

Annual Review 2020-2021



FOREWORD BY MARTIN PARTINGTON



Martin Partington, Chair of the TDS Board

THE LAST 18 MONTHS HAS SEEN THE WORLD COME TOGETHER IN WAYS WE HAVEN'T SEEN IN OUR LIFETIME. DESPITE THE INCREDIBLE CHALLENGES, WE'VE SEEN PEOPLE, BUSINESSES AND NATIONS ACHIEVE EXTRAORDINARY THINGS, TO SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER IN NEW, INNOVATIVE WAYS TO HELP NAVIGATE THIS NEW NORMAL.

The team at the Dispute Service have proved, once again, that they can deliver an unparalleled service and support to our customers despite such unexpected, unusual and worrying times.

After the fire of our Hemel Hempstead office in September 2019, we had completely upgraded the technology infrastructure moving all services into the cloud and supplying staff with laptops and Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) telephony. This paid dividends on 17 March 2020 when we instructed all staff to work from home because of Covid-19. This meant that we continued to provide a full suite of services without any disruption, right from lockdown through to the time of writing this report in the summer of 2021.

A truly magnificent team of staff and Board members have risen to the challenge of two business continuity crises one after

another. They have managed to maintain support to our industry when it needed it most, to introduce new innovations and technological solutions, and to win much-deserved awards for their efforts. Well done to all involved for their resilience, patience and hard work.

DISPUTE SERVICE BOARD MEMBERS

Martin Partington CBE QC
Chair of the Board

Mark Allan
Commercial Director BUPA

Luay Al-Khatib
*Global Director of Standards and
Professional Development [RICS]*

Jodi Berg OBE
*Chair of National Residential
Landlords Association
[from April 2020]*

David Cox
*Chief Executive ARLA Propertymark
[resigned August 2020]*

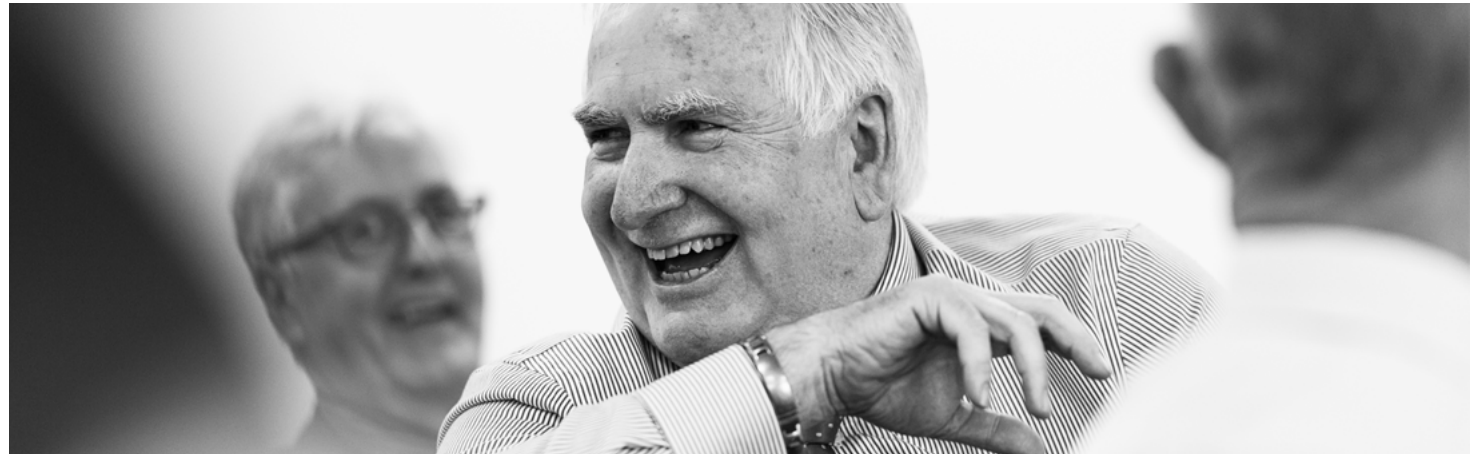
Anda Gregory
*Managing Director, Commercial at
Glass and Glazing Federation*

Mark Hayward
Chief Policy Advisor, Propertymark

Paula Quigley
*Regional Head of Operations Mears
Group plc*

Quincy Hunte
*Principal Advisory Lead for
United Kingdom & Ireland, Amazon
Web Services [Joined October 2020]*

Jacqs Harper
*Digital Director at Nuffield Health
[Joined October 2020]*



Steve Harriott, Group Chief Executive

Steve Harriott
Chief Executive

Nick Hankey
Deputy CEO [Resources]

DISPUTE SERVICE EXECUTIVE TEAM

Steve Harriott
Group Chief Executive

Nick Hankey
Deputy Chief Executive [Resources]

Alex Hillier
*Director of Technology [from May
2020]*

Rebecca Johnston
Director of Business Development

Alison MacDougall
Director of Resolution

Josanne Leon
Head of Human Resources

THE DISPUTE SERVICE

The Dispute Service Ltd is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. The two guarantors are the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and Propertymark. Established in 2003, it operates Tenancy Deposit Scheme (TDS), Insured and Custodial deposit protection schemes in both England and Wales. TDS Northern Ireland Ltd is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Dispute Service. The Dispute Service holds a controlling interest in SafeDeposits Scotland Ltd.

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VALUES

The events of 2020 led to a new set of values for TDS. A year on, this report looks at the progress made in each of these key areas.

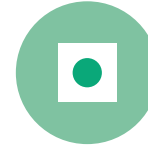
CUSTOMER EXCELLENCE



FAIRNESS



MAKING A DIFFERENCE



TEAMWORK



WHERE WE OPERATE

TDS Northern Ireland

is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Dispute Service, providing both Custodial and Insured tenancy deposit protection.

SafeDeposits Scotland is a Custodial tenancy deposit protection scheme. It is a separate company where the Dispute Service is the key partner and provides the scheme's key operational services.

SDS Resolution is a mediation service helping landlords and tenants resolve issues arising during a tenancy.

Tenancy Deposit Scheme (TDS)

is operated by the Dispute Service providing tenancy deposit protection in England and Wales. TDS offers both Insured deposit protection, **TDS Insured**, and Custodial deposit protection, **TDS Custodial**.

TDS Resolution is a mediation service helping landlords and tenants resolve issues arising during a tenancy.

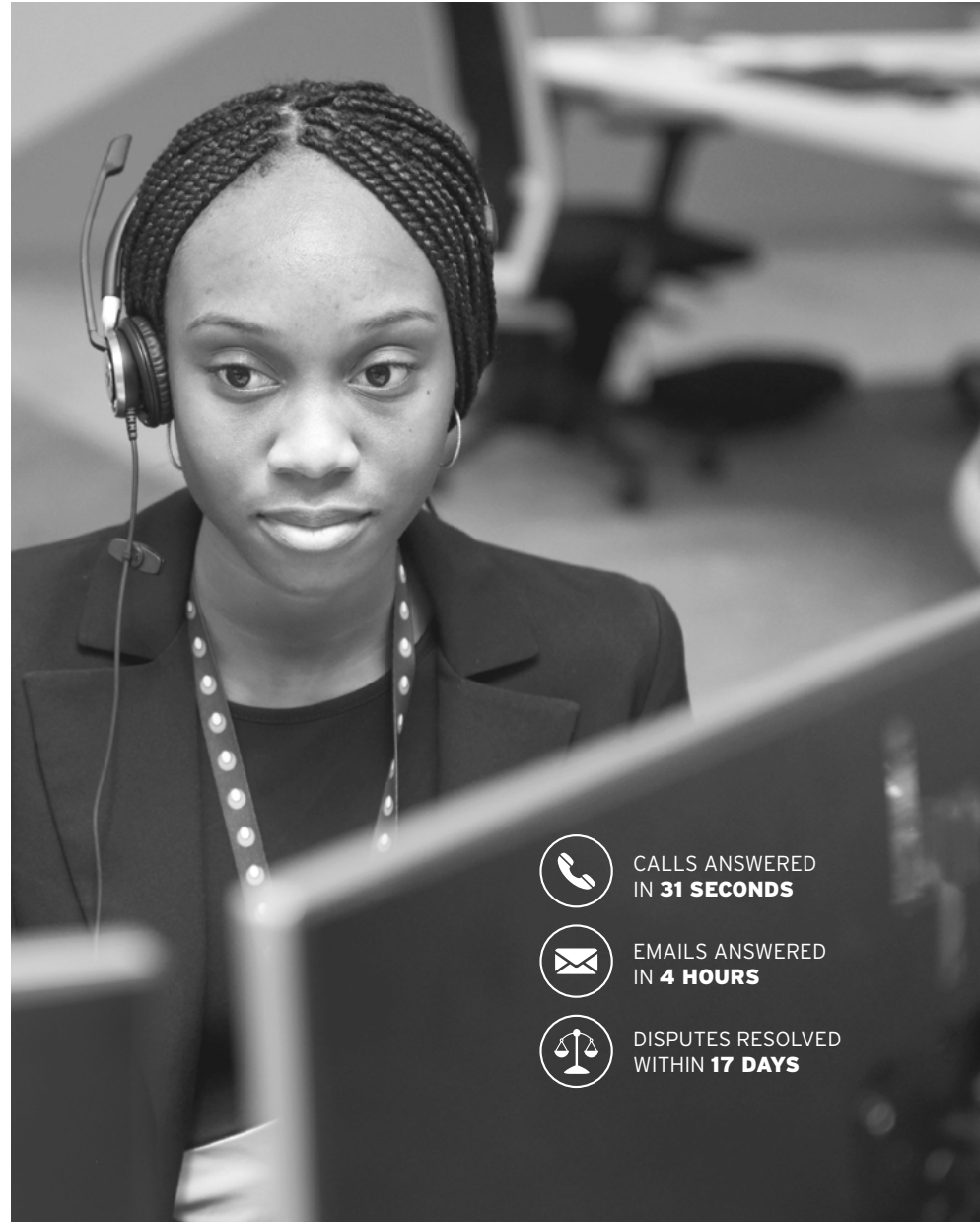


CUSTOMER EXCELLENCE

“PEOPLE DON'T CARE HOW MUCH YOU KNOW UNTIL THEY KNOW HOW MUCH YOU CARE.”

– Theodore Roosevelt

During 2020, we adapted our service quickly to continue supporting our customers remotely during Covid. Our teams came together to maintain service levels from home and move educational resources online in terms of webinars and the new TDS online Academy. Our customer service suffered no downtime, thanks to the extraordinary efforts of our colleagues at TDS.



CALLS ANSWERED
IN **31 SECONDS**



EMAILS ANSWERED
IN **4 HOURS**



DISPUTES RESOLVED
WITHIN **17 DAYS**

“WE ARE THRILLED TO HAVE MADE IT ON TO THIS YEAR'S ESTAS SHORTLIST FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE. OUR CUSTOMERS ARE CORE TO EVERYTHING WE DO AND IT'S FANTASTIC TO HAVE THE WORK RECOGNISED.”

– Steve Harriott

AWARDS

TDS continues to outperform the industry in terms of customer service response. This has been recognised in multiple awards in 2021.

ESTAS

All three TDS schemes (Tenancy Deposit Scheme, SafeDeposits Scotland and TDS Northern Ireland) have been shortlisted in the **ESTAS 2021** for outstanding customer service to customers. The ESTAS is the most notable award scheme in the UK residential property industry.



TDS has also passed its triennial review of the **Customer Service Excellence Award** with 8 areas of our customer service praised by the Assessor. This is a UK Government Cabinet Office backed standard and a tribute to the hard work of all our colleagues at TDS.

CUSTOMER REVIEWS

We continue to receive great feedback from customers through impartial review websites. 75% of customers on Trustpilot have rated TDS as Excellent - the highest score attainable.

FAIRNESS

**“I BELIEVE IN
EQUALITY FOR
EVERYONE.”**

– Mahatma Gandhi

We have built a reputation for fairness in the industry, both internally and externally amongst our customers and also in how we deal with disputes and adjudications.

TDS RESOLUTION SDS RESOLUTION

In response to the pandemic and the announcement from the Ministry of Justice regarding the possible extension of the Pre-Action Protocol for private housing landlords, TDS Resolution was launched to help all in the PRS.

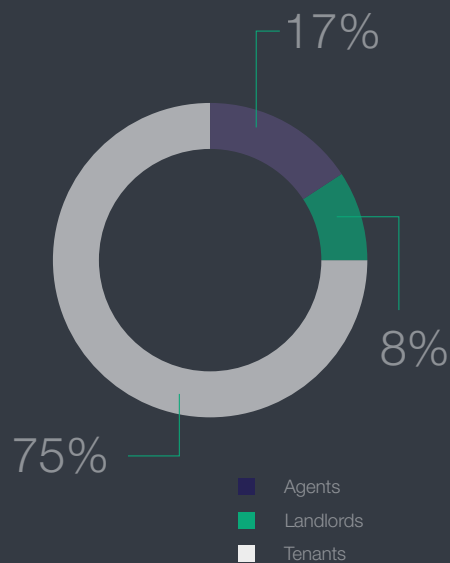
The free service provides a conciliation/mediation service between landlords and tenants and aims to facilitate a satisfactory resolution to tenancy deposit disputes without the need for adjudication or court action.

We also set up SDS Resolution to provide the same service in Scotland, a move endorsed by the Scottish Government.



WHO RAISES DISPUTES?

During 2020/21, 75.5% of dispute applications were initiated by tenants. Just 8% were initiated by landlords and 17% by agents. This is a continuation of a trend seen over the last 5 years with tenants raising more disputes than agents/landlords.



Disputes by applicant 2020/21 (TDS Insured)

WHAT ARE DISPUTES ABOUT?

Most of the disputes raised with TDS involve more than one issue, however cleaning and damage continue to be the most common areas of dispute in 2020/21.

REASON	TDS INSURED	TDS CUSTODIAL	TDS NORTHERN IRELAND	SAFEDEPOSITS SCOTLAND
Cleaning	49%	55%	42%	70%
Damage	35%	45%	40%	43%
Redecoration	26%	30%	27%	20%
Rent arrears	12%	23%	26%	15%
Gardening	15%	11%	12%	9%

WHAT ARE THE ADJUDICATION OUTCOMES?

TDS Adjudicators make their decisions independently and impartially based on the information provided by the parties. During 2020/21, the majority of adjudication outcomes reflected an equal split between agent/landlord and tenant in TDS Insured cases.

AN EXTERNAL REPUTATION FOR FAIRNESS

We continue to ensure fairness in all we do at TDS. To ensure those efforts are being translated outside of the organisation, we conducted a survey amongst TDS customers to see how they perceived TDS both before and after becoming a customer. The feedback below shows the descriptive terms most frequently attributed to TDS by the respondents.

EQUALITY IN TDS

It's one year on since the murder of George Floyd, which ignited a racial justice movement across the globe and prompted unrelenting demands for change. That included the need for a Diversity Working Group at TDS. Since then, we have implemented changes to ensure we promote equality and justice, both as individual leaders and collectively as a company.

- Equality and Diversity training rolled out to all.
- The Executive-led Mentoring programme implemented.
- TDS Values changed to Customer Excellence, Fairness, Teamwork and Making a Difference.
- Monthly nominations for colleagues meeting our Values.
- TDS website updated to include Values, Communities and Colleagues.
- Our Annual Review is now centred on these values too.
- Our website Careers page updated to include new-starters testimonials and company benefits.
- A 'virtual cup of tea' introduced to the recruitment process for external candidates to meet members of the Diversity team.
- Our recruitment package and induction booklet updated to display a true reflection of what it's like to work at TDS.

WHAT WAS YOUR IMPRESSION OF TDS BEFORE BECOMING A CUSTOMER?



Trustworthy



Impartial



Professional

WHAT WAS YOUR IMPRESSION OF TDS AFTER BECOMING A CUSTOMER?



Professional



Efficient



Fair & Impartial



Supportive & Reassuring



Approachable & Friendly



Margaret Doyle, Independent Complaints Reviewer

INDEPENDENT COMPLAINTS REVIEWERS

In England & Wales and Northern Ireland Margaret Doyle is the Independent Complaints Reviewer. Her role is to review complaints about the service where complainants are unhappy with the final stage response given by TDS. She also reviews a sample of complaints responses each year.

In 2020-21 she reviewed four complaints and did not uphold any of them.

However in some cases she made some recommendations as to how the process might have been improved.

During the last year she has also reviewed a number of complaints that were dealt with internally by TDS staff and again has made some recommendations to the Board as to how these might be improved in the future.

Annual Reports

Her full Annual Report is considered by the Board of The Dispute Service and her reports are published [here](#) on the website.

Independence

Margaret Doyle is fully independent of the Dispute Service and reports directly to the Board.

A similar role for SafeDeposits Scotland is undertaken by Carolyn Hirst. In 2020-21 there were no referrals to the Independent Complaints Reviewer for SafeDeposits.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

“WHAT COUNTS IS NOT THE MERE FACT THAT WE HAVE LIVED. IT IS WHAT DIFFERENCE WE HAVE MADE TO THE LIVES OF OTHERS THAT WILL DETERMINE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LIFE WE LEAD.”

– Nelson Mandela

A TIME FOR INNOVATION

It has been an incredibly eventful year. However, with change and challenge comes opportunity. This has forged discussions at TDS on how to make new partnerships within the private rental sector and offer our resolution and mediation services to a wider market.

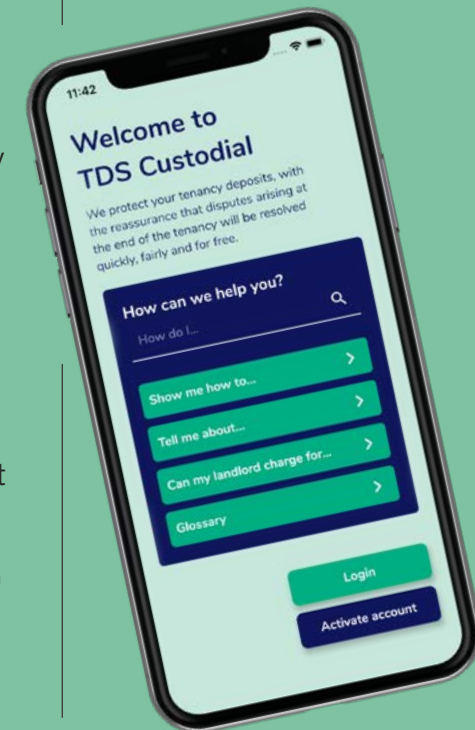
As a result, a commitment was made to make Innovation a part of our Strategic Plan moving forward. In January 2021, TDS hired its first Head of Innovation, Chris Hillier, who immediately set course to create a culture of innovation within TDS, and to educate and train our staff on methodologies and tools in areas like co-design and business modelling.

A TIME FOR NEW TECHNOLOGY

Technology’s role in the property industry has been accelerated during 2020/21. We have been fortunate to have a fast-response, highly competent in-house tech team at TDS that has been able to respond quickly to the industry’s needs and make a difference to the lives of our staff and customers during the past year.

- Secure remote working quickly implemented for business and service continuity
- Webinars and online learning introduced to provide remote education
- Online resources and guides made freely available to all
- New apps developed to streamline the tenancy deposit process

The TDS App and TDS API have been embraced by landlords, agents and tenants during 2020/21.



GUIDANCE

During 2020/21 we have maintained our commitment to provide useful, easy-to-understand guidance for tenants, agents and landlords.



CHARITY

TDS CHARITABLE FOUNDATION AND SAFEDEPOSITS SCOTLAND CHARITABLE TRUST

Both the TDS Charitable Foundation and SafeDeposits Scotland Charitable Trust were set up by the Dispute Service and SafeDeposits Scotland as charities with a mission to “raise standards in the private rented sector through the more effective education of tenants and landlords in best practice in the management of private rented sector housing”.

The TDS Charitable Foundation published its 2021/22 Annual Review which shows that the Private Rented Sector has received over £800k in grants from the charity since it was launched.

TDS staff and colleagues throughout the UK raised £4,675 for charity.

We invited partners and customers from the PRS to join us in the March in March walk to generate much needed funds for Refuge, a domestic violence charity.

During Covid, violence and abuse at home increased. Refuge received over 13,000 calls and messages to its helpline during the pandemic, which was a 60% increase on the normal monthly figures.

To support the charity, TDS set a target of walking the length and breadth of the UK in steps during March 2021. Colleagues in each of the TDS regions (TDS England and Wales, TDS Northern Ireland and SafeDeposits Scotland) all got involved in the cause. They were joined by partners and clients including the NRLA, Inventory Hive, ThinkEngine and Dawsons Estate agents.

Together, we managed to smash both the overall target of walking 7,337 miles.

TEAMWORK

“KEEPING TOGETHER IS PROGRESS. WORKING TOGETHER IS SUCCESS.”

– Henry Ford

The teams at TDS have been outstanding during what has been a challenging year for all in 2020/21.

The customer service team did not stop providing support to our customers. They suffered no downtime at all, despite working remotely, where others in our industry did. This is testament to their incredible resilience and that of our organisation. While they were pulling out all the stops to help our customers, we were doing all we could to support them in their work set-up.

“OVER THE PAST YEAR, WE’VE FOCUSED HEAVILY ON SUPPORTING COLLEAGUES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, HELPING THEM TO COPE WITH REMOTE WORKING. WE ARE INCREDIBLY PROUD OF HOW WELL THEY HAVE ALL DONE IN SUCH UNUSUAL AND CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES.”

– Steve Harriott

BEST COMPANY TO WORK FOR

The Dispute Service and SafeDeposits Scotland have been ranked No.3 in the UK’s Not-for-Profit Companies to work for in the Best Companies Awards 2021.

This year’s award recognised TDS as an exceptional place to work after assessing feedback from staff at the well-known tenancy deposit protection organisation.

In addition to being ranked third in the Top 10 UK Not-for-Profits, TDS was also ranked in the Top 75 Companies in the East of England and Top 100 Mid-Sized Companies in the UK.



TEAMING UP WITH INDUSTRY PARTNERS

Collaboration has always been a vital part of our mission at TDS to raise standards in the PRS. We know we can’t do that alone and by working together with others who share our values, we can help to make our service and our industry better for all.

Together, with our partners below, we have helped to create tools, apps and educational content to make life easier for landlords, agents and tenants during 2020/21.



propertymark



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