



Customer annual report 2019/20

ASTER
GROUP

Customer annual report 2019/20



Motivated by our vision that everyone has a home, we are proud to continue to help as many people as possible to live in safe, affordable, good-quality housing in communities they are proud to call home.

This year we invested over £260 million in building more than 1,000 homes and maintaining and improving our existing housing, providing almost 3,000 people with access to new affordable housing.

We also partnered with East Boro Housing Trust, (East Boro) and were delighted to welcome over 150 new colleagues to the group on 31 March 2020. We look forward to working with our colleagues at East Boro as we embark on our exciting plans to further enhance our offer for our customers and colleagues throughout 2020/2021 and beyond.

We made significant investments in our homes, going above and beyond compliance and investing £62.8 million maintaining and improving our existing properties,

This year also saw us continue to work towards every one of our homes receiving an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 'C' or above by 2025 and through the Warm Homes fund we are pleased to have been able to reduce the impact of fuel poverty for 81% of customers involved in the scheme.

We continue to work hard to ensure that you have as many ways as possible to let us know what you think of the services we provide, and we are committed to ensuring that your feedback helps shape everything we do.

As a result, throughout 2019/20, we continued to evolve our digital offer to make it as easy as possible for you to access the information you need when you need it. And with almost 9,000 customers currently registered for MyAster we're looking at more ways to provide instant access to the things that matter to you.

Like many organisations, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting government advice on social distancing meant that we had to temporarily pause some of the services we normally carry out to ensure our customers and our people remained safe.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your understanding during this time, your support made a huge difference to our colleagues on the front line who continued to carry out essential services throughout.

As I reflect on the year, what is clear to me is that without the transformation work we've undertaken over recent years to change not just how we work but where we work, we would not have been in a position to adapt so quickly to the many challenges of recent months. Our teams were able to quickly switch from office to home working meaning that our contact centre remained open and where possible we used technology to continue to offer some of our housing management services, like virtual viewings.

As we focus on our three-stage recovery, I am convinced that we can use the opportunity this presents to ensure that we are best placed to respond to rapidly changing customer and colleague expectations – so that we come back better and stronger than before.

I'm looking forward to another strong year, one where we continue to further enhance our offer to you.

Bjorn Howard,
Group chief executive

A few words from **Emma O'Shea**, Group customer services director



Despite the unexpected challenges we all faced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, a great deal has been achieved in the financial year 2019/20. We have enjoyed working in partnership with our customers and communities to deliver services and improve wellbeing.

It has been fantastic for us to have met and worked with so many groups representing our customers over the last financial year. Listening and responding to the opinions of customers and the feedback from over 4,000 people who completed our latest full customer survey, has played an important part in shaping decisions that we have made this year and has resulted in a number of services being enhanced and improved.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to provide feedback, complete a survey or take part in our surveys this year. Customer feedback is vital to ensuring that we deliver the best possible service and we are pleased to see that customer satisfaction overall has increased on last year, with overall satisfaction now 81%. However, through all this feedback we continue to focus on how we can learn and improve, and you can read more about how we've done just that throughout this report.

We continue to improve and increase the information available on our MyAster portal, which has had nearly 9,000 customer registrations since it launched in September 2019. These customers can now access their account and the services we provide at a time that is convenient to them.

Through the Aster Foundation we continue to empower our customers to sustain their tenancies and improve their life chances, enabling their independence, creating a lasting legacy through our thriving communities and sustaining the workforce of the future. You can read more about our work to support our customers and communities particularly around financial well-being and digital inclusion and employability later in this report.

For many years our colleagues have supported local charities and organisations through volunteering their time and fundraising activities.

This year, in addition to the 335.5 days spent volunteering in our communities and the £20,000 raised for our charity of the year Cancer Research UK, our people have gone above and beyond to support our customers with vulnerabilities.

We made over 10,000 welfare calls to our customers to offer support and help during the Covid-19 pandemic. Those in need were referred onto our supportive services or to agencies working for the government offering support with food or medical supplies. Our Aster Connect befriending programme was created and our colleagues volunteered their time to call customers who may not have heard a friendly voice that week.

This is just a flavour of some of the things that we've done this year to support our customers and communities. In the report that follows we've tried to highlight where we're performing well but also where we know we need to improve. We know we don't always get it right, and it's important to us that we learn from this, so that we can provide reliable customer services that offer our customers value for money.

Looking to the future, we are genuinely excited to be focussing on the things our customers have told us are important. Through our customer services strategy review we're looking at how best to make things as simple and accessible for customers and colleagues across Aster, to ensure we deliver reliable, safe and modern services.

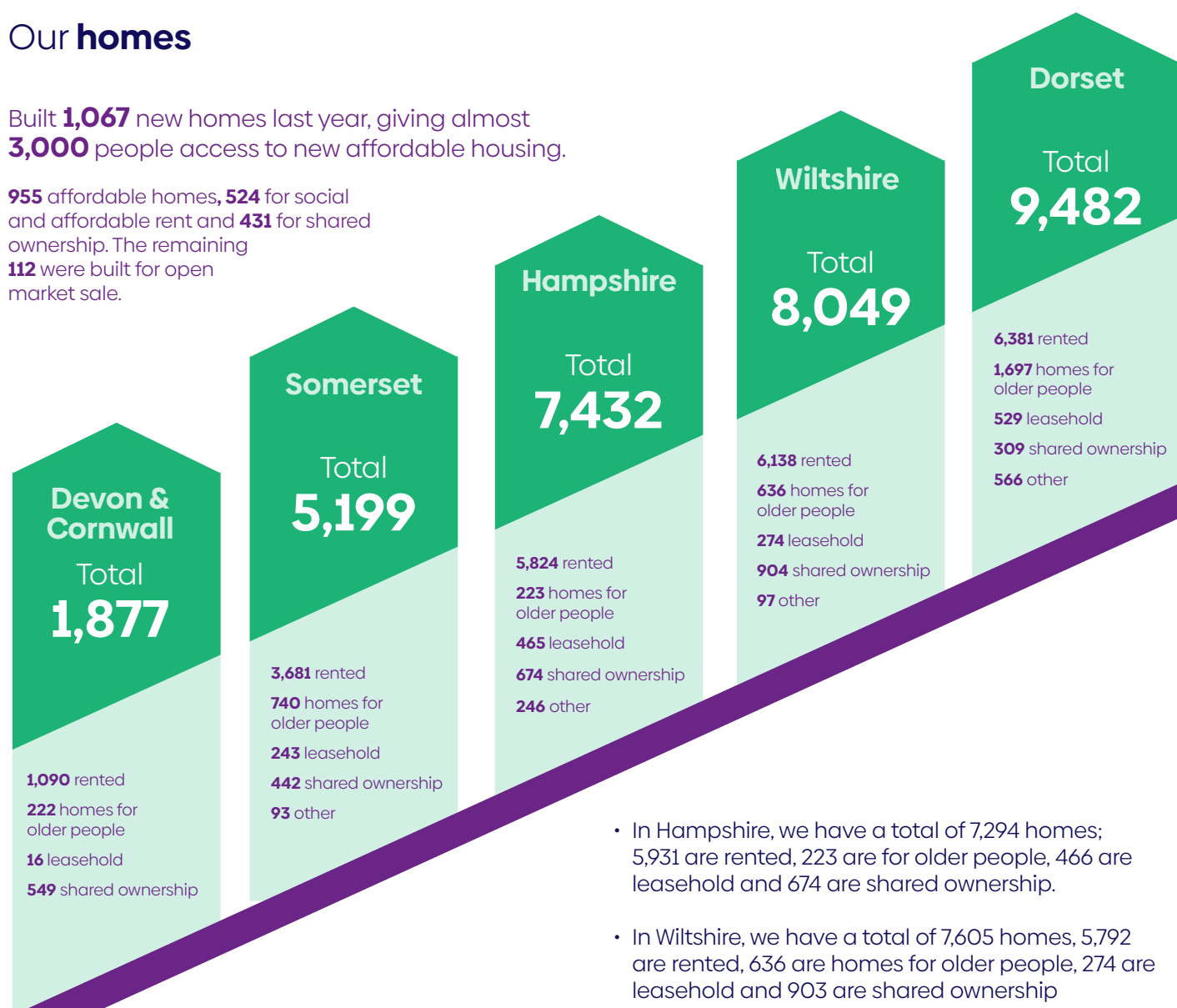
This includes how we manage things when you report a repair, what information you can access about our services and how, our digital offer, and our work to ensure customers have easy access to our services in a way that works for them. You'll be hearing from us directly about these things, but most importantly we'll continue to use customer voice to help shape the future of our service delivery.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report and I hope you find it useful and interesting. As always if you have any questions, we'd love to hear from you.

Our homes

Built **1,067** new homes last year, giving almost **3,000** people access to new affordable housing.

955 affordable homes, **524** for social and affordable rent and **431** for shared ownership. The remaining **112** were built for open market sale.



From Devon and Cornwall, Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire, we own and manage over 32,000 homes across the South.

We also build affordable homes to buy or rent often in areas where properties are unaffordable. The data below shows our owned and managed and managed for others stock across our region:

- In Devon and Cornwall, we have a total of 1,877 homes; 1,090 are rented, 222 homes for older people, 16 are leasehold and 549 are shared ownership
- In Somerset, we have a total of 5,077 homes; 3,652 are rented, 740 homes for older people, 243 are leasehold and 442 are shared ownership

- In Hampshire, we have a total of 7,294 homes; 5,931 are rented, 223 are for older people, 466 are leasehold and 674 are shared ownership.
- In Wiltshire, we have a total of 7,605 homes, 5,792 are rented, 636 are homes for older people, 274 are leasehold and 903 are shared ownership
- In Dorset, we have a total of 9,145 homes; 6,615 are rented, 1,697 are homes for older people, 523 are leasehold and 310 are shared ownership

Over 100 homes were built in 2019/20 via our joint venture with Galliford Try Partnerships, now part of Vistry Homes. A further 25 homes were delivered through Community Land Trusts (CLTs) – nine at Appledore and 16 at Chagford with more than 500 built through our own land-led programme.

Community Land Trusts are a form of community led housing, set up and run by people within the community to develop and manage homes as well as other assets. CLTs act as long-term stewards of housing, ensuring that it remains genuinely affordable, based on what people earn in their area, not just for now but for every future occupier.

Improving our homes

During this financial year, we invested £62.8 million in maintaining and improving our homes, moving beyond compliance to ensure our customers continue to live in safe, secure homes.

This included £15.6 million spent on responsive repairs and void maintenance with £29.9 million on planned maintenance and improvements. A snapshot of activity can be found below:

- £4 million on installing 843 new kitchens
- £1.77 million on installing 545 new bathrooms
- £4.2 million on 1,205 new heating installations
- £866,000 on 992 new external doors
- £3.78 million replacing 360 roofs including fascia and soffits and removal of some chimneys
- £2.77 million on the external decoration of 4,064 homes

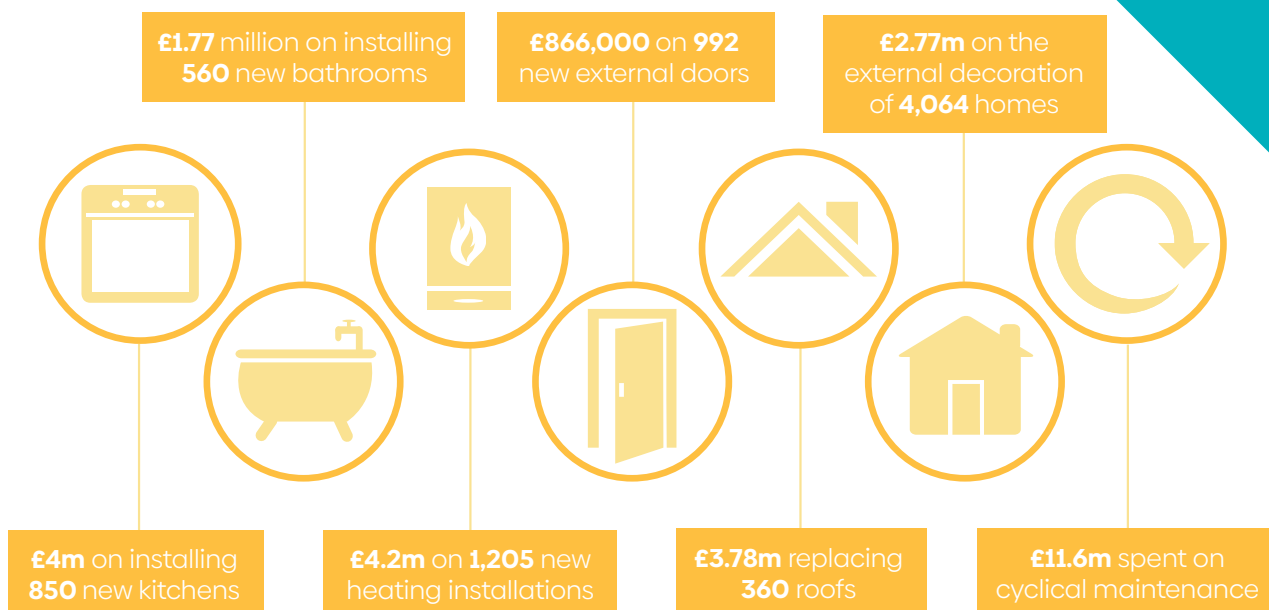
In 2019/20 we spent £112,168 on neighbourhood enhancements, which included things like installing scooter stores, bike racks and bin stores.

Looking ahead to 2020/21, we plan to keep investing in improving our 32,000 homes across the South of England, continuing our ongoing commitment to exceed our 2018/19 investment of £55 million in our homes and in our communities.

**£62.8
million**
invested in
our homes

£14.9 million on response repairs

£47.9 million on improving our homes, including:



Repairing our homes

99.70%
of gas servicing
was completed
and in date

85%

of our customers
found the repairs
process easy

80%

of repairs were
completed on first
visit

92%

of the **13,046**
emergency repair jobs
were completed on
time

86%

of the **94,046**
appointed repair jobs
were completed on
time

91%

of customers were
satisfied overall
with the repairs
service

Over the past year, we have improved our customer satisfaction rating when it comes to repairs across our homes. 85% of our customers found the repairs process easy, 90% were satisfied with their repair and 70% of customers were satisfied with the overall repairs service. We know that there is more we can do and we continue to work hard to improve our service through our customer focused action plan.

Whilst we make every effort to ensure our homes are regularly maintained we know that there will be occasions when you may need to report a repair either via the contact centre or by using our online portal MyAster, and when you do we are committed to making that process as easy and seamless as possible.

It isn't just things inside your home that we repair and maintain, we also look after the outside of our properties, the building and any fittings and any appliances we've put in.

We also carry out the repairs to the shared areas of blocks of flats. 80% of repairs were completed on first visit vs a target of 85%.

This year we completed 13,046 emergency repair jobs of which 92.24% were completed on time. Of the 94,046 appointed repair jobs we carried out, 86.32% were completed on time and 99.70% of gas servicing was completed within the annual service target date.

We are proud to say that one hundred per cent of our homes achieve the Government's 'Decent Homes Standard' and we are continuing to work towards every one of our homes receiving an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 'C' or above by 2025.

MyAster

In September 2019, following consultation and feedback from customers, we launched our MyAster portal, which gives you easy access to your account and to the services that we provide, through the portal you can:

- Check your account and make a payment
- Get help with benefits advice and put in place payment plans
- Log a standard repair and book an appointment at a time to suit you
- Tell us about a concern in your area
- Give us permission to share information with a friend or family member

Since its launch, 8,987 actions were logged through the portal with 8,440 of our customers registering to use the portal. MyAster received an 83% overall customer satisfaction rating with over 80% of customers finding it easy to use. Some of the feedback we received from users has been as follows:

"I always come into the office to pay my rent, however due to pandemic I decided to use the portal"

"I have a hearing problem so being able to use MyAster is great. It's clear and simple regarding what I need to do or go to. Very user friendly."

"So pleased to be able to access MyAster. It's been helpful to change details and keep an eye on my repairs and also to report repairs when I couldn't just ring."

"It's so much better than waiting on the phone as they can be very busy at times"

The MyAster portal is used by a variety of customers from tenants and leaseholders to garage owners of all ages from 18 to 90+ years. The highest users of the portal are those in the 30 to 45 age bracket, with females using the portal most.

Most customers used their smart phones to access the portal and 48% of actions were logged in non-working hours.

This suggests that the portal is helping those who are unable to get in touch during traditional working hours and can now progress actions when it's more convenient to them.

We are very proud of the launch of MyAster and pleased to see that it is proving to be a useful tool for our customers. Over the coming months we'll be reaching out to those of you who have not already registered to encourage and support you to use it to make your life that little bit easier.

Contact centre

In 2019/20, our contact centre handled 238,826 calls and 56,216 emails. Of all the calls that were handled by the contact centre last year, 63% of queries were resolved on the call, this is against a target of 70%.

We introduced a new suite of key performance indicators (KPIs) for the contact centre this year, designed to support improved customer service and launched our new customer relationship management system (CRM). This technology has been a fantastic opportunity for us to look at the services you contact us about most and to consider how we can improve these interactions. For example, we learnt that nearly 70% of our housing calls are related to rent. This information has helped us shape the MyAster customer portal to allow you the choice to self-serve and to access all the information about your rent and payments easily and quickly via a simple, secure online portal.

We also upgraded our Contact Centre telephony this year, which brought enhancements such as a call back function, so you no longer need to wait in a queue as we'll call you right back. We can now also provide the option for you to take part in a survey at the end of a call to let us know how we're doing.

Avoidable contact is another of our new measures which we have actioned as a direct result of your feedback. Last year, 37% of our customers had to call us more than once regarding a query. To address this, we reviewed our processes to improve the customer journey and to try and reduce the number of times you need to contact us about the same thing.

Investing in our communities, and in their future - The Aster Foundation

Through the Aster Foundation, we invest in the communities where we develop and own homes through a range of initiatives and services that support our customers now and in the future.

Social innovation, enterprise and collaboration is at the heart of the Aster Foundation and this year we've focused on how we can develop innovative and sustainable ways to drive change and create a legacy across our communities.

Our Financial Wellbeing service continues to support our customers to have a happy and healthy relationship with money. By helping our customers to access the right support and benefits available, our Financial Wellbeing team were able to access £737,989 of support for our customers.

Our Into Work team has helped 47 customers who have been unemployed for long periods of time or who have faced barriers, back into work. 98% of the those we supported into work have remained, with the majority able to transition from benefits and become financially independent.

Through our Digital College, 187 people accessed courses increasing their skills and confidence for future job opportunities. We were also able to supply 17 of our courses to the East Boro 'Work4You' project in Weymouth.

Mental health awareness and training has continued across our communities with over 500 people trained in mental wellness and resilience. In addition, just under 200 people, including colleagues and community partners, have benefited from our digital modules on self-care and resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic, including a popular mental wellbeing workshop for parents and children.

The Aster Foundation also supports Housing First to tackle homelessness and we have been able to provide homes to seven vulnerable people in Hampshire and Somerset with plans to extend the initiative across our regions in 2020.

Throughout the pandemic, volunteering has never been more important and many of our teams have been going above and beyond to help our customers and local communities. This year, we have dedicated an incredible 335.5 days to volunteering.

To address loneliness and isolation during lockdown we set up our Aster Connect volunteer befriending service with 99 customers now receiving weekly calls from our colleagues. A new partnership with Age UK and Re-engage will ensure this support continues ensuring every older customer who needs a friend at the end of the phone, has one.

To find out more about the work of the Foundation visit our website: www.aster.co.uk/foundation



Investing in our communities, and in their future - The Aster Foundation

Digital and financial inclusion

(continued)



In 2019, we renamed our Customer Support Service the Financial Wellbeing Team to clearly show the vision behind our work. Our dedicated team is on hand if you need support to help you to become financially independent, to pay your rent on time and to sustain your tenancy.

Our people are trained to offer welfare and benefit advice and have helped hundreds of customers to maximise their income and to claim the benefits they're entitled to. The team also assists with claims and appeal decisions on appropriate benefits as well as providing support on budgeting and accessing grants, foodbanks, and other vital financial support or services. Employment and digital skills also form part of this service, along with referrals to our Into Work service, debt advice and into other community support groups if we can't help.

During 2019/2020, we had 2,707 referrals by colleagues, local support groups and district councillors into our financial support service which resulted in the team helping 782 customers with successful benefit applications and appeals.

We have worked hard to build strong relationships with local food banks and reuse centres enabling us to quickly get food parcels, furniture and white goods to customers who need it the most. We helped 273 customers this year with referrals to the food bank which meant that they could continue to put food on the table when times were hard.

Over the year we held various weekly drop-in surgeries at our local offices, job centres and support groups to make our services more accessible. We focused on bridging the gap with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) helping to alleviate the impact of welfare reform on our customers, and allowing us to resolve complex issues more quickly.

Thanks to our team of highly skilled benefit experts, we also reviewed and provide advice on the new government initiatives launched during the pandemic to ensure that customers had access to the most up to date advice and understood which scheme could help them.

Throughout the pandemic we've seen a steady rise in the number of people needing to access local support groups, by working closely with these groups we are able to identify customers who might be struggling and get them the help they need.

Throughout 2020/21, we will continue to strengthen these working relationships, so our customers get the support they need to move towards financial independence.

We helped
customers to access
£737,989
of unclaimed
financial support

Welfare reform

Government reforms to the welfare and benefit system continued at a pace during 2019/20. Most new claimants now claim Universal Credit, as do many people who were previously on the old benefit system who have been switching to Universal Credit as their circumstances change.

Ensuring our customers understand the process and how it can work for them is vital, the transition to Universal Credit has had a significant impact on both our customers and us as a business. The big difference for us is that housing benefit for most, now no longer gets paid directly to us. As a result, we understand just how important it is to provide customers with the advice and support they need to make their journey onto Universal Credit as easy, successful and positive as possible.

As a long-standing member of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Landlords Strategy Group, we have continued to work closely with the DWP throughout the year. Attending several meetings and conferences to help shape the way Universal Credit is rolled out - ensuring it's as smooth as it can be for all involved.

For those customers claiming Universal Credit one of the big differences is that benefits are paid a month in arrears, meaning that some customers can end up a month in debt before their benefit is awarded.

By supporting customers to make best use of advance payments and helping set up agreements to pay their rent, we have helped our customers to reduce their arrears from an average of £363 to £331 during this financial year.

Customer voice

Customer voice is at the heart of everything we do. It's crucial we understand what's important to you and give you the opportunity to help improve our services, and influence the decisions we make about your home and the communities you live in.

Although we have some fantastic established customer groups already, we know there's more we can do to improve customer involvement. Which is why, to help us get it right, we sent a survey to every single one of our customers in the summer, asking for your ideas on how you'd like to get involved in shaping the services we provide.

We had over 4,000 responses to the survey and you told us that your priorities were around repairs and improvements to your home and neighbourhood, including the safety of your home and fire safety as well as sustainability. Using your feedback, we'll be working hard over the coming year and beyond to make positive changes in all of these areas.

In the meantime, as a direct result of customer consultation and learning from complaints 16 changes have been made to policies or the way in which services are delivered.

498 compliments were received from our customers and were fed back to the service area and colleagues involved.



Helped customers on Universal Credit to reduce rent arrears on average

**from £363
to £331**

6,280

customers
now claiming
Universal Credit

UC Universal
Credit

Our customer groups

Our involved Customer Groups have a strong voice in our business and help to shape the services we provide.

In January this year we held an open day for customers who wanted to be more involved in our work and we're delighted that 17 people joined us on the day, with two now part of one of our involved customer groups and eight invited to observe our formal groups.

We are always looking for more people to join our customer groups, if you're interested in finding out more please contact customervoice@aster.co.uk.

Customer and Community Network

Our Customer and Community Network (CCN) is a committee which forms part of our governance structure. The group is made up of our customers and senior executive and non-executive directors. The CCN has a central role to play in the key decisions we make, including scrutinising and challenging our performance, how we deliver our services to customers, the outcomes of our work, and importantly, because there are customers on the committee they bring the customers voice into our business at the highest level.

Part of the role of the CCN is to review and approve any policy that affects our customers. They consider new and revised policies in detail, have access to feedback from customer consultations to inform their debate, and make recommendations to adapt, amend or approve those policies.

Some examples of the CCN's work and customer facing policies they approved during the year include:

- Complaints policy
- Tenancy policy
- Customer Experience Statement
- Estate management policy
- Lettings policy
- Income recovery policy
- Fire safety management policy
- Leaseholder management policy
- Repairs & maintenance policy
- Recommended Customer Service, Aster Foundation and Asset Management Strategies to Board

16 changes were made to our services as a direct result of customer feedback.



We are committed to ensuring wider diversity in our involved customers groups to build a broader, more representative view of our customer base

Customer Scrutiny Panel

Our Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) provides a thorough and independent customer focussed assessment of our services and processes. This is a huge benefit and particularly important is that the CSP undertakes its reviews of our services from your point of view.

During 2019/20 the panel completed three reviews spending 347 hours in the process. The reviews carried out focused on:

- New builds
- Lettings
- Anti-social behaviour (this is currently still ongoing)

Customers' views were obtained during the process and a number of recommendations were made to the relevant business areas which included:

- Improvements to customer experience in relation to defects and home user guides explaining these in more detail
- Improved communication channels between development and operational teams during handover to improve the customer's experience

The CSP also focussed on maintaining and raising the profile of the group, both internally amongst our team and externally with our customers.



The Customer Scrutiny Panel spent **347** hours completing two scrutiny exercises - **lettings service** and **new build**

Customer Overview Group

The Customer Overview Group (COG) is a customer driven body that reviews and approves our customer facing policies and procedures.

Where necessary, the COG suggests changes to policies to ensure the customer always comes first. The group considers proposals for matters requiring our attention - from how electric cars get charged to how to deal with those unable to pay their rent.

During the last year, the COG focused on:

- Operational target setting for customer facing services
- Customer satisfaction survey data
- "Future of Customer Engagement" Survey and it's outcomes
- Updates on the work and outcomes of our Customer Scrutiny Panel
- Energy and Environmental Sustainability Strategy work
- Repairs and maintenance performance
- Approved our Customer Service strategy

All of the above have been reviewed and adapted so as to improve the service we provide to our customers.

The COG was also involved with refining the Aster Way, meeting with colleagues in our People and Transformation team to consider a set of cultural principles that underpin everything we do, as well as helping to improve the way we approach customer services in the contact centre. The group also tested our online portal MyAster to inform the user experience of the system from a customer's point of view.



The Customer Overview Group helped review key performance indicators, and The Aster Way, a set of cultural principles that underpins everything we do, tested MyAster, our online customer portal and approved a revised Customer Service strategy

Designated Complaints Panel

The Designated Complaints Panel (DCP) is registered with the Housing Ombudsman and consists of specially trained customers, tenants and leaseholders. The DCP acts independently and objectively reviewing complaints where a resolution hasn't been reached during the formal complaints process.

The DCP reviewed nine complaints during the year. The panel met with these customers to understand why they felt their complaint had not been resolved and discussed how a resolution could be reached. The DCP upheld two complaints, making recommendations to us which resulted in both complaints being resolved.

Following their reviews, the DCP also made recommendations to support improvements for service delivery. We have since incorporated a number of these into our processes.

Recommendations from the DCP included:

Following a complaint concerning service charges at an Independent Living Scheme the DCP recommended that customers signing up for Housing for Older People receive a full explanation of the Independent Living service and cost, so that they fully understand that this is a non-optout service for extra care/ sheltered housing. The panel also recommended that we provide a copy of the Independent Living leaflet at the time of sign-up and customers are directed to view the service charges breakdown summary provided as part of their tenancy agreement.

Following a complaint from a private owner the DCP established that incorrect charges for a sewerage charge connection and maintenance were being made. The DCP recommended that all similar properties where sewerage pumps are installed were reviewed to ensure this was not a reoccurring issue.

Customer satisfaction

Thank you to everyone who took the time to leave feedback this year. Your comments are vital to ensuring that we continue to provide the best possible service.

Over the last 12 months we are proud to have increased our overall customer satisfaction to 81% with 90% of our customers happy that their rent provides good value for money. 88% of you remain satisfied with your neighbourhood as a place to live and 81% are satisfied with the way we keep you informed about things that affect you.

Your feedback also identified areas for improvement, such as how we deal with repairs and maintenance and the way we support our communities. Satisfaction in these areas was 70% and 75% respectively and we're keen to focus on improving these levels year on year.



The Designated Complaints Panel reviewed **nine** complaints and upheld **two**

Handling complaints

Sometimes things go wrong and regrettably there may be times when you aren't completely happy with the service we provide. Learning from our mistakes plays an important part in helping us to improve our services - we reflect on every complaint we receive and consider how our services can be improved as a result of your feedback. Moving forward we will publish these learnings on our website so you can be confident that we are shaping our services based on your feedback.

To ensure complaints are handled well, changes have been made to our website to make it more accessible and easier to use. We continue to do our best to resolve any issues as quickly as possible. One way we achieve this is with our fast track system. This sees the specific team delivering the service contact the customer to try to resolve the issue directly. If it can't be resolved and the customer is unhappy, or if they wish to make a formal complaint, we aim to make this as straight forward as possible. From the start, we'll give you a clear timeline with an explanation of next steps and details of how you can escalate your complaint if you're still dissatisfied.

While a problem can't always be resolved immediately, we are committed to being honest about what can and can't be done and always aim to keep you regularly updated. After a formal complaint has been logged, a written response should be issued within ten working days. During 2019/20 we didn't respond within these timescales as well as we wanted and can do better to make sure you are kept better informed throughout the complaint process.

We're working hard on improving our performance and our communication to you by increasing in the size of the complaints team and carrying out a complete review of the complaints process and the information we provide.

This year we received and dealt with:



This year we received and dealt with:

- 530 formal complaints
- 788 fast track complaints
- 14 unresolved complaints were escalated and reviewed by a director
- Nine complaints were reviewed by the Designated Complaints Panel
- Four complaints which could not be resolved were investigated by the Housing Ombudsman

Our housing team saw a reduction in the number of formal complaints during the year 2019/20, with 138 complaints recorded compared to 182 in the previous year. The team also received a 36% decrease in service charge complaints (27) when compared to the 42 complaints logged in 2018/19. This was a direct result of the team reviewing services during 2018/19 which resulted in changes to the structure, processes and improved communication with our customers.

The number of formal complaints relating to the maintenance of properties increased in 2019/20 compared to the previous year. This was mainly due to the proactive changes on our website which made the complaints service more accessible for our customers, with 370 formal complaints recorded in 2019/20 compared to 298 in the previous year.

In contrast, it was great to see our teams receiving almost 500 compliments this year, our people work really hard to provide a good service and it means a lot when they receive praise for a job well done, so thank you to those of you who took the time to show your appreciation.



Tackling anti-social behaviour

It is important to us that you feel proud of your home and your neighbourhood. We always want you to feel safe and secure where you live.

We respond to every single report of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), putting you at the heart of our approach and working with other agencies where necessary to ensure that issues are resolved as quickly as possible.

We may not be able to provide all the answers, however, we work closely with all organisations who can help make sure you are fully supported. Our ASB team dealt with 642 anti-social behaviour cases in 2019/20, 486 of these were high priority and 97.36% of cases closed were resolved successfully.

During the pandemic we saw a spike in the number of anti-social cases reported to us and as a result we added extra resource into the team so that we could continue to provide a robust service during this time.



97%
of ASB cases closed
were resolved
successfully



642 ASB cases received
by our ASB team



486 were
high priority

Lettings

We have a range of affordable homes for rent across the areas we operate in which includes Devon and Cornwall, Dorset, Hampshire, Somerset and Wiltshire. The types of properties include family-sized houses, homes for single people and couples, and accommodation specifically for customers aged 55 and above.

Customers for our homes are selected by the local council, usually through a choice-based lettings scheme where they 'bid' for properties and we are pleased to say that 81% of new customers said they found it easy to move into their Aster home.

Despite the challenges of Covid-19 at the end of the financial year, our lettings performance continued to improve during 2019/20. In 2018/19, 1,677 homes were re-let in an average of 21.7 days and in 2019/20 we re-let 1,704 homes in an average of 18.2 days. All social housing properties were re-let in an average of 17.06 days.

The average time to re-let our properties (general needs and housing for older people) was 14.96 days. We benchmark ourselves against other housing associations using the HouseMark industry standard which lists an average re-let time of 18.66 days.

1,082 general needs homes were re-let in an average time of 11.58 days whilst 256 Housing for Older People homes were re-let in an average time of 27.7 days. In addition to this, 507 new homes were re-let in an average of 6.6 days.

Throughout the pandemic we were able to continue to show people around our homes by switching to virtual viewings, which meant that as soon as government restrictions around house moves were relaxed and we could progress their applications.

The amount of rent and service charges lost due to empty properties was 0.68% in 2019/20, against a benchmark of 0.67%.

We work hard to reduce the amount of time it takes us to re-let our homes so that it reduces the amount of time that new customers spend in unsuitable or temporary accommodation and speeds up the availability of good quality, safe affordable homes.

Lettings (continued)



81%
of new customers
found it easy to move
into their Aster home*

* due to Covid-19 restrictions
no data for Q4 was collected



27.71
days

Housing for older
people re-let time



0.68%

Rent loss due to
empty properties



14.69
days

Average time to re-let
(general needs and
housing for older
people properties)



17.06
days

Average time to re-let
(social housing
homes)



11.58
days

General needs
average re-let time

Collecting rent and other charges

We offer a range of support for our customers to pay their rent on time and in full. We also work with them to resolve any financial difficulties they may have.

We recognised that the pandemic presented several financial challenges for many of our customers. So, to help, we extended our Hardship Fund and provided vouchers for four major supermarkets, as well as utility top-ups to help those people who were in acute financial crisis.

We continued to have early and honest conversations with customers about how the virus was affecting their financial situation and agreed repayment plans based on their individual circumstance if it was needed.

We also signposted customers to our money advice tool for budget advice, sent out an electronic magazine produced by Universal Credit 'Quid's In' and updated our website with a raft of money advice, tips and support - including how to save money on things like energy costs.

In addition to continuing to signpost customers into our own Financial wellbeing team, making sure that they had the information they needed to access the benefits they are entitled to, including the government schemes created during this time. In one example we were able to secure an additional £1,000 a month in benefits using our Money Advice Tool.

Our arrears for current customers at the end of 2019/20 was 2.20%. According to our benchmarking indicator, which measures lots of data from landlords all over the country, the very best performing landlords had arrears of around 1.98%. We're pleased to be doing very well on this important measure.

Our former customer arrears at the end of 2019/20 was 1.32%. This places us as performing well when compared to other landlords with the average former customer arrears sitting at 1.38%.



2.2%

Current customer
arrears



1.32%

Former customer
arrears

Service charges

A service charge is a payment that you make to us to cover the cost of providing and maintaining services such as communal gas and electric, repairs, maintenance, improvements, insurance and management costs.

The amount you pay can vary depending on how much it has or will cost us to provide these services, and your individual charges will vary according to the services you receive.

Feedback from our customers has shown that 77% of you are satisfied that service charges provide value for money. This year we recovered £10,784,000 of income via service charges which equated to 87% of the total cost of us providing the services to you and next year we expect to be able to recover 90% of our costs.

We do our best to provide you with accurate service charge information and we are pleased to say that we are continuing to see a reduction in the number of changes we need to make to your service charge account year on year.

Our focus continues to be to improve the accuracy of charges and to make it even easier for you to understand what the charges are for.

£10,784,000

of income recovered
via our service charges
representing **87%**
of the cost of
delivering services

We made **5,018** changes
to charges (2.4%) on
account once rent letters
were issued affecting
2,349 properties (8.13%).

Your neighbourhood

We're delighted that 88% of our customers are satisfied with their neighbourhood – where you live plays such an important part in your wellbeing.

As a direct result of the feedback from our customer groups we stopped issuing fixed term tenancies in 2019 and changed 6,000 tenancies over to assured tenancies this year, giving people the security they need to be able to establish roots and to invest in their homes and communities.

The health and safety of our customers is our top priority and we won't compromise on this. In 2019/20 we invested £9.2 million on a range of health and fire safety measures.

We have also increased the frequency of neighbourhood inspections and introduced a zero tolerance of items placed in communal hallways or communal land. Thank you to everyone who has helped this year to ensure our neighbourhoods are safe places to live. Your support is vitally important to keep everyone safe and well.

During 2019/20, our Neighbourhood team processed 278 Mutual Exchange applications. This scheme allows customers to exchange homes, helping themselves to resolve significant housing issues affecting their lives. The team works closely with these customers to support successful moves.

We spent £112,168 on neighbourhood enhancement projects this year - providing supplies for community gardening, installing patio areas and benches, erecting fencing to create safe spaces for children to play, and enabling car parking close to homes. We are pleased to be making these improvements for our customers to enjoy.

We took the decision to stop issuing fixed term tenancies to customers and changed **6,000** tenancies to assured tenancies

Processed **278**
Mutual Exchange
applications

Sustainability

With the environment and climate change rightly at the top of the Government's agenda, we are committed to playing our role in minimising the impact our activities have on the environment.

Over the past 12 months we have taken steps to secure renewable electricity supplies for sites under our corporate contract, accounting for over 99% of consumption, replaced 82 older fleet vehicles with new, more efficient models and disposed of an over-sized office building in Wells and replaced it with smaller, more efficient spaces in the area.

This year also saw us continue to work towards every one of our homes receiving an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 'C' or above by 2025 and, through the Warm Homes Fund, reduced the impact of fuel poverty for 81% of customers involved in the scheme.

During the coming year we will look to define our medium- and long-term carbon emissions reduction targets and continue at pace with our energy strategy. We recognise that we, along with all organisations, have a huge responsibility to ensure we create a sustainable legacy for generations to come.

Value for money

We strive to achieve real value for money for our customers, our lenders and our communities.

Value for Money (VFM) has always formed a central part of our culture. Our approach balances the needs of our customers with our social value and against future housing need.

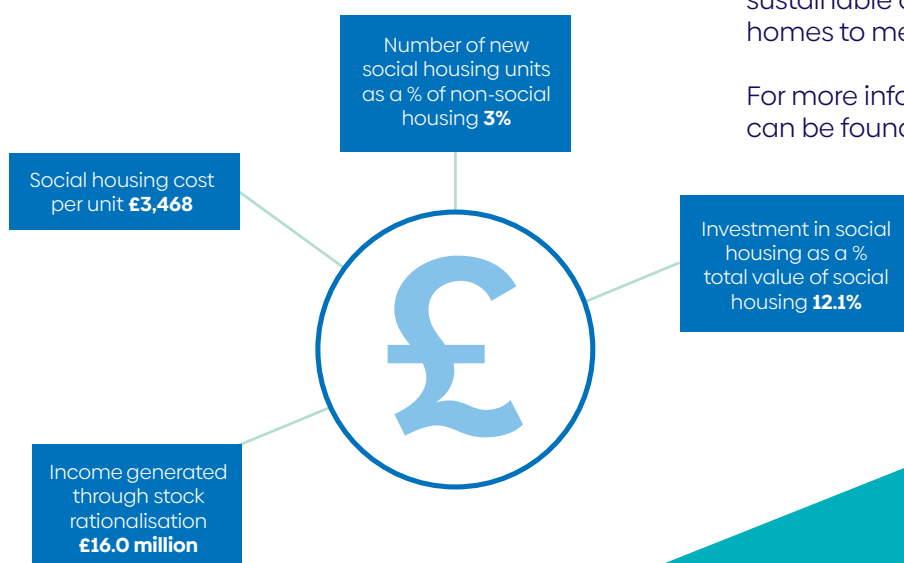
We look to strike the right balance between investment and value for money for our customers. The number of new social housing units within our portfolio this year as a percentage of non-social housing was 3% (2019: 3.5%) and the investment in social housing as a percentage of the total value of our social housing portfolio was 12.1% (2019: 11.8%). The cost of social housing per unit stood at £3,468 (2019: £3,391).

Our aim is to provide safe, well maintained homes supported by long term investment by making best use of our resources that secure social or economic value. Through stock rationalisation this year we generated income of £16.0 million which can be invested into improving the services we offer and in building more new homes. We will always ensure that local needs are considered and balanced with the opportunities for reinvestment in existing homes and neighbourhoods.

Through the provision of 955 affordable homes this year, our dedicated teams worked with our supply chain to ensure we maximise value for our customers without compromising on quality.

Our Community Land Trust (CLT) partnerships have supported our social value by helping to build sustainable communities by providing affordable homes to meet local need.

For more information the full Value For Money report can be found in our annual report on our website.





Tell us **what you think**

If you want to get involved
in helping us to shape our services
then email **customervoice@aster.co.uk**
or visit **www.aster.co.uk**.



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