Brighter Places
Building better futures

Our five-year journey TOGETHER

Corporate strategy 2022 to 2027

- All-new repairs service
- Property Safety MOTs
- Excelling in partnerships
- Best employer status
- 1,000 new homes

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Brighter Places
Building better futures

A message from our chair and chief executive

The launch of our five-year corporate strategy also marks the celebration of our first birthday as Brighter Places. Formed on 1 April 2021, we are Bristol's largest independent housing association.

We also have deep roots. We share a proud history among pioneering organisations that proved what can be achieved when residents and local communities are at the heart of decision-making for the delivery of affordable and secure homes.

Partnerships

Our strategy emphasises the value of partnership working and recognises that we unlock wider shared ambitions when working with other organisations. Over the past 12 months, we have partnered with Bristol City Council in tackling homelessness and with the West of England Combined Authority and central government to invest grant funding to improve the energy efficiency of existing homes. We continue to work with Homes England to access funding to build high quality new homes. Within communities, we work directly with many local organisations to promote inclusion and invest where there is the most need.

The hard work and determination that brought together United Communities and Solon to create Brighter Places is reflected in these pages. Our five-year strategy prioritises investment in existing homes alongside innovative partnership approaches to delivering new homes and a commitment to taking strides towards net zero carbon housing.

Promises

At the heart of our merger process were promises agreed with residents to transform the customer experience and position us among the highest performing landlords. We have made good progress on these promises and those not yet complete are covered in this strategy. We have expanded our delivery and engagement teams and we are designing a responsive repairs service with residents.

Within local communities, we are piloting listening projects to understand where investment is most needed to support communal areas improvements, community initiative and individual support.

Safety remains our top priority. New standards following the Grenfell Tower tragedy are built into our plans. We have also created senior colleague roles to oversee and develop building safety.

Central to the learning from Grenfell was the need to listen much more actively to residents. Our engagement panel works at every level in our organisation and influences decisions made by our board. As we move forward together, to reflect the communities we serve, colleague diversity will increase, and we are creating resident opportunities for training and employment. New regulatory measures for resident satisfaction are welcome and have been built into our plans from the start.

Our numbers tell their own story. The 3,300 homes we manage will grow by 1,000 by 2027. Among these new homes, 30% will come from community-led initiatives, in line with our commitment to enable people and local neighbourhoods to determine their own futures. We are also committed to providing 30% of new homes for shared ownership, offering an affordable route towards owning a home.

We have set out our ambitious targets and how we will measure progress. We are also investing in new technologies. Underpinning all our work is a financing plan and land purchase model that will ensure that we are well placed to succeed.

We look forward to delivering a truly great customer experience and to see residents' voices further embedded in everything we do. We're also working to be accredited as a top employer by 2024. Above all, we will continue to provide a great customer experience and great homes and partnerships that will position us as both the largest independent housing association in Bristol and the best.

We have much to look forward to, much to celebrate after our first year as Brighter Places and an extraordinary next journey to make together.

In preparing this strategy, we have collaborated with our engagement panel. We will now hand over to the co-chairs of the panel to explain what this five-year strategy means for residents.

Our promises to residents

Our merger from United Communities and Solon South West into Brighter Places prioritised customer service, improved colleague opportunities and higher resident involvement.

Our overall focus was on a high performing repairs service and updated homes. We continue to fulfil our promises and have set out what is left to do to complete the outcomes for these merger commitments.

Chair James Taylor, left
CEO Anna Klimczak

A message from the engagement panel co-chairs

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.

Involved

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 the through the business, right across 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.

Trusting

Our relationship has enabled us to break down barriers, which as residents we thought we may never overcome – there is no barrier and we have formed a reputable, trusting relationship.

We have so many exciting things on our radar! Firstly, we have space for new panel members and we are hoping to have Brighter Places colleagues join the panel shortly, once teams are at full capacity. 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.

Residents can attend panel meetings as observers. There are other opportunities through Connected Voices for residents living in the same communities or with shared interests – the engagement team can bring residents together.

Open

Residents can bring ideas to the panel or the engagement team – for example, if you would like to hold a tenant forum or create a scrutiny panel. It's open for everyone to have a say.

"Older properties, getting repairs right and environmental factors are all things I am passionate about. Brighter Places has evidenced that the foundation has been built for these services to be invested in and improved, and the commitment is there to residents through the promises."

Co-chair Pete Kennedy-Watson

"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 stayed positive throughout."

Co-chair Angela Russell

Our five-year journey together

We are Brighter Places

Our mission

No matter who you are, where you're from, or the journey you've been on, we'll provide you with a home and help you keep it – somewhere safe where you belong. Everyone is welcome, everyone is valued and everyone has a place in our communities.

Brighter Places was formed on 1 April 2021. We were created through the merger of two strongly independent local registered providers, United Communities and Solon South West. We own and manage 3,300 homes across Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Swindon, Forest of Dean, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset and Wiltshire.

Through this strategy we demonstrate how residents are positioned at the heart of our organisation. We consulted closely throughout our merger and established an active interim resident group that evolved into our engagement panel. We have since established a further network, Connected Voices, open to all residents to share thoughts and have a say in our decision-making.

We are very fortunate to have brought together two highly skilled and experienced housing teams to develop a structure and services. As an organisation we have agreed and set out our core values. Pages 12 to 17 show the next stages of this exciting journey, underpinned by three priorities:

- **Great customer experience**
- **Great place to work**
- **Great homes and partnerships**

Our guiding principles

Colleagues have worked together to explore and define these principles, which govern our decision-making.

- Customer and community focused
- Embracing equality, diversity and inclusion
- Providing homes for those who need them
- Focusing our operations on Bristol and surrounding areas

Our story

In the mid 1970s, Solon South West was established with the help of a loan for repairs from Solon London for a run-down terrace purchased in Totterdown, south Bristol. For the next 45 years the housing association continued to grow and maintain its independence, gradually updating to better quality homes. United Housing Association (UHA) was established in 1985 as the first Black housing association in Bristol, set up to tackle the appalling housing conditions and lack of equal access to decent accommodation that faced Black and minority ethnic residents in St Pauls, particularly older people of Caribbean descent – the Windrush generation.

From 2013 UHA began working closely with Bristol Community Housing Foundation (BCHF), originally set up to regenerate an estate in Upper Horfield (early 2000s). In 2017 UHA and BCHF formally merged to become United Communities.

By 2019 United Communities and Solon South West were working closely together, to share expertise and improve value for money. They decided to ask residents about building a joint future together. After a full resident consultation in 2020 and a positive response, the two formally merged in 2021.

Our values

We are extremely proud of our history. We believe that our values reflect our local heritage and community-led approach and set us apart from other housing associations for all the best reasons. Our colleagues express this today through these stated values.

We are human.

We listen to people's stories so they never feel like a cog in the machine. We keep our minds open and always take time to empathise and understand the needs of our communities, anyone who works with us and anyone who asks us for help. We treat people with respect and honesty. We collaborate with other organisations to achieve our goals and we trust each other.

We speak truth.

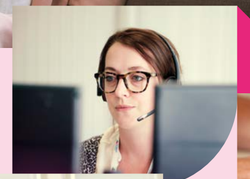
We trust each other and we're honest. Our working community is blame-free and supportive. This means we can make mistakes, own them, and learn from them without fear. We are open with the people we serve and we keep the conversation going.

We bring it.

We think big. We work hard to achieve our goals and we're always ready for the next challenge. We bring everything we've got to everything we do – so we can build the best communities possible.

We belong.

We believe in diversity, equality, dignity and the freedom to *be*. Whoever you are, wherever you're from and whatever your life story, you have a place in our communities. You are valued and you belong.



Our changing world

When developing our plans, we conduct ongoing analysis of economic, environmental and social factors and trends, and prepare to adapt and respond to many changing factors. We work with certainties such as regulation and the need to improve energy efficiency as well as many uncertainties, such as rising costs and sudden skills shortages. Above all, we focus on growing as an inclusive, responsive, adaptable and financially resilient provider of high quality, affordable homes.

The UK economy

With ongoing economic uncertainty as the UK and global economies emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, we are already seeing rises in the prices of goods and services which the Bank of England predicted would reach 8% by April 2022 and some other commentators believe will be even higher. The construction sector is experiencing huge increases in the cost of building materials and increased wages, driven by a shortage of skilled labour. At the same time, the cost of buying land for new homes in Bristol and the surrounding areas is increasing.

Throughout the pandemic we continued to provide our essential repairs service and kept on track with our new build programme. However, the increased cost of land, materials and labour will make it more expensive for Brighter Places going forward. This could impact across all our activities. More positively, the cost of borrowing to invest in existing homes and build new ones is currently low and sources of funding are plentiful.

Increased financial hardship is impacting on residents. The continued benefit cap freeze, huge increase in energy prices and end to the government pandemic support schemes are placing significant pressures on low-income households. Some may have to make a stark choice between eating and heating.

Brighter Places recognises its responsibility and its position to help alleviate poverty for residents who are feeling the effects and financial pressures of all these changes. In our plan, we set out how we are investing to support residents and communities through direct support and by creating specialist teams to work closely with residents.

Government policy

Building safety

The Grenfell tragedy in 2017 has resulted in significant changes to government laws and regulations around building and fire safety. These important measures are already considered in our strategic planning and our priorities for investment in safety.

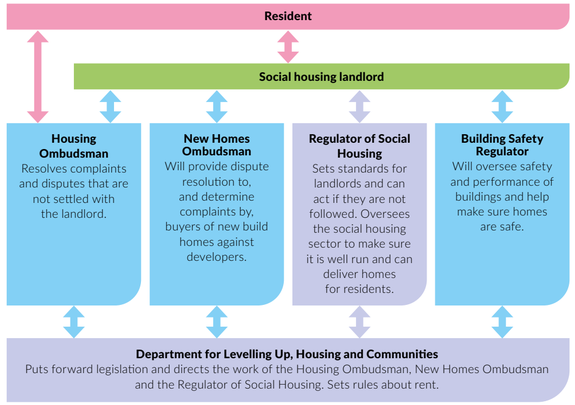
The Fire Safety Act 2021 requires owners of blocks of flats to undertake more rigorous inspections of lifts and to consider the fire safety of a building's external walls. This includes cladding, windows, balconies and entrance doors. Results must be reported to the local fire service. Owners of flats also need to provide fire safety instructions to all residents and personal evacuation plans for those who may find it difficult to evacuate in the event of a fire.

The Building Safety Act 2022 sets up a new national Building Safety Regulator for the management and scrutiny of all building construction and improvement works. Stronger focus will be placed on buildings above 18m, though we do not own such buildings.

Providers of new homes for sale will need to register with the New Homes Ombudsman, charged with resolving any complaints about construction from owners of these homes.

The Regulator of Social Housing is encouraging housing associations to improve their data about the structural and fire safety of the homes they manage. Inevitably, better data demonstrates the need to increase investment in ensuring resident safety.

Our regulators



Resident engagement and empowerment

Another important outcome of the Grenfell tragedy is the government's proposal, set out in a White Paper in November 2020, to overhaul regulatory standards for resident involvement and empowerment, using legislation and other measures. This follows evidence given to the Grenfell Inquiry that the tower block fire would not have happened if the social property owner had listened to and acted on residents' safety concerns.

Central to government policy is the Regulator of Social Housing, strengthened to act on consumer matters. A bigger toolkit (inspections, tenant satisfaction survey results, performance improvement plans) will give the regulator the means to intervene where the standards are not met.

The Regulator of Social Housing is also strengthening consumer and Decent Homes Standards and plans to compare resident satisfaction results between housing associations when assessing compliance. A new inspection regime will assess whether the new standards are being met.

The Housing Ombudsman, to whom residents can complain if they cannot resolve an issue with their landlord, has also been given more resources and greater powers of intervention.

Changes within society

An ageing population

People in the UK are living longer thanks to medical advances, reduced smoking and improvements in exercise and nutrition. The proportion of the population over the age of 65 is growing year on year. For housing strategy, this means preparing for a higher proportion of residents with changing accessibility and other support needs.

We will therefore need to invest more in aids and adaptations to homes, to enable residents to live independently for as long as possible. Independent living is what many older residents want. It also reduces the burden on the NHS and care homes.

Understanding discrimination and inequality

The Black Lives Matter movement has had a strong impact locally in Bristol, particularly around the toppling of the Colston statue, and a huge presence worldwide, increasing awareness of racism and inequality within the context of colonialism and slavery. Recognition of diverse gender identities and non-binary sexual orientation is also changing society. We embrace the need to respond through job offers, training, career development and board-level representation to prioritise equality and diversity.

We also need to develop a better understanding of how the LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning) community define and see themselves and how they wish to be addressed in our workplace and communications.

The changing world of work

Housing association residents are steadily moving online, to pay rent, order repairs or make complaints at times that suit them. This means ensuring flexibility over when and how they engage with their landlord.

All housing associations are investing in digital service delivery. Yet government statistics suggest that 4% of the UK population have no internet access and 26% have no online bank account to make digital payments. To avoid digital exclusion, we need to retain phone access and office visits for the foreseeable future.

As a result of the pandemic, 70% of the UK's largest companies intend to move permanently to flexible working between home and the office. Key benefits to employees are the end to the daily commute and the ability to fit work around other commitments. Employers benefit by reducing office space and associated costs. However, government statistics suggest that only 46% of the UK working population can physically work at home and some activities require face-to-face contact. Home working also reduces human interaction, leading to isolation and depression for some. To balance welfare and productivity, hybrid working needs to be carefully designed.

More meetings now take place outside the office – in cafés, resident homes, co-working spaces and community facilities. Colleagues need portable digital technology, linked directly to our ICT systems, if mobile working is to be effective.

Working towards net zero carbon

In the Paris climate change agreement of 2016, most governments committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The COP26 in Glasgow in 2021 remained focused on that goal. In 2019 the UK housing sector was responsible for around 15% of greenhouse gas emissions, particularly carbon dioxide from natural gas used for heating and cooking.

The urgency to reduce carbon emissions requires local action as well as national and global co-ordination. For housing, this includes the following.

- **Better insulation and the replacement of gas boilers in existing homes**
- **The move to green energy sources and zero carbon technologies**
- **Switching pool cars to electric**
- **Designing new homes with access to electric vehicle charging points**

Great customer experience

Residents expect high quality, consistent and reliable services. Customer care must be responsive, courteous and professional. Above all, our service must reflect residents' needs, through engagement at all levels within our organisation and support and investment within communities.

Where we are today

Service delivery

Housing management services from our two former organisations are now streamlined into a single service. In 2022 we retain two separate repairs contractors while we complete a full review of the repairs service with residents. We are working towards a single Brighter Places repairs service in 2023-24.

Our customer service and tenancy impact teams are well resourced and strongly positioned to support this service improvement, to respond to residents effectively and reach individuals who require higher levels of support. Working with our engagement panel and open sessions for all residents to attend, in 2021 we adopted a customer care standard and a plan for its implementation.

In April 2021 Brighter Places began the roll-out of a customer portal for online payment and customer account management and we launched a new website in November 2021.

Resident and community engagement

Our engagement panel continues to help shape decisions and policies, such as rent-setting and customer service, with a direct link to the board. Our Connected Voices network enables all residents to engage with us and collaborate to develop activities within their communities.

Engagement is supported through a broad-skilled community engagement team with a highly experienced lead and through our housing and tenancy impact teams. All work closely with residents in their neighbourhoods.

Our community investment programme supports communities to work together to identify local priorities. We have developed a community contract model, established first in the St Werburghs Community Centre, to build community-based partnerships that target local organisations for support. Investment includes smaller funding pots made available to voluntary, community and social enterprise applicants who are responding to locally agreed priorities.

Our challenges

We recognise that our responsive repairs service needs special attention and is one of the most important services for residents. We have set ambitious targets for our service.

Currently 69% of residents say they are satisfied with our services as a landlord. Only 45% feel that they are being listened to satisfactorily. There is significant room for improvement to meet the expectations that we and residents rightly expect.

Our targets

By March 2027, we aim to achieve:

- 85% resident satisfaction with landlord services and a 50% reduction in complaints
- 80% satisfaction overall with our repairs service
- Performance among the top 25% of social housing associations for resident satisfaction in housing management, repairs, income collection and anti-social behaviour response
- An upgraded repairs service from 2023-24 that becomes available to shared ownership leaseholders from 2024-25, as requested by residents

Our approach

We have consulted with our engagement panel on rent and service charges in 2022 as we manage rising costs that are impacting across the organisation. Our commitment is to:

- Continue to engage and act on what we learn
- Establish the skills and capability to analyse data to drive service improvement
- Continue to invest in colleague training and improve diversity, to build the workforce structure, culture and systems to succeed
- Roll-out of our new day-to-day repairs service in 2023-24
- Offer self-service access via our customer portal and retain phone and in-person contact, in stages that will complete in 2023-24

How we will measure progress

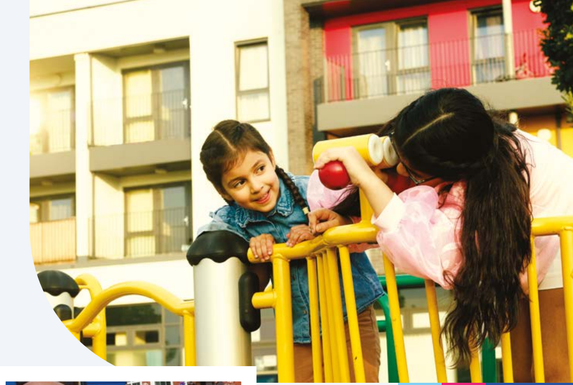
We will continue to measure resident satisfaction through quarterly surveys. Every two years from 2024-25 we will carry out a full resident satisfaction survey.

As soon as a repair is complete, we will seek resident feedback, as we do today.

In 2024-25 we will seek external assessment and accreditation of our customer service.

We will continue to operate our complaints policy, modelled on the latest good practice defined by the Housing Ombudsman, and feed learning into improvement plans.

We will monitor the effectiveness of resident engagement to gain performance insights and increase resident influence in our decision-making.



Great place to work

Our commitment is to a workplace environment where diversity and lived experience are valued, where colleagues are supported in developing skills, where job satisfaction is high and where leaders are empathetic role models. Diversity is fundamental to our vision and values. The more that our workforce reflects the diverse profile of our residents, the better we can understand and meet their needs.

Where we are today

We have created and resourced strong teams and expanded our capabilities, with specialist posts in resident engagement, community-led development and building safety. Together, colleagues and residents are working on developing and adopting an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy.

In early 2022 we are completing an audit among colleagues about racial, ethnic and gender identities, to develop strategies to maximise diversity and inclusivity. Today our colleague profile shows 58 women (13 at manager, service head or director level, including the chief executive) and 31 men (13 at manager, service head or director level).

Digital transformation and changing customer demand is defining the way we deliver services, so we need a digitally literate workforce and other technical skills – in housing management and maintenance, fire and building safety and construction.

Our challenges

Diversity among our workforce is improving all the time across the board. When colleagues move on, we will continue to use the opportunity to improve diversity.

Skills shortages mean that we need to develop an approach to identify and retain talent and bring in colleagues at entry level, such as through our new apprenticeships.

Motivation among colleagues will depend upon us creating a stronger focus on employee development and leadership.

Our targets

- By 2023-24 we will secure accreditation as one of the UK's best employers
- By 2025 our colleagues, board members, executive team and managers will be 40% from diverse backgrounds, in keeping with our communities
- By 2027, our workforce will be fully skilled and job satisfaction will be at least 80% (from 73% today)

Our approach

Actions set out in our EDI Strategy will maximise opportunities for the employee. Our apprenticeship programme launched in 2022 is open to residents in the communities we serve and promoted locally.

Leadership skills will be nurtured at all levels through personal development plans. Our leaders will act as role models, self-aware of their style and passionate about delivery. Leaders will coach and support colleagues to deliver and exceed on our objectives.

We have invested in our new Brighter Places University from 2022, offering colleagues the opportunity to professionalise their skills and undertake formal academic study.

Motivation among colleagues has focused on collaboration around employment terms and conditions. Our refreshed approach to reward and remuneration from 2022 is fair and transparent, recognising and rewarding high performance.

We will create an environment where colleagues can flourish and wellbeing is paramount, supported by our wellbeing team and mental health first-aiders.

In short, we are committed to giving colleagues the tools they need to do their job, the confidence to think creatively and the freedom to act on their own initiative. This means redesigning our working practices to promote collaboration among teams, to delegate decision-making to frontline colleagues and to simplify processes.

We will continue to invest in technology, increase automation and improve access to data about residents and homes to support colleagues in their work. Each year colleagues will evaluate our ICT (digital) services for their fitness for purpose.

How we will measure progress

- Annual colleague surveys will measure overall satisfaction and help us to evaluate our EDI Strategy
- Our colleague representative body will actively hold the executive team to account and provide a well rounded perspective on how we work and achieve outcomes
- In 2022-23 we will begin working towards achieving Best Companies accreditation

Great homes and partnerships

From childhood to old age, one of the foundations of wellbeing is a home that is warm and safe. Access to basic services, relationships with neighbours and maintaining independence all depend upon a warm, safe home to ensure quality of life.

Existing homes

Where we are today

In the UK, the national Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) system rates each home. There is no equivalent scale for safety. In practice, building and fire safety are covered by different building standards and legal obligations, including regular gas and electrical inspections and certification.

In 2021-22 we completed a condition survey and an energy assessment of all homes. Going forward, our annual Property Safety MOT and this strategic energy review will help shape our investment and improvement programme.

In 2022-23 we have already begun engagement with residents to improve communal areas in three schemes in Bristol and South Glos and we have installed a new asset management and compliance management system to improve efficiency.

Our challenges

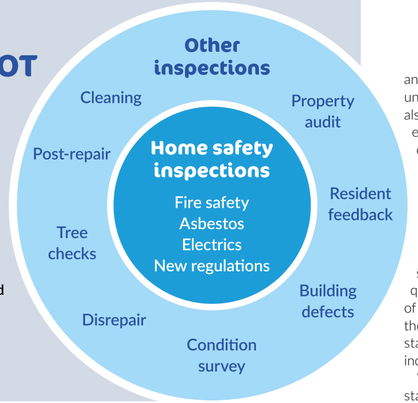
Health and safety requirements

The Grenfell tragedy has led to changes in the law for fire safety and building safety. This is our priority and we will continue to meet all regulations and working practice requirements. The Regulator of Social Housing is planning a review of the Decent Homes Standard that is likely to raise the quality standard for our existing homes in relation to fire safety and environmental impact.

Property MOT

Our new model for home inspections is designed to:

- Ensure safety
- Improve customer experience
- Improve communication
- Improve data on buildings
- Be proactive on repairs
- Fix before things break
- Identify damp and mould
- Reduce complaints and callbacks
- Support culture and behaviour change



Energy efficiency and warmth

Our strategic energy review will help us target improvements for individual homes. This will include insulating homes and replacing gas boilers in some homes, depending on the availability of external grant funding.

Stock condition

- Nearly one-third of our stock (1,000 homes) does not meet the EPC C standard
- Major investment in building safety is potentially needed to meet new regulatory standards
- We need to move investment from reactive maintenance to planned capital works

Our targets

- 100% of homes to attain the EPC rating C by 2030, where achievable
- 100% of homes to attain net zero carbon emissions by 2050, where achievable
- Our office and working practices to achieve net zero by 2030
- We will continue to meet all obligations for homes in relation to asbestos, lifts, fire, legionella, gas and electrical safety
- All communal areas in blocks of flats will be improved

Our approach

Our Asset Management Strategy launched in April and our Decarbonisation Strategy will be agreed in 2022-23. We will explore and embrace technology to improve our understanding of our housing stock. We also plan to recruit a specialist energy efficiency team and we will collaborate with contractor partners to ensure that they recruit and retain the skilled workforce to meet our needs.

The Regulator of Social Housing has stated that housing associations are likely to need to make substantial investment in their existing homes. Our investment plan seeks a balance between improvements to quality and energy efficiency and the provision of new homes. We also intend to embrace the new consumer care and Decent Homes standards without waiting for legislation, and to increase resident involvement around this.

We will actively explore grant opportunities, starting with the second wave of the government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund for energy efficiency improvements.

How we will measure progress

We will conduct periodic home condition re-inspections and carry out the annual Property Safety MOT for each home. We will also collect data from our contractors to monitor performance. To help us achieve our net zero carbon objectives, we will consider how digital technologies can be used. Data from customer satisfaction surveys, complaints and other feedback will help us monitor residents' experiences and satisfaction.

1,000 new homes

Our ambition is to deliver 1,000 new homes by 2027 that are warm, energy efficient, and happy and healthy places to live. Where possible, we will provide flexible live-work spaces for residents. Our focus will be on social and affordable rented homes and shared ownership in our established Bristol neighbourhoods of central Bristol, Easton, Horfield, Lockleaze and Bedminster and our newer neighbourhoods of Southmead, Fishponds and Lawrence Weston.

Community partnership

Through our Community Partnerships Strategy we will seek to become the West of England's community-led housing delivery partner of choice. Among our new homes, 30% will be co-designed with their future residents.

We will actively seek partners to provide new homes, inter-generational housing schemes, keyworker accommodation and ultra-energy efficient housing construction. We will explore innovative funding models in line with these ambitions.

Where we are today

We have identified three-quarters of the land required to meet our 1,000 home target. To increase efficiency and value-for-money, we will explore other partnerships, including with other housing associations.

We have already partnered with Bristol Charities on the first inter-generational new build housing scheme in the city (Shaldon Road, Lockleaze), delivered keyworker homes in partnership with Bristol and Bath Regional Capital (Elderberry Walk, Southmead), completed a government-funded Next Steps Accommodation Programme to help people move from the streets and formed the Staple Hill Road partnership with Bristol Together. We have also developed a partnership with 16:25 Independent People to provide homes for care leavers.

Our challenges

The availability of land continues to be a challenge for us. More than three-quarters of developing housing associations say this is their main constraint on development. As the range of players in the land market grows, housing associations face more competition, which pushes up land values. Competition is particularly strong for smaller sites.

Bristol was the first UK city council to declare a climate emergency and to address this through the One City Climate Strategy. All our new developments will meet the standards this sets out. Our Growth and Partnerships Strategy will set ambitious development targets and we will continue to review development standards in terms of achieving net zero carbon.

As well as decarbonisation, new build homes must also meet new legal requirements for building safety and design. The establishment of the New Homes Ombudsman (through the new Building Safety Act) will increase scrutiny and accountability for construction.

Our targets

- 1,000 new homes over five years, 60% by Brighter Places and 40% in partnership
- 70% of new homes for rent and 30% for low-cost home ownership
- 95% of development will be on land we have purchased
- 30% of new homes will come through community-led development
- 100 homes will be built using modern methods of construction
- All new homes from now will be built with access to electric vehicle charging points and without gas boilers

Our approach

Strong partnerships and the purchase of land ahead of development are needed to help improve our access to land. This will allow us the flexibility to respond to the market by changing the tenure mix and slowing or accelerating development as required. Our land-led approach – supported by Homes England grant – will enable us to lead and control the design process, ensuring that our new homes are high quality, with sustainability credentials which support Bristol's One City Climate Strategy. We will look within our own stock and work with our partners to review assets and bring forward land opportunities.

Our Growth and Partnerships Strategy will build on our relationships with key stakeholders and delivery partners. Development partnerships will unlock larger sites, enable access to new funding streams and technical expertise and offer a range of housing tenures.

We will launch our Customer and Partner Support Strategy to support Bristol City Council in delivering its Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024. This involves building new homes and bringing vacant dwellings into use.

To improve the energy efficiency of homes, we plan to bid for investment from government and the West of England Combined Authority. We are already a finalist in the Climate Smart Cities Challenge – an international competition with funding awards, and we will follow up other sources of funding to help us to achieve net zero carbon.

Where appropriate we will speed up development and reduce the carbon footprint of new homes. We will collaborate with architects, engineers and construction professionals using build information modelling technology (a digital model for building design) to streamline construction, aid consultation and create a live property record for each home.

We plan to expand our specialist community-led development team and will also register with the New Homes Ombudsman.

How we will measure progress

- Resident satisfaction surveys, focus groups and design workshops
- Stakeholder feedback from Bristol City Council, Homes England, West of England Combined Authority, the National Housing Federation and other partners
- Success in partnership bids
- Housing management colleague feedback

A strong and healthy organisation

Governance

To deliver this five-year strategy we need to operate efficiently and effectively. Good governance involves scrutiny and monitoring by our board and executive team to ensure we meet our objectives and remain financially viable. We have completed an external review of our governance arrangements and are implementing its recommendations. We maintain the highest level grade for governance from the Regulator of Social Housing.

We will adopt the new Code of Governance produced by our trade body, the National Housing Federation (NHF). This places emphasis on accountability to residents, diversity in governance and environmental sustainability. We are already putting residents at the heart of our governance, through a direct link between our engagement panel and our board. We have diversified our board by appointing two board members from ethnically diverse backgrounds, including a Brighter Places resident, and we have set targets for further improving diversity.

Financial viability

Strong financial results allow us to re-invest in existing and new homes while maintaining financial foundations that are strong enough to absorb future economic shocks. We have developed a new Finance and Governance Strategy and a dynamic funding portfolio to meet our business needs and take advantage of future funding opportunities. By spring 2022 we will have secured £35 million in borrowing to build around 250 new homes towards our target of 1,000 over five years. We will seek to maintain our top regulatory grading for financial viability (V1) and will never allow the grading to fall below V2.

People

We have increased our workforce by nearly a third since merger, mainly by expanding our tenancy support and community and resident engagement teams and by the appointment of specialists in resident engagement, community-led housing and building safety. We plan to appoint a team to manage our energy efficiency home improvement programme.

Information and communications technology (ICT)

We have invested in a new ICT system, including specialist modules for housing management and repairs. We will continue to build upon and integrate our business systems and develop improved data management to improve residents' experiences and add efficiency across the business. We are developing a Future Digital Strategy and a Digital Inclusion Strategy.

Value for money

To achieve a balance between financial efficiency and the best outcomes for residents, we will improve efficiency and reduce costs wherever possible. However, we may decide to provide higher quality services than other housing associations at a higher comparative cost. Our assessment of value for money will also consider 'social value' – the knock-on impact of our investment in the communities where we operate.

Risk management

We have adopted a new Risk Management Strategy and a new data protection framework. These initiatives will enable us to assess how much risk the business can bear so we can identify risks early and seek to limit their impact.

Brighter Places
Building better futures

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Eden House
Eastgate Office Park
Bristol BS5 6XX
0117 942 4600
info@brighterplaces.co.uk
brighterplaces.co.uk

wearebrighterplaces
brighterplaces_
wearebrighterplaces

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