

## **Place Select Committee**

# **Scrutiny Review of Consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group**

**Final Report  
January 2019**

Place Select Committee  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
Church Road  
Stockton-on-Tees  
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### **Select Committee - Membership**

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Councillor Sonia Bailey (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Louise Baldock  
Councillor Evaline Cunningham  
Councillor Ken Dixon  
Councillor Maurice Perry  
Councillor Mrs Sylvia Walmsley  
Councillor Bill Woodhead MBE

### **Acknowledgements**

The Committee would like to thank the following people for contributing to its work:

- Councillor Nigel Cooke (Elected Member and Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Housing) – Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
- Richard McGuckin (Director of Economic Growth & Development Services) – Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
- Jane Edmonds (Housing Services Manager) – Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
- Ian Wardle (Chief Executive) – Thirteen Housing Group
- Kay Glew (Director of Neighbourhoods) – Thirteen Housing Group
- Linda Minns (Director of Governance) – Thirteen Housing Group
- Chris Smith (Executive Director of Service Delivery and Development) – Thirteen Housing Group
- Julie McNaughton (Accommodation Manager) – Thirteen Housing Group
- Val Scollen (Chair of Customer Council) – Thirteen Housing Group
- Chris Joynes (Director of Customer Support Services) – Thirteen Housing Group
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## **Foreword**

On behalf of the Place Select Committee, we are pleased to present the final report and recommendations following our review of Consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group.

Thirteen are a key housing provider across the Borough and an important and valued Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council partner. In reacting to national policy, the organisation has undergone significant change to improve efficiency and increase their ability to access financial resources to support future investment. Within such a context, the Committee sought to determine the extent to which this change had affected service delivery to tenants, operational and strategic engagement with the Council, and Thirteen's investment programme and its alignment with Council priorities.

During the course of this review, the Committee welcomed Thirteen's commitment to building on their various communication streams to further enhance the relationships between the Group, its tenants, the Council and Ward Members. This is particularly relevant following the recent implementation of the new Neighbourhood Co-ordinator operating model.

A significant development in the latter stages of this scrutiny work involved Thirteen's announcement of their withdrawal from the Tees Valley-wide Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme, and the Committee sought to understand the rationale for this decision, the potential impact it will have, and Thirteen's alternative proposals. In implementing any new arrangements, the need for a strong and open partnership between Thirteen and the Council is crucial in ensuring that individuals and families who require social housing have their needs adequately met.

We would like to thank Thirteen's senior management for their co-operation with this work and for providing comprehensive input throughout.



**Cllr Derrick Brown**  
Chair  
Place Select Committee



**Cllr Sonia Bailey**  
Vice-Chair  
Place Select Committee

## Original Brief

### **Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?**

This review could potentially support aspects of all 4 policy principles:

- Protect the vulnerable
- Create economic prosperity
- Tackle inequality
- Help people to be healthier

### **What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?**

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) completed a large-scale stock transfer to Tristar Homes Ltd in December 2010 which facilitated a multi-million pound investment programme of upgrading existing stock, funding environmental improvements and the delivery of much-needed new affordable homes in the Borough.

In July 2017, Tristar Homes, along with Erimus Housing, Housing Hartlepool, Tees Valley Housing and Thirteen Care and Support joined in partnership to create one strong social purpose business called *Thirteen* (the single landlord). This consolidation would enable Thirteen to deliver an internal efficiency programme and give greater flexibility for the single landlord to lever in additional financial resources to support future investment programmes across the Tees Valley. Thirteen remain committed to working in collaboration with SBC and want to be the Council's '*partner of choice*'.

As a landlord and housing developer, Thirteen manages 34,000 properties from North Tyneside to York, with the majority of homes for rent and sale in Teesside. In addition, Thirteen is a social purpose business that uses commercial skills to meet its priorities, and its care and support services offer help for vulnerable people facing a range of challenges. A range of housing support services is also offered including money advice, extra care schemes to help people live independently for longer, adaptations to homes, and help with anti-social behaviour.

The operating environment for Registered Housing Providers has changed significantly over recent years - financial pressures due to (a) a cut in social rents by 1% per year for the next four years, (b) the proposed introduction of 'voluntary right to buy' for all housing association tenants, and (c) the proposal to limit the amount of rent payable to the Local Housing Allowance Cap (NB. Government has recently announced this element of proposed rent changes will now not be implemented). In response to these financial pressures, Thirteen (like other RPs) has undertaken a programme of efficiency savings to mitigate lost income and unlock financial capacity within the Group to be able to both continue to deliver quality services to its tenants, and deliver additional affordable housing units.

The aim of this review will be to explore the impact (if any) of the consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group in relation to:

- the delivery of services to tenants within the Borough.
- ongoing liaison and contact with SBC at both an operational level (including appropriate Ward Members) and at strategic level.

- their commitment post-consolidation to continue to be the Council's 'partner of choice' (i.e. how their significant forward investment programme aligns and supports the Council's broader economic and regeneration priorities).

**The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:**

- What was the rationale for the consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group, and how did this effect tenants / leaseholders in Stockton-on-Tees?
- What have been the key issues / challenges post-consolidation in terms of the delivery of services, and how are these being addressed?
- How does Thirteen engage with tenants / leaseholders (including communication of services and addressing concerns raised)?
- What arrangements are in place regarding operational and strategic engagement with the Council? Are they effective?
- What are the key features of Thirteen's investment programme, and how is this aligned with Council priorities?
- How will the recent internal re-organisation within Thirteen effect the partnership with the Council and tenants / leaseholders?

**Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:**

Thirteen Housing Group, through both their day-to-day delivery of housing services and their broader investment plans, will play a significant role in supporting the Council in delivering its social, economic and regeneration activities. This review can provide reassurance that following consolidation:

- Both operational (including Ward Member contact) and strategic relationships with the Council have been maintained and continue to be effective.
- Opportunities for Thirteen's significant investment potential within the Borough continue.
- That the Council fully understand the financial investment power that Thirteen Housing Group have available, and fully capitalises on this within the Borough.

## **1.0 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's scrutiny review of Consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group.
- 1.2 Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) completed a large-scale stock transfer to Tristar Homes Ltd in December 2010 which facilitated a multi-million pound investment programme of upgrading existing stock, funding environmental improvements and the delivery of much-needed new affordable homes in the Borough.
- 1.3 The strength of Thirteen's inward investment into the Borough has been significant since stock transfer (exceeding £150m). In addition to physical investment, Thirteen have sought to strengthen their relationship with the Council at all levels, including reinforcing their day-to-day working with local Ward Members.
- 1.4 The summer Budget of 2015 introduced a number of challenges for all Registered Housing Providers (RP's):
  - a) A proposal to a cut in social rents by 1% per year for a 4-year period;
  - b) The proposed introduction of 'voluntary right to buy' for all housing association tenants;
  - c) To limit the amount of rent payable to the Local Housing Allowance Cap from 2018, for all new tenancies entered into after the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 (NB. Government has recently announced this element of proposed rent changes will now not be implemented).

Thirteen identified that, as a direct result of the above, they would experience a projected loss of rental income result to the value of £55m, and would need to achieve greater efficiencies to 1) mitigate lost income and unlock capacity within the Group to be able to continue to deliver quality services to their tenants, and 2) continue to deliver additional new-build affordable housing units.

- 1.5 To address these challenges, in July 2017, Tristar Homes Ltd, along with Erimus Housing, Housing Hartlepool, Tees Valley Housing and Thirteen Care and Support, joined in partnership to create one strong social purpose business called 'Thirteen' (the single landlord). This consolidation would enable Thirteen to deliver an internal efficiency programme and give greater flexibility for the single landlord to lever in additional financial resources to support future investment programmes across the Tees Valley. Thirteen remained committed to working in collaboration with SBC and wanted to be the Council's '*partner of choice*' in so far as they wished to:
  - a) Continue to invest into the Borough and actively support the Council in delivering its key economic and broader strategic ambitions, and
  - b) Continue to maintain ongoing operational and strategic relationships with the Council – central to this was a commitment to maintaining existing contact and working relationship with Ward Members.
- 1.6 The main focus for this review was to explore the impact (if any) of the consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group on the delivery of services to tenants within the Borough, and ongoing liaison and contact with Stockton-on-Tees



Borough Council (SBC) at both an operational level (including appropriate Ward Members) and at strategic level. Thirteen's commitment post-consolidation to continue to be the Council's 'partner of choice' (i.e. how their significant forward investment programme aligns and supports the Council's broader economic and regeneration priorities) would also be examined.

- 1.7 Acknowledging the potential threats of consolidation in terms of the effect on existing local relationships, partnerships, knowledge and focus, the Committee were assured by Thirteen that robust communication mechanisms are now in place that provide high-level, frequent and mutually beneficial dialogue in order to further each partner's (Thirteen and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council) priorities.
- 1.8 The Committee were pleased to hear that performance was improving, concerns had been / were being addressed (e.g. new repairs system launched in September 2017), customer satisfaction levels were good, and customer engagement remained a high priority (e.g. employment of additional staff to help customers who have problems with Universal Credit). It is encouraging that tenants have a wide range of ways in which to contact Thirteen to ensure their views are heard, and it is important that they feel listened to and that the Group provides an adequate response to any issues they have. It is positive that Thirteen are actively seeking better ways in which to engage with their customers and are open to learning.
- 1.9 Some issues were raised regarding levels of communication between Thirteen and Ward Members – it is crucial that this particular partnership is strong, as Ward Members can often be the first people that tenants go to if they have a concern. It is important that Ward Members raise any such matters through the appropriate channels, and are kept up-to-date with relevant contact details and any developments within the Group that may affect their Ward. Feedback to Ward Members following any action to address a tenant issue would be beneficial.
- 1.10 Thirteen's commitment to being the Council's 'partner of choice' was welcomed. The strong relationships that exist between the two organisations mean that the considerable investment that Thirteen puts into the Borough plays a significant role in supporting the Council's key strategic plans, priorities and ambitions.
- 1.11 The Committee welcomed Thirteen's emphasis on providing bungalows as part of their future investment programme, which recognises an aging population and enables people to live independently for longer – the provision of low-rise accommodation is also an important alternative for older people who do not want to live in bungalows. However, the Committee are concerned regarding the national definition of 'affordable' rent (which currently includes both 'affordable' and 'social' rent), and encourages Thirteen to ensure the provision of new housing, where possible, is provided at a 'social rent' level.
- 1.12 The new operating model comprising Neighbourhood Co-ordinators was detailed. The Committee broadly welcomed this approach, though as with any new way of working, were keen to receive future updates on how it has been received by tenants.

- 1.13 A significant aspect of this review focused on the partnership between SBC and Thirteen. Whilst this has been historically and generally strong, it appears that communication around Thirteen's decision to withdraw from the current CBL scheme has not been in the spirit of previous joint working, with mixed messages around developing intentions. The Committee respect Thirteen's right to make decisions for its own benefit, but would like to think that the Borough's largest registered social housing group is not turning its back on its core purpose of providing social / affordable housing. Both SBCs and Thirteen's overriding concern should continue to be supporting the people on their housing lists, and a strong and transparent partnership is crucial in ensuring that individuals and families who require social housing have their needs adequately met.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee recommend that:

- 1. Thirteen Housing Group provide an update report to the Place Select Committee in 2019 on the new Neighbourhood Co-ordinator operating model as part of this review's monitoring process, including assurance that the new Co-ordinators are appropriately skilled, trained and supported.**
- 2. Thirteen Housing Group continue to seek positive relationships and strong communication with all Ward Members, and have robust plans in place for Ward Member engagement following the Local Elections in 2019.**
- 3. Whilst acknowledging the restrictions around the national policy approach, the Committee fully support Thirteen Housing Group's commitment to looking at options to convert its future development programme from 'affordable rent' to 'social rent', and request that an update is provided following Thirteen Board's discussions on this.**
- 4. Thirteen Housing Group provide assurance around the process of re-housing Anson House and Hudson House tenants to ensure, as far as possible, that people remain in that locality in the tenure of their choice (if this is their wish).**

*In relation to Thirteen's decision to withdraw from the CBL scheme*

- 5. Thirteen Housing Group provide assurance that the new Thirteen digital platform will accommodate the Council's requirements. If this assurance is not possible, Thirteen to provide assurance that it will include an effective interface with the current CBL operating scheme.**
- 6. In order to mitigate additional cost burdens on the Council (including additional staffing requirements to administer the Housing Register and effectively deliver the agreed Nomination Agreement), Thirteen Housing Group provide further assurance around financial support to the Council following their exit from the current CBL scheme.**

**Recommendations (continued)**

The Committee recommend that:

- 7. Thirteen Housing Group and the Council work together to ensure commonality on priority bandings in their respective Lettings / Allocation Policies, with the aim of ensuring that the Borough's housing needs are appropriately met. Thirteen to provide the Council with regular (quarterly) updates of the number of lettings, by priority banding, made directly via the Thirteen Lettings Policy.**
- 8. The agreed Nomination Agreement includes a fair and equitable percentage of Thirteen housing stock (including property type, tenure and location).**
- 9. Thirteen Housing Group give an undertaking to work jointly with the Council to ensure consistent communication and messages to residents / customers leading up to and post Thirteen's exit from CBL.**

## **2.0 Introduction**

- 2.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's scrutiny review of Consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group.
- 2.2 The main focus for this review was to explore the impact (if any) of the consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group on the delivery of services to tenants within the Borough, and ongoing liaison and contact with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) at both an operational level (including appropriate Ward Members) and at strategic level. Thirteen's commitment post-consolidation to continue to be the Council's 'partner of choice' (i.e. how their significant forward investment programme aligns and supports the Council's broader economic and regeneration priorities) would also be examined.

Reflecting these aims, the Committee undertook the following key lines of enquiry:

- What was the rationale for the consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group, and how did this effect tenants / leaseholders in Stockton-on-Tees?
  - What have been the key issues / challenges post-consolidation in terms of the delivery of services, and how are these being addressed?
  - How does Thirteen engage with tenants / leaseholders (including communication of services and addressing concerns raised)?
  - What arrangements are in place regarding operational and strategic engagement with the Council? Are they effective?
  - What are the key features of Thirteen's investment programme, and how is this aligned with Council priorities?
  - How will the recent internal re-organisation within Thirteen effect the partnership with the Council and tenants / leaseholders?
- 2.3 The Committee took evidence from Thirteen Housing Group (including the Chair of the Thirteen Customer Council, the overarching body of involved residents that reviews performance and holds Thirteen to account) and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. Existing customer survey information has been reviewed, and a site visit to Acorn House, Thornaby (supported housing scheme), was undertaken on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2018.
- 2.4 Recognising the increasing pressure on the Council's finances, it is imperative that in-depth scrutiny reviews promote the Council's policy priorities and, where possible, seek to identify efficiencies and reduce demand for services.

### **3.0 Background**

3.1 Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) completed a large-scale stock transfer to Tristar Homes Ltd in December 2010 which facilitated a multi-million pound investment programme of upgrading existing stock, funding environmental improvements and the delivery of much-needed new affordable homes in the Borough.

3.2 The strength of Thirteen's inward investment into the Borough has been significant since stock transfer (exceeding £150m), and this has delivered:

- Property and environmental improvements: between 2012/13 and 2016/17, over £108m was invested improving properties located within the Borough.
- Provision of new much-needed affordable housing: since 2010, Thirteen (via their predecessor landlords) have delivered 368 new affordable homes in a variety of locations including Yarm, Thornaby, Eaglescliffe, Norton, Stockton, Hardwick and Billingham.
- Provision of services to support the most vulnerable: working in partnership with Thirteen, a number of new-build developments have assisted the Council in addressing the individual needs of its local communities – these have included bespoke developments such as *Winford House* in Billingham (a 'care-ready' 38-unit apartment scheme (for those over 55 years) which opened late-2015 – the scheme promotes independent living with access to on-site support around the clock) and *Acorn House* in Thornaby.
- Social and community support: Thirteen have also played a vital role in supporting local communities through the provision of training and employment initiatives, as well as supporting voluntary and community groups via the Thirteen Community Fund. During 2016/17, 45 grant applications in the Borough were financially supported to the value of £54,000.

3.3 In addition to physical investment, Thirteen have sought to strengthen their relationship with the Council at all levels, including reinforcing their day-to-day working with local Ward Members. This has involved inviting all Ward Members into their North Shore offices to facilitate discussion with the Thirteen local teams, and the introduction of an '*Our Commitment*' sheet (see Appendix 1) which details how they propose to work and engage with local Ward Members.

3.4 The summer Budget of 2015 introduced a number of challenges for all Registered Housing Providers (RP's):

- d) A proposal to a cut in social rents by 1% per year for a 4-year period;
- e) The proposed introduction of 'voluntary right to buy' for all housing association tenants;
- f) To limit the amount of rent payable to the Local Housing Allowance Cap from 2018, for all new tenancies entered into after the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 (NB. Government has recently announced this element of proposed rent changes will now not be implemented).

Thirteen identified that, as a direct result of the above, they would experience a projected loss of rental income result to the value of £55m, and would need to achieve greater efficiencies to 1) mitigate lost income and unlock capacity

within the Group to be able to continue to deliver quality services to their tenants, and 2) continue to deliver additional new-build affordable housing units.

3.5 To address these challenges, in July 2017, Tristar Homes Ltd, along with Erimus Housing, Housing Hartlepool, Tees Valley Housing and Thirteen Care and Support, joined in partnership to create one strong social purpose business called 'Thirteen' (the single landlord). This consolidation would enable Thirteen to deliver an internal efficiency programme and give greater flexibility for the single landlord to lever in additional financial resources to support future investment programmes across the Tees Valley. Thirteen remained committed to working in collaboration with SBC and wanted to be the Council's *'partner of choice'* in so far as they wished to:

- c) Continue to invest into the Borough and actively support the Council in delivering its key economic and broader strategic ambitions, and
- d) Continue to maintain ongoing operational and strategic relationships with the Council – central to this was a commitment to maintaining existing contact and working relationship with Ward Members.

However, under the consolidation proposals, the Council would no longer hold rights as a company member or shareholder in Thirteen, nor would it have any automatic right to appoint persons onto the Thirteen Board (it was noted that one of the current independent members of Thirteen's Board is a SBC Cabinet Member).

3.6 As a landlord and housing developer, Thirteen manages 34,000 properties from North Tyneside to York, with the vast majority of homes for rent and sale in Teesside. In addition, Thirteen is a social purpose business that uses commercial skills to meet its priorities, and its care and support services offer help for vulnerable people facing a range of challenges. A number of housing support services are also offered including money advice, extra care schemes to help people live independently for longer, adaptations to homes, and help with anti-social behaviour.

3.7 There are a number of RPs operating within the Borough – generally these providers can be categorised as either:

- 1. 'Landlords only' (i.e. they have a portfolio of properties within the Borough which they manage and maintain)

or are

- 2. 'Active partners' (these are RPs who, in addition to managing and maintaining existing stock, have an active commitment to working in partnership with the Local Authority to support the Council's key strategic agenda's and invest significant resources into the Borough)

Thirteen fall into the latter category – they are an active partner.

## 4.0 Findings

# thirteen

## Managing and building homes

### Rationale for consolidation

- 4.1 Thirteen previously had five separate Partner Companies within the Group, and, by nature, this increased bureaucracy and duplication, and was not an effective use of money and resources. The Regulator of Social Housing (RoSH) was increasingly keen to see that groups operated within streamlined, less complicated and less risky structures to drive efficiencies and value for money, and enable more effective risk management.
- 4.2 By far the greatest benefit of collapsing the structure was the ability to release capacity across the Group. Moving away from the original structure of four Housing Associations would save on borrowing costs and release this capacity by consolidating the assets, loans and covenants into one association, so that more could be reinvested within the Tees Valley. Another key driver was to deliver consistently good services to customers, regardless of their property type or where they lived.
- 4.3 There was a potential threat that local relationships, partnerships, knowledge and focus would be lost when the Partner Companies were consolidated in terms of the strategic and operational relationships that exist with Local Authorities, and also in the arrangements that would exist to ensure local representation was maintained and the customer voice at Thirteen Board was heard. As a result (even before consolidation), regular meetings were established between Thirteen and SBC, with representatives at a senior level including the Chief Executive of Thirteen. The agenda covers progress around the new homes development programme, regeneration schemes, investment and improvements within Thirteen stock, and quarterly updates on Thirteen performance.
- 4.4 The 'Thirteen Customer Council' (TCC) plays a key role in scrutinising decisions and performance of the Group. The Chair of the TCC is represented on the Thirteen Board and brings challenge from a resident perspective.
- 4.5 Since consolidation, Thirteen's performance has been improving, and they continue to listen to tenant and customer feedback through engagement and involvement to improve what they do. The Board has also set some stretching targets within the *Strategic Plan 2018-2023* to improve performance further.



- 4.6 A co-regulatory approach is taken – this means that Thirteen’s Board are responsible for ensuring that it manages the business effectively and it complies with all regulatory requirements. In November 2017, the social housing regulator (RoSH) carried out an ‘In-Depth Assessment’ (IDA) of Thirteen. An IDA is undertaken every three or four years involving close consideration of compliance, accurate records of assets and liabilities, and detailed and robust stress-testing – it is a bespoke piece of work and considers a Housing Associations viability (ability to meet financial obligations), approach to value for money and governance. Thirteen had never undergone an IDA before and they received the outcome in February 2018, being awarded the following grades:
- G1 (the highest grade for governance) – meaning Thirteen meets the Regulators governance requirements; and
  - V1 (the highest grade for viability) – meaning that Thirteen have the financial capacity to deal with a reasonable range of adverse scenarios.
- 4.7 The Committee was reminded that Thirteen are a not-for-profit housing association, where any surplus is put back into services. Its mission is to provide homes, support and opportunities to grow, and the Board are keen to continue developing its added value.

## **Service delivery issues / challenges since consolidation**

### **Legal Structure**

- 4.8 The legal structure of Thirteen Housing Group is now much simpler, with fewer subsidiary Boards and a clear line of sight in terms of oversight and accountability to the main Thirteen Board following consolidation. The Board is supported by three Committees and two subsidiary Boards:
- Audit & Risk Committee
  - Treasury & Investment Committee
  - Remuneration Committee
  - Thirteen Homes (subsidiary company)
  - Thirteen Commercial Services (subsidiary company)

### **Consolidation and re-shape**

- 4.9 Consolidation provided the opportunity to review the Group’s management structure and this was a big focus for the organisation post-April 2017. The Leadership Team was reviewed to create a simpler structure and three new directorates (from five) were created:
- Service Delivery and Development – including all neighbourhood and tenant services, delivery of new homes, customer service, care and support, and business development.
  - Property Services – repairs, investment, estate maintenance and asset management.
  - Resources – finance, business support, people and governance services.

This created the framework for the review of the rest of the organisation which was largely developed and delivered by April 2018. The re-shape focused on



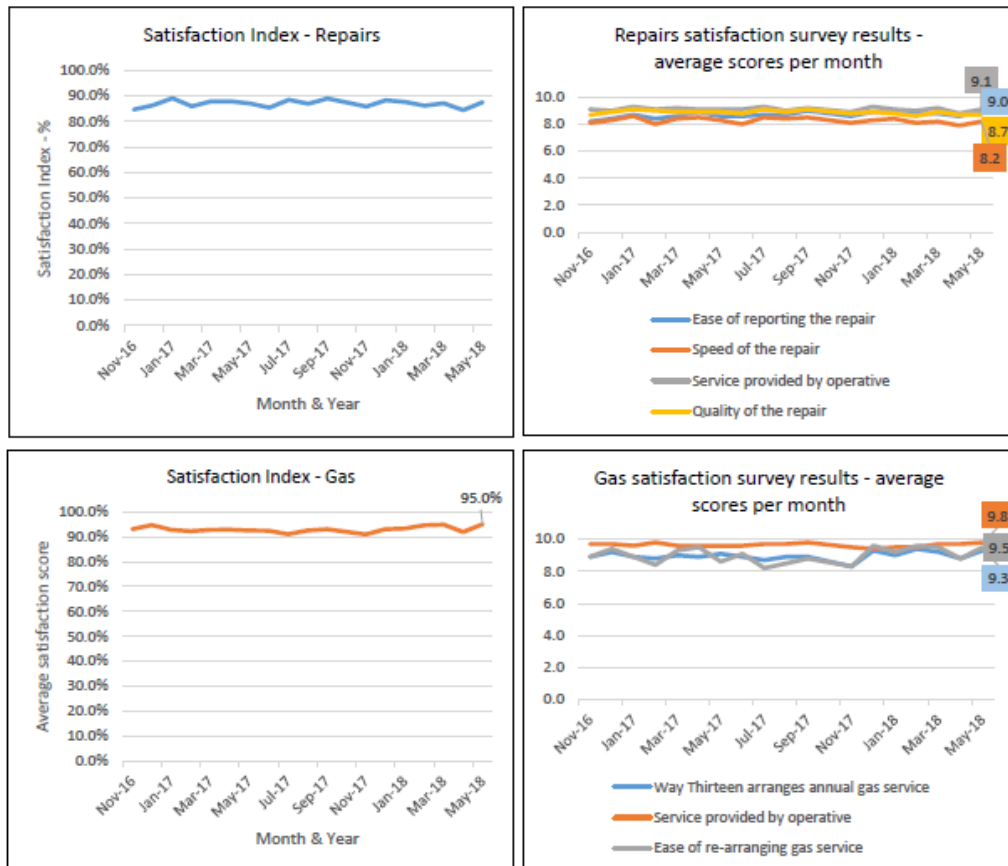
getting the right resource in the right places to ensure the delivery of services customers want, whilst offering value for money. A new operating model has been implemented as from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 to ensure that neighbourhoods are at the heart of everything Thirteen do (see *Effect of recent internal re-organisation within Thirteen* section).

4.10 Thirteen outlined their principal challenges, namely: meeting housing needs, regeneration and investment, care and support needs, and supporting the wider community. Its priorities are:

- 1) Delivering great customer services
- 2) Growing its business as a social entrepreneur (using finances to provide added value (e.g. extra care facilities))
- 3) Contributing to regenerating the Tees Valley
- 4) Being Team Thirteen

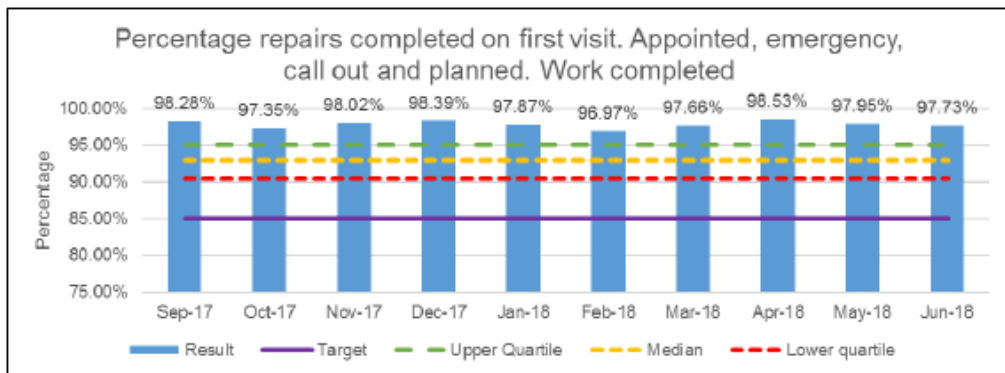
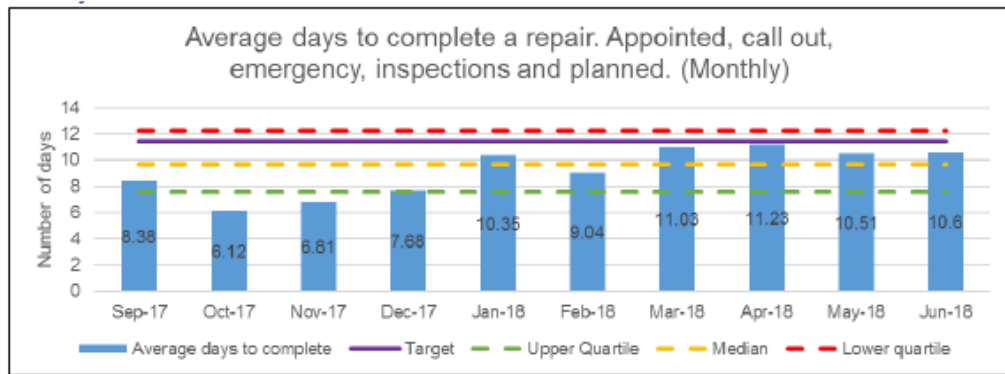
1) Delivering great customer services: performance

4.11 Repairs continue to be the area which provides most customer feedback and where Thirteen have the most day-to-day transactions as a business (and where the most money for tenants is spent). There has been a focus on this over the last year to improve performance, and a new repairs system was launched in September 2017 (allowing more flexible repair times, text messaging to confirm appointments and clearer repair definitions) resulting in better outcomes for tenants.



Importantly, the Group remains at 100% gas compliance, and customers rated their satisfaction with gas services at 9.5 out of 10 (May 2018).

The below charts demonstrate that the key measures (average calendar days taken to complete a repair and 'First Fix' (now at 97% - top 10% nationally)) continue to exceed targets. Productivity has increased including 'right first time' jobs.



Committee Members reflected anecdotal evidence of some Thirteen personnel attending a property following a repair call-out, discovering that the issue is not what they thought it would be, then leaving the property and logging the job as complete. In response, Thirteen representatives stressed that if a worker visits someone's home and does not have all the required parts to complete the job, this should be recorded on the system as a 'follow-on job' (not complete), and that only the scheduler / team leader can close off jobs. Thirteen stated that they do not want performance levels skewed, and that although some customers have waited longer for specific parts, this is monitored. It was also noted that emergencies take precedence, and that this can result in planned work being put back.

The Committee also raised concerns around the replacement of fires (gas to electric), the process of which had made some tenants unhappy. Thirteen were unaware of any issues, but would look into any specific examples that Members informed them of.

4.12 Customer Experience – In terms of 'customer service', Thirteen have maintained progress on key areas of contact and complaints. In the Contact Centre, within the quarter, 82% of calls were answered within 30 seconds, a steady increase within the year and above the 75% target for 2017/18 – this is a significant improvement compared to pre-consolidation. Over the last six months, average Call Wait Time has regularly been below 30 seconds. Satisfaction remains high for the gas and repairs service. The average time taken to respond is around two days, and over 98% have been answered

within the 5-day timescale – this is a huge improvement compared to pre-consolidation. Underlying reasons behind complaints are analysed by the Customer Relations Team, who liaise with the appropriate service area to inform improvement actions and plans. It should be noted that, compared to the number of interactions and transactions between Thirteen and its customers (over 36,000 per month), the number of complaints is low.

Analysing the Thirteen Performance Pack (for performance April to December 2017), the Committee drew attention to the five Customer Service key performance indicators (KPIs) moving in the wrong direction. Thirteen noted the following:

- During this period, there had been issues around void turnaround time, average time to answer calls, and avoidable contact.
- Void turnaround times were set a target for the 2017-2018 financial year that was not achieved, but performance was still considerably better than the year before.
- Average time to answer calls met targets through the year, and was significantly better than the year before.
- Avoidable contact missed its year-end target, but again was significantly better than the year before.
- All the customer services KPIs were set further stretch targets by the Board for 2018-2019, and this is monitored and reported to the Board.

4.13 Rent arrears are maintaining a 'steady state' despite ongoing challenges around welfare reform and Universal Credit. Thirteen continues to provide support to residents to help them manage their tenancies successfully including:

#### *Employment Support*

Thirteen provides support for people aged 15 to 29 to find work, training and education. The New Directions service works with young people and businesses across Teesside to successfully match young people with jobs, apprenticeships, training and work placements. In Stockton:

- 264 people signed up to the New Directions programme;
- 153 people received an offer of employment, apprenticeship or training;
- 156\* people took up the offer of employment, apprenticeships or training.

#### *Money Advice*

Thirteen's Money Advice Team helps customers manage their finances and make the most of their money. This year, additional staff have been employed to help customers who have problems with Universal Credit. Outcomes for Stockton include:

- 291 money advice cases dealt with;

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\* the reason that more people took up the offer of employment than were offered employment was because some people already had a provisional offer of employment from somewhere else before they joined the programme. Those 'acceptance of offers' were counted in Thirteen's figures as they did follow the programme, but Thirteen did not make them the offer of employment.

- £495,278 benefits gained for claimants;
- £400,433 social value gained in the area;
- Investment of £280,000 into Thirteen's Local Housing Discretionary Scheme benefitting 522 customers in Stockton;
- Thirteen's Universal Credit conference in May 2018 brought over 90 delegates together to share learning around the implementation of Universal Credit.

Whilst progress has been made around rent arrears (internal target met despite the introduction of Universal Credit in Hartlepool), the continuing need to raise awareness of income support to help tenants was acknowledged, particularly as performance here is poor compared to other northern housing groups.

The Committee asked if there were any lessons for Stockton following Universal Credit roll-out in Hartlepool. A key feature was to get to people early as some need intensive support and some require only guidance – understanding individual circumstances is crucial. Thirteen now have a dedicated team in place, and it is expected that Stockton should benefit from the issues experienced in Hartlepool.

- 4.14 Voids – There is natural turnover within the housing stock, although some properties are more difficult to let than others. Voids overall for the Group are sometimes higher than desired, and this is a key area of focus (down to target of 325, but still higher than the northern area average – target now adjusted to 250 and making good progress).

The Committee highlighted concerns around the number of void properties on Eltham Crescent, Thornaby. Thirteen stated that all properties are reviewed on a weekly basis.

- 4.15 High Rise Safety - The high rise block at Anson House suffered a fire in April 2017 that sadly led to a fatality. Immediate measures were taken to increase fire security on this, and the sister block at Hudson House, and all properties were treated with intumescent paint to increase fire resistance. Structural concerns emerged in January 2018 following an in-depth inspection of the buildings, and these were mitigated by installing equipment to detect potential gas leaks, removing gas cookers and developing a programme to strengthen the structure of both buildings.



Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, Thirteen were advised in June 2017 that Kennedy Gardens (Billingham) had the same type of cladding fitted, and within two days, emergency arrangements were initiated to remove it. Staff teams were out all weekend to liaise with residents and additional fire security measures were put in place. The replacement cladding programme will commence in July 2018.

Thirteen have recently completed a full option appraisal on all 18 high-rise blocks within the Group. As a result, it was agreed to demolish two blocks in Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees (Anson House and Hudson House), and three in Middlesbrough. Thirteen have appointed a specialist team to work with residents to plan for this and find suitable re-housing options – residents and Ward Members were advised of this on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

The Committee were pleased to hear of the recent commitment by Thirteen to install sprinkler systems in their high-rise properties. Thirteen confirmed that all of their 13 high-rise blocks would be retro-fitted with sprinkler / misting systems, and that information events will follow after designs are agreed (outlined in their investment plan).

- 4.16 To complement the above performance information, the Committee was provided with an *'Impact of Thirteen's services in Stockton'* (April 17 to March 18) brochure which included data and narrative on investment in homes, customer satisfaction with services, repairs, employment support, money advice, preventing homelessness and supported living (see Appendix 2).

## 2) Growing its business as a social entrepreneur

- 4.17 Thirteen commented that they are financially strong, efficient and demonstrated a good year-end financial performance. The Group compares well with other Housing Associations and have a good track record in terms of efficiencies (currently the subject of a big drive within the sector).

## 3) Contributing to regenerating the Tees Valley

- 4.18 The number of new homes being built is increasing, with the target of reaching 400 per year. 'Stock sustainability' was outlined – housing is categorised under one of five levels, with categories 1, 2 and 3 making money, and categories 4 and 5 (mostly high rise accommodation) not. The recent decision to relocate tenants in Anson House and Hudson House in Thornaby on the basis that acceptable standards would not be met in the longer-term due to factors including current and future investment needs and increased service costs for customers was noted – relocation will take place over the next 18 to 24 months so the buildings can be demolished and new housing built.

*Note: the only category 4 and 5 properties in Stockton-on-Tees is Anson House and Hudson House (now scheduled for demolition).*

## 4) Being Team Thirteen

- 4.19 There is a requirement to submit an annual return to the Regulator demonstrating adherence to 'Home Standards' – Thirteen are fully compliant with this. In terms of staff absence, rates have reduced over the last year, and the current focus is on staff mental health and wellbeing.
- 4.20 In related matters, Members expressed concern regarding new grass-cutting arrangements, and questioned how will Thirteen address this? Thirteen confirmed that this was a live issue, and that their Grounds Management Manager had met the Council's operational teams to discuss. Assurance was provided that it would not be a problem if Thirteen need to increase the level of grass-cutting.

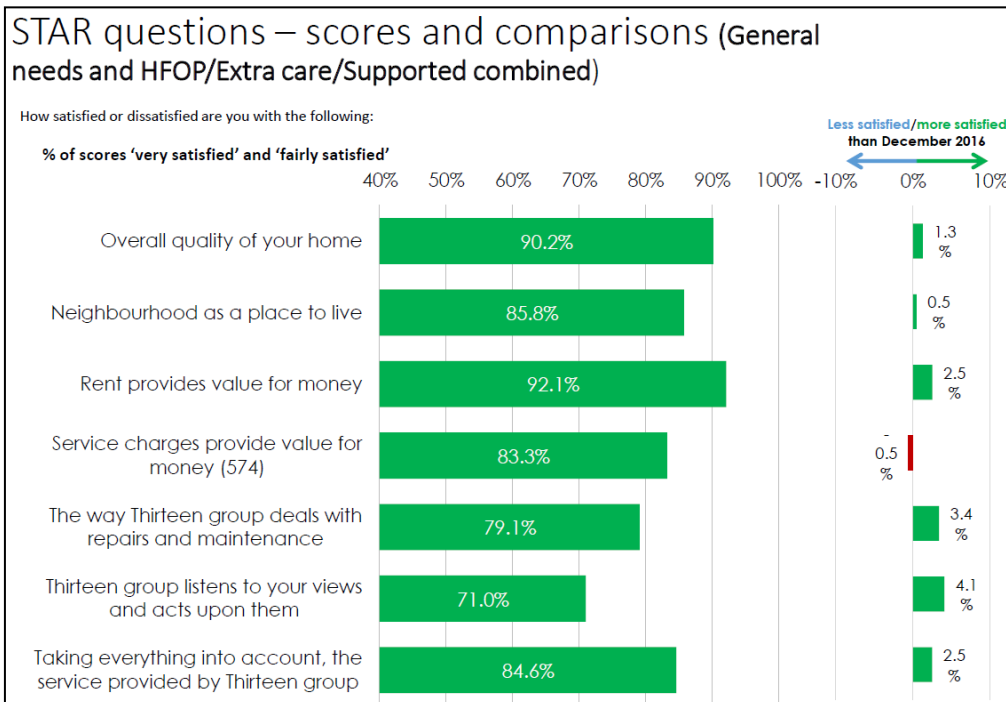
## Customer engagement

4.21 Thirteen engages with customers in a variety of ways to ensure views are heard and services improve:

- Thirteen Customer Council: is the overarching body of involved residents that reviews performance and holds Thirteen to account. Monitors standards set by the Regulator. The Chair of this Council reported that they do have influence, and go to the Board and feel part of it – the Board listens. In addition, representatives from the Scrutiny Panel (see below) also attend meetings to present and discuss scrutiny reports and recommendations to the Board.
- Scrutiny Panel: undertakes 3-4 in-depth task and finish reviews on issues that impact on tenants – last year this included the repairs service and income management. The recommendations are reported to the Thirteen Board by the Chair of the Panel, and the adopted Action Plans are monitored by the Audit and Risk Committee.
- Estate Walkabouts: last year, 215 estate inspections were undertaken – residents and Ward Members are invited to attend these sessions. Members felt there was sometimes a lack of residents around for estate walkabouts, and wondered if residents being made aware of these in advance? Thirteen stated that they will be doing these again next year and they will be advertised in the newsletters and via social media and their website – customers will again be asked if they want to be involved.
- Newsletters: these are sent to every tenant and Ward Members at least twice a year.
- Consultation Events: Thirteen carry out specific consultation events when required (e.g. new development schemes or regeneration proposals) – on-line consultations are most popular (up to 600 tenants respond providing rich feedback).
- Star Survey: this is an independent survey of tenants' views about services and is completed twice a year, with findings reported to the Board. Over 1,000 people are asked their views.
- Customer Relations Team - is a dedicated team focusing on resolving customer complaints and ensuring learning from poor customer service. The Leadership Team also visits a number of customer cases each month.
- Self-Service Portal: ensures tenants can access a number of services on-line 24/7.
- Neighbourhood Teams and the role of the new Co-ordinators: the new operating model, launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018, brings services much closer to the customer. Neighbourhood Co-ordinators are responsible for a much smaller patch, but carry out all of the key services relating to the estate, and are therefore the key point of contact for tenants. These new roles are now fully appointed to, and their contact details will be circulated.

4.22 Thirteen are always learning, and noted a substantial ongoing review to ascertain how they can better engage with their customers.

4.23 The satisfaction levels among customers gives a good indication as to the effectiveness of the services provided and also where improvements are needed. The latest Star Survey results (December 2017) were provided:



- 4.24 Thirteen acknowledged their disappointment regarding the two categories with satisfaction levels in the 70% range – these responses led to a fundamental change in the way the Group deals with repairs and maintenance (as evidenced in the previous *Service delivery issues / challenges since consolidation* section). However, it was noted that over 85% of Thirteen’s customers would recommend it to others.
- 4.25 Further information outlining customer satisfaction levels was provided to the Committee in the form of Thirteen’s monthly satisfaction surveys, the latest of which (May 2018) can be seen at Appendix 3.

**Engagement with SBC (operational and strategic)**

- 4.26 Thirteen highlighted a number of communication channels they have with the Council:
- Monthly update meetings: these are attended by the respective Chief Executives and Executive Directors and provide updates on issues that are of relevance between the organisations. They are very positive and provide an informal platform to exchange views.
  - Quarterly Board meetings: these meetings report progress on the Thirteen development and investment programme, regeneration schemes such as the Victoria project, and general estate management performance within Stockton. They are attended from Thirteen by the Chief Executive, Executive Director and the Director of New Homes Delivery; from SBC, the Director of Economic Growth and Development and the Housing Services Manager. The meetings are very productive and foster a sense of joint working to deliver the agreed priorities.
  - Support to various Council partnership Boards: Thirteen is represented on a number of SBC strategic and partnership groups.
  - Relationships with Ward Councillors: Thirteen aim to have good relationships with Ward Members; they are invited to estate walkabouts, and the

Group have hosted six-monthly Councillor sessions to keep them advised of general progress within Thirteen. Councillors are briefed personally by senior managers when specific events take place (such as the events at the high rise), and Thirteen respond directly to Ward Member enquiries via the Neighbourhood Manager. Thirteen attend resident groups with Councillors at Kennedy Gardens, Low Grange and Parkfield, and have advised all Ward Members of the new Neighbourhood Co-ordinators in their patches.

Generally these relationships are positive and productive, though it was acknowledged that there had been some issues around communication (i.e. some Ward Members not being aware of patch walkabouts).

4.27 Members raised some issues around communication between themselves and Thirteen (communication with some Ward Members has not been as good as with others), and re-iterated the need for the partnership between Thirteen and Ward Members to be strong as they are often the first port-of-call for tenants (e.g. ensure Ward Members receive the twice-yearly newsletter and are made aware of any on-line consultations). Thirteen reaffirmed their commitment to positive and consistent relationships with all Ward Members as part of this review.

4.28 From the Local Authority perspective, one of the commitments made by Thirteen as part of the consolidation process was continued joint-working with the Council. Pre-consolidation, a series of meetings occurred at both a strategic and operational level; all have continued and in some cases been strengthened post-consolidation, and remain an effective means of engagement.

Examples of this current engagement were detailed in the table below and overleaf:

<p><b>Chief Executive meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attended by SBC and Thirteen Chief Executives and Directors from both organisations.</li> <li>- Monthly.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Key strategic</u> meeting which supports the alignment of both organisations.</p>
<p><b>Delivery Board meetings</b> (<i>introduced post-consolidation</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attended by senior Directors and Service Managers from both organisations.</li> <li>- Monthly.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Key strategic</u> meeting; agenda is varied and includes discussion re. SBC key strategic priorities and how Thirteen’s investment potential can support/deliver. Agenda’s also include, as / when required, discussion on key organisational and delivery issues.</p>
<p><b>SBC partnership meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stockton-on-Tees Local Children’s Safeguarding Board</li> <li>- Safer Stockton Partnership</li> </ul>	<p>Membership / participation by senior Thirteen representatives <u>at key strategic partnerships</u> (all these partnerships directly support the Councils social, economic and</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health and Well-being Partnership</li> <li>- Housing Neighbourhood and Affordable Warmth Partnership</li> </ul>	regeneration agenda's).
<p><b>Compass</b> (Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Partnership)</p>	Attendance by Thirteen at both the <u>Steering Group</u> and the <u>Operational Group</u> aimed at ensuring the effective delivery of this vital service to residents of the borough.
<p><b>Topic specific discussions</b></p>	<u>Operational meetings</u> attended by colleagues across the Council and Thirteen.

**Thirteen's investment programme and alignment with SBC priorities**

4.29 Thirteen stated that they are committed to continued investment in repairs, maintenance and improvements to properties to ensure homes are maintained to a decent standard – this includes investment in environmental works, where appropriate, in tandem with the Council. Regeneration in key areas is also a priority and Thirteen have worked in partnership with the Council to redevelop Swainby Road, develop proposals for the Victoria Estate, and the completion of the Parkfield regeneration. Thirteen have a healthy development programme to provide new homes and work closely with the Council's team to develop accommodation for a range of requirements and tenures to help address housing needs in the Borough. Aligning investment with the Council's priorities has improved over the last 12 months.

**Investment in Homes**

4.30 Throughout 2017-18, Thirteen carried out £7,350,000 of improvement to homes throughout Stockton, including:

- 114 new kitchens installed
- 49 new bathrooms installed
- 320 boilers installed
- 284 window installations
- 88 door installations
- 220 roof installations

£5m was also spent on environmental improvements, which included boundary schemes and work to improve neighbourhoods for customers and the people living around the homes the Group manage.

**Repairs in Customer Homes**

4.31 Thirteen implemented a new repairs system in September 2017 which has helped to better allocate repairs jobs, ensure a better service for customers and increase customer satisfaction. £8m was invested on repairs and

maintenance in the Stockton area last year – this includes, repairs, voids, electrical testing and gas servicing.

*Across the Tees Valley:*

- 86,129 repairs completed (since October 2017)
- 97.79% repairs completed on the first visit (since September 2017) – this is a huge improvement compared to pre-consolidation.
- 9.6 out of 10 for customer satisfaction with repairs services provided.

### **Developing New Homes**

4.32 Over the year, Thirteen have developed new homes for people across Stockton. This includes new developments at Parkfield, Urray Nook, Morley Carr Farm, Green Lane, Queensgate, Swainby Road and the Dales, as well as empty homes to bring them back into use for local people. The development of new and empty homes supports the regeneration of the Stockton area and helps more people access affordable homes. This year, Thirteen have also started on site at Alma Street and Phase 3 of Parkfield.

<b>No. of Units</b>	<b>Affordable Rent</b>	<b>Shared Ownership</b>	<b>Other</b>
125	94	25	6

Appendix 4 shows more detail on the individual sites being constructed across Stockton by Thirteen, with additional investment planned.

4.33 Thirteen’s commitment to being the Council’s ‘*partner of choice*’ is also demonstrated by their significant (recent and planned) investment into the Borough. Examples of how this investment supports the Council’s key strategic plans, priorities and ambitions is summarised below:

<b>Key area of activity / investment by Thirteen</b>	<b>Directly supports the key ambitions and priorities of the Council as detailed in the following policy / strategy documents:</b>
<b>Ongoing multi-million investment into existing housing stock and neighbourhood / environmental improvements.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council Plan 2018-19 (Big Plans, Bright Future)</li> <li>• Economic Growth Plan</li> <li>• Affordable Warmth Strategy</li> <li>• Community Safety Plan 2017-20</li> </ul>
<b>Provision of new build affordable housing – various sites across the borough.</b>  Example sites include: <i>North Shore, Eaglescliffe and Yarm.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council Plan 2018-19 (Big Plans, Bright Future)</li> <li>• Economic Growth Plan</li> <li>• Housing Strategy 2018-22 (draft)</li> <li>• Homelessness Reduction Strategy (draft)</li> </ul>
<b>The Councils partner of choice in bring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council Plan 2018-19</li> </ul>

<p><b>forward and/or support on key regeneration sites.</b></p> <p>Examples include: <i>West End Gardens, phase 2 has commenced / Victoria / Alma Street.</i></p>	<p>(Big Plan, Bright Future)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic Growth Plan</li> <li>• Housing Strategy 2018-22 (draft)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Provision of new build specialist housing – recent examples include:</b></p> <p><i>Winford House in Billingham (provision of care ready accommodation / 38 units to support independent living)</i></p> <p><i>Acorn House in Thornaby (apartment accommodation to support independent living for those with a learning disability).</i></p> <p><i>Leasing accommodation to support the transition of care leavers to independent living.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council Plan 2018-19 (Big Plans, Bright Future)</li> <li>• Economic Growth Plan</li> <li>• Housing Strategy 2018-22 (draft)</li> <li>• Health and Wellbeing Strategy</li> <li>• Children’s Strategy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Provision of services that support the most vulnerable in our communities.</b></p> <p>Examples include: <i>Delivery of property adaptations to support Thirteen tenants remain at home.</i></p> <p><i>Delivery of the ‘Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers’ programme (1 of only 28 national funded programmes). Provides support to people who may be homeless or face the threat of homelessness / is targeted at two main groups’ single aged 18 – 34 who are at risk of homelessness and those leaving prison.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council Plan 2018-19 (Big Plans, Bright Future)</li> <li>• Housing Strategy 2018-22 (draft)</li> <li>• Homelessness Reduction Strategy (draft)</li> <li>• Health and Wellbeing Strategy</li> </ul>

- 4.34 In order to further strengthen existing relationships, the Council proposed to develop with Thirteen a Joint Investment Plan to ensure that (where viable) full advantage is taken of our collective ambitions and investment potential, with the aim of maximising both the economic benefit and outcomes for the residents of our Borough. As part of this exercise, colleagues from both organisations will meet with the aim of understanding the others priorities and start the process of plotting future financial investment to determine potential alignment opportunities. This process will be supported by exploring collaborative working to maximise service delivery and consider new models of working such as joint venture opportunities.
- 4.35 In terms of future investment plans, the Committee sought assurance that there would be a variety of properties provided. Thirteen confirmed their commitment to a mix of developments to suit differing needs, including flats and bungalows.

- 4.36 Returning to the theme of stock sustainability (see paragraph 4.18), the Committee were keen to ascertain how the categorisation of Thirteen properties was determined. Thirteen explained that all homes are looked at on a 30-year basis as part of a 30-year business plan, and that an independent surveyor is sent in to check homes and take samples throughout the year – these surveys determine what goes into the investment plan in terms of roof replacements, windows, etc. All information obtained (anti-social behaviour and voids are also factored in) gives a score which results in a category grading (level 1-5). Thirteen are expected to have high-performing stock ('Decent Home Standard' and above), and it was noted that category 4 and 5 properties will never recoup the investment put into them.
- 4.37 The Committee debated the differences between 'affordable' and 'social' housing / rent, and questioned whether there had been a shift away from normal rent to affordable housing. Thirteen stated that their core business is 'social' rent – however, whether new homes are built for 'social' or 'affordable' rent is governed by wider issues, including whether Thirteen have secured funding from Homes England, other national government funding mechanisms, or, in the case of units provided under a s106 agreement, whether this is stipulated by the Local Authority as part of a s106 / nominations agreement. Thirteen do regularly speak to housing and planning colleagues on specific types of properties required, with the defined level of need identified by the Council.

To further clarify the position regarding affordable / social rent, Thirteen provided a guidance sheet that outlined the national context as well as Thirteen's stance in relation to this (see Appendix 5). Of particular note is the fact that Thirteen cannot obtain grant from Homes England for new build social rented housing in the Tees Valley as Stockton is not defined as a high affordability pressure area (as per the national Government definition) – however, Thirteen are looking at options to convert its future development programme from affordable rent to social rent, and its Board will discuss this in the autumn as part of its rent policy.

- 4.38 The Committee commended Thirteen for their developments in Fairfield (noting the excellent response to calls for repairs) and Acorn House, Thornaby (which had received numerous compliments). In order to see an example of such investment into the Borough, Committee Members visited Acorn House, a supported housing scheme with 15 residents each in their own fully self-contained apartment with en-suite facilities.



Operated by CRG (not Thirteen), the main building was well-presented and maintained, creating a calm, clean and welcoming environment. There was

an impression that residents were well cared for and secure, though Members felt that the standard of the external recreational space was not as good as it should be considering residents pay a garden maintenance service charge (something acknowledged by staff).

#### **Effect of recent internal re-organisation within Thirteen**

- 4.39 The re-shape of Thirteen's services has introduced a new neighbourhood operating model which the Group believe will bring services closer to tenants and customers. Tenants have stated that they wanted Thirteen staff to be more visible in neighbourhoods, helping them to deal with the issues they face on a day-to-day basis. Thirteen have therefore reduced the number of properties its Neighbourhood Co-ordinators manage from around 850 to 300 / 350. Responsibility has been decentralised to this team so they now deal directly with lettings, rents and income, anti-social behaviour and estate management – this will allow a greater understanding of the patch and a better response to local issues and individual needs.
- 4.40 Local Councillors will have a named Neighbourhood Co-ordinator to contact as the first point of call, and this will improve communication and visibility on Thirteen's estates. A key aspect of this new model is that the Neighbourhood Co-ordinators will hold Thirteen to account – this is a subtle but important shift in business.
- 4.41 In summary, Thirteen stated that they remain financially strong, operate with a simple and clear business plan, are improving their performance, undertake effective engagement (and are always willing to learn), and are delivering, with more to come.
- 4.42 Reflecting on the new Neighbourhood Co-ordinator model, the Committee expressed some reservations regarding this arrangement as potentially more responsibility was being placed on these staff (despite overseeing less properties). Thirteen provided assurance that management oversight had been strengthened, with more neighbourhood service managers in place with a maximum of six direct reports instead of perhaps 25 in some cases. Much smaller, focused teams with a tighter support network have been created, and a lot of work has gone into determining the patches. The Committee were also informed that four non-specific Co-ordinators are in post if the need arises for additional support in certain areas.
- 4.43 Addressing concerns raised in relation to anti-social behaviour, Thirteen noted that the new Co-ordinators will be able to pull on all services around them, and will have the ultimate responsibility for their residents. Ensuring that timely feedback was provided to tenants (and Ward Members) when issues had been raised was important – Thirteen confirmed that protocols were in place to cover this.
- 4.44 The Committee questioned if the inexperience of some patch managers may make it difficult for them to deal with the sometimes complex issues that tenants may have / raise. It was stressed that Thirteen should ensure that the new Co-ordinators are not working in isolation, but can learn from each other's experiences across all Wards.

4.45 From a tenants' point of view, the Chair of the Thirteen Customer Council confirmed that they prefer this new arrangement.

4.46 On a wider organisational perspective, Thirteen have advised that they are planning to provide a customer-facing base on Stockton High Street – this should increase visibility and accessibility.

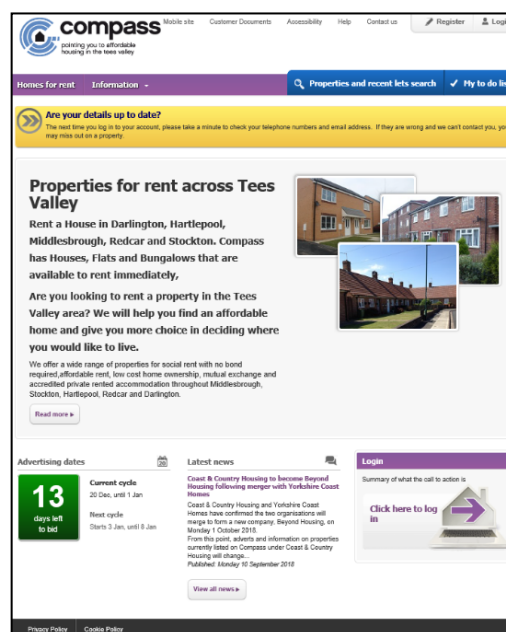
### Withdrawal from the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme

4.47 During the final stages of this review, the Committee were made aware of a significant decision by Thirteen Housing Group to withdraw from the Tees Valley-wide Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme, a partnership of the five Tees Valley Local Authorities and four Registered Housing Providers (Thirteen, Beyond Housing (formerly Coast and Country), North Star and Home). The aim of CBL is to provide one point of contact for those seeking affordable / socially rented housing across the Tees Valley. To ensure consistency of approach, the partners agreed and implemented a Tees Valley Common Housing Allocation Policy.

In light of this development, the Committee requested that Thirteen representatives provide details of the rationale behind this decision, when it was made, and how it was communicated to relevant partners. The Committee were also keen to understand Thirteen's proposals to replace the current CBL scheme, including when this will be operational, and how it would be communicated to partners and prospective tenants.

### Rationale for decision

4.48 Thirteen stated that their withdrawal from the CBL scheme is part of a wider review into how it delivers key frontline services to customers. Feedback from various surveys and consultations has demonstrated that customers have not always found Thirteen easy to contact or communicate with, and the Group's online service offer is very limited at present. Whilst many of the internal systems have been addressed in order to improve the customer experience, it is felt that CBL (Compass) remains challenging for applicants, and, in Thirteen's view, requires radical change.



4.49 Thirteen gave a number of reasons why CBL is not a popular system for customers (also see Appendix 6):

- The customer-facing website is old fashioned and difficult to navigate.
- The application process is long (between 17-19 pages), onerous and time-consuming, resulting in customers making incomplete applications and / or abandoning the system.

- The back-office is time-consuming for staff to complete the shortlisting process.
- The system does not effectively interact with management systems, even with an interface functionality.
- The website is not easily located within the search engine for customers looking for available housing.
- It simply cannot compete with other platforms such as Right Move that offer easy access, quicker feedback and good quality advertising and marketing.
- It is confusing for applicants as their status changes according to who is registered, and it therefore leads to frustrations when their priority changes.
- It categorises customers and does not enable them to see a full range of housing options that are, and could be, available to them throughout their life-cycle as a customer of Thirteen. For example, shared ownership, sales and other rented products.

4.50 Despite Thirteen (and other CBL partners) expressing concern about the system, it was felt by Thirteen that only minor improvements had been made over recent years. The Committee were informed that the biggest reason for tenants leaving Thirteen is to go to the private rented sector, and more than half of those registered on the system are not in priority need for re-housing – this is leading to a situation where Thirteen is not able to capture possible customers with their offer.

#### Timeline and communication of this decision

4.51 Thirteen's decision to leave the CBL scheme is part of the wider service transformation programme which was agreed as part of the Thirteen Strategic Plan developed in 2017. This set out the intention to:

*'Prepare an options appraisal to evaluate the best way of lettings (e.g. use of choice based lettings and exploring the viability of other approaches)'*

4.52 Around 18 months ago, Thirteen and SBC agreed to work together to try to influence the wider CBL Steering Group to look at more fundamental changes to allocations across the Tees Valley. In November 2017, an event (organised and hosted by Thirteen) with partners highlighted a number of areas of concern with the current system such as:

- The application process to apply for housing is unwieldy.
- There has been a significant reduction in customer demand for advertised properties.
- Customers report being confused with the CBL process.
- Partners are applying processes differently (i.e. notice periods, differences in one offer policy).
- Thirteen and other housing providers are also using alternative platforms (e.g. Right Move) to advertise housing to try to generate more demand for properties.

4.53 Following this event, the CBL Steering Group decided to appoint a Service Development Officer that would work on behalf of the group to implement an agreed Improvement Plan (including the development of a shorter housing

application form and, where identified, improvements to the back-office). Though Thirteen felt this would not address the fundamental issues with CBL, or improve customer satisfaction with the system and the overall experience of securing a home from Thirteen, they did agree to contribute to the costs of the Service Development Officer for a year. Although this post has been filled (commenced July 2018), Thirteen reported that no changes have yet been introduced.

- 4.54 Thirteen stated that the CBL Steering Group were aware they were carrying out an option appraisal, and that various options were to be presented to the Thirteen Board for consideration, the outcome of which could not be communicated to the partnership until the approval was given by the Thirteen Board. This was concluded on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2018, and the decision to withdraw from the CBL scheme was communicated to the Chief Executives of the five Tees Valley Local Authorities by email on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2018. A letter to the Chair of the CBL Steering Group was also sent on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2018 (by email) to formally advise the partnership of the decision.
- 4.55 Thirteen gave six months' notice of this intention (double the three month requirement in the partnership), and since that time, have attended a number of meetings with the CBL Steering Group, the Operational Group and individual Local Authorities and Registered Providers to discuss the implications of the decision, and to share more of the details of their plan. Thirteen stressed that the CBL partnership is a voluntary arrangement where members can leave (as per the Accent Group), but remain committed to continuing to work closely with Local Authorities once their new system is in place.

#### **Thirteen's proposals to replace current CBL scheme**

- 4.56 As part of their wider digital transformation programme, Thirteen has procured an ICT developer to progress bespoke systems for frontline services. The first priority is to provide an easy-to-access Digital Lettings Platform for customers along with customer access points and telephone advice / applications. Thirteen believe that this improved process will enable them to react promptly and efficiently for customers requiring housing, and showcase all of their available homes in one place, irrespective of their tenure.
- 4.57 The new system has been developed from a customer-perspective to provide an accessible digital system that provides a range of services in addition to the Digital Lettings Platform. Customers will be involved in the testing of the platform, and feedback on improvements will be considered throughout this process. Thirteen is acting on previous feedback from customers who have highlighted that the current system is complex, difficult to understand and has a lengthy registration process. The new system will be more automated and therefore requires the applicant to do less. They will be directed to the most relevant housing product for their circumstances and preferences, and this will include Thirteen's full range of products such as shared ownership and more bespoke lettings such as live / work. It will be a 'one stop shop' for anyone wanting to access Thirteen accommodation in the Tees Valley.
- 4.58 Thirteen reported that they will be capturing feedback through the testing and live running phases to ensure that they remain responsive to, and aware of, customer demands. Thirteen has invested heavily in developing a flexible data structure and experience platform that will best serve customers in all



aspects of the housing market, and would share these findings and present them back to Members in due course.

- 4.59 Details, and an overview of the ICT system, have been shared with the CBL Steering and Operational Groups. The ICT provider (Saadian) has also met with Local Authority partners to provide an overview for the platform and discuss for how they can link in with Thirteen's digital offer with regards to nomination requirements. From their perspective, Thirteen felt that these meetings had been very positive, with Local Authority representatives seeing the potential of the system for their own purposes.
- 4.60 Thirteen gave assurance that they will continue to work with Local Authority partners to put an effective process in place to offer nominations for households in housing need, and re-iterated that the discussions with Saadian are available as the Local Authorities and partners wish.

When will this be operational and how will it be communicated?

- 4.61 The Digital Lettings Platform will be available from April 2019. Thirteen has considered a request from the CBL partnership to extend this timescale by a further three months to give more time for the group to deliver the necessary actions from their side. Thirteen are writing separately to the partnership to agree this extension, but are clear that they cannot go beyond this additional timescale (July 2019).
- 4.62 To communicate these proposals, Thirteen is attending regular meetings with partners to provide regular updates, answer queries and communicate progress. Thirteen will also continue to be an active member within the CBL Steering and Operational Group meetings to facilitate this approach and enable a smooth transition. There is a corporate communication plan that covers a wider remit than the Digital Lettings platform – the Action Plan has key milestones for media announcements, drop-in sessions to promote the new system and customer / stakeholder testing opportunities. It was previously agreed with Local Authorities that a joint approach for media announcements would be preferred – this is planned to commence in the New Year, and further dialogue will be undertaken post-Christmas 2018.
- 4.63 Thirteen stated that a copy of their communication plan in relation to these proposals would be shared with the CBL partnership, though will need to be reviewed following the three-month extension before it is circulated.
- 4.64 In summary, Thirteen gave a commitment to working with the CBL Steering Group until it leaves the scheme, and remain committed to supporting partners and the people of Teesside in meeting their housing needs and raising their aspirations. When the new system is launched in July 2019, Local Authorities will have nomination arrangements with Thirteen (as they currently do with other Housing Associations) that will ensure housing needs in each Local Authority area are addressed – Thirteen are working with Local Authorities across the Tees Valley to draft up these agreements so they are in place for the future.

**Impact of Thirteen's decision**

- 4.65 Detailed discussion ensued regarding Thirteen's decision and their proposed future arrangements. The Committee acknowledged that the current system

did not appear to be working in all instances, with some individual Councillors highlighting the number of complaints they receive in relation to the same CBL issues identified by Thirteen previously. However, whilst improvements via an alternative system / approach would be welcome, several concerns were expressed in terms of the communication of Thirteen's intentions, as well as their future proposals.

- 4.66 Noting that Thirteen deal with a range of people, some of whom are older and / or vulnerable individuals, the Committee asked if the emphasis on digital developments could lead to potential tenants being excluded due to a lack of digital skills or technology required to access the proposed new platform. Thirteen stated that their focus was not solely on digital contact channels, and that face-to-face communication would remain very important in their future operations (e.g. if someone was in dire need, they should talk to Thirteen, not log on to an online service) – the Neighbourhood Co-ordinators are a key part of this. Whichever way people wish to make contact, Thirteen want to ensure the same standards of service.
- 4.67 Following implementation of Thirteen's new Digital Lettings Platform, the Committee queried if people would have to access more than one system in order to register their interest in seeking affordable / socially rented housing. It was noted that individuals may potentially have to submit dual applications to Thirteen and the existing CBL scheme, should SBC decide to remain in the CBL partnership.
- 4.68 The Committee asked whether there would be any difference in Thirteen's own lettings policy compared to what is used as part of the current CBL scheme (e.g. would priority groups be classified differently?). Thirteen stated that they had followed the existing CBL approach and had strengthened certain elements – this had been consulted upon (SBC consulted in summer 2018) and the new policy document had been shared with the CBL partnership. The SBC Housing representative confirmed that there are differences in the Thirteen Lettings Policy and the current Common Allocation Policy (i.e. priority bandings were different).

The Committee cautioned against any changes in the way priorities were categorised which led to people falling between gaps, particularly those who are homeless. Thirteen stated that it is fully aware of its obligation to assist in re-housing those people in housing need.

- 4.69 The application process was highlighted, and it was queried how Thirteen were simplifying this without losing the requirement for key information to ensure that those who need prioritising are prioritised. Thirteen's aim is to only request information that is absolutely necessary for the application, whilst still making sure that an individual's needs are identified. Local Authority Officers noted that work had been undertaken during the summer of 2018 to streamline the current CBL application form, however the changes to the form needed to be matched with IT system improvements – these changes were a priority and were currently being worked on.
- 4.70 Thirteen's procurement of an IT developer (Saadian) to progress bespoke systems for frontline services was explored. The Committee were informed that the IT partner will provide an off-the-shelf product, but that the customer-facing look will appear bespoke so people feel confident they are browsing a Thirteen website – there is nothing unusual about this approach, but it will

need to be rigorously tested to ensure it is right. Local Authority Officers confirmed that the Council have not used Saadian before, and are not in a position to say if such a system will work for the purpose required by SBC (in the one meeting held with Saadian, the focus had been on Saadian understanding SBC's needs. SBC was awaiting a follow-up reply from Saadian on what they could potentially deliver and costs).

- 4.71 The Committee sought to understand what will happen on the day the new system is implemented, and whether people would need to re-register. Thirteen are expecting a data transfer and would contact current applicants to see if they did wish to register with Thirteen (Thirteen would then action on the customers behalf), though acknowledged that a publicity-drive would be sensible to ensure people are informed about this process.
- 4.72 Moving forward, Thirteen confirmed that a percentage of their stock will be offered to Local Authorities via an agreed Nomination Agreement (the Council would then nominate suitable applicants for these properties), and that the remaining percentage would be let by Thirteen (via their Lettings Policy).
- 4.73 Local Authority representatives were asked if Thirteen's decision to withdraw from the CBL scheme would have a financial impact on SBC. Officers stated that it would, principally due to the fact that, at present, the Council does not undertake an active nomination role, nor does it have a function with regard to housing applications. When Thirteen are no longer part of CBL, SBC will need to administer the CBL Housing Register (for Stockton-on-Tees residents who wish to continue with a CBL application) and deliver the agreed Nomination Agreement – this has clear resource implications at a time where already challenging Council budgets are being set, and decisions will need to be made on how this will be financed. Thirteen commented that they were happy to look at the costs incurred by the Council to try to mitigate any financial pressures that may result from their decision.

*The following paragraphs reflect discussions around specific questions to Council Officers – Thirteen Housing Group representatives were not present at this point*

- 4.74 Local Authority Officers noted that Thirteen's decision will also have repercussions for other Council's within the Tees Valley, albeit to varying degrees – as such, a pooled resource to administer / maintain a Housing Register and undertake the future nominations function (across some Local Authority areas) is being considered / explored.
- 4.75 As demonstrated previously within this report, SBC greatly values its partnership with Thirteen, and they have proven themselves to be excellent landlords. However, Local Authority Officers felt that communications between the Thirteen and the Council around CBL fell disappointingly short of the usual openness, and that, although expressing their dissatisfaction with the current scheme, Thirteen did not explicitly state that they wanted to go their own way until the announcement was made in September 2018. Indeed, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing was unaware that the proposal to withdraw from the CBL scheme was even being put to the Thirteen Board in September 2018.
- 4.76 It was also expressed by some Committee Members that, despite the large stock transfer taking place many years ago, people continue to refer to these properties as 'Council houses' – as such, how confident can the Committee

be that there will be no significant issues arising from Thirteen's decision which Councillors themselves will be forced into addressing through this continued public perception? The Committee also questioned whether Thirteen's consultation in relation to leaving the CBL scheme was compliant with the Stock Transfer Agreement.

## **5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations**

- 5.1 Thirteen Housing Group, in its current guise, emerged following the consolidation of the original structure of four separate Housing Associations. This was undertaken in line with the approach being advocated by the Regulator of Social Housing (RoSH). They are a key housing provider across the Borough.
- 5.2 Thirteen acknowledged the potential threats of consolidation in terms of the effect on existing local relationships, partnerships, knowledge and focus. The Committee were assured that robust communication mechanisms are now in place that provide high-level, frequent and mutually beneficial dialogue in order to further each partner's (Thirteen and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council) priorities.
- 5.3 Due to the huge number of properties that Thirteen oversee, it is perhaps inevitable that some of the diverse issues raised by both tenants and Ward Members can be challenging to overcome. However, the Committee were pleased to hear that performance was improving, concerns had been / were being addressed (e.g. new repairs system launched in September 2017), customer satisfaction levels were good, and customer engagement remained a high priority (e.g. employment of additional staff to help customers who have problems with Universal Credit). It is encouraging that tenants have a wide range of ways in which to contact Thirteen to ensure their views are heard, and it is important that they feel listened to and that the Group provides an adequate response to any issues they have. It is positive that Thirteen are actively seeking better ways in which to engage with their customers and are open to learning.
- 5.4 Some issues were raised regarding levels of communication between Thirteen and Ward Members – it is crucial that this particular partnership is strong, as Ward Members can often be the first people that tenants go to if they have a concern. It is important that Ward Members raise any such matters through the appropriate channels, and are kept up-to-date with relevant contact details and any developments within the Group that may affect their Ward. Feedback to Ward Members following any action to address a tenant issue would be beneficial.
- 5.5 Thirteen's commitment to being the Council's 'partner of choice' was welcomed. The strong relationships that exist between the two organisations mean that the considerable investment that Thirteen puts into the Borough plays a significant role in supporting the Council's key strategic plans, priorities and ambitions. Examples of this investment were commended by the Committee, and it is hoped that this partnership continues to thrive for the benefit of Thirteen's tenants in Stockton-on-Tees. Thirteen's recent decision to retro-fit all 13 high-rise blocks with sprinkler / misting systems was highly praised.
- 5.6 The Committee welcomed Thirteen's emphasis on providing bungalows as part of their future investment programme, which recognises an aging population and enables people to live independently for longer – the provision of low-rise accommodation is also an important alternative for older people who do not want to live in bungalows. However, the Committee are concerned regarding the national definition of 'affordable' rent (which currently includes both 'affordable' and 'social' rent), and encourages Thirteen to

ensure the provision of new housing, where possible, is provided at a 'social rent' level.

- 5.7 The new operating model comprising Neighbourhood Co-ordinators was detailed. The Committee broadly welcomed this approach, though as with any new way of working, were keen to receive future updates on how it has been received by tenants.
- 5.8 A significant aspect of this review focused on the partnership between SBC and Thirteen. Whilst this has been historically and generally strong, it appears that communication around Thirteen's decision to withdraw from the current CBL scheme has not been in the spirit of previous joint working, with mixed messages around developing intentions. The Committee respect Thirteen's right to make decisions for its own benefit, but would like to think that the Borough's largest registered social housing group is not turning its back on its core purpose of providing social / affordable housing. Both SBCs and Thirteen's overriding concern should continue to be supporting the people on their housing lists, and a strong and transparent partnership is crucial in ensuring that individuals and families who require social housing have their needs adequately met.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee recommend that:

- 1. Thirteen Housing Group provide an update report to the Place Select Committee in 2019 on the new Neighbourhood Co-ordinator operating model as part of this review's monitoring process, including assurance that the new Co-ordinators are appropriately skilled, trained and supported.**
- 2. Thirteen Housing Group continue to seek positive relationships and strong communication with all Ward Members, and have robust plans in place for Ward Member engagement following the Local Elections in 2019.**
- 3. Whilst acknowledging the restrictions around the national policy approach, the Committee fully support Thirteen Housing Group's commitment to looking at options to convert its future development programme from 'affordable rent' to 'social rent', and request that an update is provided following Thirteen Board's discussions on this.**
- 4. Thirteen Housing Group provide assurance around the process of re-housing Anson House and Hudson House tenants to ensure, as far as possible, that people remain in that locality in the tenure of their choice (if this is their wish).**

*In relation to Thirteen's decision to withdraw from the CBL scheme*

- 5. Thirteen Housing Group provide assurance that the new Thirteen digital platform will accommodate the Council's requirements. If this assurance is not possible, Thirteen to provide assurance that it will include an effective interface with the current CBL operating scheme.**

**Recommendations (continued)**

The Committee recommend that:

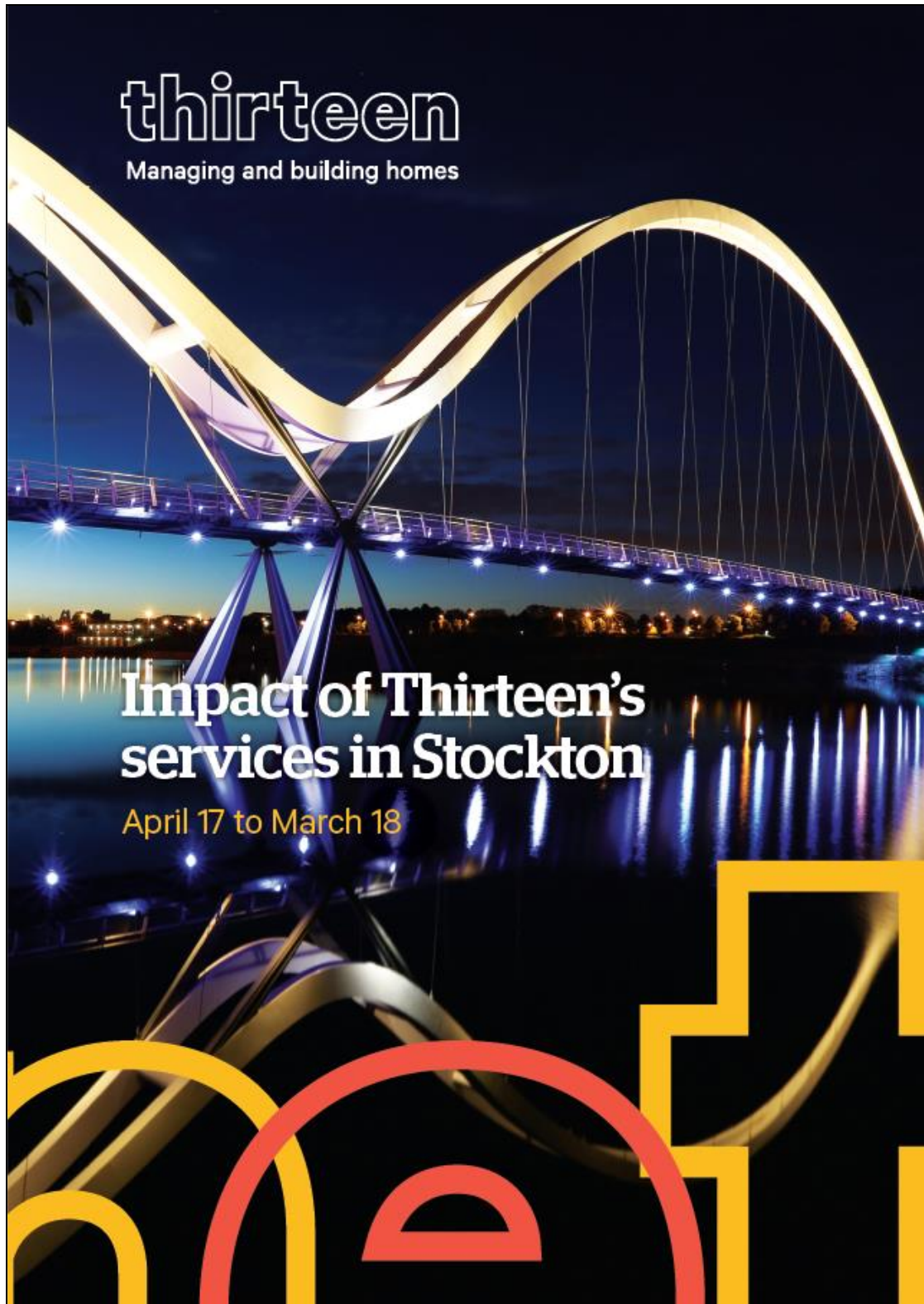
- 6. In order to mitigate additional cost burdens on the Council (including additional staffing requirements to administer the Housing Register and effectively deliver the agreed Nomination Agreement), Thirteen Housing Group provide further assurance around financial support to the Council following their exit from the current CBL scheme.**
- 7. Thirteen Housing Group and the Council work together to ensure commonality on priority bandings in their respective Lettings / Allocation Policies, with the aim of ensuring that the Borough's housing needs are appropriately met. Thirteen to provide the Council with regular (quarterly) updates of the number of lettings, by priority banding, made directly via the Thirteen Lettings Policy.**
- 8. The agreed Nomination Agreement includes a fair and equitable percentage of Thirteen housing stock (including property type, tenure and location).**
- 9. Thirteen Housing Group give an undertaking to work jointly with the Council to ensure consistent communication and messages to residents / customers leading up to and post Thirteen's exit from CBL.**

# Our Commitment

## Working in partnership with councillors

1. We will let you know who your neighbourhood officer is, as well as their mobile number and email address and tell you about any changes when these happen. This will be provided as a Who's Who guide which we will send via email, directly to you, or as a printed version if necessary.
2. We will invite you to localised members' briefings at least twice a year, giving you the chance to meet the area management team members, hear about what we've been delivering and discuss any issues or concerns.
3. We will give you details of who to get in touch with about enquiries so you have a named contact.
4. When you contact us, we will respond within 24 hours and give you a timescale of when we will respond in full to your enquiry. We aim to deal with all these queries within five working days but will let you know the reason and agree a response timeframe with you if the issues are more complex.
5. We will invite you to attend estate walkabouts every 12 weeks. Where there are other walkabouts in place, such as ones organised through the local authority, we will arrange joint walkabouts where possible. If you can't attend a planned walkabout, we will give you the opportunity to talk about any concerns you might have.
6. By March each year, we will give you dates of the estate walkabouts for your area for that year, to ensure you have advance notice.
7. Within four weeks of an estate inspection, we will email you to let you know about the action we have taken to address any issues.
8. Where investment work is planned in your ward, we will tell you about the work being carried out and a named person for any enquiries that might come up during the work.
9. Where we have agreed to carry out environmental work in your area, we will consult you about the work, alongside our customers, so we can make the best use of our resources.





## APPENDIX 2: Impact of Thirteen's services in Stockton (April 17 to March 18)

### Thirteen at-a-glance

Thirteen manages almost 34,000 homes across the North East and North Yorkshire and the range of services that we provide has a far-reaching impact for tenants, customers and the wider community across our area.

This booklet provides some important information about these impacts and demonstrates how we are performing in these areas. The performance information in this booklet also helps us to make changes to the way we work and improve the services we offer to customers.

The figures cover the year from April 2017 to March 2018 and give you details about some of the impacts that Thirteen has in Stockton.

We also have more information about performance and Thirteen's impact in the area on our website at [www.thirteengroup.co.uk/aboutus](http://www.thirteengroup.co.uk/aboutus).

We manage just under



We reach out to more than



**£350m**  
of additional security  
with our lenders

Over  
**£217m**  
to be invested in  
our properties



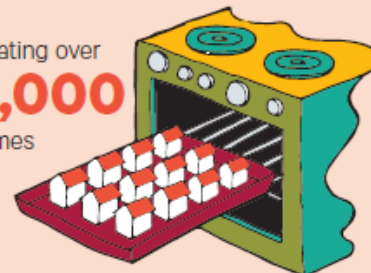
Turnover of more than  
**£170m**



**1,500**  
colleagues



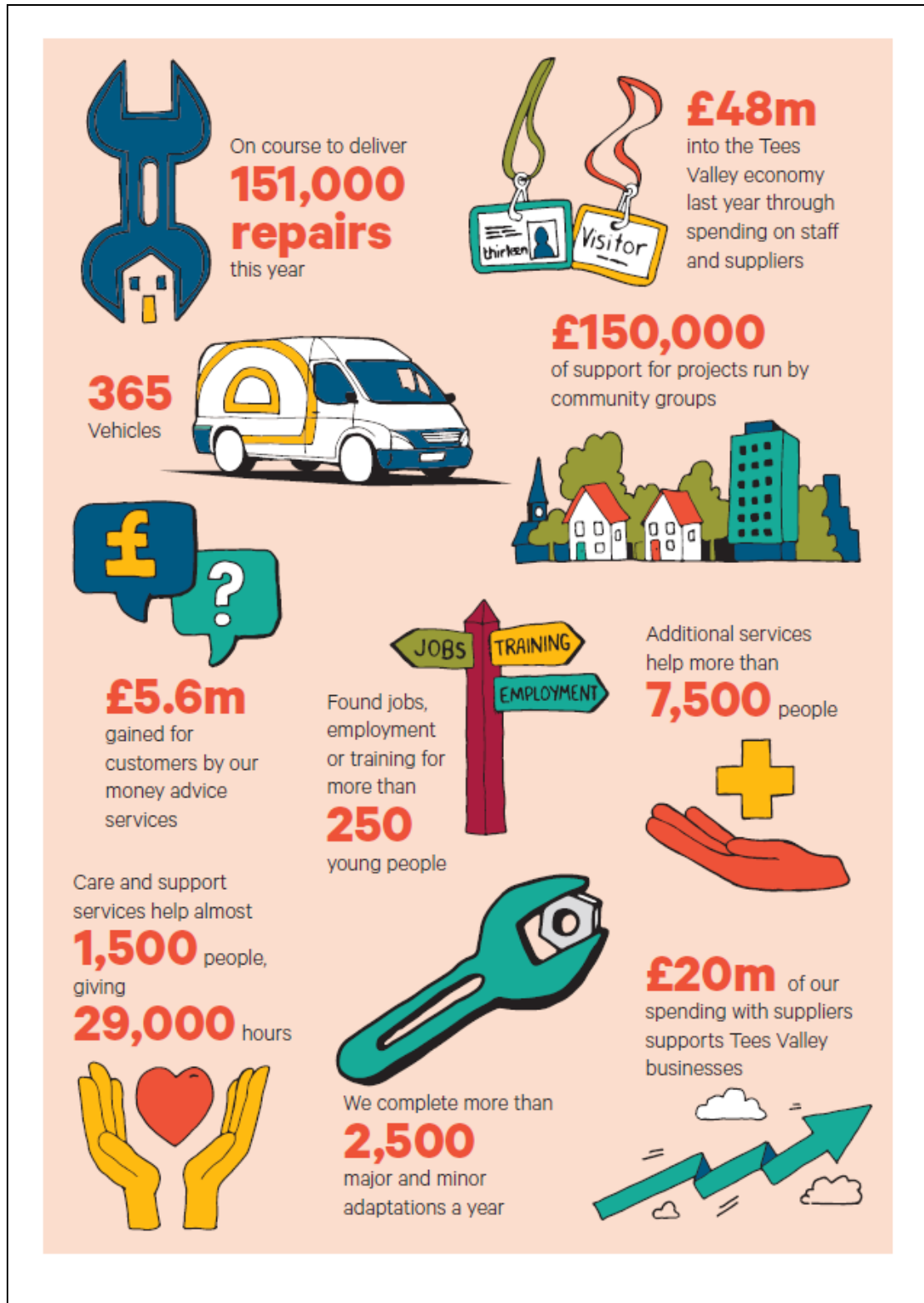
creating over  
**2,000**  
homes



Asset base of  
**£1bn**



**APPENDIX 2: Impact of Thirteen's services in Stockton (April 17 to March 18)**



## APPENDIX 2: Impact of Thirteen's services in Stockton (April 17 to March 18)

### Investment in homes across Stockton

Throughout 2017-18, we carried out £7,350,000 of improvements to homes throughout Stockton.

Over the next five years, we'll be continuing to invest in improving existing homes and develop new properties in the North East and North Yorkshire. As part of this, we'll be spending millions in different areas to keep existing homes and grounds up-to-date across Stockton.

You can see the work we carried out in Stockton throughout 2017-18:



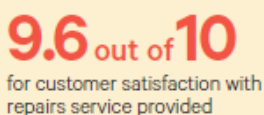
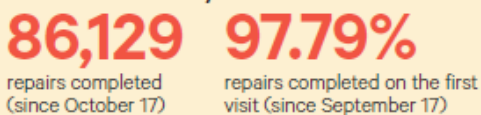
### Repairs in tenants' homes

We are responsible for carrying out a range of repairs in our customers' homes to ensure they are kept in a good condition.

We have a range of skilled staff including plumbers, electricians, plasterers and bricklayers to maintain and repair homes, together with gas fitters who service and repair heating systems.

Thirteen implemented a new repairs system in September 2017 which has helped to better allocate repairs jobs, ensure a better service for customers and increase customer satisfaction.

Across the Tees Valley:



### Customer satisfaction with services

Customer satisfaction is one of the major factors that provides Thirteen with a focus for its services.

The satisfaction levels among customers gives us a good indication as to the effectiveness of the services we provide and also where we need to make improvements.

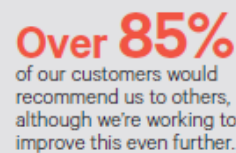
We listen carefully to what customers tell us through a number of surveys that we carry out with them.



Across the Tees Valley:



Our customers rated their satisfaction with our gas services at

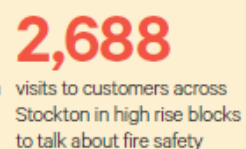
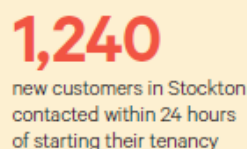


### Improving Neighbourhood Services in Stockton

Since the end of 2017, Thirteen has been working to bring about a fundamental change to the operating model for the way we work within our communities.

Tenants and customers told us that they wanted our staff to be more visible in neighbourhoods, helping them to deal with the issues they face on a day-to-day basis.

To help us do this, we're adopting an operating model to put neighbourhoods at the heart of our business.



## APPENDIX 2: Impact of Thirteen's services in Stockton (April 17 to March 18)

### Care and support

Working in communities across the area, we provide services to meet the needs of vulnerable people to support them to make changes and improve their quality of life.

We support a wide range of people who face challenges in their lives and provide services for homeless people, ex-offenders, people with mental health issues, people recovering from substance misuse, families, women and young people.

We've been developing and delivering support services for over 30 years and we're always working with our service users and partners to develop our range of services to meet specific needs.

**359** referrals to tenancy support across the Tees Valley

**54** referrals to Stockton Floating Support



### Employment support across Stockton

Thirteen provides support for people aged 15 to 29 to find work, training and education.

The New Directions service works with young people and businesses across Teesside to successfully match young people with jobs, apprenticeships, training and work placements.

The project helps young people and businesses to:

- find quality information, advice and guidance about jobs, training and education
- find mentoring and support to plan a way into work or training
- develop the skills that businesses need
- overcome barriers to getting a job or training.

**264** people signed up to the New Directions programme

**153** people received an offer of employment, apprenticeship or training

**156** \*people took up the offer of employment, apprenticeships or training



\*4 people had an offer before starting with us

### Developing new homes in Stockton

Over the year, we have developed new affordable homes for people across Stockton.

This includes new developments at Parkfield, Urray Nook, Morley Carr Farm, Green Lane, Queensgate, Swainby Road and The Dales, as well as projects to redevelop empty homes to bring them back into use for local people.

The development of new and empty homes supports the regeneration of the Stockton area and helps more people to access affordable rents in the area.

**86** on-site starts for new-build affordable homes

**145** new-build affordable homes completed



Many new homes are in our development pipeline with **400** new affordable homes to be built each year.

### Money advice in Stockton

Thirteen's Money Advice Team provides customers with details to help them manage their finances and make the most of their money. The team helps customers and tenants to:

- claim the benefits they're entitled to
- deal with benefit problems
- deal with debt problems
- manage their money and budget for the things they need.

This year, we have also employed staff to help customers who have problems with Universal Credit.

**291** money advice cases in Stockton

**£495,278** benefits gained for claimants in Stockton

**£400,443** social value gained in Stockton

(find out more about social value at [www.thirteengroup.co.uk/aboutus](http://www.thirteengroup.co.uk/aboutus)).



## APPENDIX 2: Impact of Thirteen's services in Stockton (April 17 to March 18)

### Preventing homelessness in the Tees Valley

We have a number of services across the region to help people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness.

Our teams are also responsible for helping people to move on from supported accommodation into more general accommodation with a social landlord.

Thirteen works to identify people at risk of homelessness and works to improve their lives by offering help, advice and practical support. This can include help with finding a home or a job, building resilience or working towards personal independence.

#### Across the Tees Valley:

**449** people/families have been prevented from becoming homeless



**600** referrals to Key Step homelessness project

**111** formal homelessness cases have been dealt with

**1,458** advice cases have been handled

**81** people have been helped to move on from supported accommodation into general accommodation

### Supported living in Stockton

We own and manage Extra Care and sheltered housing schemes across Stockton which offer specialist support to help older and vulnerable people to live independently for longer.

Accommodation and support is flexible and tailored to suit customer requirements.

Schemes also provide customers with privacy while offering the chance to retain an active social life and remain in the heart of the community.

The supported living services help to sustain tenancies, reduce social isolation, promote wellbeing and reduce the impact on adult social care and health services.

We've provided:

**180** homes for people with medium to high level needs in sheltered accommodation in Stockton\*

**28** homes for people with learning disabilities across the town

**80** Extra Care homes for older and vulnerable people across the town

**111** major aids and adaptations projects in people's homes in Stockton

**693** minor aids and adaptations across the town

**£372,000**

spent on home adaptations in Stockton to help tenants remain in their homes.

\*11 homes run by separate provider

## Our Thirteen philosophy

Our Thirteen philosophy captures our strategy to build a stronger business with five component parts:

### 1 Our mission – why we are here

We provide homes, support and opportunities to grow.

### 2 Our vision

We are a caring landlord and housing developer. We're for anyone who needs a home and maybe a little help to get it. We're about investing in neighbourhoods and making a major contribution to the regeneration of the Tees Valley.

### 3 Our priorities

1. Delivering great customer service
2. Growing our business as a social entrepreneur
3. Contributing to regenerating the Tees Valley
4. Being Team Thirteen – high performing, collaborative and efficient

### 4 Our geographic focus

Our new affordable housing development work will focus on the Tees Valley. We will consider developments and services outside of the Tees Valley if it covers costs and generates profit. On the whole, we will not seek to be the landlord of properties beyond our core operating area of the Tees Valley.

### 5 Our values

- Considerate
- Smart
- Progressive

THIRTEEN



## APPENDIX 2: Impact of Thirteen's services in Stockton (April 17 to March 18)

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In a world where life can be a challenge for some people, we are a caring landlord and housing developer. We're for anyone who needs a home and maybe a little extra help to get it. We're against inequalities that limit our potential.

We value empathy, flexibility and reliability, provide homes, support and opportunities to grow and we promise a home for your life.

The homes and support services that Thirteen provides are just the beginning.

They provide the foundation from which to develop. A place to grow independence. Somewhere to begin a family. The security to enjoy retirement. The opportunities are limitless.

### Work with us...

As well as always improving what we do, we're growing. Growing our business to provide more affordable homes; homes for market sale, delivering regeneration projects and providing accommodation with care services.

But we're not a business that just wants to work alone. We can provide services on behalf of your organisation. Our skilled colleagues and committed board directors all work tirelessly to support over 70,000 tenants and customers, bringing a breadth of experience and a can-do attitude.

All this in an organisation of size and scale and in a strong financial position, but that still remains locally responsive.

At Thirteen, we're a willing partner – so just get in touch if you'd like to work with us.





**thirteen**  
Managing and building homes

**Thirteen satisfaction surveys May 2018**



## APPENDIX 3: Thirteen – Satisfaction Surveys (May 18)

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### Satisfaction surveys

Thirteen obtains the views of its customers on the service they receive in a number of ways:

- twice a year we carry out a full satisfaction surveys, often referred to as STAR asking over 1,000 people what they think
- every week we telephone 200 people who have had a repair or gas service carried out, for their feedback
- we carry out surveys with people when they have contacted us or when we have delivered a service.

This document gives details on nine service areas including the gas and repairs surveys conducted by The Leadership Factor.

We are always looking to improve what we are doing and we have recently introduced three new surveys to help us find out about satisfaction levels around our extra care service (new customers and alarm monitoring) and people who move into properties that we have built.

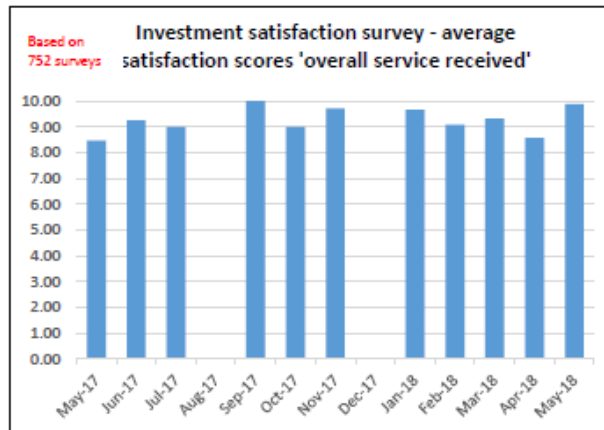
Our surveys are regularly analysed and presented visually so that we can understand trends and patterns over time, to identify where we need to act on feedback.

If you have any queries or comments regarding this document, please contact:

- Michael Cook: [Michael.Cook@thirteengroup.co.uk](mailto:Michael.Cook@thirteengroup.co.uk) or
- Victoria Williamson: [Victoria.Williamson@thirteengroup.co.uk](mailto:Victoria.Williamson@thirteengroup.co.uk).

## APPENDIX 3: Thirteen – Satisfaction Surveys (May 18)

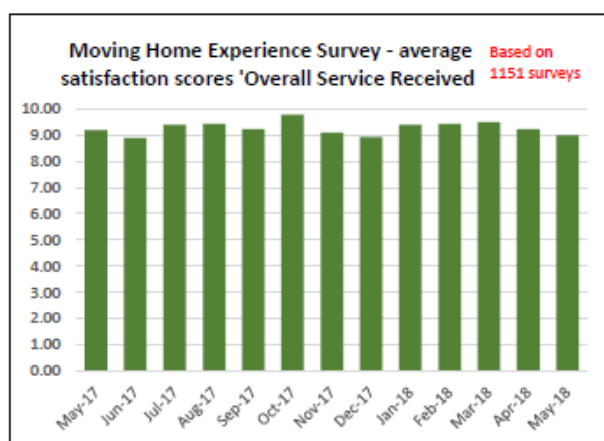
### Investment:



#### About this survey:

- This survey also measures satisfaction across indicators for how well customers were informed throughout investment works, length of time to complete works in accordance with timescale, standard of workmanship, and the improvement works once complete.
- The results from this survey show that the average satisfaction score for 'overall service received' was highest in September at 10/10. The lowest average score was in May, at 8.47/10.
- The average score for the most recent month (May 2018) was 9.89.
- No surveys were conducted in August and December 2017.

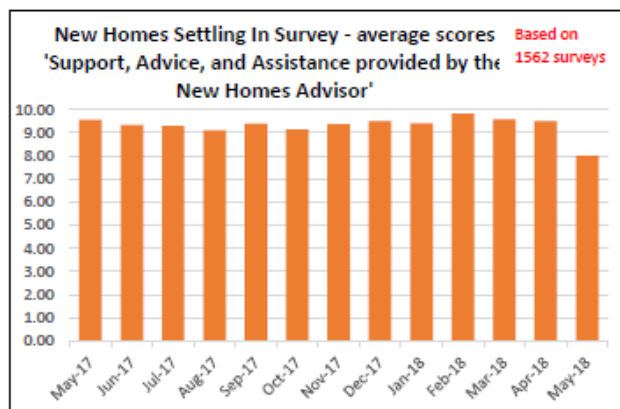
### Empty Properties:



#### About this survey:

- This survey measures further satisfaction indicators such as standard of decoration, ease of applying for a property, information provided about the property, how well kept informed of progress, officer knowledge, property standard, standard of cleaning, speed property was received, and likeliness to recommend Thirteen.
- The results from this survey show the highest average score for 'service received' was in October 2017, at 9.78/10 and lowest in December 2017 at 8.92/10.
- The average satisfaction score for the most recent month (May 2018) was 9.00/10.
- This survey has now been replaced with the 'New Home Experience' survey as part of a review to support our new way of working.

### New Homes Advisors (Neighbourhoods):



#### About this survey:

- This survey measures further satisfaction indicators such as the helpfulness of the NHA, how well kept informed post-tenancy commencement, and likeliness to recommend Thirteen.
- The results from this survey show the highest average satisfaction score for 'support, advice, and assistance provided by the NHA' was in February 2018 at 9.83/10.
- The average satisfaction score for the most recent month (May 2018) was 8.00/10 and this month also had the lowest average satisfaction score.
- This survey has now been replaced with the 'New Home Experience' survey as part of a review to support our new way of working.

## APPENDIX 3: Thirteen – Satisfaction Surveys (May 18)

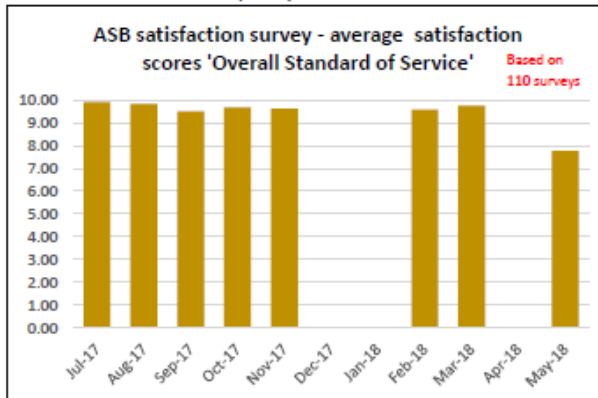
### Neighbourhoods:



#### About this survey:

- This survey has replaced the 'Moving Home Experience' survey and the 'New Homes Settling In' survey, and the purpose is to measure satisfaction with the new home experience and the service received by Thirteen's Neighbourhood teams.
- The survey measures indicators such as: ease of applying for property; being kept informed of progress for repairs and cleaning works; internal and external property standard; cleanliness; overall property standard; lettings service; overall service received; and likeliness to recommend Thirteen.
- The average satisfaction score for 'overall service received' is 9.88/10.

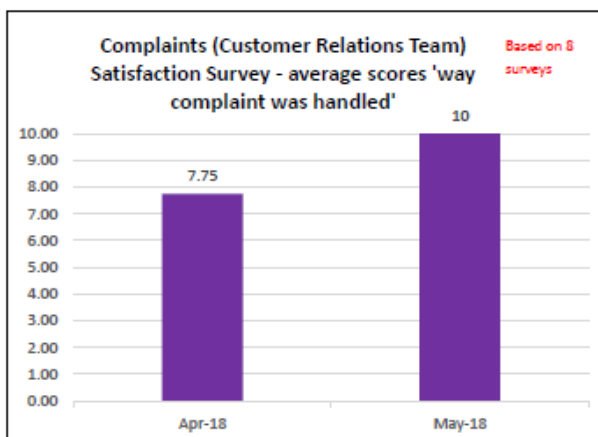
### Anti- Social Behaviour (ASB):



#### About this survey:

- This survey measures further satisfaction indicators such as the outcome of the ASB complaint, the way the case was dealt with, and how well kept informed.
- The average satisfaction result for 'overall standard of service' was highest in July 2017 at 9.91/10.
- The average satisfaction score for the most recent month (May 2018) was 7.77/10. This month also had the lowest average satisfaction score.
- No surveys were conducted in December 2017, January 2018, and April 2018.

### Complaints (Customer Relations Team):

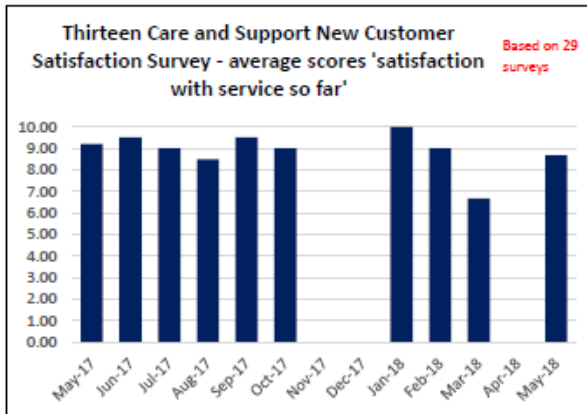


#### About this survey:

- A new survey to measure satisfaction with how complaints are dealt with was launched in April 2018. This means that some of the satisfaction indicators have changed compared to the previous survey.
- This survey measures the following satisfaction indicators: customer service received from the complaint handler; updates received throughout complaint; outcome of complaint; handling of complaint; and likeliness to recommend the Customer Relations Team.
- The average satisfaction score for the most recent month (May 2018) for the indicator 'way complaint was handled' was 10/10.

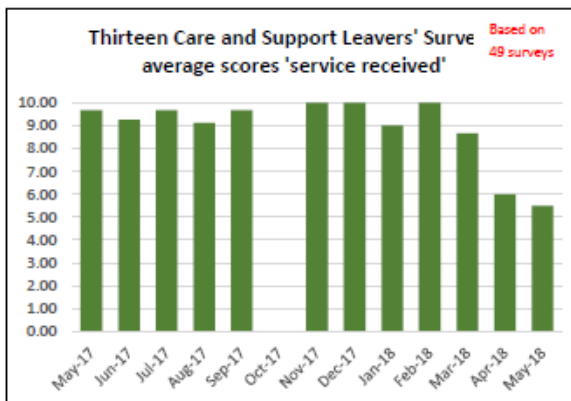
## APPENDIX 3: Thirteen – Satisfaction Surveys (May 18)

### Thirteen Care and Support:



#### About this survey:

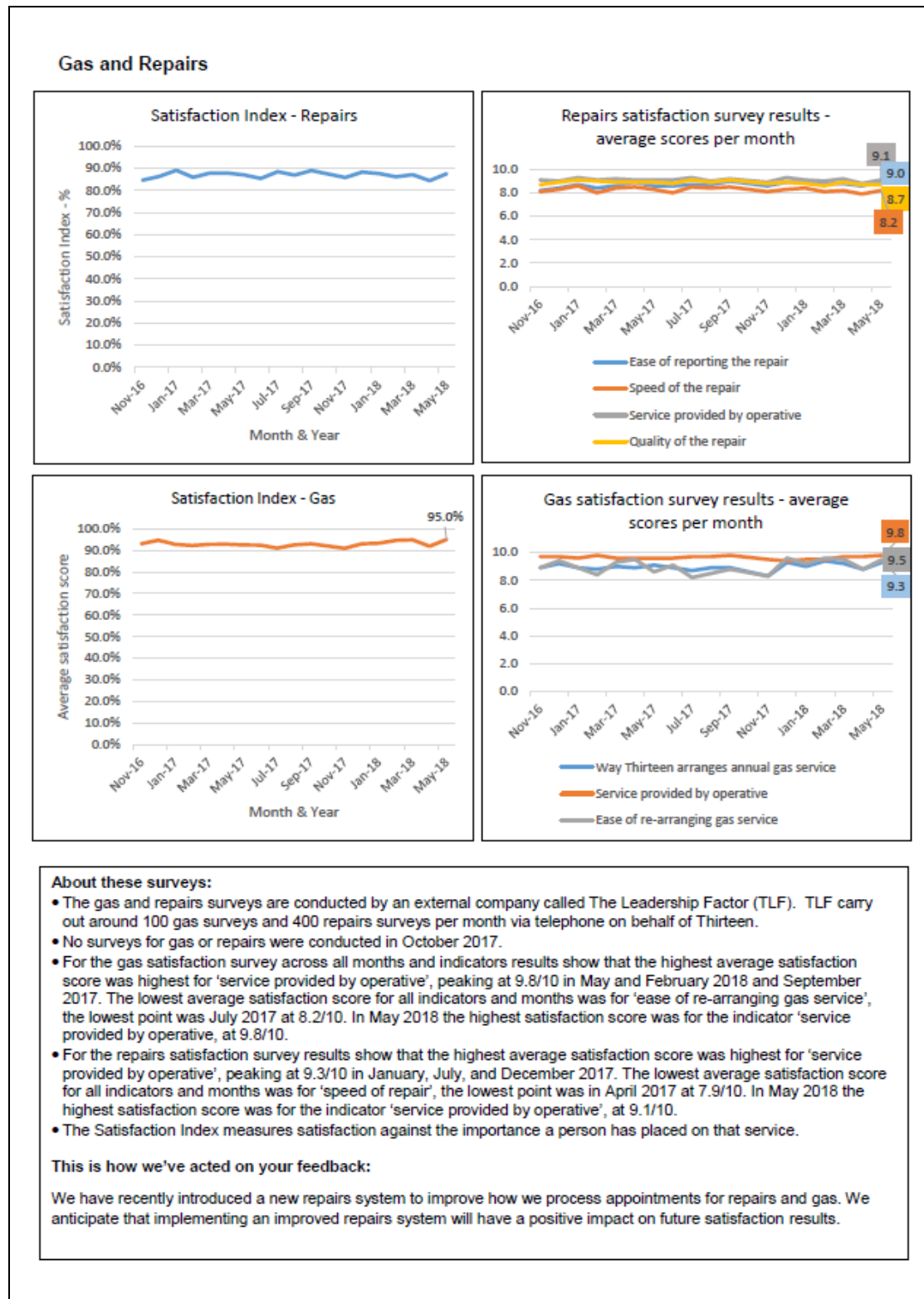
- 'New customer' refers to Thirteen Care and Support clients who have recently started to use the service.
- This survey measures further satisfaction indicators such as adequacy of furniture, safety of communal living area, information given at pre-sign up, and whether their flat / room in good repair.
- The survey results show that satisfaction results were highest in January 2018 at 10/10, and lowest in March at 6.67/10.
- No surveys were conducted in November 2017, December 2017, and March 2018.



#### About this survey:

- 'Leavers' refers to Thirteen Care and Support clients who have recently ceased using the service.
- This survey measures further satisfaction indicators such as success in achieving goals. The survey gathers further information such as things liked and disliked about the service, whether their main goals were achieved, if assistance was needed from other services, and whether the customer had enough support to move into independent living accommodation.
- The results from this survey show that satisfaction was highest in November, December and February at 10/10.
- The lowest score was in April 2018 at 6.00/10.

## APPENDIX 3: Thirteen – Satisfaction Surveys (May 18)



## APPENDIX 4: Thirteen – New homes being developed

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### Appendix I – New Homes being developed

<b>Stockton Completions 2017/18:</b>	<b>No. of Units</b>
Parkfield Phase 2	47
Urlay Nook (Saddlers View)	14
Morley Carr Farm	5
Green Lane	41
Queensgate Phase 3	8
Swainby Road	2
The Dales	6
Empty Homes Stockton	2

#### **Parkfield Phase 2**

Completed: 17/08/2017

Total no. of units: 65

Tenure: Affordable and Shared Ownership

House Types: 2x Bed Bungalows, 2x Bed & 3x Bed Houses

#### **Urlay Nook (Saddlers View) - Eaglescliffe**

Due to complete: June 2018

Total no. of units: 29

Tenure: Affordable Rent & Shared Ownership

House Types: 2x Bed & 3x Bed Houses

#### **Morley Carr Farm - Yarm**

Due to complete: December 2021

Total no. of units: 70

Tenure: Affordable Rent & Shared Ownership

House Types: 1x Bed, 2x Bed & 3x Bed Houses

#### **Green Lane – Yarm**

Completed: 16/10/2017

Total no. of units: 41

Tenure: Affordable Rent & Shared Ownership

House Types: 2x Bed & 3x Bed Houses

#### **Queensgate Phase 3**

Due to complete: May 2019

Total no. of units: 30

#### APPENDIX 4: Thirteen – New homes being developed

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Tenure: Affordable Rent & Shared Ownership

House Types: 2x Bed & 3x Bed Houses

##### **Swainby Road**

Due to complete: June 2019

Total no. of units: 30

Tenure: Affordable Rent

House Types: 2x Bed Apartments, 2x Bed Bungalows, 2x Bed & 3x Bed Houses

##### **The Dales**

Completed:

Total no. of units: 6

Tenure: Social Rent (Supported Housing)

House Types: 1x Bed Apartments

<b>Upcoming Stockton Completions 2018/19:</b>	<b>No. of Units</b>
Mount Leven	10
Witham House	8
Northshore Phase 3 (Infinity Riverside)	15
Queensgate Phase 3	13
Swainby Road	4
Urlay Nook (Saddlers View)	8
Morley Carr Farm	26
Ingleby Barwick	8





**Social Rent Information**

**Stockton Council Scrutiny Review of the Consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group**

1. Social rent is based on guideline target rents determined through the national rent regime. It is a life-long tenancy.
2. Social rent should enable housing associations to set rents at a level that allows them to meet their obligation to their tenants, maintain their stock (to at least the Decent Homes Standard) and continue to function as financially viable organisations, including meeting obligations of lenders.
3. In 2011, the Government introduced the Affordable Homes Programme. This provided funding for new homes to housing associations at much lower grant rates and only for affordable rents. Social rents were not funded. A condition of being part of the programme was that all new homes constructed would be based on an affordable rent.
4. Affordable rent is no more than 80 percent of the local market rent (including services charges). The tenancy is for five years.
5. In addition, housing associations who became part of the programme had to agree to convert existing social rent homes to affordable rent homes when they were re-let. Housing associations had to sign a legal agreement to obtain the grant. Thirteen did this at the time so that it could continue to construct new affordable homes.
6. In October 2017 the Government announced the introduction of Social Rent as a tenure eligible for funding; to be focused in areas of high need. The statement announced an additional £2 billion to deliver Social Rent across the country including London, of which £1bn was made available in London.
7. As outlined above, previously, the government's affordable housing policy primarily supported 'affordable rent' – rents of up to 80% of local market level – and low-cost home ownership. This announcement now extended support for 'social rent' – but only in specific areas.
8. Following these two announcements, in June 2018 Government confirmed a total additional budget for Homes England of £1.67 billion to deliver Social Rent as well as tenures currently available through the existing affordable homes programme.
9. Based on the change in approach to allow social rented homes we understood that future new homes to be constructed could be considered. However, Government has stated that funding for Social Rent is allocated to areas of greatest need. The Government are only inviting bids for Social Rent funding from areas that can



demonstrate that they are in a high affordability pressure area. The key metric is the difference between average social rents and private rents and they will fund Social Rent in local authorities where the difference between these is £50 per week or more. Stockton and the Tees Valley do not fall within this criteria and we cannot obtain grant for social rent in the Tees Valley.

10. Notwithstanding the national policy approach, Thirteen are looking at options to convert its future development programme from affordable rent to social rent. We are assessing by doing this what the impacts would be for tenants, housing benefit/universal credit, reduced development capacity etc. The board will be discussing this in the autumn as part of its rent policy.

August, 2018

**APPENDIX 6: Thirteen - Customer Issues with the Compass Choice Based Lettings scheme between April 17 – March 18**

