



**ACCENT'S**

**ESG**

**REPORT**

**2022/23**

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**Accent Housing provides homes and services to more than 40,000 customers in more than 20,500 homes across the north, east and south of England. We believe that everybody has the right to a safe, sustainable and affordable home. This has been our belief since we formed in 1966.**

Our values complement this core belief:

# **WE ARE CARING, WE ARE SMART, WE ARE DRIVEN, AND WE ARE INCLUSIVE.**

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Our first ESG statement for 2022/23 outlines how we deliver on these values, while striving to meet the Sustainability Reporting Standard for Social Housing, and relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Amid a cost-of-living crisis, driving value for customers has continued to be our priority this year. Striving to reduce costs and ensure our customers feel supported, not dependent, is critical to all areas of our work, and we continue to put the customer voice at the forefront of our delivery and decision making.

Caring for our customers also means caring for their environment. With our ambitious energy-efficient development plans, our adoption of the Carbon Literacy Statement, and our retrofitting projects modernising our homes; we are putting sustainability at the fore so that we can drive value for customers now and in the future.

Our values start at our core. We are committed to being a fair, diverse, and stable employer, which is why we are delighted to have once again been awarded the highest governance rating by the Regulator of Social Housing.

**WE HAVE RETAINED OUR  
G1/V1  
RATING** 

We make a stand for what we believe in. We are especially proud of continuing our More Than Homes campaign, which has raised over £420K for the Trussell Trust, to raise awareness of and help support food banks to help meet the needs of the increasing volume of people experiencing hunger.

**WE ARE  
ON A  
JOURNEY.**

**Our mission  
does not stop  
here, and we  
will continue  
learn and  
progress as  
we build and  
deliver on our  
values in the  
year to come.**

## **SOCIAL**

**We believe that everyone should have access to an affordable, sustainable, and safe home, and as a national housing association we work to provide homes in areas of housing need.**

**As anchor institutions in the communities where we work, we leverage partnerships and seek opportunities for customers that provide the foundations for better living, championing self-reliance, not dependency which ensures the sustainability of tenancies.**



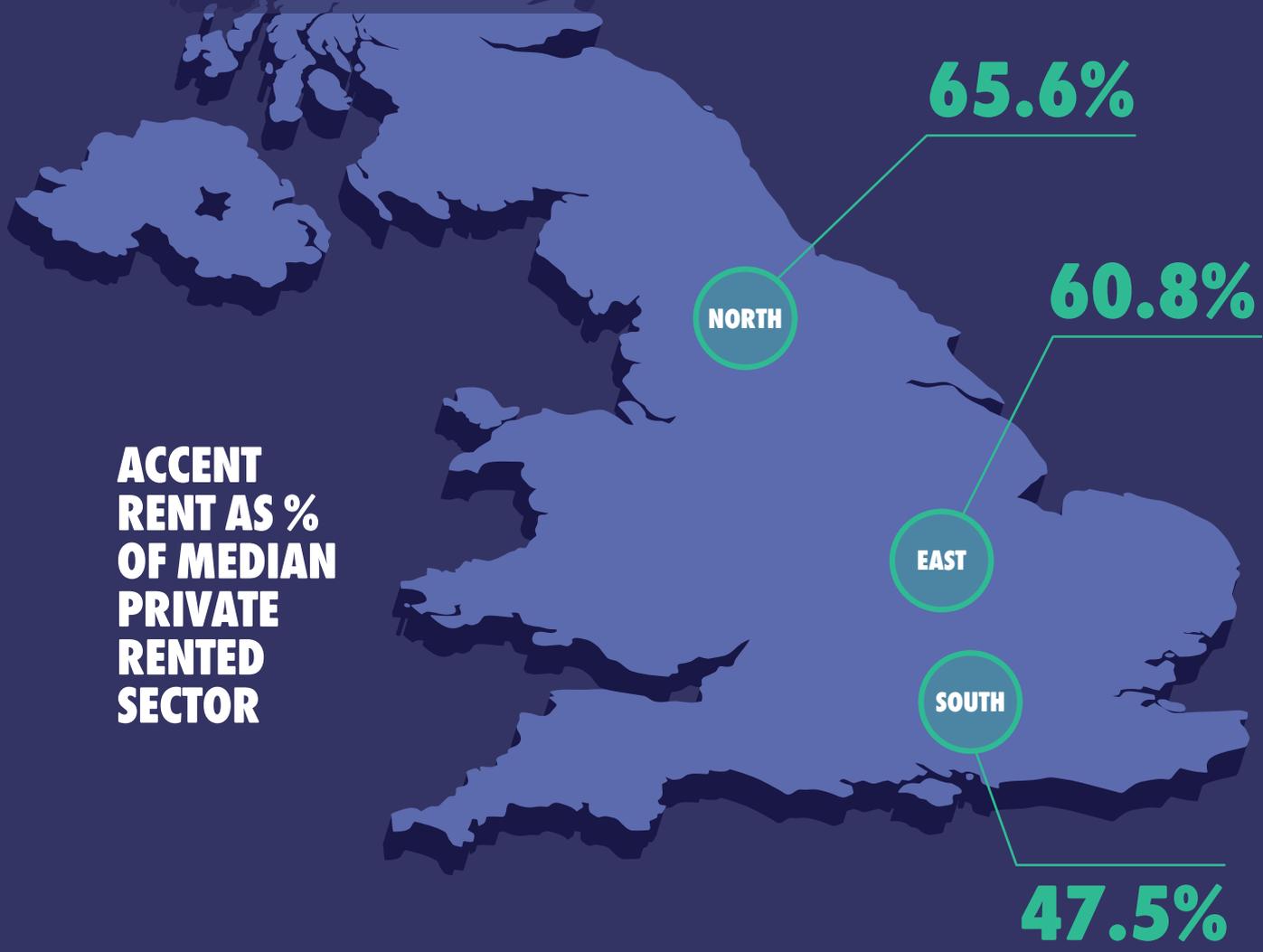
## **AFFORDABILITY AND SECURITY**

It is essential we provide truly affordable homes which provide long-term security for our customers who are unable to access suitable housing on the open market. As part of this` we actively consider the costs of running the home, enabling us to help reduce fuel poverty and the rising cost of living, whilst working to meet the governments' decarbonisation targets.

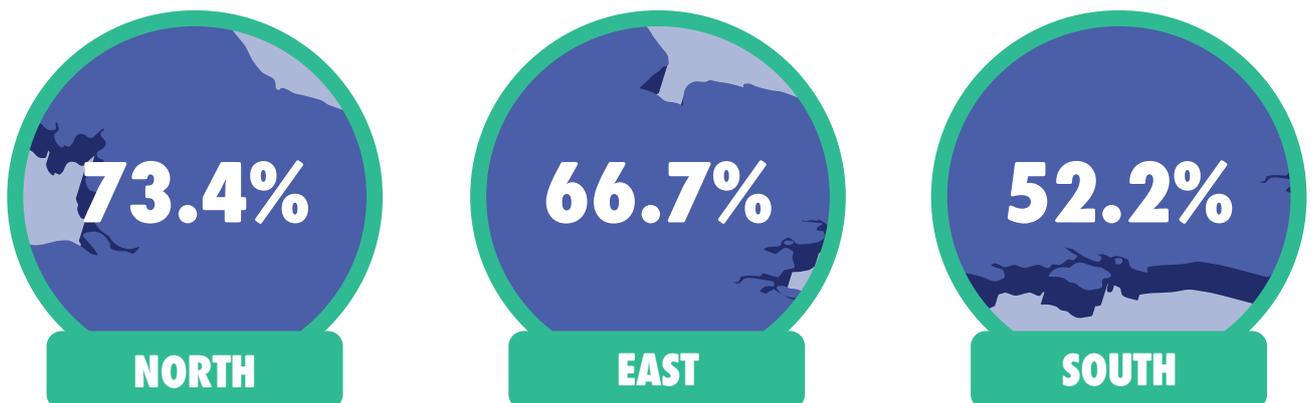
## OUTLINE OF TENURES

Across all areas of operation, the average rents we charge are well below the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate and the private rented sector market rents. Our rents are 72.2% of LHA rates and 61.9% of private rented sector rents.

## ACCENT RENT AS % OF MEDIAN PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR



## ACCENT RENT AS % OF LHA



# 94.7%



of our rented homes are currently let at a social rent to provide high levels of affordability.

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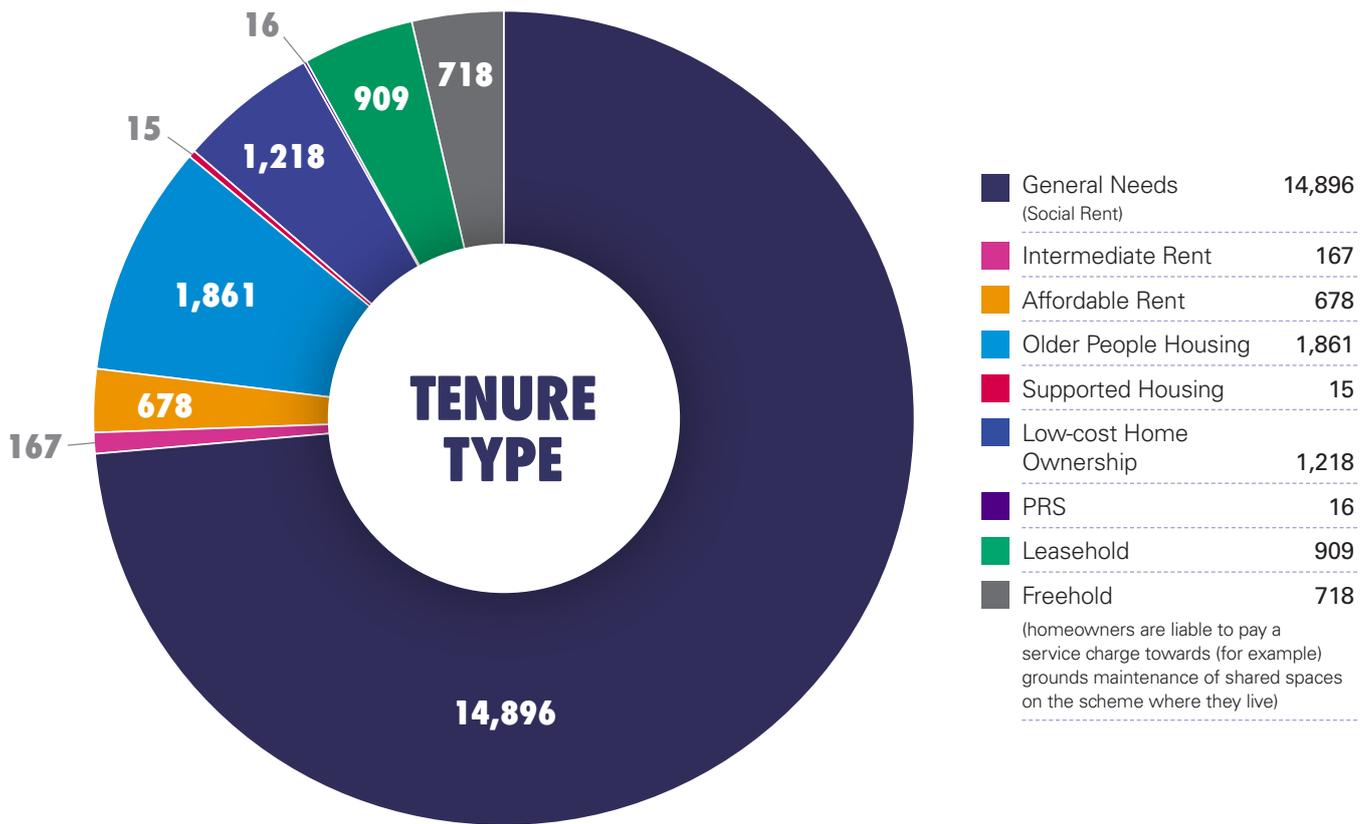
**We know having a home to plant roots is the foundation for life and providing this has always been important to us.**

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# 100%



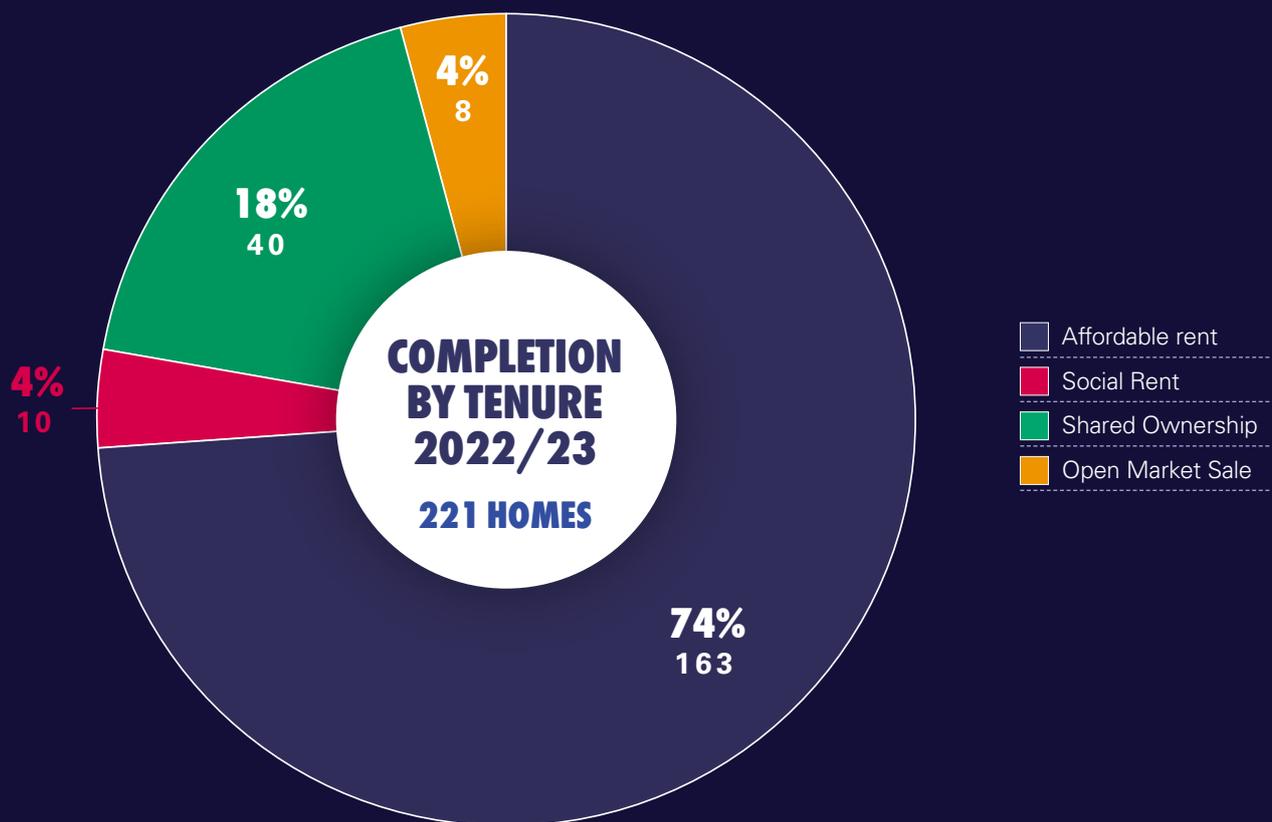
of homes are rented on an assured tenancy following the completion of a 12-month starter tenancy, to afford customers with high levels of security and stability.



## Our customers have told us that the delivery of more new homes of all tenures is a priority.

We have protected our existing social rented housing and have taken the decision to continue to build a proportion of our new homes to be let at a social rent. We know and understand the importance

of delivering a range of tenures and the role social rent can play in helping our customers to reduce dependence on benefits, improve stability and achieve independence.



**ACCENT DELIVERED 221 NEW BUILD HOMES IN 2022/23, WITH A TOTAL OF 1,304 HOMES APPROVED IN OUR DEVELOPMENT PIPELINE AND 859 HOMES ALREADY ON SITE. IN 23/24 WE PLAN TO START DELIVERY OF 437 NEW AFFORDABLE HOMES AND TAKE HANDOVER OF 413.**

## CASE STUDY

# TRELOWEN WAY: Innovative, sustainable and affordable homes in Peterborough

**Accent is building 75 new homes for affordable rent to the east of Hempsted, Peterborough, on land reclaimed from a historic brickworks site.**

The homes are being built using innovative and sustainable modern methods of construction and form a key part of the local development strategy to support the creation of sustainable communities in the area.

With lower running costs than brick and block-built homes, these are the first homes built by Accent using prefabricated, low carbon timber panels from GreenSquareAccord's award-winning manufacturing facility,

LoCal Homes. This timber frame open panel system has increased thermal performance and Photo Voltaic (PV) panels installed on every roof will reduce energy costs. Off-site construction will also mean the homes can be built cleaner, with fewer waste products and minimum disruption for residents moving in.

All of the properties have been designed to be highly energy-efficient using a 'Fabric First' approach which will result in each home achieving an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 'A'. The design, together with the innovative low carbon timber build and roof panels, will help tackle fuel poverty whilst also supporting Accent's sustainability & development ambitions.



Photo credit:  
Burmor Construction



We are **committed** to providing housing across a variety of tenures, including **supporting** people ready to take their first step into **homeownership**.



In 2020 we launched Homemade Homes by Accent, a new brand within Accent. Homemade Homes by Accent is the company within which all private sales and marketing of new homes is managed. It also acts as the marketing brand for all Shared Ownership properties.

The Accent brand and Homemade Homes by Accent are inextricably linked; Homemade Homes by Accent, and the sale of new homes, provides capital to Accent Housing Ltd which we invest in our wider development programme, and help to make our mark on the UK's housing crisis.

In 2022/23 we received sales income of over £6m from the sale of 43 shared ownership and 3 outright sale homes.



## SHARED OWNERSHIP: A customer's story

**Anca and her son moved to the UK from Romania four years ago to join her husband, Lucian, who had secured an international position at his company's headquarters.**

Anca, who was newly pregnant and desperately searching for a permanent family home after being given notice of eviction from their small privately rented flat, recalls, "Scrolling through property websites to check availability in the area, I was very discouraged by the high value of homes and thought we would never succeed in buying a house".

Anca found information about Coombelands, a brand-new mixed tenure development of affordable rent and shared ownership homes. Anca explains, "One weekend we just drove to Coombelands to see the houses being built and discovered 'Shared Ownership' being promoted". The couple enquired about a two-bedroom house; however, they were heartbroken as it had already been reserved. But some good news was just around the corner.

Anca recalls, "It was the summer holidays, and we were incredibly stressed about receiving notice to leave the apartment, so we decided to visit our family back in Romania. While abroad, Homemade contacted us to advise that one property had become available again and to ask if we were still interested in a Shared Ownership home".

When we asked what their brand-new home means to the family, Anca says:

*We love the house. It has woodland behind it which you can really appreciate whilst out in the garden. Every day looks amazing as we see a lot of wildlife and both my sons love it. My youngest son can jump up and down all day, as we don't have neighbours living directly below us anymore... We never in our wildest dreams thought we could buy a new home.*

## CASE STUDY

# A proactive approach to support customers at risk of fuel poverty

**We want to tackle fuel poverty for our customers and are aware that due to the energy and cost of living crisis the number of fuel poor households within our customer base was likely to rise.**

To monitor this and to help us to determine where support was most needed, we created a fuel poverty dashboard which uses several points of data, such as arrears data, EPC data and household data (number of dependents, if customers are in receipt of universal credit, other forms of support), to estimate if the household is at risk of fuel poverty. We can then use the data to spot trends both geographically and demographically to determine where support may be needed.

The dashboard is used by Housing Partners to help them identify which of the households they support may

be at risk. It is also used within the Sustainability Team when considering which homes should be prioritised for decarbonisation works.

The results of the dashboard have been proactively used to send targeted energy saving advice to customers most at risk of fuel poverty. This has already resulted in customers, who have not sought support before, seeking advice to manage their finances.

In addition, specialist training has been provided to contact centre advisors and customer facing teams to ensure colleagues are alert to

customers at risk of fuel poverty and wider financial challenges and are maximising signposting opportunities.

Looking forward, a fuel poverty task group will be created, containing colleagues from the sustainability team, the community Development team and housing teams to analyse the data collected, share ideas and share best practice as to how we support our customers. The fuel poverty dashboard will be refreshed regularly upon the creation of this group, and the group will then work with colleagues and external stakeholders to provide help to those households most in need.



# **The safety of our customers is paramount.**

**A substantial proportion of our homes are modern – over 60% of homes are less than 40 years old. Stock condition data is routinely collected so planned work programmes ensure properties continue to meet the Decent Homes Standard.**







# 99.9%

**OF HOMES WITH A GAS  
APPLIANCE HAVE AN  
IN-DATE, ACCREDITED  
GAS SAFETY CHECK**



# 100%

**OF BUILDINGS HAVE  
AN IN-DATE AND  
COMPLIANT FIRE  
RISK ASSESSMENT**



# 99.2%

**OF HOMES MEET THE  
NATIONAL QUALITY  
STANDARD**



# CUSTOMER VOICE

## WE ARE COMMITTED TO LISTENING TO AND EMPOWERING CUSTOMERS MEANINGFULLY TO EMBED A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC CULTURE OF CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT AND COLLABORATION.

We have been successful in involving residents in decision making and setting housing policy and service standards through membership of our Customer Experience Committee, feeding into Board discussions and decisions. 50% of the committee members are Accent customers.

We have a group of residents called Accent1000 who make up an online community of engaged residents willing to participate in service reviews, consultations and surveys via Your Voice, our online engagement platform.

We have had a remunerated National Scrutiny Group (NSG) in place since 2018 and they have successfully carried out a range of scrutiny activities, feeding recommendations into both operational and strategic service improvements. We understand the power this level of scrutiny provides and want to grow this approach. Following a review of arrangements, conducted in January 2023 which included benchmarking our approach against best practice in the sector, we took the decision to end current arrangements and move to a more flexible model, aimed at engaging a broader pool of customers in scrutiny activity. This approach is being developed in 2023.

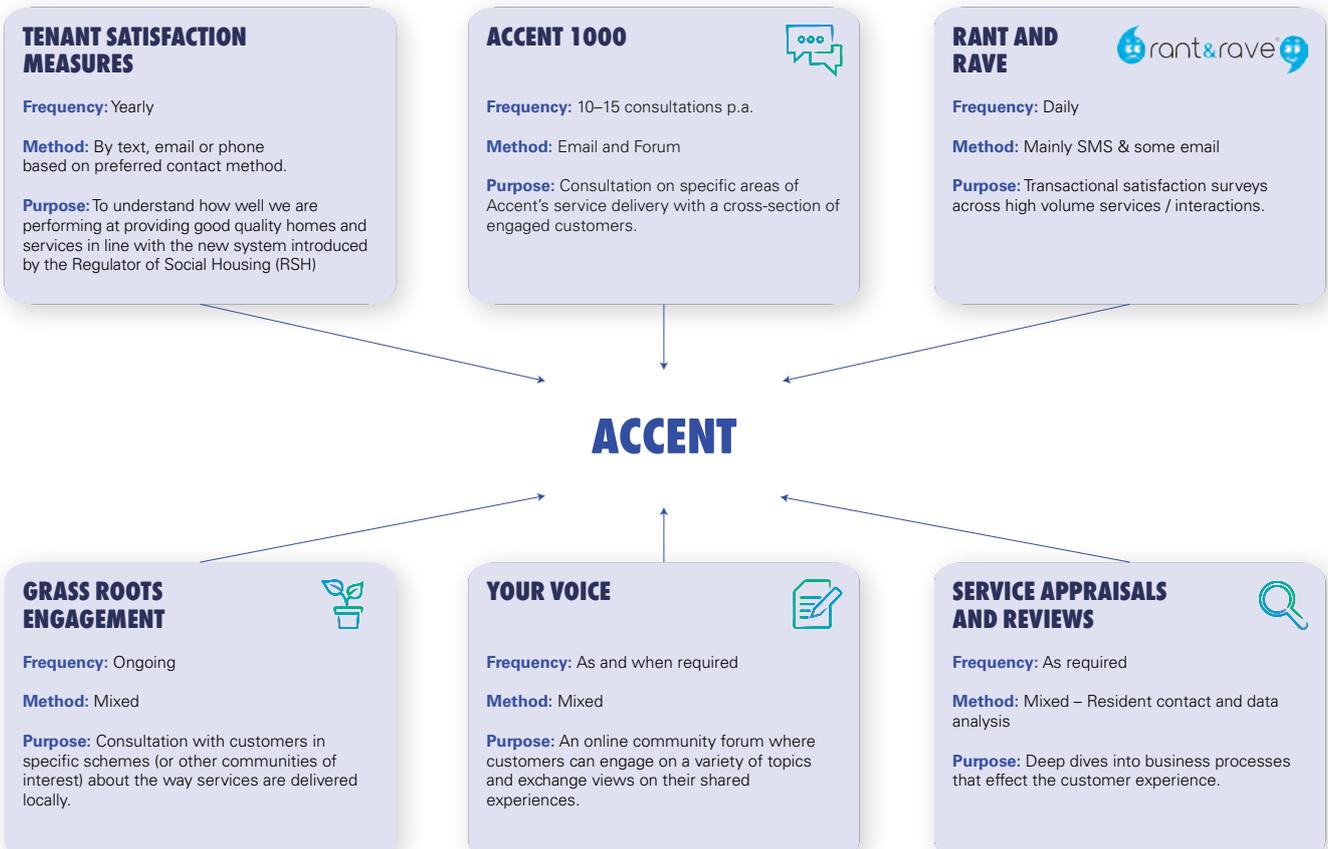
Over the past three years our principal benchmark for overall perception based Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) is via UKCSI, which is measured once each year.

In 2019, our UKCSI score was 58.3, and in May 2022 this had improved to 65.2.

This compares to an average score of 69 for satisfaction with 'Your Housing Association', a benchmark provided by UKCSI.

In 2023, we will be replacing UKCSI with the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures being introduced by the Regulator of Social Housing. We will undertake an annual customer perception survey via a third party research company in September 2023.

We also use Rant & Rave software to measure transactional satisfaction against 6 key service areas and this is used to understand more detailed feedback about service delivery, enabling operational improvements to be made.





## CASE STUDY

**ACCENT'S NATIONAL SCRUTINY GROUP INVESTIGATED THE WAY THAT THE ORGANISATION COMMUNICATES WITH CUSTOMERS ABOUT FIRE SAFETY. THEY FOUND THAT, IN SOME AREAS, CUSTOMERS WERE CONFUSED ABOUT THE RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION TO TAKE IN THE EVENT OF A FIRE.**

To address this, we consulted with customers to find out how useful Accent's correspondence on fire safety was, and to understand what additional information they felt would make such correspondence clearer, more engaging or more memorable. This feedback was instrumental in the development of scheme-specific 'Safety in Your Home' notices, which were sent to all customers as part of a comprehensive mailing campaign.

As a result of the campaign, awareness of the evacuation procedure increased from 42% to 61%. In addition to increased awareness, the campaign prompted some customers with hearing and visual impairments, physical disabilities and mental health illnesses to contact Accent to express concern about their ability to execute the recommended evacuation plan - important information that could be used in the event of a fire.

## CUSTOMER SUPPORT

**As we look towards the future, we know if we stand still, we will not be able to meet the changing needs of our customers or future-proof our services.**

If we work alone, we will limit the value we can add to the communities where we work. If we offer nothing more than a bricks-and-mortar landlord service, we will fall short on helping create places where people can thrive or ensure people can sustain their tenancies with us.

But we know our limitations and sometimes delivering the best customer outcomes means creating partnerships to have a greater impact than we can achieve on our own. Leveraging expertise from local communities and organisations and identifying signposting to wider services offers additional support to customers where we know it is needed.



**As a national housing association, we operate across 71 diverse local authority areas. The support that we provide to customers responds to the specific needs and challenges of each community, and includes employment, food and fuel poverty, financial inclusion and health and wellbeing.**

Examples of the support we provide are set out on the following pages.

## Employability service in partnership with Thirteen Housing Group



**‘Journey 2 Success’ is a partnership employability service with Accent and Thirteen Housing Group. The project encourages resident households into employment, training, apprenticeships, education, and volunteering.**

The project aims to deliver individual and community-based benefits:

- **Financial stability** – reducing arrears by increasing resident income
- **Social inclusion** – within the local community
- **Improve wellbeing** – health and mind
- Increase sustainable tenancies and reduce voids
- Improve the local economy

The scheme has been running for 5 years, resulting in 165 referrals and 86 customers working with the employability team.

- 36 customers have completed accredited training in employability, hospitality, customer service, mentoring & befriending
- 40 customers have been successful in obtaining employment

The opportunities available to our customers are unique as the partnership have direct relationships with employers in the area, businesses advertise directly with the partnership and not the open market, thereby giving our customers first opportunity to vacancies. Our customers continue to receive 6 months aftercare once any positive employability service is engaged, ensuring they are happy and sustaining employment.

## BUILDING FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE: A customer's story



**BUILDING  
BETTER  
FUTURES**



**Our Housing Partners support customers amid the increasing cost of living to build their financial independence, for instance by signposting to a network of specialist agencies for financial and employment support, such as Step Change, a national debt management charity.**

Work in this area continues throughout the year as we engage customers through awareness campaigns, providing advice and support to help customer with their financial decisions.

One of our customers, John, sought financial support from Accent following a period of illness. John said speaking to Accent helped 'turn his life around' after admitting he 'didn't know where he'd be now'. After Accent's help with benefits and financial support, John was able to set up a plan to help manage his arrears.

**WE SUPPORT**  
**1,815**  
**CUSTOMERS TO**  
**CONTINUE TO LIVE**  
**INDEPENDENTLY**  
**IN 49**  
**INDEPENDENT**  
**AND 2**  
**EXTRA CARE**  
**LIVING SCHEMES**





Working alongside the local authorities we provided housing related support for **97** individuals or families who faced homelessness for various reasons, with the sole purpose to support them in to more stable, sustainable accommodation.

The **scheme manager service** provides health and wellbeing checks and a 24/7 lifeline call function as well as the facilitation of events and referrals to a wider network of support services.

Residents of extra care also receive a **meal service** as a condition of their tenancy alongside the provision of a dedicated **24/7 on-site care team**.





## PLACEMAKING

**We understand the impact our work can have in creating better places for people to live by providing well-designed housing, which is in short supply, and building sustainable communities where people choose to live.**

Our most significant contribution towards placemaking is demonstrated through our development strategy. When supplying new housing, we work with local authorities and parish councils to identify housing need to deliver attractive, tenure blind, new homes for local people who are unable to afford housing on the open market.

Additionally, we partner with local authorities and other agencies to undertake scheme 'walkabouts' to identify and tackle issues such as anti-social behaviour and fly tipping, arrange scheme tidy up days and plan estate improvement works.

**CASE  
STUDY**

# REDEVELOPMENT OF



**IN SEPTEMBER 2022 ACCENT CONCLUDED A CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITY CONSULTATION IN RELATION TO ONE OF OUR 1970'S SCHEMES CONSISTING OF 164 FLATS IN BRADFORD.**

# RIPLEYVILLE, BRADFORD



Ripleyville is formed of several blocks of flats which proved expensive to heat and the scheme was built to a design footprint which encouraged anti-social behaviour in an area where there is an oversupply of flats and strong demand for family housing.

Following a significant appraisal of the site and evaluation of the living environment it provided, a major engagement and consultation programme with residents and over 2,000 members of the surrounding community was carried out. Overwhelming support was given for the 1970s estate to be demolished and regenerated. By working closely with the community we have identified which types of homes are in most need in the area and consulted on a large scale to ensure we meet both the immediate and long-term needs of residents, especially in providing homes which are cost effective to run.

The restoration project represents a £21.5m investment in the local area. 73 new family homes, which will be available for affordable rent, will be built using innovative modern methods of construction. A fabric first approach, supported by a forward-thinking energy strategy, will ensure it meets Accent's commitment of ensuring new built homes achieve an EPC rating of 'A' to help combat the increasing number of people facing fuel poverty and meet Accent's sustainability aspirations. The development will be future-proofed and include housing for a broader spectrum of accessibility needs bring long-lasting regeneration, sustainability and opportunity to the local and wider community and address the historic issues the site has had.

**THE MORE THAN HOMES  
CAMPAIGN  
INITIATED AND LED BY  
ACCENT  
AIMS TO RAISE A TARGET OF  
£1M  
FOR THE TRUSSELL TRUST**

## CASE STUDY:

### More than homes campaign

It launched with the backing of the National Housing Federation, the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Northern Housing Consortium in 2020. The campaign quickly gained momentum in trade media, online channels, and across the housing sector. The campaign called for a united sector-wide effort to support an organisation well-skilled, established and resourced to deal with the many new challenges arising from heightened levels of destitution leading to food poverty.

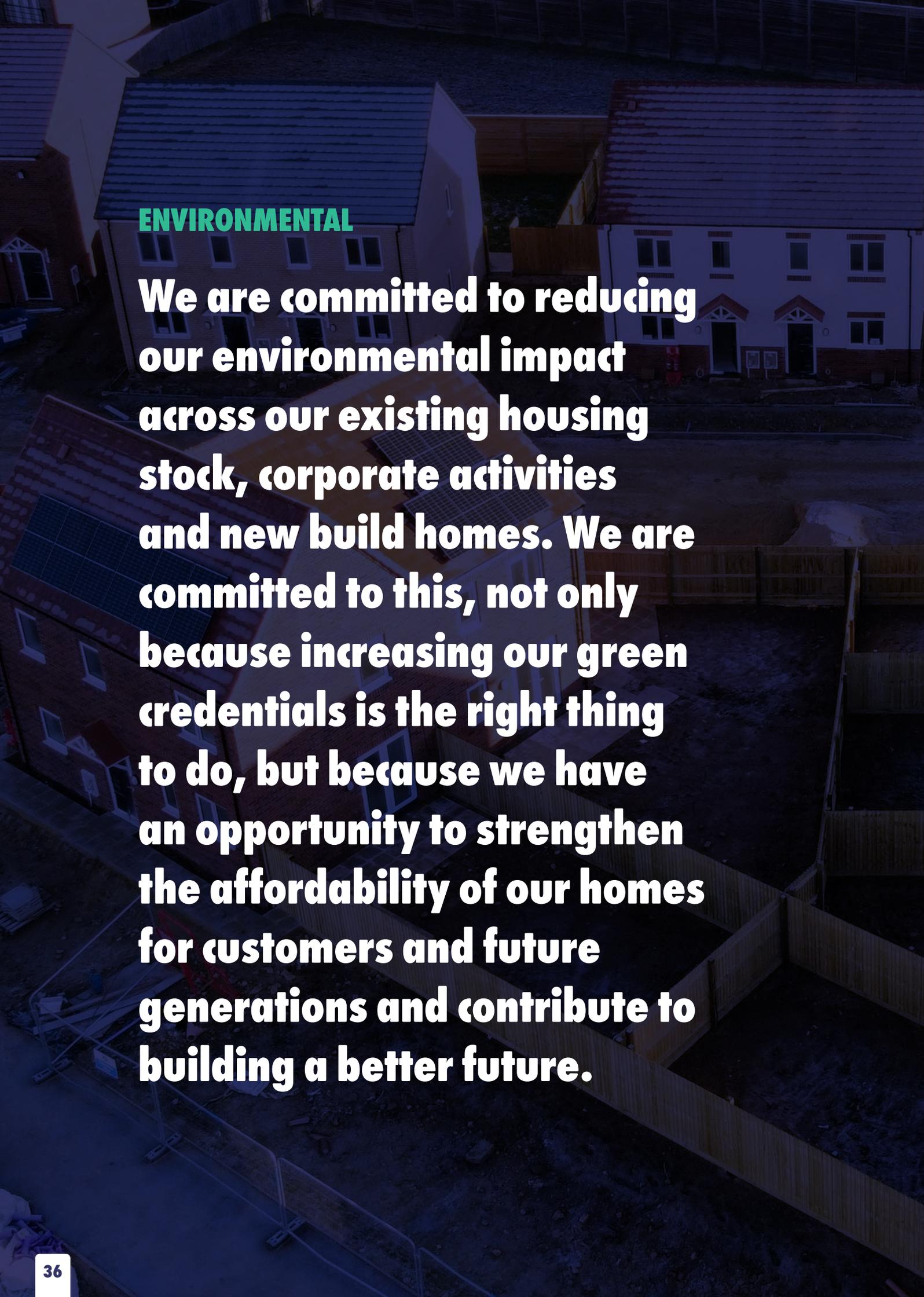
**Since we launched More the Homes £420k has been pledged to the Trussell Trust to help tackle food poverty via direct donations to local food banks, or more widely to the Trust's national effort.**

At a time where the financial draws on those already facing poverty worsen, we recognise that continued and sustained support of the Trussell Trust will help not only meet the immediate demands of those facing food poverty but will support the Trust's aim to stop people needing to access emergency food at all.

Chris Woo, Head of Philanthropy and Programme Funding comments:

The devastating economic and personal consequences of the (C)OL crisis have tipped more people than ever into financial crisis and to the doors of food banks. Food banks have been at the front-line of the pandemic, serving their communities during some of the most challenging times. Together they have provided over 2.5 million emergency food parcels, nearly 1 million of these went directly to children.

A heartfelt thanks to Accent and everyone who has joined More than Homes. Your support has enabled food banks up and down the country to respond to the huge increase in need. It has been amazing to witness the sector step forward with such generosity. Thank you.

An aerial photograph of a residential development. In the foreground, there is a construction site with a wooden fence and some debris. In the middle ground, several houses are visible, some with solar panels on their roofs. In the background, more houses are visible, some with red roofs. The overall scene is a mix of completed and under-construction homes.

## ENVIRONMENTAL

**We are committed to reducing our environmental impact across our existing housing stock, corporate activities and new build homes. We are committed to this, not only because increasing our green credentials is the right thing to do, but because we have an opportunity to strengthen the affordability of our homes for customers and future generations and contribute to building a better future.**

**CLIMATE CHANGE | EPC RATINGS**

**By 2030**

all our homes will achieve an  
EPC C or above rating.

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**At year-end**

**82%**

of our rented homes achieved an EPC C  
rating or above in 2022/23 showing we  
are well on our sustainability journey.

**We have made a commitment to deliver all our land-led programme homes to an EPC A standard (70% of our overall programme).**

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**We currently have**

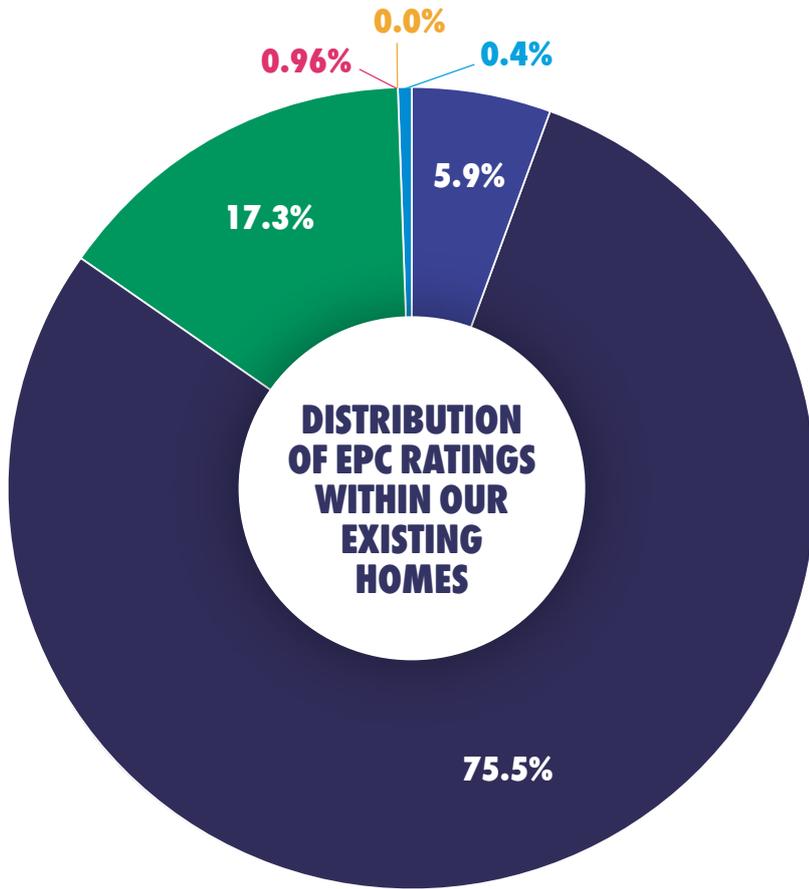
**815**

**new homes on site and being constructed to this standard.**

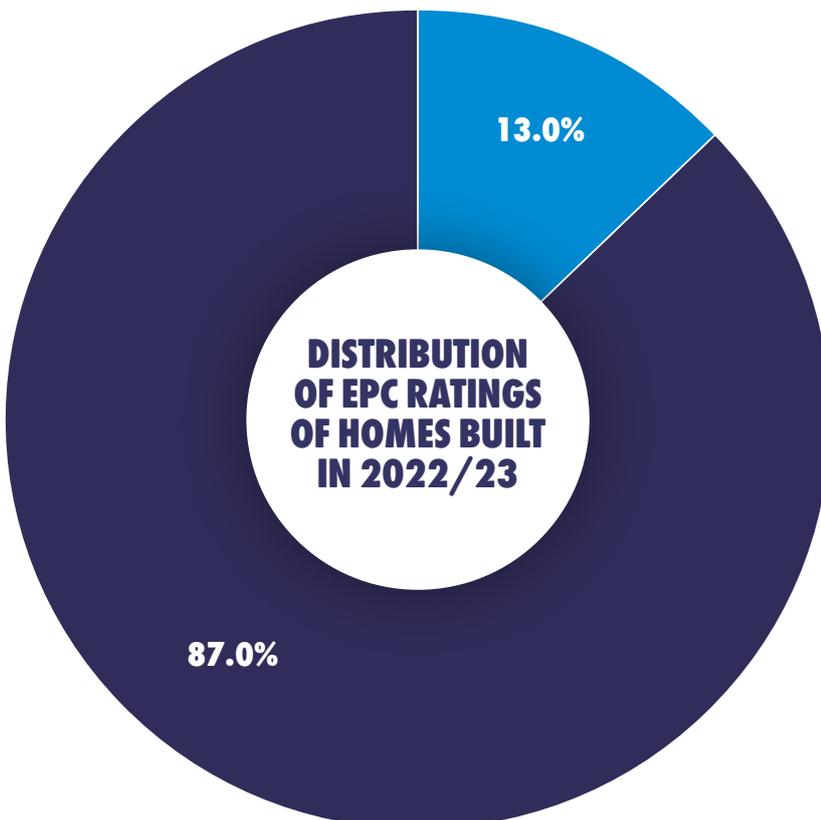
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**Delivering a home to an EPC A rating will save the resident an average of**

**£480** per annum to heat their homes



<span style="color: #00AEEF;">■</span> % Of homes rated A	0.4%
<span style="color: #3366CC;">■</span> % Of homes rated B	5.9%
<span style="color: #191970;">■</span> % Of homes rated C	75.5%
<span style="color: #008000;">■</span> % Of homes rated D	17.3%
<span style="color: #CC0000;">■</span> % Of homes rated E or worse	0.96%
<span style="color: #FFA500;">■</span> % Of homes without EPC rating (unknown)	0.0%



<span style="color: #00AEEF;">■</span> % Of homes rated A	13.0%
<span style="color: #191970;">■</span> % Of homes rated B	87.0%

## GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

# Accent has adopted an operational control approach to establishing the scope of our carbon footprint report.

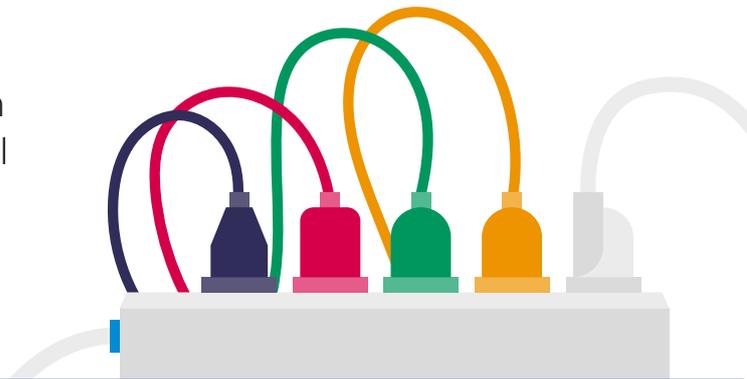
1  
**SCOPE**



emissions from consumption to natural gas to heat offices and multi-occupancy buildings e.g. independent living schemes.

2  
**SCOPE**

includes all GHG emissions from electricity used within offices and communal areas within multi-occupancy buildings.



3  
**SCOPE**



emissions include all business travel via flights, trains, taxis and personal vehicle; transmission and distribution of electricity; material use (paper and board); water supply and treatment; hotel stays and working from home.

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**SCOPE 1**

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**KG CO2 EQUIVALENT 718,399**

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**SCOPE 2**

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**KG CO2 EQUIVALENT 315,200**

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**SCOPE 3**

---

**KG CO2 EQUIVALENT 48,276,748**

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**SCOPE 1,2 AND 3**

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**TOTAL KG CO2  
EQUIVALENT 49,310,347**

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The methodology used is in line with the Greenhouse Gas Protocol and the BEIS Environmental Reporting Guidelines. CO2e has been used to represent all greenhouse gases.

# ENERGY EFFICIENCY ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN IN THE LAST YEAR

In 2022/23 we:

- ✓ Delivery of a £1.25m retrofit project to 63 homes across Yorkshire and Surrey through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF Wave1). This included installation of various energy efficiency measures such as external wall insulation, cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, new windows and doors, ventilation and solar PV.

We have successfully secured further funding from SHDF Wave2 for decarbonisation measures to a further 71 homes in Yorkshire and the East. Plus, additional funding from WYCA for 99 properties to receive loft/ cavity wall insulation measures.

- 
- ✓ We have continued to use our bespoke fuel poverty matrix to colleagues enabling them to determine which households they work with may be at risk of fuel poverty.

**We have calculated our  
baseline carbon footprint  
and begun to develop our  
Sustainability Strategy and  
Decarbonisation Plan.**

This will allow significant carbon reduction initiatives to be implemented over the coming years. We are in the process of optimising our Planned Programme so that retrofit works become 'business as usual' and to enable us to align works with our 30-year financial plan.

## Accent's retrofit pilot is now underway

**In February 2022, Accent was awarded **£1.25m** of grant funding from two successful bids to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF).**

The funding marks an exciting start for our sustainability agenda and a pilot project of retrofit works in over 80 homes in Yorkshire and Surrey.

We have subsequently secured a further £638K to deliver retrofit measures to 71 properties in Yorkshire and the East, plus an additional £186k WYCA funding for insulation measures to 99 properties in West Yorkshire. These projects are currently underway.

Decarbonising properties at scale is an underdeveloped concept for the UK housing sector. Supply chains need to be established, contractors need to be familiar with strict regulations and materials and products need to be sourced and tested. By securing this funding stream, we can begin to build these networks and learn from the pilot in preparation for rolling out works at scale in 2023 and beyond.



**So far, the pilot scheme has provided us with invaluable learnings for how this will work at scale by:**

- Engaging with residents to explain the works, promote the financial and environmental benefits and importantly, give residents lots of opportunities to ask questions and raise any concerns
- Implementing a rigorous retrofit assessment process to determine the suitability of homes put forward for the planned energy efficiency works
- Identifying homes with already higher than EPC C+ ratings and swapping these out for less energy efficient homes
- Understanding the realistic timescales involved in delivering retrofit works and other challenges such as designs outside building regulations and the impact of market volatility on costs

## CASE STUDY

# INSTALLING ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEASURES TO OUR HOMES HAS MULTIPLE POSITIVE BENEFITS.

Fabric first retrofitting focuses on ensuring a property is well insulated, which will help reduce heat loss and reduce energy consumption required to achieve an adequate level of thermal comfort.

Customers will benefit from reduced energy consumption, helping to tackle fuel poverty and reduce the health and wellbeing impacts of living in a cold home. Using less energy will also reduce associated carbon emissions helping to tackle the impacts of climate change.

Ventilation is also a key consideration in our retrofits, helping to ensure condensation, damp and mould doesn't occur as a result of works and providing a healthy home for the future.





## ECOLOGY

# CLIMATE RESILIENCE IS CRITICAL TO THE FUTURE OF ACCENT'S HOMES AND COMMUNITIES.

We have begun mapping flood risk areas to determine where mitigation measures may be required. We are also in the early stages of investigating overheating, particularly in our Independent Living Schemes where centralised heating systems can cause an increased risk.

As a responsible housing provider, we understand the importance of green space not just for biodiversity but also for the co-benefits it can provide to the community such as enhanced wellbeing, community-cohesion and opportunities for education.

A colleague sub-group, set up within Accent as part of the creation of our 'Place Strategy' determined that the most effective way of enhancing green space would be to address it simultaneously to planned works. Where schemes are receiving upgrades at a large scale i.e. scheme wide, we will use this opportunity to consider the green space and how it can be improved.

## Biodiversity on a new build scheme

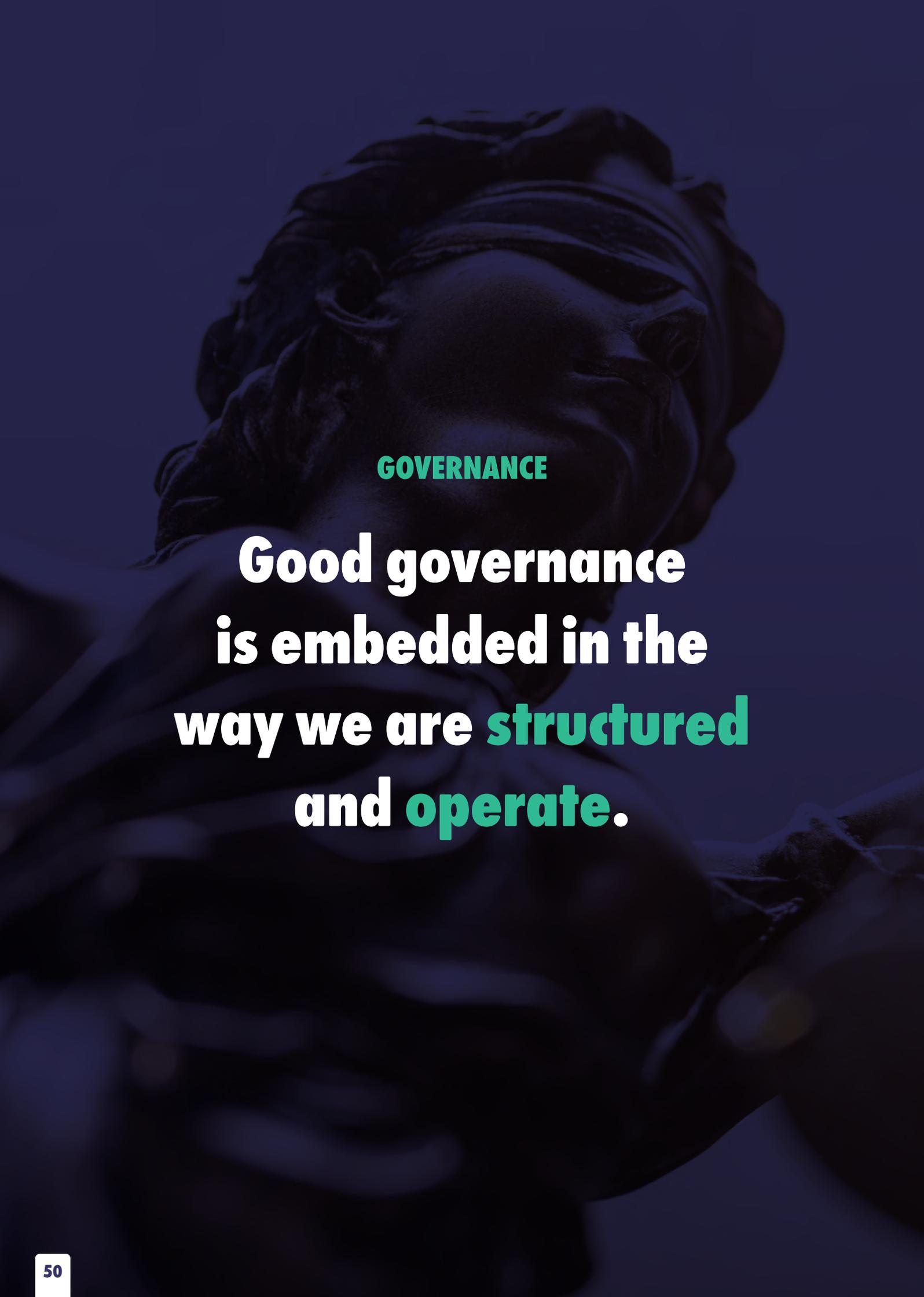
**A focus on maintaining and enhancing biodiversity has been taken at our site in **Biddenham**, Bedfordshire, where we acquired **38 new affordable homes** in **2022/23**, with a further **37** due.**





Accent strives to work with suppliers that demonstrate sustainable practices. Across the sites Accent has acquired in Biddenham, developer Dandara has developed several enhanced ecological features, including:

- Providing five Schwegler 1SP sparrow terraces on new builds post-development
- Registering the site under a District Licence prior to any works to protect Great Crested Newts present on site
- Installing a lighting scheme designed to avoid light spill onto boundary vegetation and adjacent woodland.
- Installing five Schwegler 1B bird boxes on retained trees post-development to provide nesting opportunities for a range of bird species.
- Providing new habitats including native hedgerow, wildflower meadow and an attenuation feature to provide new foraging opportunities for bats, badgers, grass snake and amphibians.
- Maintaining a new wildflower and wet meadow for reptiles and amphibians.
- Creating a hibernaculum within the new wildflower meadow using logs from onsite vegetation clearance to provide new opportunities for reptiles, amphibians and saproxylic species such as stag beetles.
- Clearing vegetation outside of nesting bird season (March – July inclusive) or following a check from an ecologist.
- Ensuring that all areas of grassland is subject to a habitat manipulation exercise to encourage the small population of grass snake to disperse into adjacent habitat.
- Adopting best practice measures during construction (in terms of site management, storage of materials etc.) to avoid harm to badgers.
- Providing 13cm x 13cm gaps in the base of all boundary fences to facilitate continued movement for hedgehogs.
- Installing five Schwegler 1FF bat boxes, or equivalent, on retained trees. This will provide new roosting opportunities for locally present bat species.
- Retaining and protecting trees with bat roost potential.
- Retaining boundary vegetation retained and planting these with native species.



**GOVERNANCE**

**Good governance  
is embedded in the  
way we are structured  
and operate.**

## GOVERNANCE KEY FACTS

**We are a not-for-profit housing provider.**

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### **G1V1**

RSH strapline grading published summer 2019 and has been reaffirmed annually. The grading has been upheld in 2023 following a further independent review, which concluded that Accent's approach to governance is effective and the organisation is operating well.

**Governance grade: G 1**

**Viability grade: V 1**

**Regulatory: Stability Check**

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**We follow the NHF Code of Governance 2020 which came into effect within Accent on 1 April 2021.**

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**We are registered with the Regulator of Social Housing.**

**MANAGING ORGANISATIONAL RISKS**

**All areas across the business contribute to the organisation's operational risk management.**

Accent's approach to risk management is scrutinised at Board level and supported by the internal Audit & Risk Committee (A&RC), who conduct additional reviews to capture new and emerging risks. For example, in 2022/23 this included consideration of the World Economic Forum's Perception Survey 2021-22 and Gartner's Emerging Risks Report and included looking at how risks around pandemic, cyber threat, climate change, economic crisis and social cohesion may lead to strategic or operational risks for Accent. The A&RC analyse the Regulator's Sector Risk Profile (2022) when mapping these risks.

**THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF OUR BOARD**



\*9% preferred not to disclose their gender.



**BLACK  
ASIAN  
MINORITY  
ETHNIC**

**NONE  
OF OUR  
BOARD  
HAVE A  
DISABILITY**

**9%**  
**LGBTQ+  
BOARD  
MEMBERS**

<b>AGES OF OUR BOARD MEMBERS:</b>	<b>35 - 44: 1</b>	<b>55 - 64: 5</b>	<b>PREFER NOT TO SAY: 1</b>
	<b>45 - 54: 1</b>	<b>65+: 3</b>	

**The Board have agreed four EDI commitments which will form part of the EDI plan to be executed in 2023/24. The Board have already made and are continuing to make positive steps to ensure that there is a gender balance which moves towards better reflecting our customer demographic.**

# BOARD AND ASSURANCE KEY FACTS

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In 2022/23

**TWO**

members retired from the Board, and

**THREE**

members were appointed.

A succession plan has been provided to board in the last

**12 MONTHS**

evidencing clear planning and preparedness.

We want our board members to be innovate and bring fresh thinking and challenge so we have a maximum tenure of 6 years.

**THE AVERAGE BOARD TENURE IS 4 YEARS**

**91%**

of board are non-executive directors and the roles of Chair and CEO are held by two different people; Tom Miskell and Paul Dolan respectively.

Our previous independent board-effectiveness review happened in 2017, with a follow up in 2020. A further review was conducted in February 2023. Remuneration of board members was benchmarked as part of this review, and a new Senior Independent Director has been appointed in 2023.

**Our audit partner carried out their first audit in 2022/23 and have been reappointed to audit 2023/24.**

**We maintain a declarations of interest register and ask board members to confirm any changes that may be required to this. Declarations are made in the meeting for the relevant agenda item. If considered material, the chair and company secretary would ask the conflicted board member to leave the meeting. This procedure is reviewed on an annual basis and updated accordingly.**

To ensure no conflicts of interest on our remuneration committee, members are made up of group board or committee members. No executive directors are permitted to sit on the committee.

# AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

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To ensure our audit process is fully compliant with appropriate laws and regulations **four** of the **Audit and Risk Committee** members have significant, recent and relevant **financial experience** and one of those is a chartered accountant. We periodically undertake skill audits to provide further assurance.

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**FOUR**

**OF THE MEMBERS ARE ALSO MEMBERS OF ACCENT GROUP BOARD AND ACCENT HOUSING BOARD.**

**This has been reduced to **two** Board members in **2023/24** to accommodate for more independent committee members.**

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**STAFF WELLBEING**

**WE ACTIVELY WORK TO ENSURE THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF OUR EMPLOYEES AND UNDERSTAND A HAPPY AND SECURE WORKFORCE CONTRIBUTES TO BETTER CUSTOMER OUTCOMES.**

**We are committed to ensuring our employees earn a wage that meets the cost of living, not just the government minimum which is why we pay the Real Living Wage.**

**OUR MEDIAN GENDER PAY GAP IS**

**11.2%**

**AN IMPROVEMENT ON 2021/22 WHEN THIS WAS 14.7%**

**OUR MEDIAN WORKER:CEO PAY RATIO IS 5:9**

**In 2023/24 we will produce our first extended pay gap report, so we can also report on our ethnicity, sexuality and disability pay gaps.**

We support our staff by offering initiatives via our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provider Health Assured, which includes:

- Free 24/7 counselling, legal and information line
- Critical incident advice and telephone support
- Online health portal and access to the My Healthy Advantage app
- Relationship management support & usage reporting\*
- Management support line & counselling
- Manager support guides

Additionally, we have invested in developing our wellbeing team. The end of the financial year 2022/23 saw us with 5 Mental Health First aiders. Our wellbeing group and Wellbeing Champions, working with our EDI Specialist and ERF, formulate the strategy for wider wellbeing support and engagement. This includes broader aspects such as financial wellbeing (through initiatives such as our Talk Money Week sessions), lived experience sharing (through our colleague-led People Series talks) and mental health messaging. We promote a healthy work/life balance and provide additional support through Occupational Health and Display Screen Equipment Assessments. We introduced our employee benefits platform, Hapi, at the end of 2022/23, which gives colleagues access to a wide range of discounts and financial incentives.

From 2023/24 onwards, our Head of Organisational Development will be working to create an extended calendar of engagement, making sure wellbeing initiatives are central to colleague inclusion. We are employing these initiatives to help reduce the average number of sick days taken per employee – which, at the end of 2022/23 was 12.8.

In 2023 a Strategic Health & Safety Group has been implemented to ensure effective health and safety arrangements and associated performance is in place. This ensures that customers, colleagues and communities are safe. Oversight of measures and performance is reported to Board.

## **SUPPLY CHAIN**

**We know that good governance extends beyond our own operations and includes managing and maintaining strong links through the chain, ethical behaviour towards suppliers, and the requirement of sustainable practices by those suppliers.**

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We want to engage with potential suppliers who will maximise social value in the communities where we have homes, and we follow guidance in the Government published Procurement Policy Note consider the following Social Value Model themes including fighting climate change, wellbeing, equal opportunity, and tackling economic inequality.

Proportionate weightings are allocated in the procurement process to achieve this, and we set expectations for the delivery of social value as part of the tender process for new contracts, involving internal and external stakeholders (customers) in this process for relevant contracts. Contractors and suppliers will be requested to pledge what

they will deliver each year of the contract term, with social value pledges forming part of their contractual obligations to deliver outcomes in line with submitted tenders.

Accent wants to engage with potential suppliers who will not only improve the comfort, health and well-being of our customers – for example by delivering warm, energy efficient homes - but who will have the most positive environmental, social and economic impacts across the entire life cycle on all we procure.

We look to identify like-minded partners to enhance our contribution to overall carbon reduction and we aim to choose companies to work with based on

their commitment to environmental sustainability. This includes asking questions in the procurement process to consider potential suppliers' commitments to circular economy principles, carbon reduction, energy consumption, water consumption, waste reduction, delivery optimisation, biodiversity, nature conservation and greening, noise, land and water pollution, air quality, responsible consumption, sustainable supply of produce and materials, and the consideration of food miles. We endeavour to track the delivery of these environmental/sustainability objectives as part of the performance management processes for applicable contracts.

