



Customer voices driving positive change

Our annual report to customers 2021 to 2022



orbitcustomerhub.org.uk

Customer welcome message



Our mission as Engaged Customers is ‘Customer voices driving positive change’, meaning that as residents ourselves, we share our views and experiences, and review Orbit’s services so that we can help bring positive change to everyone who lives in an Orbit home.

Over the last year, we’ve worked closely with Orbit to help set up a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion working group, so that we can ensure everyone can equally access Orbit’s services. Alongside this, we’ve helped form a new LGBTQ+ Diversity Group to give our LGBTQ+ community a greater voice and to understand how our LGBTQ+ customers are affected by housing issues, and how Orbit can support them better.

We’re also working with Orbit to deliver changes with the new Social Housing Regulations to ensure that residents continue to be safe, listened to and live in good quality homes. I’ve recently joined the Government’s Social Housing Quality Resident Panel, bringing together social housing residents from across the country so we can directly share our views with government on our approach to improving the quality of social housing for everyone.

As a Mental Health Champion, I’m pleased that Orbit offers a free mental health support service called ‘Breathing Space’ as part of its Better Days offer. The service is available to all residents.

BETTERDAYS®
have a good day, every day

Now that we’re back to face-to-face meetings, earlier in the year I set up an estate inspection with my fellow residents, Property Manager, Estate Services Manager and local Councillor. Between us, we were able to identify issues that needed sorting such as grass cutting, paths that need clearing and overall grounds maintenance. We agreed the steps that needed to be taken to resolve the issues. By working together, we can improve our local communities for everyone, so I encourage you to get involved in your next estate inspection. Just check the noticeboard on your estate to find out when the next inspection is taking place or contact your Property Manager.

I enjoy being an Engaged Customer and hope that we have improved services for all residents. Have a read through the report to see what differences we’ve made and how we’ve used our voices to deliver positive change for you.

- Phil Coldicott

To find
out more

Just visit
[orbitcustomerhub.org.uk
/better-days](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/better-days)



To find out how
you can get
involved, please visit
[orbitcustomerhub.org.uk
/get-involved](https://orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/get-involved)



Welcome

It's been over two years since the start of the pandemic and whilst we've seen restrictions ease and a return to a more normal way of living, it hasn't been without its challenges. We continue to work incredibly hard to deliver high quality services, although increased material costs and labour shortages have meant that some repairs and home improvements have taken longer than we would like. However, we are pleased to let you know that we've been able to catch up on our backlog of repairs and reintroduced a 28-day completion timescale for routine repairs. We thank you for your patience whilst we work to continually improve in these areas and are grateful to our Engaged Customers for their input in shaping improvements.

We've also seen a huge increase in demand for our Better Days programme and we are expanding the programme to be able to help more people who need it during these especially challenging times. We continue to reach out to those who may need extra support through our wellbeing calls and our new 'how are you?' procedure, which provides more options for customers with regards to how often we contact them. We're here to help, so please do get in touch if you need us.

Your safety continues to be one of our top priorities. Last year we achieved 100% compliance on home safety for the fifth year in a row, meaning you can feel safe in your home. We also launched a successful pilot in Stratford to retrofit homes below an EPC Band C rating to make them more energy efficient and sustainable. And we delivered £29m of home improvements to ensure that 99.91% of our homes meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard.

At a time when many organisations have seen their customer satisfaction levels slip, overall customer satisfaction has increased slightly from 4.2 to 4.3 (out of five). We've improved our digital offer with a new Digital Services Showroom on our customer website; where you can choose a contact method to suit you. Our website was recently awarded the Crystal Mark by the Plain English Campaign; meaning the information on the site is 'crystal clear' - easier to read and understand. More of you are also using myAccount, the place where you can access statements and raise a repair at a time that is convenient for you.

As ever, we remain totally committed to working with you and listening to your views so that we can deliver on our Customer Promise of bringing positive change to places and our communities and improving services for everyone. Please continue to share your feedback with us and I hope you enjoy reading this report.

Kind regards,



Paul Richards
Group Director of
Customer and Communities

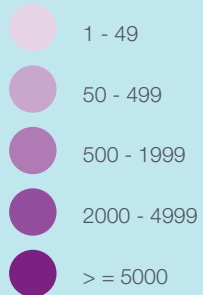


Where our communities are located

Our 2025 Corporate Strategy sets out our vision to create thriving communities. Our aim is to provide Better Homes, Better Places and services that enhance your experience of living in an Orbit home.

Orbit Properties by County

Number of Properties



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Our promise to you

In 2021 we introduced our new Customer Promise and, since that time, we've been working hard to deliver it to all our residents. Throughout the report, we've included icons alongside those sections that demonstrate how we've delivered against our promise to you.

Helping our customers and their communities to thrive

Delivering an excellent customer experience



Providing high quality, safe and sustainable homes



Bringing positive change to places and communities



Working together for a better day



2021-22 highlights



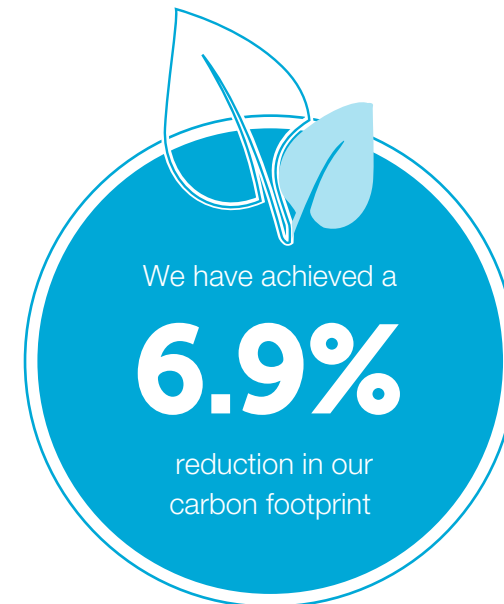
for overall customer satisfaction (this is an increase from 4.2 in 2020-21). However, we know we have work to do to improve our services to you. In 2020 we issued our first ever UK Customer Satisfaction Index (UKCSI) survey, where we received an overall customer satisfaction rating of 55.3. We carried out the same survey again this year and achieved a 55 rating.



including 1,013 new homes for rent, shared ownership and market sale, as well as a small number of homes built for other organisations.



including £32.4 on repairs and getting homes ready for new customers, £36.8m on heating upgrades and other home improvements, £10.2m on making homes safer and £1.4m on making homes more energy efficient.



compared to last year, representing a total reduction of 33% since 2018-19.



2021-22 highlights



where we support you from day one to ensure your tenancy is successful. 100% of these new customers successfully sustained their tenancy for the first 12 months.



or find unpaid work through our customer-facing teams.



by taking part in our free Better Days wellbeing support programmes.



to find paid employment.





Creating Better Days and building thriving communities



You have given me strategies to cope with everyday life and you have also signposted me to support agencies. I feel like a person for once instead of being invisible and not being heard.

- a resident who used Breathing Space, our free mental health support service



Highlights

We are proud to be more than a landlord, offering you help and advice through our Better Days programme. Last year we saw a 40% increase in referrals to our services, as people sought money advice and mental health support. After working with our independent debt advisors, customers were quoted as saying 'if I hadn't spoken to PayPlan I would have lost everything' and that they 'couldn't believe the money they saved from a few simple tips'.

In 2021-22 Better Days supported more than 5,500 residents:

- **£760,000** of customer debt managed and we helped secure an additional income of **£495,000**
- **1,400** customers saw an improvement in their mental health as a result of our support
- **239** customers accessed volunteering opportunities
- **219** customers improved their confidence through our online digital skills support.

97%

of customers who used Better Days were happy with the support they received.



Creating Better Days and building thriving communities



How we've supported your communities:

- We invested **£20,000** in an energy voucher scheme so those of you most affected by increased energy costs were able to heat their homes during the winter
- In areas where we have the most homes, we provided financial support to food banks, and we have worked with the Child Action Poverty Group to help reduce the cost of the school day for families in **14 schools**, by funding a project that reached **7,500 pupils**
- Our **Happy Healthy Starts** grants have provided families with school uniforms

Last year, following a survey of over 700 residents to better understand and respond to the challenges many people are facing, we created our new 'Thriving Communities strategy' to support you.

Like many organisations over the last two years, we delivered our services online and over the phone. However, we understand that face-to-face contact is important to you, and from February we were able to get back out and engage with you in your local neighbourhoods.

We are listening to you; we understand the pressures everyone is currently facing, and we are keen to offer free support to you in your communities. Last year, we kicked off our community events programme and saw 238 residents within the first two months. More than 10% of the residents we met took up our free support offers and we were able to signpost many others to receive support from our external partners.

Thousands of people have already benefited from Better Days support. We look forward to seeing you at one of our neighbourhood events. Remember, regardless of where you live, you can always contact us for support.

Keep an eye out

as we will be out visiting neighbourhoods with our Better Days events, where we will be providing you with cost of living advice and support. We'll be sure to let you know if we are in your area

You said

We did



Creating Better Days and building thriving communities



Plans for this year...

This year, we're putting a number of measures in place and working with some key partners such as the mental health charity, Mind, Citizens Advice and Barclays to help ensure the support you told us you needed most is available:

- We're planning even more Better Days drop-in events to take our support programme direct to your community
- This Autumn we'll be launching a new energy advice service, bringing cost of living support and expert energy advice and guidance to you
- A hardship fund will be available to those residents who need it most, with grants to help cover fuel or other essential household costs
- Our online **Cost of Living Hub**  will provide customers with useful information, including government and local council support, lowering energy usage and energy support, debt advice, budget planning, payday loans (loan sharks), cost of living scams, food affordability, mental health support and employability upskilling
- A new Welfare Benefits Advice Service which will help customers who need it most to maximise their benefits income and reduce financial pressure
- A new employability and skills portal on our **customer website**,  which is quick and simple to use, will match you to potential jobs and training opportunities based on your skills and interests.



Our BetterDays programme

is all about helping you to have a good day, every day. Whether it's finding employment, improving your digital and money management skills, or enhancing your mental health and wellbeing, we're here to help. Visit our website to find out more



Having your voice heard



Orbit, like all housing providers, is delivering services alongside the new Social Housing Regulation Bill (which comes from the Government's Social Housing White Paper and is intended to change the way social housing is run by being more transparent and accountable). For Orbit to embrace this and support the creation of a customer created and led Customer Engagement Strategic Committee, is a huge step forward in making sure you have the opportunity to have your say in how services are delivered.

Our mission is 'Customer voices driving positive change', and as things develop so will we. We want to take you with us on this journey. If you're interested in getting involved please contact us by emailing CESC@Orbit.org.uk.

David Glover – Interim Chair, Customer Engagement Strategic Committee



Highlights

	2020-21	2021-22
Number of Engaged Customers	378	571
Customer satisfaction for engagement activities (Net Promoter Score)	+53	+59
Number of service improvements implemented	30% of 137 identified	33% of 79 identified



Having your voice heard - continued



Our commitment to listening to your views is at the heart of our Customer Promise.

By working with our Customer Engagement team, Engaged Customers are able to provide feedback on their experiences, review performance, identify service improvements and hold us to account. Last year, 193 new residents opted-in to receiving updates about engagement opportunities and to take part in engagement activities, bringing the total of Engaged Customers to 571.

We have what we call our 'Complaints Scrutiny and Co-Creation' group where customers help to shape service improvements for areas such as complaints, customer communications, property operations and policies.

Working with Engaged Customers, this year we:

Made it easier for you to access our complaint handling process

Reviewed our website to ensure it is easy to navigate

You said
We did

Worked with Engaged Customers to deliver our innovative 'gas servicing hackathon' where customers and colleagues reviewed the gas servicing process and co-created 47 service improvements. Customer letters were re-written, and the work was recognised by our first ever 'Best Resident Engagement Strategy' award at the 2022 Association of Safety & Compliance Professionals (ASCP) Awards



Having your voice heard - continued



Our 'Your Voice Festival' saw us use a new approach to bring together customers and colleagues to raise awareness of customer engagement activities. Across 12 days, we visited all three of our regions and delivered eight activities engaging with 76 customers.



We've used the feedback from our Engaged Customers to make sure that our activities are accessible for everyone, ensuring that the service improvements identified by our residents are deliverable and help increase customer satisfaction.



It's really important to us that we capture as many customer voices as possible and ensure all of our customers feel comfortable when engaging with us. We're proud to have launched our LGBTQ+ Diversity Group, shortly to be followed with a Disability and a Younger Customer Diversity Group.

To make engagement as accessible and easy as possible, we have developed a programme of activities that don't require any previous experience or training for people who want to get involved.

To find out more about our focus groups, conferences, surveys and more, visit our digital engagement platform.




**Everyone is
welcome!**



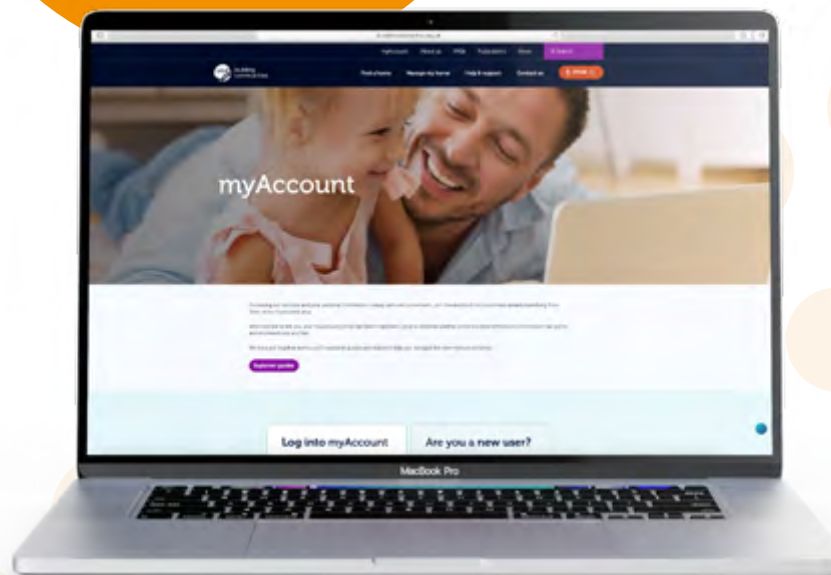
Keeping in touch with you

We created a new Customer Communications team in 2021 with the aim of providing you with quality on and offline communications about matters that are important to you, your home and your community. We work closely with our Engaged Customers and experts across Orbit to turn complex subjects and processes into easy-to-understand information, keeping you up-to-date and informed with news and information relevant to you.


We continue to make improvements to our digital channels to help us deliver on our promise of being easy to deal with. While our Customer Service Centre (CSC) is the first port of call for many, we also want to ensure that you have a choice of online communications channels to use anywhere, anytime and on any device. Our new Customer Hub website was launched in 2021 and has been awarded the Crystal Mark by the Plain English Campaign, meaning the information on the site is 'crystal clear' and easier for everyone to use.


We've been making even more customers aware of myAccount, which allows you to manage your tenancy and make payments or raise repairs online. More than 3,700 customers have registered with myAccount in the last year bringing the total to 18,000 customers who are benefitting from the ease of use and convenience that it brings. We are constantly working with our Engaged Customers to improve what we offer through myAccount, which also won the 2022 National Housing Maintenance Forum Award for Best Customer Impact.

The new Customer Hub website was launched in 2021 and has been awarded the Crystal Mark by the Plain English Campaign



Keeping in touch with you - continued

With cost of living becoming a challenge for many of us, it is more important than ever to deliver on our promise to help our customers have a better day. Our website, social media channels and Orbit Life magazine are just some of the touchpoints the Customer Communications team has used to provide information about the offers, advice and services we provide. Our customer website now has a dedicated energy page and there is advice and guidance on your journey to a greener, more energy efficient home on **our new eco-hub**. 

A new customer handbook was produced in 2021. The handbook clearly sets out all of the services and support that we provide to help you live well in your home. The handbook is currently available on our **customer website**  and this year, we will be producing a version of the handbook specifically for leaseholders.

Our **'A Day in the Life of' video series**  was launched in July 2021, to demonstrate how colleagues across Orbit are bringing the Customer Promise to life each and every day. In 2022-23, we are focusing on sharing more of your stories as we demonstrate how our commitment to our Customer Promise is helping our customers and communities to thrive.



Visit our website

to find out more. Be sure to check back regularly as we'll be providing up-to-date cost of living advice as it becomes available



Providing you with great quality service



Jodi was very helpful, sympathetic and patient. She handled my issue with compassion, ensuring that she recorded all relevant information and then read it back to me. An ideal person to have in customer services and a bonus for Orbit.

- Clifford Collyer, a customer who called into our CSC



We have all faced many challenges recently and we've done so head on by evolving and adapting the way we work and by focusing on delivering an excellent customer experience through our CSC.

Highlights:

We have been working closely with our Repairs team to:



Improve our processes and the quality of information we give you



Resolve any issues the first time you contact us

By collaborating with our Complaints team, we are better able support to you and make improvements to our services. We've provided additional training to our advisors to ensure they are fully trained to discuss your issues and any concerns, and to listen in an empathetic and supportive way.

To make sure we have the right skills in the right place at the right time, we have also introduced a new Workforce Management system. This system helps us understand which areas are receiving the most calls and have the right people ready to handle them.

We have linked our email system to other ways we communicate with you so that we have a view of all previous customer contact, allowing us to have more meaningful conversations.

We have improved training for our new CSC advisors, allowing them to take live calls with the dedicated support of a coach for their first four weeks with us



Providing you with great quality service - continued



Plans for this year...

Our CSC is the main point of contact for you, and we are investing in our people to build a right first-time ethos and create a great customer experience. We have restructured the team so we have one Head of Service who is accountable for both the office-based and frontline teams, improving team working and the consistency of our services.

We know we haven't always got this right, but are confident we can make it easier for you to deal with us by:

- Having skilled and knowledgeable people in the right roles
- Providing our employees with coaching and ongoing development so they can deliver services to you that are of the highest standard
- Continuing the development of our online customer service area, myAccount, in partnership with our Digital Operations team
- Working with our Complaints team to ensure the right processes are in place to deal with complaints efficiently and effectively. We've also increased the size of our Complaints team so that we can respond to you quicker
- Working with our Tenancy Sustainment team to ensure we direct you to the right places for support and advice.

Highlights for the year



Last year, we achieved an overall customer satisfaction score in the CSC of 4.41 out of five.



We are proud to have supported the development of 25 advisors who have moved from the CSC to other areas of the business such as Customer Safety and Income.



We made 2,201 referrals to our Tenancy Sustainment team with a 97% acceptance rate, meaning we have successfully helped 2,139 customers.



Helping you to manage and sustain your tenancy



The service helped us save money with a couple of schemes available to lower income families and offered support if needed.

– Georgina, a resident who was supported by our Tenancy Sustainment team



Last year, we developed our service to offer employment support as part of our tenancy coaching. Our new Tenancy Sustainment Job Coaches can now offer you employment advice as part of their service.

Highlights

6,737 residents were referred to Tenancy Sustainment this year, of which **1,144** were new ‘House with Support’ customers who we support from day one to ensure they sustain their tenancies through having a positive experience managing their new home. **100%** of these new customers successfully sustained their tenancy for the first 12 months.

Our work also helps you to reduce rent arrears and **77%** of those we supported had an improved rent balance 12 months after the support ended, compared to when they were first referred to us.

Last year we also supported:

- **1,237** residents to start training or work experience
- **211** into paid work.

By adding employment support to the role of our tenancy coaches, it means we can help you sustain your tenancy, help you move into employment if needed and support you to become better off financially too. On average, those who moved into work this year were £537 a month better off.

Plans for this year...

In 2022-23 we aim to support 234 customers into paid work, helping keep those customers in their homes by supporting them with their tenancy and improving their rent account balance.

	2020-21	2021-22
‘House With Support’ customers’ tenancies sustained for first year	100%	100%
Customers rent balances improved 12 months after support ended (Net Promoter Score)	76%	77%
Customers going into paid work	101	211
Amount customers are better off after moving into work	£541 per month	£537 per month



Learning from your feedback when things go wrong



Customer complaints (stage one)

We adapted and changed the way we work, whilst taking steps towards delivering an excellent customer service.

Stage one is the first step in our formal complaints procedure. We aim to provide you with a response within 10 working days and to resolve your complaint at this first stage.

If you are not happy with our response at stage one, you can request to have your complaint reviewed. It will then progress to a stage two complaint and will be reviewed by an independent manager. We will keep you regularly updated and aim to provide you with a response within 20 working days.

Highlights

- We reduced the average waiting time to fully resolve customer complaints to 34 days, compared to 51 days in 2020-21
- We produced a new complaints leaflet to help you understand what you can expect when you make a complaint
- We introduced a new system to help us track and log complaints more efficiently, as well as giving you an automatic complaint reference number to make it easier to follow up with us

- We introduced a quality assurance approach and scoring which has helped to:
 - Identify gaps in the service we deliver to you
 - Develop a robust training and development programme for all employees within the complaints department.
- We designed an induction plan for new employees and continuous improvement training for employees who manage complaints
- We implemented processes to make sure we are compliant with the new Housing Ombudsman code, which launched earlier this year and ensures fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused approach
- We worked with our repairs contractors to help resolve customer complaints relating to repairs, identifying gaps in our service and putting improvement plans in place.

You said

We did

We've worked in close partnership with our colleagues in the CSC to identify any areas of coaching needed to help deliver a right first-time culture.

The Housing Ombudsman Service is a free, independent and impartial service that looks at complaints made against housing organisations. Residents and landlords can contact the Ombudsman at any time for support in helping to resolve a dispute.



Learning from your feedback when things go wrong



Plans for this year...

We will continue to provide our team with coaching and ongoing training to ensure you receive a helpful and respectful experience when you communicate with us.

We are also working to ensure our stage one complaints handling process is in line with the new Housing Ombudsman legislation, this will include:

- Refreshing all complaints policies and procedures
- Assessing ourselves against the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code and publishing the results
- Changing the way in which we classify complaints to help us work more efficiently
- Developing a framework to understand the root causes of complaints
- Developing a Quality Assurance framework to keep our level of service high
- Updating our compensation calculator to make it more accurate
- Launching customer satisfaction surveys for those who have been through the complaint handling process.

Customer complaints (stage two)

We have introduced a new way of completing stage two investigations. We now complete independent reviews and as a result, we have successfully overturned 39% of cases in favour of residents.

The main reasons for overturning stage one decisions included:

- Additional information being supplied by you during the stage two review
- Our improved understanding of the impact on you if things have gone wrong.

These changes have seen a reduction in the number of customers referring their complaints to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Last year, the Housing Ombudsman Service made formal decisions resulting in eight service failures (where we didn't provide a good enough service) and seven maladministrations (where we failed to do something, done something we shouldn't have or, in the Ombudsman's opinion, delayed unreasonably) - this is a reduction on the number of service failures and maladministrations in the previous year.

Whilst we've made good progress, we know that we still have a way to go and are committed to continuing to work with you through our Complaints Scrutiny and Co-Creation group to further improve your experience with us.



Learning from your feedback when things go wrong



Housing Ombudsman complaints and outcomes

Overall Determination	Count	%
Maladministration	7	22%
Partial Maladministration	8	25%
Reasonable Redress	3	9%
No maladministration	8	25%
Outside Jurisdiction	3	9%
Withdrawn	3	9%
Grand Total	32	100%

We have recently appointed a 'root cause analyst', who will share complaints insights across the organisation and support teams to make improvements. We will share regular updates on our customer website and to our customers who sit on our Complaints Scrutiny and Co-Creation group.

Last year, we used our complaints insights to:

- Launch and improve the chatbot on our Customer Hub website, which provides an immediate route for you to communicate with us
- Improve our out-of-hours service, particularly for our leaseholders
- Add new enquiry forms to our website for those who would prefer to contact us digitally
- Update our website to make it easier to navigate.

Are you interested in helping to improve our complaints process? To find out how you can have your voice heard, please visit orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/get-involved/



You said

We did





Helping you manage your rent



Despite me being behind on my rent, your advisor was non-judgmental. They managed to answer my questions and sent my number to the correct department to repay the last small amount on my rent.

– Danielle, a customer who came to us for support with managing their rent account



We have adapted to ensure that we can still deliver an excellent customer experience, offering support and advice to you in these challenging times.

Highlights

- We have supported our customers with their tenancies and explored alternative solutions to avoid eviction wherever possible, reducing eviction rates by 75% (from 248 to 59)
- Reduced written off debt to the lowest figure for six years
- Reported the lowest percentage arrears result for eight years
- Supported the smooth transition of customers moving home as a result of the stock transfer with Midland Heart so that those new customers can pay their rent and access other services more easily
- Helped you access the information you need quickly, by working with our Digital Operations team to make more information available through our online chatbot
- Worked with our Independent Living team to set up a process to offer face-to-face conversations with customers who are due to receive a legal notice for non-payment of rent.

Did you know

that through our Better Days programme, we offer a free independent debt advice service for customers who may be struggling with their finances?

Visit our website and fill in our contact us form, text 'contact me' with your name to 07869 017 857 or call on 0800 687 1221 and press option 1 then option 4



Helping you manage your rent - continued



- We reviewed our refund process leading to quicker customer refunds
- If you need debt advice, you can now be referred in one contact, rather than waiting for a call back
- We recognise the challenge running a home can present and want you to feel supported in your home. We worked with our Local Authority homelessness prevention teams to update how we share information so we can better support you if you may be at risk
- We sent SMS texts to raise awareness of the rent review and help you if you receive Universal Credit to reduce the risk of delays to your benefit payments.

We held a 'scrutiny hackathon' focus group with our Engaged Customers to look at our income policies and communications, and to discuss improvements to resident letters and our rent collection policy.

Plans for this year...

Explore the use of digital automation to complete Universal Credit customer rent checks and reduce delays in benefit claims with the Department for Work and Pensions

Work in partnership with our Tenancy Sustainment and Lettings teams so that you know about the different ways you can pay your rent and service charges and manage your rent account more easily



Your service charges



Getting your service charges right is really important to us, but we also know how important this is to you too. We continue to work hard on making our service charge budgets more accurate. We're also making service charge statements more transparent and are issuing them earlier, helping to reduce customer queries (down by 15.7% from the previous year).

Number of service charge customer enquiries

Period	2020-2021	2021-2022	Volume	Percent
Q1	1,701	1,420	-281	-16.52
Q2	1,117	1,222	105	9.40
Q3	2,132	1,349	-783	-36.73
Q4	2,638	2,406	-232	-8.79
Total	7,588	6,397	-1,191	-15.70

This year, we're going to be working more closely with Engaged Customers to share draft service charge budgets and statements before issuing them, so that they are clear and easier to understand.



Moving people into their new home



You were helpful every time I phoned and the Lettings Officer was lovely when we came and signed for the property. We love our new home.

– what one of our new residents had to say about moving into their new home



Last year we welcomed 2,529 people into their new homes. We also helped 383 customers move into a new home with us through a mutual exchange.

To simplify our tenancy agreements and make them more consistent, we’ve reduced the number of agreements offered to new residents and are pleased to announce the end of fixed-term tenancies for affordable rented customers (except in limited circumstances). People moving into our rented homes, are now offered a ‘lifetime’ assured tenancy and existing fixed-term customers will be offered a ‘lifetime’ assured tenancy at review following satisfactory management of their fixed-term tenancy. This gives you more security and peace-of-mind, knowing that you can remain settled in your home without further reviews.

At the beginning of last year we had 200 more empty homes than we had planned for. However, we made good progress with reducing this number by 132. Labour shortages experienced by our contractors and a lack of supplies to prepare new homes for

re-letting meant meeting our target for reducing the number of empty homes was challenging.

Whilst we had a demanding year, you told us that we still delivered a good service, with a customer rating of 4.12 out of five for ‘first impressions’. This represents a slight reduction from last year’s rating - we’ve taken on board your comments to ensure that we are focused on the areas where we can improve. We have also reduced the time needed to let rented and sheltered homes by 5.61 days and 98.15% of our properties are occupied at any given time.

	2020-21	2021-22
First impressions (out of five)	4.2	4.12
Average re-let time (rented and sheltered homes)	99.21 days	93.60 days
Homes occupied	97.8%	98.15%

This year, our focus remains on reducing the total number of empty homes and improving the average time taken to re-let them. We are specifically looking to improve customer satisfaction when it comes to getting the heating switched on when customers move into their new homes. We are also completing a full review of our mutual exchange service and will be looking to make changes to improve the overall customer experience.



Investing in your homes



Contractors were respectful of my home and were clean and quick. They kept me informed each day - it made my anxiety go away as they reassured me it would be okay.

– Ann-Marie Shepherd, a customer who recently had a new kitchen installed in her home



Despite continued material shortages, increased prices and a shortage of contractor labour, we delivered a range of improvements and completed **88%** of our year's programme; making improvements to **7,713** homes.

We invested just under £30m in your homes last year (compared to £16.9m in 2020-21), from kitchen and bathroom replacements to roofing, heating and insulation installations. We achieved an average customer satisfaction score of 4.12 out of five against a target of 4.25, with an improvement in scores towards the end of the year, particularly from our new kitchen and bathroom installers.

We also surveyed 160 customers to understand how we could improve communication and engagement with you when completing home improvements. This research will help us shape the way we contact you in future and make sure we're giving you the information you need before, during and after we complete improvements in your home.

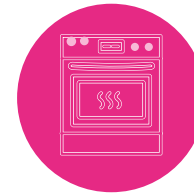
Customer safety is always our top priority and last year, we undertook over 450 safety inspections to make sure that the work completed by our contractors was carried out safely and to a high standard.

Last year we completed:



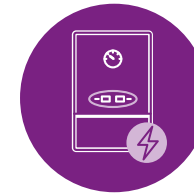
208

New bathrooms



600

New kitchens



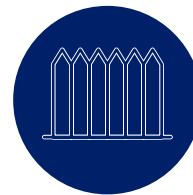
1,508

New domestic
boilers



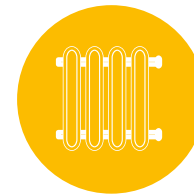
117

Insulation
installations



117

External
decorations



541

New storage
heaters



169

New doors
and windows



94

Roofing
improvements



Investing in your community



The contractors have done a really good job on the steps especially with the non-slip metal netting. I think we will see the communal garden get a lot more use in the summer now.

– **Malcolm Corble, an Independent Living customer, in response to some steps we had installed to allow customers easier access to a communal garden**



Hearing what you have to say about your estates is really important to us; it helps us make sure they are well maintained and that we are creating communities where you are proud to live. Due to an increased presence on-site and the ability to speak with Property Managers on a regular basis, more of you got involved in estate inspections in 2021-22 than the year before, helping us to deliver an even better service to all customers living in our 1,400 estates. A big thank you to all of you who took part.

Your views about your estate really do matter and we'd love you to join us at your next estate inspection. To find out when the next inspection is taking place, please see the noticeboard in your scheme or contact your Property Manager. Everyone is welcome.

The Property Management team completed a successful estate improvement pilot, investing an extra £400,000 in your communities and delivering 84 improvements across 80 estates. This included landscaping, new storage solutions, fencing and paving, bin/bike store improvements and community room refurbishments.

As part of the estate improvement pilot, Engaged Customers told us that all residents need to have a greater voice in shaping the priorities that matter for each estate. We're currently developing a three-year programme for each estate and as part of this we will be inviting you

to help us agree priorities for additional improvements and to specify the works required.

In January, we also worked with our Engaged Customers as we started a review of how the Property Management team works overall. It's been four years since the team was created and we want to make sure we are operating effectively and delivering the services that are important to you. We are expecting to receive the results in the Autumn and these will help us to shape any changes required to improve our services in your communities. We'll be sure to feedback in next year's customer annual report.

	2020-21	2021-22
Number of estate inspections planned and completed	98% (4,573 out of 4,663)	99.9% (4,324 out of 4,328)
Estate inspections where customers participated	8% (290)	23% (1,013)



New noticeboards and signage have now been installed in all our buildings within communal areas. Property Managers will be working with residents and our partners to ensure that they are kept up-to-date with relevant and local information (including what you can expect from your Property Manager and how to contact them)



Ensuring communities look great



The bin stores look fantastic. The contractors have done a really great job and the colour looks really good and really fits with the rest of the estate. We're really pleased.

– a customer from Dinsdale Court in Felixstowe, Suffolk, after new bin stores were installed



You told us that keeping your communities clean and well maintained is important to you and we have continued to deliver a full grounds maintenance and cleaning service to your estates.

In partnership with our Income team, we have been working on a pilot project to reduce fly tipping and help keep your communities clean and tidy by recharging customers who do not dispose of their bulky waste responsibly.

In December we started a detailed review of Estate Services to understand how we can deliver our grounds maintenance and communal cleaning services more effectively. Although we're still completing the review, we've started developing an action plan that includes a dedicated in-house team working more closely with our contractors. Our Estate Services Managers have also started working more closely with you, Property Managers, Independent Living Scheme Managers and other partners to share information and follow-up work to make sure it is completed to a high standard. This will help ensure we deliver the services you want to see in your communities and that are included in your service charges.

Working closely with Engaged Customers, we've reviewed our grounds maintenance contracts in the Midlands and appointed new contractors, Ground Control, Newmans Landscapes and Fourth Corner, who all started in January.

You told us that you wanted to more input into setting service charges, so Estate Services Managers and Property Managers have worked together to produce more accurate information on the costs and specifications for cleaning and grounds maintenance work this year.



You told us you want more details about grounds maintenance and cleaning schedules. This information is now available on the newly installed estate noticeboards. If you would like to get involved with an inspection on your estate, please contact your Property Manager (whose details you will find on the new noticeboard in your scheme)



Keeping you, your home and neighbourhood safe



Orbit's approach to property safety is sector leading and has been recognised at the highest level by the British Safety Council through its globally recognised 'International Safety Awards'. The awards celebrate organisations from around the world which have shown a true dedication to keeping their customers and employees healthy, safe and well.

What's truly impressive is their interactive fire safety tool, which allows you to take a virtual tour of a flat, identifying fire hazards and showing you how you can reduce your risk and save lives. It's received over half a million views online.

Visit orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/fire-hazards-interactive-tour/ to find out more.

– Engaged Customer, John Bennett



We have a team of dedicated experts and specialist contractors who work together to keep you safe. Much of our work involves inspecting and servicing equipment to reduce the likelihood of the equipment breaking down when it's needed most.

This means that much of our work is unseen, with our contractors servicing things like lifts, emergency lighting and communal water systems, without the need to enter your home. However, there are times when we need to come into your home to carry out essential gas and electrical safety checks, which are crucial to keeping you and your neighbours safe.

As you can see from the table below, we have continued to keep your communities safe.

	2020-21	2021-22
Compliance against statutory health and safety requirements	100%	100%
Risk assessments carried out	3,562	4,127
Number of services carried out on life safety equipment	22,978	23,435

Over the next year, we want to work more closely with customers living in our tallest buildings. Fire safety laws have changed, and we want to understand whether any of you have safety concerns about your building. To help us understand this, we have added a new option for when you call our CSC to allow you to speak to or leave a message for our dedicated Building Safety team.

Keeping you safe is our number one priority.
For more information about safety in your home,
please visit: orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/homesafety



Repairs to your home and within your community



I have found raising a repair via myAccount easy to use and my repairs have been fixed quickly and without delay.

- Phil Coldicott, a customer who recently completed a repair request online via myAccount, our customer service area on the website



Our Repairs team has been extremely busy working through the higher than normal volume of repairs that had built up over the last two years. Labour shortages, material availability and a higher number of repairs being reported than ever before has made this incredibly challenging at times. However, we are pleased to let you know that we've worked through the increased volume and reintroduced a 28-day completion timescale for routine repairs. Throughout all of this, we've worked closely with Engaged Customers to keep them up-to-date on our progress and would like to thank you for your patience whilst we cleared the backlog.

Highlights

- Working with Engaged Customers, we've completed a full review of our repairs service to understand where we can improve, and we are now busy making those changes (see page 33)
- Last October, we held a partnering workshop with Engaged Customers and our repairs contractors, Fortem and MPS, to discuss issues raised by customers and to also help customers understand how repair requests are managed
- Following your feedback at our Engaged Customer 'gas hackathon' sessions we've improved our service letters and the way we communicate via text message.

For an update on the different types of repairs we manage and what you can expect from us, please visit: orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/news/articles/repairs-service-update/



Repairs to your home and within your community



You told us that you care about condensation in your home, so we've set up a customer-led forum to better understand the causes of damp and mould. We will now be sending a trained officer out to any home that reports condensation issues so that we can get to the root cause of the issue and resolve it more quickly.

	2020-21	2021-22
Number of repairs completed	Last year we said we received 125,998 repair requests	141,293
Customer satisfaction with repairs	3.87 out of 5	4.1 out of 5
Repairs gas servicing	4.64 out of 5	4.65 out of 5
Gas safety checks completed	100%	100%

Plans for this year...

We know how important the repairs service is to you and we'll be introducing a number of improvements following your feedback over the year.

They include:

- Offering you an appointment when you call us, rather than having to wait for our contractors to contact you
- Introducing text messaging and tracker systems (such as those used by couriers when delivering parcels), so you know precisely when contractors are on their way to your home
- Carrying out more training with our CSC employees to ensure the repairs you report are correctly prioritised and we collect the information needed to help our contractors get your repair right the first time they visit



Taking care of your homes to make them more energy efficient



I can't thank you enough for all you have done in finding me a new home. I love my bungalow and garden; I can't wait to get out there and potter about. You are really lovely and have helped me so much. Thank you for taking the time to listen and again for helping me find my forever home.

– Feedback from a customer who we've help move to a new, more energy efficient home



Stock condition surveys

Understanding the quality and condition of your homes allows us to make sure we spend money in the right places and helps ensure all homes are safe and warm.

To help us achieve this, we have appointed a new stock condition surveying team to deliver a rolling programme of surveys, with the help of a new digital surveying tool. This will help us gain insight into your homes so we can make sure the right properties receive planned improvements each year. The tool also enables us to carry out a safety assessment and provide a new Energy Performance Certificate if needed. We plan to carry out a full survey to each home every five years.

In 2021-22

99.91% of our homes met the Government's Decent Homes Standard





Your community



Our Independent Living schemes



On first entering Queensway Court, I was so surprised - it opened my eyes to what is available. It was like a different world! I'm still independent, it's like living again and has completely changed my life for the better. I feel more relaxed and no longer feel alone because I can go downstairs to have a coffee and talk to people. I can also attend activities like skittles and 'knit and natter'. I feel so happy now. My apartment is lovely and cosy - without stairs and I feel safe. I wish I had moved in years ago!

- says Jean, a rented customer who recently moved into her new Independent Living home in Leamington Spa



In 2020 we made some major changes to the way we work and this included ensuring each scheme has a dedicated employee. In June 2021, we issued a survey to Independent Living residents focusing on what we should start, stop and continue doing. An action plan for each scheme was created and 437 actions were recorded for us to take forward. General themes included improving communication and continuing with wellbeing calls. We reissued the survey in April 2022 and are pleased to report that satisfaction levels increased by 7% to 91%.

You told us you wanted more outdoor space available to grow your own plants and vegetables, so space for small allotments has been made available at some of our schemes. We've also given you more options for how we get in touch with you. With our new 'how are you?' process, you can continue to receive a wellbeing call or opt out completely. 62% of you asked us to continue the calls, which equates to about 3,700 calls each week.

Highlights

- We have improved communication with you, with the introduction of newsletters and more regular resident meetings
- To reduce any distress caused by rent arrears letters, scheme employees now receive more information on arrears from our Income team and are able to discuss issues with you before any formal arrears process begins
- To increase social activities at schemes, we have developed a shared activities folder to support with delivering the types of activities you've requested



You've told us that some schemes need investment and updating. An improvement plan for each scheme has been created and will be delivered over the next few years



Our Independent Living schemes



Plans for this year...

To give you a greater voice that ensures your views are heard, this Summer we started working with Engaged Customers to look more closely at how we deliver our Independent Living services. This will help more clearly define our services so that you can have more influence about how they're delivered.

In partnership with the University of Sussex, we've launched a research project at three Independent Living schemes to review and test new assistive technology (such as smart speakers, tablets linked to call warden systems, smart plugs, fall detectors and Fitbits) to help you stay independent and safe in your home. If successful, we plan to rollout the offer to all Independent Living customers through our aids and adaptations offer.

Our home adaptations service will be reviewed and relaunched, making it easier for you to access advice and support, and to enable you to make informed choices about your housing requirements.

We're currently piloting a Relief Officer role to cover schemes in the absence of the scheme employee and, if successful, we'll be looking to roll this out in all areas.

We're also looking at the homes where we have customers who are over the age of 55 to determine if you need any additional support, so that you will receive the same housing management service as our Independent Living customers.

Service charge meetings will be reintroduced to give you more opportunity to feedback on services and costs.



Driving positive change for our customers



Last year saw significant changes for Tenancy Services, with a continued focus on improving customer service and satisfaction. We carried out a full review of the way we work, created a new team structure with new roles including a specialist team with legal officers and expanded our Safeguarding team. This will allow our frontline officers to be more visible and proactive in your communities.

Key highlights from the year include:

- Keeping you safe is important to us. In 2020, we were the first housing provider to be accredited by Leaders In Safeguarding which is awarded to organisations in recognition of how they keep children, young people and adults who are at risk safe. We were successfully reaccredited in March 2022 following a further in-depth audit
- We are taking a stand to ensure we deliver safe and effective responses to domestic abuse. We have been successfully accredited by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA), in recognition of our work. The DAHA accreditation is the UK benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse
- We successfully resolved 1,719 anti-social behaviour (ASB) cases, resulting in 156 court applications being made, which has helped reduce ASB in communities. Of those, we obtained 19 possession orders, nine ASB injunctions, 11 breach of tenancy injunctions and carried out 70 evictions. 110 properties were recovered due to tenancy fraud and being abandoned.

The 'Leaders In Safeguarding Quality Mark' is awarded to organisations in recognition of how they keep children, young people and adults who are at risk safe.



Plans for this year...

- To improve your customer experience further by putting in place plans that help ensure we can respond even more quickly to you and provide further support
- To bring positive change to you and your community through our proactive multi-agency approach to managing ASB, supported by a new ASB strategy
- To continually review our services, listen to your feedback and learn from complaints with the aim of reducing ASB even further and ensure we are providing an excellent customer experience.

	2020-21	2021-22
Domestic abuse cases supported	407	362
ASB satisfaction	75%	74%
ASB cases resolved	1,355	1,719
Safeguarding concerns managed	3,247	3,567

Our focus this year is to have our officers working more proactively within your communities, improving ASB hotspot areas and building stronger relationships with outside partners. Our officers will be more visible on estates, listening to your concerns, resolving issues more quickly by getting involved earlier and developing strong partnerships with local specialist services, with the aim of reducing ASB and improving customer satisfaction.

To report anti-social behaviour, please visit our website.





Your planet



Working towards a more sustainable future



We are working to create a better society, building affordable homes and communities, and doing so in more socially responsible and sustainable ways. All of this will be delivered whilst ensuring we reduce our environmental impact across homes, services and offices. We do this through our environmental sustainability programme, Orbit Earth.

What is Orbit Earth and what will it achieve?

Last year, we put more focus around Orbit Earth's structure, strategy and target setting to agree firm goals. Along with this, we set up the plans behind those goals to ensure we are making environmental improvements that provide sustainable homes and bring positive change to your communities.

There are three strands to Orbit Earth:

- Climate action to become net zero carbon (NZC)
- Enhancement of outdoor spaces to improve the quality of natural resources including biodiversity, land, water and air
- Sustainable consumption to manage resources, materials and products responsibly.

We also launched our new environmental management system, helping our team members across Orbit to prevent pollution and nuisance in our communities and to unlock the many opportunities available by becoming a more environmentally sustainable organisation. We aim to achieve independent certification in the coming year to give you confidence in our approach.



**Climate action
to become net
zero carbon**

Listening to your feedback on our plans has continued to be important to us, here are just a few examples where your input has helped shape Orbit Earth this year:

- Feedback webinars on our **NZC roadmap** and survey responses supporting our NZC research 
- Being part of a waste workshop reviewing how to reduce waste to landfill so that we can form a new zero waste strategy
- Attending Customer Engagement roadshows and discussing how we can help you become more environmentally sustainable
- Being part of our **'Reverse Advent Calendar'** videos. 

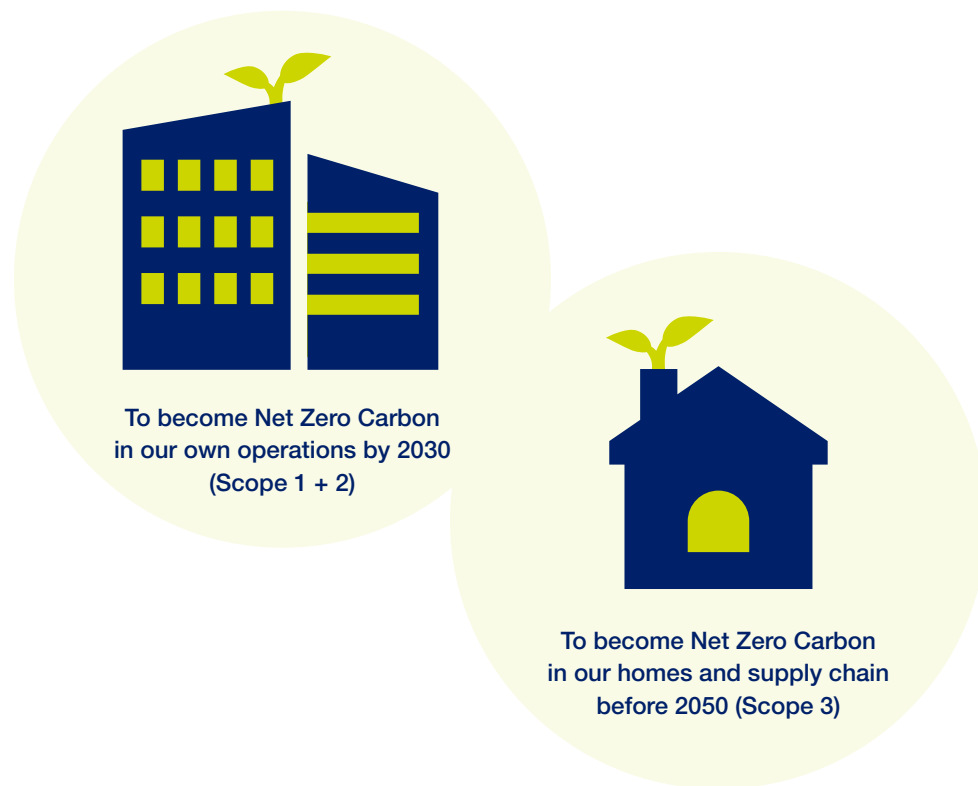


Our approach to becoming Net Zero Carbon by 2030




Back in November 2021, we saw world leaders gather in Glasgow for COP26, a conference calling for action on climate change. To show our commitment, we launched our NZC roadmap and set two important target milestones. Firstly, how we will reduce those emissions we directly control, and secondly, how we'll work with you, our customers, and suppliers to reduce your carbon footprints. This will have benefits for everyone, by reducing our energy use at a time of unprecedented energy prices.

Our net zero carbon goals:



We're already making good progress towards these goals. Last year we saw a 7% reduction in our carbon footprint as a business, which means we've lessened our impact on climate change by roughly a third since 2018-19. We've achieved this reduction by closing some of our offices, connecting our new build homes to renewable electricity and continuing to improve energy efficiency in our homes through our retrofit programme (which you can read more about below). We've recently made a commitment to use 100% hydrotreated vegetable oil fuel in our construction activities which produces 90% fewer emissions than red diesel and is less polluting.

Making your homes more energy efficient

Our Stratford-upon-Avon project to retrofit 69 homes, in a way that demonstrates how best to achieve a net zero carbon outcome, will be completed later this year. This work improves the energy efficiency of homes that are below an energy performance certificate (EPC) Band C and also helps ventilation, heating efficiency and cooling in the summer. We have partnered with **Act on Energy**  who are offering energy advice and support at each stage of the works to our customers.

Sustainability is integrated into our investment plans and our staged approach focusses on first improving the fabric, e.g. walls, lofts, windows and doors, of each home to ensure they are as insulated as possible. We then look at replacing fossil fuel heating systems and where appropriate, we install renewable energy technologies and as a final step, we tackle any extra carbon through an offsetting programme. We were delighted to receive a further £1.4 million as part of the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) and are working with Stratford-upon-Avon District Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority to upgrade an additional 136 homes.





Biodiversity and sustainable consumption



Biodiversity

Through our partnership with the Wildlife Trusts, we carried out a biodiversity pilot on four estates to improve our outdoor communal spaces for nature and wildlife, whilst ensuring they are places that you can enjoy spending time. Changes included sowing wildflower areas, planting native hedgerows and trees, and planting climbing plants for pollinators.


We will continue to monitor these estates as the seasons change. However, from successful learnings so far, we were able to set a target and approach that aligns with the Wildlife Trusts '30by30' campaign, the first of its kind in the housing sector. We will now begin to roll this approach out in our wider communities in the coming years.

30% of our outdoor spaces will be supporting nature's recovery by 2030



Enhancement of outdoor spaces to improve the quality of natural resources including biodiversity, land, water and air

Wildlife outside your window

Last year we ran our 'Wildlife outside your window' campaign sharing some simple year-round ideas on how to encourage wildlife into your outdoor space, no matter how big or small. We offered you a **free booklet**  and wildflower seeds and even ran a nature photography competition to see wildlife from your perspective.

Our winning photos, chosen by our Engaged Customers, are below:



Biodiversity and sustainable consumption

Sustainable consumption

We adjusted this final commitment last year to work towards sustainable consumption, meaning that we are looking at what we buy, how we use it and how its life can be extended. This is a complex goal that will require working closely with others, including you, our residents, to see where we can consume less and keep things in working order for as long as possible.



**Sustainable consumption
to manage resources, materials
and products responsibly**

Plans for this year...

This year we have started to collect and improve our waste information to understand how much waste we produce and where it goes. We have also run a series of workshops with different business areas to generate improvements, both short and long-term. We already work with Community Wood Recycling on our construction sites to ensure 100% of wood waste is diverted from landfill and have been making progress with some of our suppliers to reduce packaging waste, meaning that our new homes are being delivered in a more environmentally responsible way.



To find out

how to live a greener lifestyle, what we're doing to make homes more energy efficient, and our partnership with The Wildlife Trusts, go to our all new eco-hub.

Visit orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/eco-hub to find out more!





Get in touch:

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orbitcustomerhub.org.uk

Or to talk to us, please call:
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