

# One Day

many lives

Annual review  
2020

# One day: in numbers



On a typical day\* in 2019-20 we

finished building **1** new home.

handled **416\*\*** customer calls asking for help with their homes, their finances and their work-related problems.

completed **107** repairs requested by our customers.

carried out **40** gas safety inspections in our customers' homes.

dealt with **15** phone calls to Beep Assist from customers with our supported-living technology.

replaced: **1** front door • **1** roof • **1** kitchen • **1** bathroom • **8** windows • **3** boilers.

spent around **£60,000\*** on improving people's homes.

ran a job skills session to help customers into work.



\* Based on 254 working days in the year, excluding Bank Holidays and weekends. Figures rounded to the nearest whole number.

\*\* Based on 170 working days (call management data starting 1 August 2019, minus four Bank Holidays)

## Inside:

This has been another fantastically successful year for Futures Housing Group and also an extraordinary one – not just for our communities but also the whole world because of the arrival of Covid-19.

While many aspects of our work and achievements have reached record heights, it's the day-to-day impact we have on our customers and the many people we work with that counts most.

This review tells the story of just some of the people who we work with, and for, and how we make a difference to their lives every single day.

## Contents:

<b>One day: one future</b>	<b>4</b>
Mike Stevenson, Board Chair Lindsey Williams, Chief Executive	
<b>Our year: in numbers</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>One day: one new home</b>	<b>10</b>
Customers, Helen and Mark Love	
<b>One day: moving ahead</b>	<b>12</b>
Customers, Rachael and Rae	
<b>One day: in the neighbourhood</b>	<b>16</b>
Customer, Tracey Lings	
<b>One day: working together</b>	<b>18</b>
David Arkle, Amber Valley Borough Council	
<b>One day: investing in the future</b>	<b>22</b>
Mike Roche, Savills Financial Consultants	
<b>One day: for learning</b>	<b>24</b>
Leonie Brookes, Healthcare Apprentice	
<b>One day: a long career</b>	<b>26</b>
Paul Hodgkinson, Senior Gas Engineer/Plumber	
<b>One day: for our people</b>	<b>28</b>
Poppy Johnson, Graduate Business Partner Karen Allen, HR Business Partner	
<b>One day: future benefits</b>	<b>32</b>
Luke Stanley, Transformation Project Manager	
<b>One day: of insight</b>	<b>34</b>
Melanie Hughes, Research and Intelligence Manager	



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# One day: one future

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My first full year as Chair of the Group Board has been an incredibly eventful experience!

I joined at a time when we were making big decisions about our future. This included significant work on a new corporate plan that sets out our journey for the coming years and has been developed from the outset to involve and reflect the views of our own people and those we work alongside. We have also agreed a new brand identity to better reflect the organisation we have become and aspire to be. We commissioned an independent governance review and underwent a rigorous assessment by our regulator which helped secure our top-ranking 'G1/V1' status.

We have had a record year when it comes to building new homes – one of the most important things we can do to tackle the ongoing housing crisis. We came tantalisingly close to our four-year target to build 1,000 new homes – a goal we only missed by a mere handful and of course not helped by the disruption caused by the Covid-19 outbreak in the final months of the financial year.

Our success, combined with the right financial conditions, left us with an appetite to accelerate our development plans beyond our initial forecasts as we move through 2020.

My Board colleagues and I worked closely with the senior leadership team to help equip us with the skills and systems we need to make the right decisions around difficult choices in an uncertain environment. This has included work to help us focus on those partners, particularly local authorities, who really help make a difference for our customers.

As the financial year came to a close in March, we were of course shaken by the Covid-19 pandemic. Our staff responded very quickly and effectively to the multitude of challenges this brought. Our customers also worked with us through the many rapid changes we had to make to ensure people's safety. Both were extraordinary to witness and made me immensely proud of the positive relationships we enjoy throughout the Group.

Behind these headlines though, this report gives a flavour of the many lives we have touched during the year which is ultimately what motivates us towards achieving even more success in the future. My deepest thanks to everyone who has played a part.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Stevenson'.

**Mike Stevenson, Group Board Chair**

This review shines a light on just a few of the people who play a part in Futures every day. But together with all the other stories and experiences of our 300-plus staff and more than 12,000 customers we contribute and achieve much more.



Operating as one is an essential part of how we do this. It's a core value that we expect every team member to make real in their job, and which drives everything we do for customers. This year has put this value and all our other beliefs as well as our culture to the test like never before.

We have invested heavily in our people, our homes, in communities and in our customers again this year. For example, we made great headway in training the next generation of construction and maintenance workers through projects such as our Repairs Academy and our work through Access Training. Our Leadership Academy helped 31 team members to build their potential as managers and leaders. We launched a new online community, MyVoice, where we can better understand our customers and their needs and involve them in making important decisions. And we worked hard to make sure that we manage our homes in a way that ensures we and our customers get the very best value out of them.



Modernising how we work, both to make us more efficient but also to make life easier for customers, has also been a huge priority, together with building strong and effective partnerships. We have started to take a fresh look at how we approach diversity and equality too as part of our modernisation and are investing in future leaders outside our sector by supporting a new initiative, Get on Board, that gives those from more diverse backgrounds a helping hand towards senior and advisory roles.

The world is and will be different because of the coronavirus pandemic. So far our teams and customers have adapted incredibly well but we are in no doubt that the virus will create new hardship and challenges for more of our customers. We're determined that we will be ready to support them when they need it.

This positive energy is reflected in our updated branding and new corporate plan. We're not content for good things and times to just be a vague aspiration for one day sometime ahead – we're working to bring them about right now.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lindsey Williams".

**Lindsey Williams, Chief Executive**

# Our year: in numbers

Here are some key results and outcomes from 2019-20. Setting and reaching targets is important, but they may not illustrate the day-to-day experiences of every customer. Numbers can hide big differences in individual customers' experiences and satisfaction but they also show us that our core performance remains strong.

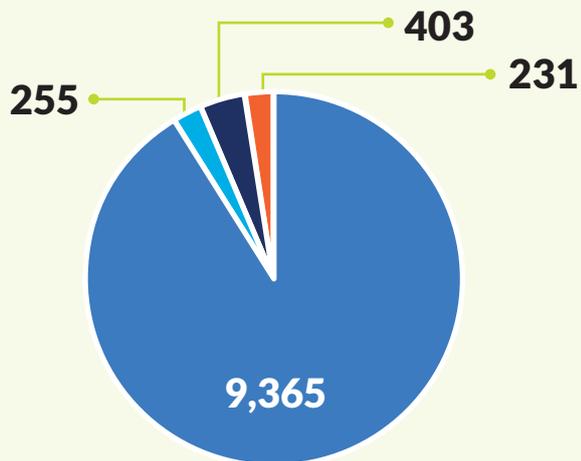
Together with collecting data we believe in asking penetrating questions to get behind the numbers and find out what's really happening and in involving residents through our Insight Committee. That's true performance.



**10,254 total homes owned and managed**

(2018-19: 10,208)

## Total homes by tenure:



 social and affordable rent  
(2018-19: 9,315)

 market rent (2018-19: 217)

 shared ownership and Rent to Buy  
(2018-19: 342)

 managed but not owned  
(2018-19: 334)

**3,195 supported and sheltered**

(2018-19: 3196)

**11 days average time  
to complete a standard repair**

(2018-19: 14 days)

**20.8 days average time  
to re-let vacant homes**

(2018-19: 21.2 days)

**£15.39 million spent on improving  
and maintaining existing homes**

(2018-19: £12.9 million)

**194 new Beep Assist  
alarms installed**

(2018-19: 271)

**263**  
homes built or  
acquired (2018-19: 236)

**14** for social rent

**87** for affordable rent

**33** for shared ownership

**40** for market rent

**32** for Rent to Buy

**55** for sale on the open market (2018-19: 5)

**131** days average sales period from  
handover to completion

**2** managed on behalf of other organisations

£££

**£21 million operating surplus**  
(2018-19: £20.1 million)

**36.4% operating margin**  
(2018-19: 40%)

**£57.8 million turnover**  
(2018-19: £50.6 million)

**£47.6 million total net asset value**  
(2018-19: £27.2 million)

**£5.5 million grant  
received from Homes England**  
(2018-19: £10 million)

**1.2% rent arrears of total annual rent collectable** (2018-19: 1.3%)



**We had 179 complaints during the year**

(88 of which were upheld)



**Our average time to investigate and respond to  
a complaint was 16 days.**



**£65 million of new building schemes approved**

**50 homes sold through Right to Buy, Voluntary Right to Buy  
or Right to Acquire** (2018-19: 29)



**679 qualifications** and jobs secured through Access Training (2018-19: 873)



**25 apprentices** working in the Repairs Academy (2018-19: 6)



**31 graduates** from the Leadership Academy (2018-19: 44)



**325 staff employed** (full-time equivalents) (2018-19: 274)



**89.6% staff engagement** - those who agree with the statement:

“I am proud to work for and feel loyal to the business”

(2018-19: 89.5%)



**90.9% agreed with the statement:**

“I would recommend someone I know to work here”

(2018-19: 92.7%)





**+24 customer Net Promoter Score**  
 (comparable to many well-known household brands)

Please see our **financial statements** for full details of our financial and value-for-money performance in 2019-20.

## Compliance and standards

All housing associations have to meet a range of regulatory and legal standards. Futures takes this area of work very seriously and we work hard to comply with all of the Regulator of Social Housing's economic and consumer standards, and the National Housing Federation's Code of Governance.

All our homes meet the Government Decent Homes Standard, and where applicable have up-to-date assessments and certificates for fire, Legionella, asbestos and lift safety. Like most organisations in our sector, lockdown caused major disruption to some areas of work in the final weeks of the financial year. As a result, this meant that we failed to

achieve our usual 100% compliance rates for a few inspection criteria – typically because we could not visit households that were shielding. The regulator has acknowledged this sector-wide issue and, as of the time of writing, we are back on track with full compliance now that lockdown has eased.

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## One day: one new home

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Housing experts agree that a shortage of new homes lies behind the housing crisis in the UK. So building new ones is a high priority for Futures. This was a record year for us on the homebuilding front and we built or acquired a new home every day – 263 in 254 working days. As well as providing more high quality new homes across the East Midlands, the money we raise from house sales helps fund services and improvements that benefit many more customers.

This year, this meant one special day and one new home for Helen and Mark Love. They moved into their four-bedroomed shared ownership house in Badby near Daventry in January and describe it as ‘a fairy tale’.

Helen and Mark met in 2014 and rented a home together in Northampton. With responsibilities for older parents, plus five grown-up children and three grandchildren from their previous marriages, they found it difficult to save enough to afford a deposit to buy a property, and had almost given up hope of becoming owners again.

The couple were drawn to a new home because of the lower maintenance and energy costs but worried about taking on a big mortgage. So Helen was delighted when she spotted details of two houses being developed by Futures for shared ownership in the pretty village of Badby near Daventry. She was thrilled when their application to the local council was approved within 24 hours meaning they could buy a 50 per cent stake in the four-bedroom house, while paying an affordable rent for the rest.

Everything about the home suits their family circumstances and lifestyle: there's plenty of parking, a big garden, room to work from home and easy access to the outdoors.

Apart from the financial benefits of shared ownership and living in a new property, most of all they're enjoying the freedom to put their own stamp on their new home.

With her experience in the construction industry, Helen has a keen and critical eye for detail and describes their new place as "great value and very fair for the price we paid". So while it may only take one day to move into a new home, the benefits will stay with people like Helen and Mark for years to come.

"Shared ownership opened up a different world for us. Futures kept us informed at every stage of the purchase and moving here has been really positive for our family. We've got some exciting plans for the garden next year, and hope to buy a bigger stake in the house. It's absolutely amazing!"

## Things that really matter

**86%** of new customers rate us 3 or more on a scale of 1 to 5 for satisfaction (5 being the highest)



We reduced the average time to complete all responsive repairs from 12.2 days last year to **10.5 this year**

*(ie all repairs requested by customers regardless of priority)*



We raised **£4.5m** from property sales – money we reinvest in services and work to benefit our customers



Almost **two thirds (64%)** of the new homes we finished this year were for social rent, affordable rent or shared ownership  
*(ie homes offered at less than typical local market rates)*



We invested **over £15m** in improving homes this year

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## One day: moving ahead

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Life can be challenging. Having a good home is fundamental for our security and happiness. But work and money worries can get in the way. So we support our customers to find their feet again when job and financial troubles come along. Many have begun new careers with help from our employment support service, Futures Gateways.




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## Helping people re-find their feet

Twenty-something Rachael (not her real name) says that while she's done a range of jobs in the past she's "never had a career." After relocating with her young daughter from West Yorkshire because of being in an abusive relationship, she'd found it hard to get a secure job. Things changed though early in 2019 when her Job Centre advisor told her about the support that Futures offers to help people into employment.

Rachael met with the team and explained that she'd become isolated and lost confidence. Despite struggling with social situations she agreed to join a one-week employability course to help her back into work. This covered preparing a strong CV, interview techniques and tips on applying for jobs. It soon paid off, with the offer of a part-time catering role at her daughter's school – just ten minutes from home.

Rachael's first day back at work was the start of a big change. She loved the job and working locally, in a place connected with her daughter. She was quickly offered a permanent role. Soon after, the Gateways team suggested a course with the Derby Network to become a teaching assistant.

Six months of juggling her lunchtime job with studying and 15 hours a week of classroom experience paid off when she qualified. Although the school was disrupted by Covid-19 she started helping out two days a week with those children who were still attending.

Rachael is now feeling energetic and excited about the next stage in developing her career – a Level 3 teaching assistant course to enable her to independently supervise and work with children.




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“I cannot fault the input from Futures. One of the worst things about being in an abusive situation is the feeling that you can’t get out of it. I hope my story shows that it is possible to make that change.” Rachael

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## Home from The Range

Rae, her partner Daniel and their two cats moved into their second-floor Futures flat in 2018 from a privately rented property in Belper. Despite some varied retail work experience, she found it hard to get another job. When Daniel also became unemployed, Rae contacted the Gateways team who met up with her a few days later to help her review her skills and CV and advise on local recruitment agencies.

As a result of this support, together with her existing food hygiene qualification, Rae secured a cafe job at The Range – a local home, garden and leisure store – in November 2019. Meanwhile, Daniel also found a new job at a butcher’s shop.

Sadly the pandemic meant the café was closed at the time of writing and the future of her job remains unclear. But Rae now knows where to go if she needs help and advice again.

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“Futures has been really helpful. I’ve been a bit bored while furloughed from work, so am looking forward to returning. And I know I can get straight back in touch with the team again any time.” Rae

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# One day: moving ahead

## Questioning and challenging

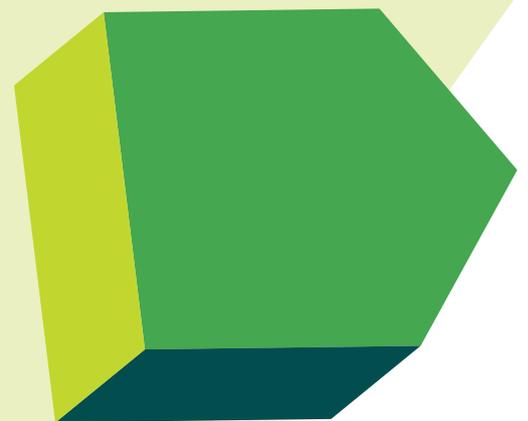
Board member Ciara McMillan chairs Futures' Customer Insight Committee, made up of four residents, a Daventry District Councillor and two independent members with wider customer service experience. The Committee connects us with our customers' priorities, helps us understand their experiences, and provides a powerful, informed voice that constantly challenges how we think, work and communicate.



To explore ways to help people moving into new homes, Ciara and another committee member visualised a couple walking through the door for the first time and thinking what they'd need for their (imaginary) family. Their 'virtual' experiences, together with research by Loughborough University, has shown us how we can make vacant properties more 'user friendly' from day one for households that need extra support, such as those on low incomes. Work is now underway on a pilot scheme for homes that include more basic furnishings than usual with social rented homes to help families get off to a better start.

We are also forging ahead on the digital front to make our online services more accessible and comprehensive. We want customers to have more on-demand services at their fingertips such as those they get from other big-name companies and service providers.

We're pleased to be part of the National Housing Federation's Together with Tenants initiative and to offer the transparency and engagement needed to feed residents' priorities directly into our corporate plan, strategies and policies.





“The Customer Insight Committee is a really important part of Futures’ governance. It provides a straight line of accountability direct to the Board, and keeps us focused on offering people good homes and solid foundations for life.” Ciara

## Changing lives

**97** people were referred to Gateways for employment support



We helped to organise 60 job interviews for people and this resulted in **28 job offers**



**16** people secured full-time jobs with our help – **10** more than last year

More than **1,000** customers were referred to our Money Advice service



We helped customers to claim over **£550,000** in benefits and other income they were entitled to



**9 out of 10 (92%)** people who used our Money Advice service rate us 3 or more on a scale of 1 to 5 for satisfaction (5 being the highest)

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## One day: in the neighbourhood

The life and wellbeing of Tracey Lings have been transformed by moving to a Futures flat in the Derbyshire village of Horsley Woodhouse. She describes it as her “forever home.”



Tracey moved to her new flat in spring 2020; leaving behind a stressful situation in which the block of flats she previously lived in (belonging to another housing provider) became the focus for serious drug and alcohol abuse. “It was horrendous,” she says, “I felt trapped – it was really affecting my mental health, and I was desperate to move.”

With support from her doctor and other health professionals, Tracey secured a one-bedroom flat in Horsley Woodhouse through the Home Options scheme. She qualified for the scheme, reserved for older people, because of her medical condition, and has never been happier.

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“Futures called me on a Wednesday, I viewed the property on Friday, then signed the tenancy and got the keys on Monday. There are just eight flats here – each with its own front door, and my neighbours are all lovely and friendly. It’s only about seven miles from where I used to live, but it feels worlds away.” Tracey

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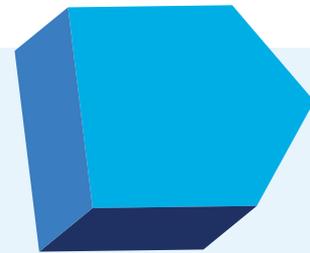
The move means Tracey can help look after her two granddaughters who live near Nottingham. With help from an occupational therapist, she's also been able to get some aids and adaptations to help her at home, including a keysafe, extra handrails and lighting. She's also due to have her bath replaced soon with a walk-in shower.

Feeling safe and settled in her new surroundings, Tracey has joined Futures' online MyVoice forum to keep up to date with what's happening and give her feedback and suggestions for improvements. "It's a good way to keep in touch," she says, "Joe who manages the page posts things regularly – it's a good mix of community information and fun stuff."

"Being here has had such a positive impact on my life. It's beautiful and rural, but still accessible to shops and everything I need. Futures have been brilliant – they seem like a really good landlord." Tracey



## Things that really matter



**90%**  
**of residents**  
feel that Futures can  
be trusted (rating us 3 or  
above on a scale of 1 to 5)



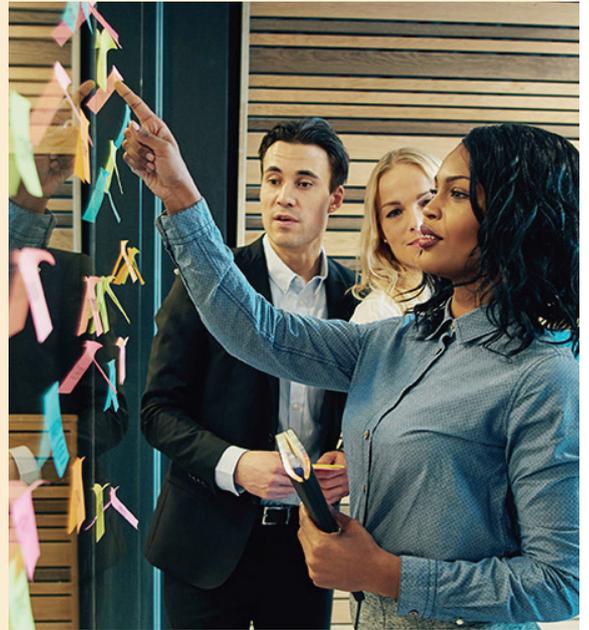
**+24**  
**Customer Net  
Promoter Score**



**£223,000 spent on aids and adaptations**

in customers' homes in 2019-20

# One day: working together



## Together for communities

Local councils are key partners for every housing association and Futures is no different. We have properties throughout the East Midlands and this means we work with over 20 local authorities to help house those most in need and ensure that people can access other types of help and support they require.

Amber Valley is one of two areas where Futures has a large number of homes as we evolved from Amber Valley Housing - created by the council to manage its former council housing stock in 2003. Last year, Futures built 77 new homes for rent, shared ownership and sale in Amber Valley - nearly a third of the properties we built. Daventry is another very important area for us where we have a large number of homes. So our relationship with these two councils is extremely important.

Head of Housing Services at Amber Valley Borough Council, David Arkle, is one of our key partners who sees first-hand how close working can benefit communities.

Our work with the Council covers a wide range of services and needs - from dealing with homelessness and allocating affordable homes through to community safety and supplying aids and adaptations for people with special needs. This brings a huge range of daily challenges as well as opportunities.

For example, David is particularly proud of a joint project between Futures, the Council and two bowls clubs to transform some old and unused tennis courts in Heanor. The partnership has taken this under-used site to create six new two- and three-bedroomed homes for affordable rent and shared ownership, plus an attractive and well-equipped new pavilion for the clubs and community events. Sadly the planned celebration day for opening this new community resource had to be postponed as a result of the pandemic – but it will undoubtedly be a home for many more special days and events in the years to come.

Our strong relationship with the Council also came to the fore in the early stages of the Covid-19 outbreak. Futures stepped in within a matter of days to give the Council access to a two-bedroom house for emergency use by rough sleepers who needed to self-isolate. Futures also prioritised work

to prepare empty homes in the borough so that new residents could move in safely to temporary accommodation during the crisis.

David believes that it's in demanding situations like this that partnerships really matter. Agencies need to be around the table together and be willing to act as critical friends to each other – openly recognising the balance of commercial necessity and community needs.

The Council is keen to carry on supporting Futures' homebuilding – helping to shape bids, secure sites and diversify the types of homes developed for different people's needs. With demand for affordable homes in the borough as high as ever, expanding this new supply has never been more important. It's a mutually beneficial and productive connection that ultimately delivers to meet the needs of the community.

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“The Council wants to continue collaborating with Futures Housing Group to support what they're doing to meet local housing needs and serve the community. Together, I'm confident that we will keep on achieving positive outcomes.” David



## One day: working together



### Businesses doing good

Futures has signed up to be a strategic partner of the East Midlands Chamber of Commerce – the region’s voice for business with more than 4,300 members across Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. Our partnership brings fantastic benefits through lobbying, campaigning and other work that we do together. It also helps us to make new strategic relationships that help to unlock the good that local companies can bring to communities, whatever their line of work.

We take a lead on working with other organisations to boost skills, employability and corporate social responsibility. We sponsor the Commitment to People Development category for the annual Nottinghamshire Business Awards – won in 2019 by managed IT services provider Littlefish. The company stood out for its focus on putting people first and offering brilliant career development and progression to deliver an exceptional user experience to its customers. Like Futures, Littlefish has a leadership development programme, which combines leadership training with active, hands-on experience, to prepare the leaders of tomorrow.

We have much in common – and as part of the Chamber, lots to offer the East Midlands.



## Working together

We referred **70 households** to local foodbanks during the year and our team members joined forces to collect and make food donations to these vital services



Our strong relationships with local employers helped us find **28 job opportunities** for our customers

**Social impact: The HACT calculation of social value delivered (taking into account training, community, health and crime prevention activity) is:**

**£5.47 for every £1 we spent** (2018-19: £3.31)

**2**

Gateways customers undertook volunteering in 2019-20

**4**

customers also did work experience

**24**

school students had work experience at Futures

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## One day: investing for the future

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Director at Savills Financial Consultants, Mike Roche, has advised Futures on its funding strategy since 2013, helping us ensure we have the money we need to continue developing new homes and growing to meet local needs. On a typical day working with us he can be helping us with highly technical areas such as capital funding and treasury management.



Mike sees Futures as an active, ambitious organisation that's clearly focused on its strategy and meeting the objectives in our corporate plan. Raising private finance for new homebuilding is at the heart of this, which is where Mike and his colleagues play a vital role. Savills helped us secure our last major bond issue, worth £200 million in 2018, and more recently supported us to place the final £50 million tranche this year at one of the lowest rates ever achieved by a housing association.

The extra money – enough to build around 850 homes when combined with Homes England grant and other funding – was achieved only by being agile and prepared to take advantage of the right market conditions, what Mike describes as 'a sweet spot' for bond finance. He believes that our strong commercial awareness within the Group Board plus close relationships with professional advisors like Savills and a stable, determined Executive Team makes all the difference.

While investors are interested first and foremost in the profits they stand to make from investing in Futures and have no control over how we use the money, Mike says that "selling the strategy" is crucial. Financial institutions need to be confident that their funds are secure and being put to good use for the long term. Work like this typically involves hours of preparation culminating in a day of presentations to the financial sector to make a powerful case for investing in us and our plans.

Mike is also keen to praise Futures for the work it did to continue supporting communities and providing services despite the Covid-19 outbreak at the end of the financial year. He also thinks that our low levels of rent arrears and solid credit rating – reconfirmed during the year as A+ stable by S&P Global – mean that we're well-placed to cope with the ongoing effects of the virus and its aftermath.



“Futures is exceptionally well-rated – it’s a notch above most other housing providers, which makes investors very receptive and ready to trust the group with their money.” Mike

## Sound finances



Our turnover increased by over **14% this year** to **£57.8m**

Our operating profit was **£21m** a fantastic margin of **36.4%**



**Our fixed assets increased by £32m** as a result of spending more on developing property



**Our net assets have increased by £20m to £48m**

# One day: for learning



The fairer, better and safer world we want to help bring about depends on high-quality education and skills. We're proud to invest in people's futures through our partnership agency Access Training and support a project to develop the next generation of non-executive directors and board members. Our own apprenticeship scheme is also giving new opportunities to local people to learn skills and prepare for a career.

## Success starts with Access

This year has highlighted the value and dedication of Britain's healthcare workers like never before. Access Training – the company Futures jointly owns and runs with Nottingham Community Housing Association – has been placing apprentices in hospitals, care homes and day centres for 35 years; providing a consistent stream of highly skilled and motivated people.

Leonie Brookes, Health Care Assistant for the Complex Health Needs team at Oak Field School and Specialist Sports College in Nottingham is a recent example of this. She originally joined the school, which caters for children and young adults who have physical and learning difficulties or disabilities, over a year ago.

Part of Nottinghamshire Health Care NHS Foundation Trust is based on the same site, and

Leonie saw for herself the crucial role the NHS plays in the school's support for students and their families. So when she spotted an advertisement for a Senior Health Care Support Worker and Level 3 Apprenticeship at the beginning of 2020, she decided to apply.

Excellent feedback about Leonie from the school helped her to get the job and start a new career in nursing. Her typical day includes personal care and feeding for students, alongside learning the theory of healthcare and how to use the software systems and medical records that support young people's care, education and development.

Leonie loves the variety and fulfilment of her job, and knowing that every day brings her one step closer to her dream of being a fully qualified practitioner.

“No two days are the same, and of course every student is different. The one constant is the sense of personal achievement I get when I’m able to make a difference to a student’s wellbeing and comfort.” Leonie



## Back to school

Over 80 children at Alfreton Nursery School in Derbyshire can enjoy a new outdoor learning area thanks to the hard work of a dozen of our community-minded apprentices.

The new space will help the children to learn about the impact of pollution, climate change and deforestation through artworks and specially-designed areas to stimulate storytelling and exploration.

As well as a new purpose-built sculpture made from recycled car parts, it includes animal carvings specially created by David Wadsworth of Futures’ landscaping team. Our CEO, Lindsey Williams, dropped in on an unusually sunny but windy February day to see the team in action. The scheme is also another great example of partnership working as all the materials needed were provided free of charge by one of our key suppliers, Travis Perkins.

## #getonboard

At the start of 2020 we launched the Get on Board initiative in conjunction with our long-time partners ema consultancy and Creative Bridge. This scheme aims to identify and boost the prospects of 12 people seeking to become non-executive directors and board members in housing organisations, charities and the voluntary sector.

The programme builds on ema’s 2019 research into achieving greater diversity in governance, and the chosen group reflects that vision. It’s attracted a lively group of highly motivated people from different sectors and settings, who’ve benefitted from networking and online masterclasses about leadership, branding, conflict resolution, profiling and recruitment.



Our CEO, Lindsey Williams, is heavily involved in the programme and spent a day with the participants discussing and exploring how to develop a ‘personal brand’ as an important part of becoming a senior leader.

Some of the participants have already secured exciting board and committee roles, so it’s an approach that’s clearly working well.

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# One day: a long career

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Futures' longest-serving team member, Paul Hodgkinson, brings over four decades of experience to his role as a senior gas engineer and plumber. Gaining the trust and cooperation of more vulnerable customers calls on all his accumulated skills, and he's still learning and passing on his knowledge to younger colleagues.



## A close-knit team

Paul joined our predecessor service at Amber Valley Borough Council straight from school in 1979. "I'm a local lad who's stopped local," he says. "I finished school on a Friday, and started my apprenticeship the next Monday. And I'm still here!" He's one of a group of employees who learnt their trades at South East Derbyshire College

and stuck together at the heart of our repairs and maintenance team.

"It's made for a fantastic atmosphere," says Paul. "We've worked brilliantly together – never more than during the first half of 2020, when we just haven't stopped."

"I do the same job every day, but in a different workplace and with different people every day. I love it!" Paul

He's especially pleased with his success in gaining the trust of some people who for different reasons were nervous about allowing access to their homes, even for urgent leaks and other essential work. Paul recently took part in a mental health first aid course. It's given him a new perspective on conditions like depression, bipolar disorder and psychosis, and how they can lead to problems with isolation, hoarding or anti-social behaviour. The key thing he learnt is to know what signs to look out for, and how best to respond.

Paul likes sharing his experience, skills and passion for the job with young people. He goes to local schools to talk about his trade, and is an invaluable coach and mentor for Futures' Repairs Academy apprentices. Most of all, he enjoys meeting and spending time with customers and helping to keep them safe, warm and comfortable.

Outside work, for the past 20 years Paul has fostered dogs for The Doodle Trust – a national charity dedicated to rehoming all Poodle cross-breeds. This year also saw the birth of Paul's first grandchild, so with the help of our in-house pensions adviser, he's eyeing a different future spending more time on both. For now though, we and our customers are fortunate to have someone of Paul's calm maturity, long experience and local knowledge.



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# One day: for our people

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the **GEM**  
programme

Poppy Johnson is one of the Graduate Business Partners working across Futures as part of the two-year GEM Programme – a national initiative to attract new, young talent to the housing industry and produce well-rounded, highly-motivated professionals. It's a description that fits Poppy perfectly.



After graduating in Forensic Science from Sheffield Hallam University, Poppy worked in call centres and other customer service jobs, which didn't inspire her. She then spotted an advertisement for the Futures GEM scheme and things happened fast. Her first introduction to Futures was at a graduate open day – a day which opened the door to becoming part of the Futures family with an offer to join our neighbourhood management team. This is a role she loves for the chance to help people and make a difference to their lives and communities.

The technical skills that Poppy learnt, like carrying out investigations, are highly transferable and she likes the friendly, relaxed feel of the organisation. Even the changes brought about by Covid-19 have added to her learning and skills development through having to adapt how we communicate and interact with customers. Poppy is impressed with how every part of the business has pulled together to find new ways of working.




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“Futures seemed friendly right from the day I walked through the door. I felt at home here straight away.” Poppy

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Human Resources Business Partner Karen Allen is full of praise for Poppy and the other colleagues completing the GEM programme. “GEM is about bright people doing real jobs while they learn about the complex world of housing. Our graduates get the chance to work in every part of the business and see how other organisations and agencies function. Poppy has found her feet very quickly and discovered a passion and natural flair for working with customers and neighbourhoods.”

## One day: for our people



### Putting 'agile' to the ultimate test

Monday 23 March was a day many people in Britain will not forget in a hurry – the day when (hopefully the first and only) national lockdown caused by Covid-19 was announced. This was when Prime Minister Boris Johnson told the nation to stay at home. While this clearly meant big changes for everyone, here at Futures we were well prepared for what was to come.



'Agile working' has become a popular buzzword in recent years – describing flexible, mobile working methods that are highly adaptable to change. Futures has been embracing this new way of working for some time and thankfully, because of careful planning, discussion and investment in systems and technology, large numbers of staff were simply able to head home with their laptops and carry on working as normal the next day.

This meant customer calls were routed through to our contact centre team members at home, finance team members were balancing the books from their living rooms, managers were organising team members on video calls and our websites could be updated by someone enjoying a coffee in their kitchen. For many this was business as usual – if not quite as normal.

Not all of our teams work at a desk though. We have many people helping vulnerable customers, out on construction sites and repairing homes all over the East Midlands. The first few days, indeed weeks, presented many challenges for some of these teams. But thanks to everyone's willingness to learn and adapt and their enthusiasm for doing a great job, we kept most of our services running as normal. We also have to thank our customers for understanding the challenges we faced and helping us adapt to these new ways of working.

We also started doing new things. Staff from across Futures joined in to make calls to customers who we knew might be struggling during the lockdown - over 5,300 in total. In some cases this meant quickly training people in the skills and systems they needed to help with this work. We also delivered 395 free care packages of food, cleaning materials, household basics and treats to help people live safely, comfortably and in reasonable spirits.

Our People team also worked hard to make sure everyone was adapting well to these changes and taking care of themselves. This included regular surveys to check how people were feeling and find out what extra help they might need with working from home.

As lockdown has eased we are still adapting but we've also proved how well prepared we are for sudden change and how willing and able our people are to tackle new challenges. The whole experience has reminded us of our social purpose and rebooted our commitment to supporting the local communities of which we're part.

When you're put under pressure or into a tight spot, it pays to be agile.



## Onwards and upwards



We have **5 graduate business partners** currently working at Futures



**21 of our colleagues** trained and qualified in mental health first aid this year

# One day: future benefits



Transformation Project Manager Luke Stanley is part of the team responsible for questioning, modernising and improving the way we work – making every hour and pound we spend go further and achieve more.

With a background in private lettings management, Luke said he's "always been a tinkerer" – constantly on the lookout for better ways of doing things and adding value for customers. Luke and his colleagues dig deep into Futures' business data and the experiences of customers and colleagues as well as our systems and processes to iron-out inefficiencies and streamline to help us achieve our ambition of making customer experiences effortless.

A typical day for Luke involves brainstorming with teams across the business to dissect how things work, step-by-step, and looking for ways to make things run more smoothly. Luke and his team also bring new ideas and technology into the mix to help keep us moving forward.

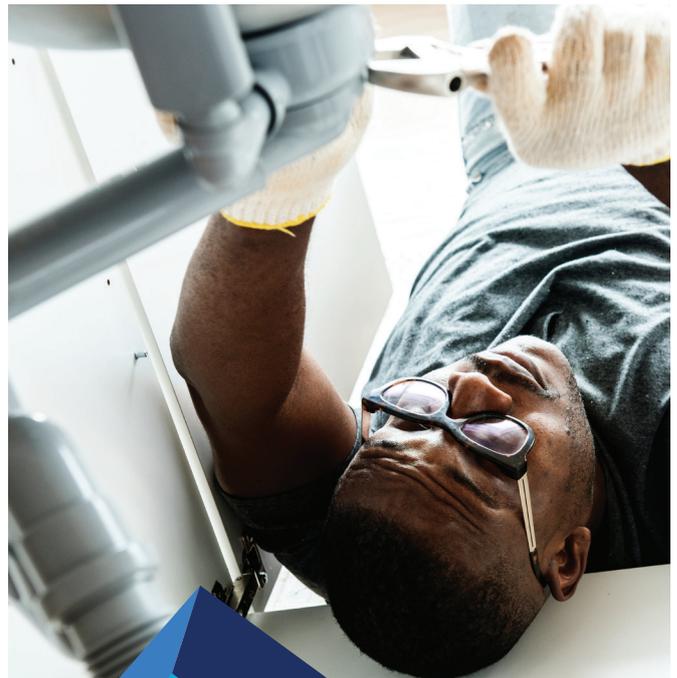
In the past year, the team has been looking hard at repairs – one of the most important parts of our service for residents. Altering the timescales of more urgent repairs to fit better with when customers are at home and having expert tradesmen on-hand at the customer contact centre have been among the improvements and have had a dramatic effect.



“It’s a joy to see people stop and think about the impact of what they’re doing. Futures is a land of opportunity if you’re willing to take it.” Luke

We now have a qualified plumber working full-time within the customer service team. He advises other team members on how to help customers make reliable ‘DIY’ fixes over the phone – this alone has helped reduce the number of repairs by more than a thousand in 2019-20. As well as saving thousands of pounds and helping customers get ‘on the spot’ solutions, it frees up technicians to make other home repair visits that need specialist work. Other repairs colleagues have also passed on their know-how to contact centre staff through hands-on training sessions at our office and in vacant homes.

Luke describes innovations like these as “working out the right thing to do in every situation, not just following a procedure.” It’s an example of blending people and processes so that they enable each other. For our business transformation team, one day is day one of the future.



## Savings and gains



**25% increase**  
in customers using  
online MyAccount  
services during 2019-20



**£53,000 (11%) savings**  
on office costs compared to 2018-19

**27,107 responsive repairs completed**

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# One day: of insight

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Our customers are at the heart of what we do. But to meet their needs and improve how we work, we need to get to know them, their experiences and their views. Research and Intelligence Manager Melanie Hughes says that the job of her team is to “really understand what’s going on” for Futures customers and to bring the business closer to residents and communities.

Melanie joined Futures in 2018 from a background in private sector utilities, retail and publishing. She’s found the jump to a different kind of work fascinating and motivating.

The Research and Intelligence team collects feedback from our customers and combines it with the data collected across Futures to analyse trends and spot patterns to help improve the reach and effectiveness of what we do. Tracking customers’ experiences through our monthly customer feedback survey (launched September 2019) and blending it with the feedback we get through our online MyVoice system (launched in January 2020) gives us valuable insights into what matters most to customers and how well we’re meeting their needs and expectations.

As well as getting general day-to-day insights, the team has also dug deep into why some households fall behind with their rent. They showed that there is often a complex mix of factors behind people’s ability to pay; variables like age, family relationships and housing circumstances all play a part.

The team has also played a key role in Futures’ joint affordability research project with the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University. This project showed that while overall housing costs in the East Midlands are relatively low compared to other parts of the UK, low household income levels mean that housing affordability is a major problem, with some families’ finances pushed below what’s required to maintain a minimum socially acceptable standard of living.



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“Housing touches every part of everyone’s life. My role is about making sure we never view or treat customers as just numbers. Every day we focus on data to help us gain a deep understanding about people as individuals, so we can respond to their circumstances and needs.” Melanie

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As a result of what we’ve learned we’re now doing more work around moving-in costs and how to help people cope with large or unexpected costs and household bills. We’re also doing more to help people access online services, get help from our Money Advice and Employability teams and keep up to date on how we can assist with the pressures of day-to-day living. Melanie and her colleagues will continue to analyse data and feedback to provide the evidence we need to continue refining and improving what we offer our customers.



**THANK YOU** to everyone who has supported our work and people through difficult times this year. We're here for each other.

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## Contact us

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## Right for you

If you'd like to have this review in a different language or format to suit you, please contact us on **0300 456 2531** or **[enquiries@futureshg.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@futureshg.co.uk)**

