

# Stockport Homes'

## Delivery Plan Outcomes

2019/20



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## **Executive summary**

Stockport Homes Group (SHG) delivered the objectives set for it by the Council in 2019/20 and contributed significantly to wellbeing in the Borough. It maintained the Council's housing stock in excellent condition, provided support to vulnerable customers and delivered effective homelessness prevention and adaptation services. It did this by being an engaging employer with exceptional levels of staff commitment and motivation. It achieved this within budget and by generating efficiencies through innovation, as it has done every year since it was set up. It responded to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, which commenced in the very last week of the year. The Pantries adapted to customer needs by changing the way it delivered goods during the pandemic, with 165 deliveries direct to customer homes in March. It maintained 100 per cent compliance on gas service, and although this position will change SHG will take all reasonable steps to deliver compliance. Similarly, rent collection and arrears measures performed at pre-lockdown levels for March<sup>1</sup>, however, over 100 customers reported difficulties in paying rent due to the impact of Covid-19. This may affect rent collection and arrears in future months, although the Customer Finance Team is working closely with customers to understand their situation and provide support. Other services have met the challenge of Covid-19 with improved levels of performance and service delivery. The number of One Number calls answered is at 96.8 per cent, which is an improvement on the 94.7 per cent recorded in December 2019. The ASB Service is making proactive contact with victims and survivors of domestic abuse from the last six months, on the guidance of Stockport Without Abuse. Covid-19 will have a greater impact during 2020/21 and the effects will be covered in the following year report.

SHG contributed effectively in partnerships to help sustain communities by tackling unemployment, crime and poor health, particularly working alongside the Council to address the inclusive growth agenda through a range of social and financial inclusion projects. It operated in a socially responsible way, engaging and empowering communities to achieve more for less. It continued its excellent performance in collecting the Council's rental income and sustaining high levels of customer satisfaction, despite challenges generated by the introduction of Universal Credit.

The growth in the Group's business contributes to sustaining Stockport's neighbourhoods<sup>2</sup>. Its charitable subsidiary company, Foundations Stockport, began delivering a range of support services and attracted external funding into the Borough. Its ThreeSixty company successfully delivered the Council's housing capital programme and began winning external business. Its 'Viaduct' subsidiary continued to work in partnership with the Council to meet housing need through new build.

SHG worked hard last year to enhance both its and the Council's reputation at regional and national levels; taking a leading role among the Greater Manchester

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<sup>1</sup> Rent collection was 100.00 per cent and rent arrears was 1.88 per cent at the end of December. The measures are at 100.49 per cent and 1.93 per cent respectively at the end of March.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the £905,771 from collecting water charges on behalf of United Utilities

Housing Providers and remaining at the forefront of good practice by winning a number of awards for its pioneering approaches.

Stockport Homes and its subsidiaries continue to deliver against Council and customer priorities including promoting Stockport and contributing to its one team approach.

## **Background**

Stockport Homes Group (SHG) is made up of four companies:

- the parent company, Stockport Homes, manages housing and a range of other neighbourhood and support services on behalf of Stockport Council;
- its development company, Viaduct Partnerships, builds new homes with the Council through the 'Viaduct Housing Partnership';
- ThreeSixty, delivers large scale capital works to the Council's stock at a competitive rate and has begun to engage in building projects to earn income; and
- its charitable company, Foundations Stockport, has begun bidding for external grant funding and seeking new opportunities. Its first new contract to deliver a 'Housing First' service began in 2019/20 and funding has been secured from MHCLG to deliver an outreach service to rough sleepers across Stockport and Trafford. A number of operational services that link to the aims of the charity have transferred to the company, including Motiv8<sup>3</sup>. Your Local Pantries and the Furniture Recycling Service.

The relationship between the Council and SHG is governed by a long-term Management Agreement<sup>4</sup>. This is based on five-yearly Delivery Plans, a range of strategic liaison meetings where the two organisations discuss shared objectives and a number of task and finish groups. The current Plan runs from 2016-2021 and this is the fourth annual report back on performance against it.

A number of challenges have had an impact on both SHG and the Council since this Delivery Plan was first agreed. These include reductions in Council resources, housing affordability pressures, the long-term impact of an ageing population and increases in homelessness. In addition, a number of political factors have changed the landscape, such as Welfare and Public Sector Reforms. Stockport Homes has worked with the Council to address the various challenges faced in recent years, and to take advantage of opportunities that have been generated, for example by the Council's proactive approach to town centre regeneration.

The current Plan was originally based on Stockport Homes' aims as they stood in the winter of 2015/16<sup>5</sup>. These were updated when the ALMO established its group

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<sup>3</sup> Funded by the Big Lottery and the European Social Fund

<sup>4</sup> In place until 2042

<sup>5</sup> Exceed customer expectations and always do the right thing; support customers in all aspects of their lives through effective partnership working; create greener places to live and work and continually minimise our impact on the environment; develop our thriving, safe and sustainable neighbourhoods, maximising our contribution to meeting housing need; involve, customers and staff in decision making and create opportunities for them to fulfil their potential; and grow by making the best use of our resources and diversifying into new businesses that compliment what we already do

structure the following year and the plan was jointly reviewed during 2018/19, alongside the Council's review of its Housing Strategy. Stockport Homes' Group aims were endorsed by this review but they will be revisited jointly in 2020/21 as part of establishing the next five year Delivery Plan for 2021/26.

## **Stockport Homes' objectives**

### ***Group Mission:***

**One team - transforming lives**

### ***Group Aims:***

- **Be a great place to work**
- **Be accountable to customers**
- **Maximise efficiency**
- **Reduce inequalities**
- **Build strong, collaborative relationships**
- **Improve the environment**

### ***Group Values:***

- **Ambition** – we have the ambition and courage to challenge; translating this into commercial success and brilliant customer outcomes
- **Social responsibility** – we always try to do the right thing; using our role as a service provider, employer and buyer to generate trust, build our communities and empower our people
- **Passion** – we have a passion for what we do; with positive, motivated and enthusiastic staff who enjoy their work
- **Innovation** – we are innovative in everything we do; with the agility, creativity and edge to keep defying expectations and delivering fresh and exciting things
- **Respect** – we treat each other with respect; supporting and inspiring one another and collaborating across teams and partnerships
- **Excellence** – we continually improve how we work; challenging the status quo, learning from what goes well and always being professional

These support the delivery of the Council's five year Housing Strategy which prioritises:

- Investing in growth: increasing housing supply, choice and affordability;
- Regenerating neighbourhoods – place making, strong communities;
- Housing choices: supporting independent living;
- Improving quality in the private sector; and
- Making the best use of affordable housing stock.

And its Corporate Plan which has the following goals:

- People are able to make informed choices and look after themselves;
- People who need support get it;
- Stockport benefits from a thriving economy;
- Communities in Stockport are safe and resilient; and
- Stockport is a place people want to live.

## **Delivering the aims**

Below are details of how SHG has delivered its aims during the past twelve months. It recognises that, although this has been a successful year, there are always areas for improvement. On this basis, each section ends with some reflection about lessons learned during the year and opportunities that will be taken to do things differently in future.

For ease of reference, Appendix One maps SHG's key achievements against the objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan.

### ***Aim One - Be a great place to work***

Delivering excellent services to customers is only possible with an engaged and well-motivated employee team. Strong 'Staff Voice' groups represent people from across the business and are key to planning activities like the annual staff conference. Last year staff voice shaped policies on disciplinary processes, recruitment and selection, family friendly processes, and special leave.

SHG again was recognised by 'Best Companies' and 'Investors in People' in 2019/20 as a role model organisation where people want to work. The Sunday Times named it Britain's Number One 'not for profit' and a 'Three Star – Extraordinary' employer. This is the 11<sup>th</sup> consecutive year that SHG has been in this list, which demonstrates the long term commitment to staff engagement.

These judgements are based on responses from an independently run, confidential staff survey so they reflect the views of people who are delivering services. Last year also saw the ALMO retain its Investors in People Platinum accreditation and Health and Wellbeing Award for commitment to people development.

Despite this success, the organisation is not complacent about staff morale issues and a number of opportunities had been identified for improvement, including bespoke development activities in the Customer Finance Team to support the professional development of team members. By the time of the October Best Companies survey, this was the most improved team in SHG.

There was a continuation in 2019/20 of SHG's commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of staff. For example, there were 243 attendances at workshops specific to supporting the health and wellbeing of staff, such as Resilience, A First Aid Approach to Mental Health, ASIST, Autism Awareness, Mindfulness, and Epilepsy Awareness & Cancer Awareness. Attendance at the courses equated to 1,429 learning hours.

The GROW<sup>6</sup> framework for developing the workforce continued to offer opportunities for employees to enhance their skills and knowledge. There are a number of pathways on the scheme. The Facilitator pathway upskills individuals to develop and facilitate workshops for colleagues. The Housing Champions pathway upskills individuals to promote a career within housing to the wider community through

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<sup>6</sup> GROW is the working title given to all learning, personal and career development activity across SHG



careers fairs, local schools and colleges and community events. The GAP mentoring program and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) mentoring program supports professional development; 12 individuals successfully matched with a mentee or mentor from within SHG, or other GM Housing associations in 2019/20.

SHG's approach to offering apprenticeships once again demonstrated its commitment to providing developmental opportunities for local people and to ensuring these are high quality jobs which make staff want to stay with the organisation. 2019/20 saw all 30 apprenticeships paid at the 'living wage' level rather than an apprentice rate. These were six months longer than 'standard' placements because SHG ensures apprentices have sufficient time to develop the skills they need to move on to permanent jobs and to benefit from the 'move on' support it offers. Of the 30 apprentices, 10 positions were created within our Neighbourhoods and Support Services Directorate by changing established vacant posts into temporary 18-month Apprenticeship placements. This created additional opportunities that would not otherwise be available. All posts have been successfully filled following a dedicated recruitment campaign, assessment centre, and interview selection process. During the last five years, a further 23 apprentices have been employed, of whom nine went on to permanent jobs within SHG and 14 with other employers. All individuals completed their apprenticeships.

Last year saw the ALMO employ three graduate apprentices to carry out short term projects. These were designed to help them become job ready and to provide the organisation with valuable pieces of research work. These graduates supported the development, for example, of new builds, buy back refurbishments and the purchasing of flats to refurbish for people who were previously homeless. Another graduate, supported flood mapping using a geographic information system and the analysis of photovoltaic energy alongside the organisation's own energy initiatives. SHG also continued a three year graduate apprenticeship placement to support work to implement the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) which came into force in May 2018.

SHG is a Stonewall Diversity Champion organisation. This recognises its commitment to supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transgender, Questioning and Intersex people in the workplace and to developing services to customers who are LGBT+. A dedicated LGBT+ staff forum ensures SHG understands and values its LGBT+ communities, provides places where LGBT+ people choose to live, work and socialise and takes an interest in access and service delivery issues for customers. This was supported by training of staff 'Allies' to support the work of the Group and promote a positive culture around gender and sexual identity in the workplace. Last year saw the introduction of a Vision for an Inclusive Workplace, which sets out our commitment to an environment that values all individual and group differences in the workforce. In 2019 the ALMO improved its position in the Stonewall Top Employers list from 199 to 151 and has worked with Stonewall to develop a plan for further improvement.

SHG is committed to ensuring equality and diversity in its workforce. In 2019/20 the percentage of BME staff rose from 7.8 to 8.1 per cent and its mean gender pay gap

stands at 3.2 per cent<sup>7</sup>. It particularly has more female employees, more female line managers than males in the upper pay quartile, and has more women than men on the senior management team. It has signed up for the Chartered Institute of Housing '2020 Challenge' which seeks to ensure greater diversity in leadership teams and it is part of a Greater Manchester Housing Providers research project 'Generating Routes for Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnic (BAME) Leadership'<sup>8</sup> which is developing ideas for improving diversity. Managers have received training on increasing diversity in the workplace during the year.

Corporate social responsibility is central to SHG's culture and helps motivate its staff, who embrace opportunities to 'give something back'. For example, the staff team raised £19,440 for Reuben's Retreat and did 2,320 hours of volunteering for local causes last year. A number of staff teams also held awaydays at Reubens, not only to support teambuilding but also to help this excellent local charity with much needed repairs and landscaping work.

### *Opportunities to improve*

There are a number of areas where the organisation recognises that it can still do better. For example:

- The proportion of BAME candidates and people with disabilities who are successful in being appointed to roles is lower than their proportions in the local community. An in depth analysis has been completed and a number of actions identified to address the issue and the Board is monitoring these figures on a quarterly basis.
- SHG meets eight of the ten requirements of the '2020 Challenge'. It is making progress on the remaining two requirements by developing mentoring opportunities and implementing a Talent Management Strategy.
- SHG recognises that it can do more to improve female representation in traditionally male-dominated trades. It has developed a plan to encourage and support women to enter this part of the business and this is being taken forward as a key strand of making the organisation a great place to work. During 2019/20 Repairs 1<sup>st</sup> recruited two female trade apprentices with each progressing with college studies alongside on-the-job training.

### ***Aim Two - Be accountable to customers***

SHG continued to have excellent performance and satisfaction levels in 2019/20. Continuous improvement was the result of effective customer involvement and scrutiny, alongside learning from satisfaction surveys and complaints. For the eleventh successive year the organisation achieved the Customer Excellence Standard for providing accessible and responsive services.

Service delivery in the areas that matter most to customers continued to be excellent in 2019/20. Satisfaction with the outcomes of repairs, for example, was 99.8 per cent and with the outcomes of antisocial behaviour (ASB) cases it averaged 98.93 per cent, these are both exceptionally high. Stockport Homes' caretaking service continues to deliver against stringent service standards, with 99.27 per cent of customers satisfied with the service delivered in multi storey blocks. Estate

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<sup>7</sup> The median pay for women is £14.38 and for men it is £14.86, a 3.2 per cent difference

<sup>8</sup> in association Manchester Metropolitan University



inspections also indicated that 98.07 per cent of neighbourhoods were maintained to a good or excellent standard. These outcomes evidence SHG's ongoing commitment to listening to its customers.

The organisation benchmarked among the top twenty-five per cent of ALMOs and very well against other types of housing provider in core service delivery. It was particularly outstanding in business critical areas which protect the Council's income and safeguard its tenants, for example re-let times and gas servicing. The table below outlines its benchmarked positions<sup>9</sup>.

Benchmarking results at 31.05.20	Performance	All ALMOs		All Housing Providers	
		Position	Base	Position	Base
Percentage of dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate	100%	<b>1st</b>	16	<b>1st</b>	87
Rent arrears of current tenants as a percentage of rental debit	1.93%	<b>3rd</b>	6	<b>6th</b>	34
Percentage of rent lost through dwellings being vacant	0.47%	<b>1st</b>	6	<b>3rd</b>	19
Average number of sick days per employee	6.58 days	<b>2nd</b>	6	<b>8th</b>	31
Average time taken to re-let empty dwellings (all re-lets)	11.9 days	<b>1st</b>	6	<b>2nd</b>	30

Customer satisfaction remained high during the year, with customers expressing 98.0 per cent satisfaction with SHG as a landlord and 97.1 per cent with the quality of their homes.

The Covid-19 UK lockdown commenced on 23rd March 2020. This means that performance as set out above covers a significant period where services were operating closer to 'normal' conditions than they were in the final month of the year. This is reflected in the results, for example with 100 per cent of gas servicing certificates issued before the due date, a situation that the service knows will change in April 2020<sup>10</sup>. In all instances, the service will be taking reasonable steps to gain access to properties. Similarly, rent collection and arrears measures are performing at pre-lockdown levels for March<sup>11</sup>. However, over 100 customers have reported difficulties in paying rent due to the impact of Covid-19. This may affect rent collection and arrears in future months, although the Customer Finance Team is working closely with customers to understand their situation and provide support. Other services have met the challenge of Covid-19 with improved levels of performance and service delivery. The number of One Number calls answered is at 96.8 per cent, which is an improvement on performance of 94.7 per cent recorded in December 2019. The Pantries have adapted to customer needs by changing the way it delivers goods during the pandemic, with 165 deliveries direct to customer

<sup>9</sup> 30 ALMOs and hundreds of other housing providers could choose to submit performance data for benchmarking but many do not and it is generally assumed that the better performers are those that benchmark and, particularly, those that benchmark before the end of June.

<sup>10</sup> The service anticipates between five and ten properties that will not meet their renewal data in April due to customer shielding measures.

<sup>11</sup> Rent collection was 100.00 per cent and rent arrears was 1.88 per cent at the end of December. The measures are at 100.49 per cent and 1.93 per cent respectively at the end of March.

homes. The ASB service is making proactive contact with victims and survivors of domestic abuse from the last six months, on the guidance of Stockport Without Abuse.

SHG's core services are accredited by reputable professional bodies, all of which expect to see customers engaged in service improvement. Last year it won 11 awards, received six commendations and was shortlisted for a further 19 awards for the quality of its services from recognised, established bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Housing, and the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce. It is also shortlisted for a further eight awards, the results of which have been delayed into the next financial year due to Covid-19. To win these accolades illustrates how SHG has listened to what its customers want and demonstrate the strength of its reputation for delivering.

Customers hold the organisation to account in a range of ways. They are involved in formulating policies and strategies, monitoring service delivery and working with staff to make spending decisions. Examples of this in 2019/20 included:

- Customer HUBs were used to consult on Carecall's customer services, the rent strategy and rents and service charges.
- Customer focus groups were used to consult on the social housing green paper, refugee services and new service standards
- The customer roadshows were used to consult on fire safety and wi-fi access in blocks with the survey findings contributing to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's research project into building safety
- Online, email and telephone consultations were used to consult on reporting of ASB, the New Build Design Guide, the Digital Transformation Strategy, the Lettable Standard and Holiday Club provision
- The Neighbourhood Improvement Budget allowed local people to prioritise spend on community, environmental and partnership projects, including estate clean-ups, diversionary activities, community groups, and the refurbishment of the Arthur Greenwood centre and its food pantry.
- The Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) reviewed two service areas that included the Reception Service at Cornerstone and the Greenspace Service. The reviews increased customer access to the reception area at Cornerstone and made information more readily available to customers. The Customer Monitoring Group meets three times per year to review corporate performance reports and financial reports. It provides comments, which are provided to the Councillors who monitor Stockport Homes' performance at its Member Committee.

During 2019-20 SHG has worked closely with 54 community groups across the Borough, providing a variety of support, expertise and guidance. This includes helping to set up seven new groups and supporting existing groups with the on-going running of weekly sessions varying from digital skills to art, toddler and family groups, community cafes and domestic abuse support.

SHG manages ten community centres on the Council's behalf. Activities last year included keep fit sessions, and digital inclusion classes. The Centres were also increasingly used to support multi-agency working, with four centre being used by partners for training, meetings and one-to-one sessions, with two centres hosting

successful job clubs. Both Offerton and Brinnington Centres have award winning, social enterprise community cafes and two centres host 'Panttries' where local people can purchase affordable, healthy food and gain volunteering experience.

A major refurbishment project was carried out in the Arthur Greenwood Centre. The investment has enabled a new local pantry project to be established in the building and opportunity to maximise the buildings use for existing and new users with extra marketing potential, along with increasing income.

### *Opportunities to improve*

There are a number of areas where the organisation recognises that it can still do better. For example:

- Each of the CSP's reviews resulted in managers taking action plans to the Board to address its recommendations. For example, the Reception Service at Cornerstone is being improved to ensure all customers can access the reception area and easily find what they are looking for through improved signage. In addition, during the CSP Review of the Greenspace Service it was recommended to improve online access to the service, to enable customers to easily find out information about the service and report issues.
- A number of improvement opportunities were identified following customer complaints and enquiries. For example:
  - Dementia training has been implemented for frontline staff, in order to better support customers who may have, or show signs of, dementia
  - Additional training has been provided to Repairs staff to ensure all necessary checks are carried out so that the causes/sources of leaks are identified correctly to prevent repeated visits.
  - There is improved management and oversight of the asbestos testing/reporting process, to ensure tests are done within reasonable timeframes and works are carried out accordingly.

### ***Aim Three - Maximise efficiency***

A strong value for money ethos exists within Stockport Homes. It makes best use of resources by generating efficiencies, bidding for external funding and channelling income into service delivery, based on priorities agreed with customers.

Many efficiencies are non-cashable and are translated directly into service improvements. Efficiencies of 6.42 per cent of the revenue budget were generated in 2019/20 - £701,349 of which were from changing the way services operated and £1,126,632 from other efficiencies, such as through buying supplies and services differently. Some examples include:

- using a consortium procurement approach to save £154,206 on a range of services;
- installing solar panels at the head office saving £1,665 on energy costs;
- restructuring the Anti-Social Behaviour Team to meet new service needs saving £14,173;
- delivering marketing literature design work in-house rather than sourcing from the open market saving £25,000; and
- supporting customers in "housing need" to move via mutual exchange rather than leaving a property empty, saving £267,444.

SHG considers that efficiency is about delivering 'more for less' but this does not always mean making a cash saving. During 2019/20 it has continued to deliver briefing sessions with teams to embed the link between the ASPIRE values and social value. It has continued to develop its approach to procurement, using standard documentation for tender scoring, which provides consistency for suppliers and staff when they consider social value requirements. It has linked those requirements to service delivery such as employment support initiatives. It has been involved in the first Greater Manchester Housing Providers Social Value Conference, held in January 2020, which highlighted the importance of buying local, supporting social enterprise, and being a good employer. In addition a framework of social value tender requirements have been implemented that are aligned to the aims of the Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy. This ensures that the social value offered by contractors aligns more closely with the requirements of services. Stockport Homes' involvement with a group of housing providers from across Greater Manchester has continued during the year. It has continued to take a lead on data collection and analysis for the group and it has taken a co-lead role on the Group's communication plan. This has raised the profile of social housing providers across the region and celebrated the delivery of social value outcomes.

Stockport Homes has a strong commitment to safeguarding public assets. Its housing fraud initiative, for example, helps to ensure that people in the greatest housing need are able to access social housing. In 2019/20 SHG prevented 12 fraudulent applicants from obtaining social housing, potentially saving £38,880<sup>12</sup>. In addition, it prevented 30 Right to Buy bids moving beyond the application stage, potentially preventing the loss of public assets worth £3,787,619<sup>13</sup>. Stockport Homes also recovered 16 properties following investigations into fraudulent use. This is a potential saving of £372,000<sup>14</sup>. Only one of these cases required Court action and the rest were recovered based upon the work of the Housing Fraud Investigation Officer.

Another example of this rigorous approach to defending the housing stock is the successful defence of 30 disrepair claims last year, saving approximately £120,000 in legal fees<sup>15</sup>.

Stockport Homes' subsidiary companies were set up to maximise income, protect core services and help deliver the Council's objectives in the most focussed and cost-effective way. In 2019/20:

- Viaduct Partnerships delivered the Group's development programme efficiently. It participated in the completion of 36 new homes for rent and 33 for shared ownership within the Borough during 2019/20, with a further 394 individual units

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<sup>12</sup> Based on a calculation developed by the Cabinet Office due to annual costs of temporary accommodation, they estimate £3240 per application removed from the waiting list. National Fraud Initiative Report 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2018

<sup>13</sup> Calculated using the average value of properties sold in 2019/20

<sup>14</sup> The Cabinet Office estimates a cost of £23,250 per property recovered based on annual costs of temporary accommodation, costs of recovery and re-letting. National Fraud Initiative Report 4 November 2016. Due to inflation this cost may be higher, however there has been no updated figure released

<sup>15</sup> Based on approximate legal fees of £4,000 per case

under construction at the end of 2019/20. Viaduct Partnerships made tax efficiencies of £17,497 for the Group in 2019/20.

- Threesixty delivered a significant proportion of the capital programme, with turnover of £7.2m and efficiencies created used to re-invest into delivering more services for customers in Stockport.
- Foundations had its first full year of trading, with a turnover of £688,000, which helped it to deliver its charitable activities.

Stockport Homes constantly reviews its structure to ensure it makes the best use of resources. In 2019/20 this included, for example combining the Housing Support and Older Persons Services to create an Independent Living Service, and bringing all Customer Skills and Employment services including Motiv8 together under one Manager leading on both operational delivery and strategic approach to employment. SHG commenced a restructure during the year to take advantage of a number of opportunities created by vacant posts. It created more development opportunities for managers and enabled services to reflect the growing diversity in the range of services delivered. Other service-level restructures include a restructure of the Tenancy and Estates and Housing services, creating a saving of £33,079; ThreeSixty Living, the private sector team combining services. SHG has also worked with partners to support wider efficiencies, such as providing CCTV for libraries and offering noise monitoring and lend-a-cam for other social landlords.

Wherever possible, Stockport Homes streamlines systems and processes to optimise use of resources. For example, it:

- Implemented significant improvements to online services, including repairs, that has increased capacity and improved turnaround time
- Completed the first phase of transformation of IT systems to improve flexibility, efficiency, and the customer experience
- Continued to mobilise all front line caretaking teams to provide rapid logging of issues and associated responses
- Commenced the modernisation of the Carecall service call-handling platform
- Introduced the One Number contact platform, which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- Introduced public access Wi-Fi in multiple high rise blocks

In addition to maximising efficiencies, Stockport Homes has been very successful in attracting external funding. Its dedicated funding officer secured £464,000 of external grant and £456,000 of match funding to support a range of projects, including employment, community growing; digital inclusion; health and wellbeing; and environmental schemes.

A range of contracts were renegotiated last year to extend successful services delivered by SHG and partners. This include the Targeted Prevention Alliance, the APR and the Wellbeing Independence Network, each of which has been extended to March 2021. Additional funding has been secured for Motiv8, extending the service to early 2022.

The ALMO took the opportunity last year to help raise standards across the sector by sharing its expertise, creating growth to support the core business. For example, it

held two very successful 'Skills Share' seminars to showcase best practice. This gave staff an opportunity to share their enthusiasm and learning with 42 peers from around the country and brought in £2,440 additional income.

SHG works to support the best use of resources across the Council's family of companies. For example, it provided energy management services to 46 local schools, which collectively spend over £1.37 million a year on energy. This allowed them to benefit from its Energy Procurement Strategy, which typically results in tariffs of 11 per cent below the market average.

'Win win' projects where SHG was able to carry out work at a more competitive rate than commercial contractors and still make a small surplus also improved value for money across the Council family. For example, it provided an architectural and contract management service for the Bruce Lodge Dementia Care Home, managed by Boroughcare.

As a result of these activities, Stockport Homes' various companies each met their financial targets during 2019/20.

#### *Opportunities to improve*

There are a number of areas where the organisation recognises that it can still do better. For example:

- Reviewing contracts in place, particularly those that are due for renewal and ensuring that new specifications / procurement processes will maximise the benefit for SHG and its customers and provide efficiencies to be reinvested, where possible

#### ***Aim Four - Reduce inequalities***

The ALMO continued its commitment to reducing inequalities in 2019/20. Its charitable company, Foundations Stockport, took on the management of several new and existing projects, including the Motiv8 service. Motiv8 works with people with complex needs that are most removed from the labour market, moving them towards education, job searching and employment. Your Local Pantries and the Furniture Recycling Service have also been transferred to Foundations Stockport, enabling the team to identify and explore additional sources of funding which were previously unavailable. Funding has also been secured from the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government to fund two Outreach roles working with Rough Sleepers across Stockport and Trafford. The charity's aims are:

- supporting people into employment, relieving poverty, relieving food poverty and developing digital skills;
- supporting customers in local communities and delivering support services to help people live independently;
- empowering communities to develop networks of support, including targeted work with people who may experience disadvantage such as people with disabilities, from BME communities and those with complex needs;
- working in partnership to reduce demand on statutory services; and
- supporting the development of the third sector, ensuring additional resources and services are secured.



A number of SHG's advice services helped combat poverty among customers last year. For example:

- Energy Solutions Advisors carried out 980 home visits<sup>16</sup> to give customers free and impartial advice on switching supplier, eligibility for government grants and winter payments. This saved customers £114,379.84, which includes warm homes discount and Charis grant payments, helping them get the most out of their low carbon appliances;
- 346 customers were supported to apply for savings on their water charges at an average annual saving of £172 per customer; and
- Money Advisors worked with 3,133 customers to help maximise their household incomes. They assisted with claims for new or additional benefits, challenging incorrect benefit decisions and applying for trust funds and grants. This resulted in £6.8m of additional income for customers and the prevention of 21 cases of homelessness.
- A team of specialist Money Advisors is in place and offering intensive support to all new UC claimants during the first 6 weeks of their claim. Support starts from the point of Stockport Homes being made aware of a new claim, to the claimant receiving their first UC payment.
- During 2019/20, the team supported 1,569 UC claimants, mainly as a result of being notified about new claims via the DWP Landlord Portal. All claimants are contacted initially by telephone, with a face to face appointment arranged if required. Out of the UC cases who engaged with the team, 87% received their first payment and paid as requested

Since April 2019, Your Local Pantry has attracted 514 new members providing affordable groceries to an average membership of 544 households. 9,232 visits have been made across the five pantries, offering potential savings for members of £575 per household per year with total savings across the membership amounting to £106,168 in 2019/20.

A group of up to 40 community volunteers manage the day-to-day running of each Pantry. This includes taking deliveries and storing and rotating stock, completing opening and closing checks and supporting members with their weekly shop. During 2019/20, the pantries generated £93,652 of social value<sup>17</sup> because of volunteering alone with 4,314 hours of volunteer time being committed. During the last 12 months, 31 volunteers have been recruited and supported through a comprehensive induction programme including training in manual handling and Food Hygiene Level two.

SHG has particularly focused on supporting 278 people, furthest from the labour market, into employment, supporting the Council's ambitious inclusive growth agenda to put people and communities at the heart of economic growth. In 2019/20 this included meeting demand from local businesses for targeted training and recruitment campaigns with a focus on addressing the multiple barriers some people face getting into work. These took the form of pre-employment courses to get applicants 'job ready' with sector specific skills training and interview preparation, offering guaranteed interviews with employers and, where necessary, supporting

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<sup>16</sup> Of which 674 were new cases

<sup>17</sup> Social value based on HACT's Social Value calculator 2018

them with travel expenses and suitable interview clothing. In 2019/20 SHG worked with five such businesses within four employment sectors and people secured 31 jobs directly through its training and recruitment programmes. SHG has designed new courses to support individuals to explore a variety of employment sectors. This has started with an innovative, seven weeks 'Introduction into Housing' course, building awareness and engagement of all aspects of housing sector employment. At a time when large sector based opportunities reduced in Stockport, SHG responded by designing and delivering Assessment Centre Coaching Sessions, improving interview success for customers.

Other initiatives to increase employability and employment opportunities include:

- the long standing 'Blue Sky' environmental project which supported seven ex-offenders into employment by providing skills and experience in grounds maintenance;
- the partnership with B4Box continued to help people gain nationally accredited construction skills and resulted in 18 people being employed who were previously far removed from the labour market;
- specialist employment staff supported 133 people into sustainable employment;
- commissioned business start-up support, enabling eight people to set up new small businesses; and
- the Skills for Life training programme resulted in 84 customers attending tailored training programmes with 31 securing employment.

SHG also supported placements for six schoolchildren during the year and ran an awards event to encourage community activity and celebrate people who volunteer.

SHG has a range of cross tenure services, which empower vulnerable people to live independently and sustain tenancies. Key outcomes for these services included:

- 78 new furnished tenancies were created to support people to establish themselves as tenants;
- 261 vulnerable households received a bespoke package of housing related support, with 97 per cent per cent sustaining their tenancies;
- 1498 hours of intensive, short term support were provided by the Intensive Support service;
- 627 visits were carried out to customers living in tower blocks who required a short term intervention by a Block Support Officer; and
- 13 customers were supported to live independently within a local 'Housing First' offer (in addition to the GM Housing First funded project)
- 92 private sector ASB cases resolved in the private sector with cases closed in an average of 42 days. Every customer was satisfied with the outcome of the case.
- Positive Engagement Officers (PEOs) supported 115 new referrals of chaotic drug and alcohol users and people with mental health or anger management issues to help them sustain their tenancies. In total 69 cases were successfully closed during the year without the need for legal action.

An increasing number of in house initiatives also supported older people and people with disabilities last year. For example:

- winter welfare visits to 307 of SHG's oldest customers to identify support needs and give advice about keeping warm and well;
- the cross-tenure older persons' activity service for the over 50's reduced social isolation and enhanced mental wellbeing through 830 events for 230 older people;
- SHG's dedicated Housing Options for Older People (HOOP) service gave bespoke advice and information to 737 older customers about housing and care options to help them either remain in their homes longer or move to more suitable accommodation. Successes included, for example, providing advice and support to 112 customers to access 'extra care' housing to prevent the need for residential care, 77 customers received other advice about issues such as money management, adaptations and other issues to support independent living; and the service supported 34 people out of hospital into suitable accommodation, preventing ongoing delayed discharges; and
- SHG carried out 198 adaptations on Council stock and 233 on the Council's behalf in the private sector to help people live independently in their homes for longer.

SHG's Carecall Service, with the critical support of the Council, continued to enable independent living and reduce hospital admissions to the growing aging population of the Borough. The service offers 24-hour Telecare Monitoring and Response to service users, including a newly introduced night response/lifting service. The 'Universal Offer for Carecall' is now available to all residents and was successfully launched on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2020. Over the next four years is anticipated to generate savings of £394,000 for the Council, becoming cost-neutral thereafter.

A great deal of work was done again last year to prevent and address homelessness in Stockport. 2019/20 again saw increased demand for the Council's housing options service which is delivered by Stockport Homes. This focuses on holistic housing options advice and prevention work, often with partner agencies. The service successfully prevented 196 cases of homelessness through interventions such as mediation, negotiation with landlords and money advice.

SHG continued to work on a Lottery funded initiative with local charity Helping the Homeless into Housing (H3) to tackle homelessness among regular users of the hospital to reduce the likelihood of them experiencing health crises. Co-located in its Integrated Transfer Team, the project supports people with complex substance-misuse issues and works closely with the psychological medicines team to help clients with dual diagnosis and challenging psychological disorders. Outcomes last year included 69 homeless clients being supported to leave hospital in a safe and planned manner and 39 people with complex health, substance misuses and housing issues to find settled accommodation, conduct home detoxes and engage with primary health care rather than using emergency services. H3 has also ensured that 59 homeless people have access to primary care by supporting registration with GP's to avoid hospital visits altogether where possible.

Work was done last year to help combat rough sleeping. This included participation in the Greater Manchester Mayor's 'A bed every night' project, which delivered 398 positive move-on outcomes for people at risk of rough sleeping in the Borough during 2019/20. As well as providing accommodation, this included interventions

around health and wider support, including mobilising volunteers to deliver additional projects such as cooking classes.

The three temporary accommodation (TA) schemes managed by SHG on the Council's behalf provide a safety net for people who have become homeless and support them to move to settled housing in a planned, sustainable way. People living in temporary accommodation were involved in a wide range of positive engagement activity last year to help them address the complex needs often associated with homelessness. This activity included healthy eating, arts, cooking, getting active, peer support, mood management and children's' holiday sessions.

SHG continues to successfully manage the Council's housing register as well as supporting households to meet their own housing need through mutual exchanges. It helped 92 households to move in this way last year, saving Stockport Homes around £264,776 in void costs. In addition, it supported 40 households by providing bonds to help them access properties in the private rented sector.

To increase the pace of delivering new homes to meet housing need last year, SHG and the Council continued to work together in the 'Viaduct Housing Partnership'. This took advantage of SHG's skills as a developer and the Council's strategic oversight and ability to borrow prudentially. This successful partnership saw SHG add 69 completed units to its portfolio, consisting of 36 new homes for rent and 33 for shared ownership completed across three sites, which mitigated the impact of stock losses through the Right to Buy<sup>18</sup>. This is a significant achievement in a Borough with such scarce and expensive land resources. Work also started on a further 16 homes for social rent, four for affordable rent, 68 for shared ownership, which will be added to the SHG portfolio, and seven for outright sale. Four existing properties were also acquired and refurbished for social rent, two general needs properties and two properties, which will provide accommodation and support for care leavers.

In the Housing Revenue Account, units owned by Stockport Council, there are 26 schemes under construction or refurbishment, consisting of 24 Affordable rent units at Hexham Close and two former RTB properties. At the end of March 2020, there are 420 units in the pipeline for SMBC, which are scheduled for delivery over the next three to four years.

During 2019/20 £5.084m in capital grant funding was drawn down from Homes England to support the delivery of new affordable homes, although this will still not make a significant impact on the problems of supply or affordability in the local housing market, which are extreme.

SHG retained its focus on delivering the Council's priority of digital inclusion to improve access to services and enhance financial and social wellbeing. All of its community centres and sheltered housing schemes offer free Wi-Fi for residents and it continued to facilitate digital skills training with partner Starting Point for 139 unique customers at 282 sessions in three locations. In addition, SHG worked with Good

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<sup>18</sup> Which numbered 118 last year

Things Foundation, the Council and 17 other local partners and community groups, to deliver the '#digiknow' alliance and network which is designed to increase online access for Stockport residents.

SHG championed, sponsored and participated in a range of activities designed to support marginalised communities, such as: Stockport Pride; Hate Crime Awareness Week; a veterans support day and a refugee event. The ALMO also provides specialist support for refugees through the United Nations Gateway Protection Programme. In 2019/20, it delivered successful integration of 18 refugee families into UK society, with support in accessing training and employment opportunities.

Community development work has been very successful in enhancing sustainability. Funding of £463,809 was gained for 27 unique community organisations, including Stockport Homes, which stimulated Stockport's voluntary sector and supported the Council's inclusive growth agenda. This has been supplemented by intensive partnership working in key neighbourhoods with local people. For example:

- Offerton Activities Committee: SHG is working with the Alzheimers' Society to deliver a Singing for Memory run by volunteers for local residents, building on the success of the existing Alzheimers' group in the areas. Funding has been provided initially by Stockport Homes, supplemented by the local Methodist church and The Freemasons.
- Offerton Community Kitchen/Café has been a lifeline for many local older residents providing a coffee morning and low cost meals. In addition to this the volunteer run café has linked up with the dementia drop in at Offerton Community Centre, they also took over organising and running the Senior Shindig providing an afternoon of entertainment, raffle and a hot lunch served by Stockport School students following their carol singing for 100 residents. This was made possible through partnership working with SHG, Stockport School, GLO Church and other community groups. The lead volunteer worked with SHG in Summer 2019 to provide a weekly cooking sessions where families learnt how to prepare and cook a hot meal and dessert on a budget.

Last year the Fabulous Foundations project generated 205 instances of engagement with children through holiday clubs. All the parents fed back that it had a positive impact on their children's' happiness, self-confidence, and feelings about school, willingness to try new activities and interaction with adults. They also thought that it had helped them to combine work and childcare and that the club had had a positive impact on their finances.

#### *Opportunities to improve*

There are a number of areas where the organisation recognises that it can still do better. For example:

- It will do more to support women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds in accessing employment training and support. This will build on initiatives such as the support provided to the Heaton Norris Pavilion Committee and Make A Difference, which enabled them to be awarded a grant of £16,560 from the Workers educational Association. The funding was used to deliver a 24-week accredited pre employment training course aimed at women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

- Building on the strong networks that have been developed between the PROUD staff network and Stockport Pride. This includes enabling the network and pride group to use the community rooms facilities as a safe meeting space, to access the SHG online training offer on themes such as health and safety, which will support the organisation of the Stockport Pride annual event.
- Embed processes that have been created to support customers that are transitioning, building on work undertaken in collaboration with the PROUD network and Stockport Pride. This already includes ensuring SHG staff call those that are transitioning by the correct name and correct pronouns no matter which stage of the transitioning process the customer is at.

### ***Aim Five - Build strong, collaborative relationships***

SHG continues to be a leading partner within the Great Manchester Housing Providers group (GMHP). This represents most of the social housing providers in the sub-region and its work supports the aims of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and the Great Manchester Social Care and Health Partnership (GMSCHP), ensuring the valuable contribution of housing to their agendas is understood.

During 2019/20, this collaboration delivered a number of contracts including GM Housing First, which will support 300-400 homeless households with a range of complex needs resulting in chaotic and challenging behaviours over a three-year period. During 2019/20 seven households have engaged with the service, with six securing accommodation, all seven households have started to address their substance misuse issues and develop independent living skills.

Although only delivered since November 2019, the two Rough Sleeper outreach workers have been working with 32 rough sleepers across Stockport and Trafford. Most of the people have been homeless for significant periods, refused many previous offers of accommodation and have complex needs. During this time, they have encouraged and supported eight people to take up offers of housing, and more importantly ensure the support is in place to make placements sustainable. Additional funding has been secured to deliver the service up to April 2021.

GMHP's delivery company, Manchester Athena Ltd, is a vehicle for delivering key projects and attracting external funding. For example, the Motiv8 initiative, funded from the Big Lottery and European Social Fund, supports people from excluded groups with complex needs who are far removed from the labour market. Stockport Homes works in partnership with four other consortium partners to deliver the service. In the last year it supported 374 excluded people within the Stockport and Rochdale hub to achieve 920 positive outcomes in areas such as health and well-being, finance and self-confidence and self-development, with 71 of those people moving into education, training and employment, 21 people commenced job searching and 16 people participated in volunteering activities.

In January 2020 work onsite commenced with regards to the European Regional Development Fund project "Homes as Energy Systems". Throughout January and up until the Covid-19 restrictions in March work was primarily focused around drilling



the deep-bore holes for the ground source heat pumps at The Cloisters. The total project is valued at circa £6.1m with £2.4m coming from European grant funding. The project will continue to be delivered in 2020 and into 2021. A total of 643 measures will be completed comprising of renewable technology heat pumps, Solar PV, enhanced insulation and new roofs.

2019/20 saw SHG working closely with strategic housing and social care colleagues from the Council on a range of issues. It is a long-standing member of the Stockport Housing Partnership, which supports the Council's strategic housing function. It is also working with SMBC colleagues across Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing on a range of 'Ageing Well' work streams. This included analysis and planning in response to data secured through the Housing Needs Assessment, events with Registered Providers to secure commitments to the Ageing Well agenda, piloting technology and support and care models to support the development and thinking on the Academy of Ageing Well.

SHG also takes a key role in providing support. The Council's Targeted Prevention Alliance (TPA) to prevent, reduce and delay demand for statutory services through early intervention and resilience building, saw the ALMO work with six partners - receiving 4160 referrals in 2019/20, with 1168 given advice and information. Among those people requiring longer-term support, 633 achieved all the goals they set for themselves in their Goals of Care plan and 844 made significant progress.

SHG is a key partner in the Council's safeguarding work. This includes the Stockport Safeguarding Children Board, the Safeguarding Adults Board and the multi-agency safeguarding and support hub (MASSH) which supports families with complex needs. Stockport Homes' MASSH representative helps prevent cases of families with complex needs escalating to statutory Social Care intervention stage and gives housing advice and guidance on others. During 2019/20, this post holder provided information, in conjunction with other professionals within the MASSH, to 278 enquirers, supported work on five complex cases and was the lead Officer for a further three. A range of outcomes were achieved, including: tenancy sustainment, improved health and well-being, increased school attendance, parenting support and prevention of escalation into Children's Social Care and Child Protection processes.

The ALMO plays a key role in the Safer Stockport Partnership (SSP). It has contributed significantly to strategic thinking and service delivery by working with partners to map trends and develop plans. At an operational level, 2019/20 saw a number of partnership projects to tackle anti-social behaviour. For example, a review was carried out of the Community Safety Services delivered across Stockport. This identified opportunities to provide a more joined up and more efficient approach that will improve outcomes across the Borough. New ways of working, that included the transfer of the Council's private sector ASB service to SHG, would simplify the approaches to dealing with anti-social behaviour in residential areas and enable the Council to make savings in a way that does not impact on front line services. Stockport Council commissioned SHG to deliver ASB services in the private sector and this service delivery agreement came into effect on 15 July 2019.

Stockport Homes continued to support the Council's Place Based Integration (PBI) work last year, through dedicated staffing resources and office space in a community

building. During 2019/20 the PBI approach was expanded to the Victoria and Stepping Hill locality with a specific focus on Adswood, Bridgehall and Cheadle Heath. The PBI approach continues to enable a wide range of agencies to share information, identify issues and collectively agree the most appropriate intervention which will engage people at an early stage, implement short and timely interventions, engage people in relevant universal services and resources and prevent escalation to high cost, reactive statutory services.

SHG continued its partnership work on a wide range of health related projects in 2019/20. Its counselling service for tenants and TPA customers was delivered by the charity Talk Listen Change (TLC) and provided 11 students with high quality placements and 280 individuals with counselling. 935 counselling sessions were provided across the year.

Over the course of the last 12 months, more than 200 Stockport residents have benefited from SHG's partnership with Self Help, via workshops focusing on managing bereavement, anger, worry and stress. 55 per cent of participants had reported a positive impact on their wellbeing from having completed the workshops against a Self Help target of 50 per cent.

Other work included a partnership with Acorn Recovery which provides four shared three-bedroom properties with support for people abstaining from substance misuse to help them prepare for secure stable accommodation and get into long term volunteering and employment. The ongoing partnership with Public Health to provide home safety equipment to under twos in vulnerable households benefitted 77 families last year.

Last year saw the ALMO again supporting the Council to improve the private rented sector in the Borough. Its lettings service provided private landlords with high quality, reliable management services on properties throughout last year with 161 properties being managed as at year end. This helped drive up standards and encouraged landlords with empty homes to improve and relet them to households in need. SHG will continue to support private sector availability through its ThreeSixty Living service, which is seeking to provide private sector block management within the Borough.

During the last year, the ALMO has been a lead member of the Greater Manchester Ethical Lettings Agency, a partnership established by Greater Manchester Housing Providers to work with the GMCA to improve access to the private rented sector for those currently excluded. SHG is one of five housing service providers who are working in partnership to achieve the objective<sup>19</sup> with each organisation having significant experience in working with the private rented sector (PRS) in leasing from or managing on behalf of private landlords.

#### *Opportunities to improve*

There are a number of areas where the organisation recognises that it can still do better. For example:

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<sup>19</sup> Bolton at Home, ForHousing, Wigan Council and Salix Homes

- Grow the portfolio of private sector block management through ThreeSixty Living, to provide quality private sector rental management and generate income to support core service delivery
- Support Stockport Council in its ambition to regenerate the town centre by working with developers to secure the management of any new blocks through ThreeSixty Living, thereby ensuring high quality services are maintained.

### ***Aim Six - Improve the environment***

Customers continued to benefit in 2019/20 from the work SHG did in previous years to retrofit homes with renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. For example, the switch from electric storage heaters to biomass district heating systems saw customers' annual heating and hot water bills reduce by 79 per cent<sup>20</sup>, customers with photovoltaic panels save approximately £191 per year on electricity and those who benefited from loft and wall cavity insulation save £200 per year. In addition, 'feed-in tariff' income generated from solar panels contributed £1,257,419<sup>21</sup> towards the Housing Revenue Account in 2019/20, which supports the improvement programme.

Last year's £19.7m Capital Investment Programme delivered a range of improvements to the housing stock on the 'big impact' basis agreed with customers. This focussed expenditure in ways that contribute best to the sustainability and financial viability of the stock. This approach means SHG is part way through a £9.7m programme in Offerton that delivers the aims of the Offerton Masterplan to over 600 properties. The programme delivered works to 123 properties in 2019/20. In addition, benefits for local communities over the first two years of the programme include:

- £4.46m has been reinvested in the local area
- There have been £38,840 of fuel cost benefits for tenants due to roof, door, window and wall installations
- 55 Greater Manchester-based residents are employed on the contract, 26 of which live in Stockport
- 27 brand new properties delivered on the Offerton estate, creating £2.4m of economic impact from the construction process

Similarly, 300 properties in Adswood and Bridgehall neighbourhoods have benefitted from a combination of new roofs, wall and chimney repointing, and external render finish. Customer satisfaction with the programme last year was 98.6 per cent and the energy performance rating of properties improved on the previous year, with 92.5 per cent achieving an Energy Performance Certificate rating of C or above. This compares favourably to the national average Energy Performance Certificate rating of D.

The Capital Programme also accommodates £4.9m in 2019/20 as part of a two-year sprinkler installation programme to 22 high-rise blocks, which followed extensive customer consultation and communication work. The work resulted from a joint

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<sup>20</sup> Saving an average of £1,000

<sup>21</sup> Fit income generated between April and December 2019. Final quarter isn't available until June due to validation and billing time frames

decision by SHG and Stockport Council to retrofit sprinkler systems across the high-rise stock. SHG has carried out wide ranging consultation with Stockport Council, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, Independent Fire Risk Assessors, and Mechanical and Electrical specialists. The two-year programme of installations started in 2019/20 with six high rise blocks having sprinkler installations commissioned and in service during the year. All remaining tower blocks will have sprinklers fitted by the end 2020/21; however, this will be subject to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions.

SHG's waste management framework recycled 85 per cent per cent of its waste last year with only 0.1 per cent of waste going into landfill. In addition, it supported community engagement in clean up and recycling initiatives through neighbourhood clear-outs.

SHG carries out a cyclical programme of estate inspections across the Borough, which enables issues such as fly tipping and other hazards to be identified and addressed. It reduces the impact on the environment, reduces the likelihood of vermin infestations, and makes open spaces on estates safer and more attractive. The Environmental Services team has a team dedicated to remove fly tipping and bulky waste, which supports estate management. This in turn reduces the pressure on the Council services.

In 2019/20 SHG continued to maintain a variety of quality green spaces with high levels of customer satisfaction<sup>22</sup>. It worked with Stockport Council to improve play areas and with other partners to support a range of health and wellbeing initiatives, including local allotment groups, Friends of Parks groups and Life Leisure. In addition, 251 older and disabled customers received a bi-annual visit for assisted gardening.

During the early summer Stockport, along with most of the country, suffered an extended period of very heavy rainfall which, combined with a number of other factors caused some localised flooding. The worst affected area for Stockport Homes was on Sandringham Rd in Cheadle Hulme where six properties were flooded, resulting in extensive remedial works being required and six families being moved out of their homes for around six months. Whilst the properties were unoccupied, Stockport Homes also took the opportunity to install flood defences to prevent a re-occurrence. As this event was unprecedented, Stockport Homes identified a number of areas where it could be better prepared for such incidents, such as the availability and provision of sandbags and availability of a significant volume of temporary accommodation on an individual night. The lessons learned from these events have resulted in a review of out of hours emergency procedures and the development of a clear processes linked to the handling of the early stages of any future flooding incidents.

A review of community safety services across the Borough identified opportunities for closer working between Stockport Homes and Stockport Council. During the year Stockport Council transferred its ASB service to Stockport Homes, simplifying the approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour in residential areas and enabling the

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<sup>22</sup> 88 per cent customer satisfaction with grounds maintenance service

Council to make savings in a way that does not impact on front line services. The service delivery agreement came into effect in July 2019. SHG has dealt with 91 cases in the private sector since that date, successfully resolving 100 per cent of closed cases in an average of 42 calendar days. Customer satisfaction with the outcome of the case at the point of closure was recorded at 100 per cent over the period.

There was a range of initiatives to enhance the safety of neighbourhoods last year, including 'target hardening' work<sup>23</sup> for 180 customers experiencing ASB. Stockport Homes was proactive in serving 41 Community Protection Warnings and eight Community Protection Notices on behalf of the Council and taking out 38 injunctions and undertakings to address 'hotspot' issues. By recognising the individual needs of perpetrators and victims, Positive Engagement Officers (PEOs) supported 115 new referrals of chaotic drug and alcohol users and people with mental health or anger management issues to help them sustain their tenancies. In total 69 cases were successfully closed during the year without the need for legal action, which contributed to reducing spend on legal action by £75,000 compared to anticipated spend. This approach has contributed to sustainable changes in behaviour, with all having stopped causing nuisance altogether as a result of this specialist support.

#### *Opportunities to improve*

There are areas where the organisation recognises that it can still do better. For example:

- During the CSP Review of the Greenspace Service it was recommended to consider how customers can engage with the delivery, development and monitoring of the service. The recommendations will be incorporated by the service into its processes and approaches.
- Building on the strong foundations of historic investment in low carbon technology, such as large-scale biomass and Solar PV installations, SHG will install over 400 low carbon measures<sup>24</sup> and renewable technology over the next 18 months. This is part of its role as a delivery partner on the Homes as Energy Systems project.
- Stockport Homes has commissioned a specialist consultancy company to conduct an energy study across the housing portfolio. The report will provide Stockport Homes with a clear roadmap and cost analysis to achieving a carbon neutral housing portfolio by 2038 in line with GM targets.

#### **Conclusion**

Despite a number of challenges, SHG continued to deliver in 2019/20. Its performance and customer satisfaction levels were excellent and it took opportunities to improve by constantly being open to challenge, listening to customers, stakeholders and staff and reviewing services. It grew its business and delivered significant efficiencies.

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<sup>23</sup> Such as security lighting, dummy cameras, additional locks, etc.

<sup>24</sup> Such as enhanced insulation, continued rollout of photovoltaic cells and batteries, and large-scale deployment of renewable heat pumps

SHG particularly supported the Council's priorities by delivering elements of its private sector housing and all of its homelessness assessment and prevention services and by efficiently managing its Capital Programme.

The ALMO and its subsidiary companies continue to work innovatively with the Council to meet housing need and enhance inclusive growth in the Borough. It supports the Council's priorities in an ever-changing environment; constantly seeking opportunities to invest in and transform the lives of people in Stockport. None of this would be possible without a strong and effective partnership with the Council which remains a priority for SHG.



## **Appendix One – Achievements mapped against the Council’s Corporate Plan goals**

### **People are able to make informed choices and look after themselves**

Since April 2019, Your Local Pantry has attracted 514 new members providing affordable groceries to an average membership of 544 households. 9,232 visits have been made across the five pantries, offering potential savings for members of £575 per household per year with total savings across the membership amounting to £106,168 in 2019/20.

A group of up to 40 community volunteers manage the day-to-day running of each Pantry. This includes taking deliveries and storing and rotating stock, completing opening and closing checks and supporting members with their weekly shop. During 2019/20, the pantries generated £93,652 of social value<sup>25</sup> because of volunteering alone with 4,314 hours of volunteer time being committed. During the last 12 months, 31 volunteers have been recruited and supported through a comprehensive induction programme including training in manual handling and Food Hygiene Level two.

A great deal of work was done again last year to prevent and address homelessness in Stockport. 2019/20 again saw increased demand for the Council’s housing options service which is delivered by Stockport Homes. This focuses on holistic housing options advice and prevention work, often with partner agencies. The service successfully prevented 196 cases of homelessness through interventions such as mediation, negotiation with landlords and money advice.

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<sup>25</sup> Social value based on HACT’s Social Value calculator 2018

The three temporary accommodation (TA) schemes managed by SHG on the Council's behalf provide a safety net for people who have become homeless and support them to move to settled housing in a planned, sustainable way. People living in temporary accommodation were involved in a wide range of positive engagement activity last year to help them address the complex needs often associated with homelessness. This activity included healthy eating, arts, cooking, getting active, peer support, mood management and children's holiday sessions.

SHG continues to successfully manage the Council's housing register as well as supporting households to meet their own housing need through mutual exchanges. It helped 92 households to move in this way last year, saving around £264,776 in void costs. In addition, it supported 40 households by providing bonds to help them access properties in the private rented sector.

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### **People who need support get it**

The ALMO continued its commitment to reducing inequalities in 2019/20. Its charitable company, Foundations Stockport, took on the management of several new and existing projects, including the Motiv8 service. Motiv8 works with people with complex needs that are most removed from the labour market, moving them towards education, job searching and employment. Your Local Pantries and the Furniture Recycling Service have been transferred to Foundations Stockport, enabling the team to identify and explore additional sources of funding which were previously unavailable. Funding has been secured from the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government to fund two Outreach roles working with Rough Sleepers across Stockport and Trafford. The charity's aims are:

- supporting people into employment, relieving poverty, relieving food poverty and developing digital skills;
- supporting customers in local communities and delivering support services to help people live independently;
- empowering communities to develop networks of support, including targeted work with people who may experience disadvantage such as people with disabilities, from BAME communities and those with complex needs;
- working in partnership to reduce demand on statutory services; and
- supporting the development of the third sector, ensuring additional resources and services are secured.

A number of SHG's advice services helped combat poverty among customers last year. For example:

- Energy Solutions Advisors carried out 980 home visits<sup>26</sup> to give customers free and impartial advice on switching supplier, eligibility for government grants and winter payments. This saved customers £114,379.84, which includes warm homes discount and Charis grant payments, helping them get the most out of their low carbon appliances;
- 346 customers were supported to apply for savings on their water charges at an average annual saving of £172 per customer; and
- Money Advisors worked with 3,133 customers to help maximise their household incomes. They assisted with claims for new or additional benefits, challenging incorrect benefit decisions and applying for trust funds and grants. This resulted in £6.8m of additional income for customers and the prevention of 21 cases of homelessness.
- A team of specialist Money Advisors is in place and offering intensive support to all new UC claimants during the first 6 weeks of their claim. Support starts from the point of Stockport Homes being made aware of a new claim, to the claimant receiving their first UC payment.
- During 2019/20, the team supported 1,569 UC claimants, mainly as a result of being notified about new claims via the DWP Landlord Portal. All claimants are contacted initially by telephone, with a face to face appointment arranged if required. Out of the UC cases who engaged with the team, 87% received their first payment and paid as requested

Since April 2019, Your Local Pantry has attracted 514 new members providing affordable groceries to an average membership of 544 households. 9,232 visits have been made across the five pantries, offering potential savings for members of £575 per household per year with total savings across the membership amounting to £106,168 in 2019/20.

A group of up to 40 community volunteers manage the day-to-day running of each Pantry. This includes taking deliveries and storing and rotating stock, completing opening and closing checks and supporting members with their weekly shop. During 2019/20, the pantries generated £93,652 of social value<sup>27</sup> because of volunteering alone with 4,314 hours of volunteer time being committed. During the last 12 months, 31 volunteers have been recruited and supported through a comprehensive induction programme including training in manual handling and Food Hygiene Level two.

SHG has a range of cross tenure services, which empower vulnerable people to live independently and sustain tenancies. Key outcomes for these services included:

- 78 new furnished tenancies were created to support people to establish themselves as tenants;
- 261 vulnerable households received a bespoke package of housing related support, with 97 per cent per cent sustaining their tenancies;
- 1498 hours of intensive, short term support were provided by the Intensive Support service;

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<sup>26</sup> Of which 674 were new cases

<sup>27</sup> Social value based on HACT's Social Value calculator 2018

- 627 visits were carried out to customers living in tower blocks who required a short term intervention by a Block Support Officer; and
- 13 customers were supported to live independently within a local 'Housing First' offer (in addition to the GM Housing First funded project)
- 92 private sector ASB cases resolved in the private sector with cases closed in an average of 42 days. Every customer was satisfied with the outcome of the case.
- Positive Engagement Officers (PEOs) supported 115 new referrals of chaotic drug and alcohol users and people with mental health or anger management issues to help them sustain their tenancies. In total 69 cases were successfully closed during the year without the need for legal action.

An increasing number of in house initiatives also supported older people and people with disabilities last year. For example:

- winter welfare visits to 307 of SHG's oldest customers to identify support needs and give advice about keeping warm and well;
- the cross-tenure older persons' activity service for the over 50's reduced social isolation and enhanced mental wellbeing through 830 events for 230 older people;
- SHG's dedicated Housing Options for Older People (HOOP) service gave bespoke advice and information to 737 older customers about housing and care options to help them either remain in their homes longer or move to more suitable accommodation. Successes included, for example, providing advice and support to 112 customers to access 'extra care' housing to prevent the need for residential care, 77 customers received other advice about issues such as money management, adaptations and other issues to support independent living; and the service supported 34 people out of hospital into suitable accommodation, preventing ongoing delayed discharges; and
- SHG carried out 198 adaptations in its own stock and 233 on the Council's behalf in the private sector to help people live independently in their homes for longer.

SHG's Carecall Service, with the support of the Council continued to enable independent living and reduce hospital admissions to the growing aging population of the Borough. The service offers 24-hour Telecare Monitoring and Response to service users, including a newly introduced night response/lifting service. The 'Universal Offer for Carecall' is now available to all residents and was successfully launched on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2020. Over the next four years it is anticipated to generate savings of £394,000 for the Council, becoming cost-neutral thereafter.

2019/20 saw SHG working closely with strategic housing and social care colleagues from the Council on a range of issues. It is a long-standing member of the Stockport Housing Partnership, which supports the Council's strategic housing function. It is also working with SMBC colleagues across Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing on a range of 'Ageing Well' work streams. This included analysis and planning in response to data secured through the Housing Needs Assessment, events with Registered Providers to secure commitments to the Ageing Well agenda, piloting technology and support and care models to support the development and thinking on the Academy of Ageing Well.

SHG also takes a key role in providing support. The Council's Targeted Prevention Alliance (TPA) to prevent, reduce and delay demand for statutory services through early intervention and resilience building, saw the ALMO work with six partners - receiving 4160 referrals in 2019/20, with 1168 given advice and information. Among those people requiring longer-term support, 633 achieved all the goals they set for themselves in their Goals of Care plan and 844 made significant progress.

SHG is a key partner in the Council's safeguarding work. This includes the Stockport Safeguarding Children Board, the Safeguarding Adults Board and the multi-agency safeguarding and support hub (MASSH) which supports families with complex needs. Stockport Homes' MASSH representative helps prevent cases of families with complex needs escalating to statutory Social Care intervention stage and gives housing advice and guidance on others. During 2019/20, this post holder provided information, in conjunction with other professionals within the MASSH, to 278 enquirers, supported work on five complex cases and was the lead Officer for a further three. A range of outcomes were achieved, including: tenancy sustainment, improved health and well-being, increased school attendance, parenting support and prevention of escalation into Children's Social Care and Child Protection processes.

During 2019/20, a collaboration with other Greater Manchester housing providers delivered a number of contracts including GM Housing First, which will support 300-400 homeless households with a range of complex needs resulting in chaotic and challenging behaviours over a three-year period. During 2019/20 seven households have engaged with the service, with six securing accommodation, all seven households have started to address their substance misuse issues and develop independent living skills.

Although only delivered since November 2019, the two Rough Sleeper outreach workers have been working with 32 rough sleepers across Stockport and Trafford. Most of the people have been homeless for significant periods, refused many previous offers of accommodation and have complex needs. During this time, they have encouraged and supported eight people to take up offers of housing, and more importantly ensure the support is in place to make placements sustainable. Additional funding has been secured to deliver the service up to April 2021.

The Greater Manchester Housing Provider's delivery company, Manchester Athena Ltd, is a vehicle for delivering key projects and attracting external funding. For example, the Motiv8 initiative, funded from the Big Lottery and European Social Fund, supports people from excluded groups with complex needs who are far removed from the labour market. Stockport Homes works in partnership with four other consortium partners to deliver the service. In the last year it supported 374 excluded people within the Stockport and Rochdale hub to achieve 920 positive outcomes in areas such as health and well-being, finance and self-confidence and self-development, with 71 of those people moving into education, training and employment, 21 people commenced job searching and 16 people participated in volunteering activities.

SHG continued its partnership work on a wide range of health related projects in 2019/20. Its counselling service for tenants and TPA customers, was delivered by

the charity Talk Listen Change (TLC) and provided 11 students with high quality placements and 280 individuals with counselling. 935 counselling sessions were provided across the year.

Over the course of the last 12 months, more than 200 Stockport residents have benefited from SHG's partnership with Self Help, via workshops focusing on managing bereavement, anger, worry and stress. 55 per cent of participants had reported a positive impact on their wellbeing from having completed the workshops against a Self Help target of 50 per cent.

Other work included a partnership with Acorn Recovery which provides four shared three-bedroom properties with support for people abstaining from substance misuse to help them prepare for secure stable accommodation and get into long term volunteering and employment. The ongoing partnership with Public Health to provide home safety equipment to under twos in vulnerable households benefitted 77 families last year.

### **Stockport benefits from a thriving economy**

SHG has particularly focused on supporting 278, people furthest from the labour market, into employment, supporting the Council's ambitious inclusive growth agenda to put people and communities at the heart of economic growth. In 2019/20 this included meeting demand from local businesses for targeted training and recruitment campaigns with a focus on addressing the multiple barriers some people face getting into work. These took the form of pre-employment courses to get applicants 'job ready' with sector specific skills training and interview preparation, offering guaranteed interviews with employers and, where necessary, supporting them with travel expenses and suitable interview clothing. In 2019/20 SHG worked with five such businesses within four employment sectors and people secured 31 jobs directly through its training and recruitment programmes. SHG has designed new courses to support individuals to explore a variety of employment sectors. This has started with an innovative, seven weeks 'Introduction into Housing' course, building awareness and engagement of all aspects of housing sector employment. At a time when large sector based opportunities reduced in Stockport, SHG responded by designing and delivering Assessment Centre Coaching Sessions, improving interview success for customers.

Other initiatives to increase employability and employment opportunities include:

- the long standing 'Blue Sky' environmental project which supported seven ex-offenders into employment by providing skills and experience in grounds maintenance;
- the partnership with B4Box continued to help people gain nationally accredited construction skills and resulted in 18 people being employed who were previously far removed from the labour market;
- specialist employment staff supported 133 people into sustainable employment;
- commissioned business start-up support, enabling eight people to set up new small businesses; and
- the Skills for Life training programme resulted in 84 customers attending tailored training programmes with 31 securing employment.



SHG also supported placements for six schoolchildren during the year and ran an awards event to encourage community activity and celebrate people who volunteer.

SHG's approach to offering apprenticeships once again demonstrated its commitment to providing development opportunities for local people and to ensuring these are high quality jobs which make staff want to stay with the organisation. 2019/20 saw all 30 apprenticeships paid at the 'living wage' level rather than an apprentice rate. These were six months longer than 'standard' placements because SHG ensures apprentices have sufficient time to develop the skills they need to move on to permanent jobs and to benefit from the 'move on' support it offers. Of the 30 apprentices, 10 positions were created within our Neighbourhoods and Support Services Directorate by changing established vacant posts into temporary 18-month Apprenticeship placements. This created additional opportunities that would not otherwise be available. All posts have been successfully filled following a dedicated recruitment campaign, assessment centre, and interview selection process. During the last five years, a further 23 apprentices have been employed, of whom nine went on to permanent jobs within SHG and 14 with other employers. All individuals completed their apprenticeships.

Last year saw the ALMO employ three graduate apprentices to carry out short term projects. These were designed to help them become job ready and to provide the organisation with valuable pieces of research work. These graduates supported the development, for example, of new builds, buy back refurbishments and the purchasing of flats to refurbish for people who were previously homeless. Another graduate, supported flood mapping using a geographic information system and the analysis of photovoltaic energy alongside the organisation's own energy initiatives. SHG also continued a three year graduate apprenticeship placement to support work to implement the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) which came into force in May 2018.

SHG's GROW<sup>28</sup> framework for developing the workforce continued to offer opportunities for employees to enhance their skills and knowledge. There are a number of pathways on the scheme. The Facilitator pathway upskills individuals to develop and facilitate workshops for colleagues. The Housing Champions pathway upskills individuals to promote a career within housing to the wider community through careers fairs, local schools and colleges and community events. The GAP mentoring program and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) mentoring program supports professional development; 12 individuals successfully matched with a mentee or mentor from within SHG, or other GM Housing associations in 2019/20.

A strong value for money ethos exists within Stockport Homes. It makes best use of resources by generating efficiencies, bidding for external funding and channelling income into service delivery, based on priorities agreed with customers.

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<sup>28</sup> GROW is the working title given to all learning, personal and career development activity across SHG

Many efficiencies are non-cashable and are translated directly into service improvements. Efficiencies of 6.42 per cent of the revenue budget were generated in 2019/20 - £701,349 of which were from changing the way services operated and £1,126,632 from other efficiencies, such as through buying supplies and services differently. Some examples include:

- using a consortium procurement approach to save £154,206 on a range of services;
- installing solar panels at the head office saving £1,665 on energy costs;
- restructuring the Anti-Social Behaviour Team to meet new service needs saving £14,173;
- delivering marketing literature design work in-house rather than sourcing from the open market saving £25,000; and
- supporting customers in “housing need” to move via mutual exchange rather than leaving a property empty, saving £267,444.

SHG considers that efficiency is about delivering ‘more for less’ but this does not always mean making a cash saving. During 2019/20 it has continued to deliver briefing sessions with teams to embed the link between the ASPIRE values and social value. It has continued to develop its approach to procurement, using standard documentation for tender scoring, which provides consistency for suppliers and staff when they consider social value requirements. It has linked those requirements to service delivery such as employment support initiatives. It has been involved in the first Greater Manchester Housing Providers Social Value Conference, held in January 2020, which highlighted the importance of buying local, supporting social enterprise, and being a good employer. In addition a framework of social value tender requirements have been implemented that are aligned to the aims of the Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy. This ensures that the social value offered by contractors aligns more closely with the requirements of services. Stockport Homes’ involvement with a group of housing providers from across Greater Manchester has continued during the year. It has continued to take a lead on data collection and analysis for the group and it has taken a co-lead role on the Group’s communication plan. This has raised the profile of social housing providers across the region and celebrated the delivery of social value outcomes.

Stockport Homes has a strong commitment to safeguarding public assets. Its housing fraud initiative, for example, helps to ensure that people in the greatest housing need are able to access social housing. In 2019/20 SHG prevented 12 fraudulent applicants from obtaining social housing, potentially saving £38,880<sup>29</sup>. In addition, it prevented 30 Right to Buy bids moving beyond the application stage, potentially preventing the loss of public assets worth £3,787,619<sup>30</sup>. Stockport Homes also recovered 16 properties following investigations into fraudulent use. This is a potential saving of £372,000<sup>31</sup>. Only one of these cases required Court action and

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<sup>29</sup> Based on a calculation developed by the Cabinet Office due to annual costs of temporary accommodation, they estimate £3240 per application removed from the waiting list. National Fraud Initiative Report 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2018

<sup>30</sup> Calculated using the average value of properties sold in 2019/20

<sup>31</sup> The Cabinet Office estimates a cost of £23,250 per property recovered based on annual costs of temporary accommodation, costs of recovery and re-letting. National Fraud Initiative Report 4

the rest were recovered based upon the work of the Housing Fraud Investigation Officer.

Another example of this rigorous approach to defending the housing stock is the successful defence of 30 disrepair claims last year, saving approximately £120,000 in legal fees<sup>32</sup>.

Stockport Homes' subsidiary companies were set up to maximise income, protect core services and help deliver the Council's objectives in the most focussed and cost-effective way. In 2019/20:

- Viaduct Partnerships delivered the Group's development programme efficiently. It participated in the completion of 36 new homes for rent and 33 for shared ownership within the Borough during 2019/20, with a further 95 sites started within the year and 394 individual units under construction at the end of 2019/20. Viaduct Partnerships made tax efficiencies of £17,497 for the Group in 2019/20.
- Threesixty delivered a significant proportion of the capital programme, with turnover of £7.2m and efficiencies created used to re-invest into delivering more services for customers in Stockport.
- Foundations had its first full year of trading, with a turnover of £688,000, which helped it to deliver its charitable activities.

Stockport Homes constantly reviews its structure to ensure it makes the best use of resources. In 2019/20 this included, for example combining the Housing Support and Older Persons Services to create an Independent Living Service, and bringing all Customer Skills and Employment services including Motiv8 together under one manager leading on both operational delivery and strategic approach to employment. SHG commenced a restructure during the year to take advantage of a number of opportunities created by vacant posts. It created more development opportunities for managers and enabled services to reflect the growing diversity in the range of services delivered. Other service-level restructures include a restructure of the Tenancy and Estates and Housing services, creating a saving of £33,079; ThreeSixty Living, the private sector team combining services. SHG has also worked with partners to support wider efficiencies, such as providing CCTV for libraries and offering noise monitoring and lend-a-cam for other social landlords.

Wherever possible, Stockport Homes streamlines systems and processes to optimise use of resources. For example, it:

- Implemented significant improvements to online services, including repairs, that has increased capacity and improved turnaround time
- Completed the first phase of transformation of IT systems to improve flexibility, efficiency, and the customer experience
- Continued to mobilise all front line caretaking teams to provide rapid logging of issues and associated responses
- Commenced the modernisation of the Carecall Service call-handling platform
- Introduced the One Number contact platform, which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week

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November 2016. Due to inflation this cost may be higher, however there has been no updated figure released

<sup>32</sup> Based on approximate legal fees of £4,000 per case

- Introduced public access Wi-Fi in multiple high rise blocks

In addition to maximising efficiencies, Stockport Homes has been very successful in attracting external funding. Its dedicated funding officer secured £464,000 of external grant and £456,000 of match funding to support a range of projects, including employment, community growing; digital inclusion; health and wellbeing; and environmental schemes.

A range of contracts were renegotiated last year to extend successful services delivered by SHG and partners. This include the Targeted Prevention Alliance, the APR and the Wellbeing Independence Network, each of which has been extended to March 2021. Additional funding has been secured for Motiv8, extending the service to early 2022.

The ALMO took the opportunity last year to help raise standards across the sector by sharing its expertise, creating growth to support the core business. For example, it held two very successful 'Skills Share' seminars to showcase best practice. This gave staff an opportunity to share their enthusiasm and learning with 42 peers from around the country and brought in £2,440 additional income.

SHG works to support the best use of resources across the Council's family of companies. For example, it provided energy management services to 46 local schools, which collectively spend over £1.37 million a year on energy. This allowed them to benefit from its Energy Procurement Strategy, which typically results in tariffs of 11 per cent below the market average.

'Win win' projects where SHG was able to carry out work at a more competitive rate than commercial contractors and still make a small surplus also improved value for money across the Council family. For example, it provided an architectural and contract management service for the Bruce Lodge Dementia Care Home, managed by Boroughcare.

As a result of these activities, Stockport Homes' various companies each met their financial targets during 2019/20.

### **Communities in Stockport are safe and resilient**

The ALMO plays a key role in the Safer Stockport Partnership (SSP). It has contributed significantly to strategic thinking and service delivery by working with partners to map trends and develop plans. At an operational level, 2019/20 saw a number of partnership projects to tackle anti-social behaviour. For example a review was carried out of the Community Safety Services delivered across Stockport. This identified opportunities to provide a more joined up and more efficient approach that will improve outcomes across the Borough. New ways of working, that included the transfer of the Council's private sector ASB Service to SHG, would simplify the approaches to dealing with anti-social behaviour in residential areas and enable the Council to make savings in a way that does not impact on front line services. Stockport Council commissioned SHG to deliver ASB services in the private sector and this service delivery agreement came into effect on 15 July 2019. SHG has dealt with 91 cases in the private sector since that date, successfully resolving 100 per cent of closed cases in an average of 42 calendar days. Customer satisfaction

with the outcome of the case at the point of closure was recorded at 100 per cent over the period.

There was a range of initiatives to enhance the safety of neighbourhoods last year, including 'target hardening' work<sup>33</sup> for 180 customers experiencing ASB. Stockport Homes was proactive in serving 41 Community Protection Warnings and eight Community Protection Notices on behalf of the Council and taking out 38 injunctions and undertakings to address 'hotspot' issues. By recognising the individual needs of perpetrators and victims, Positive Engagement Officers (PEOs) supported 115 new referrals of chaotic drug and alcohol users and people with mental health or anger management issues to help them sustain their tenancies. In total 69 cases were successfully closed during the year without the need for legal action, which contributed to reducing spend on legal action by £75,000 compared to anticipated spend. This approach has contributed to sustainable changes in behaviour, with all having stopped causing nuisance altogether as a result of this specialist support.

SHG championed, sponsored and participated in a range of activities designed to support marginalised communities, such as: Stockport Pride; Hate Crime Awareness Week; a veterans support day and a refugee event. The ALMO also provides specialist support for refugees through the United Nations Gateway Protection Programme. In 2019/20, it delivered successful integration of 18 refugee families into UK society, with support in accessing training and employment opportunities.

SHG is a Stonewall Diversity Champion organisation. This recognises its commitment to supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transgender, Questioning and Intersex people in the workplace and to developing services to customers who are LGBT+. A dedicated LGBT+ staff forum ensures SHG understands and values its LGBT+ communities, provides places where LGBT+ people choose to live, work and socialise and takes an interest in access and service delivery issues for customers. This was supported by training of staff 'Allies' to support the work of the Group and promote a positive culture around gender and sexual identity in the workplace. Last year saw the introduction of a Vision for an Inclusive Workplace, which sets out our commitment to an environment that values all individual and group differences in the workforce. In 2019 the ALMO improved its position in the Stonewall Top Employers list from 199 to 151 and has worked with Stonewall to develop a plan for further improvement.

SHG is committed to ensuring equality and diversity in its workforce. In 2019/20 the percentage of BME staff rose from 7.8 to 8.1 per cent and its mean gender pay gap stands at 3.2 per cent<sup>34</sup>. It particularly has more female employees, more female line managers than males in the upper pay quartile, and has more women than men on the senior management team. It has signed up for the Chartered Institute of Housing '2020 Challenge' which seeks to ensure greater diversity in leadership teams and it is part of a Greater Manchester Housing Providers research project 'Generating Routes for Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnic (BAME) Leadership'<sup>35</sup> which is developing ideas for improving diversity. Managers have received training on increasing diversity in the workplace during the year.

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<sup>33</sup> Such as security lighting, dummy cameras, additional locks, etc.

<sup>34</sup> The median pay for women is £14.38 and for men it is £14.86, a 3.2 per cent difference

<sup>35</sup> in association Manchester Metropolitan University

Community development work has been very successful in enhancing sustainability. Funding of £463,809 was gained for 27 unique community organisations, including Stockport Homes, which stimulated Stockport's voluntary sector and supported the Council's inclusive growth agenda. This has been supplemented by intensive partnership working in key neighbourhoods with local people. For example:

- Offerton Activities Committee: SHG is working with the Alzheimers' Society to deliver a Singing for Memory run by volunteers for local residents, building on the success of the existing Alzheimers' group in the areas. Funding has been provided initially by Stockport Homes, supplemented by the local Methodist church and The Freemasons.
- Offerton Community Kitchen/Café has been a lifeline for many local older residents providing a coffee morning and low cost meals. In addition to this the volunteer run café has linked up with the dementia drop in at Offerton Community Centre, they also took over organising and running the Senior Shindig providing an afternoon of entertainment, raffle and a hot lunch served by Stockport School students following their carol singing for 100 residents. This was made possible through partnership working with SHG, Stockport School, GLO Church and other community groups. The lead volunteer worked with SHG in Summer 2019 to provide a weekly cooking sessions where families learnt how to prepare and cook a hot meal and dessert on a budget.

During the last year, the Fabulous Foundations project generated 205 instances of engagement with children through holiday clubs. All the parents fed back that it had a positive impact on their children's' happiness, self-confidence, and feelings about school, willingness to try new activities and interaction with adults. They also thought that it had helped them to combine work and childcare and that the club had had a positive impact on their finances.

SHG continued to have excellent performance and satisfaction levels in 2019/20. Continuous improvement was the result of effective customer involvement and scrutiny, alongside learning from satisfaction surveys and complaints. For the eleventh successive year the organisation achieved the Customer Excellence Standard for providing accessible and responsive services.

Service delivery in the areas that matter most to customers continued to be excellent in 2019/20. Satisfaction with the outcomes of repairs, for example, was 99.8 per cent and with the outcomes of antisocial behaviour (ASB) cases it averaged 98.93 per cent, which are both exceptionally high. Stockport Homes' caretaking service continues to deliver against stringent service standards, with 99.27 per cent of customers satisfied with the service delivered in multi storey blocks. Estate inspections also indicated that 98.07 per cent of neighbourhoods were maintained to a good or excellent standard. These outcomes evidence SHG's ongoing commitment to listening to its customers.

The organisation benchmarked among the top twenty-five per cent of ALMOs and very well against other types of housing provider in core service delivery. It was particularly outstanding in business critical areas which protect the Council's income and safeguard its tenants, for example re-let times and gas servicing.

SHG's core services are accredited by reputable professional bodies, all of which expect to see customers engaged in service improvement. Last year it also won 11 awards, received six commendations and was shortlisted for a further 19 awards for the quality of its services from recognised bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Housing, and the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce. It is also shortlisted for a further eight awards, the results of which have been delayed into the next financial year due to Covid-19. To win these accolades illustrates how SHG has listened to what its customers want and demonstrate the strength of its reputation for delivering.

Customers hold the organisation to account in a range of ways. They are involved in formulating policies and strategies, monitoring service delivery and working with staff to make spending decisions. Examples of this in 2019/20 included:

- Customer HUBs were used to consult on Carecall's customer services, the rent strategy and rents and service charges.
- Customer focus groups were used to consult on the social housing green paper, refugee services and new service standards
- The customer roadshows were used to consult on fire safety and wi-fi access in blocks with the survey findings contributing to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's research project into building safety
- Online, email and telephone consultations were used to consult on reporting of ASB, the New Build Design Guide, the Digital Transformation Strategy, the Lettable Standard and Holiday Club provision
- The Neighbourhood Improvement Budget allowed local people to prioritise spend on community, environmental and partnership projects, including estate clean-ups, diversionary activities, community groups, and the refurbishment of the Arthur Greenwood centre and its food pantry.
- The Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) reviewed two service areas that included the Reception Service at Cornerstone and the Greenspace Service. The reviews increased customer access to the reception area at Cornerstone and made information more readily available to customers. The Customer Monitoring Group meets three times per year to review corporate performance reports and financial reports. It provides comments, which are provided to the Councillors who monitor Stockport Homes' performance at its Member Committee.

During 2019-20 SHG has worked closely with 54 community groups across the Borough, providing a variety of support, expertise and guidance. This includes helping to set up seven new groups and supporting existing groups with the on-going running of weekly sessions varying from digital skills to art, toddler and family groups, community cafes and domestic abuse support.

SHG manages ten community centres on the Council's behalf. Activities last year included keep fit sessions, and digital inclusion classes. The Centres were also increasingly used to support multi-agency working, with four centre being used by partners for training, meetings and one-to-one sessions, and two centres hosting successful job clubs. Both Offerton and Brinnington Centres have award winning,

social enterprise community cafes and two centres host 'Panttries' where local people can purchase affordable, healthy food and gain volunteering experience.

A major refurbishment project was carried out in the Arthur Greenwood Centre. The investment has enabled a new local pantry project to be established in the building and opportunity to maximise the buildings use for existing and new users with extra marketing potential, along with increasing income.

In January 2020 work onsite commenced with regards to the European Regional Development Fund project "Homes as Energy Systems". Throughout January and up until the Covid-19 restrictions in March, work was primarily focused around drilling the deep-bore holes for the ground source heat pumps at The Cloisters. The total project is valued at circa £6.1m with £2.4m coming from European grant funding. The project will continue to be delivered in 2020 and into 2021. A total of 643 measures will be completed comprising of renewable technology heat pumps, Solar PV, enhanced insulation and new roofs.

### **Stockport is a place people want to live**

Stockport Homes continued to support the Council's Place Based Integration (PBI) work last year, through dedicated staffing resources and office space in a community building. During 2019/20 the PBI approach was expanded to the Victoria and Stepping Hill locality with a specific focus on Adswood, Bridgehall and Cheadle Heath. The PBI approach continues to enable a wide range of agencies to share information, identify issues and collectively agree the most appropriate intervention which will engage people at an early stage, implement short and timely interventions, engage people in relevant universal services and resources and prevent escalation to high cost, reactive statutory services.

Last year saw the ALMO again helping the Council to sustain the private rented sector in the Borough. Its lettings service provided private landlords with high quality, reliable management services on properties throughout last year with 161 properties being managed as at year end. This helped drive up standards and encouraged landlords with empty homes to improve and relet them to households in need. SHG will continue to support private sector availability through its ThreeSixty Living service, which is seeking to provide private sector block management within the borough.

During the last year, the ALMO has been a lead member of the Greater Manchester Ethical Lettings Agency, a partnership established by Greater Manchester Housing Providers to work with the GMCA to improve access to the private rented sector for those currently excluded. SHG is one of five core housing service providers who are working in partnership to achieve the objective<sup>36</sup> with each organisation having significant experience in working with the private rented sector (PRS) in leasing from or managing on behalf of private landlords.

To increase the pace of delivering new homes to meet housing need last year, SHG and the Council continued to work together in the 'Viaduct Housing Partnership'. This took advantage of SHG's skills as a developer and the Council's strategic oversight and ability to borrow prudentially. This successful partnership

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<sup>36</sup> Bolton at Home, ForHousing, Wigan Council and Salix Homes



saw SHG add 69 completed units to its portfolio, consisting of 36 new homes for rent and 33 for shared ownership completed across three sites, which mitigated the impact of stock losses through the Right to Buy<sup>37</sup>. This is a significant achievement in a Borough with such scarce and expensive land resources. Work also started on a further 16 homes for social rent, four for affordable rent, 68 for shared ownership, which will be added to the SHG portfolio, and seven for outright sale. Four existing properties were also acquired and refurbished for social rent, two general needs properties and two properties which will provide accommodation and support for care leavers.

In the Housing Revenue Account, units owned by Stockport Council, there are 26 schemes under construction or refurbishment, consisting of 24 Affordable rent units at Hexham Close and two former RTB properties. At the end of March 2020, there are 420 units in the pipeline for SMBC, which are scheduled for delivery over the next three to four years.

During 2019/20 £5.084m in capital grant funding was drawn down from Homes England to support the delivery of new affordable homes. Although this will still not make a significant impact on the problems of supply or affordability in the local housing market, which are extreme.

Last year's £19.7m Capital Investment Programme delivered a range of improvements to the housing stock on the 'big impact' basis agreed with customers. This focussed expenditure in ways that contribute best to the sustainability and financial viability of the stock. This approach means SHG is part way through a £9.7m programme in Offerton that delivers the aims of the Offerton Masterplan to over 600 properties. The programme delivered works to 123 properties in 2019/20. In addition, benefits for local communities over the first two years of the programme include:

- £4.46m has been reinvested in the local area
- There have been £38,840 of fuel cost benefits for tenants due to roof, door, window and wall installations
- 55 Greater Manchester-based residents are employed on the contract, 26 of which live in Stockport
- 27 brand new properties delivered on the Offerton estate, creating £2.4m of economic impact from the construction process

Similarly, 300 properties in Adswold and Bridgehall neighbourhoods have benefitted from a combination of new roofs, wall and chimney repointing, and external render finish. Customer satisfaction with the programme last year was 98.6 per cent and the energy performance rating of properties improved on the previous year, with 92.5 per cent achieving an Energy Performance Certificate rating of C or above. This compares favourably to the national average Energy Performance Certificate rating of D.

The Capital Programme also accommodates £4.9m in 2019/20 as part of a two-year sprinkler installation programme to 22 high-rise blocks, which followed extensive

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<sup>37</sup> Which numbered 118 last year

customer consultation and communication work. The work resulted from a joint decision by SHG and Stockport Council to retrofit sprinkler systems across the high-rise stock. SHG has carried out wide ranging consultation with Stockport Council, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, Independent Fire Risk Assessors, and Mechanical and Electrical specialists. The two-year programme of installations started in 2019/20 with six high rise blocks having sprinkler installations commissioned and in service during the year. All remaining tower blocks will have sprinklers fitted by the end 2020/21; however, this will be subject to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions.

SHG carries out a cyclical programme of estate inspections across the borough, which enables issues such as fly tipping and other hazards to be identified and addressed. It reduces the impact on the environment, reduces the likelihood of vermin infestations, and makes open spaces on estates safer and more attractive. The Environmental Services team has a team dedicated to remove fly tipping and bulky waste, which supports estate management. This in turn reduces the pressure on the Council services.

During the early summer Stockport, along with most of the country, suffered an extended period of very heavy rainfall which, combined with a number of other factors caused some localised flooding. The worst affected area for Stockport Homes was on Sandringham Rd in Cheadle Hulme where six properties were flooded, resulting in extensive remedial works being required and six families being moved out of their homes for around six months. Whilst the properties were unoccupied, Stockport Homes also took the opportunity to install flood defences to prevent a re-occurrence. As this event was unprecedented, Stockport Homes identified a number of areas where it could be better prepared for such incidents, such as the availability and provision of sandbags and availability of a significant volume of temporary accommodation on an individual night. The lessons learned from these events have resulted in a review of out of hours emergency procedures and the development of a clear processes linked to the handling of the early stages of any future flooding incidents.

In 2019/20 SHG continued to maintain a variety of quality green spaces with high levels of customer satisfaction<sup>38</sup>. It worked with Stockport Council to improve play areas and with other partners to support a range of health and wellbeing initiatives, including local allotment groups, Friends of Parks groups and Life Leisure. In addition, 251 older and disabled customers received a bi-annual visit for assisted gardening.

Corporate social responsibility is central to SHG's culture and helps motivate its staff, who embrace opportunities to 'give something back'. For example, the staff team raised £19,440 for Reuben's Retreat and did 2,320 hours of volunteering for local causes last year. A number of staff teams also held awaydays at Reubens, not only to support teambuilding but also to help this excellent local charity with much needed repairs and landscaping work.

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<sup>38</sup> 88 per cent customer satisfaction with grounds maintenance service

SHG is ambitious to achieve high standards, make a difference and therefore contribute to putting Stockport on the map in a positive way. This pride in the area, contributes to a positive image and feel about Stockport, which it is hoped, in turn, makes it a place people want to live.