers with their outdoor spaces. There is also commitment to develop four community space projects featuring the likes of vegetable growing pods. These will be an important addition to our Independent Living sites.

We also benefitted from a bpha Resident Inspector being on the evaluation panel for our latest electrical services contract. The new contractor has pledged to cut emissions by 10% each year in addition to committing £5,000 to supplying bpha customers with energy saving products. The contract will also see the development of a £5,000 solar PV and storage installation. Both electrical and estate services contracts contain a commitment to fulfil the work using an electric vehicle fleet, the latter also committing to use battery-powered equipment.

bpha is looking to formalise a process whereby we assess and evaluate the net zero journey strategies of our larger suppliers and contract bidders. This is in line with a government directive which calls for sectors and organisations with large environmental footprints to publish detailed plans to reach carbon neutrality.

Ashburnham Court, Bedford





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