



AFFORDABLE HOUSING AWARDS

Hello and welcome to this special section of *Inside Housing* devoted to the very best of UK housing.

Over the course of the next 26 pages, we reveal details about the winners of this year's Affordable Housing Awards – that's organisations and teams delivering exceptional services in areas such as reducing homelessness, providing much-needed supported housing and social homes.

Obviously, the awards took place at a time when major regulatory change is under way in England – and the focus across the UK is on involving tenants and residents more in decision-making. We've looked to reflect that with the awards this year, consulting with tenants and residents on the criteria and categories, and with many of those residents taking part in the judging process, too.

The other main context for the awards this year is political. This supplement publishes as the parties are properly starting to gear up for next year's general election. One of the important things the awards does is flag the crucial role the sector plays in communities across the UK – and why the work they do needs

continued support and backing from government.

I'm writing these words just 24 hours after new homelessness figures revealed a jump (again) in the number of children living in temporary accommodation – nearly 140,000 kids are doing just that as you read these words.

For that reason, *Inside Housing* will continue its Build Social campaign, calling on political parties to commit to investment in substantial numbers of new homes for social rent in their manifestos for the next election.

But it is so important that the sector continues to share the stories about the amazing and important work it is doing, too (as well as continuing to address the problems). For that reason, the work you will see in the following pages is worth shouting about and learning from.

Thanks to our sponsors and judges for their time and support in making the Affordable Housing Awards such a success this year. And congratulations to our winners. Here are their stories.

Martin Hilditch, editor, Inside Housing

Judges

Rob Anderson

Head of implementation and policy, Centre for Homelessness Impact

Peter Apps

Contributing editor, *Inside Housing*

Samia Badani

Chief executive, Supporting People and Community Empowerment (Space), and chair, Bramley House Tenants and Residents Association

Caroline Baker

Managing partner for the North West, Cushman and Wakefield

Michelle Baker

Board member, Southdown

Monica Barnes

Resident ambassador, Southern Housing

Yaw Boateng

Chair, Croydon Council Tenant and Leaseholder Panel, and vice-chair, Stop Social Housing Stigma

Fiona Brown

Treasurer, Stop Social Housing Stigma

Leslie Channon

Public relations and tenant engagement consultant, Taroe Trust

Eileen Cotterill

Head of transformation, Livin Housing

Jim Dennison

Chief executive, Simon Community Northern Ireland

Victoria Dingle

Vice-chair, Soha Housing

Lisa Dunbar

Tenant, Shal Housing

Tracy Fallows

Delayed transfers of care (mental health) intervention officer, Bolton at Home

Chloe Fletcher

Policy director, National Federation of ALMOs

Ian Fletcher

Director of policy, British Property Federation

Gary Fulford

Group chief executive, WHG

Jennifer Hawthorne

Director of housing services, Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Julie Haydon

Director of corporate services, Wolverhampton Homes

Martin Hilditch

Group editor, *Inside Housing*

Lorri Holding

Head of independent living programme, Centrepoint

Shahi Islam

Assistant director for affordable housing grants, Homes England

John Kerr

Vice-chair, Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers

Mushtaq Khan

Chief executive, Housing Diversity Network

Anne McLoughlin

Interim chief executive, First Choice Homes Oldham

Steve Mackenzie

Climate change champion, Social Housing Tenants' Climate Jury

Bruce Moore

Chief executive, Housing 21

Gary Moreton

Chair, WHG

Hakeem Osinaike

Director of housing, London Borough of Brent

Jane Ryland

Non-executive resident director, Origin Housing

Isaac Samuels

Director, Curators of Change

Chris Smith

Deputy chief executive, Thirteen Housing Group

Rhea Stevens

Head of policy and external affairs, Community Housing Cymru

Dan Taylor

Head of development operations, Essex Housing

Mark Washer

Chief executive, Sovereign Network Group

Phil Watson

Chair, Calico Group

Jo Wilkinson

Chief officer for housing and property, Lancaster City Council

Jason Wroe

Chief executive, Newydd Housing Association

About

The Affordable Housing Awards are a platform to showcase and spread learning across the social housing sector. They are about identifying the social landlords, charities and partners that work with their communities to deliver great outcomes for residents.

Judged by tenants and experts from individual fields, these awards celebrate success and help other landlords learn from it and replicate it.

We have also worked in partnership with More Than Homes to support its work with communities in the UK.



Contractor of the year *Repairs team, Lewisham Homes*



Lewisham Homes' repairs improvement plan has turned a struggling service around

A focus on outcomes for customers has driven up both efficiency and customer satisfaction scores

The team has also made significant improvements to its financial performance

In 2022, Lewisham Homes launched its repairs improvement plan, designed mainly by frontline and operational staff.

This was the start of a huge culture shift away from a 'them and us' repairs service to a people-first, 'faces not cases' ethos, with a focus on tangible outcomes for customers.

The success of this approach can be seen in the repairs service's increase in productivity. The service went from completing 2.1 jobs on average per day, to 4.6 jobs – and it also achieved a 7% rise in customer satisfaction scores.

The judges said:

“This ALMO's repairs improvement plan demonstrated what can be achieved when frontline staff are put in the driving seat. Their work has turned around a struggling service”

Lewisham Homes overhauled its IT systems to make life easier for its residents. In the past year, it launched Localz, which combines real-time location tracking with two-way customer communication. Residents can see where operatives are and their estimated time of arrival, while a customer feedback element allows for real-time identification of issues after an appointment.

Lewisham Homes also focused on improving its repairs service's finances, reducing its deficit by around £2.5m and generating £19m of income against a budgeted forecast of £14m.

This category was judged by:
Martin Hilditch, group editor, *Inside Housing*
Chris Smith, deputy chief executive, Thirteen Housing Group

Highly commended
John Southworth

Home builder of the year – housing association/local authority

Housing delivery team, Haringey Council



Haringey Council is building its first council homes in a generation and delivering a £1bn programme

The local authority is building 3,000 new council houses, primarily on council-owned land

With more than 12,500 households on the local waiting list, Haringey has prioritised family homes

Haringey has pledged to build 3,000 new council homes over a decade, primarily on council-owned land. It has already completed nearly 200 high-quality new homes, with more than 2,000 more under way on 39 sites.

As well as brownfield land, Haringey is repurposing disused buildings, such as a derelict shop on Finsbury Road that has been transformed into a three-bedroom family home. To build its first council homes in a generation as well as deliver a £1bn programme, Haringey secured £327m from the Greater London Authority and £10.6m of Brownfield Land Release Funding.

The programme is needs-led. More than 12,500 households are on the local waiting list, including many families with young children living in overcrowded conditions. This is why Haringey has prioritised family homes: more than one-third of the 272 council homes being built at its Ashley Road Depot site will have three or more bedrooms.

The programme also aims to build suitably adapted homes for every Band A tenant with critical support needs, while 20% of houses throughout the entire building programme will be wheelchair accessible.

This category was judged by:
Shahi Islam, assistant director of affordable housing grants, Homes England
Dan Taylor, head of development operations, Essex Housing

Highly commended
Orbit Homes

The judges said:

“We were impressed by the approach to resident engagement and sustainability, as well as the steps the team is taking to ensure their workforce represents the community they serve”

Home builder of the year – independent *Riverbank View, Keepmoat and Salford City Council*



Riverbank View transformed a run-down corner of Greater Manchester into a thriving new community

The 425-home scheme includes 85 affordable homes and two hectares of new green space

It delivered plenty of social value, from apprenticeships to a focus on local labour and supply chains

Riverbank View, on the banks of the River Irwell in Charlestown, near Salford, used to be a hotspot for anti-social behaviour, with run-down, empty shops. Today, it is a 425-home development, 85 of which will be affordable (21 for social rent, 39 for affordable rent and 25 for shared ownership).

To date, 418 homes have been completed, transforming not only the environment of the neighbourhood, but the perceptions of local people. The development has retained economically active residents who may otherwise have left the city, and attracted economically active inward migrants and

professionals to a once run-down neighbourhood a short bus ride from the city centre. New community facilities have been built and existing ones refurbished.

The scheme has also been a boon for the wider community, as Keepmoat prioritised social value. It delivered 65 apprenticeships and traineeships, drew 85% of the workforce from the Greater Manchester area and ensured 71% of the build spend went to local businesses. It also provided 186 weeks of work experience to local people and added two hectares of green space, including play areas and an outdoor gym.

This category was judged by:

Shahi Islam, assistant director of affordable housing grants, Homes England
Dan Taylor, head of development operations, Essex Housing

The judges said:

“This entry demonstrated the impact of the Riverbank View project on the local community – with the emphasis on social value, partnership working and community engagement”

Innovator of the year – housing association/local authority ***Open Market Purchase Scheme, North Lanarkshire Council***



This initiative buys properties on the open market to meet acute housing need in specific areas

In the five years to April 2023, the council acquired 630 properties through this scheme

The pace is picking up, with around 100 new purchases expected this year

North Lanarkshire Council's Open Market Purchase Scheme (OMPS) involves purchasing privately owned properties on the open market, addressing acute housing need in specific areas.

The scheme has experienced significant success. Between April 2018 and April 2023, the council acquired 630 properties with support from the Scottish government. The OMPS has proven transformative, not only boosting housing supply, but also playing a crucial role in the acquisition of properties in mixed-tenure blocks. By acquiring properties on the open market, the council can

undertake repairs and investment works often compromised by private owners.

The scheme's positive impact extends to regeneration efforts, revitalising areas plagued by property blight and instilling confidence in the local property market. The OMPS has already brought 352 empty properties back into use. It set a target of acquiring 75 more properties over 2023-24, but due to overwhelming demand for the scheme this year, it is expected that around 100 homes will be purchased. The OMPS has also attracted interest from other local authorities keen to replicate its success.

This category was judged by:

Caroline Baker, managing partner for the North West, Cushman and Wakefield
Hakeem Osinaike, director of housing, London Borough of Brent

The judges said:

“This is a timely innovation, given the homelessness issues being experienced by local authorities across the country, with the capacity to also address other social and financial issues”

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Innovator of the year – independent ***John Southworth***



Blackrock Street in Manchester includes two homes which are full net zero carbon

Using an offsite modern method of construction, it was delivered six weeks ahead of schedule

The UK Green Building Council recognised this scheme of 22 houses as an exemplar

Over the past five years, family-owned house builder John Southworth focused on advancing construction techniques with the aim of building affordable, net zero homes. This paved the way for Blackrock Street in Manchester: 22 social rent homes that have been built to low-carbon standards, including two which are full net zero carbon.

As the first such development, there was no clear path on how to construct these homes, and there was a reluctance within the supply chain to commit to the project. John Southworth worked with its partners to devalue the risk and took a balanced

approach of fabric-first improvements, carbon-reducing technology and the use of cost-efficient, high-performing and sustainable materials. As a Passivhaus-registered contractor, the company managed every aspect of the build. By selecting an offsite modern method of construction for the main structure, it delivered the scheme six weeks ahead of schedule.

Blackrock Street has been recognised as an exemplar by the UK Green Building Council. John Southworth has engaged with local authorities, developers and even direct competitors to share what it has learned.

This category was judged by:

Eileen Cotterill, transformation manager, Livin Housing

Jane Ryland, non-executive resident director, Origin Housing

Highly commended
Zed Pods

The judges said:

“By pooling expertise from within its own ranks, this organisation has pioneered fresh ideas to meet the challenges the building sector is facing”

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Professional services partner of the year

Voicescape



Voicescape develops technology-driven communication products for social landlords

Its AI-powered Caseload Manager makes intelligent predictions about individual arrears cases

It reduced Thirteen's number of cases requiring manual intervention by 65%

Voicescape creates communications solutions that help social landlords and local authorities drive operational efficiencies and service improvements. The past year has been transformational. It now supports more than 70 housing providers and local authorities, enabling them to connect with communities at scale across critical touch points, including rent collection, customer-satisfaction feedback and gas and safety checks, and to generate income which can be reinvested.

Voicescape's Caseload Manager, developed with housing association Thirteen, assesses

a range of long and short-term risk factors to make intelligent predictions about individual cases for social landlords. Harnessing AI, machine learning and Voicescape's data science and behavioural insight expertise, it reviews resident behaviours and risks before automating every stage of rent arrears management. It delivers the right message, at the right time, using the right contact method, freeing-up human resources.

Since Thirteen deployed it, it has reduced the number of cases requiring manual intervention by 65%, and delivered an arrears collection rate 16% above target.

This category was judged by:
Martin Hilditch, group editor, *Inside Housing*
Gary Moreton, chair, WHG

Highly commended
Shakespeare Martineau

The judges said:

"A strong example of collaborating with tenants and customers to drive changes in their products. Their approach led to better outcomes for customers"

Campaign of the year

Homelessness in the Countryside: A Hidden Crisis, and the launch of the Rural Homelessness Counts Coalition, English Rural Housing Association



This campaign aimed to challenge misconceptions around the issue of rural homelessness

Its research generated a new evidence base and a report that gained national media attention

A coalition of 20 organisations committed to keeping this issue on the national agenda was created

Rural homelessness is too often overlooked. The primary objective of this campaign in England was to shed light on the issue, and to challenge misconceptions and stimulate policy and practice changes. Its aims included conducting comprehensive research into rural homelessness, raising awareness of the issue among the public, policymakers and relevant organisations, and then to establish a coalition to continue the work initiated by the campaign.

The research exceeded its objectives. It provided a robust evidence base, revealing alarming statistics, such as a 24% rise in

rough sleeping in rural areas in a year. The findings were encapsulated in the *Homelessness in the Countryside: A Hidden Crisis* report.

For the first time, rural homelessness has become a national issue. The campaign secured broad media coverage on BBC News and 30 other sources, including Sky, ITV, *The Independent* and *The Yorkshire Post*. A powerful social media campaign achieved nearly four million impressions. The campaign's success was amplified by the formation of the Rural Homelessness Counts Coalition, an alliance of 20 organisations.

This category was judged by:
Mushtaq Khan, chief executive, Housing Diversity Network
Mark Washer, chief executive, Sovereign Network Group

Highly commended
Telling the story of All In, Eastlight Community Homes

The judges said:

“This campaign was impressively thought through, first concentrating on rough sleeping in rural areas, then moving on to the general problem of homelessness in the countryside”

Resident employment and training award *Livin Futures, Livin Housing*



This highly successful employability programme now has a 13-year track record

Livin Futures has helped more than 2,700 residents into employment over that time

It is improving lives, fostering more sustainable tenancies and strengthening communities

County Durham-based Livin Housing launched its employability programme, Livin Futures, in 2010 to support residents to improve their lives, sustain their homes and tenancies, and create successful, sustainable communities. The programme is known for its high-quality employability support and its successful track record. More than 2,700 residents have been supported into employment over the past 13 years.

Livin Futures has a dedicated employability team with over 40 years' collective experience in delivering work and training support. The team keeps in touch with tenants

and residents, spots challenges and opportunities, and tailors its programmes to meet the needs of the local labour market.

It has 14 programmes on the go, from apprenticeships to start-up mentoring, and takes a personal approach in each case, to understand and negotiate any barriers that are holding up people's progress.

This initiative also supports sustainable tenancies: in the six months following employment after a Livin Futures intervention, participants' rent arrears fell by 33.5% on average.

This category was judged by:

Monica Barnes, resident ambassador, Southern Housing

Gary Fulford, group chief executive, WHG

Highly commended

Working Roots, North Tyneside Council

The judges said:

“This was the stand-out entry thanks to the longevity of the project, which has now been running for 13 years, and the number of people it has benefited over the past 12 months”

Homelessness project of the year

Bromley homeless support and health project, Bromley Homeless



The Bromley Homeless health hub addresses the barriers homeless people face in accessing healthcare

It offers on-site services, from vaccinations and mental health support, to medical consultations

This facility is the first of its kind in Bromley and has already made a real impact on the people it serves

Homeless people often face significant barriers, such as financial constraints or a lack of transportation, when it comes to accessing healthcare. The Bromley Homeless charity created a dedicated health hub that caters to the needs of this population.

The hub offers a safe and convenient space where services can be accessed, including medical consultations, vaccinations and mental health support, putting an end to the gatekeeping homeless people experience.

The hub offers an integrated approach to healthcare by providing a nurse practitioner.

This means homeless individuals can receive primary care services, including physical exams, diagnosis and treatment for common illnesses, right at the hub. This level of integrated healthcare helps ensure that users receive the medical attention they require in a timely and comprehensive manner.

Homeless people often also face mental health and substance abuse challenges. The nurse practitioner can offer screenings, addiction counselling and referrals to specialised services. This holistic approach to healthcare for homeless individuals is the first facility of its kind in the borough.

This category was judged by:
Rob Anderson, head of implementation and policy, Centre for Homelessness Impact
Lorri Holding, head of independent living programme, Centrepoint

Highly commended
Pre-tenancy homelessness prevention,
Your Own Place

The judges said:

“This smaller service showcases excellent partnership working, a strong commitment to using evidence and data to improve outcomes, and demonstrated real impact”

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The neighbourhood transformation award

All In, Eastlight Community Homes



This innovative programme paid 20 residents a year's salary to develop local ways to tackle social issues

Four programmes were created, covering money, women's health, well-being and social isolation

University researchers found this scheme delivered over £6 of social value for every £1 of investment

In June 2022, 20 Essex residents were given a full-time salary so they could dedicate a year of their lives to one goal: creating a bold solution to tackle a major social issue. All In, the UK's first full-time community incubator, was created by Eastlight Community Homes to empower residents, so they could introduce the changes they knew were needed in their communities.

Eastlight recruited a diverse group of residents, many with personal experience of the social issues they were taking on. Offering a full-time national median salary meant some could return to work or leave

zero-hours roles to take part. Although most had no previous experience of this type of work, everyone completed the programme.

Eastlight partnered with the University of Essex, which found the programme's social return on investment was £6.26 for every £1 invested. It also found the programme had a transformative impact on its 20 participants, whose work with thousands of residents strengthened communities and delivered four programmes – including a financial advice service and community-led mental health support – which tackled the biggest local social challenges.

This category was judged by:

Julie Haydon, director of corporate services, Wolverhampton Homes

Jason Wroe, chief executive, Newydd Housing Association

Highly commended

Riverbank View, Keepmoat and Salford City Council

The judges said:

“Eastlight’s All-In project is led by tenants and residents; it is a really brave, radical and innovative project that would have easily been dismissed by less forward-thinking organisations”

Best older people's landlord

Alpha Living



Alpha is a 960-home specialist older people's housing provider based in the North of England

It has engaged in an extensive programme of listening to residents and acting on feedback

Alpha's residents have given the quality of their homes an average satisfaction score of 84%

Alpha Living is a specialist provider of housing and services for older people, with 960 apartments in 11 local authorities across the North. Alpha offers residents a place of their own to live, with the added security and company of a dedicated team of development managers and housekeepers, as well as care staff in its extra-care schemes.

Residents are listened to through formal consultation processes such as Love Where You Live roadshows, regular surveys and individual feedback. The most recent residents' satisfaction survey showed that, for 97%, the quality of their home was the

most important thing. In response, Alpha replaced traditional bedsits with modern apartments, improved the kerb appeal of its properties and redesigned communal areas to make them bright and welcoming.

It also invested in making homes more user-friendly, creating level-access showers and bathrooms, and undertaking 'invisible creations' – adaptations that don't look like mobility aids. Where possible, homes have been future-proofed by widening doorways to facilitate wheelchairs. Residents give the quality of their homes an average satisfaction score of 84%.

This category was judged by:
Peter Apps, contributing editor,
Inside Housing
Phil Watson, chair, Calico Group

Highly commended
Sutton Housing Society

The judges said:

“Alpha's values do not just exist on paper, but clearly sit at the heart of the way they serve their residents, providing the best possible environment for people to grow older in”

Best supported housing landlord *Southdown*



This support service is also a supported housing provider with 515 tenants and shared owners

Southdown supports more than 10,000 people in Sussex each year, across 63 services

Of its residents, 97% agreed with the statement, “my landlord treats me fairly and with respect”

Southdown's mission is to provide exceptional community support services that enable people to live well. Established in 1972, it supports more than 10,000 people in Sussex each year across 63 services.

As well as providing learning disability, mental health and homelessness prevention support, Southdown is a supported housing landlord for 515 tenants and shared owners. As a small provider, Southdown and its tenants enjoy a close and understanding relationship. This was reflected in its 2023 annual survey, in which Southdown scored comfortably above the sector average in

every category, with 97% of residents saying they were satisfied with the repairs service and the safety of their homes, while 97% also agreed with the statement, “my landlord treats me fairly and with respect”.

In the words of Annabel, a Southdown tenant: “I feel reassured that safety is a priority. For people with complex needs, we need to feel safe and secure in our environment to build up confidence. They're easy to contact. Because of that close connection and communication, you feel valued as a person, and not just somebody with a disability and a problem.”

This category was judged by:

Lisa Dunbar, tenant, Shal Housing
Tracy Fallows, delayed transfers of care (mental health) intervention officer, Bolton at Home

Ian Fletcher, director of policy, British Property Federation

Highly commended
Choice Housing
North Devon Homes

The judges said:

“We were impressed by their drive and passion. This is great partnership working that is having a positive influence on their communities and customers”

Recruitment or retention campaign of the year

Recruitment campaign, Lincolnshire Housing Partnership



Last year, Lincolnshire Housing Partnership decided to rethink the way it recruited new staff

Its approach cut agency hires from 55% to 8%, and increased job board hires from 17% to 38%

The campaign saved more than £350,000, which can be invested back into housing stock

In 2022, Lincolnshire Housing Partnership (LHP) moved to an in-house recruitment model. LHP was recruiting more than half of its positions through agencies, at a cost of £550,000; fewer than one in four was recruited internally.

LHP formed a three-person talent team. After months of research, the team reshaped its recruitment process by putting the candidate front and centre. This included a commitment to contact candidates by phone (LHP's research had found that most agencies use text or email); asking candidates for their most convenient interview times; and

ensuring candidates had all the information they needed to prepare for their interview.

The team worked hard to eliminate unconscious bias, and focused on recruiting school and college leavers. LHP established an internal apprenticeship scheme as well.

One year later, the number of employees recruited through agencies had fallen from 55% to just 8%; the number hired via job boards or internally rose from 17% to 38% and 22% to 28% respectively, while word-of-mouth recruitment accounted for 26%, up from 8%. This has saved LHP £350,000.

This category was judged by:
Martin Hilditch, group editor, *Inside Housing*
Bruce Moore, chief executive, Housing 21

Highly commended
Succeed at Eastlight, Eastlight Community Homes

The judges said:

“Personal contact with all candidates, whether successful or not, demonstrated the values of the company, while savings generated by in-house delivery boosted frontline services”

Excellence in community-led decision making *Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel and Tenant Charter, Wokingham Borough Council*



The panel provides co-production between tenants, the council and external partners

Established about 20 years ago, it gives tenants a voice in all areas of the service their landlord provides

An inspiring example of how to enable and unlock strong community-led decision-making

The Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel was established at Wokingham Borough Council in the early 2000s. It ensures tenants have a voice in the service their landlord provides, and that they can scrutinise these services and work together to identify, develop and implement improvements. The panel provides co-regulation, co-creation and co-production between tenants, the council and external partners.

Since the pandemic, the panel has consulted on and implemented a number of projects and initiatives, including the Tenant Charter update in 2022. The charter was created in

2019 when tenant volunteers and the panel started discussing ways of improving services to residents in the borough.

Tenant volunteers worked with an external consultant to create the original charter, but it soon required updating, due to changes taking place in the housing sector. The updated charter was presented to the council in October 2022, and it was voted in unanimously. This would have not been possible without the partnership working and non-political engagement the panel provides, which enables it to put the tenant's voice at the heart of decision-making.

This category was judged by:

Samia Badani, chief executive, Supporting People and Community Empowerment (Space), and chair, Bramley House Tenants and Residents Association

Jim Dennison, chief executive, Simon Community Northern Ireland

The judges said:

“Excellent community-led decision-making: meaningful involvement from tenants; commitment from the council; partnership working; and lasting benefits for local people”

Financial inclusion initiative of the year *Tenant Financial Support Fund, Choice Housing*



Choice Housing is making a real difference amid Northern Ireland's housing and cost of living crises

It delivers vital support services, focusing on financial management and sustaining tenancies

Demand for this successful service rose from 508 requests in 2020-21, to 973 in 2022-23

With more than 45,000 people requiring housing assistance in Northern Ireland, there is a need for sustainable housing that offers tenants independent living along with the provision of social and financial support. Food and energy bills are surging, fuelling concerns that struggling families face a choice between eating and heating.

Choice has delivered vital support services with a focus on financial management and sustainable tenancies. Pre-intervention work ensures Choice contacts every new tenant, offering benefit and budgeting advice to aid tenancy sustainability.

Choice is acutely aware of the pitfalls of welfare reform and has developed bespoke mandatory training, with Advice NI, for all housing management staff.

Choice has also developed a household budget planner for all tenants. Its financial inclusion team seeks out tenants who are struggling. Understanding that speaking about financial matters can be difficult, all tenants are offered the opportunity to speak face to face in a professional, confidential location. The success of this service is reflected by its rise in demand – from 508 requests in 2020-21, to 973 in 2022-23.

This category was judged by:
Isaac Samuels, director, Curators of Change
Rhea Stevens, head of policy and external affairs, Community Housing Cymru

**Highly commended
Community Housing**

The judges said:

“We were blown away by Choice’s comprehensive and inclusive activity to help tenants. Their determination to reach as many people as possible, and at pace, is inspirational”

Partnership of the year – delivering for communities *Blackpool Coastal Housing and LeftCoast*



This partnership has been increasing participation in the arts in Blackpool for 10 years

It has just completed its most ambitious project: a laundrette/ library called Wash Your Words

It provides a space for learning new skills and crafts, while meeting a basic need for many local families

In 2013, Blackpool Coastal Housing was instrumental in creating LeftCoast to increase participation in the arts in some of the most deprived areas of the UK. With funding from the Arts Council England, Blackpool Coastal Housing was pivotal in the arts organisation's success. It has provided pro bono business support, a direct route to tenant and resident communities and accommodation for artist-in-residency projects.

The LeftCoast and Blackpool Coastal Housing partnership has delivered its most ambitious project to date: Wash Your Words, a community-built laundrette-cum-library.

The judges said:

“It’s fantastic to see how this type of innovation continues to be funded to offer opportunities to some of the country’s most deprived and in-need communities”

Over the past year, a disused former housing office on Langdale Parade, Mereside, has been transformed into a laundry room/library/ social hub, hosting weekly workshops for residents to learn new crafts, such as sewing.

Wash your Words was branded, designed and built by the community and local partners. Working with architects from the University of Central Lancashire, the space has been designed to be functional and friendly. The free laundry facilities meet a basic need for many families on the estate as they become members. They help with the upkeep of the space and the cleanliness of the machines.

This category was judged by:

Fiona Brown, treasurer, Stop Social Housing Stigma

Jo Wilkinson, chief officer for housing and property, Lancaster City Council

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Partnership of the year – development

Lar Housing Trust and Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership



Lar Housing Trust was founded to address Scotland's shortage of affordable rented housing

With Edinburgh Health and Social Care, it builds developments for tenants with specific needs

Projects provide safe homes tailored around the bespoke needs of vulnerable tenants

Lar Housing Trust was founded in 2015 to address the lack of affordable homes to rent in Scotland. It was set up to provide mid-market rental homes to people who could neither afford private rents nor qualify for social housing – a growing demographic.

Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership serves adults and older people in the community and delivers homelessness, mental health and disability services as well.

These organisations have joined forces to deliver two housing developments for people with specialist housing needs.

The developments are small in number, but have a massive societal impact, providing safe and high-quality homes designed around the bespoke needs of prospective tenants.

The first scheme restored a derelict property in Niddrie; some of its current tenants had spent years in hospital for want of specialist accommodation. Its success informed the partnership's latest development at Ford's Road in the west end of Edinburgh. The nine flats have been designed to help tenants live comfortably and safely, and to take account of their sensory support needs.

This category was judged by:

Michelle Baker, board member, Southdown
John Kerr, co-chair, Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers

The judges said:

“What was particularly impressive was the dedication to make a real difference to the lives of the tenants, not solely by providing somewhere to live, but by enhancing their lives”

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Partnership of the year – zero carbon

Lune Walk, South Lakes Housing, Lune Valley Community Land Trust and Lancaster City Council



This three-way collaboration has redeveloped a brownfield site with 20 affordable Passivhaus homes

The 13 affordable rent and seven shared ownership homes are earmarked for local people

The partnership hinged on aligned values, diverse skills and a shared commitment to project success

In 2018, Lune Valley Community Land Trust drew up an ambitious plan to redevelop a brownfield site for 20 community-led homes in the rural village of Halton in Lancashire, with a requirement that all homes be built to Passivhaus standard.

The trust approached Lancaster City Council, as the scheme aligned with its pledge to be carbon neutral by 2030. The council awarded the project funding for a feasibility study and pre-development work. Once the study was done, the trust secured an option agreement on the land and set out to find a social landlord partner to deliver the scheme.

The judges said:

“A fantastic example of a council and a housing association playing their parts to deliver on community aspirations for high-quality, sustainable, affordable homes for local people”

South Lakes Housing was selected as its delivery partner due to their shared values and aims, excellent reputation and willingness to engage in an unusual project. In March, this collaboration delivered 20 affordable Passivhaus homes – 13 for affordable rent and seven for shared ownership.

The success of this three-way collaboration rested on three factors: an alignment of values between the partners; the right mix of skills and experience, and a shared enthusiasm; and a willingness on all sides to go above and beyond the call of duty to get this scheme over the line.

This category was judged by:

Chloe Fletcher, policy director, National Federation of ALMOs

Steve Mackenzie, climate change champion, Social Housing Tenants' Climate Jury

Highly commended

Greener Herts, Watford Community Housing, B3 Living and Settle

Sponsored by:



Council or combined authority of the year

Stevenage Borough Council



Stevenage Borough Council aims to increase the supply of quality, affordable housing in the area

The council funds development through a subsidy that reinvests profits from private housing sales

The housing development team is on course to deliver 500 new affordable properties by 2025

Stevenage Borough Council's housing development team was established in 2015 to deliver more social, affordable and high-quality homes, both by building new houses and improving the quality of the council's existing 8,000 properties.

The council launched a subsidy programme to fund the development of council homes through building and selling private housing and reinvesting the profits.

Careful planning and gradual development of sites are key to maximising the number of homes in Stevenage's developments.

The judges said:

"We were impressed by the organisational culture of the team, which shone clearly through the team taking ownership of the project and not shying away from difficult conversations"

The council is aiming to add 500 new affordable properties to its portfolio by 2025. Delivery is on target, with 396 finished and 303 under construction throughout 2023.

Combatting homelessness is another priority. The council secured an additional £525,000 to fund its rough sleeper initiative for the next three years, while developing schemes focused on providing intense support alongside a secure and stable home. This programme provided an additional 30 spaces to ensure some of Stevenage's most vulnerable residents have an address and a secure home environment.

This category was judged by:

Yaw Boateng, chair, Croydon Council Tenant and Leaseholder Panel, and vice-chair, Stop Social Housing Stigma

Leslie Channon, public relations and tenant engagement consultant, Taroe Trust

Jennifer Hawthorne, director of housing services, Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Highly commended

Ashfield District Council

Mid Devon District Council and Zed Pods

Sponsored by:



Landlord of the year *Stockport Homes Group*



More than just a social landlord, Stockport Homes Group offers diverse services, including telecare

Customers are involved and empowered, leading to a satisfaction rating of almost 99%

SHG's charitable arm supports its parent's housing objectives, while unlocking financial efficiencies

Stockport Homes Group (SHG) manages 11,500 homes on behalf of Stockport Council, as well as its own portfolio of 800 homes. SHG is more than a landlord. It provides homelessness support, employment initiatives, money advice, telecare and private sector lettings. Its dedication to service delivery and investment in safe homes and communities earned this ALMO a customer satisfaction rating of almost 99%.

The importance of learning from customers, colleagues and the sector is central to SHG's approach, along with maximising opportunities to share best practice.

The judges said:

“[This organisation] couples customer involvement and empowerment with top-quartile performance, a strong development programme and external accreditation”

Skylight, the group's charitable arm, supports the housing objectives of SHG through the services it delivers directly, as well as by enabling opportunities for further financial efficiencies across the group – such as reinvesting Gift Aid of £384,000 in frontline services in the previous financial year.

The continued support SHG has given to more than 70,000 customers in increasingly difficult financial times has been outstanding. A range of services has helped them with finances and provided food, energy advice, employment support, free counselling and homelessness advice.

This category was judged by:

Victoria Dingle, vice-chair, Soha Housing
Anne McLoughlin, interim chief executive, First Choice Homes Oldham

**Highly commended
Southdown**

Sponsored by:

