



Futures in focus

Futures in the community



www.futureshg.co.uk



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Welcome to your spring edition of Futures in Focus.

The first of 2023!

It's officially spring. We've all heard the saying 'spring is in the air' but do you know the reason for the term? Spring does have its own smell. But it's not the whiff of flowers in bloom as you might think. It's simply because there's more moisture in the air. Our sense of smell increases with higher humidity, which there's usually more of in spring.

This edition won't be revealing any more smell-related facts, but we have sniffed out what's been going on in the world of Futures since the start of the year. We take a look at the numerous community projects we've got stuck into so far, give the lowdown on how your rent is spent, plus your own personal budget table.

If you'd like support with a community project, feel free to get in touch with us at communications@futureshg.co.uk

Don't put all your eggs in one basket. 🥚

Oops, we've dropped our Easter eggs and need help finding them! They're hidden throughout this magazine, but can you spot how many fell out of our basket? Email your answer to communications@futureshg.co.uk by 21 April to be in with a chance of winning £75 in shopping vouchers.

P.S Don't count the eggs on this page or the back page, all eggs have been dropped on pages 4 - 19



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Want the latest breaking Futures news?

Follow us on social media! We share weekly facts on the world of Futures and social housing, what we've been doing, where we're going and how you can join us.

 @futureshousing

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 Futures Housing Group

'Futures in the community' news

We've been busy, busy bees giving back to the community... that sort of rhymes, right? Here's a round-up of some of the buzzing community projects we've been involved in recently.



Tree-mendous tree planting sessions

We've planted 140 trees in local communities since December last year. You could say we went apple-solutely mad, as almost 50 of those were different types of apple trees, now that's a lot of potential apple pies to be baking!

The trees were all planted in honour of The Queen's Green Canopy Project, a nationwide campaign originally set to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee, but extended to mark The Queen's passing. The planting fits perfectly with our passion of giving back to the community and our ongoing sustainability journey.

We worked closely with customers, community groups and local councils to bring this fantastic project to life, in over 20 locations near our customers' homes. Matt Waterfall, Chairman at Denby Parish Council said: "It's great to see community areas being enhanced with tree planting. It not only benefits our environment for future generations, but also makes a positive impact on the visual aspect in communities."

£7,000 donated to local foodbanks

A phenomenal £7,000 was donated to foodbanks across community locations at the end of 2022.

The amazing total was achieved thanks to the two contractors we use for gas servicing at customer's properties. J Tomlinson and Aaron Services. They agreed to donate cash every time we successfully scheduled a customer's free gas safe ty check on the first attempt. They then kindly let us decide who the donation should go to.

We chose to split the money between ten foodbanks in areas where our customers live, as we know they provide much-needed support to the community. Life essentials, including gas, electricity and food, have come at a higher cost than many have experienced before lately. So it's no surprise that this puts ever increasing demand on foodbanks.



Tracey Gibson, Organiser at Oscari foodbank in Riddings said: "The stark reality of it is that without the generosity of donors like yourselves, 1,200 people would go without food. That's frightening. The money is a literal life saver to the people we help."

We caught up with some of the foodbanks in February. Skip to page eight to see what impact the donations had.

Futures helps start 'Swap shop'

How many times have you bought an item of clothing that's never then made it out the wardrobe? While many of us can hold our hands up to this, some of us may also need a helping hand with buying clothes.

Colleagues at Futures rounded up their unwanted clothes and sent bags full of garments to the Southbrook Community Centre in Daventry to help launch its own 'Swap shop'. People can donate clothes and take clothes away, without having to pay a penny.

Leto Dietrich, Chairman of the centre said: "We're thrilled to have started the 'Swap shop'. With prices going up and up there's never been a better time to think about the impact of recycling unwanted clothes."

The project not only stops clothes from going to landfill, but saves on the pennies and hopefully brings a smile to someone's face.



Leto said:

We thank you Futures for all your help and support, it's been wonderful.



Your grass cutting questions answered

Every year we get a lot of questions and comments about how we cut the grass in communal areas and public spaces. Now we're in grass cutting season, we've pulled together the answers to our most frequently asked questions.



Why do you leave the cuttings behind?

Leaving grass clippings to decompose back into the ground helps keep soil healthy and supports all the bugs, worms and beetles that contribute to a good ecosystem. It also greatly reduces energy use and carbon emissions. So while we know it's not to everyone's taste, we now leave behind the clippings rather than taking them away. While this can look a little untidy for a few days, we think the long term benefits are worth it.



How often should the grass be cut?

We aim to provide ten cuts between March and November. This is weather-dependent and we've been known to cut right up to Christmas. Early in the season when the grass is lush, we usually cut around every six weeks.



Why hasn't the grass near me been cut?

While we aim for every five to six weeks as a minimum, there are times where we can't access or cut the grass for various reasons. This may be due to excessive dog fouling, large amounts of litter or decorations. If we can't cut the grass, we'll always leave a card to explain why. And if you want to help, please avoid dropping litter and remove it safely if you can in grassy areas.

#ThankyouThursday

Our customers are at the heart of everything we do at Futures. We love hearing your thoughts, feelings, and ideas as they inspire us to do more. So now we use our social media channels every Thursday to thank our customers for their feedback and celebrate the difference their comments make. Why not take a look and share your ideas too?



We're updating our photo library and we need your help!

Models wanted

Are you interested in being Futures' next top model?

We need people from all ages and backgrounds to be in our photos.

No experience required!

Do you have what it takes? Email us for more details.

Email: communications@futureshg.co.uk

Estate walkabouts

Come and say hello on one of our community tours.

This year our Neighbourhoods team will be out and about more than ever and may be visiting a street near you. Our estate walkabouts are a chance for our customers and neighbours to give us feedback about the areas where they live and let us know what more we can do to help. We're keen to hear from everyone who lives in the communities around our 10,300 homes, which is why we've set over 100 dates in more than 60 of your towns and villages.

Ever think "I wish Futures could help or us to do this..." or "How do I get this sorted...?" No matter how big or small an issue may feel, you can ask us any questions. Come along and share an idea of something you'd like to see in your area, or even just come to say hello.

We've invited our partners from local councils and other local organisations along to some of the visits, so we can all work together to support your community. As they say, **team work makes the dream work!**



We'll be covering Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and West Northamptonshire. Find your nearest visit [here](#).



Catch-up with Daventry foodbanks

We were delighted to donate £7,000 to ten local foodbanks last year, with thanks to the fantastic support of our gas servicing contractors J Tomlinson and Aaron Services. We know just how much foodbanks, pantries and community larders are needed right now, so we caught up with the organisations in Daventry and Northamptonshire, to see what difference the donations have made.



Daventry Food Bank

Angela Gee, Senior Pastor at Vineyard Community Church has run the [Daventry Food Bank](#) with her husband since 2010.

Angela said: "The donation was an absolute blessing and took our breath away. We really weren't expecting it. We're getting rising referrals week-on-week, and this money meant we could buy additional food to support the families referred to us."



Re:store Northampton

[Re:store Northampton](#) originally started as a foodbank in 2009 and has expanded to provide a wide range of services for the community.

Alex Turtle, Funding Manager at Re:store said: "We want to thank Futures and Aaron Services for their extremely generous donation. We know these are hard times, and some are having to choose between heating their homes and buying essentials. Support like this means we can take away some of the pressure from people."



Hope Centre's Community Larder

[Hope Centre's Community Larder](#) in Daventry opened last July and provide a sustainable way for the community to buy food affordably. People pay £5 or £10 a week in exchange for food worth three or four times this amount.

Mason Smith, volunteer at the Larder said: "The main thing is people have been fed. We've been able to support them better and make sure they're getting the best quality of life they deserve."

We're incredibly thankful at Futures for the remarkable amount raised by Aaron Services and J Tomlinson, as well as our hard-working colleagues ensuring the gas services are booked. It's meant thousands of people from Derbyshire down to Northamptonshire have had access to essential items.

What we do with your rent

We think it's important to be transparent about what we do with your rent money, especially when money is so tight for everyone. So here's a simple guide to show how your payments are spent and that providing more and better homes remains our financial priority.



Every £1 we receive is spent like this:



Development

Futures is not-for-profit organisation. Our income and any profit is reinvested in homes and services for our customers. Development costs pay for new homes for people who desperately need an affordable place to live and to maintain and upgrade existing homes.



Interest

We need money to build and improve homes so as well as the income we get from your rent we apply for grants and borrow on the financial markets - like a home owner taking out a new mortgage to pay for home improvements. When we borrow money, we have to pay interest on the loans, so a small percentage of your rent goes towards this.



Management and Support/Service




Your safety is our priority and with well over 10,000 homes to take care of, we do our best to ensure your properties are safe, secure and well-maintained. We use your rent money to cover support and management services, such as cleaning communal areas, utilities (gas, electricity, water and telephone) fire safety equipment, lift maintenance, health and safety, communal window cleaning and landscaping.



Repairs

To help maintain your home, around a quarter of your rent money is used to cover our repairs services.

This includes:

-  Regular maintenance and repairs, such as fixing leaking roofs, plumbing and general wear and tear.
-  Emergency repairs, such as a broken boiler or a burst pipe.
-  Planned improvement work, such as upgrading kitchens and bathrooms.

More information about our repairs services can be found [here](#).

Building a budget

Budgeting can seem scary but it can help you avoid a crisis when times are hard. So here's our simple guide to be clear about where your money goes.









Create lists!

Split your outgoings into two lists, fixed costs and variable costs, and write down what you need to spend next to each item.

What are fixed costs?










These are outgoings that we can't control. They include things like:

-  Rent
-  Electricity bills
-  Gas bills
-  Water bills
-  Council tax
-  Medication

Some people may need a car or bus to get to work or to take the kids to school. This means that you may also need to include travel costs (eg car insurance, petrol and bus fares) in your fixed costs list. And if you are paying off debts, these charges need to be added to your fixed costs too.

What are variable costs?

These are outgoings that we can control and include things like:

-  Subscriptions such as premium TV and music streaming services.
-  Food. This is clearly an essential but we can control how much we spend and shop around for cheaper options.
-  Self-care such as haircuts and new nails.
-  Internet and phone bills.
-  Socialising and going out.
-  TV licence (if you don't watch BBC or any live TV, you may not need a TV licence)
-  Gym memberships
-  Clothes, shoes, and makeup
-  Video games and video game subscriptions.

As you can see, there are plenty of costs that we can control by choosing to have more or less of something and only a few things that we can't control. If you focus on paying your fixed costs first you can then start to make choices about how to spend what you have left.

Here is a handy table for you to fill out

If you get paid weekly, do your budgets weekly and divide your monthly outgoings by four to work out how much they cost a week. If you get paid monthly, multiply your weekly outgoings by four to work out how much they cost a month.

Add up all your income (whether weekly or monthly) in the top box. Then add together all your outgoings and subtract that total from your weekly or monthly income to find out what you have left over – or whether you might need to cut things out or change your variable costs to fit within your monthly allowance.

Monthly income – total fixed outgoings = budget left for variable costs

Once you know what income you have left after paying your fixed bills, you can then decide how best to share out what remains across your variable outgoings.

Income	Per week:	Per month:
Outgoings - fixed	Cost per week (£)	Cost per month (£)
Rent		
Electricity		
Gas		
Water		
Council Tax		
Medication (if any)		
		Total fixed outgoings:
Outgoings - variable	Cost per week (£)	Cost per month (£)

Your guides to cleaner, greener and cheaper habits

We've just published six short guides packed full of advice on how to cope with the increasing cost of living while also doing more for the environment. Download from our website.



Cosy community café gets cooking again

Heanor residents will soon be able to enjoy popping into a revitalised community café, thanks to a new cooker we've donated and installed for Derbyshire charity [Salcare](#).

The charity has been providing a wide range of support services for the community across Amber Valley, Erewash and beyond since 1977. They're a 'one-stop shop' where people can access a foodbank, domestic violence support, therapy and help with other household essentials such as furniture.

Pre-pandemic, Salcare ran a community café but the facilities suffered during lockdown and a new cooker was needed to get back in action again. But thanks to donations and support from our partners at [Travis Perkins](#), [Harmony Fire](#) and [Electrium](#), we've been able to install and test a new commercial cooker to help them get back up and running.

Don Davis, Business Development Manager at Salcare said:



Without all this support we'd have really struggled. Everyone has helped us deliver this project and it's thanks to Futures that we've managed to get a cooker that's fit for purpose and means we'll be able to give people a warm space to eat.



The community café is looking to reopen in April. For all updates follow Salcare on [Facebook](#).

How customer feedback has helped us improve

For the last three years we've been asking our customers some deep questions about how they feel about our services: everything from the ease of dealing with us, how helpful and friendly we are, to how much we're trusted to do what we say we will and the perceived value for money of our rent charges.

Around 2,000 customers a year take part in this survey, and the results have been rocket fuel for improvement activities that we've been able to deliver. For example, we have:



Replaced our entire repairs booking and scheduling system with one which enables better end-to-end visibility of customer repair jobs from our staff, in response to feedback about our customers needing more information on the progress of their repair jobs.



Created a new Tenancy Support team to bring together a number of different support functions in response to the range of complex needs customers had told us they had. This included needing more help with skills, confidence and wellbeing as well as managing financially.



Restructured our Customer Services team to specialise more on certain areas and free up more time for taking calls, in response to customer feedback about the time taken for us to respond to requests.



Introduced a range of online self-help tools covering a wide range of answers to frequently asked questions (including videos), in response to customer feedback about frustrations at having to wait in a call queue to ask simple questions.

If we hadn't take the time and investment to gather this depth of feedback, we would not confidently be able to say that we have truly listened to our customers. Nor would we be able to identify the difference made by any improvements. Evidence shows that this is working – comparing our overall customer satisfaction level with the average of 30 similar housing associations across the UK shows that we have been consistently above average for over a year.

With the introduction of the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures in April, our customers may receive multiple surveys depending on the type of interaction they have with Futures. We're required to publish these new measures so you'll be kept up to date on our performance!

Help us to help you

We know asking for help can feel hard, so we've got a range of services to support you in both your home and personal life.



Money advice

You can talk to us about debt, budgeting, benefits, setting up a bank account and more. If you're behind with your rent or potentially going to fall behind, speak to us so we can help.



Employment advice

We can help you with job applications, interview preparation, training courses or finding a job. It's all completely free!



Tenancy support

This doesn't just mean keeping up with rent, it means supporting you with living in your home. It includes things like accessing health services, support with bills and help with your skills and confidence.



Neighbourhoods

The home and community you live in is just as important to us as it is you. Our Neighbourhoods team can support you with a whole host of topics, from domestic abuse advice and antisocial behaviour to changes you'd like in communal areas.



Repairs

There are some simple things you can do to help us to get your repairs dealt with more quickly.



Make sure that we have your up-to-date contact details so that we can get in touch to make arrangements when we need to.



Be at home when we've made an appointment to carry out repairs or tell us you're going to be out as soon as possible if it's unavoidable so that we can rearrange. That saves us time that we can use to help the next customer.



Use [MyAccount](#) and the repairs checker on our website rather than calling – it's usually quicker.



If you do miss an appointment for a repair and we can't get into your home to do the work, the job will be cancelled. If you still need help you must [contact us](#) to rearrange or we won't come back and the problem won't be dealt with.



Be aware that we can't specify an appointment time for [fast](#) or [priority](#) repairs so you will need to be prepared to be at home all day. However, for other, less urgent repairs you can choose a morning, afternoon, anytime or 'avoiding school runs' slot.

