Acuity Benchmarking

2024 Report

PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKING

Acuity

intelligence. insight. improvement.

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Introduction

Welcome to Acuity's annual benchmarking report: key performance and cost data for smaller and specialist Housing Associations in England.

Acuity Benchmarking is the leading national benchmarking network for smaller housing providers, facilitated by Acuity Research & Practice.

Aimed at housing providers with up to 1,000 homes, the network has over 150 members owning/managing over 82,000 homes across eight English regions, with a median stock size of 357.

Providing the data you need

Acuity provides performance and cost benchmarking data for members, enabling you to compare against a peer group of similar organisations facing similar challenges. This data is used by staff, boards and residents to better understand performance (including what 'good' looks like) and contextual factors, as well as to inform decision-making. Data provides lenders, partners, the regulator and other stakeholders with assurance that you are efficient, well-run and delivering on your social mission.

2024 data continues to show Acuity members in a positive light – you compare favourably with the rest of the social housing sector on satisfaction and 'hard' performance metrics. This has continued despite the changes brought about by introducing TSMs in 2023.

There is no room for complacency, though – the sector faces further scrutiny with new legislation around Data Protection, Social Value, and Procurement to land in 2025 and a new government considering further changes to the sector. Using the benchmarking club membership to support each other's response to this challenge is key to delivering the social housing mission.

"Benchmarking has given us the chance to create valuable networking connections with other local providers and peer-to-peer contacts."

2024 Conference in Review

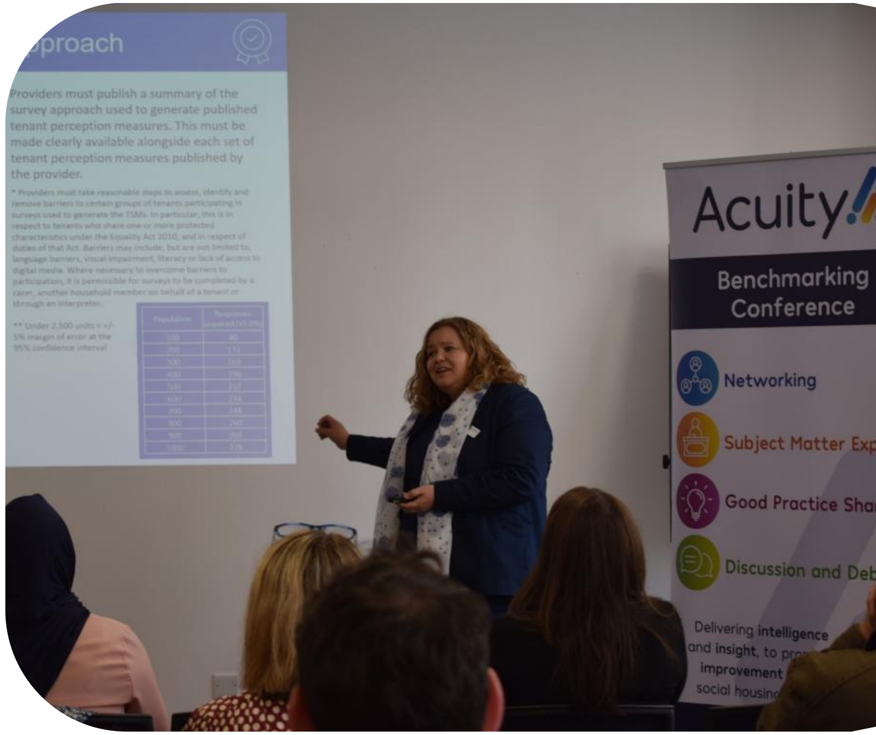
The 2024 Acuity Benchmarking Conference was held on 18 April 2024 in London. A busy day at the conference venue of the NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations) saw 50 delegates attend in person, with a further 19 attending online.

Feedback from the event was excellent, and suggestions on how to improve it further have been considered as we plan future conferences.

Key Takeaways

- **100% of delegates found the event to be worthwhile**
- **95% felt that it was good or very good value for money**
- **90% would recommend the event to other colleagues**
- **Five of the presenters and organisations took forward work with attendees from the day**

"Well done, Acuity, I would definitely recommend these events and look forward to the next one."



2024 Conference Comments & Feedback

"We found it very enjoyable and thought the content from the various sessions was very informative and, most importantly, interesting."

"I thought the conference was really good, great bookings with respect to the speakers, and lovely to catch up with the Acuity team in person."

"I thought that this year's event was the best yet! It was well attended, had a good variety of interesting presenters/ speakers, and everyone seemed well engaged."

"Thanks for a terrific day yesterday, really good selection of speakers, good questions from the floor and all on topic."

"I was really impressed by Pete Apps' presentation, so much so that I've recommended it to my colleagues in the East Sussex authorities who are organising a conference to see if we could enquire about him coming to speak at an event later in the year."

What's Next?

Our members continue to drive Acuity's agenda. As discussed in last year's report, we undertook a member survey to develop and improve our service offer. The suggestions received from this are now being implemented and more will be seen in 2025.

While we are likely to do more of the same – benchmarking performance, costs and processes, and supporting members through networking and sharing good practices, we want to explore the best way to deliver this.

In a fresh development, we know how active the Question and Answer approach clubs ask from each other is, and we will be looking to expand this, with a central platform of all previous questions and responses being readily available to help on the improved benchmarking platform, alongside embedded learning opportunities. Watch this space!

Evolution of Benchmarking Metrics

The new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) have now been in operation since 2023 and apply to all providers. Whilst providers with less than 1,000 stock are not required to submit their TSM data to the Regulator, you still must collect and report them to your tenants for the year. Here, Acuity provides a vital role in facilitating your collection and reporting of the data, whilst the benchmarking clubs will support your efforts to get the regulatory requirements right, as well as share best practice and speak to members about how they are overcoming challenges across the sector.

For this report, we have been able to include the data issued by the Regulator in late November 2024. This has enabled us to benchmark our members' performance against the 360 large landlords the Regulator has collected data on. 302 of these were solely for general needs housing, 54 reported on shared ownership, and 4 reported in a combined manner. Where relevant, we have presented the RSH score alongside our 'All Provider' data from our own larger landlord clients.

What’s Next?

We wish you a successful 2025 and, as always, are keen to hear how we can contribute to the essential work you do.

Acuity Research & Practice

During 2024, we ran a successful webinar on the emerging Procurement Bill ahead of its completion and enactment in February 2025. We plan to run further webinars on cleansing and improving data collection in February 2025. Our next major face-to-face event will be our annual conference on 20 and 21 May 2025. This will be the first two-day conference, enabling benchmarking members to meet the larger providers, with one day dedicated to benchmarking and one to satisfaction.

As a facilitator of a national network for smaller providers, we have a unique role and will continue to work with organisations such as the Regulator of Social Housing, Housing Ombudsman, Chartered Institute of Housing and National Housing Federation, to ensure that we provide the business intelligence our members need to navigate an increasingly complex and challenging operating environment.

Finally, as many of you will know, Acuity isn’t just a benchmarking business; we are a long-established provider of satisfaction surveys and market research. Our team is at hand to help you with your surveys, whether you want to undertake a defined task or outsource it all from conception through to surveying and reporting. To find out more, please contact:
denise.raine@arap.co.uk or sean.brennan@arap.co.uk

Member Comments & Feedback

"Our experience has been really good since we joined. We particularly enjoy the networking opportunities it provides, too."

"I always find these reports useful, and the statistics they include are used when reviewing and setting salaries each year by our organisation."

"Our experience with Acuity and the Benchmarking group has been incredibly positive. It excels in sharing valuable information and data, which has been instrumental for our organisation."

"This is new and I like it. Hopefully, it will shine a spotlight on others whose numbers don't stack up."

"The benchmarking comparisons are particularly useful, allowing us to measure our performance against other providers, which allows us to compare against a diverse group."

Performance & Improvement

Performance Comparison & Improvement

Acuity benchmarking data provides smaller associations with comparisons between similar peers and the rest of the sector. The results on the following pages show that, overall, members compare favourably with the rest of the sector in key areas such as rent collection, arrears, voids and the cost and management of repairs.

The data in the following pages provides an insight into the overall performance of Acuity Benchmarking members for the year April 2023 to March 2024. Two sets of data are provided for each key activity:

1. The median performance of all organisations submitting data to Acuity (referred to as ‘Smaller Providers’) and the median performance of all larger organisations Acuity provides TSM surveys for (referred to as ‘All Providers’)
2. Year-on-year data indicating the direction of travel in performance among Acuity members

We use a traffic light system to indicate whether the median for Acuity members is higher, lower or the same as the median for All Providers, and trend arrows to indicate whether performance among Acuity members has improved, declined or stayed the same. In addition, where available, we have also used the RSH TSM Data issued on 26 November 2024.

The year-on-year trend is based on data from Acuity members who submitted figures for both 2022/23 and 2023/24. Using a balanced panel in this way ensures that trend comparisons are robust and not adversely affected by changes in the sample between years. This means that the Acuity medians compared against All Providers may differ slightly from the medians used for the same year in the trend analysis.

All resident satisfaction (TSM) data is based on the latest Regulatory guidance.

“It focused the Board‘s attention on the areas where improvements are possible. This has kept the momentum going in areas where we are behind our sector.”

Voids & Lettings

The performance of Acuity (Smaller Providers) members across all six metrics for voids and lettings compares favourably to All Providers. Average re-let times perform particularly well for HfOP, taking 46 days less. However, performance has declined by 5 days since last year.

Three of the measures – percentage of rent lost due to voids (both GN and HfOP) and average re-let time in days for HfOP have improved in performance.

Two measures have declined in performance. The percentage of rent lost due to voids has slightly worsened for Supported by 0.21%, whereas average re-let time for general needs has increased 6.8 days.

Taking each tenure performance individually:

General Needs has improved for voids and declined for re-let times. HfOP has improved for voids and re-let times. Supported performance has worsened for both void loss and re-let times.

	All Providers	Smaller Providers		2022/23	2023/24	
Percentage of rent lost due to void properties (GN)	1.30	0.52	●	0.71	0.51	↓
Percentage of rent lost due to void properties (HfOP)	4.14	1.05	●	1.40	1.05	↓
Percentage of rent lost due to void properties (Supported)	6.55	6.10	●	5.44	5.65	↑
Average re-let time in days (GN)	41.5	37.6	●	28.20	35.00	↑
Average re-let time in days (HfOP)	71.00	25.00	●	30.00	25.00	↓
Average re-let time in days (Supported)	51.70	42.69	●	33.50	37.59	↑

"The quality of the reports we received together with benchmarked comparisons was welcomed by both our staff and Board."

Rent Collection & Arrears

Both Acuity and All Providers members are evidencing strong management of income loss at a time when tenants continue to face a cost-of-living crisis. Measures of state support, such as DHP and HSF have contributed to part of this.

The median performance of Acuity members on rent collection is higher than that of All Providers for HfOP but lower for GN and Supported (although these differences are marginal for GN).

Rent collection figures are affected by the timing of (HB)/(UC) payments, and arrears levels often reflect performance over several years. GN and HfOP arrears are lower for Acuity members than for All Providers, but higher for Supported. This continues the performance trend from 2023.

Comparing Acuity members' performance from 2022/23 to 2023/34, performance for five of the nine metrics here have improved, for HfOP rent collection and arrears, Supported and GN arrears, and Supported arrears net of unpaid HB.

	All Providers	Smaller Providers	2022/23	2023/24
Rent collected as a percentage of rent owed (GN)	99.21	99.16	99.39	99.10
Rent collected as a percentage of rent owed (HfOP)	99.63	100.23	99.94	100.37
Rent collected as a percentage of rent owed (Supported)	99.90	97.86	99.00	97.90
Current tenant arrears (GN)	3.56	3.15	3.04	3.18
Current tenant arrears (HfOP)	1.23	1.03	1.21	1.03
Current tenant arrears (Supported)	4.00	4.16	4.98	4.16
Current tenant arrears net of unpaid HB (GN)	3.03	3.15	2.90	2.85
Current tenant arrears net of unpaid HB (HfOP)	0.47	0.52	0.25	0.47
Current tenant arrears net of unpaid HB (Supported)	0.47	1.50	1.52	1.30

Repairs & Maintenance

Sector-wide, asset management has continued to be challenging throughout 2023/24 as Contractor failures – both availability and performance of, Health & Safety inspections and material supply-side issues impacted services. That said, smaller providers have fared well.

This is particularly the case compared to the performance published by the RSH in November 2024. Smaller providers outperformed RSH providers for all three measures, significantly so for emergency and non-emergency repairs (3p.p. and 12p.p. respectively).

Acuity members' median performance was higher than All Providers for all six measures. Smaller providers are also the only comparison group to achieve full satisfaction for gas safety completion.

Compared to last year, performance has decreased for three of the six measures – emergency and non-emergency repairs, and repairs satisfaction. Performance has improved for end-to-end repair time, and repairs completed at first visit. Gas safety checks remain 100% this year. All data is for GN housing, supported housing and HfOP combined.

	All Providers	RSH	Smaller Providers		2022/23	2023/24	
Percentage of emergency repairs completed within target (TSM)	94.80	95.32	98.46	●	100.00	99.20	↓
Percentage of non-emergency repairs completed within target (TSM)	81.50	81.29	93.33	●	95.00	93.19	↓
Average end-to-end time for all reactive repairs	13.33		9.10	●	9.65	9.25	↓
Percentage of repairs completed at first visit	88.13		91.30	●	90.47	90.50	↑
Percentage of residents satisfied with last repair (from repair completion survey)	88.10		92.65	●	95.02	93.00	↓
Percentage gas safety checks completed on time (TSM)	99.97	99.95	100.00	●	100.00	100.00	↔

"The benchmarking service's dynamism, knowledge, and foresight can only propel us to a greater footing".

Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

Benchmarking members compare favourably with the rest of the sector with ratings for TSM metrics between 9p.p and 16p.p higher. Satisfaction with overall services is 14p.p higher for benchmarking members than All Providers and 12p.p higher than RSH. This metric is also the third-highest score, suggesting that Acuity members are performing well across services. Only safe home and treated fairly and with respect score higher.

Elsewhere, satisfaction with Smaller Providers is considerably higher than larger landlords, particularly for both repairs measures, which have over 10p.p higher satisfaction compared to All Providers and RSH landlords. Seven of 12 TSM measures have scores over 80% for Smaller Providers. By comparison, no measures for All Providers or RSH score 80% or more.

Continued focus on the measures remains important, however, when we compare scores to last year. 8 of the measures have witnessed a performance decline since 2022/23. Although this decline averages less than 3%.

	All Providers	RSH	Smaller Providers		2022/23	2023/24	
Overall satisfaction (LCRA)	69.4	71.3	83.2	●	85.8	85.0	↓
Overall repairs service (LCRA)	70.4	72.3	82.5	●	85.0	86.5	↑
Last repair time taken (LCRA)	66.4	67.4	80.0	●	80.5	80.6	↑
Well maintained home (LCRA)	69.4	70.8	82.0	●	86.6	83.0	↓
Safe home (LCRA)	76.1	76.7	86.9	●	89.0	89.0	↔
Listens & acts (LCRA)	58.9	60.4	75.1	●	78.0	76.3	↓
Kept informed (LCRA)	69.5	70.3	80.5	●	86.0	84.1	↓
Treated fairly & with respect (LCRA)	76.3	76.8	86.0	●	88.0	87.0	↓
Complaint handling (LCRA)	33.8	34.5	50.0	●	65.0	62.0	↓
Communal areas (LCRA)	65.5	65.1	75.0	●	80.5	76.2	↓
Neighbourhood contribution (LCRA)	62.5	63.1	73.0	●	78.1	74.4	↓
ASB handling (LCRA)	57.0	57.8	69.3	●	75.0	75.0	↔

Staff Engagement

As with previous years, Acuity members reported that on average they lost significantly fewer working days to sickness absence than larger providers. Time lost to sickness absence has decreased by 1.92 days from last year and is now less than half the absence levels of larger providers.

	All Providers	Smaller Providers		2022/23	2023/24	
Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence	10.84	5.00	●	6.96	5.04	⬇

"This is very useful and a real resource for us."

"The Acuity membership presents significant advantages for small providers, particularly in areas such as benchmarking, training, and the exchange of best practices related to our daily operations. This network serves as a secure platform that creates opportunities for small providers to thrive in a challenging environment, and I strongly recommend that all small providers consider joining our network."

VFM/Cost Measures

These unit cost metrics were developed to enable sector comparisons and are more robust than those derived from statutory accounts as they require members to apportion costs in accordance with a methodology more consistent than that associated with accounting practice. The cost per property measures are 'direct' and exclude overheads.

Compared with All Providers, Acuity members reported higher average cost per property of housing management and cost per property of responsive repairs and void works. Some of this difference can be explained by the profile of Acuity members: many have a significant percentage of supported and HfOP accommodation as compared to All Providers (see note below right). However, one should generally expect these costs to be higher for smaller providers – the flip side, of course, is high satisfaction rates.

Acuity members' cost per property for major and cyclical works was lower than the average for All Providers. Since last year, the cost per property has increased for housing management and responsive repairs, voids, major and cyclical works. Overhead costs as a percentage of turnover, however, have decreased over the same period.

	All Providers	Smaller Providers	2022/23	2023/24
Cost per property of Housing Management	272	536	437	520
Cost per property of responsive repairs and void works	847	901	885	899
Cost per property - Major and cyclical works	1,177	1,040	1,297	1,071
Overhead costs as a percentage of turnover	16.07	18.99	19.50	18.80

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"Reports are easy to read and explained well in the meetings where they are presented".

**NOTE: All data relates to general needs housing, supported housing and housing for older people combined with one exception: the 'all provider' result for housing management excludes supported housing. Although the Smaller Providers metric seeks to level the playing field by excluding the cost of direct support/care provision, it is likely to reflect higher costs associated with supported housing providers' treatment of scheme-based staff, specifically the split between housing management and support and care.*

Regulator for Social Housing

In 2018, the RSH introduced the requirement that all regulated HAs must report in their accounts against specific Value for Money (VFM) metrics.

The RSH intention is that these metrics are a starting point for associations to explore and demonstrate VFM, drawing on other data and evidence (such as that found in the rest of this report) to 'unpack' the headline position.

In the table to the right, the median values for Acuity members (Smaller Providers) are compared with the medians from RSH Global Accounts data for providers owning or managing more than 1000 homes.

Operating margins overall and for social housing lettings are both lower for Smaller Providers, as are reinvestment rates and returns. Cost per unit is also considerably higher by £1401 for Smaller Providers. As a Smaller Provider-only comparison in costs since last year, however, this median increase is negligible (£46). Presentation of the Clubs' annual reports in 2024 highlighted that these metrics are ones where members would welcome training to understand and use this insight better.

	Providers over 1000*	Smaller Providers	2022/23	2023/24	
Operating margin (overall)	19.30	15.52	13.05	16.60	⬆
Operating margin (social housing lettings)	21.1	18.52	13.78	18.82	⬆
EBITDA MRI (as a percentage of interest)	123	200	170	218	⬆
Gearing (RSH and Scorecard measure)	46.8	17.30	14.19	16.00	⬆
New supply delivered (Social housing units)	1.45	0.00	0.00	0.00	⬌
New supply delivered (Non-social housing units)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	⬌
Reinvestment %	8.2	2.70	4.04	2.63	⬇
Return on Capital Employed (ROCE) %	2.8	2.53	2.18	2.64	⬆
Headline social housing cost per unit	5,046	6,447	5,674	5,720	⬆

*The median from the most recent Regulator for Social Housing Value for Money data, published with the global accounts in early 2023 for providers owning / managing > 1000 homes:
[2023 Global Accounts of private registered providers - GOV.UK]

Salaries Survey

Each year, Acuity runs a survey comparing salaries and terms and conditions for smaller housing providers. This year was the 14th edition of the survey.

49 smaller housing providers participated in 2024, and the feedback from participating organisations has been excellent.

Participants receive a detailed report with a comparison and analysis of salaries and other benefits in August 2024. The report was developed with considerable input from members and is intended to help them and their boards judge how the pay and rewards they offer compare with others.

Would you like to see the full details underpinning these figures? If so, please contact Acuity about taking part in the 2025 survey.

"I always find these reports useful, and the statistics they include are used when reviewing and setting salaries each year."

Summary of 2024 Findings

Staff numbers: General Needs providers employ on average 2.54 FTE staff per 100 properties. This is a 0.24 increase from last year.

Staff turnover: Median staff turnover is 13.5%. This is unchanged since last year.

Salary costs: Median total salary costs are 23% of turnover, slightly higher than last year (21%).

For General Needs providers, median salary costs are 19% of turnover, 2% points higher than in 2022.

CEO salaries: The median salary for chief executives is £90,043, 6% higher than last year (£84,900).

Salary increases: The median salary increase is 5%, the same as the previous year.

Overtime & bonuses: 21% of organisations pay overtime and 19% pay bonuses.

Pensions: The median cost of pensions, to employers (including past deficit), is 8.4% of the total salaries bill. This is a reduction of 0.83% from last year.

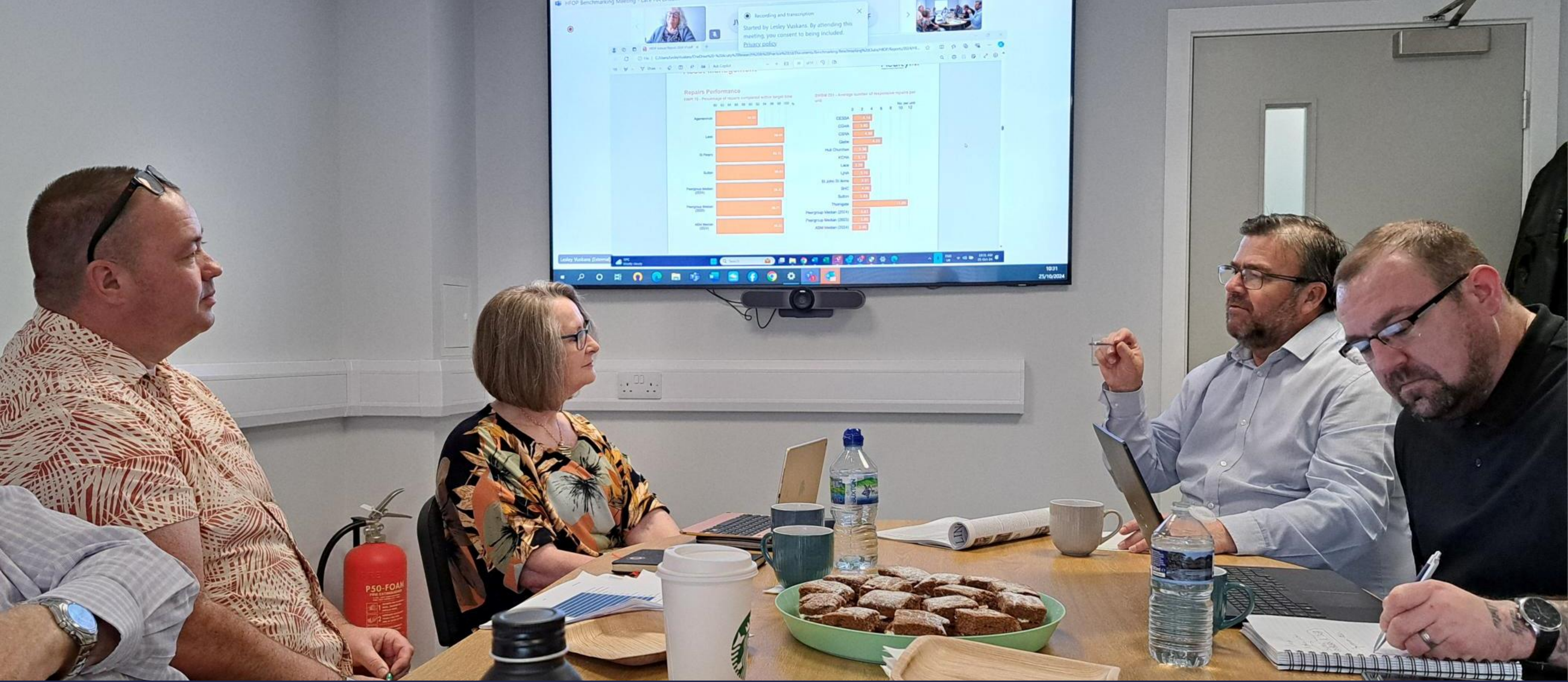
Pension contributions: The average employer contribution is 8% of salary. The average employee contribution is 5%. On average, 87% of staff participate in pension schemes.

Sickness benefits: 63% of organisations offer enhanced sickness absence entitlements. This is a 12% reduction since last year.

Training & development budgets: Organisations spend on average £500 per FTE member of staff. This is 30% less than last year (£714).

Other benefits packages: All participants provide a range of other benefits as part of their staff reward packages; with the most frequent benefits being time off in lieu (TOIL), provision of an appraisal scheme, payment of professional fees, home working, personal development planning (PDP), provision of study time, and employee assistance.

Boards & board remuneration: The average board has nine members. More than one-third of participants remunerate the chair or other board members.



Benchmarking Clubs

"Meetings are a good place to inform, challenge and bring back good practice to my organisation"

Benchmarking Clubs

We currently support the following benchmarking clubs in England:

- London and South East
- Housing for Older People
- Community HAs North West
- South West
- Supported Housing
- West Midlands
- Yorkshire & Humberside

And in Ireland:

- The Housing Alliance

Acuity brings member organisations together in regional and specialist benchmarking clubs, offering the opportunity to meet with colleagues from similar organisations facing similar challenges, to move beyond purely numeric comparisons.

Clubs generally meet quarterly, either face-to-face or online, to network, share ideas and learn from each other. Members have the freedom to determine how their meetings operate, with some electing to hold more face-to-face meetings in recognition of the fuller networking it has enabled in 2024. Members unable to travel, however, can still join remotely. 2024 has also seen some reconfiguring of clubs, with the London and South East (LSEBM) Benchmarking Club now in operation.

Current challenges that clubs have identified to focus on include: improving void turnaround, managing arrears, recruitment and retention, insurance, complaints handling, procurement, internal audit and operational improvement.

We run a variety of ad-hoc benchmarking projects each year with clubs, such as one-off cost comparisons (insurance, audit, telecoms) and projects where members take a collaborative approach in responding to challenges.

We continue to consider requests from members to ensure as granular and relevant benchmarking clubs as possible. Exploration of sub-groups for Care and Almshouses is ongoing following approaches from members. All changes, however, will be determined by the clubs and their members themselves to ensure it serves to benefit the members. A steering group has also been established to share ideas across groups and enable member-led coordination.

About Acuity

Acuity provides consultancy services to help social housing providers improve services and engage with their residents.

We support the benchmarking activities of housing providers in Ireland and the UK, carry out tenant satisfaction surveys, customer research and insight, and we work with staff, Board members and residents to support their learning and development needs.

Our philosophy is to build relationships with clients that enable them to achieve performance and service improvements through access to the highest quality information and learning experiences. Our services are highly flexible and always carefully tailored to the requirements and budgets of our customers. We have been providing consultancy services to the social housing sector since 1998.

Acuity
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