

2022-2023

Report to members

together we're STRONGER

Welcome

To our

2022/2023 Report to Members



Marcus Powell
Chair of Democratic Body

We always aim to ensure that Merthyr Valleys Homes is a truly member, owned organisation and the membership is representative of the communities we serve.

2022/23 has proved to be a challenging year. Following the impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, we have been working hard behind the scenes collaborating with and supporting the Board and Leadership Teams to ensure that we are meeting our objectives. I've captured some of our highlights below, but please have a read through this report to find our more.

We have strengthened the diversity of the Board by successfully recruiting one new Board Member, two Co-optee Board Members and re-appointing one existing Board Member for a further 3-year term of office.

We played a significant role in the governance and regulation of MVH, including evaluating the organisation's performance against the Welsh Government's Performance Standards. We approved the Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23, while continuing to monitor progress and performance. We appointed Bevan Buckland LLP as our External Audit Service provider to assist us in providing assurance that our finances are being managed well.

We helped assess how MVH provides Value for Money across all its services and participated in the 'Star Chamber' budget setting process alongside Board Members to ensure that our Gyda'n Gilydd objectives could be achieved. This year our members selected four worthy local charities/groups to support via our Members' Charity fund.

We have played our part in the co-design of a number of strategies, placing a strong emphasis on ensuring that the tenant and employee voice has been considered in setting some key objectives for the years ahead.

We played a significant role in the biggest change to housing law in Wales for decades – Renting Homes Wales Act. We influenced the communications that went out to tenants, and the project was successful.

We continue to influence and receive updates on the Brighter Futures project, a very important project to Democratic Body which has seen a number of successes that have made a real difference to people's lives.

We've also been working on our Democratic Body goals and aspirations, including a review of our composition and skills, and looking towards the future with some succession planning. We recently congratulated one of our tenant representatives, Nigel Phillips-Gunter, who deservedly took home the title of Tenant of the Year at this year's TPAS Cymru Awards.

Over the coming year we will continue to have representation on Audit Governance and Policy Committees, ensuring MVH is financially strong, manages risks appropriately and undertakes a mutual approach in everything that we do. The forthcoming year is set to be difficult due to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, so we will work together with Board and Leadership Teams to focus on ensuring our tenants, employees and the wider communities are supported in the best way possible.

I am proud to be the Chair of the Democratic Body and to share the hard work we have been doing over the past year, and look forward to continuing to work with our tenant and employee members over the year ahead

Thanks for reading,
Marcus

Democratic Body activities

Merthyr Valleys Homes, our mutual, is owned by our tenant and employee members.

We, the Democratic Body, are elected by fellow members to act on your behalf and in your best interests by working with the Board and the Executive Leadership Team. Throughout the year we have been making key decisions and influencing activities that will have a positive impact on our homes and in our communities.

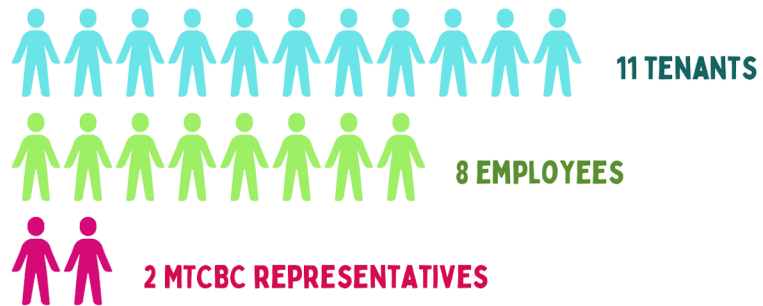
In this report, we have captured a summary of our activities over the past year as well as how you, as members, can play a role in the next 12 months to take our mutual from strength to strength.



Seats and appointments

This year Democratic Body reviewed the number of seats available and unanimously agreed that our tenant members should continue to hold the majority of seats

DEMOCRATIC BODY SEATS



We appointed 4 temporary positions to our Democratic Body to drive forward the development of new strategies and bring new knowledge, skills and experience to the table.

We also welcomed Councillor Claire Jones as the MTCBC appointment to Democratic Body

We're a mutual for

everyone

We place a strong emphasis on ensuring that membership is inclusive to all and that our membership is representative of the communities we serve.

We reviewed our membership diversity alongside our tenant diversity and used this to influence project delivery for the year ahead.

This year we increased our membership amongst our Polish community when we found that Polish tenants were underrepresented as members.



Impacting the future

We have helped to **co-design the Climate Strategy, Homes & Places Strategy and Development Strategy**, which all aim to create a mutual that is people focused, mindful of our impact on the environment, and plays a role in doing our bit to address climate change.

As well as **saving paint from landfill through our A Fresh Approach project** (further information can be seen in our Annual Report) we undertook a painting project in partnership with Merthyr College and colleagues in Homes & Places.



Areas to play
are important

Young Voices

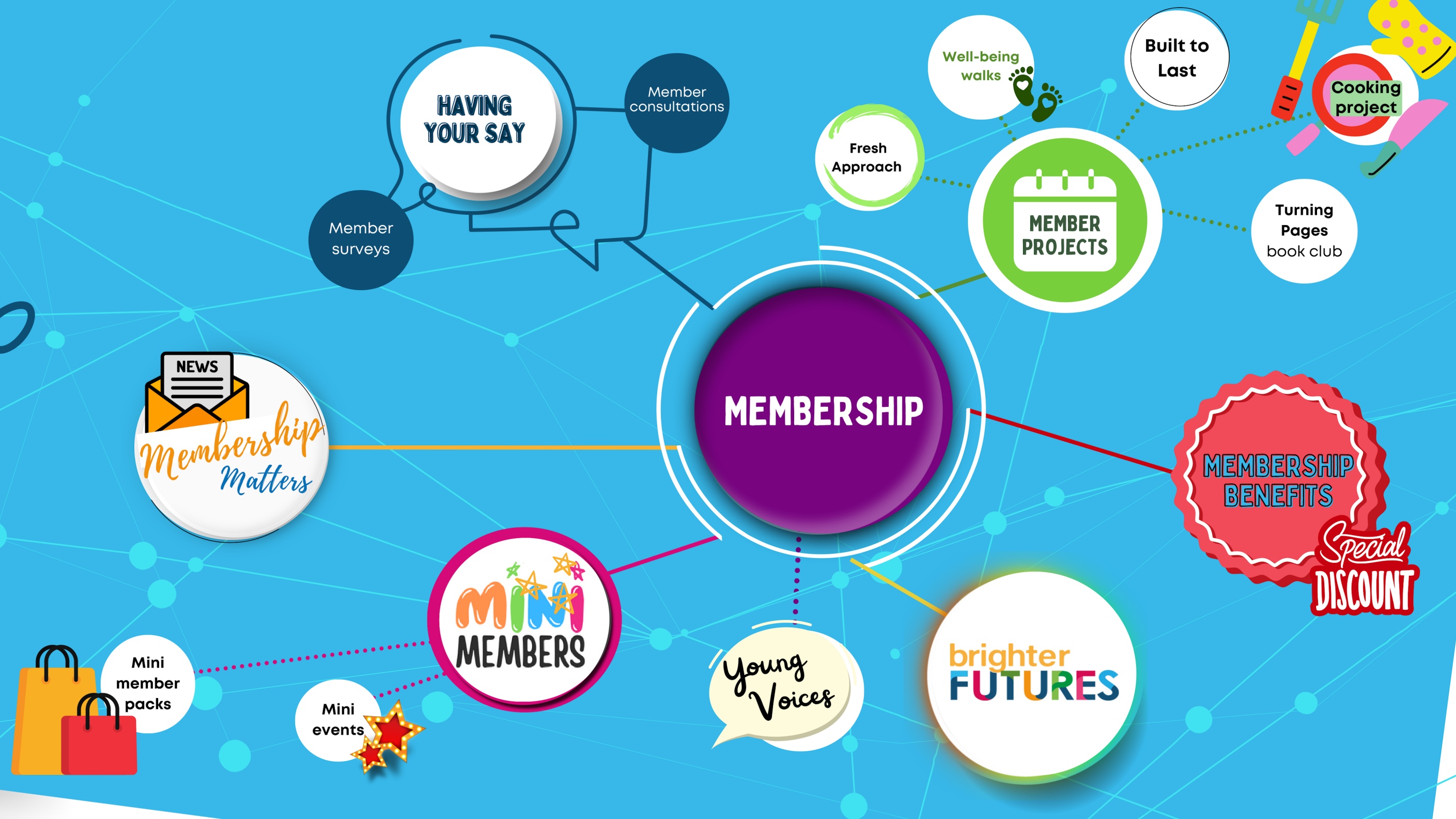
Through Young
Voices we feedback to
the Homes & Places
Teams that:



If we're building, we
consider the size of
the garden.

Elements of membership

There are lots of different areas that Membership covers



Membership strategy

Democratic Body also has a strategy that they own, monitor and amend for membership.

The Membership Strategy sets out our expectations on how members can actively get involved in matters that affect them, so that they have a true voice in our mutual.

OUR ACTIONS AGAINST THE MEMBERSHIP STRATEGY:

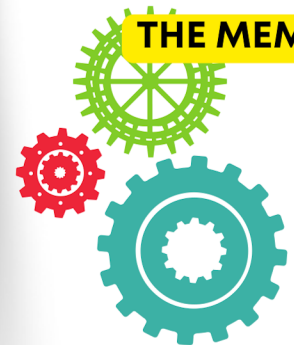


Held **6 free family events** during school holidays and a Christmas pantomime

Mini member projects and young voices link with the environment and the development of new homes.



Democratic Body feedback on the 4 day week, what values are important to tenants when they come into contact with MVH and its employees, this will be used in employee appraisals.



THE MEMBERSHIP TEAM

Supported colleagues including Tenant Engagement, Community Living and MVH Youth teams at events and consultations - pictures and further details can be seen in our Annual Report



5 editions of Membership Matters

Surveyed members on their interests and added 3 new projects as a result for the 2023/24 financial year

- Painting project
- Upcycling
- Gardening Project including growing your own



MEMBERSHIP BENEFIT SCHEME



Supported

**25 LOCAL
BUSINESSES**

who take part in our
Membership Benefit
Scheme

It explores how we can link with local businesses and offer an enhanced membership package and provide projects and activities exclusively for members.

In return all we ask is that our members engage with us in a way of their choosing so that Democratic Body understand the needs and aspirations of you all.

Listening to members

Some of the work that has been undertaken by our Membership Team tells us what we need to engage with members on.

Members have identified **key areas that they wish to share their views on:**



Repairs & improvements to existing homes



Value for Money



Key priorities for MVH over the next 3 years

Members have told us that **they want to engage in:**



Well being projects



Skills improvements and employment support



Enhancing their DIY skills



Community improvement projects





£2,500



MEMBERS' CHARITY

Each year we support members to identify and vote for local charities of their choice to receive funding from the Member's Charity, this year we made the decision to support the top 4 voted for charities, so that we could maximise the impact the money would have for our members and communities at a time when people are being affected by increase in costs, business closures and changes in personal circumstances. Further information on the charities supported can be found in our Annual Report.

We continue to drive forward our Brighter Futures project, which was created by Democratic Body to support our members and communities in three key skills areas relating to employment, interests and DIY. We have seen a number of successes that have made a real difference to people's lives.

brighter FUTURES

COOKING PROJECT

We delivered two rounds of 10-week cooking projects during 2022/23.

We provided ingredients packs to each participant and issued people with a slow cooker. The aim was to encourage slow cooking of healthy cheap meals from scratch using fresh ingredients

BENEFITS/OUTCOMES:

- Increased cooking skills
- Support with food budgeting
- Increase in healthy eating and understanding nutrition
- Increased cooking as a family and improved family mealtimes
- Increased confidence to try new things.

PERSONAL CHANGES INCLUDED

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Eating better | • Mental health improved |
| • Meals for the family | • More time for the family |
| • Portion control | • Confidence |
| • Better cooking skills | • Healthier meals |

I think the people who run these projects are amazing they really go above and beyond. I started suffering with Agoraphobia and one member of staff delivered by ingredients so I could be included in the project.

"Thoroughly enjoyed the course was made so very easy and comfortable to take part"

Would just like to thank Rachel and Richard for making it so enjoyable even though it was only an hour a week, I really looked forward to it.

The cooking club has been a great opportunity for people to feel that they are doing something together, something many haven't been able to do with covid

"Just like to say thank you to staff for providing such a great cooking club, Rachel was so supportive and encouraging."



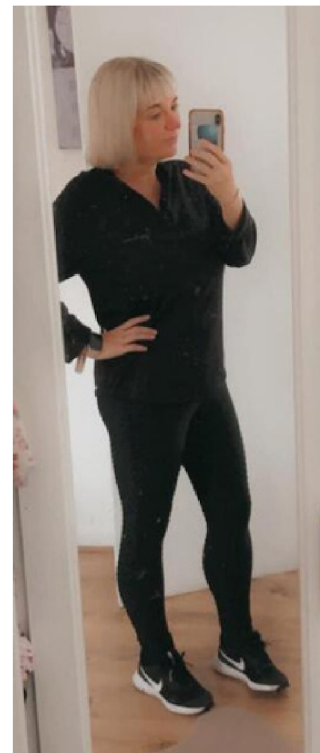
BUILT TO LAST

Working in partnership with The Fitness Locker, members had the opportunity to be more active through exercise and to implement healthy eating habits. Members used an app to track activity and calorie intake, and support was provided by two personal trainers. A weekly live exercise class brought participants together, supported by the use of a closed Facebook group.

Those that participated reported

- Increased physical activity
- Increased confidence
- Weight loss and change of body shape
- Healthy habits formed
- Increased motivation and energy levels
- Improved mental health and a positive mindset

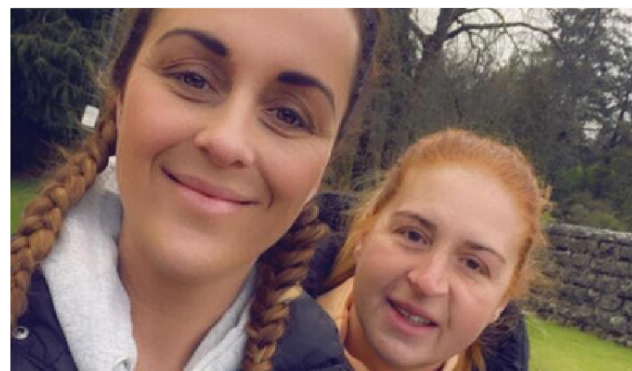
“ ‘Loved the programme, loved the people, liked that there was motivation, which helped a lot and that there was accountability, but were still your own person and done at your own pace



Amazing project, really enjoyed it. Friendly staff who are always there to help. Good food recipes and exercises to keep me going at home’



“ “Lee and Richard were fab, but Rachel was amazing, there for us and pushing us every step of the way”



CASE STUDY

I joined the programme because I wanted to get out of the house, my son is in school and I wanted to lose weight and help my mental health, do something for myself. I was nervous at first, but the face-to-face Q & A session was great, and I left the session feeling really positive and really looking forward to starting the programme.

I gave this programme my all, I enjoyed every minute of it, and I am so gutted that it is finished. I watched what I ate, I walked and walked and did loads of home workouts. The zoom sessions were fab with Richard, and I can't believe how many workouts you can do at home, even turned my living room into a gym a few times and had a little circuit going of different exercise stations when the weather was bad, and I couldn't get out. I really enjoyed my mental health is better, I feel better, I am much fitter and I lost 1 and ½ stone during the programme and I really want to keep going now and keep it off. I'm not stopping now I just want to keep going but have felt lost since the programme's finished.

Believe
in
yourself

Being part of *key areas*

Complaints Panel

Some of our Representatives sit on the Complaints Appeal Panel to ensure those who appeal a decision are given a fair hearing

Standard review

MVH assess themselves every year the Welsh Government regulatory framework standards. We checked that the assessment matched the experiences we all have of living in an MVH property or working for our mutual. We determined that MVH was meeting the standards in all but one area – tenants are empowered and supported to influence the design and delivery of services. We recognised that there has been some work completed in this area but there is still more to be done

Rent increase

We also reviewed the Welsh Government rent increase and recommended to Board a solution that was fair and considered the financial impact during a cost of living crisis.

Community Engagement

Whilst Democratic Body work for and on behalf of our members, we are also keen to hear the wider tenant voice and work closely with the Tenant Engagement Team supporting projects that benefit our communities within the borough.

RENTING HOMES WALES

One of the big things that happened this year was **Renting Homes Wales Act** which changed our tenancy agreements to occupation contracts. This was the biggest change to housing law in Wales for decades and **we were involved in the communication to all tenants both before and after the Act was implemented, to help tenants understand what this meant for them.**

**DID
YOU
KNOW?**

**MVH HAS ONE OF THE LOWEST
RENT LEVELS FOR HOUSING
ASSOCIATIONS IN WALES.**

**From 1st December 2022*,
The Renting Homes
(Wales) Act 2016, will
improve how we rent,
manage, and live in
rented homes in Wales.**



**1ST
December
2022**

*Welsh Government has announced its intention to implement the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 on 1 December 2022.

Democratic Body Representatives sit on Board Committees so we really are in the thick of it all, making sure that the mutual is run well and is financially sound.

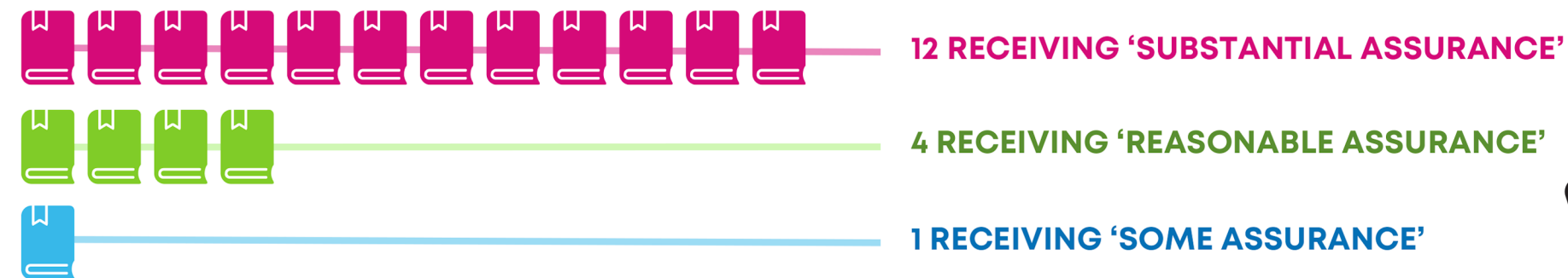
Audit

This past year we have:

- **Received feedback** from external organisations **on audits that have been undertaken**,
- **Appointed Bevan Buckland LLP** as our external auditors and
- **Approved the internal audit work plan** to set out key business areas for audits to be undertaken over the coming years.

How did we do?

Over the past year there have been 17 internal audits:-



NONE OF OUR AUDITS FELL INTO THE LOWEST OF THE FOUR CATEGORIES OF 'LIMITED ASSURANCE'.

Finances

We also keep an eye on the finances.

Every year we take part in our 'Star Chamber' budget setting exercise alongside Board and Leadership Teams to review the proposed budgets for the year ahead making sure they align with our priority areas.

Our representatives on Audit Committee also receive quarterly updates against budgets to make sure everything is on track.

We helped to assess how we are providing Value for Money across all of our services.

We were involved in procurement exercises, selecting contractors for some of MVH's largest service areas.

WHAT DO THE LEVELS OF ASSURANCE MEAN?

The level of assurance shows the strength of the evidence that MVH was able to provide that there are processes in place to meet legal and regulatory requirements and that the health & safety of our tenants and colleagues is a high priority.





0800 085 7843

mvhomes.org.uk

THANK YOU!

We wanted to say thank you to all our Members, Mini Members, membership benefit businesses, community partners, colleagues and fellow Democratic Body Representatives for all your continued time, input and support into our Mutual

Democratic Body's key decisions



RENTS AND BUDGETING

Took part in the discussions on rent setting and how we could **ensure that our rents are affordable for tenants.**

76 hours spent on budgeting setting, to make sure that tenants money is spent wisely and enables MVH to deliver what it says it will deliver for our communities.



TENANTS' HOMES

Looking at **solutions to make our existing homes more energy efficient**

Supported the Cefn Isaf and Honeysuckle Close redevelopments that will create X new homes. We have a **representative on the development group.**



LOCAL EMPLOYMENT

As part of our Brighter Futures Project we took part in the Government's KickStart scheme with over 50 young people taking part



BOARD AND GOVERNANCE

Recruited an independent Chair of the Board to deliver on our Corporate Strategy which is set by and for members, looking at the top priorities for our tenants, employees and communities.

Recruited 3 new Board Members who bring a wealth of knowledge to MVH and run the business on Members' behalf.

Representatives sit on a number of Board committees and strategic working groups to help shape them and ensure MVH delivers what they say they will



FINANCE AND RISK

Helped to secure a refinancing package that not only strengthened our financial position but released a significant number of properties that our new loans are secured against.

Worked with Board to co-design a new risk management approach and set an Internal Audit Plan that will add an extra sense check to make sure we deliver the best services possible

Challenging MVH to demonstrate that it provides Value for Money and is making use of community benefits on offer from key contractors



Supporting our community

**THE MEMBER LED
GRANT PANEL AWARDED** **£22,000**

in grants to community groups including
6 brand new applicants to the scheme

MEMBERS CHARITY DONATED

£8,000 to local charities that address food poverty, homelessness,
community safety and ill mental and physical health.



EMPLOYABILITY PROJECT

We provided support to

18 PEOPLE

which led to **6 people** going into employment, **2 people** setting up their own business and **3 people** going on to further training



THE FUTURE
IS
BRIGHT

WHAT'S NEXT.....

We are exploring how to offer training programmes with our partner organisations to match opportunities in the local labour market.

Membership strategy & communicating with members

Reviewed our Membership Benefits Scheme and the **local businesses** who take part told us they receive more customers as a result, demonstrating that our membership are supporting local economy.

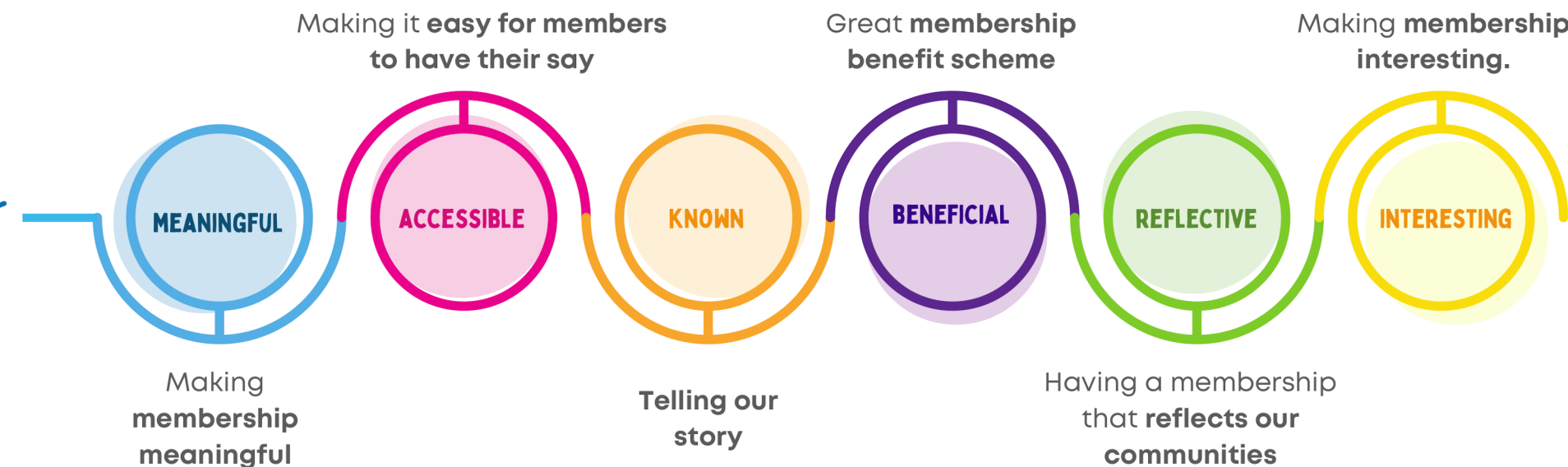
We have made use of a new survey tool to ensure our members have the opportunity to tell us what they think about topics before decisions are made and to help steer what is important both for our strategies and projects.



OUR NEW MEMBERSHIP STRATEGY

In November 2021 we created and launched a brand new membership strategy which set out 6 key objectives:

objectives



why get involved

Members told us that they had signed up for membership because >>>>

- >> they're **interested and curious**
- >> thought **it's important**
- >> wanted to **be more than just a tenant**
- >> wanted to **have their say**
- >> feel **happy and positive about membership**
- >> like **the incentives**

Membership for everyone

We reviewed membership to check if it's inclusive of all members of our community. Here's what we found:

- In most areas it was reflective of our communities in terms of age, certain impairments or learning difficulties, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, gender, mental health, and disability.
- However, we have some members of our communities who are underrepresented, Polish and Portuguese people, those with hearing impairments, memory loss and Welsh speakers

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