



ANNUAL REPORT 2022





Tim Johnston, Board Chair

Onward has enjoyed a strong year during which the financial resilience and maturity of the organisation has continued to grow.

As an incoming Chair, starting in October 2021, I was drawn to Onward by its great potential to make a positive difference for customers and in their communities. The strong foundations of a united and well governed organisation have been built under the stewardship of the Executive Team, Board and of course my predecessor.

These annual accounts reveal underlying financial strength that is enabling significant investment in homes we own and manage, in new homes to meet growing need and in the services we provide for our customers.

The Strategic Partnership with Homes England and the agreed unsecured £90m revolving credit facility are significant markers of our growing capacity to deliver.

We look ahead to the coming year with confidence as we prepare plans to deliver step-change investment in performance, customer satisfaction and the quality of our homes. Everything we do will be driven by listening to our customers and showing them how we are responding and improving.

In the coming year effective partnerships with national and local government, charities and private business will accelerate our ability to make The Onward Difference for our customers.



Bronwen Rapley, Chief Executive

In the last 12 months Onward has passed significant milestones as our organisation and colleagues continue to grow. We are building a strong foundation for managing, improving and building affordable homes, as well as for serving our customers and communities.

But reflecting on the year covered by this annual report, it is the stories of our customers that matter the most, rather than our organisational story. Customers we support as they struggle to pay bills as everything becomes more expensive. Those who need us to complete repairs or improvements to keep their homes warm and dry. People who want to learn and apply new skills in their careers or in their communities.

As we prepare to introduce a new Corporate Plan to guide us through the years ahead, our commitment is to listen to these voices and place the stories of our customers right at the heart of our organisation.

We know that the cost of living is becoming more difficult for most. For some of our customers this will be especially hard in the months ahead. Our strong finances will allow us to support our customers during difficult times. We have invested in our financial inclusion and support work this year and are ramping this up in response to growing need.

Improvements have continued to be made in customer service and the quality of our homes this year. But we know our customers want us to go further and faster to deliver better outcomes, sooner. We are committed to doing so.

We are well positioned to support our customers in the face of the challenges ahead of us all.

Our highlights from the last 12 months

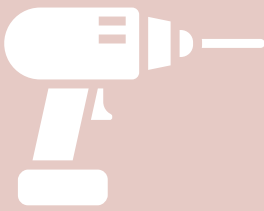


Homes
England

Becoming a Strategic Partner of Homes England, supporting plans to invest **£600m** in building **5,000** new homes by 2030

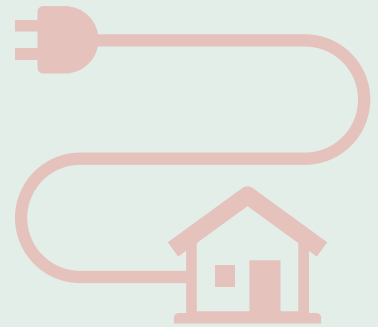


Contour Homes formally became part of Onward on 1 April 2021, creating a **single and unified organisation**

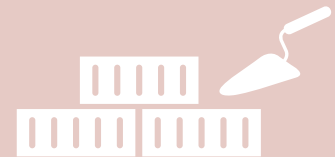


Investing a total of **£70m** to mend, improve and update homes and keep customers safe

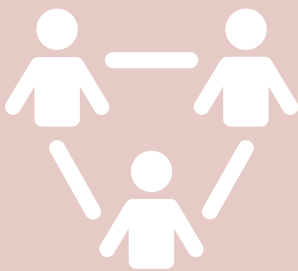
Securing **£1.5m** for energy efficiency and other improvements to homes in Runcorn



Keeping our **A1** Credit rating, which continues to allow us to access funding at low rates



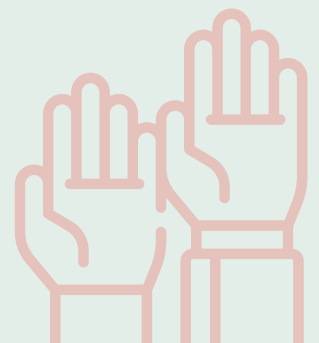
Agreed a **Revolving Credit Facility** (RCF - short term lending) to support delivery of new homes



Establishing a local **Community Design Team**

to lead our community-renewal proposals or Murdishaw, Runcorn

Completing a **customer consultation** on proposals for a major regeneration scheme in Preston



Improving our Neighbourhoods.



LOCAL COMMUNITIES TAKING BACK CONTROL.

Our plans for community-led renewal in Murdishaw, Runcorn, gathered pace this year. Local residents are leading a new Community Design Team, supported by Onward, to design and deliver improvements to the local area for the benefit of the whole community.

In partnership with the Community Design Team, we have worked up plans for a new local centre. The centre will be part of a thriving hub at the heart of the community, offering a space for local people to socialise and enjoy lots of different activities. Consultation took place this year and we are working with the Community Design Team to consider feedback.

In the meantime, early achievements include making public spaces greener and safer and increasingly using them for community activities, such as a Christmas craft market, supported by our local neighbourhood teams who know the community inside out.

We are backing this up with real investment, including through our success in securing £1.5m from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund for extensive improvements to existing local homes. We will use this money to renovate 129 bungalows, making them warmer, drier and fit for modern living. Our longer term ambitions include building more new affordable homes to meet local need.

PLACE BASED REGENERATION IN PRESTON.

We recently completed a customer consultation on the first step in proposals for a comprehensive regeneration of our Avenham neighbourhood in Preston. Customers were asked for their views on our preferred option to demolish the three existing tower blocks and replace them with better quality homes fit for modern living. A decision on how to proceed will be announced in due course.

Our ambition is for replacement of the tower blocks to become a catalyst for wider transformation of the local area, delivering much better quality housing and an overall increase in the local supply of affordable homes.



Becoming the Social Landlord of Choice.



We aspire to be a listening landlord that hears what customers want and improves our homes and services in response. Respecting our customers and giving them a voice is important to us, which is why we invest in a Customer Scrutiny Board and a wider engaged community of 2,000 customers.

Something we hear very clearly at the moment is the challenge of keeping up with the cost of living, as inflation escalates and many everyday things become more expensive. This year we have continued to invest in our Financial Inclusion Team, which provides free financial advice and support for customers, helping them to pay their bills and remain in their homes.

We are also piloting a new scheme called Home+, which gives targeted support to some customers taking on new tenancies by providing white goods, appliances and some furnishings. We want to take the pressure off as our new tenants make the house their home right at the beginning of their tenancy.

Elsewhere, we have continued to support customers by working with charity and local government partners. Examples include the Community Shops we support in Liverpool, Runcorn and the Wirral, helping local people access affordable food, as well as the 1st Call Centre in Accrington, preparing people for work through training and mentoring.

RESPONDING TO THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS



LISTENING AND LEARNING ON IMPROVING CUSTOMER HOMES.

Everyone deserves a warm and dry home where they will be comfortable and healthy. With some older homes this can be challenging and we have not got it right in every case. But we are listening to customers where they tell us this is an issue and we are determined to deliver better outcomes.

In response, this year we have implemented a new approach to identifying, escalating and resolving damp and related issues. This is already helping to drive better outcomes for customers but we know there is more to do. Longer term, we are planning and already beginning to deliver comprehensive investment in the homes we own to make them as warm, dry and as affordable to heat as possible.

Growing where we can make a positive difference.

INVESTING IN AFFORDABLE HOMES.

Onward Homes has become a Strategic Partner of Homes England. This means we are one of the group of leading developing social landlords working in partnership with government to deliver its Affordable Homes Programme.

Our agreement with Homes England is to receive £152m in grant funding to help us build 3,200 new homes, with construction beginning no later than 2026. The Partnership is part of our wider plans to invest around £600m in building more than 5,000 new homes across the North West by 2030.

Most of these will be affordable homes, available to rent or buy at a significant discount from their market value. There will be a range of types of homes and tenures to meet the variety of need, from first time buyers to growing families and people on the most limited incomes.

Quality is important to our customers and it is to us as well. This is why we routinely build all of our new homes to a higher standard than required by legislation and guidance. All of our new homes will have an Energy Performance Rating of at least 'B', which means they will be warm, dry and energy efficient to keep bills down.



BUILDING ACROSS THE NORTH WEST.

During 2021, we were active across the North West by securing permission to build new housing, starting work on site and moving people into brand new homes.



HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- Securing planning permission to build 240 new homes at Helsby in Cheshire West
- Starting work on 70 new homes in Hattersley, Greater Manchester, along with a 91-home extra care facility
- Getting to work building 28 new homes at Mersey View in Wirral
- Completing delivery of 27 homes for affordable rent in Bury, Greater Manchester, with all homes allocated within 2 weeks