

Tai Tarian Storyboard: **Sustainable Homes**

**April 2023**



# **SUSTAINABLE HOMES**

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# Introduction

**Throughout the year we assess our performance and the difference we are making not only for our tenants but our communities too.**

**Our Storyboards have 4 key themes:**

- Sustainable Homes
- Sustainable Communities
- Sustainable Planet and
- Our Business

All are aligned closely to our Corporate Plan.

For each theme local outcomes have been developed with key stakeholders including our staff and tenants, that fit with Welsh Government requirements.

We work with an independent group of tenants and associate members known as the Academy to review the outcomes of our work and provide feedback through several Storyboards.

**The local outcomes for all four themes, as decided by the group are:**

- We deliver value for money to make the best use of our resources
- We are accountable to our customers
- Customers have opportunities to make a choice

We act on our customers' feedback and are committed to continuously improving our services:

- We understand our customers and deliver services that meet their needs
- Our tenants and members are able to influence decision making and shape our services

The Academy felt these local outcomes

should be a 'golden thread' throughout all Storyboards and should be visually prominent within each.

**'Sustainable Homes' covers outcomes in relation to our homes and services and has five specific local outcomes.**

- 1.** We work with our tenants and partners to provide tailored services
- 2.** Tenants feel our homes are affordable
- 3.** We repair and maintain homes in an efficient, cost effective and responsive way
- 4.** Tenants are confident that we will help them to sustain their tenancies through providing additional advice and support
- 5.** Tenants feel secure in their homes



**Tenants are confident that we will help them to sustain their tenancies through providing additional advice and support**

## **Summary**

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**Across the organisation we are committed to supporting tenants to sustain their tenancies with dedicated advice and support.**

Engagement is key to this and there has been a huge drive in making more face to face contact with our tenants to help build relationships.

We appreciate that people's circumstances vary so a solution focused approach is always our preferred method, calling on expertise from trusted partner agencies to help us.

The Welsh Government is working towards a 'no evictions from social housing into homelessness' agenda which we are supporting.

## **Academy Feedback**

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The Academy were pleased by the effort made to engage with our tenants experiencing money worries and life challenges. They were complimentary of our in-house support, were really impressed with the proactive 'Money Mentors' scheme and liked the idea of tenants having the opportunity to become money mentors in the future.

# Strong relationships are key More call for money support

Several factors can lead to a tenant falling into arrears with their rent. A job loss, ill-health, family bereavement, unexpected bills or a rise in living costs, can all take their toll.

Our teams are committed to ensuring that when this happens tenants are supported to get back on track utilising a more holistic approach that includes making calls, texts and visits to the tenant who needs help.

## Building trust with tenants

Background:

*A mum of 3, tenant for 8 years with a history of irregular payment.*

The tenant was struggling to keep up with rent payments but was unwilling to engage with us. As arrears started to build, we persevered with contact. Once conversations started, we realised she was experiencing poor mental health and had difficulty in managing her money.

As we built trust with the tenant, she revealed an online gambling addiction that started as a result of the pressures of lockdown, and when home-schooling especially became a struggle.

For us this was so much more than getting rent paid, it was about supporting the tenant to get the help she needed.

Our team encouraged her to seek help from her GP and arranged for partner agencies including Platform, The Wallich, Housing Options, Shelter, Social Services and Building Blocks to support her to get back on track. All of this meant she was able to manage her gambling addiction, mental health and her children's welfare.

We continue to support her two years on and we're proud of the progress made.

The cost-of-living crisis is being felt keenly by tenants so it's more important than ever for us to ensure we work with them to sustain their tenancies.

Our Financial Inclusion and Universal Credit teams can support with money worries, budgeting help and claiming or appealing benefits. Demand is high but getting in touch has made a huge difference to many tenants.

### Financial Inclusion and Universal Credit support 2022/23

FIT Referrals	1,135
UC Referrals	1,053
Digital Support	63
Successful Benefit Claims	1,802
<b>Money Raised</b>	<b>£3,929,386.32</b>

Our in-house Universal Credit team is seeing referrals up by 20 per month. Successful benefit claims are up 27% on last year and by the end of the financial year it is expected that £4 million in additional benefits will have been raised for tenants.

Demand for food bank vouchers has also doubled since 2019/20, we are issuing 44 per month on average.

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#### Tenant Feedback

“I very much appreciate all the help you gave me with my benefits. For your patience and understating, not to mention all the hard work. It really made a very stressful and complicated process so much easier. Big thanks and best wishes.”

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# Energy schemes support tenants

The high cost of energy is having an impact on our tenants. With several schemes available to help with bills, our Financial Inclusion Team has worked tirelessly to ensure we have accessed as much income and funding as possible to help support our most at need tenants.

We are approved partners with some schemes and can refer tenants, or access support for them.

The fuel bank support scheme demand has been very high, with 87 vouchers being issued on average each month. Tenants are limited to three vouchers in 6 months and multiple vouchers have been issued to some individuals.



**230 Tenants**

have been supported in just a 4-month period.

## What support has been given?

Energy Support	Number Awarded	Money Raised
DAF Emergency Assistant Payment	13	£720
Welsh Government Winter Fuel Payment (£200)	18	£3,600
Unpaid Carer Grant (£500)	8	£4,000
HACT Winter Fuel Payment	17	£770
HACT Energy Redress	116	£4,718
Fuel Bank Energy Credit	346	£16,764
Fuel Bank Off-grid support – Oil, Solid Fuel and LPG	11	£5,562
<b>Total raised in energy support so far</b>		<b>*£36,134</b>

*\*Our Cartref readers and our social media followers were also made aware of several of these schemes so had the opportunity to apply independently.*

# Listening to our Academy

**In the last sustainable homes storyboard the Academy asked about the feasibility of gifting household items left in empty properties if suitable to tenants in need.**

As a result, we have started piloting a “re-use and re-cycle” project, that will not only benefit tenants as they won’t need to purchase those essentials but it also ties in with our wider sustainability goals in that it is great for the planet too.

To date we have been able to gift 34 items to 20 tenants with a further 35 items in storage, some of which are waiting for delivery dates to be arranged. We also keep a reserve list for any items we don’t currently have in case they become available.



Donations so far	Delivered to Tenant
Cooker	5
Fridge	3
Freezer	1
Fridge-Freezer	3
Washing Machine	6
Microwave	1
Sofa	1
Single Bedframe	3
Double Bedframe	4

# Acts of Kindness Fund makes a difference

**The Acts of Kindness fund was set up in 2021 thanks to a commitment from Tai Tarian staff to make monthly payments to support local good causes.**

Since then, a proportion of the money is used to support tenants who have fallen on hard times or may be struggling to buy everyday things such as food, clothing, or other essential items.

Recently the fund was used to help a tenant purchase school uniform at a time when all other doors were closed.

Through no fault of her own she did not have the funds to buy the uniform required for the new school term, which at that time was only days away. Her rent and bills had

been paid but when an expected payment of Universal Credit did not arrive, she was left with no money with which to live that month.

Our tenant did not qualify for any other support or grants and her child's school, or her employer were unable to help. Recognising the importance of a child being able to turn up to school in uniform on their first day, colleagues used the Act of Kindness fund to step in and help purchase uniform.

A recent staff cake sale and raffle helped boost the fund.

**£750** was raised.



# Supporting some of our most vulnerable tenants

**Our Tenancy Management service provides intensive housing management (IHM) so that tenants can sustain their tenancies.**

The Team:

- Team Leader
- 7 IHM Officers
- 5 IHM Assistants
- Business Support Assistant

**How do we hear about those that need support?**

- New tenancies where a risk to the tenancy has been identified
- Existing tenancies where there is a serious breach of tenancy usually because of mental health, physical health or other vulnerabilities

**How do we help:**

- ✓ Agree a Personal Housing Plan
- ✓ Make arrangements to remedy breaches of tenancy conditions
- ✓ Regular contact to support the changes that are to be made
- ✓ Provide advice on all aspects of sustaining a successful tenancy
- ✓ Signpost to and facilitate support offered by other in-house services or partner agencies e.g. help with finances and budgets, help from other voluntary agencies

Where there are more complex support needs, it is important for us to work with partners that have specific expertise that can help our tenants across our communities.

**IHM Partners**

- Plattform - formal partnership with mental health provider for tenants with complex needs
- Salvation Army – assist homelessness
- NPTCBC – Social Services including care providers
- Gateway – referral process for Tenancy Support
- Collaborative approach to working – with other teams, in-house services and our in-house referral process

**Service Feedback:**



**290 Tenants**

currently being supported through our IHM service.

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**Partner agency feedback:**  
“The Tai Tarian staff member was instrumental in saving the tenants life and has continued to support them and works with external agencies now that the tenant is home. The tenant has made vast improvement since her communications with Tai Tarian and had the staff member not been on hand, the outcome could have been very different.”

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**We work with our tenants and partners to provide tailored services**

## **Summary**

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**We continue to enhance the ways in which we help our tenants to sustain their tenancies even before sign up. Working with partners we offer new tenants the opportunity to take part in pre tenancy training so they have a better understanding of how to manage their home. We have continued to focus on providing staff with training to support tenants with money worries.**

## **Academy Feedback**

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**The Academy understood the high demand for social housing but were pleased to see our commitment to building or redeveloping new homes and supporting new tenants to sustain their tenancies.**

## High demand for housing

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As one of the largest social housing providers in Wales we are often seen as the go to landlord in the area and have an agreement with Neath Port Talbot Council to house those in urgent need of housing.

However, the rise in homelessness caused by the cost-of-living crisis and many private landlords selling homes due to the Renting Homes (Wales) legislation, has seen demand spike.

## Digital Lettings Portal

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We have been working on creating a new portal to make applying for housing with us easier and the good news is that we are almost ready to launch.

This allows prospective tenants to apply for housing themselves, instead of an assessment being carried out over the phone by a member of the applications team. We still ask for all the important information up front, but we will now be able to give a decision much more quickly.

The information we ask for hasn't changed so completing the application can take around an hour. Evidence is still important, so we have the option for people to save their application and go back in if they need to find medical information, bank statements and other key documents. We have included helpful information on each section to answer any questions that may arise as the application is completed.

## Tŷ Cam

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To address the demand, we are continuing to build or redevelop new homes.

The 'Big Cam', a well-known pub on the corner of Windsor Road and Alfred Street in Neath has been transformed into 10 modern, energy efficient apartments.

The development consists of seven one-bedroom flats and three two-bedroom flats and was made possible thanks to Welsh Government homelessness grant funding.

Prior to tenants moving in the focus was on building a sustainable community. Partnership work ensured applicants were given the best chance to succeed in their tenancy. We held meet and greet sessions and gave people the opportunity to take part in pre-tenancy training.

Support from our housing teams has been provided to those tenants as they start a new chapter of their lives, something which has been hugely rewarding to everyone involved.



**519 homes**  
let during 2022.



# Money Mentors

**5 years ago, a carpenter visited a tenant to complete a repair. At the property the tenant broke down about money worries, feeling she had no choice other than to send back essential household items that were being paid for monthly.**

This conversation triggered a commitment from Tai Tarian to support tenants with the financial pressures of life.

In 2019 with support from Toynbee Hall, a leading financial health and advice charity based in London's East End we created 'Money Mentors', a bespoke training programme.

It aims to give staff the skills to support tenants who are struggling with money worries. An understanding of financial issues and the impact they are having on our communities, personal budgeting and money management and help to spot the early signs of financial pressure alongside the ability to confidently advise and signpost to partner organisations who can help.

Post covid and in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis the content has been updated and so far, 20 staff have completed the training. The next stage will involve several staff undergoing further training so that they will be able to deliver the programme to their co-workers. There is a commitment that all Tai Tarian staff will complete mandatory training so whenever a colleague is faced with a tenant who wants to open up about money worries, they will be better informed and, in a position to actively help.

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Jonathan Morris is co-ordinating the programme on behalf of Tai Tarian:

“Our tenants, many of whom are on low incomes, are feeling the pinch more than anyone.

“We know from talking and listening to them that when their money is working well then they are likely to experience less stress, be healthier, happier and more connected.

“Our goal is that all Tai Tarian staff will have Money Mentors knowledge, so they will know what to say and do when they meet someone who needs support around making money work better for them.

“Many of our staff meet tenants in their roles which means they have a unique opportunity to help people when they are out and about in the community.”

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**Hear from our Money Mentors here:**



## Tenants feel our homes are affordable

### Summary

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**As an organisation we understand how important it is for our tenants to get the most out of their money.**

Therefore, we work hard to ensure that tenants feel our rents are affordable. One of our aims is to support tenants to maximise their income and reduce costs, making their homes affordable and tenancies sustainable.

### Academy Feedback

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The Academy understood the need to balance affordability with financial stability with the requirement to deliver services. They felt that the rent booklet was easy to understand, contained all the information they needed about rent and service charges and felt less formal than a letter.

They were pleased that we were able to access communal energy via the National Procurement Framework and that the team was being proactive to ensure costs were kept as low as possible especially when people were paying service charges.

The Academy felt we were going over and above to support tenants facing difficult times. The newer members were impressed by the additional support that we offer to not only help tenants in hardship but to do everything we can to keep them in the home.

### Action

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Continue to communicate the financial inclusion support available to tenants on a regular basis.

Consider a customer portal to ensure important information can be uploaded there instead of posting information out to all tenants.

Making sure our homes are affordable is a key factor in ensuring our tenancies are sustainable.

**Our affordability principles were developed with tenants, they are:**

- **Principle 1:** We will assess our rents against market rents and agree a proposal based upon the results.
- **Principle 2:** Our rents will be affordable in line with the Living Rent Model for households with contract-holders who earn a low wage.
- **Principle 3:** Our rents will take into consideration the number of bedrooms within the property. We will consider the feasibility of introducing a minimum size bedroom requirement.
- **Principle 4:** We will set out what contract-holders will receive for service charges, and will ensure the amount is fair, reasonable, and provides value for money.

The living rent model is also explored and consideration given to how an increase in benefits and living wage will support tenants. We also carry out a comparison exercise around our rents to those in the private rented sector.

All tenants receive a rent booklet with details of the rent (and service charges if applicable) that they will need to pay, this is sent two months before the duplicates are made. There is a big emphasis on the importance of reaching out for help if tenants feel they would be struggling to make payments. Contact numbers and email addresses are contained within the booklet and this message is regularly shared on social media and in our quarterly tenant newspaper Cartref.

Our charges are based on guidelines given to us by Welsh Government but with our affordability principles in mind. Tenants are at the heart of decision making around rent so every year we talk to them about rent and service charges prior to any increase taking place.

In addition, every year a detailed exercise is undertaken looking at how our money is spent, our 30-year Business Plan and how we can find the balance between financial stability and maintaining service delivery.



# Communal Energy

**We buy energy in bulk through the National Procurement Framework. This supplies all our buildings, offices, communal areas and Haven schemes.**

For tenants living in properties with communal areas, we have projected costs for the year ahead, this cost is then shared between the number of units in a building.

Being part of the framework has allowed us to pay considerably less for our energy but changes to standing charges brought about by OFGEM has seen these costs rise considerably from £8000 to £36,000 in the last year.

To keep the costs as low as possible we:

- ✔ Maintain a detailed database of the energy we use
- ✔ Take monthly meter readings to ensure costs are based on actual usage, and not estimates
- ✔ Insulate our older scheme buildings
- ✔ Optimise the heater temperature settings in communal areas
- ✔ Maximise the use of solar panels

We will continue to buy our energy via the framework but the cost of energy is going to be significantly higher due to the time that it was bulk purchased. Standing charges are also expected to rise again.

However, we can still be proactive to reduce our energy usage and will:

- ✔ Review all meters to ensure they are in the correct banding
- ✔ Identify where we can lower the cost of energy and or other charges
- ✔ Undertake a feasibility study to install solar panels on other Haven schemes
- ✔ Continue to optimise the heating settings in our communal areas
- ✔ Assess the various options available for using the electrical heaters in our Haven schemes



## Energy trial underway

In an empty flat at one of our Haven Schemes we are carrying out a study to monitor energy costs depending on heating usage and temperature control. Once completed this will help us advise tenants on the difference how they use their energy can have on their bills.



## Tenants feel secure in their homes

### Summary

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**Tenants feeling secure within their homes is a high priority for us and we are committed to ensuring that our homes meet all health and safety compliance regulations.**

Our anti-social behaviour policy and the work our Tenancy Relations Team carry out demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that tenants feel secure in their homes.

### Academy Feedback

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The Academy were pleased to see the high levels of safety compliance and the way in which we interact with tenants to achieve this. They were also happy with our proactive approach to dealing with ASB, with good partnerships in place.



# Property Compliance

**We always aim for 100% safety compliance in all areas.**

Where we have not met 100% this will be as a result of being unable to gain access to homes, which we continuously try to resolve.

## Our Stats



% of Gas compliance  
**99.86%**



% of Fire Safety  
**100%**



% of Legionella compliance  
**100%**



% of Asbestos compliance  
**100%**



% of Electric compliance  
**99.86%**



% of Legionella –  
Temperature Monitoring  
**99.86%**

## Compliance with Renting Homes

Our assets team have been ensuring we are compliant with Renting Homes and the specific requirements for properties. This includes:

- ✓ That dwellings have working carbon monoxide detectors
- ✓ Any room with gas, oil or solid fuel burning appliance is in proper working order
- ✓ That dwellings have working smoke alarms by 30th November 2023. On every storey, in proper working order, connected to electricity supply and interlinked
- ✓ That there is cyclical testing and inspection of electrical installations.

### Why is this important?

- Disrepair claims – increasing in number particularly for community landlords with a number of properties
- Damp and Mould – going to be an increasing problem where people cannot afford heating
- Fitness for Human Habitation – a court may need to decide if the rent is payable

We must be able to show we have acted appropriately and done everything we can, even where there may be no legal obligation for us to do so.





# Anti-social behaviour

**Dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB) can be challenging. All cases are different and so we need to use a wide range of resources to reach a satisfactory resolution. In simplistic terms, we must think outside the box, always considering ‘what else can we do?’**

In the last year most ASB complaints were around harassment, noise and substance misuse. In all cases reported, its important for us to understand the behaviour and offer practical solutions to resolve things often signposting to partner agencies for support.

**174**

Total number of reports of ASB between 1st January 2023 & 28th February 2023

**114**

Of the total 174 ASB contacts 114 were reported by individuals within our communities.

**128**

Of the 174 contacts 128 were unique to a client & classification. Meaning that some of the 114 individuals reported more than one issue.



**We repair and maintain homes in an efficient, cost effective and responsive way**

## Summary

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**Repairing and maintaining our homes in an efficient, cost effective and responsive way is a key element of our business. Our repairs are carried out in-house by a team that is dedicated to maintaining our homes to a high standard.**

We work to ensure the service is being operated as efficiently as possible, providing the best service to our customers, and ensuring value for money. Our repairs team serve all tenants, and we pride ourselves for arriving on time for 100% of all emergency repair call-outs.

## Action

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The Academy would like the energy efficiency projects to be communicated to a wider audience explaining the approach used to identify suitable properties, why it's a big part of our carbon neutral aims and what the expectation needs to be for tenants.

They would also like to take part in Carbon Literacy training.

## Academy Feedback

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The Academy were pleased that repairs and compliance work is taking place as expected. They valued the adaptations work that is going on and the impact these changes can have on the wellbeing of individuals.

They were pleased with the ongoing programmes of work especially around the energy efficiency elements and how some existing homes are now more energy efficient than a new build. They understood the need to trial new technologies before a wider scale roll out.



## Day to Day repairs

**We currently follow up any issues that are raised via our monthly satisfaction survey, if a tenant indicates that they are not happy with the service provided. This allows us to listen, learn and act on feedback and continuously improve the service we provide.**

During the survey, if a tenant indicates they have any unresolved issue the details will be shared with the appropriate team for action. This process ensures that any dissatisfied tenants are listened to, and appropriate action is taken to address issues promptly. In some cases, we may not be aware of the issue as it has not been previously reported, so this is invaluable feedback so that we are able to resolve as quickly as possible.

### Repairs Apr 22 - Apr 23

Repairs completed (non emergency)	10,684
Repairs completed on time (non emergency)	9,923
Repairs completed on time (non emergency) %	93%
Repairs completed and on time (emergency)	1,703
Repairs completed on time (emergency) %	100%

## Tenant Satisfaction

Apr 22 - Apr 23	Surveyed	Satisfied	%
Satisfied with repairs and maintenance	661	582	88%
Satisfied with service provided	662	613	93%

# Major work continues

Our major works programmes are ongoing, and five streams are currently in operation.

Programme	Numbers	Tenants Satisfied
Fabric (including External Wall Insulation)	47	90%*
Safety (including rewires)	201	99%
Roofs	79	100%
External work carried out by our Copper Foundation team	105	100%
Solar Panels	96	100%

\*We're currently looking at this rating as it is lower than expected. Weather has impacted the programme as has labour issues.

## Knowing our homes better than ever

Surveying our homes to review their condition has been an ongoing programme since late 2021.

We have 3 dedicated surveyors carrying out 70 surveys a week with 4,527 completed to date.

They carry out a detailed exercise looking at key areas of the home including the

roof, rainwater goods, kitchen, bathroom, heating, electrics, ventilation, windows and doors, this includes assessing for any damp, mould and condensation issues.

Each element is given a rating based on condition and age and this information is included in a property report which helps inform our planned work.

A comprehensive major works programme over the past 12 years means the bulk of our homes fall into the green category, low numbers are showing as red, however this knowledge helps us plan and target key properties within our works programmes.

## Turning homes green

Thanks to a scheme part funded by Welsh Government called ORP 2.2 we have been retrofitting empty homes to make them more energy efficient for new tenants.

Our team looked at homes on an individual basis before energy efficiency measures such as external and internal wall insulation, new windows, solar panels, battery storage, increased ventilation or insulated floors were introduced with the aim to get these homes to an EPC A rating.

An average household has an EPC C rating which produces an average of 6 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. In comparison an EPC A home will produce 0.82, so the end result is much more energy efficient homes for new tenants and the organisation is getting much closer to our carbon neutral goal.

## A-rated home thanks to energy measures

A three-bedroom, semi-detached home in Neath has been part of the programme. It has benefitted from new windows, doors, roof, solar panels and battery storage, loft and floor insulation, a new heating system, together with a new kitchen and bathroom. The energy rating has gone from a D to an A, meaning a much more comfortable, energy efficient home for a new tenant to enjoy.

The EPC A rating means the property will produce an average of just 0.3 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year, compared to 3 tonnes before the retrofit measures were installed. There are another 12 properties that have already achieved EPC A through the programme through similar works, and another 32 well underway at present.

## Trialling new technology

A tenant who was apprehensive about changing their old boiler, now has cutting edge technology in his property, allowing us to explore new heating solutions for others. We have installed a combined air source heat pump combined with PV and a gas combi boiler.

Based on the tenant's energy tariff the system works out what element is more cost effective to use at any one time. The results have been positive so far and has given us the opportunity to test the technology on a small scale before considering it for further roll out.



## Adapting homes to support tenants

**Adapting our homes in a practical way to support the needs of our tenants who may have disabilities or mobility issues is something we are committed to.**

We work closely with occupational health and the local authority and have an in-house adaptations team who can make assessments at home. Improvements fall into one of three categories.

### Small adaptations:

- Steps
- Grab rails
- Small ramps

### Medium adaptations:

- Level access shower
- Wet Room
- Stairlift
- Access/egress to home and garden

### Large adaptations:

- Extensions – bathroom/bedroom

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### Positive feedback:

“The team have been exceptional at communicating and carrying out the upgrading of flooring and shower seating in the wet room. A really positive interaction at all times.”

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## Adaptations carried out this year

Some of this work is carried out by our teams in house but for medium and large adaptations, contractors tend to be used. In the last year many jobs have been completed, having a huge impact on the quality of life for our tenants.

Size	Numbers
Small	433
Medium	175
Large	14



