Brighter Places

Brighter News

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We're part of the Bristol entry for this international challenge

Help to get the June party started

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Community support for Jubilee holiday

Fresh thinking

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Our five-year strategy launches in April

Finding our way together

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Resident co-chair Angela says the engagement panel is working well and all residents are invited to attend panel meetings.

Find out how well merger promises are being met

One year on, read the update on progress for each of the promises we made to residents. Find out which are complete, which are still in progress and how longer-term promises will be completed.

Read our quick summary on page 8.

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It's all here in our five-year strategy

£40m investment in existing homes is set out in our formal strategy published his month.

You said we did!

PAGE 10

Communal spaces are improving, co-designed by residents with our support.

Join the panel

We are looking for residents to join our engagement panel. Anyone can apply. Full details online.

- Share your views
- Scrutinise performance
- Influence the board
- Bring real change

Best three options for repairs now being discussed

Launch of the all-new service gets closer as we choose together.

Following resident consultations in 2021 we are looking at which repairs service might suit us best.

There are three clear options: an external supplier, an in-house service, or a partnership service with another housing association.

A full proposal will be delivered to the board in May and discussed with the engagement panel. A wider resident consultation will then follow, later this year. Our launch in 2023 is on target (see page 6). Meanwhile, our customer satisfaction figures show that current services are continuing to improve (see page 4). **Do you need a repair? See page 12 for who to call.**

What's behind the April rent increase?

All residents have been sent a letter to explain how the rent rise of 4.1% this year was calculated. The letter covers rent and service charge rates where this applies.

The increase reflects rising costs we are paying, but it's never easy to put up the rent. We recognise the impact this can have and we have income officers who understand and can offer support if you are worried.

Before we set the rent, we met residents on the engagement panel to look at how services would be impacted if we kept rents at the same level. The panel accepted the need for the increase.

Inflation is the highest it has been since 2011 and it is still going up. Last September it was 3.1%. We used this rate and added 1% set by the government formula. So the overall increase is 4.1%. Please do get in touch with our income officers if you are struggling to pay. Call us on 0117 942 4600.

Check the leaflet we sent with the rent increase letter. It includes further support.

Rising inflation means we have to increase rents to deliver our services.

Team effort saves the day

For Vanessa of Chipping Sodbury, a nasty kitchen fire last winter could have been a disaster. Instead, we sprang into action, re-housing the family, repairing and redecorating.

"I was so grateful that Brighter Places worked so efficiently to get me back in within five days, and just days before Christmas.

"Marie, my housing officer, was in regular contact throughout. Mark was fantastic – he really worked hard to get everything turned around," she said. Happily, Vanessa had insurance so even the decorations were replaced. "It has covered most of my damage," she added.

Vanessa and dog Mabel were back home just 5 days after the fire.

Do you have insurance? We can recommend My Home Contents Insurance. Call 0345 450 7288 or visit **thistlemyhome.co.uk**

More inside...

4 £50 winners
Our communication survey winter draw is announced

8 Resident blog
Notes of engagement panel meetings are shared online

11 How we build for the future
Construction methods for net zero carbon ambitions

Customer service

Everyday quality standards are set

In 2021, 48 residents attended one of our drop-in sessions to help us set the level of customer care you can expect. We used these conversations to draft some customer care standards and then consulted again online to refine and prioritise them. Now they are published in full on our website.

The standards focus on respect, trust, excellent communication, secure and accurate data, and dealing with you fairly, honestly and consistently. The 18 standards go into detail to explain exactly how we will work with you and what good customer care will look like. They also strongly reflect and build upon standards agreed within Solon and United Communities ahead of merger.

We will continue to review the standards so they remain relevant and will monitor our performance against them, reporting to residents via the engagement panel and other channels.

Our customer care principle

Brighter Places treats all of our residents as valued customers and strives to uphold the customer care quality standards in every aspect of service delivery. We ask in return that you engage with us constructively so we can continually improve the services we provide.

The current list of 18 standards is online:

brighterplaces.co.uk/customer-care

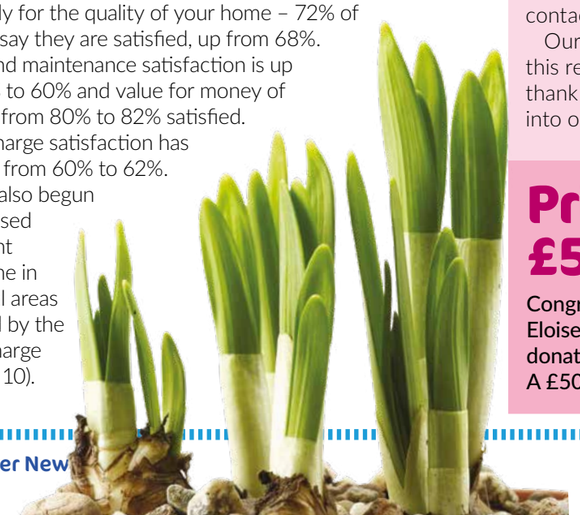
Green shoots as satisfaction goes up

Our five-year corporate strategy sets high targets for customer satisfaction. We are confident we will meet them.

In the 12 months since Brighter Places was formed, we have been working hard towards this. We are not where we need to be just yet, but improvements are starting to show.

There were some dips in satisfaction last summer in relation to value for money for rent and service charge and for customer service measures on listening and acting on what you say and being easy to deal with. As we settled in as a new organisation during the pandemic we implemented new combined systems which take a while to embed and deliver the service we want.

Now satisfaction is higher across all measures, particularly for the quality of your home – 72% of residents say they are satisfied, up from 68%. Repairs and maintenance satisfaction is up from 52% to 60% and value for money of rent is up from 80% to 82% satisfied. Service charge satisfaction has increased from 60% to 62%. We have also begun our promised investment programme in communal areas – covered by the service charge (see page 10).



How you like to be in touch

Good communication from us means supplying useful, relevant information in a way that suits you and via the channels you prefer – websites, social media, text, WhatsApp and so on. We are also keeping phone and person contact options.

It's vital that we understand how many residents are online as we develop more web-based customer services in the next couple of years. This helps us to improve communication and understand what other channels are needed for contact or extra support.

Our autumn survey about this received many replies – thank you! These are feeding into our decision-making.

Prize draw £50 winners

Congratulations to our prize draw winners Eloise Cockell, Tom Mcveigh and Kate Talbot. Kate is donating her prize-equivalent to the Ukraine appeal. A £50 shopping voucher is on its way.

Corporate strategy 2022-27

Our five-year journey together

How we will improve repairs, energy efficiency, communal areas and overall quality is set out in a report published this month.

Our five-year strategy has clear targets and a £40m investment plan for existing homes. It explains where we are today, what we aim to do and how we will achieve our aims. It also sets out how residents will help shape this journey every step of the way. Turn the page for an overview of this journey.

Improved repairs + customer service

Our responsive repairs service gets special attention. This is one of our top priorities and is on track for:

- 90% satisfaction with our repairs service by 2027
- Our new service will be in place from 2023 for rental homes and from 2024 for shared ownership
- Externally approved customer service excellence by 2024-25
- 85% resident satisfaction with landlord services by 2027
- 50% reduction in complaints by 2027

Home quality, safety + energy efficiency

In 2021 our full survey and energy assessment of all homes showed where we need to invest. A new annual Property Safety MOT will keep this up-to-date. Working with residents we have already begun to improve communal areas (see page 10). We are aiming for:

- 100% of homes to achieve an EPC rating C by 2030 – one-third of existing homes will be improved
- All safety work relating to asbestos, lifts, fire, legionella, gas and electrical safety to continue to meet all current and new standards
- All communal areas in blocks of flats to be improved
- 100% of homes to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050

See pages 6 and 7 for how we've planned improvements and investment over the next five years.

Full report on our website

Our five-year strategy is available as a PDF online. Go to: **brighterplaces.co.uk/publications** to read or download a copy or call us and we will send one to you.

Our five-year journey together

Year 1 2022-23

Great customer experience

- Customer care standards launch
- Service charge review
- New online services

Repairs
New service develops

Great homes and partnerships

Investment 30 year plan agreed

Existing homes
- Communal area improvement
- Property Safety MOTs begin

Energy efficiency
Upgrades to EPC C begin

Decarbonisation Strategy

£35m Investment secured

Equality, Diversity + Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

Great place to work

Colleague training
- Brighter Places University begins
- Apprenticeship programme launched

Race, ethnicity and gender identity survey

Year 2 2023-24

Great customer experience

Repairs
New service launch

Great homes and partnerships

New Homes
- 42 multi-generational homes begin
- 50 homes on a shared heating network

No gas boilers in new homes

Existing homes
- New property standard agreed
- Net zero carbon retrofit pilot begins

Great place to work

1st Brighter Places resident conference

Report repairs online

Digital strategy finalised

'Best Companies' external rating

Year 3 2024-25

Great customer experience

Repairs
Shared ownership service begins

Customers
External measure of service

Resident satisfaction census

EDI

40% diversity among board, executive and senior managers

500 new homes on-site

Energy efficiency
EV charging for all new homes

Factory-made homes begin

Year 4 2025-26

Energy efficiency
EPC C upgrades 50% complete

Great homes and partnerships

Customers
Ongoing focus on service improvement

Year 5 2026-27

Great customer experience

80% satisfaction with repairs

Top 25% for customer satisfaction

Great place to work

80% job satisfaction

Fully skilled workforce

Great homes and partnerships

30% of homes are community-led

£40m invested in existing homes

1,000 new homes delivered in partnership
- 70% rental
- 30% shared ownership

Keeping our merger promises

One year on from the launch of Brighter Places, we have seen real progress in the delivery of promises we made to our customers, even during the pandemic.

Many of the promises are already fulfilled. The bigger ones – like our new repairs service – are well on their way. The Brighter Places five-year strategy, launched this month, provides details and dates for all promises that we still need to complete. Here is a report of progress.

Promise
Improved customer service

PROGRESS We have invested in people and training, with a bigger customer service team and an expanded tenancy impact team for when you need advice or support. See page 12 for details of support and how to get in touch.

Promise
Keeping a personal service

PROGRESS Following wide consultation with residents, the new customer care standards (see page 4) have been agreed and our new systems and staff teams are delivering on the promises.
brighterplaces.co.uk/customer-care

Promise
An improved office for colleagues and residents

PROGRESS Our upgraded office opened in January 2021, a shared base for colleagues following the merger of United Communities and Solon. We were not open during the pandemic but are now welcoming visitors again.

Promise
More resident involvement and transparency

PROGRESS The engagement panel meets regularly and receives quarterly updates on progress against these promises made to residents. Progress is also published in meeting notes online and in this magazine. We also launched Connected Voices to engage with all residents on specific issues. See page 10 for more details.
brighterplaces.co.uk/get-involved

Promise
New website and online services

PROGRESS Our new website launched in 2021. Our new online services will be available to all residents in 2022-23. Reporting repairs will be available online by 2023-24. We are also keeping open options for phone and person contact.

Promise
Overhaul of the repairs service

PROGRESS Former Solon residents have an interim contractor, MD, for improved repairs while we consult with residents and colleagues to develop a new repairs contract. New repairs standards are being agreed with the engagement panel and a new health and safety framework has been adopted. See page 3 for an update on progress and next steps.

Promise
Equality and diversity

PROGRESS Our latest two board members are from ethnically diverse backgrounds, including one resident. We have also set targets to improve diversity in our workforce. Our first apprentice was appointed in January, and we will recruit more later this year. This opportunity is open to anyone in the communities we serve.

Longer-term promises

On pages 6 and 7 we offer an overview of our strategy, covering many aspects of the promises that were set out in our Customer Service Proposal at merger, including improvements to existing homes.

- £40 million investment in home improvements
- Property Safety MOT for your home
- Improved energy efficiency measures
- Improved quality of fixtures and fittings in every home
- Communal area improvements

What it means to 'have a say'

Resident and co-chair Angela Russell explains how the engagement panel is involved in decisions with Brighter Places.

"Working with Brighter Places colleagues from across the business has enabled the panel to help shape and influence decisions by providing comments, suggestions and scrutiny from a resident perspective.

"There is always a two-way conversation with the executive team. This makes us feel confident that we are listened to. We are always provided with feedback, an outcome or progress update, or a decision.

"The panel has been involved in the customer feedback policy, repairs options appraisal, helping shape customer standards and rent review proposals.

"The structure and role of the panel bridges the gap from the board all through the business, right across to the resident base. We have felt heard at all levels and have seen a genuine commitment from Brighter Places that residents are at its heart.

"As a panel we have always been treated with respect and shown realism, which enables us to trust Brighter Places and feel confident that we can support other residents now and in the future as engagement grows and we begin to empower other residents.

"Residents can attend panel meetings as observers. See: **brighterplaces.co.uk/engagement-panel**

"I feel as though we are part of Brighter Places, not just as residents, but we are valued in so many ways. We are always progressing and have remained positive throughout. We really have found our way together.""
Angela Russell, Co-chair, engagement panel

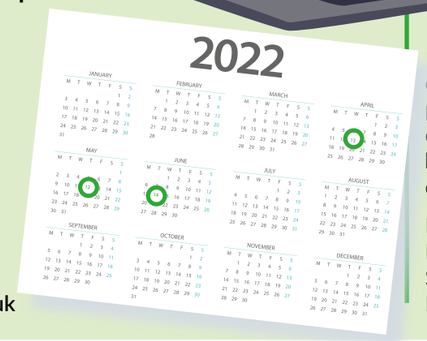
"We have so many exciting things on our radar! We have space for new panel members, and we are hoping to have Brighter Places colleagues join the panel shortly. We are keen to get into our communities and hope to be able to host some community roadshows.

"We will be focusing on building a stronger connection with our board, attending each other's meetings and ensuring regular, planned opportunities to touch base about specific interests. We will also be reviewing policies and procedures and will be involved in the Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategy and repairs options assessment."

Follow every meeting
Our new resident blog

Panel members now post short blogs from their regular meetings to keep you updated: brighterplaces.co.uk/engagement-panel
It's a great way to see what's going on and join in. Remember: any resident can come to these meetings as an observer and you can join us online. Meetings are from 5pm to 6.30pm.
Next meetings
- Wednesday 13 April 5pm
- Thursday 12 May 5pm
- Tuesday 14 June 5pm

Want to join us? Email: **engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk**



Could you join our panel?

We want to welcome more residents to the engagement panel. We are inviting applications and no experience is necessary.
Get in touch if you are interested. We will arrange a 1-2-1 meeting with one of our friendly co-chairs and then have a selection process. If you are interested, fill out our form at:
brighterplaces.co.uk/join-the-panel
or call us on **0117 942 4600**

Deadline: **Friday 15 April**
Meetings: **from Monday 18 April**
Selection: **by Friday 29 April**
First meeting: **Thursday 12 May 5pm**

Shared vision for communal areas

Giving spaces a lift: a pilot project at The Quarrys began with a resident clean-up of fly-tipping.

Huge thanks to residents from Fedden Buildings in Lockleaze and The Quarrys in Lawrence Weston for their great feedback to help us plan improvements to communal areas.

Our consultation events in January and February were pilot projects to understand resident priorities before work begins. They also helped us develop a model for how other residents can shape improvements for communal areas in the years ahead.

Residents fed back on internal storage, the bin areas, decoration and security. At The Quarrys, residents were also supported to clear their communal garden and bin store of fly-tipping. This helped us see how the space could be used in a positive way.

We then created proposals for improvements in March and gave residents the chance to comment and confirm some choices – for example, to decide if new storage is flexible enough for their needs. Work has begun at both locations and we're following up with residents on decisions such as colours for floors, walls and storage needed.

You can be the voice of change

Residents who would like to join others to discuss our services or share ideas for community projects can sign up to Connected Voices via our website or by email.

We will then get things moving to help you connect with others and bring about change. Just tell us your topic of interest and we'll team you up with other residents who have similar interests and set up discussion groups.

A member of our team will help you to get things started and take a note of ideas and suggestions that emerge. Ideas for groups could include:

- Repairs service
- Online access to our services
- Equality issues
- Ideas for local community projects such as events or litterpicks

You decide the topic. There's no commitment – just join in as much or as little as you want to.

When we start talking about things, we start finding solutions. What are you waiting for? Join now, connect with others and be the change!

brighterplaces.co.uk/connected-voices

Want more of these updates?

Sign up to the Brighter News monthly email where we share community news, events and opportunities.

brighterplaces.co.uk/publications

Help to get the June party started

Brighter Places is making some funding available for communities who would like to organise a community event during the Platinum Jubilee weekend of 2-5 June.

Apply for funds by 28 April

Applications for up to £150 can be made by locally based, voluntary and community groups towards free-to-access activities between 2 and 5 June in communities where Brighter Places has homes. Any resident or group who wants to discuss ideas or apply should call the engagement team on **0117 450 9429** or email **engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk**

Support and information on running a play activity or street party is available at:

- playingout.net/what-can-i-do
- bit.ly/streetpartyguidance

Finalist for climate-smart homes

Brighter Places has been selected as a finalist in the Climate Smart Cities Challenge for the Bristol region. The challenge is to identify innovative solutions to reduce the climate impact in four cities, Bogotá, Colombia; Curitiba, Brazil; Makindye Ssabagabo, Uganda; and Bristol, creating a better future for all.

Brighter Places was selected for our Passivhaus approach, using low carbon technologies such as ground source heat pumps, air-tight membranes with mechanical ventilation heat recovery (MVHR) systems, triple glazing, solar panels and super-insulation.

Now we'll be supported by local partners and work with the other finalists to progress our ideas and develop a team. Four teams will be selected to move into the system demonstration phase of the challenge in 2023. Watch this space. **climatesmart.citieschallenge.org**

Our LaunchPad factory-built homes in Fishponds helped us become a Climate Smart Cities finalist.

Low energy construction

Our latest low carbon homes at Luckwell Road in Bedminster (67 flats and houses) are built using Porotherm blocks. These are perforated clay bricks engineered to have high strength and thermal efficiency.

Porotherm low carbon blocks are constructed without the use of chemicals.

They are cost-effective, environmentally friendly and highly durable – part of our Passivhaus technology creating ultra-low carbon homes. No chemicals are used in making the bricks, creating a healthier construction, particularly for people with allergies. The homes are expected to be completed in spring 2023.

Moving in and moving on with support

Our partnership project to provide housing for 18 young people in Yate is showing how support, training and high quality accommodation offer a route to greater independence.

In the 12 months since opening, Woodleaze has supported 34 young people through 1625 Independent People (1625IP) and South Gloucestershire Council. Fifteen residents have already transferred to more independent housing.

Support activities at the centre include art-based workshops, baking and other cookery sessions, growing projects and health and fitness. Gardening workshops are well attended, and the winter vegetables and salads promise good crops. Grant support is bringing planters and benches for the outdoors.

The 1625IP support team holds regular resident meetings, to continue to develop and understand the needs of those living at Woodleaze. Discussions are also under way to offer apprenticeship sessions for residents and the wider community.

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
- Managing your debt
- Fuel costs and utility bills
- Mobility in your home
- Furniture and appliances
- Lack of food

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**

To report a repair

For new residents + previous United Communities

0117 942 4600

Emergency repair when office is closed or at weekends:

0800 054 2180

For previous Solon residents

0117 924 4071

Emergency repair:

0330 726 0193

Urgent gas repair:

Gregor Heating

0117 947 9034

Rent payment

Pay your rent via our website
brighterplaces.co.uk/pay-your-rent

Pay by phone 24 hours 7 days a week
Call allpay 0330 041 6497

Coming soon for all residents: our online service MyPlace

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

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All information is correct at time of publication.

MyPlace