



**SOUTH DEVON RURAL**  
HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED



**Places  
for People**

2023/24

Annual Report



**Putting homes  
and people  
together since 1958**

## INTRODUCTION FROM PETER SYMONS, SDR CHAIRMAN

A proud  
history  
behind  
us and a  
positive  
future  
ahead...



After an extremely challenging year, South Devon Rural Housing Association started to see light at the end of the tunnel towards the end of March 2024, when we completed the first stage of our merger with Places for People.

The SDR Board had known for some time that a combination of factors meant the future of our organisation would be secured only if we teamed up with another, larger partner.

So, after a proud history of providing homes for people in South Devon and beyond for the past 66 years, we looked for a suitable stablemate – and eventually found Places for People.

In December, we announced our intention to merge and immediately launched a seven-week consultation exercise to ensure we had the approval of the SDR “family” – our hundreds of Customers, who are the reason we come to work every day.

After a favourable response, and months of working behind the scenes with the Places for People management team, we made the link official on 20 March, a short time before the end of the financial year.

The merger has the approval of the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and we expect full integration to take place in Autumn 2024.

**CAPTION: Working together (L-R): Greg Reed, CEO, Steve Ashton, Chief Partnerships Officer, both of Places for People; Christine Candlish, SDR Managing Director, Robert Carnon, SDR's Housing Manager.**

‘WE’VE BEEN WORKING  
TOGETHER BEHIND THE  
SCENES TO COMPLETE  
THE FIRST STAGE OF  
THIS IMPORTANT  
PARTNERSHIP’



‘We’re confident that this new partnership will bear fruit, both in the short and longer term, for the benefit of our existing Customers and the many people in our region who need and deserve a decent home. The future looks really positive’. *Peter Symons*



# ‘A new era beckons for our Customers’

LOOKING FORWARD TO AN ALL-ROUND IMPROVEMENT IN PERFORMANCE AND PROSPECT OF MORE NEW HOMES IN THE SOUTH WEST



SDR Managing Director Christine Candlish sees an exciting future just around the corner...

After 66 years of serving the South Devon community in a variety of ways, all the while making a positive contribution to the lives of people, young and old, it's time for South Devon Rural to turn the page and start a new chapter.

For as long as people need homes – especially in the communities where they grew up and where they want to stay – there will always be a need for housing providers like us to give a helping hand.

Throughout those six and a half decades, SDR has shown how evolving economic conditions can provide opportunities rather than threats. We have shown how flexibility and adaptability can win the day and take us forward with renewed strength and energy.

This year has been no exception – providing as it does yet another example of how foresight and courage can overcome challenging circumstances.



The first of two consultation surveys.

Faced with a difficult economic environment and a funding challenge, we sought out – and have found – a business partner that shares comparable values and has similar ambitions to our own.

Early in 2024, we ran the first of two merger consultation exercises with our Customers, to ensure they have a full say in the process.

Now a new era beckons, in which we offer a better service to Customers and play a full part in the delivery of additional, affordable housing for the people of this region.

Together, we and our new partners will continue to put people at the forefront of everything we do, making a difference to families and individuals desperately in need of a roof over their heads.

‘Through our exciting partnership with Places for People, we’ll put people where they belong – at the forefront of everything we do. Our primary aim will be making a difference to families and individuals desperately in need of a roof over their heads’.

Christine Candlish

## Complaints policy updated to meet new Ombudsman Housing code



Earlier this year, the Housing Ombudsman updated its Complaints Handling Code to reflect the requirements of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

The Ombudsman consulted on its updated Complaint Handling Code and their intended approach to the duty to monitor the code in late 2023.

This statutory Code took effect from 1 April 2024 and the Ombudsman’s duty to monitor compliance with the code commenced at the same time.

The Housing Ombudsman believes every member must comply with all provisions in the Code as this represents best practice in complaint handling.

SDR’s Board agreed at its meeting on 22 April to adopt a new Complaints Policy. SDR has also completed a Complaints Self-Assessment Form against the new Code.

Our new Complaints Handling Policy can be accessed from our website by clicking on the ‘For Tenants’ tab, then Complaints Handling, where you will also find a copy of the Housing Ombudsman’s new code and SDR’s recently completed self-assessment form.

# OUR TENANTS' SATISFACTION SURVEY – THE RESULTS AT A GLANCE

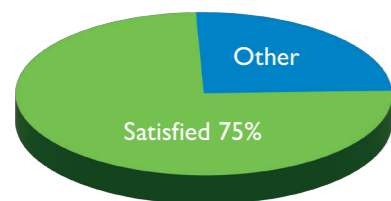


We're grateful for the active participation of our residents in a Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) survey conducted during the Summer and Autumn of 2023.

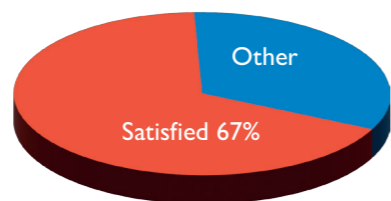
The results have now been published and will feed into a new system introduced by the Regulator of Social Housing to assess how well social housing landlords in England are doing at providing good quality homes and services.

As well as contributing to the national picture, our results also inform SDR's Management Team and Board Members about the comparative strengths and weaknesses in our day-to-day performance as a landlord and housing provider.

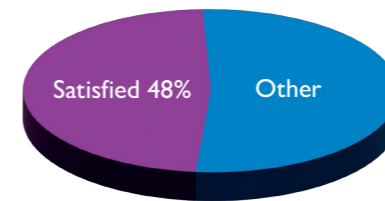
This helps us to identify what's working well and should continue, as well as what's not working so well and so needs fixing. The Board are already looking at what needs to be done to remedy any identified shortfalls in performance.



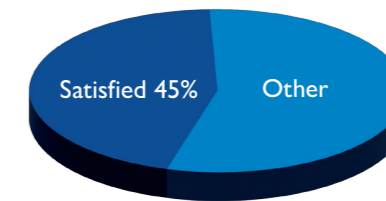
**Chart 1**  
Satisfied with the overall repair service (TP02)



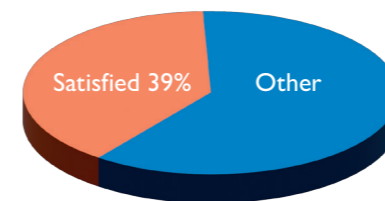
**Chart 2**  
Shared spaces are clean and are well maintained (TP10)



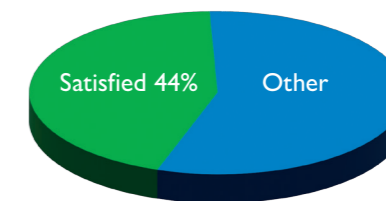
**Chart 3**  
Satisfied how SDR resolves tenants' issues (TP01)



**Chart 4**  
Positive impact on the local neighbourhood (TP11)



**Chart 5**  
Approach to dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour (TP12)



**Chart 6**  
Kept informed of things that matter to tenants (TP07)

## Delivering a better future

### Repair Performance

Our merger with Places for People Group, which moved a step closer in March, will enable SDR Customers to access a wealth of information, advice and helpful tips via the Places for People website. This includes guidance about the Repair Process, giving Customers a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities and helping them to decide whether their proposed repair request is realistic.

Giving Customers accurate and helpful information enables them to understand what help is available and what they are responsible for. It also helps them to feel informed about things that matter to them (TP07). See Chart 6.

### Keeping Customers Informed

Another key improvement to be tackled early is improving communication with Customers. This applies right across the whole spectrum of activity – from frequent updates on progress with the merger integration process, to providing better operational information about all aspects of SDR's interaction with Customers.

A robust Communication Plan is already in place to ensure Customers are kept informed about important aspects of the merger integration process as we progress towards Legal Transfer in the autumn of 2024.

Other aspects of communication and information provision can be expected to progress seamlessly and improve as SDR adopts the Places for People methodology and culture.

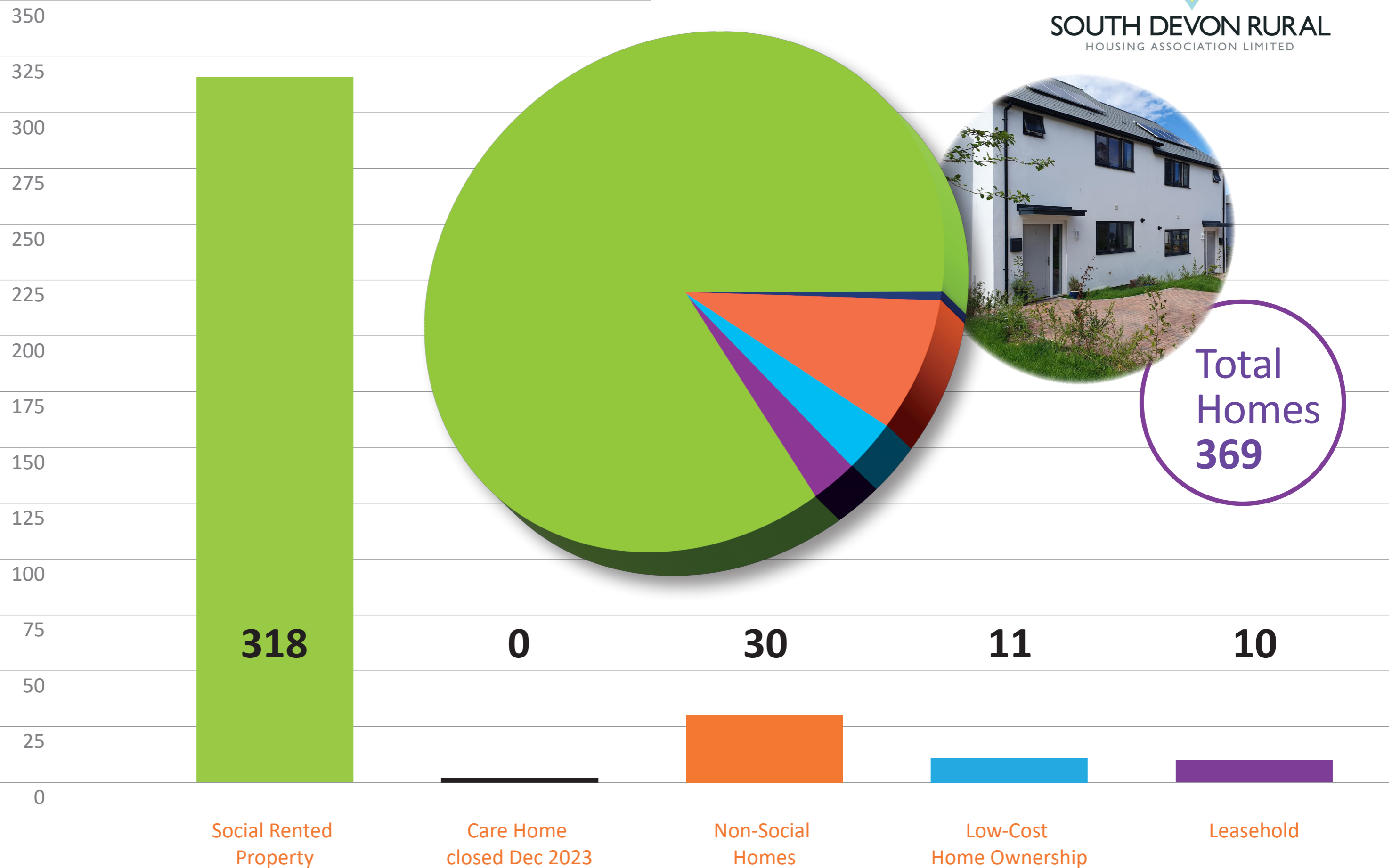
# Our Stock as at 31.03.2024



**SOUTH DEVON RURAL**  
HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED



**Total Homes**  
**369**



# Are our Customer Services up to standard?



Giving our Customers the best possible service is important to us. So, we keep an annual check on how well we're performing, aiming to improve each year. This helps identify where things are going well and, importantly, what may need improvement.

We use a number of regular Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), along with Customer Feedback, to give us a sense of whether our services are up to standard. These statistics are studied by the SDR Board to inform strategies for working more efficiently and effectively in the future. On these pages are some examples of KPIs from 2023-24, taken as averages over our full trading year.

Rent arrears as % of total rent due  
**0.51%**

Total losses from empty homes  
**1.21%**

Average days to re-let empty properties  
**45**



Average weekly rent  
**£94.39**

# We're striving for year-on-year improvements in performance levels

Reported cases of Anti-Social Behaviour  
**5**

Reported cases of ASB still open on 31/03/24  
**0**

Electrical Installation Condition Report  
10 Year **23%**

5 Year **77%**

Gas Checks completed at properties with a Gas Supply  
**100%**

Average End-to-End Time for all Reactive Repairs  
**90%**

Repairs/Contractor Satisfaction  
**92%**



# Complaints Performance Summary



Formal complaints (details below): 20



## Repairs and Maintenance: 8

Issues included delays in addressing repairs, poor workmanship, and lack of communication regarding repair appointments.



## Customer Service: 4

Complaints focused on staff behaviour, unresponsiveness, and general dissatisfaction with the service provided.



## Tenancy Issues: 5

Issues included disputes over tenancy terms, handling of neighbour disputes, and allocation of properties.



## Estate Management: 3

Concerns were raised about the maintenance of communal areas, noise from neighbouring properties, and general estate upkeep.

- SDR has achieved compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Code.
- No findings of non-compliance or maladministration by the Ombudsman in the past 12 months.
- The SDR Board receives regular updates on performance and trends.



# Service Improvements

Based on feedback received through complaints, we have implemented a number of improvements to our services and our procedures:

- All of our Colleagues have now received updated training in Complaints Handling to ensure a consistent and effective approach.
- We have established new protocols, designed to improve communication and raise responsiveness, ensuring that residents are kept fully informed throughout the entire complaint process.
- We have appointed a dedicated Member Responsible for Complaints to oversee the complaints process and ensure accountability at the highest level.
- A new Complaints Coordinator role has been established to manage the day-to-day handling of complaints, ensuring timely responses and efficient resolution. This Coordinator is also responsible for monitoring trends and implementing service improvements based on complaint feedback.



# The story of our working year, told in pictures

The photos on these two pages illustrate a working year in the life of South Devon Rural. The 2023-24 financial year has seen some pretty massive changes, including the closure of our Forder Lane House care home and an agreement for SDR to merge with a much larger housing provider.

These at-a-glance images tell the story of our efforts to adapt to a changing environment whilst keeping in mind the single reason we come to work every day – helping people to find homes that suit their needs and budget.



## Take action and report fire door issues to help CLOSE THE DOOR ON FIRE

**EDUCATION IS NEEDED TO CLOSE THE DOOR ON FIRE**

The findings highlighted a dangerous lack of understanding and need for education on the role of fire doors

<b>31%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>49%</b>
incorrectly believed that a fire door that was propped open with a wedge or a fire extinguisher was safe	believed that keeping a fire door closed stops it performing	said having a better understanding over what fire doors do and how they work would encourage them to take action



ABOVE: A special newsletter feature gave our residents advice on fire safety and the importance of fire doors in flats and other shared buildings. ABOVE RIGHT: As winter approached, we sent every Customer a leaflet showing how to keep warm on a limited budget. RIGHT: Part of our active marketing efforts to keep Forder Lane House open was this poster at Totnes Railway Station.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Summer 2023 saw completion of our long-term Brimhay development; we also asked Customers for feedback through a Tenant Satisfaction Survey. In the autumn, tough trading conditions forced us to close our wonderful care home at Dartington; we also announced plans to merge with housing provider Places for People in a special edition of our newsletter. The merger prompted a Stock Condition Survey in the New Year; to progress the merger, we worked with colleagues at Places for People, including their Chief Partnerships Officer, Steve Ashton.







**Celebrating over six  
decades of giving people  
a place to call home**



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HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

South Devon Rural Housing Association Limited  
Registered England and Wales  
South Devon House, Babbage Road, Totnes TQ9 5JA  
T. 01803 863550

Registered Office: 305 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8QR  
E-mail: [Info@southdevonrural.com](mailto:Info@southdevonrural.com) Website: [www.southdevonrural.com](http://www.southdevonrural.com)