



Customer Annual Report 2019/20

karbon
homes

Providing a strong foundation for life.

Welcome

I am pleased to introduce our Customer Annual Report for 2019/2020.

We publish this report to make sure our customers are kept up to date on how we are performing against the standards that are set by the Regulator of Social Housing. These standards help show how well we are doing as an organisation and, more importantly, allow you to understand how well we are delivering our services to you.

Over the last year we have seen some great achievements. Now our organisation is three years old, we're increasing the scale and scope of what we can achieve – and reviewing how we can improve.

This year's report shows just how much we've expanded our service offer. We're determined to do more than just build, manage and look after affordable homes for people, we aim to provide the services and support that gives our customers and communities strong foundations for life.

Our Board and Management Team continue to provide leadership and direction, so necessary at a time when the wider world has been changing very rapidly. They, like me, are determined that all our customers have fair access to the support services we offer.

The safety of our customers is a key priority for us and in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, we have continued to focus our efforts in ensuring our homes are safe through additional investment in fire, gas and electric safety.

Throughout, we have maintained very high levels of both customer and colleague satisfaction but there will always be areas where we can improve. Thankfully with committed colleagues we know we can build upon what we already do well.

As the financial year was coming to an end, we were already beginning to see the first devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and I was immensely proud that we were able to act almost immediately. We maintained emergency service levels, ensured our customers who needed support were safe through regular check-in calls and Silver Talk, our telephone befriending service, and offered financial support to local projects via our Covid Emergency Fund.

We know that the best way to improve our services is to listen to our customers and act on your feedback. This year we have worked with you to find out what areas of the organisation you would like us to regularly report on going forward, you can read more about this on page 14.

I would like to thank our customers, particularly our Strategic Residents Group, who give so much of their time to working alongside us. We look forward to working with you in the future.

Paul Fiddaman
Group Chief Executive



Michael Lisle

Chair of the Strategic Residents Group

I'm pleased to give you an update on what the Strategic Residents Group has been doing on your behalf over the last 12 months.

The group is made up of a small number of customers who hold Karbon Homes to account and monitor levels of customer service by looking at Karbon's performance and reviewing any feedback received by customers. I am happy to say that Karbon has done very well in the past year in all aspects, ranging from the repairs that have been carried out, to resolving complaints to a satisfactory level.

The six of us had a brilliant year together getting stuck into a whole host of projects. A definite standout one for me was the scrutiny review we carried out on how repairs calls are handled by Karbon.

As customers ourselves, we understand how important Karbon's repairs service is to you all and we all want them done as soon as possible. We wanted to analyse whether the reporting of a repair is fit for purpose and I am pleased to say that our review found that a good level of service is provided.

However, we did find that there was room for some improvements and therefore made a number of recommendations which will hopefully be implemented to make reporting a repair by telephone an easier experience for us all.

We're all really looking forward to continuing to hold Karbon to account for the services it delivers to customers over the next 12 months. We will continue to work hard on your behalf to make sure Karbon provides the best services possible and will continue to challenge, but also support, Karbon going forward.

As Chair of the group, it would be wrong of me not to mention the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Recent months have been difficult and challenging and I'm sure you will join me in saying thank you to all the colleagues and customers at Karbon for what they have done and will continue to do to support each other.



Did you know?

We're always on the lookout for more customers to get involved, helping us to shape our services and products in the future. Turn to page 12 of this report for more information.



Karbon key facts



Karbon owns and manages almost

30,000

homes across the North East of England and Yorkshire



Karbon has

869

employees and

16

apprentices

There are approximately
60,000
people living in our homes



Economic standard

The Economic Standard focuses on effective governance; the achievement of value for money, and how rent levels are set in line with the Government's Rent Standard guidance.

Karbon is in a position of financial strength. As a profit for purpose business, we continue to invest any money we make into maintaining and improving our existing homes, developing the services we provide to customers, and building more new homes.



Karbon has a turnover of
£136 million
(the amount of business the organisation has done in the year).



We have a
G1/V1 rating
from The Regulator of Social Housing, the highest possible score for governance and financial viability (this means we are well run and financially strong, which will help us achieve our future plans).

We set our rents according to the Government's regulations, which last year saw a
0.92% decrease.



Tenancy standard

This standard focuses on the way homes are allocated and how customers are supported to maintain their tenancy.

Letting homes



We let **3,027** homes, 534 of which were new builds of all tenures

Had an average re-let time of

48 days



91% of customers were satisfied with the lettings service

92% of customers were satisfied with the quality of their home

Collecting your rent



Average weekly general needs rent was

£75.06

We collected

99%

of rent against a target of 100%



Our rent arrears were

3%

of our rental income



Did you know?

We've started using Zoopla and Moving Soon as key advertising platforms for our empty homes.

Tenancy standard

Money Matters is a confidential advice service on everything to do with your finances, benefits and money.



The Money Matters Team has this year:

Supported
5,396

customers to provide benefit, money and debt advice.

Secured

£6.5 million

of income gains for customers through their specialist advice - our highest yet.



This year we've formed some strong partnerships. The Money Matters Team became trusted partners of Northumbrian Water, enabling residents with low incomes to benefit from water rates discounts of up to 50% off their annual bills, including those customers who pay their water rates direct to us.

Newcastle City Council also commissioned the team to support its welfare rights function and provide advice for **850** Newcastle residents. The Money Matters Team have so far confirmed over **£1,500,000** in benefit gains for non-Karbon Newcastle residents.

To date, we have confirmed water rate reductions worth over **£16,500**.



No matter how big or small the problem, the team is here to help.

money matters@karbonhomes.co.uk
0808 164 0111



Foundations for Life is our employment and digital support service available to all Karbon Homes' customers.

In 2019/2020 our Foundations for Life team supported:

78

customers to build their digital, literacy and numeracy skills.



265

customers towards employment

73 into work

5 into further education

37 into training

20 into work experience or volunteering

33 gained an additional qualification.

Did you know?



Last year we broke down barriers for 77 customers with our Foundations Support Fund, totalling over £4,700

With a smartphone paid for through the Foundations Support Fund, Eileen was able to take her job search to the next level.

“I’m so thankful to Kate. She was instrumental in helping me find my perfect, dream job, assisting me in overcoming a few barriers that prevented me from moving forward.

“In recognising my potential, she gave me the confidence boost I needed to aim higher once again.”

Customer Eileen Gallon, Longframlington.



Whatever it is that you set out to achieve, our experienced advisors are here to help.

foundations@karbonhomes.co.uk

0191 223 8750

Home Standard

This standard focuses on the provision of quality accommodation, a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service, the health and safety of customers, and the provision of an adaptations service that meets customer needs.

Repairing and investing in your home

All of our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard (set by the Government that council and housing association homes have to meet)



79,685

repairs were completed in response to customer needs.

It took on average

10.7

days to complete a responsive repair.

99.9%

of emergency repairs were completed within the target of 24 hours.

87.7%

of customers were satisfied with the repairs service.

Keeping you safe in your home

Nothing is more important to us than keeping you and your family safe in your home. That's why we make it a top priority to carry out regular safety checks in your homes, to ensure all appliances and safety equipment are in a safe, working condition.

99.91%

of gas services due were completed prior to certificate expiry.



Approximately

2000

electrical tests were undertaken to ensure the condition of electrical installations in our homes is safe.

We invested

£2.7 million

on fire safety related works and continue to invest heavily in this area.



Did you know?

Last year we invested

£44 million

in maintaining our existing homes:

1,694

adaptations were made, helping customers remain safe and independent in their homes.

634

new boilers fitted or heating improvements were made.

76

bathrooms fitted

231

kitchens fitted

249

roofs fitted



If we've contacted you to say a safety check is due, please make every effort to keep your appointment. If you know you're not going to be home, please make sure it is rescheduled for as soon as possible.

This is not just a legal requirement, it is vital for your safety.

We provide a range of ways for customers to access homes: from homes to buy and shared ownership, to affordable housing, social housing and supported and specialised housing.



Did you know?

This year we have invested
£67million
in building **534** new homes.



181

Homes for Affordable rent.



284

Shared Ownership and Rent to Buy.

We have expanded into a larger footprint, with Karbon now building new homes in **17** local authority areas across the North East and Yorkshire.

We plan to complete **458** new homes in the coming year.



Rent to Buy is aimed at people who would like to buy a property but who currently don't have enough savings to cover a deposit, allowing residents to rent before they buy.

Holly Avery, with her partner Ben and their two daughters Pearl and Ruby, aged three and one, were living in a rented two-bedroom house and desperately needed more space.

Thanks to the scheme, they have been able to move into their forever home on Karbon's Springfield Meadows development in Darlington.

"I fell in love with the house as soon as I saw it. This one just ticked every box for us.

"This is getting us on the property ladder through Rent to Buy. We are hoping to have bought it before the five-year period is up.



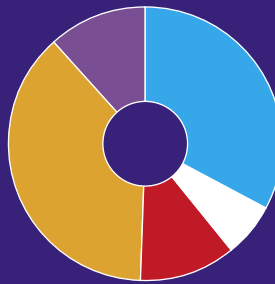
Neighbourhood and Community Standard

This Standard focuses on the cleanliness and safety of neighbourhoods and communal areas; the promotion of social, environmental and economic wellbeing; and the prevention and tackling of anti-social behaviour (ASB).

Your community

Our Community Investment Team works within your communities to build strong sustainable places for our residents to live.

Over the past 12 months we've supported **61** projects in your communities through Karbon grant funding, totalling **£286,457**.



Northumberland	20
Newcastle, Gateshead Sunderland	4
North and South Tyneside	7
County Durham	23
Multiple regions	7



Karbon resident Nichola Winthrop and friend Lynsey Baxter dreamed of a place where children with additional needs could take centre stage. So, they created it! The Odd Socks Foundation secured **£4,680** grant from Karbon to run free drama and dance classes for kids with extra needs and their siblings in South Tyneside.

"I was so excited when I found out that Karbon offers help to community projects that support its residents. From the second I spoke to the team they were clearly on my side and wanted to help.

"The grant we've been given means that rather than charging £3.50 a session we will just ask for donations."



If you know of, or are part of, an organisation or community group who may be interested in working with us to support our customers, please contact our Community Connectors.

mycommunity@karbonhomes.co.uk

0808 164 0111

Your neighbourhood

89.6%

of customers were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live

Across all our communities, our housing teams dealt with **1,868** cases of anti-social behaviour **633** of which were of a serious nature.



Our housing and community teams visited **54** Karbon neighbourhoods and engaged with **530** customers, finding out what they loved about where they lived, and what issues were the biggest concern for them.



The residents of Merton Square in Blyth are grateful to Karbon's housing team, who have worked closely with them to help make their small community a great place to live.

Regular meetings with the residents meant their housing officer could help them get repairs resolved that hadn't been reported, refer those who needed assistance with a variety of problems into support services, and chat to them about the ways they can securely report incidents of anti-social behaviour to help them feel safe.

"Karbon have been really good to us the team are really approachable and down to earth and their presence around the square means we always have someone to talk to if there's an issue.

I feel like they really care about what happens in the square and want the best for us."

Hazel, Resident of Merton Square.

Involvement and Empowerment Standard

This standard focuses on providing opportunities for tenant involvement and empowerment; supporting customers to scrutinise and improve services; having a clear focus on good customer service, choice and complaints; and having a clear understanding and response to the diverse needs of customers.

The Karbon customer experience

- **90.6%** of new Karbon customers were very/fairly satisfied with service they received as they moved in
- **89.8%** of all Karbon customers were very/fairly satisfied with the service they received from us

Our customer Net Promoter Score is

+45.3

The Net Promoter Score measures our customers' willingness to recommend Karbon to friends or family. Scores range from -100 to +100 and the Customer Service UK benchmark is +21



Did you know?

We've been making some big changes to our customer portal - MyKarbon.

Since its relaunch in October last year we've worked hard to make sure you have the services you need at your fingertips.

You can now make a payment, check your rent statements, and, most importantly, book a repair slot that works for you and your daily schedule.

We've had some great feedback on the changes so far and we're exploring more of your ideas for the future so watch this space. Log in or register today. Visit www.karbonhomes.co.uk/mykarbon

4,718

customers have active accounts on MyKarbon.



Customer feedback is really important to us. It helps us to continuously improve, learn and develop our products and services.

In the last year:

- Received **322** compliments
- Received **2,288** complaints with **76%** resolved at first point of contact



Connect with Karbon

Our involved customers help us ensure our customers are at the heart of how our business is run, working alongside our teams to ensure the customer voice is heard and that projects are well managed and deliver value for money.

Here's a quick run through of what our involved customers have helped us with over the last year.

In the kitchen with our customers

Prior to selecting a new kitchen supplier, customers worked with us to identify what in our kitchens could be improved, and if the layouts and designs were satisfactory and keeping up with current trends.

Home sweet home

Customers are helping us to implement a new lettable standard to ensure our customers receive a consistent standard of repairs. They have suggested improvements to the service standards of kitchens, bathrooms, gardens, decoration, and cleaning and some have even visited several empty properties to test the standard.

Customers at the heart

Customers told us what good customer service meant to them and how they wanted to see us measure it going forward. They then worked with us to choose our new Customer Service Standards. (Turn to page 14 for more information).



We're looking for customers of all ages and from all walks of life to get involved with the things we do to improve your home and neighbourhood.

If you're interested in finding out more about how you can help us shape our services and products in the future, please get in touch.

connectwithkarbon@karbonhomes.co.uk
0808 164 0111

The future – Our new Customer Service Standards

The Regulator for Social Housing has two main objectives set by the Government.

One is an economic objective, to ensure that we are financially strong and run efficiently, and the other is a consumer objective which is broken down in to the four standards that this report has covered.

- Home Standard
- Tenancy Standard
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

In the new year we ran a number of focus groups with customers, many of whom had never engaged with us before.

We asked them to make suggestions on what elements of Karbon's service they'd like to see us measure and regularly report on, to show we are meeting these four standards.

Lots of good suggestions were made and it was really useful to hear what good customer service meant to each of them.

Some measures stood out as being really important such as gas and fire safety measures which were raised by every single participant at the focus groups.

Following the group work, we agreed on a set of Customer Service Standards which were then signed off by our Strategic Residents Group and the Karbon Leadership Team.

Going forward we will report on these standards on our website regularly throughout each year.



Our New Customer Service Standards

1. All blocks of flats with communal doors will have a current and up to date Fire Risk Assessment.
2. We will answer calls to our emergency 'Out of Hours' telephone service within 100 seconds.
3. We will ensure our homes are kept safe by successfully checking all gas appliances in your home once a year.
4. If you make a complaint, we will acknowledge it within 1 working day and we aim to resolve 75% at first point of contact at Stage 0.
5. We will answer calls into to our Customer Relationship Team via the Freephone service within 100 seconds, Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm.
6. We will provide all customers with clear and appropriate information in relation to their new home, including legal obligations relating to their tenancy (we are making some system changes to track this and will be able to report on this from January 21 2021).
7. When you report your repair, we'll complete it in the following times:
 - a. 24 hours for emergency repairs
 - b. 20 days for non-emergency repairs.
8. 100% of our properties will meet the Decent Homes Standard.
9. We will visit all of our schemes and estates on at least a quarterly basis and where relevant, will invite customers, Local Authorities, Police and other parties to attend.
10. We will keep you informed of the progress of your home from offer to commencement of tenancy.



In addition to the above 10 standards, customers also chose two standards relating to how Karbon deals with anti-social behaviour (ASB).

We are currently developing a plan for how we measure and report these two ASB standards.

We would love to hear what you thought of this year's report. Your constructive feedback, from the content to the layout and design, helps us understand how we can improve it in the future.

You can get in touch with our Communications and Marketing Team in the following ways:

communications@karbonhomes.co.uk

0808 164 0111



@karbonhomes



To chat to us about anything else, contact our Customer Relationship Advisers.

The full service is available 8am - 6pm on weekdays.

0808 164 0111

info@karbonhomes.co.uk

www.karbonhomes.co.uk

or visit our social media pages

Don't forget, you can also use your MyKarbon account to pay your rent, check your balance, update your contact details or to book a repair at a time that suits you.

Visit **www.karbonhomes.co.uk/mykarbon** to log in or register.