Brighter Places

Brighter News

Final touches

PAGE 11

New homes at Elderberry Walk

PAGE 6

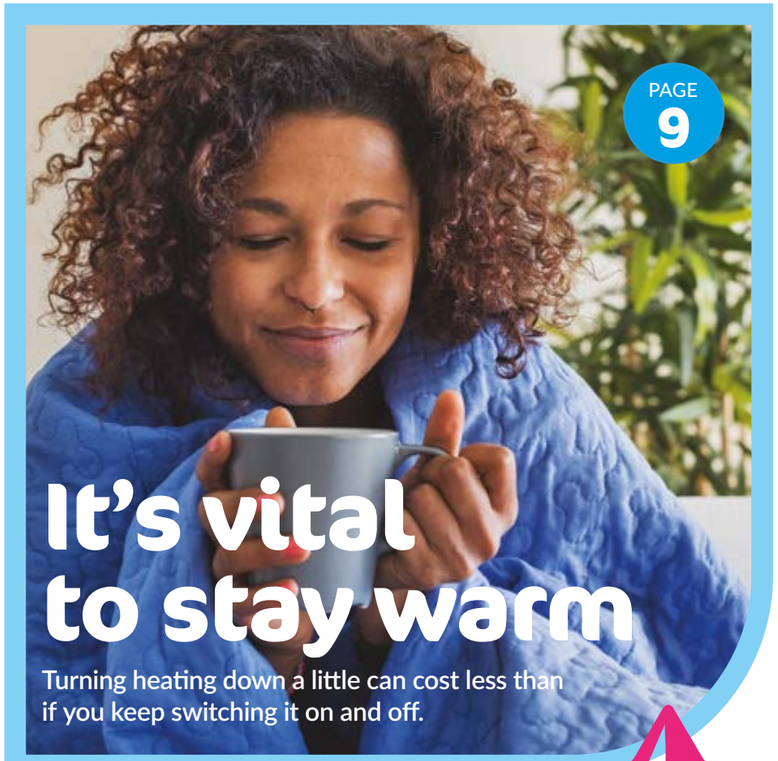
Together again

PAGE 7

St Werburghs centre autumn events

We put you first in the community

Real belonging is about more than a place to live.



PAGE 9

It's vital to stay warm

Turning heating down a little can cost less than if you keep switching it on and off.

Look to the stars! How we are keeping our promises to you

Brighter Places made clear pledges: to ensure high resident involvement and service excellence, to be an outstanding employer, and to deliver 1,000 new homes by 2025. **This star highlights our work to keep these promises.**

PAGE 11

Together anything is possible

Here's the community group now finishing their Shaldon Road homes.

You said – we did!

PAGE 7

What happened when you asked for our help to end a bin store nightmare.

It's all online

Our new website arrives in November, making it easier than ever to manage your tenancy.

- Pay your rent
- Report a repair
- Share your views
- Get in touch

Welcome

How you help design the repairs service

Our number one customer service promise to you was a major overhaul of the repairs service in 2021. This work is now well under way and we want to thank every resident who is involved.

Earlier this year, colleagues met with the engagement panel (see page 4) and a resident group to focus on repairs. We then held a wider resident consultation to understand the customer experience and expectations. In September residents helped us to create new customer care standards that will apply to our repairs service. **You said our new repairs service must:**

- Deliver a high level of customer satisfaction
- Get repairs right first time
- Meet our new customer care standards
- Provide customers with easy ways to report repairs

There will be more opportunities to comment as this work develops.

We said you would decide

Our promise to shape our repairs service with resident input is working. Get in touch via **feedback@brighterplaces.co.uk**

Who do I call for repairs?

While we design the new service together, we continue separate repairs contracts.

Previous Solon residents are served by MD Group and previous United Communities residents by Alliance Homes. We are keen to hear your feedback on both these services. Expect a follow-up call after a repair to discuss your experience or get in touch (see left).

See page 8 for how to report a repair today.

What the uplift really meant

by chief executive Anna Klimczak

On 6 October the government removed the £20 uplift payment that they had added to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit due to the pandemic. Back in August, in the strongest terms I urged them, via several local MPs, not to remove this payment.

That £20 a week was a lifeline for many residents. It removed the daily hardship and worry that can lead to a worsening of mental health and wellbeing.

We see this day to day in our work with residents. Poor mental health affects people in many ways, from struggling to care for yourself or your children to increased anxiety and anti-social behaviour. The impacts are felt negatively on families, neighbours and communities.

You are not alone
If you need support, call our tenancy impact team
see page 12

It is simply not a coincidence that increased reports of anti-social behaviour, particularly domestic arguments, shouting and threatening behaviour, go hand in hand with the question of how to make ends meet.

The uplift was about more than £20 per week: it was about supporting the residents and communities who need it most, vital support that should be reinstated.

Have a say

£50 prizes Give us your views to enter the draw

Our survey in this issue asks what you want to see in **Brighter News** and how you prefer us to communicate with you. Answer the six questions and send back the freepost form and you can enter a draw to win a **£50 shopping voucher.** Don't hold back: feed back! You can enter online at: **brighterplaces.co.uk/survey** when our website launches in November.

Brighter News wins the day

Our title was chosen by you in July, with a clear favourite – **Brighter News –** among many strong suggestions. All entries were put into our prize draw and now £25 vouchers are on their way to two lucky residents and a colleague.

More inside...

5 Fear of sharks
How to spot an illegal money lender and escape the trap

6 Litter-saw-us
Small hands at work on community clean-up

9 Avoid mist and damp
Protect your home from condensation this winter

11 Spending on homes
How we invested in your homes in 2020-21

How residents inspire and steer our team

April 2021 saw 10 residents come together to form the **Brighter Places engagement panel**. Two among these residents, Angela Russell and Pete Kennedy-Watson, stepped up to become the co-chairs of the panel.

Keeping you involved

As promised, there are more ways to have a say than ever before and a bigger team to help you become involved – see below.

Since April, the panel has met every three weeks and has made a fantastic start. They work with colleagues to help us monitor customer service performance, shape services and discuss policies and plans. The aim is to have five colleagues join the panel to ensure a shared approach.

So far, work has focused on:

- Rent and service charges
- Customer feedback policy
- Communication and digital access
- Repairs service review (see page 3)
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- Making the panel accessible to other residents.

What do you think our customer standards should be? We shared all the feedback with residents who came to our recent workshops.

Inside view of co-chair Pete

Pete Kennedy-Watson (right), who is co-chair of the Brighter Places resident panel, talked progress with our resident engagement officer Danielle Jones (far right).

What skills and experience do you bring and how will this help residents to get their views across?

Having chaired and co-chaired panels like this before, I make sure everyone has their voice heard. I have found it to be an extremely rewarding and useful forum for putting residents at the heart of decision-making. I really do think the panel will continue to make positive change for residents – a real voice at the heart of organisation.

"I really do think the panel will continue to make positive change for residents – a real voice at the heart of organisation."

You met Brighter Places chief executive Anna Klimczak and chair of the board James Taylor in July. What did you talk about?

We discussed how the resident panel would work and how we collaborate for the benefit of residents and staff. James and Anna were keen for the panel to attend board meetings. I found it a focused and genuine first step.

The panel covers a wide range of topics. Which ones are priority and why?

We have looked at issues such as the annual rent and service charge review, repairs, and most recently the equality, diversity and inclusion project. Post-merger there were areas we needed to look at immediately – for example, taking steps to improve services that directly affect residents. We hope that the progress will be felt soon.

Pete has been a resident since 2016. He is an NHS researcher and data manager and previously a trustee of Bristol Credit Union. He was an elected officer (Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Equality) at Plymouth University Students' Union.

Join the panel for a meeting online

We want to hear from residents and we have many ways you can get involved. Email Danielle at **engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk** for more information or to share ideas and feedback.

Any resident can join our online meetings as an observer – let us know if you would like to try this. There is also a form on our website to make contact and share feedback.

Are you included?

Brighter Places comes from a strong and proud tradition of social housing that was set up by people determined to improve their own communities and make sure everyone is included. To continue this work, we invest to tackle exclusion and make sure all residents are treated fairly and have equal access to the services they expect and deserve.

We are working with inclusion specialist Aisha Thomas (right), who will be talking to residents, including those experiencing exclusion in different parts of their lives.

Bristolian Aisha studied law at the University of the West of England before moving to education and specialising in Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB). She is a passionate educational activist with a particular interest in race and anti-racist practice.

If you would like more information, contact: engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk

Aisha Thomas is the inclusion specialist leading our work to support thriving communities. @itsaishathomas

Debt support & advice

Could you write off debt?

Since June 2021 more people qualify for a Debt Relief Order. This means thousands more people struggling from Covid-19 costs will be able to write off their debts this year.

Use the online **Find an Adviser** tool which allows you to search for sources of information and advice on benefits, housing, jobs, legal issues and other practical help. It contains details of local, regional and national organisations in all areas of the UK. Go to: **advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk**

How to spot a loan shark

Loan Sharks are illegal money lenders who take advantage of people who are struggling.

With many pay-day lenders going out of business and the pandemic putting extra strain on everyday living costs, more people are turning to illegal lenders to borrow. But help is available. If you think you or someone you know is paying money to a loan shark, visit **stoploansharks.co.uk** to understand your rights and find out more information. You can also talk to our **tenancy impact team** – see page 12.

How we make brighter places

Brighter Places has a community and resident engagement team that is busy involving YOU in decisions and building links within your communities. They make sure resident views are shared with our housing and maintenance teams. Look around these pages to see how we support you to get creative, join a community activity or get things done!

Working directly with you

Our team is big on feedback, events, community action and new ideas.
engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk

Danielle Jones is our resident engagement officer, always coming up with new ways to give residents a say.

Marie Luigi helps to create links among older people, ethnic communities, residents living with a disability, young people, LGBQT+, faith groups and more.

Alex Niven manages all feedback. Your complaints, suggestions and compliments are logged, tracked and resolved.

Claire Moulds provides support to the team and brings rich and wide-ranging experience in events and performance.

Community and resident engagement team (left to right): Alex, Claire, Danielle, Marie and Scott.

Scott Jacobs-Lange is the manager who oversees the team to ensure we increase resident influence and support community involvement.

You and your community

Brighter Places created this specialist community team to help you connect with your kind of people wherever you live.

Outdoor seating is uplift for neighbours

Nathan's first grand seat was so loved by young neighbour Dea that he made a special mini version for her to enjoy.

Upper Horfield carpenter and handyman Nathan Kitchen is not usually sitting around. Instead it's his neighbours who get that pleasure, on hand-crafted thrones he builds for the communal garden.

Self-taught after his stepfather gave him his first woodworking tools, Nathan upcycles pallets to build seating and other furniture for the garden.

"Sharing is caring," says Nathan, who even created this delightful small throne for his young neighbour Dea.

"Nathan's amazing. He built the garden furniture in his own time during lockdown for all residents. My girls love the big chair especially!" said Dea's mum, Jasmeet.

Nathan's thoughtful acts do not stop there. He also helps neighbours whose first language is not English to arrange repairs and understand letters they get, building trust and respect among residents.

An accomplished street artist and tattooist, Nathan has work across Bristol. With his zoo keeper partner he also fosters small animals. Luckily for the neighbours, this huge creative talent is often shared right on their doorstep.

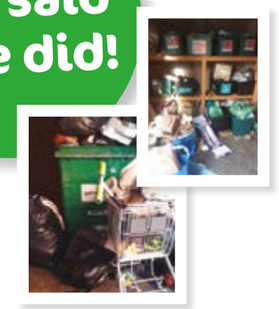
You said – we did!

An end to waste misery

Fly-tipping, infestation and odour are common waste headaches, but this summer residents from Sheaves Park in Southmead decided to act.

With funds from our estate improvement budget, their ideas to improve the bin store came to life. With help from Bristol Waste we transformed the store and gave each flat its own waste and recycling section in a locked unit .

Could we improve your estate? Email **engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk**

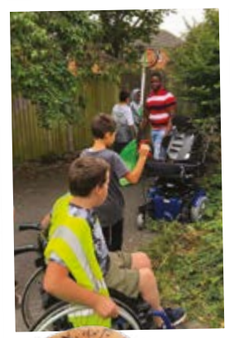


BEFORE: Overflowing bins and fly-tipping had overwhelmed the shared facility.

AFTER: Open plan design, extra lighting and locked access have transformed the space.

"It's made such a difference to how the estate looks and feels."
Sheaves Park resident

Green Close lives up to its name

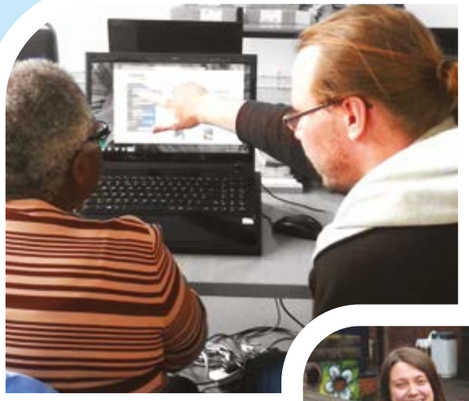


Thanks to the energy and determination of younger residents – and a friendly dinosaur – one Horfield neighbourhood was looking much brighter earlier this year.

With Bristol Waste, Brighter Places supported residents to organise a community litter-pick. Local children joined in along with the neighbourhood police and we discussed ideas for future community projects. A well-earned lunch was enjoyed by all.

"The children worked really hard. They collected eleven bags of rubbish and recycling. They enjoyed it so much, they're doing it again next week!" said Marie Luigi, our community engagement officer.

Want to create a litter-picking event near you? Call **0117 942 4600** or email **engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk**



Social hubs are back

St Werburghs community centre is open for learning, food support and fun activities for all ages.

The community centre in St Werburghs has re-opened its doors to offer classes, drop-in clubs and meeting and events spaces for individuals, groups and businesses. Here's a taste for the autumn.

- Easy PC, one-to-one computer skills to help older people get online.
- Computer access (10am to 9pm), first come first served.
- Support with CVs, cover letters, emails, scanning, printing and admin skills.
- Raking and Baking, a seven-week free course on food growing and healthy cooking (starts 4 November).
- Stay and Play, an adult-accompanied free weekly toddler group with voluntary support.
- Tai Chi for the over 50s, to improve mobility and mental health (£3 per class).

St Werburghs Community Centre
Horley Road, St Werburghs, BS2 9TJ
0117 955 1351 stwerburghs.org.uk

Make local more vocal

Shout out to all the residents who are busy making things happen in their local community. Share your stories with us and we'll tell the world and offer you support where possible. No idea is too small – or too big! We'd love to hear from you. Send details to engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk

Who are your local housing team?

Brighter Places has a dedicated group of colleagues for each area. You have your own housing officer, income officer and lettings support colleague. All areas and colleagues are listed below. To get in touch, please email: info@brighterplaces.co.uk or call 0117 942 4600.

UPPER EASTON, EASTVILLE & ST GEORGE
Housing officer: **Nicola**
Income officer: **Trina**
Housing & lettings: **Sarah**

CENTRAL ST PAULS, CITY CENTRE & LOWER EASTON
Housing officer: **Paul**
Income officer: **David**
Housing & lettings: **Sarah**

HORFIELD, SOUTHMEAD & WEST BRISTOL
Housing officer: **Megan**
Income officer: **Katie**
Housing & lettings: **Maria**

HORFIELD, LOCKLEAZE & CHESWICK
Housing officer: **Michelle**
Income officer: **David**
Housing & lettings: **Maria**

SWINDON, NORTH & EAST BRISTOL
Housing officer: **Ella**
Income officer: **Katie**
Housing & lettings: **Sarah**

SOUTH BRISTOL
Housing officer: **Kym**
Income officer: **Trina**
Housing & lettings: **Maria**

PRIVATE RENTED HOMES
Housing officer: **Lisa**

To report a repair

Previous United Communities residents

0117 942 4600

Emergency repair when office is closed or at weekends:
0800 054 2180

Previous Solon residents

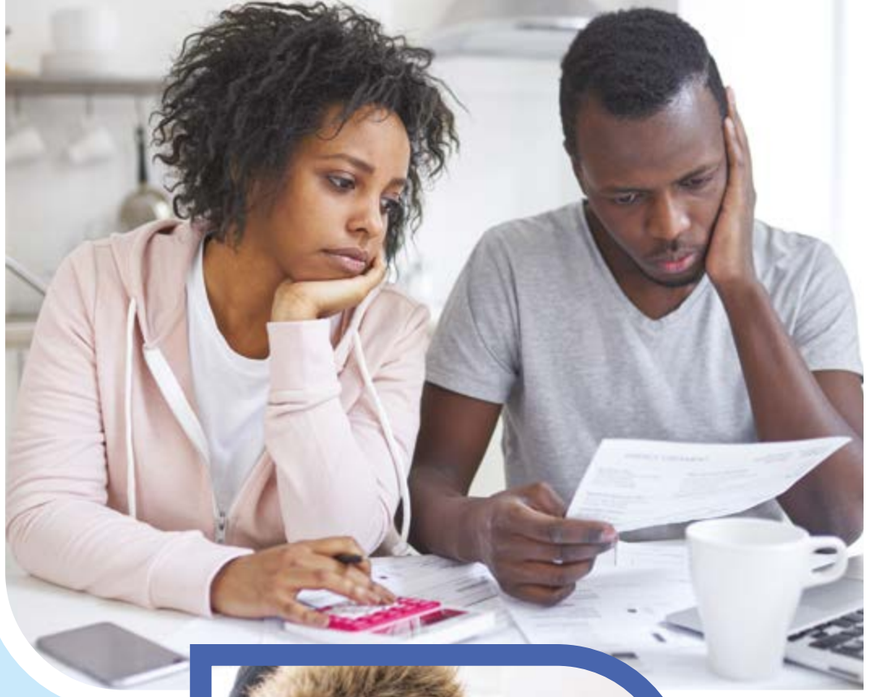
0117 916 4071

Emergency repair:
0330 726 0193

Urgent gas repair:
Gregor Heating
0117 947 9034

Smell Gas?

CALL 0800 111 999 IMMEDIATELY 24/7
This is Transco, the National Gas Emergency Service.



Prepare for the winter months

As temperatures drop, most of us will be spending a lot more time indoors. Keep your home safe and warm so you stay well. Take steps to manage heating costs carefully and prevent condensation.

As it gets colder, keep your home at a set temperature of between 18 and 21 degrees. A steady lower temperature is better than switching heating on and off.

If you let your home get cold, it takes more fuel to heat it up again than if you left it on low. A steady temperature also stops condensation.

With high fuel price rises, you need to look at ways to manage fuel costs. There is free help online to make it easy to look for better deals. Go to: energycompare.citizensadvice.org.uk

To switch, it helps if you know how much you use or how much you pay.

You may also qualify for winter fuel payments or the Warm Home Discount. Find out more at: gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme

Don't get steamed up

Follow these tips to help reduce moisture and stop condensation

- Keep furniture away from radiators.
- Don't dry clothes on radiators – heat needs to circulate freely.
- Open the window in the kitchen or bathroom for a short while if you are cooking or bathing and making lots of steam. Once the steam has cleared, close the window again.

Check your heating now!

- Test your heating to make sure it is working correctly. Don't wait until the first cold snap to switch it on. If you think there is a problem, let us know.
- If your guttering or external pipes leak, report it to us and we will get it fixed.
- Remember, if you go away from home for 24 hours or more, turn off the main internal stopcock or isolation valve so your pipes don't freeze.

Cost worries? We are here

If you are struggling, please pick up the phone or email our team. There is so much we can do to help immediately and to make longer term plans with you. Call 0117 942 4600 or email: info@brighterplaces.co.uk.

Find more information and support on our website: brighterplaces.co.uk

Moving in

At last a place to call home

Brighter Places has an ambitious housebuilding programme that will deliver more than 1,000 homes by 2025. The real reward comes when homes become occupied. Then residents put housing stress behind them and start to look forward in life.

Crisis support that became stable housing

Fully furnished units offer a secure base to residents able to move off the streets during the first lockdown.

Last summer saw the final touches made to a renovation of three Victorian houses as part of the 'Next Step' accommodation programme in Bristol. The fast turnaround achieved – just nine months from funding approval – proved what's possible when agencies come together with housing providers to make homes happen.

These six flats are now providing supported housing to previous rough sleepers who received emergency support in the 2019 Covid crisis.

Along with high quality 'retrofit' renovation to ensure energy efficiency (triple glazing, wall and floor insulation), residents are offered personal support, via Bristol City Council and St Mungo's.

Moving on is sign of success

Through Brighter Places, residents at Rackfield House move on to independent tenancies.

Rackfield House in Bath offers specialist services for homeless men and women for up to two years, to support recovery from homelessness and associated issues. Support around mental health, employment, training and probation is managed via a dedicated local specialist team.

In the past few months, one resident has moved into a garden flat locally on a 12-month starter tenancy. Another secured their own bedsit and expressed gratitude at the outcome: "Thank you for everything you and your staff have done for me. I now have a lovely home, thanks to Rackfield."

The two spaces freed up have already been offered to new residents in the facility, which supports people aged 18-65 who are referred via a team of specialist support workers. The whole team is immensely proud to support life-changing personal development and positive outcomes.

1,000 new homes by 2025

We are on track to deliver the homes in our merger promise.

Buy a little, dream a lot

After seven years of private renting, Monika and Wojciech wished for somewhere to call home in an area of Bristol they love. Shared ownership helped them realise their dream.

The couple had expected to rent and didn't think they had any other option until a friend mentioned shared ownership, where you buy a part share of a property and rent the other share.

Monika recalls how surprised they were to discover that high prices and the need for a substantial deposit would not stand in their way. Since they were buying only a share of the property, they also qualified for a shorter-term mortgage which took account of salaries and retirement plans.

After a few months of searching, they found a two-bedroom house in the heart of their desired area.

Six months on, Monika and Wojciech are thrilled with their home. Now they are looking to 'staircase', so that over time they will pay less rent and eventually own the whole property – a choice available to shared ownership tenants who can afford this option.

Would they recommend shared ownership? "Of course we do. The staff were very helpful and friendly."

Their top tip? "It is key to regularly check property listings on the Help to Buy website, ask questions and – most importantly – keep the dream alive."

More info from Help to Buy South at: helptobuyagent3.org.uk

New homes

Completed in March 2021

Bedminster Road

Residents have now moved into this development of 29 new homes.

Due to complete in winter 2021

Elderberry Walk

This development of 77 new homes in Southmead includes 41 for affordable rent and 36 for shared ownership.

Due to complete in autumn 2022

Luckwell Road

The 67 homes on this site will complete towards the end of 2022 and provide 47 rented units and 20 shared ownership.

Due to complete in winter 2021

Shaldon Road

The 50 homes completing this winter are a mix of 26 affordable rent and 24 shared ownership.

St Johns Lane

Planning go-ahead is confirmed on this development of 36 homes.

Marshfield

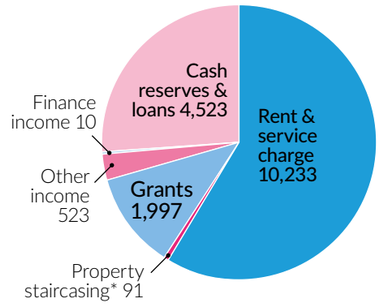
Planning permission is being sought for this development of 15 homes.

Annual accounts

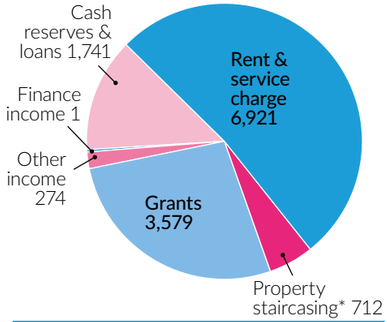
How we invested in 2020-21

Brighter Places was formed in April 2021, at the start of the new financial year. So the charts below show the income and spending for United Communities and Solon before we merged to become Brighter Places. The figures show high levels of investment in existing homes and the breakdown of spending.
Figures are in £000s (thousands).

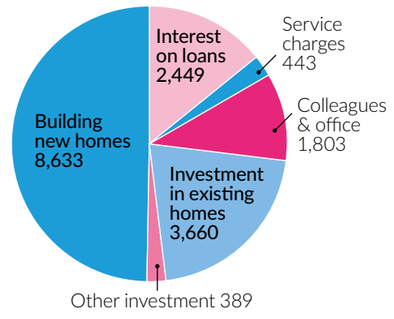
United Communities income: £17,377k



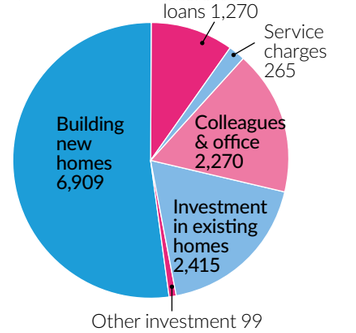
Solon income: £13,228k



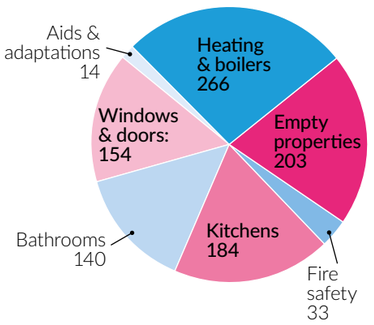
United Communities spending: £17,377k



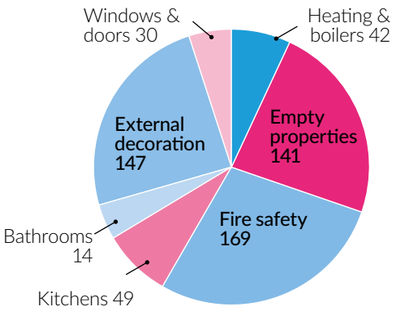
Solon spending: £13,228k



United Communities capital investment in existing homes: £994K



Solon capital investment in existing homes: £583K



* From residents buying more shares via shared ownership.

Tenancy support is here for you

Please don't struggle on your own if you need some support or advice. We have a specialist team on hand to help. If you are worrying about the following, please get in touch.

- Mental health
- Rent arrears and other debt
- Fuel costs and utility bills
- Mobility in your home
- Furniture and appliances
- Lack of food

Call or email our team. There is so much we can do to help immediately and to make longer term plans with you. Call **0117 942 4600** or email: **tenancyimpact@brighterplaces.co.uk**

Please let us know if you would like this document in another format such as large print or another language. A digital copy is on our website.

Brighter Places
Building better futures

Find links to all our services online
brighterplaces.co.uk

Contact us

By phone

General enquiries
0117 942 4600

Previous Solon residents
0117 924 4071

Previous United Communities residents
0117 942 4600

Monday: 8.30am – 5pm
Tuesday: 8.30am – 5pm
Wednesday: 10.30am – 5pm
Thursday: 8.30am – 5pm
Friday: 8.30am – 4.30pm

By email
info@brighterplaces.co.uk

Office address
Eden House
Eastgate Office Park
Bristol BS5 6XX

wearebrighterplaces
brighterplaces_
wearebrighterplaces

Pay your rent

Report a repair

Tenancy support

All information is correct at time of publication.