



Residents at the heart



Putting our residents at the heart of what we do means offering services that are easily accessible, speaking with residents, listening to what they say, and acting on it.

What have we done?

Over the last five years, we have...

Opened a new city centre office at 195 Upper Dock Street.

Launched an online portal for residents to resolve simple queries 24/7, such as viewing their account and making payments. This also helps us to focus on more complex queries.

Embedded customer service standards to make sure we deliver an inclusive, consistent and high-quality customer experience.

Brought together our resident engagement and customer service teams to improve the way we engage with residents and build a deeper understanding of what's important to them.

Provided a new way for residents to get in touch through our web chat.

Established the resident Scrutiny Partnership to ensure our resident engagement is effective and that resident views drive our decisions.

Trialled and established our 'Good Start' approach which offers intensive support to all new residents for the first six weeks of their tenancy.

Continued to change the way we offer income support in response to the roll out of Universal Credit.

Joined the 'Free from Fear' campaign to combat domestic abuse.

Improving the customer experience

Since establishing our customer service offer in 2018, we've made a wide range of changes to improve the services that we know matter the most to residents.

This has been part of an on-going programme involving colleagues from all areas of NCH.

We've made it easier for residents to communicate with us and access our services at a time and place that best suits their needs. While we have improved our online services, improving our face-to-face services remains important to us. Many of our residents do not have regular access to the internet and some prefer to meet with an NCH colleague in person.



Feedback from residents since opening our @195 city centre office has been extremely positive.

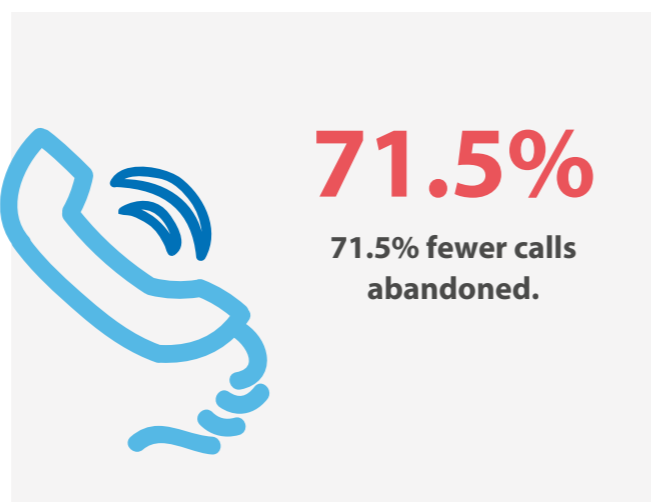
“Perfect location, it’s easy for me to do my shopping at the same time.”

“Feels more like home, much bigger and better.”

“Better location, easier to get to than Nexus House, easy to park the car.”

“This office is much better. Far less of a walk for me to get to. I told them and they listened to me. Thank you!”

Where have we improved this year?



Lettings Review

Our lettings and voids review redesigned our processes to improve the customer experience of moving into a new home and reduce the time properties are vacant.

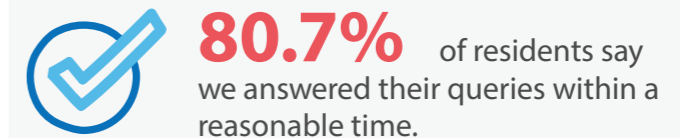
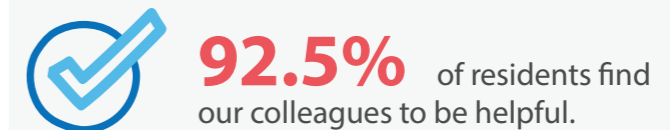
Since we introduced these changes in 2018, we have reduced this time by 24 days to 31 days at the end of March 2020.

This has resulted in a reduction in rent lost on these dwellings of £175,000 in 2019/20 compared to 2018/19.

This is a significant reduction, but we will continue to find ways to reduce this further.

We have seen performance improvements in many areas. However, we recognise there is more to be done to improve the satisfaction of our residents. That's why our new NCH Strategy 2025, as well as our Transformation Portfolio, are both underpinned by our commitment to improve service quality and resident satisfaction.

The Transformation Portfolio will redesign the way we deliver our services to improve resident satisfaction, deliver value for money and continue to be a well-run association. The programme will be supported by the digitalisation of services and processes and improved use of resources and data.



We're supporting residents to stay in their homes

A 'Good Start' for residents

Moving home can be a stressful experience. We want to make sure our residents settle into their homes and have the best chance of long-term success.

Following a successful pilot in February 2019, we now offer all new residents support in the first six weeks of their tenancy. For 65% of new tenants, we have been able to help change their circumstances for the better and improve the sustainability of their tenancies.



Our income support offer

We recognise that personal circumstances can change at any point in a resident's tenancy with us so we will always work with our residents to help them adapt to new situations.

In direct response to the transition to Universal Credit and wider welfare reform, we have regularly reviewed and adapted our income offer and targeted our resources to best meet the needs of residents to sustain tenancies.

Despite seeing a continued increase in the number of households on Universal Credit, the impact on rent arrears has slowed significantly. 2018/19 saw a 59% increase in tenant rent arrears which slowed to a 3% increase in 2019/20.

This reflects our commitment to early prevention and the help we offer to residents to maximise their income and maintain stable rent accounts which, in turn, reduces the risk of tenancy failures.

CASE STUDY

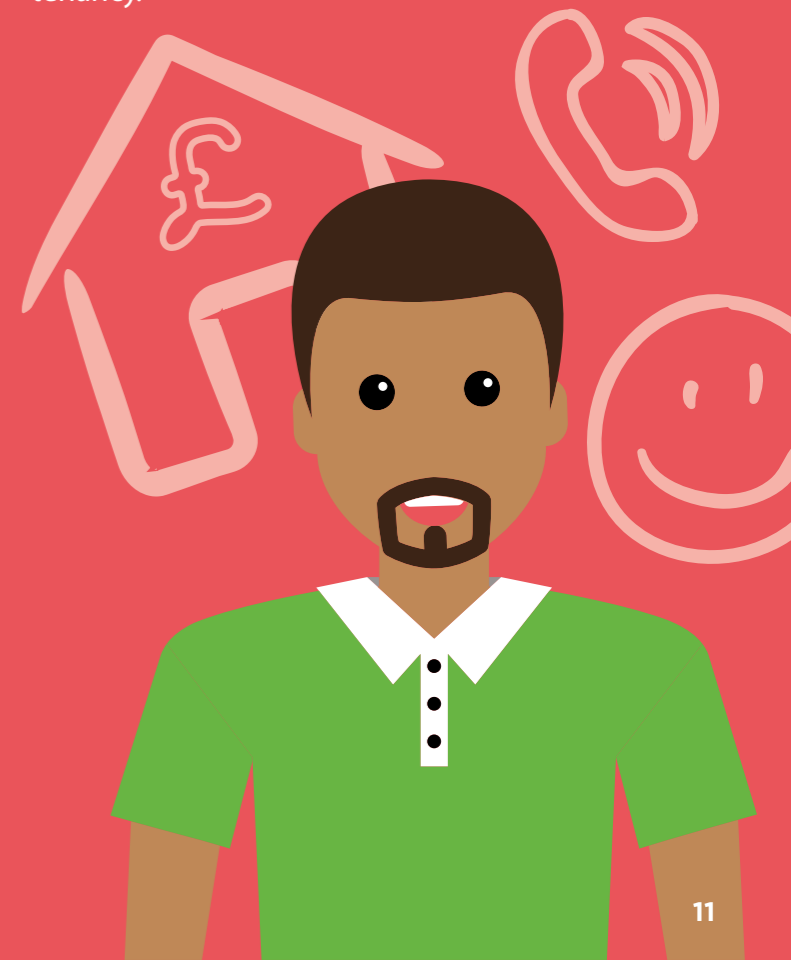
Resident supported to maintain their tenancy and become more financially stable as a result of applying for Universal Credit

Mr H, an NCH resident for over 20 years, had unexpectedly started to fall behind with his rent payments. His NCH income officer got in touch to see how we could support him. Mr H explained he had been on sickness leave from his work and physically unable to work full time for some time. He was unsure if he would return to work and told us he was suffering with alcohol dependency in addition to his financial struggles.

Mr H lives alone in a three-bedroom house. While this had been his home for a long time, financially, it was not feasible for him to remain. Having been put in touch with our tenancy support team, they found that if Mr H didn't return to work, he could apply for Universal Credit. He would then be eligible for a Discretionary Housing Payment of 25% of the bedroom tax, should he be willing to downsize to a smaller property. This would save him around £100 each month.

Mr H was receptive to these discussions and was successful in his applications, which included backdated payments. An application to downsize has also been made through the Council's Home Options system.

His rent arrears have since reduced substantially, and although Mr H is yet to downsize, he is now more financially stable and able to maintain his tenancy.



Playing an important role in preventing homelessness

Providing homes and supporting our residents to sustain their tenancies continues to be our main role in preventing and tackling homelessness in Newport.

Earlier this year, like many other housing associations in Wales, we made our pledge of “no evictions into homelessness”. We are also committw legal action as a last resort with other issues such as significant rent arrears, anti-social behaviour and other tenancy breaches.

In situations where residents are at real risk of losing their home, we work closely with Newport City Council to find the most effective ways of resolving issues and circumstances.

We are proud to continue working closely with Newport City Council and other local registered social landlords on the innovative ‘Housing First’ initiative in Newport.

The project aims to reduce street homelessness in the city and is designed to support people who need significant levels of help to move away from homelessness.



Even during the period of disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, we have continued to provide accommodation for vulnerable people who are experiencing homelessness, suffering domestic abuse or are living in other difficult circumstances, as well as leasing properties to Newport City Council for temporary accommodation.

We have also acted swiftly to dedicate NCH colleagues to work with the council’s housing team to support individuals who are homeless and awaiting permanent accommodation, in response to increased pressures placed on public services.

“Housing First has been a successful model in tackling homelessness internationally, and we’re really pleased to be working with partners including Welsh Government, the local authority and support service providers to bring the approach to Newport.

“We’re committed to doing all we can to help those experiencing homelessness, and we’re delighted that through the Housing First pilot we have now helped seven people move into a home. We plan to build on this early success and work in partnership to eradicate street homelessness for good.”

Sharon Wilkins, Deputy Director of Homes and Communities

This is what our Housing First residents have told us

“My home is everything to me.”

“I haven’t had a bed for at least 6 years, I can’t wait to go to sleep.”

“The weight of the world has been lifted off our shoulders.”

“It feels great to have a place that I can call my own.”



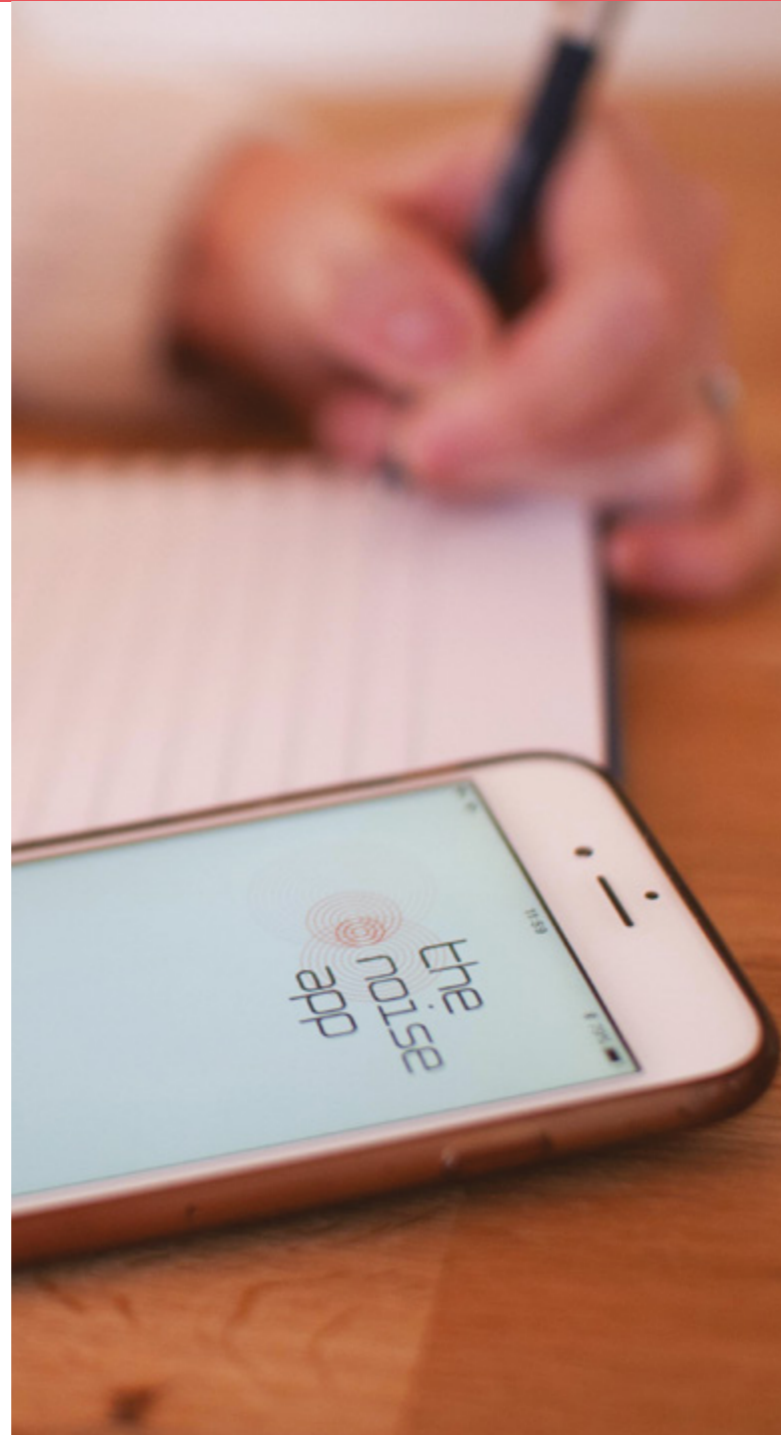
Tackling anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse

We have recognised that anti-social behaviour is a key area of resident dissatisfaction with us as a landlord.

We have responded to 939 anti-social behaviour cases this year and continue to work with our partners and support residents to resolve matters in the most suitable and effective ways.

The Noise App continues to offer residents an effective way of providing us with evidence of noise disturbance. By recording audio and text evidence, and submitting this to us through the app, we are in a much better position to review, investigate and act on the evidence.

This year, we have listened to almost 3,000 recordings, including recordings that have allowed us to respond to concerns of domestic abuse and safeguarding. It's also proven to be a useful tool for interacting with residents directly as we investigate each case.



Partnership working

Working with partner agencies has always been a vital part of our response to both anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse.

NCH colleagues attend, and often chair, Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARACs) to discuss high risk cases of domestic abuse. We also work closely with charities such as Women's Aid and Llamau to offer victims the support they need.

In the summer of 2019, a community safety hub near our Malpas Office was opened to create a co-working space for partners including neighbourhood policing teams, fire service, victim support and other social landlords in Newport. This has made a big difference to the way we work together and share information as incidents arise and has helped to achieve joint and proactive responses.

Eviction will always be a last resort, but where an individual's actions continually have an impact on a community, we take action to ensure the safety and wellbeing of residents.

We realise that through working with residents and partners, we can often achieve quicker and more sustainable outcomes for communities.

CASE STUDY

After receiving reports of people coming and going from a property within a neighbourhood, we became aware of a vulnerable resident who was being exploited by a group of people. They were using the resident's home as a base for criminal activity.

This practice is known as cuckooing and has a negative impact on both a community and of course the vulnerable person whose home is no longer their own.

Through taking swift action, and working in partnership with Gwent Police, the vulnerable resident has been safely re-housed, and the property closed.

"The family of the resident who was re-housed has told us that they are now thriving and continue to recover from the physical and emotional effects of having their home and income controlled by someone else. The wider community has also thanked us for bringing to an end what they called their 'nightmare' and allowing them to continue enjoying their homes free from fear and disturbance."

**Liz Davis, Homes and Income
Team Leader**

Our approach to resident engagement

Scrutiny Partnership

As part of delivering our resident engagement strategy, we are committed to ensuring our residents have an impact on our decision-making.

Our Scrutiny Partnership, made up of seven NCH residents, evaluates our services and business decisions and challenges us to make sure residents' voices continue to be heard and considered in our strategic and operational decisions.

Since its inception two years ago, we have been extremely pleased with their enthusiasm, dedication and their overall development as a mature group that work well together and with the association. We're also grateful to have three new members join the partnership earlier this year.

As a group, they have continued to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to fully question and hold us to account. This year, the Chair of Scrutiny Partnership attended our Audit and Risk Committee meetings and has provided valuable contributions and perspectives on behalf of the group.

They have:

- Scrutinised this annual self evaluation to ensure it is informed by resident feedback.
- Reviewed the effectiveness of the resident engagement strategy and its quarterly activity.
- Worked with our senior managers to review our progress in key areas and provided recommendations to further enhance how residents inform service improvements.
- Reviewed our Value for Money framework.
- Conducted mid-year and full reviews of our performance.
- Utilised their knowledge of the association to help inform the development of our new NCH Strategy 2025.

"What has been really good from my point of view is that they have taken note, they have listened to us, respected us and considered what we have said."

Joan Curnuck,
Scrutiny Partnership member



#Talkabout

Earlier this year, we held a #Talkabout with residents to discuss how they think we've performed against our 2020 Vision, in order to inform our self evaluation and future plans.

Residents' feedback:

- The support we offer residents to sustain their tenancies is valued and appreciated.
- It's important to develop new homes, but to continue to invest in existing homes and neighbourhoods.
- Reducing the carbon footprint of all our homes is important.
- Our programme to improve our repairs service is needed to improve satisfaction.

- We can do more to communicate our ambitions and progress against them.
- We are providing more ways for residents to engage with us.
- Partnership working with organisations who share NCH's values can avoid duplication of services and have a much greater impact in communities.
- We should make sure that young people are given opportunities to share their ideas for the future with us.
- There was good discussion which allowed residents to feedback their views on our services and they felt we listened and were able to answer to their questions.

Community Voice

Community Voice events are resident led and held in local communities throughout the year. These events give the community the opportunity to discuss things that matter to them, while also providing a range of activities for families during school holidays. This year, over 200 residents and community members attended four events organised in Underwood, St. Julians, Caerleon and Bettws.



Seasoned and Support (SAS)

Our SAS group meets regularly to discuss the things that affect and matter to older and disabled residents living in Newport City Homes properties. They help us to ensure we continue to meet the needs of residents with additional support needs. For example, they have provided feedback to key service areas including repairs, aids and adaptations, compliance and resident services. They receive regular updates on our aids and adaptations service and have also contributed to consultations on Board remuneration and rent setting.

Youth Foundations Consortium

As part of a consortium of housing associations, we have achieved the Kite Mark for engaging children and young people from Children in Wales. This reflects the processes, quality and experience we collectively demonstrate in our engagement work with these groups.

In the last few years, our work with Pobl to support UNITY, a forum for younger residents, has helped us to ensure young people have their voices heard.

The forum has been involved in a range of activities since it was formed, from running community events and projects to supporting homelessness charities and working with partners to give their views on affordable housing and community safety.

Our summary

Significant progress has been made in key areas that matter most to residents including the improvement in re-let times, the availability and accessibility of services and the effective management of significant welfare reform.

Despite this progress, we realise there is still more to be done in order to improve resident satisfaction. This is a key priority within the NCH Strategy 2025 and our Transformation Portfolio.

Our Customer Service Standards have been embedded in all activity and we have opened a city centre office as part of the enhanced customer experience. We have enhanced our digital offer with the launch of our online portal and highly successful webchat option.

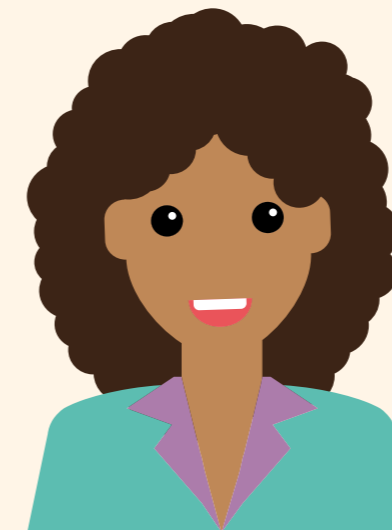
The resident Scrutiny Partnership has become established and works effectively to evaluate the effectiveness of the resident engagement strategy and ensures resident views drive our strategic and operational decisions. This is reported to our Audit and Risk Committee annually through the Resident at the Heart report.

Our rating



AMBER

There has been good progress in key areas, but we recognise there is more to do to improve our residents' customer experience and address issues that affect their satisfaction.



What next?

We will:

- Review our operating models to enhance service quality and cost and to improve resident satisfaction.
- Ensure our rents remain affordable and we continue to deliver value for money through the services that matter the most to residents. This will include developing an affordability model that underpins our social rent and service charge policy.
- Maximise the occupancy of our homes to ensure we are providing housing to those in need.
- Continue to work closely with residents and partners to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- Update our Resident Engagement Strategy and ensure we engage with a wider and representative group of residents, utilising a range of engagement channels, including improved digital and online opportunities.