

Annual Report

20/21

1st April 2020 - 31st March 2021

Welcome

We know the past year has been difficult for most. Not seeing family, friends and colleagues as often as we're used to has taken its toll. However, a return to normality feels closer than ever, with millions of people already vaccinated and lockdown restrictions eased.

At Prima Group, we've been busy ensuring we continue to deliver a high-quality service to all of our tenants despite the ongoing restrictions. Back in March 2020, the sudden lockdown meant that we quickly had to change how we worked and embrace the latest technology. Now we're more than a year into the pandemic, both customers and colleagues are seeing the benefits of us making better use of technology as we offer video viewings and virtual property inspections. Our efforts have even been recognised by Housing Digital, who placed us 10th in their Top 30 Digital Housing Providers list.

We are very excited about the new properties we're building in Kirkby, Leasowe and Walton. These schemes represent the beginning of some big development plans we have coming up over the next few years.

They also provide our local communities with some much needed new homes, as well as employment and training opportunities. Please get in touch for further information.

Working differently over the past year means our teams have been able to offer more support to customers. Taking a proactive role in maximising tenants income and working alongside our partners in the community where more specialist services were needed - meeting the challenges of the pandemic together.

If you have any questions about what you read in this annual report, please don't hesitate to contact us. We would also love to hear from you if you're interested in getting involved in how we work, either informally through our estate walkabouts and clean up days or by becoming a Customer Voice member.

John Ghader
Prima Group CEO



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Wheatfield Close

Repairs & Maintenance

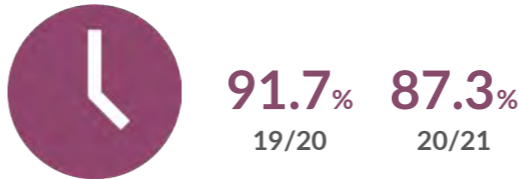
Our repairs and maintenance service has continued to operate smoothly over the past year, keeping homes in good repair, despite the COVID-19 pandemic limiting our access to homes for a large part of the year. The restrictions in place have meant that it has taken us slightly longer than it would normally to complete some repairs. This is due to customers and colleagues having to isolate and us trying to minimise the number of people working in a property at any one time to help with social distancing.

Our early adoption of digital services at the beginning of the pandemic meant we could still carry out inspections remotely. Repairs diagnosis software, XM Reality, allows our Surveyors to see the repair you are reporting just as you see it, using the camera on your smart phone. This means they can assess what's needed and guide you as if they were right by your side, without you having to wait in for an appointment. If it's a simple fix or advice on how something works, you can sort it out straight away.

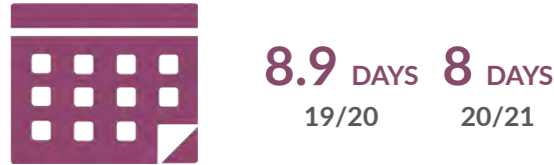


Our investment programme was placed on hold while it was unsafe for our staff, contractors, and customers to be mixing. From July 2021, we are delighted to be fitting kitchens in Liverpool, Leasowe and Sefton again. We are keen to catch up quickly so those who have unfortunately had to wait due to the pandemic restrictions benefit from the new fixtures and fittings as soon as possible. To make this happen we have planned our biggest investment programme to date.

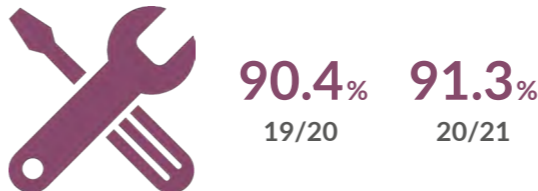
Routine repairs completed within target time



Average number of days taken to complete a repair



Customers satisfied with most recent repair



Number of homes that had new central heating boilers installed





90
19/20 6
20/21

Number of homes that had their bathrooms replaced

We put internal improvement works on hold last year to reduce the number of people having to go into homes to try and keep people safe. We have big plans to catch up by fitting over 500 bathrooms and kitchens in 2021-22.



190
19/20 18
20/21

Number of homes that had new kitchens fitted



£301k £529k
19/20 20/21

Amount of money invested in external repair works



91.7% 100%
19/20 20/21

Properties meeting the Decent Homes Standard



99.86% 99.82%
19/20 20/21

% of dwellings with valid gas safety certificates



9 2
19/20 20/21

Major adaptations delivered using Disabled Facilities Grants



35 21
19/20 20/21

Minor adaptations funded and completed by Prima Group

Visit our website to find details of our planned maintenance programme

www.primagroup.org/planned-maintenance

What we did this year

- Successfully implemented XM Reality, a new technology that allows us to carry out property inspections virtually, making them more convenient for our customers.
- We quickly put in place safe ways of working so that we could continue to provide our day to day repairs service as fully as possible throughout the restrictions. Customers were a great help in keeping us operational as they followed the new safety measures around wearing masks, social distancing and ventilating rooms whilst our contractors were on site.
- We started to use a drone to carry out roof inspections, instead of having to put up scaffolding or using a cherry picker. As well as being quicker and more convenient for customers, using the drone has saved us around £20k over the year.
- We focused on external improvement and maintenance work as this made social distancing easier.
- To improve communication with customers we introduced a new 'Repair Reported' text message, so customers get confirmation of their repair and a timescale of when it should be completed every time they report a routine repair to us.
- We introduced a new way for customers to feedback their satisfaction on repairs. Each time a repair is completed a text message is sent asking for customers to tell us how things went, and customers who give us a low score are contacted so we can put things right quickly.

What we will do next year

- Resume work on our planned improvements schedule. After a lengthy consultation period, we have now started working on the kitchens that were due to be fitted before the pandemic meant we had to put things on hold.
- We will introduce a repairs reminder text for customers, so they don't forget when the repair appointment is arranged for.
- We will replace the passenger lifts in Maud Roberts Court, Litherland and in Griffon House and Merlin House, Southport, keeping our homes fit for the future.
- We will consult with customers due to have a new kitchen on the style, colours and design of the kitchen choices available, providing a wider choice they can select from.
- We will start to replace the remaining door entry systems in Leasowe that haven't yet been upgraded.



New Kitchens

Developments

During 2021, Prima Group has started work on two new developments to create 41 new homes. These homes will provide much needed accommodation for families and people living with disabilities. We are also working with local partners on a children's home on Rice Lane, Walton.

It's great to see the progress of our new development in Kirkby where 11 two-bedroom houses are on track for completion at the start of next year. Located off Roughwood Drive and Kenbury Road, these homes will be a welcome addition to the neighbourhood, where there's a real need for two-bedroom houses, and they are expected to be very popular with smaller families. Our experienced construction partners Ecogee are doing a great job in managing the development.

The development at Twickenham Drive in Leasowe will start later this year and will provide 30 new two-bedroom homes (20 houses and 10 bungalows). Wellcare Construction, another experienced contractor who we've worked with before, will be building these homes for us. Two of the bungalows will be fully wheelchair accessible with covered access from the drive to the front entrance. The remaining eight bungalows will be suitable for people with mobility issues but not requiring a wheelchair. All of the bungalows will include charging points for mobility scooters.

Our new homes will be available at affordable rent prices. They are being built to a higher specification using timber frame construction, smart heating controls and electric car charging points. All homes will have off road parking and front and rear gardens. The timber frame will be given a traditional look and feel through a brick facade, tiled roof, PVCu windows and secure composite entrance doors, which complement the nearby homes.



Neighbourhoods

We have continued to support our customers with financial advice, tenancy support and help accessing basic essentials during the pandemic. RAISE, our local partners have supported 120 of our customers who have been dealing with financial issues. If you need support or advice, then please don't hesitate to get in touch with us using the contact details on the back page.



Referrals to RAISE for benefits, debt and money guidance advice (#)

133	120
19/20	20/21



Tenancy support referrals managed by Prima Group

506	637
19/20	20/21



Evictions due to rent arrears

13	0
19/20	20/21

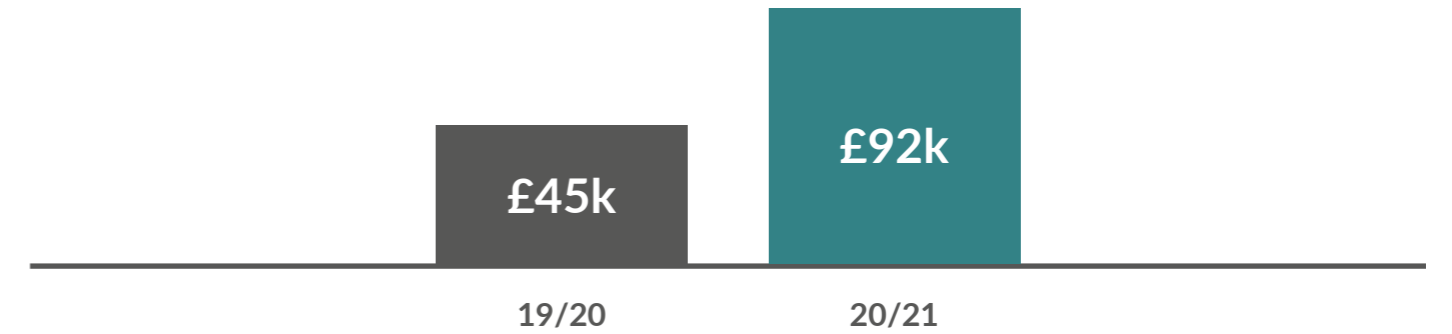


% of rent collected as % of rent due

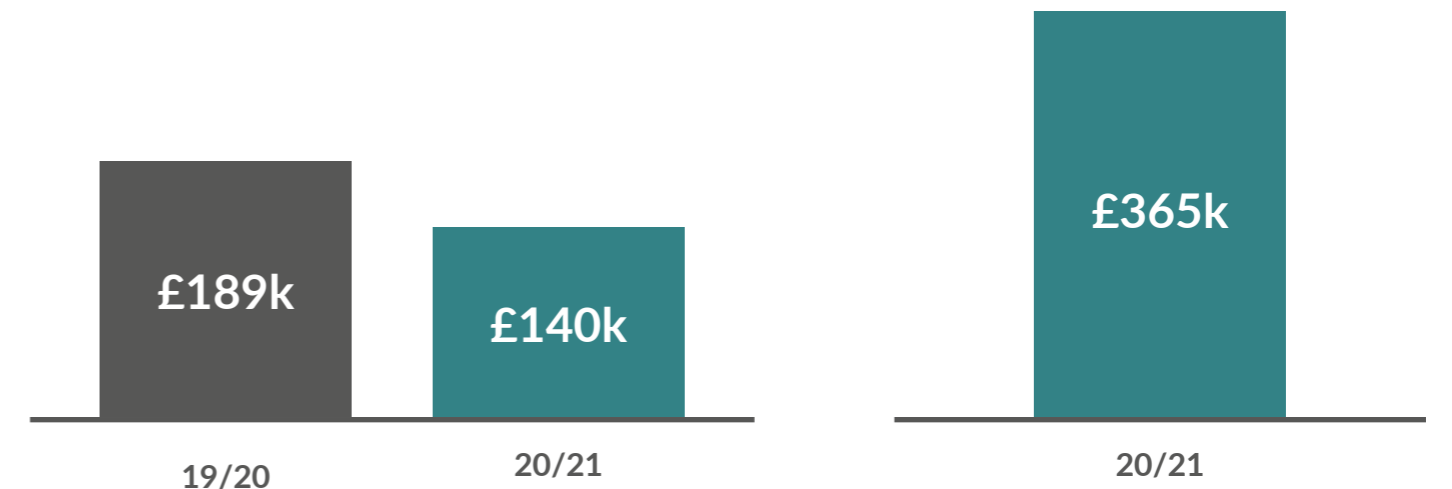
99.95%	101.49%
19/20	20/21

Our Income Team have focused on maximising customers income during the pandemic and ensuring those who were new to Universal Credit, or were furloughed, had access to our support.

Our Income Team have been providing more benefits advice and support to customers than ever before. Customers that would have been referred to RAISE or Wirral Development Trust (WDT) to provide support in previous years have been helped by our Income Officers who've done a great job at maximising customer's income and putting an amazing £92k extra money in our customers pockets - this is more than double from the year before.



Income secured for customers by Prima Group (£)



Income secured for customers by RAISE (£)

Income secured for customers by Wirral Development Trust (£)





% of rent loss through properties being empty

0.9% **1.29%**
19/20 20/21

For the first few weeks of the lockdown, people were not able to move house and it was taking longer for people to arrange to move with the restrictions in place. This, combined with us prioritising housing those in priority need as part of Everyone In, means it took a little longer to get new customers moved in.



Incidents of ASB reported

67 **234**
19/20 20/21

We had an increase in noise complaints during the first lockdown period. We invested in the 'Noise App' which customers affected by noisy neighbours can use to record and track any disturbances - it has been a great success and helped us resolve cases for customers much more quickly than before.

What we did this year

- We reviewed our Neighbourhood Plans, consulting with the Customer Board on what would make the plans most useful for customers.
- We supported over 111 people with shopping, medication deliveries and access to benefits when people couldn't access the internet.
- We quickly responded to the lockdown by putting in place regular welfare calls to customers who were older, lived alone or had additional support needs, making over 2000 check-in calls.
- We pulled together a wealth of resources working with partners and charities so we could signpost customers to the help they needed - such as support with food deliveries, medicine drop offs and food parcels. The approach we took with Wirral Development Trust for Leasowe in providing food and support to vulnerable customers was used as a blueprint and adopted by the council for other areas.
- We successfully bid for £20k funding from the Department of Education to deliver the Leasowe Summer of Food & Fun project to keep families busy and support them with healthy eating over the summer holidays.



What we will do next year

- Due to the restrictions this year, we were unfortunately unable to complete any of our usual Estate Walkabouts or Clean-Up Days. This year we already have a schedule for both events and have carried out our first clean-up day in Dovecot with the help of local partners.
- We will consult on service charges to get tenant's views and will take these views into account when the services are re-tendered.
- We will monitor our Neighbourhood Plans and let you know what has been delivered. You can find out what is in the Neighborhood Plan for where you live [here](#).



Moving Home



Rent arrears

3.87% **3.25%**
19/20 20/21



Empty properties

19 **15**
19/20 20/21



Transferred tenancies

1 **5**
19/20 20/21



Homes re-let

266 **153**
19/20 20/21



Number of days taken to re-let a property

23.1 DAYS **48.1 DAYS**
19/20 20/21

Due to restrictions on moving at the start of the pandemic and putting in arrangements to keep customers and colleagues safe, it has taken us longer than usual this year to move customers into their new homes.



What we did this year

- We introduced 'video viewings' so potential new tenants could see the property without having to travel.
- We introduced 'virtual sign-ups' where customers could sign for their tenancy by video call and sign all the necessary papers remotely, keeping them safe.
- We launched our new look Tenant Handbook, full of all the information you need about managing your tenancy - you can find it on our website.
- Implemented changes to how we manage empty properties, making it quicker for people to move into their new home.
- We have also participated in the Everyone In project, a homeless initiative in Liverpool. This was during the pandemic and we have rehoused over 25 families/single households.
- We supported some customers to move homes in emergency situations during lockdown by providing them with our empty properties and assisting with furniture.

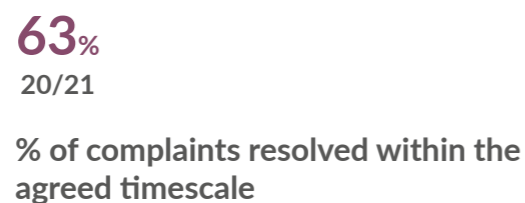
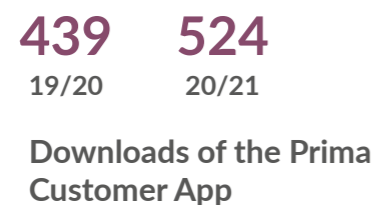
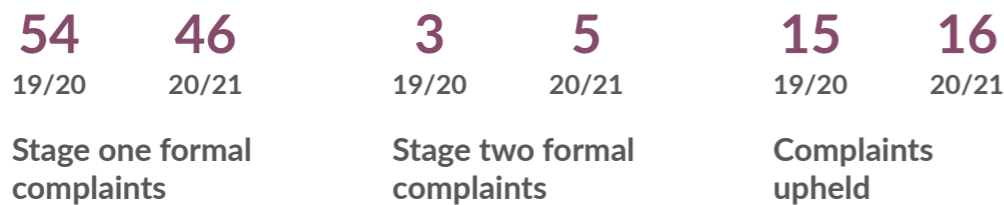
What we will do next year

- We will review our empty homes process, focusing on areas that will make it quicker and easier for new customers to move in.
- We will review our 'Void Policy' including the standard set for the condition we let homes to new customers.

Customer Care, Complaints & Communications

This year, we have continued to expand our communication channels so customers have more access to us now than ever. Since the beginning of the pandemic, more customers have been downloading the Prima Customer App as the reliance on digital services increased, and we also introduced a regular e-newsletter to customers. Please let us know your email address and we will send these to you too.

Our Customer Board helped us to review our Complaints Policy. When reviewing complaints, they ensured that the customer perspective was considered and identified where procedures may need to change.



What we did this year

- Ensured more vulnerable customers had access to our services. To help us with this, we asked customers more questions about their household make up and circumstances, so we can better target services based on improved customer information.
- Implemented a new safeguarding support system.
- We changed our telephony system to one that supported agile working, so our employees could work from home and still deliver all our services as usual.
- We reviewed our Complaints Policy against the new Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Code.
- We started to share our policies on our website, each time one is reviewed or updated, it is put on our website to improve transparency.

What we will do next year

- We will review our Customer Standards, asking for customer feedback on them so we get these right.
- We will consult with customers on policies and procedures, building in the opportunity for customers to comment before they are approved.
- We will update our website, adding much more information to help customers with common queries and so they can access information 24 hours a day.
- We will introduce a chatbot in addition to our current webchat service that means frequently asked questions can be dealt with 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- We will send a customer satisfaction survey after every complaint is closed to see how easy it is for customers to raise a complaint and how they found the process.

Listening to Customers

Every conversation with a customer, complaint we receive or engagement on social media that we have provides us with an opportunity to hear the customer voice and act on what we hear. One improvement we made to our Complaints Policy, was to start capturing what we learn from complaints; this is so we can put in place changes when customers have told us that something isn't working for them.

Examples of how we have made changes following complaints and feedback include:

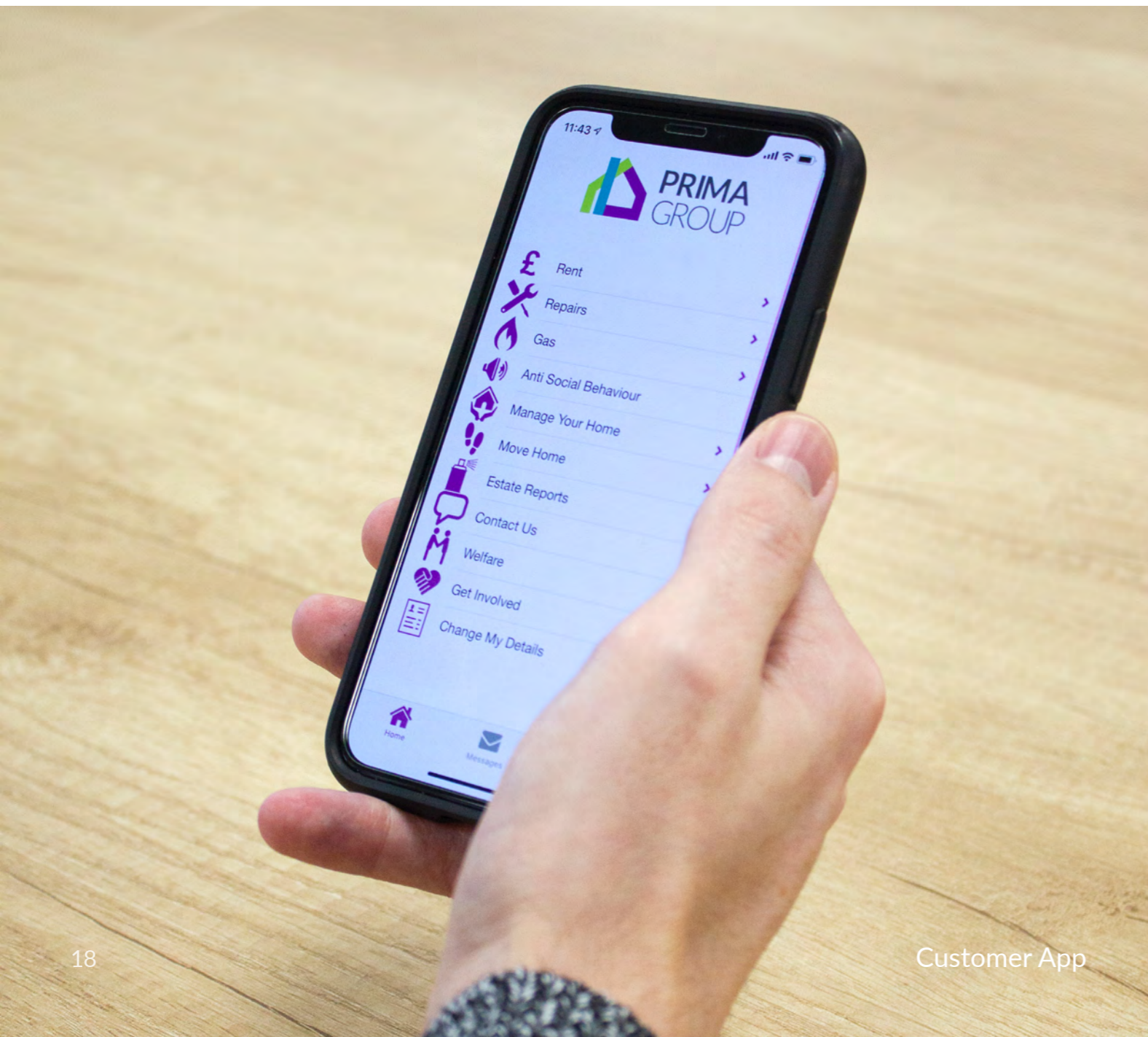
- When we send repairs to a contractor that are to external areas, we are now clearer about exact locations, following a complaint about us attending to a wrong drain.
- Several complaints around delays to repairs being completed led us to investigate new technology to help us communicate with our contractors. This resulted in the introduction of the 'Contractor Portal' where we can share notes and updates on the progress of repairs direct with the contractors in real time, so we can provide better up to date information to customers on progress.
- Updating our website with clearer information on what to do when a tenant dies and the steps to take.
- Introduced a 'Repairs Confirmation' text message so customers have easy access to details of the repair they reported and when it should be completed by, as customers told us they wanted improved communication about their repairs

- Introduced the Noise App for customers impacted by noisy neighbours following an increase in customer feedback and reporting of noise nuisance.
- Investigated making the Customer App available to users of Huawei smart phones, but we couldn't progress with this due to security concerns on the Huawei app approval process.



Download the Prima Customer App

With the Prima Customer App, you can now easily check your balance, see mini-statements, request a statement, report a repair, request visits and report ASB amongst a whole host of other options.



Customer App

Customer Board

During last year the Prima Customer Board, made up of tenants and leaseholders, met regularly by video call. They reviewed the work Prima Group were carrying out and how we were performing, attended training sessions and provided feedback on the policies that had been reviewed, checking that they met customer's needs.

Over the year, the Customer Board reviewed and influenced policies covering:

- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Aids & Adaptations
- Mobility Scooters
- Electrical Safety & Testing
- Repairs & Maintenance
- Customer Complaints
- New Tenancy Agreement
- Former Tenant Debt
- Helping Hands Support Scheme
- Safeguarding
- Together with Tenants Charter

Board members also joined in with webinars and online consultations held with tenants from housing associations across the country and organisations such as the Housing Ombudsman, Tenant Participation Advisory Service and the National Housing Federation on topics such as customer engagement, climate change and complaint handling.

The Customer Board looked at our Neighbourhood Plans, giving us great feedback on what they needed to include to make them more useful for tenants – we took all their suggestions on board and you can see the outcome for where you live [here](#).

The Customer Board play a key role in how we respond to complaints, sitting on the panel to review any escalated complaints we receive. They helped us to respond to complaints last year, ensuring that the customer voice was heard and that we learnt when things hadn't gone as they should have.

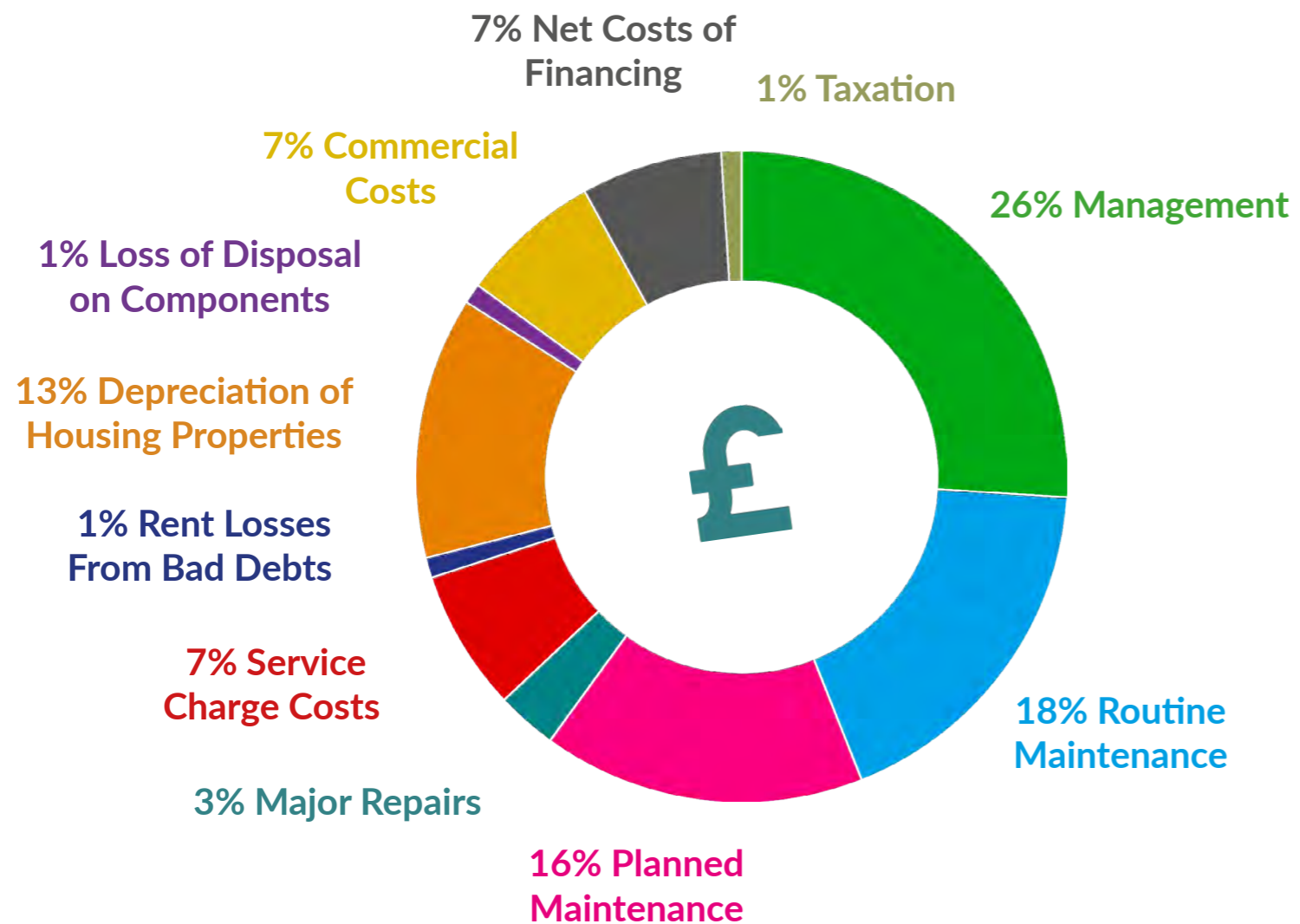
We are re-launching the Customer Board soon and are looking for new members – if you are interested in getting involved, finding out a bit more on how we work and helping us put customer views at the heart of Prima Group, please get in contact here: www.primagroup.org.



Finance

- In 2020/21 we had an income of £14m from rents and service charges.
- We spent £10.5m on delivering key services; this covers things like managing tenancies, repairing homes, carrying out safety and maintenance checks, as well as repaying debts.
- Surplus for the year was £2.8m.

How we spend each £



Columbus Quay



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