

HATTON HOUSING TRUST LIMITED

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

What is this report about?

The Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) requires us to issue an annual report to tenants every year. This annual report must give tenants information on how Hatton Housing Trust is meeting the regulatory standards:

Economic standards

1. Governance and financial viability
2. Value for money
3. Rent

Consumer standards

4. Tenant involvement and empowerment
5. Home
6. Tenancy
7. Neighbourhood and community
8. Tenant satisfaction measures

How well are we doing?

1. Governance and financial viability

The Management Committee of the Trust have clear roles, responsibility and accountability to ensure that the Trust is effectively governed and controlled. At the Management Committee meetings the financial viability and liquidity of the Trust is regularly monitored. There is regular inspection of the properties in general to ensure that they are properly maintained and each individual property is inspected by two members of the Management Committee at least every four years. Five of the six sites were inspected in 2022, as none had been inspected in the two previous years, as a result of the Covid restrictions. And during 2023 the sixth site, Ferbies Close, is to be inspected by Diana Barber and Jane Clay.

2. Value for money

2.1 What we do

Property Manager: The Property Manager receives all notifications of minor day-to-day repairs and maintenance works that need to be carried out.

Prioritisation: At every Management Committee meeting, the programme of maintenance and repair works prepared by the Property Manager is reviewed. The Property Manager is then instructed to prioritise these. The Management Committee are mindful of the need not to lose revenue and, therefore, to speed up any works necessary to prepare any vacant properties for a new tenancy agreement to start. However, the Property Manager is also requested to attend promptly to minor repairs that can become a continual irritation to tenants if not attended to.

Value: A Management Committee member is responsible for each site, in order to ensure that any

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maintenance or repair work, has been properly attended to. At every Management Committee meeting, the Committee members review the detailed listing of all expenditure incurred in order to ensure value for money in the cost incurred.

This pie chart shows how your money was spent in 2022:



2.2 Our policies

The Trust reviews all its policies annually.

At every site there is an appointed Trust Representative who reports to the Management Committee on any matters relevant to their site.

For any works likely to cost more than £5,000 we normally obtain a minimum of two quotes. As most of our daily maintenance is carried out by one contractor, all the itemised bills are scrutinised by the Management Committee at their meetings to ensure that value for money is obtained from this one contractor in particular but looking at all expenses generally.

2.3 Our commitment

The Trust is committed to provide quality homes to meet our tenants' needs and to upgrade these as necessary.

The Trust is committed to providing all maintenance and repair works to a standard acceptable to our tenants at a cost that is not excessive and ensures that the Trust is able to make payments within its means for all its annual expenses.

The Trust is committed to providing communal services, such as security, lighting and garden maintenance for the benefit of all tenants at value for money.

3. **Rent**

3.1 What we do

Rent level: Our rents, and costs, are deliberately kept as low as practicable, in all cases well below market rents.

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Cost allocation: The vast majority of the rental income is used in the upkeep and maintenance of the properties.

Support: We are willing and keen to welcome those tenants that qualify for housing benefit.

3.2 Our policies

We have a number of policies and practices that support our activities.

A full and formal review of rents and all associated costs is carried out once a year.

Our major items of cost are identified and, where practical, tenders from alternate suppliers are sought to ensure best value for money.

Increases in rents are limited to those necessary to operate Hatton Housing Trust in a prudent manner, so that it may meet its likely future costs and liabilities.

Tenants that do fall behind in their rent are offered a reasonable time to redress their debts. However, tenants that consistently fail to pay their rent will have action taken to evict them.

3.3 Our commitments

In the future we aim to deliver the following:

To continue to operate on a low cost basis and to limit our rent rises to those needed to operate the business in an efficient and cost effective manner.

To support the Government's cap on social rent increases: this year the government has announced a cap on social rents of 7%. The Trust will continue to aim to keep rent increases below government rent standards.

To provide a broad understanding of how the rental income is allocated to our costs.

To provide information and support to help tenants seek housing benefit and other financial support where appropriate.

4. **Tenant involvement and empowerment**

4.1 What we do

Customer service, choice and complaints: We aim to be as friendly and helpful to all tenants and prospective tenants as possible. All tenants have telephone numbers for the Secretary and the Property Manager so that they can make direct contact and members of the Management Committee are also available to help with any problems. Applicants are asked for their choice of site and type of property when they apply for accommodation and this information is taken into account by the Committee when it is allocating accommodation. When renovations are being carried out the Property Manager tries, as far as she is able, to take account of tenants' wishes. We aim to be sympathetic if personal circumstances change and tenants need a different type of accommodation e.g. a flat on the ground floor.

We are proud of the service we provide on a very limited budget. Any complaints are taken very seriously and reviewed by the full Management Committee to determine the most appropriate action. No complaint has been referred to the Independent Housing Ombudsman. Many tenants write to thank us for our work or some particular action, others take the opportunity of the Annual Tenants' Meeting to express their gratitude. Very few tenants wish to leave or move elsewhere, the vast majority staying with us for many, many years.

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Involvement and empowerment: It is our policy each year to invite all tenants to a meeting where the Chairman reports on all significant property improvements which have been carried out over the past year and tells the tenants of any major repairs or improvements planned for the coming year. He also consults tenants on whether the Trust is involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the Trust's housing management in the best way. The Chairman also reports on the financial position of the Trust for that year. Should any major change in the Trust's management be proposed, such as a change of Landlord, the tenants would be consulted formally. There is then an opportunity for the tenants to ask any questions or make any comment. We did not hold our usual tenants meeting in 2020 or in 2021 because of covid restrictions, but it was good to see so many tenants at our meeting in September 2022 and again in September 2023.

The Trust will be seeking information from tenants about their satisfaction with the Trust's performance as landlords in accordance with the Tenant Satisfaction Measures that the Regulator of Social Housing has recently introduced (see point 8 below).

Tenants volunteer to act as Trust Representatives on each site. The Secretary contacts them before each meeting of the Management Committee and asks whether they wish to raise any maintenance issues, problems or suggestions. After each meeting of the Management Committee the Secretary informs the Trust Representatives and individual tenants who have raised issues what action has been agreed by the Committee on their particular concern.

Property inspections are carried out by 2 members of the Management Committee every 2-3 years, giving tenants the opportunity to draw attention to any problems and to make suggestions about the running of the Trust. When particular problems arise at one site, we consult all the relevant tenants and take notice of the wishes of the majority. A member of the Management Committee has special responsibility for, and takes a particular interest in, each of the Trust's sites.

Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants: We treat all applicants for accommodation equally regardless of race, gender, religion, marital status, sexual orientation and age – except that our accommodation is provided specifically for older people who are able to look after themselves. All tenants are made aware that the Trust expects all tenants to treat each other sympathetically and with courtesy. Our application forms provide space for an applicant to give information on disability or any other problem they may face and they can discuss this during the initial interview. However, it is clearly stated that this is voluntary. Tenants may also raise such issues confidentially with the Management Committee through the Secretary or with members directly during property inspections. We arrange lifts to the Annual Tenants' Meeting for any tenant who requires this.

4.2 Our policies

We back up what we do with specific policies. A schedule of the Trusts' current policies is available from the Secretary.

We do not have the resources to provide a warden but it is our policy to offer such help as we reasonably can to any tenants with difficulties. We will make minor adaptations, such as grab handles, or ramps for ground floor accommodation without charge. We will also replace a bath with a shower cubicle if required but tenants are asked to pay for the shower, cubicle and screen. Where a tenant needs more major adaptations to their accommodation and these can be accommodated within the fabric of the building – such as a walk-in shower to replace a bath – we will, if asked, do the work at the tenant's expense or will put the tenant in touch with Agencies which may be able to help them financially to install a shower either arranged by Social Services or by themselves. The Secretary is always willing to give tenants, who are finding life difficult, information about Agencies which may be able to help.

We understand that our properties were built at a time when standards were not as demanding as they are now and it is our policy to try to make improvements where tenants are experiencing problems e.g. with sound-proofing, where we are able to do so in an affordable way.

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We have an Equality Scheme which was adopted in 2015 and information about this is included in the pack sent to prospective tenants.

We have a formal complaints procedure providing for three stages – resolution by the Secretary, resolution by the Management Committee and thirdly resolution by the Independent Housing Ombudsman. This is also included in the pack of information sent to prospective tenants.

4.3 Our commitments

We shall continue to listen to any suggestions put forward by the tenants and will act upon them where this is practicable.

We will monitor and update our policies to ensure that tenants are involved and feel empowered and we will adopt any new policies required by law.

We will monitor all complaints, feedback from the Annual Tenants' Meeting, and any suggestions made by outside Agencies to see if we can improve further the service we provide.

5. **Home**

5.1 What we do

Accommodation: We have 116 properties in 7 locations, 6 in the Tunbridge Wells area and 1 in Shipbourne. Five of the sites have purpose built blocks of flats, one of these having six semi-detached bungalows. The remaining two sites have large 19th century houses that have been converted into flats.

The properties have one or two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and a bathroom. The living rooms, though not large have comfortable space. Some of the bedrooms can only accommodate a single bed. The kitchens are compact, but meet the standards required having cupboards, space for a cooker, a fridge and in most cases a washing machine. The bathrooms have a bath or shower, a lavatory and a basin.

Thermal comfort: The flats have night storage heaters or electric panel heating, double-glazing and good insulation, both wall and loft. We have replaced a number of double glazed units and repaired window handles and seals.

Safety: Each flat is fitted with a smoke alarm and heat detector, and in most cases they are linked to a fire alarm panel in the communal area of the block. Individual properties without a communal area have a mains wired smoke and heat alarm. Stairs have handrails. Electrical safety inspections have been carried out, and rewiring work following these has been a priority. Tree inspections have resulted in some felling and pruning where necessary. Legionella risk assessments are carried out as each time a new tenant moves into a property. Variety of methods used to identify areas of concern regarding mould in the properties and once identified prompt action taken to remediate the issue.

Repairs and Redecoration: We continue to monitor the properties and keep them in the best possible order. Some of the work is a major undertaking, such as re-roofing or re-pointing walls. We also endeavour to upgrade bathrooms and kitchens when necessary. Some work is of a minor nature, but all work is carried out with the safety and comfort of our tenants a priority.

5.2 Our policies

The Property Manager oversees the day to day maintenance and repair works as well as implementing longer term planned preventative maintenance and refurbishment of properties between tenancies. A full property management report is given at each Management Committee meeting to provide an update on the work carried out since the previous meeting and provide general awareness of asset management matters affecting the Trust. The Management Committee review and approve action required.

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The Trust has a Health and Safety Policy which is reviewed annually by the Management Committee.

The sites and individual properties are inspected every 2-3 years. A full report is made on each flat and site. At the Management Committee meeting, it is then reviewed and decisions are made concerning any work required.

Each site is the particular responsibility of a member of the Management Committee, and regular visits are made to ensure that no glaringly obvious problem goes unreported. Each site also has a Trust Representative who passes on any problems to the Trust, and of course action is taken where appropriate.

5.3 Our commitment

We want our flats to be comfortable, secure and safe homes for our tenants.

We are committed to ensuring that anti-social behaviour does not occur but if instances should develop we are committed to act within our powers to ensure that tenants and those who visit our properties do not feel threatened in any way.

We are committed to a high level of safety. The Trust's Risk Assessment identifies and monitors hazards at the properties.

We are committed to working alongside relevant organisations to provide an adaptations service that meets our tenants needs.

We undertake major improvements when called for. Examples of these are re-roofing, replacing drainage systems and re-pointing.

We are committed to thermal efficiency.

We endeavour to plan ahead to avoid unexpected major expense.

6. **Tenancy**

6.1 What we do

Allocations: Our homes are let in a fair, transparent way and efficient way, taking into account the particular needs and circumstances of each tenant. We also operate a transfer scheme that allows, subject to normal operating constraints, tenants to transfer between properties as and when that is possible.

Tenure: We offer a National Housing Federation model tenancy agreement that offers fair and reasonable terms to our tenants. In some cases tenants will be issued with a 6-month Starter Tenancy prior to the grant of an assured tenancy.

6.2 Our policies

We have a number of policies and practices that support our activities.

- A standardised and rigorous selection process; involving application forms, interviews by individual members of the Management Committee, home visit reports, where appropriate, and oversight by the full Management Committee. We treat our candidates in a fair, equal and respectful manner.
- An Equality and Diversity Policy formally considered and agreed by the Management Committee, ensures all applicants will be treated equally regardless of age, race, disability,

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gender, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, sex and sexual orientation.

6.3 Our commitments

In the future we aim to deliver the following:

- To consider where practical what improvements can be made to our selection, allocation and transfer process such that our target group, namely individuals over the age of 55 with limited incomes, are best served.
- To minimise the time that properties are left empty by reviewing at each Management Committee meeting all such empty properties, to then agree an action plan for each empty property and to review all relevant actions promptly.

7. **Neighbourhood and community**

7.1 What we do

Neighbourhood management: All communal areas are kept clean and safe. The surrounding gardens, trees and hedges, where applicable, are maintained by contractors. Salt/sand bins are provided for the tenants to use as required.

Local area co-operation: Our aims and objectives are notified to relevant local bodies. Wherever possible, we co-operate with any Local Authority initiative.

Anti-social behaviour: Our tenancies are such that anti-social behaviour has not generally been a problem. A member of the Management Committee will provide support to tenants to try and deal with any examples of anti-social behaviour. Whenever a tenancy dispute arises, it is dealt with immediately, by a member of the Management Committee, or in extreme cases the services of a mediator may be sought.

7.2 Our policies

The gardening maintenance contract is reviewed annually.

The Trust has a complaints procedure, whereby any notification of anti-social behaviour has to be in writing to the Secretary and referred to the Management Committee for resolution.

At the Annual Tenants' Meeting, tenants are made aware of the Trust's expectations in relation to good neighbourly behaviour. In 2022 the Annual Tenants Meeting took place on the 16th September, after a break of two years.

7.3 Our commitment

The Trust will continue to maintain safe and clean communal areas, in order that the properties are pleasant to live in.

The Trust will co-operate with any future relevant Local Authority initiatives.

The Trust will continue to monitor any reports of anti-social behaviour.

8. **Tenant Satisfaction Measures**

As many of you will know, Hatton provides registered social housing. This is the highest standard of social housing and for the Trust to maintain its registration it must comply with a large number of rules and standards that are frequently being changed.

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After the tragic Grenfell Towers fire the Regulator has introduced a whole new series of measures to check that tenants are being listened to and that Landlords are responding to tenants' concerns. (The Tenant Satisfaction Measures) . It has introduced a requirement that each landlord asks each tenant 12 separate questions about these matters in a survey. The surveys are completed anonymously. The survey measures satisfaction with the landlord's performance. The survey information has to be compiled into a series of tables and be submitted to the Regulator before April 2025.

Several of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures are really aimed at the performance of the very large social housing providers with big estates. One measure for example is about whether a landlord makes a positive contribution to the local neighbourhood. It is difficult to know what the Trust, with its relatively small sites and its limited resources can do in relation to this measure. Others are very relevant to all landlords.

The Trust is still considering the best way and the best time to carry out the tenants' surveys. Because one of the measures the Trust is judged on is the number of completed surveys it receives all the Trust can say is that there will be a prize draw and everyone who hands in a completed survey will automatically be entered into the draw. Full details will follow as soon as the Trust has more information on a few outstanding queries it has raised.