

# ANNUAL **REVIEW** 2022 - 23



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### **Board Chair Introduction**

The Vision of Tai Calon is to go beyond affordable housing and create vibrant communities across Blaenau Gwent. That is a vision that will hold true today as it will in 100 years' time.



Since we set our corporate plan in 2022, the primary focus has been on delivering a high level of customer satisfaction, and that drive will continue. Housing Associations aren't just local landlords, they broaden to become anchor organisations for local communities. Hence our Vision, that we are here to help create vibrant communities within the county. This Annual Review is a snapshot of the work that we have been doing during the last year to increase customer satisfaction and positively impact our communities and our environment.

Looking forward, that work will be enhanced as we increase our development of much needed affordable homes within the area. Recently the Board was delighted to agree a new £105 million loan facility with the Royal Bank of Scotland that will help fund our aspiration to build new homes in Blaenau Gwent.

Our governance structure is being tailored to reflect this increased activity.

In last year's annual review, I explained how we were doing everything we could to support our customers through the cost-of-living crisis. A year on that crisis is still with us, as is our commitment to support our customers. Alongside our £100,000 Tai Calon hardship fund we also continue to work with other organisations in the county to provide as much support as is possible. It's very gratifying for Tai Calon to receive the "Hearing the Voice of the Customer" award from TPAS (the Tenant Participation Advisory Service).

The Tai Calon Board is responsible for ensuring the strategic development of the organisation and ongoing assurance around performance and risk. A key strategic development was our scheduled review of our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy, with quarterly updates on our action plan as it is delivered and evolves further.

continued on page 4...

## ...Board chair continued

The Board has also changed in the year. We were joined by two new members, Ellen Jones and Sonia Behr who have added their skills to the established board. During the year we were also sorry to see Kath Howell and Chris Jofeh leave. We thank them for their contributions.

Finally, I would like to thank all the staff for their work in driving the improvements in customer satisfaction and the other changes to best position the organisation to deliver our exciting Vision.

PROFESSOR SIR ADRIAN WEBB Board Chair

## **Chief Exec Introduction**

As highlighted within our Chair's report, housing associations can go beyond being just the local landlord.



So, the key areas of the report are customer satisfaction, social impact, environmental impact, and financial results.

#### **Customer Satisfaction:**

In support of our vision the organisation has a mission to achieve 90% customer satisfaction. As recently as 2 years ago, we used to undertake an annual survey of a sample of our customers to understand what they felt about the organisation. Now it is significantly different, and Tai Calon seeks quick feedback on a considerable number of transactions as soon as they are completed. This is using our Rant and Rave system, and last year we sought and received over 10,000 pieces of individual feedback. This provides the detail to ensure that we can adapt our services as and when required to meet the needs of our customers.

#### Social Impact:

Tai Calon also has a role in supporting our customers whether it is through periods of severe weather, the COVID-19 pandemic, or more recently with the cost-of-living crisis.

This Annual Report details the range of things we have done, and continue to do, to support our customers. The report highlights financial support but also advice which can be as important for the long-term sustainability of tenancies.

#### **Environmental Impact:**

This is what we do to mitigate the environmental impacts of our activities. That spreads from promoting biodiversity, as shown by our recent bee friendly award, through to the significant remodelling of existing homes that seeks to reduce the impact of rising home energy costs and climate change. Environmental mitigation will become an ever-increasing important aspect of what we do.

#### Financial:

Our financial results are positive and have also helped make Tai Calon attractive to new lending, in turn helping us develop more affordable homes within Blaenau Gwent.

HOWARD TOPLIS

Chief Executive

### Meet the directors



#### Richard Hopkins - Assets & Property

Our first development of 23 new affordable homes at Glanffrwd is going as planned and is due for completion next summer. We have recently received planning permission for 14 new affordable homes at Glan-y-afon. We have also employed four new local trade apprentices that will spear head the start of our apprenticeship programme. In order to gain better information about customers' homes, we completed 3,500 stock condition surveys this year.



#### Elle Elliot - People & Culture

The last year has seen us continue to make changes in how we work to improve our delivery and services to our customers, but also to help us become a Great Place to Work for our people.

We are a people-led organisation with a focus on our culture, which will help us to be a great employer. Our CALON values: *Creativity, Authenticity, Learning, Ownership and 'Not on your own'* are at the centre of our work and continue to embed strongly.



#### **Andrew Myatt - Communities & Housing**

The past year has been very challenging for our customers due to the cost-of-living crisis. We continue to offer a wide range of support and advice, focusing on improving satisfaction with our services. With this in mind, we were very proud to be awarded a TPAS good practice award in July 2023 for our success in hearing the voice of our customers.



#### **Martyn Price - Resources**

Over the last year we have been working on refinancing our funding facility. Since our founding we have been funded by Barclays and RBS which enabled us to borrow the money to bring customers' homes up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard however restricted Tai Calon in numerous ways such as limiting our development programme.

The new loan facility with RBS removes these restrictions and provides significant funding to grow the business through development or acquiring homes, thereby creating greater financial capacity to do even more within our communities across Blaenau Gwent.

## **Customer Satisfaction**

We continue to be committed to providing the best service possible by listening to our customers and adapting the way we work.

**Customer Voice** 

8

We aim to achieve

90%

overall customer satisfaction (CSAT) by 2025.

#### So what's next?

From April 2023, Tai Calon will be seeking instant feedback from customers, using our Rant and Rave system, in the areas of:

- 1. Housing management
- 2. Major works and
- 3. Our support team

We've added a new monthly measure called the recovery score. This will further help us understand how well we respond and turn around negative customer experiences. These developments will help us look for even more ways to improve the customer experience.



#### Over the last 12 months, we have:

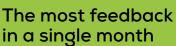
Received

9,936 items of feedback, up 6,000 from last year *Increase* in customer response

from 3,713

CSAT score is up (over 90%) at:

4.58 A Highest CSAT score 4.67 in August



949

items of feedback received

June 2022



26%

response rate up **2%** from previous year



# Ravers % is up!



from 85%

to

89%



Just over

9000

**items** of positive feedback which is up by **5,746** 

## **Improving First Call Resolution**

#### **Enhancing Customer Experience**

10

Being able to deal with queries and provide a service without delays or transferring the call to different people, is important to our customers.

To help us understand where we could improve this, our Customer Service Team have been working with teams across the business.

Previously, when we received calls about lost and misplaced rent cards, our customer service advisors had to pass them to the rent and income team to deal with. We recognised that with some training and guidance, this was something our Customer Services team could deal with directly. We also noticed increasing requests for foodbank vouchers, and now, following training and guidelines, the Customer Services team are able to issue foodbank vouchers to customers without delay when our Rent and Income team aren't available to help.

Both changes mean that customers can now get help with what they need by talking directly to one of the customer services team.

The team has also worked closely with our Assets team, helping to arrange stock condition surveys, managing the surveyor's diary, calling customers to explain the process, and agreeing on the most convenient time for us to visit. This new way of working has seen a massive 73% increase in the number of properties being surveyed per week.

We are always happy to try new ways of working and so we will continue to have conversations across the business to enhance customer experience!

#### Llys Cwm Llydrhew project

Following a customer consultation event, it was decided that the lounge needed to be a welcoming space where tenants and families wanted to spend their time together.

A fresh coat of paint, some new light fittings to increase brightness levels, a sofa for extra comfort and some artwork by a local school created a more inviting, comfortable and homely space for everyone.

#### **Tenants said:**

"It's so much better and more welcoming. There is now a group who meet weekly in the lounge for a coffee and a chat."

"Jo was great and I think with all of the improvements put together, it makes it way more cosy."





## **Social Impact**

Find out if one of our services at Tai Calon may be able to help you.

#### Our Supported Housing Service

We have eight schemes across Blaenau Gwent, offering people a comfortable home, pleasant gardens and communal activities for those who want to be involved, whilst remaining independent.

For more information on supported living, follow the QR code below.

#### **Our Lifft Service**

The Lifft Team has the know-how and contacts to support tenants with bill payments, direct debit arrangements, budgeting assistance, benefit entitlement guidance, and understanding their tenancies.

The team also help clients access various funds and benefits such as Discretionary Assistance Fund Payments, Direct Housing Payments, Personal Independence Payments/Appeals, Tai Calon Hardship Fund Applications, Food Bank Vouchers, Housing Benefit applications, and Universal Credit claims.



Live your life the way you want to enjoy it!

#### What can Lifft help with?

- Help setting up your home
- Budgeting advice and benefit claims
- Helping access to grants
- Support in setting up home for new tenants
- Tenancy advise/support
- Arranging access to health services on behalf of a tenant
- Good neighbouring tasks, life skills
- Referral & signposting to other agencies
- Home safety
- Social inclusion-connecting people with their communities
- Working with a person where tenancy issues may jeopardize their tenancy

We can do a whole lot and have helped a whole lot of people.

The Lifft team empowered

218

individuals to live independently this year.



# A single mother of four gets financial support

Recently, a single mother with four children faced financial hardship and rent arrears of £2,119.91. Our Income Team intervened, securing a £505.56 Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP), a £500.00 payment ato reduce arrears, and a £400.00 hardship grant. They also supported her return to work through Communities for Work, arranged childcare, and provided floating support for tenancy issues.

After this, arrears were reduced to £1,528.44, and a Direct Debit was set up. Short-term support prevented homelessness, and she was referred for a transfer closer to family. Long-term floating support aids budgeting, tenancy, and family matters, whilst employment and training engagement improved her well-being.



"No one has ever helped me like this. Thank you; I love my new home."

- Mr W.

#### Life-changing support

We provided life-changing support to Mr. W during his time of need. Following a tragic road traffic accident that claimed the lives of his daughter and two grandchildren, Mr. W had just two weeks to find new accommodation. With no bank account or identification, he had only the clothes on his back.

Our Lifft Support Workers, Joanne Jones and Janice Elliott, stepped in. They secured a flat in one of our sheltered schemes, helped him obtain a birth certificate, opened a bank account, and registered him with a GP. We also accessed the Tai Calon Hardship Fund for essentials like bedding, crockery, pots, pans, and food. Housing/Council Tax Benefits and Personal Independence Payment applications were successful. As a result, Mr. W received an additional £1,252 per month (annual £15,024) and a one-off payment of £2,742.

#### **Cost of living**

14

Our Income Team has been working hard over the last financial year in assisting customers with rising living costs. With a team of 12 Rent and Income Advisors, they ensure customers access entitlements like Housing Benefit, Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment, and more.

Additionally, they offer Discretionary Housing Payments, Assistance Funds, and collaborate with verifiers like Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water for low-income households. Last year, they referred nearly 3,000 individuals through referrals to partners like Citizen Advice Bureau and Foodbank.

Following four key principles of wellbeing used in the Welsh housing sector resulted in a remarkable 99.88% sustained tenancy rate.

We partnered with MP Nick Smith to address the local cost-of-living crisis in Ebbw Vale and Abertillery. Seventeen partners, including Platform, Blaenau Gwent Benefits team, Tai Calon, and Melin Homes, offered advice and support. Ninety-one people attended in Ebbw Vale, and 38 in Abertillery, receiving useful advice about utility savings and access to

government support schemes like the Welsh Government's £200 Fuel Support Scheme and ECO scheme for free heating and insulation

upgrades.

#### **Hardship Fund**

This year we launched a £100,000 Hardship Fund to help struggling tenants who are responsible for full rent payments due to unforeseen financial challenges, such as job loss or unexpected bills.

In addition to the fund, our Income advisors provide support, referrals to debt advice agencies, and advise on utility assistance like Welsh Water Assist. These advisors collaborate closely with Housing Options at Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and can refer cases for grant assistance to maintain tenancies.

Self-paying tenants can also access our internal floating support service (Lifft) and wellbeing coaches to enhance their skills and return to work.

A couple who were struggling to pay full rent and fell into arrears of £2,900 when one partner lost their job. With the help of Tai Calon's support team and Housing Options, they received financial aid, food parcels, and ongoing support, to help them through.



# Our Wellbeing Team is actively engaging with tenants and residents of all ages:

#### **Partnerships:**

They collaborate with organisations like Job Centre Plus, Communities for Work, BGCBC, and local schools for events like Jobs Fairs and career activities. They provide 1:1 employment and volunteering support and lead the Working Wardrobe project, offering free workwear.



#### **Community Engagement:**

They support various community activities like Food Hubs, Warm Hubs, Fit and Fed for schoolchildren, Mental Well-being sessions, physical literacy, and community allotments. They have a Sustainable Food Co-ordinator working closely with Wellbeing Coaches.





#### **Recent Initiatives:**

The Working Wardrobe project offers free workwear, and the Community Kit Room provides sports clothing and footwear for all ages.

#### **Additional Support:**

They help through Warm Hubs, recipe packs, food support for young people, Christmas foodhampers, and employability support.

#### **Dylan's Dream Job**

Dylan, an autistic student, aspired to an IT career. Wellbeing Coach Jo Reames assisted him in tailoring his CV and application for an IT Apprenticeship. Dylan gained experience through volunteering and interview preparation. He secured the apprenticeship and loves his dream job.



## In the Community

Our wellbeing team continue to help the community access grants, put on events and provide support and our Christmas appeal this year has helped some wonderful people.

#### **Brighter Futures Fund**

Last year we delivered two rounds of the Brighter Futures Fund awarding £16,000 to seven different community projects in Blaenau Gwent.





#### Community kit room project

The Community Kit Room is a free service that provides appropriate sports clothing and footwear for people aged 3 – adults. The aim is to support members of the community within Blaenau Gwent with their health, sport and fitness journey.

The project is led by Aneurin Leisure, and we are key partners in supporting and promoting this very worthwhile project.



#### **Terence Gardens Summer fete**

Over 500 people attended the Summer Fete at Terence Gardens last year.

Designed to be a family fun day, both children and adults enjoyed some fun and games. The support organisations who attended alongside Tai Calon's teams ensured that there was a wide variety of help and advice on offer to people across the borough.











Scan me

The feedback we had was excellent and there was a lot of tenant engagement on the day.

#### Christmas appeal

# The Tai Calon Christmas Appeal 2022 was a huge success and raised a fantastic £10,549.90!

So far, these are the ways in which the money raised has been spent to support local children, young adults, and their families over the year; We have also helped a tenant that needs to keep their medication in the fridge, by topping up their electricity, as they were about to run out of credit.

- Provided toys and gifts to 13 families - 20 parents and 34 children.
- Delivered 63 food parcels, feeding 172 people. These contained breakfast items and drinks, main meals, treats, a stew pack, a bag of potatoes, a voucher for the butcher, toiletries and other essentials.
- The Trussell Trust, who run the five foodbanks within Blaenau Gwent.
- A delivery of food, toiletries, nappies and a cash donation will also be made to the food bank so that they can continue to help people in the wider community.

The foodbank provides three days of nutritionally balanced food to local people who are referred to them.

The housing and rent teams are continuing to identify tenants that are struggling, and we have delivered to the homes of those tenants; food shopping, cleaning products and nappies.







The Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership is hosted by Tai Calon Community Housing in partnership with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Natural Resources Wales.



# Charlie's Fab Food on a Budget

We offered 12 months of budget cooking courses which took place at Sirhowy Community Centre and was often sourced with seasonal ingredients harvested from Sirhowy Community Allotment (also part funded by Tai Calon & BG Food). Participants tried new and different vegetables they wouldn't normally find and took valuable information away, learning how to cook meals on a budget.



#### Little Veg Libraries

Funded by the food partnership, Aneurin Leisure libraries has run with this project getting acclaim from the South Wales Argus and Nick Smith MP. Anyone can pop into the library and grab a selection of easy to grow seeds, offering a risk free entrant to growing food at your own at home. Aneurin Leisure have paired this with books on gardening so users can learn as they grow.

# Plant and Share Grants

The Food Partnership has given 10 small grants to fund community groups across the borough encouraging them to put on events aimed at community engagement, bring people together to learn and share around growing activities. One event saw 3 grant recipients collaborate, attracting around 100 people on the day. Other events included planting in wellies, hanging baskets and vegetable plant giveaways.

Read more about what the Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership has done in the past year by scanning the QR code above.

## **Environment**

# Biodiversity: Tai Calon's Environmental Projects and Activities

#### **Local Nature Partnership**

The Local Nature Partnership discusses, plans and enacts environmental activities across our areas of influence and ownership to ensure we follow a unified approach to our projects and have the greatest positive impact possible.

#### Wildflower Planting

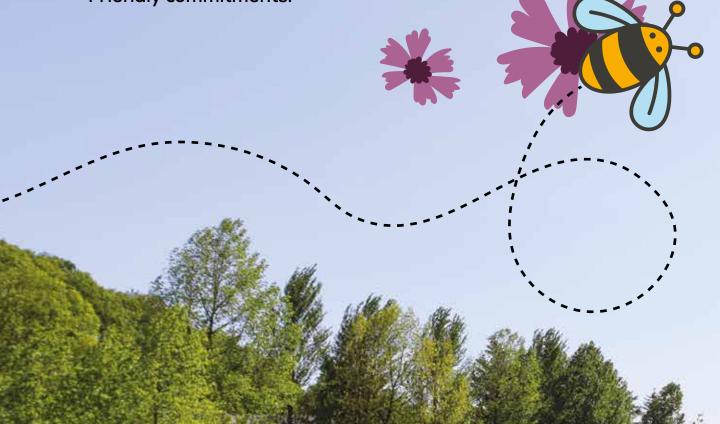
We began planting up several areas in 2022 following plans we made prior to the pandemic; this work has been expanded upon this year across a dozen sites from Brynithel to Tredegar.

The purpose of this has been to enhance our sites with native wildflower species to support pollinators as part of the ongoing efforts of our Bee Friendly commitments.

#### Nature Isn't Neat areas

We continue the Nature Isn't Neat project alongside Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. This involves a reduced cutting regime in areas of non-amenity land with several associated benefits. It showcases the array of native plants which will grow in these areas, provides food and shelter for insects and allows these insects and pollinators to thrive and benefit the wider environments.

These areas are cut once or twice a year, and we remove all the grass that we cut when we undertake the work. If the grass is cut and left behind, new wildflowers aren't always able to grow.



#### **Bee Friendly Award**

We have recently been successful in receiving the Bee Friendly Award! This means that the certificate recognises that Tai Calon Community Housing is Bee Friendly and has committed to:











We hope to continue our efforts of being Bee Friendly and will submit a further application next year to keep our Bee Friendly status!

us.



#### **Working with Local Schools**

We have attended school environmental days at Bryn Bach Park, taking out groups of children from local schools to explore wilderness. The events have been organised by BGCBC and are run in conjunction with Tai Calon, Aneurin Leisure and other local environmental groups to teach children about the importance and many benefits of the natural world around

#### **Hedgehog Highways**

For many years now we have been involved in the Hedgehog High-ways programme, supporting the wellbeing of the native mammals with a few small changes in the way we work. This has involved adapting all new fences with a small hedgehog hole to create a network of pathways around our estates to open them up for use by hedgehogs foraging for food and shelter.





#### **Community Groups**

We continue our support for an array of environmentally minded community groups across our estates. With activities ranging from litter picking and fun days to plant giveaways and bug hotel making there are a variety of things to get involved in and multiple groups hoping to seek our expertise and love for nature.



Scan me

# Committed to Sustainability: A Year of Carbon Balance

In our dedication to ecofriendliness, we've actively reduced our carbon footprint over the past year. This effort earned us recognition from the World Land Trust in the from of a prestigious certificate.

Our partnership with Resource, a leading carbon-balanced print company closely aligned with the World Land Trust, was pivotal in achieving this milestone.

We offset 525kg of CO2 emissions this year, thanks to our eco-conscious use of FSC sustainable papers.

This collaboration also preserved 104 square meters of tropical forest, reinforcing our sustainability commitment and protecting vital natural carbon sinks – our cherished trees.



#### **Building Safety & Quality**

100%

of homes with a gas appliance have an in-date, accredited gas safety check.



of buildings that require an in-date and compliant Fire Risk Assessment have one.

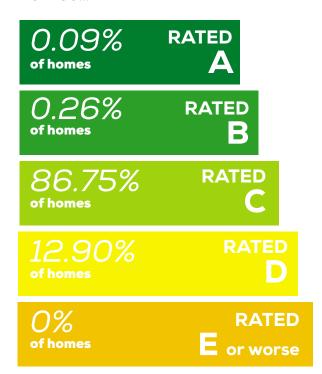


of homes meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.



#### Climate change

EPC ratings of existing homes...



0% of homes without EPC rating (unknown).

Greenhouse Gas Emissions
Scope 1, Scope 2 and Scope 3
greenhouse gas emissions.

SCOPE 1:

Kg CO2 equivalent 105132.57

**SCOPE 2:** 

Kg CO2 equivalent 423219.10

**SCOPE 3:** 

Kg CO2 equivalent
Unknown

**SCOPE 1,2 & 3:** 

Total Kg CO2 equivalent 528351.67

# RESIDENTS' ENERGY USE



Energy and emissions from electricity use for communal areas, lighting etc. that serve residential properties is 349,711.01 kWh

Total tCO2e (Scope three) 12,187.07 Intensity ratio: tCO2e per property managed 2.09

# WASTE MANAGEMENT



Quantities, recycling rate and emissions from waste generated tonnes of waste - 382.25 tonne Waste diverted from landfill -91.58%

## WATER



Volume of water used and resultant emissions from supply and treatment - 1077.00 m3

Total tCO2e 12,187.07 Intensity ratio: tCO2e per property managed 2.09

# Garnlydan Retrofit Pilot: Paving the Way Towards a Greener Future

Residents in Garnlydan, Ebbw Vale, have embraced energy-saving solutions through Welsh Government retrofit funding.

The Garnlydan Retrofit Pilot, enhancing eco-friendliness and energy efficiency, equipped twenty-five homes with Air Source Heat Pumps, solar panels, and battery storage.

This pilot evaluated renewable technology integration in various households, proving the potential of eco-heating. Early data indicates up to 30% energy cost savings. This initiative reduces carbon emissions, preserving Ebbw Vale's natural beauty. As the pilot ends, these homes serve as models for sustainable living, showcasing the promise of community collaboration and forward-thinking policies for a greener future.



# Where your rent is spent

# 16.60% Housing Services

81%

of our customers said their neighbourhood is a wonderful place to live.

Customer service team handled

53,028

calls this year with **81%** customers satisfied.

Received **85**anti-social behaviour cases successfully.

As well as supporting those experiencing domestic abuse.

# 4.30% Development of New Homes

Construction started again on the 23 new homes at Glanffrwd, Ebbw Vale.

The development will provide much-needed new energy efficient homes.



# 29.10% Improvement of Homes

Investing in improving the energy performance of our homes.









each garden costing on average **£3,943** on the previous year.



- Installed 58 kitchens
- 75 bathrooms
- Rewired 19 homes
- Upgraded 26 boilers

# 15.30%

## **Operational Spend**

This is the percentage of interest we pay each year to our lenders for the loans we take to help us improve homes across Blaenau Gwent.

We spent

£2,157,157

with local businesses across Blaenau Gwent the last financial year.



Repairs & Maintenance



13,925

(Combined & Reactive), an average of **2.4 repairs** per home.

89%

completed within the target time 93%

of tenants who had a repair said they were satisfied completed

6,852 gas boiler services

**1,053** electrical tests



### Governance

#### Self-evaluation

The framework housing associations use to review our performance. The Welsh Government sets nine Regulatory Standards that cover our activities. (Read our 2022 report)

#### **Governance Performance**

Our Regulatory Judgement by Welsh Government took place in June 2021. We were awarded the highest rating for both the organisation's governance and for financial viability: Standard. Since then, a new ratings system has been introduced and we await our latest Judgement which will indicate our performance in a red, amber, green light format.

In the meantime, we continue to improve our governance arrangements, continually improving how we run our business through external reviews and working through the governance improvement action plan that came out of Altair's review of our governance in 2022.

#### Meet the board

Our board is made-up of six independent members, two members nominated by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and three tenant board members. This year, we are pleased to introduce two newly appointed council-nominated board members, Councillor Sonia Behr and Councillor Ellen Jones. Sonia is passionate about the environment and the pursuit of decarbonization. Ellen is an engaged community member from Sirhowy and supports the tenants within Blaenau Gwent.

#### Financial Statement Summary 2022 - 23

Statement of Comprehensive Income	Year end 31 March 2023	Year end 31 March 2022	<u>Movement</u>
Turnover	29,310	28,065	1,245
Operating Expenditure	(26,437	7) (27,143)	(706)
Surplus on disposal of property, plant and equipment	522	0	522
Operating Surplus / (Defici	it) 3,425	922	2,503
Net Interest Pension Fund Adjustment	(4,375) 19,216	(4,139) 9,079	238 8,108
Net Surplus / (Deficit) on Comprehensive Income for the Year	18,266	5,862	10,375

## **Overall Performance**

**99.21%** of rent collected

1.88% rent due as of **31st March 2023** 

2,986
customers received

support and advice.

89%
done on time.
97%
appointments
kept & on time.

REPAIR satisfaction

#\ \*\*\*\*

4.65(OUT OF 5)

food bank vouchers to those in need

**27** 

empty homes on the 31st March 2023 (target less than 40) 47

days is the average time a home for relet is empty

0.77% income loss whilst homes are empty

with a target below

1.5%

Our homes with a valid electrical certificate.

99.95%

99.96%

gas servicing completed on time

of passenger lifts were inspected by their due date



100%

of homes requiring fire risk inspection water management risk assessments were up to date



of customer calls answered on time



100% of complaints answered within target time

47 complaints received (17 less than last year)

**24** complaints received





#### DO YOU NEED A DIFFERENT FORMAT?

If you would like our Annual Review in a different language please contact our customer services.







Tai Calon Community Housing, Solis One, Rising Sun Industrial Estate, Blaina, Blaenau Gwent NP13 3JW