Brighter Places

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Resident voice boosted by law

Landlords to be rated by customer feedback

Making a difference

The resident engagement panel share what motivates them to carry out scrutiny of Brighter Places services and policies.

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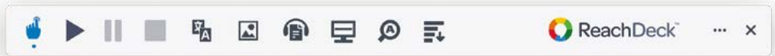
Our website offers accessible choices



Our new website toolbar (above) is designed to increase access to information for residents. It has the following features.

- **Text to speech** reads the text out loud.
- **Translation** converts text to the language you choose.
- **Screen mask** adds a pane to make it easier to read.
- **Magnifier** makes the text bigger and reads it out loud.
- **Page simplifier** offers a simpler view of the page.
- **Picture dictionary** converts words to illustrations.
- **MP3 maker** converts online content into MP3 files that you can listen to instead.

We offer FREE access to learn digital skills

Brighter Places has teamed up with **Learn My Way** to offer all residents lessons to learn how to access the internet and use software. We also have a computer you can use in the reception area of our office.

Complete beginners and residents who want to improve their skills can get access to online videos that teach you all you need. Short clips help you understand the basics of using a computer and going online.

You work at your own pace and can learn personal tasks such as online banking or finding out about Universal Credit. You can also learn software such as Microsoft Office.

To get started, contact our engagement team on 0117 942 4600 or email: engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk

FREE SEEDS

Our spring giveaway to get growing

Look out for our resident survey in this issue so you can tell us how you prefer for us to be in touch with you.

As well as a prize draw of a **£50 voucher** for three lucky residents, we are offering free seeds to residents who return their survey reply form. We've chosen herbs and flowers that grow happily on the window-sill or in pots outside.

Just tick the box and we'll post seeds to you. If you pop in to the office we also have a few extras to give away.

Anti-racism pledge for social housing

In February Brighter Places joined other Bristol housing and social organisations to commit to an anti-racist housing landscape for the city and to celebrate the outstanding contributions of one of our founders, Mr Guy Bailey OBE.

The event *Firming Foundations and Raising Roofs* emphasised the city's role in addressing housing inequalities faced by people of colour, as well as minoritised and newly arrived communities.

The call at the event was to move on from broad discussions about equality to taking clear action through meeting the standards of the SHARP pledge on anti-racism (see details below).

The issues were highlighted by Yvette Williams MBE from Justice4Grenfell, who spoke about the multiple failings behind the loss of life in the Grenfell fire in 2017 and the lack of representation of people of colour in giving evidence afterwards.

Anna Klimczak, Brighter Places CEO, said: "As part of Brighter Places committing to the SHARP pledge we will work with residents to explore and understand the actions and change needed for anti-racism to be properly meaningful. With our partners in Bristol we are determined to see anti-racism become a reality for residents in the city."

The event was organised by ACH, which works to transform the experience of refugees and migrants held in poverty.

Photography: Ukrainian refugee Zhenya Melesyk

Bristol poet Miles Chambers (left) and Bristol City Council Head of Housing Management & Estates and Brighter Places board member Fiona Lester at the anti-racism event.

What is SHARP?

The Social Housing Anti-Racism Pledge (SHARP) is a social housing call to implement an anti-racist framework that can demonstrate its effectiveness.

Brighter Places is committed to working with residents to explore, design and understand the positive change needed to embed SHARP.

See **Resident focus** on page 8.

National award for Mr Guy Bailey OBE

The National Housing Federation has presented an award to one of our founders and current shareholders, Mr Guy Bailey OBE, for his outstanding contribution to social housing.

Guy is one of the community leaders who set up United Housing Association in St Pauls in 1985 to address the appalling conditions faced by older Black and minority ethnic residents.

Brighter Places is proud to have sponsored a film about Guy's achievements. This will be available on our website soon at: **brighterplaces.co.uk**

Mr Guy Bailey OBE (left) receiving an award for outstanding contribution to social housing from Simon Nunn, Executive Director (Member Services) National Housing Federation.

More inside...

4 Rent review
How we consulted to set the 2023-24 rent and service charges

10 Damp and mould
What we are doing PLUS tips for reducing condensation

11 How do I...?
Resident questions are answered by our team

Rent and service charges from April

This month the rent rates for 2023-24 begin. We consulted our resident engagement panel before we made the difficult decision to increase rent. Find out below how we calculated the rise, what support is available and how you can go online to view your rent account and manage payments.

Why your rent has increased

Every year we review rent levels in line with government policy and in relation to rising costs.

Your rent increased by 7% from 1 April if you pay monthly and from 3 April if you pay weekly.

For 2023-24 the government stated that housing associations could increase rents by a maximum of 7%. This is known as the 'rent cap'. Previously rent rises used the Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1%, which would have been a 11.1% rise.

Resident consultation

Following consultation with the Brighter Places resident engagement panel, our Board agreed the 7% rise. This was a very difficult decision and one we didn't take lightly. As a not-for-profit housing association our income comes mainly from rent. From this we run services, maintain homes, refit homes to be more energy efficient, gain access to new financing to build homes and help to support strong communities.

We appreciate that a rise is challenging right now. Although most benefits and the state pension increased by 10.1% from 1 April, we know that many residents are concerned about how to afford their other outgoings.

Our website explains the many kinds of support available. We also sent you a leaflet with your rent notification letter. The leaflet includes information on support and advice to help you with budgeting, benefits, managing debt, employment and keeping track of your energy costs. For support, contact your housing officer or go to: **brighterplaces.co.uk/tenancy-support**

Finding it hard to pay?

Call **0117 942 4600** and speak to your income officer if you're struggling to pay your rent. They can set up an affordable repayment plan to help you budget.

Annual service charge review

All residents who pay a service charge have also been notified of their charge for 2023-24.

The charges cover maintaining communal areas such as hallways, gardens and secure entry systems.

In late January Brighter Places consulted with residents who pay this charge, with a breakdown of costs. We also invited comments on the standards of cleaning and maintenance services. Residents asked us to clarify charging for communal areas electricity, fire safety equipment, door entry systems and security barriers. We responded to all queries in March and will consult again next year.

Find out more at: **brighterplaces.co.uk/service-charge-faqs**

MyPlace: the easy way to manage your tenancy

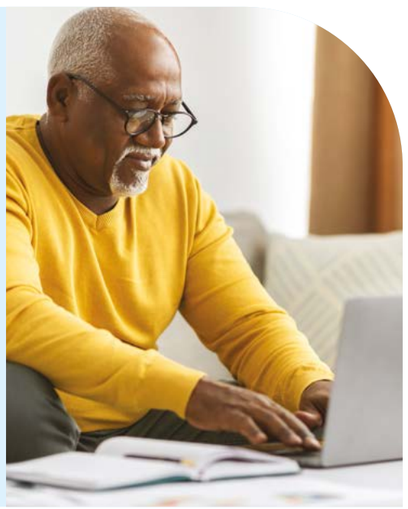
Our resident portal, MyPlace, is a secure, convenient and quick way to check your rent balance, make payments, view your transactions and update your personal data 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

More than 700 residents (1 in 5) are using MyPlace. Feedback tells us they find the portal easy to use.

As well as managing your rent, you can update personal details or request a change to your tenancy. Register at: **brighterplaces.co.uk/myplace**

Need help to get online?

We offer access to a computer and FREE digital training. **See page 2.**



"It's all OK, works nicely and all the info you need is at your fingertips."

Cost of living advice

Our website is up to date with local and national advice and support. We also sent you a leaflet with your rent update. If you are in crisis, we can offer immediate assistance.

Call 0117 942 4600 or go to: brighterplaces.co.uk/tenancy-support

In times of struggle we're beside you

Since last April our Tenancy Support Fund has helped 62 households who were suffering extreme hardship.

The Tenancy Support Fund operates as an e-voucher scheme for essentials for residents who are overwhelmed by the cost of living crisis and struggling to afford to eat, buy fuel or provide the basics for their family.

The support gives you a little breathing space while you get back on your feet.

We have awarded more than £12,000 since April 2022. This includes up to £250 in shopping vouchers, depending on individual circumstances.

Further support

We support residents facing extreme financial hardship because we recognise the challenges so many are dealing with.

If you are feeling really worried about money, call us and ask to speak to your housing officer first. They will put you in touch with our tenancy sustainment team.

Hardship fund

Our Tenancy Support Fund remains open to residents in need. Contact the housing team or email: **seniortenancyimpact@brighterplaces.co.uk**

"Thank you so so much. You really don't know how these will help me get back onto my feet for five minutes whilst I sort out my finances!"

"Thank you for the £250 Asda voucher that will help us keeping warm with some winter clothing and food. Means I can eat a few hot meals a week instead of waiting for daughter to finish so I can have leftovers. I have been so depressed not eating properly."

"To know I can now go food shopping and be able to treat my children has relieved so much pressure."

How to get help

Visit our website or call us

brighterplaces.co.uk/cost-of-living
0117 942 4600

We regularly add advice to our website – on money and budgeting, food banks, energy costs, keeping warm and other support available.

For example, our link to **Ofgem**, the energy regulator, tells you what to do if you cannot afford your energy bills. The **National Debtline** link has information about managing water debt and about how to join a **credit union**.

Talk to your income officer

brighterplaces.co.uk/tenancy-support

Our specialist colleagues can talk things through with you and help you maximise your income.

Careers support

brighterplaces.co.uk/jobs-and-training

Visit our jobs page or **see page 6** for details of career coaching.

Get monthly e-news

Keep up to date with news and resident information. Email your details to **communications@brighterplaces.co.uk**

Careers

My longed-for promotion is in the bag

Bristol-based Taiwo was studying and working part-time as a customer service advisor before joining Future Bright. She aspired to work in a management position after finishing her studies and was able to achieve her goal with support from her personal career coach, Rebecca.

What would you say to someone thinking of joining Future Bright?

"Future Bright is a really good opportunity and if you commit, the results will show over time. The goals you set, you can achieve."

What was it like to work with Rebecca?

"We set goals together and talked through any challenges and solutions that would help me to overcome them. We explored what opportunities were available that would take me to my long-term goals."

How did Future Bright change your life?

"I got a promotion! I set the goal of getting a management role and I got it. I have a full-time permanent contract… and a pay rise. I realised that I did have some experience that was transferable to get me to the role that I wanted."

FUTURE BRIGHT Support Advice Skills

Share your dream with us

Taiwo is among hundreds of people over 18 who have benefited from Future Bright. With our support you could be next.

Brighter Places has trained career coaches and funding via the Future Bright service. Call 0117 942 4600 to talk to one of our coaches, email: futurebright@brighterplaces.co.uk or visit brighterplaces.co.uk/jobs-and-training

New homes

Crossing the finish line

Residents in Lockleaze have been hands-on this spring to put the finishing touches to their homes in Merry Hill.

This unique self-finish project, initiated by local residents and delivered through Bristol Community Land Trust, has brought 26 affordable rental properties and 24 shared ownership low carbon homes to Lockleaze.

In March, a group of Merry Hill residents completed the kitchens and bathrooms in nine flats in exchange for lower rents or increased share of ownership.

Merry Hill residents took on kitchen and bathroom fitting, tiling and other tasks with support from Ecomotive.

Self-finish in practice

With professional support from Ecomotive, who enable resident-led social housing projects, the team gained skills in kitchen fitting, tiling and carpentry to put the essential finishes to their homes.

In a collaborative effort they worked on all the homes, forging relationships for the new community. In the months ahead, residents will move on to planting and landscaping the gardens and open spaces.

Low carbon living

The Merry Hill development provides low-cost, energy efficient and comfortable homes using low carbon technologies. They all have Ground Source Heat Pumps (GSHPs) and Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery Systems (MVHRs) to heat homes without the cost of gas. The site design encourages travel by bike or on foot rather than by car and the homes are designed to adapt to the future needs of residents.

Merry Hill, Lockleaze, Bristol.

Shared ownership

A more affordable home purchase

Shared ownership (SO) is a way to get onto the housing ladder by purchasing a share that you can afford and paying rent on the remaining share.

In April we launched our own SO website at **bphomes.co.uk** to help residents see opportunities in their local communities. This includes:

- Details of properties available (see below)
- Information on how shared ownership works, including the finance model
- How to register and apply for an SO home

Our latest shared ownership schemes

bphomes.co.uk

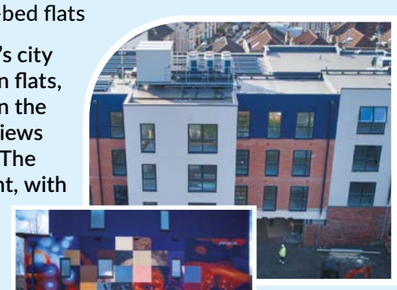
- **Elderberry Walk, Southmead**
  1-bed and 2-bed flats, 3-bed houses

Located to the north of Bristol city centre, our 161 beautifully curated homes have rich landscaping that links to open parkland.

Elderberry Walk is part of the regeneration of Southmead.

- **Lower Ashley Road, St Pauls**
  1-bed and 2-bed flats

Close to Bristol's city centre are seven flats, including one on the top floor with views across the city. The full development, with a colourful mural by Hazard0ne, has 31 homes over four storeys and three blocks.



Protecting your resident rights

From April 2023, resident rights are strengthened with respect to repairs, safety, value for money, customer service and complaints, following new rules from the Regulator of Social Housing.

New Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) to monitor landlord performance have been introduced for all social housing associations. They are designed to make housing association performance and operations more accountable and more transparent.

There are 22 TSMs in all: 12 are included as questions in our regular resident STAR survey and the other 10 will come from our data that we must collect and hold as part of running our organisation.

In 2024 the first TSM report will be published and new consumer standards will come into law

Grenfell failings

The TSMs are part of the wide-ranging shake-up of social housing management following the Grenfell tragedy in 2017, which highlighted many failings – poor building safety rules, a lack of trust between residents and social housing landlords, and how residents were not being listened to when they complained.

A government white paper in 2020, called The Charter for Social Housing Residents, set out to change this. A new Building Safety Regulator for high rise buildings and the Housing Ombudsman to manage resident complaints are already in place.

In 2024 the first TSM report will be published and new consumer standards will come into law. These are currently going through Parliament as part of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill.

Better representation

The Brighter Places engagement panel was set up in 2021. It is open to all residents and provides the clear and strong resident representation expected by the Regulator of Social Housing. See how we do this on the page opposite.

Scrutiny meetings with the Board

The Engagement Panel (right) joins the Board and senior colleagues every three months to discuss a service area.

These 'Bridge' meetings mean the panel contributes to discussions about areas identified for improvement and ensures resident interests are at the centre of co-designing services. Find out more at:

brighterplaces.co.uk/get-involved

Brighter Places chief executive Anna Klimczak welcomed the introduction of the TSMs: "Our commitment to ensuring the voices of residents are heard at all levels within Brighter Places defines us as a housing association and remains as strong as ever.

"We welcome the regulatory changes as proactive measures to improve trust and ensure the quality and peace of mind that all residents have the right to expect."

Brighter Places will report against the TSMs in summer 2024. Updates will be included in Brighter News and our monthly e-news.

South West residents driving the agenda

Brighter Places engagement panel former co-chair Angela Russell (right) joined social housing residents from across the region in October to give their views directly to Angela Holden from the Regulator for Social Housing. This was part of the national consultation around improving resident rights (above).

"The Regulator of Social Housing really did take the time to value and listen to what we were saying," said Angela. "It was fantastic to see so many residents come together for this event. The power of the resident voice really drove the course of the day."

Engagement panel members at the March meeting (left to right): Roselyn Ramgeet, Peter Kennedy-Watson (co-chair), Carol Shearman (observer), Martyn Lewis and Angela Russell.

Strength and vision in our resident voice

In just two years, our resident engagement panel, which scrutinises Brighter Places, has grown to 12 members. Any resident is welcome to join our monthly meetings as an observer, so please get in touch and come along in person or online. In March, Brighter News asked residents at the meeting to tell us what motivated them to get involved.

"I would love to be able to use my lived experiences of over 30 years to improve processes and services for all residents. I have a background in quality and continuous improvement that I'm keen to share with Brighter Places."

Sarah White

"I want to influence the change in social housing for residents and I'm also interested in personal growth and development."

Resident

Connected Voices

Our wider network is for any resident who wants to bring change, set up a community event or make connections locally. Go to **brighterplaces.co.uk/connected-voices** to get in touch.

"Accountability and transparency is so important. Listening to residents is key because of their lived experiences."

Lucy

And a word of welcome from our panel chair, Pete Kennedy-Watson:

"It's fantastic for us to have new panel members. We've already started agenda planning for the coming months and how we can make a real difference for all residents."

Pete Kennedy-Watson

Follow engagement panel progress

Follow the blog at **brighterplaces.co.uk/engagement-panel** or email the panel chair to find out about the work they do: **panel.chair@brighterplaces.co.uk.** You can also email our team to discuss resident scrutiny: **engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk**

Action to tackle condensation, damp and mould

Preventing and treating damp and mould is a priority for Brighter Places and we take resident concerns very seriously. We are working hard with our repairs partner, HRS Alliance, and contractors to quickly resolve damp and mould issues that residents have reported to us and identified through inspections. There are a number of cases so we are prioritising homes with the most serious issues as part of a planned approach to ensure all residents have safe, warm homes.

Get support from us

If you have concerns about damp and mould in your home, we are here to help. You can contact us through:

- Our online form: brighterplaces.co.uk/report-a-repair-form
- Email: info@brighterplaces.co.uk
- Or by phone on 0117 942 4600
  You can call this number during our office hours, or at any time if it is an emergency.

What to do if you think you have a leak

Leaks from roof problems (stains on ceilings and around chimney breast), pipework (including under sinks and baths), window frames and under doors are common sources of moisture.

Please report issues to us as soon as possible, so we can deal with them quickly. Then use a bucket or bowl to collect drips and a mop or towel to keep surfaces dry while we arrange a repair.

Tips to prevent condensation

Here are some things that you can try to help reduce moisture in your home.

- **Dry clothes** on a rack not a radiator, in a well ventilated room.
- **Keep doors** closed when bathing, showering and cooking.
- **Use an extractor fan** in kitchens and bathrooms to stop the spread of moisture.
- **Ventilate your home** by opening window trickle vents when you're washing or cooking.
- **Use a dehumidifier** to remove moisture, especially if you dry your clothes indoors.
- **Keep furniture and belongings away from walls** by allowing at least 5cm of space from the wall.
- **Don't overfill your wardrob**e but instead allow space for the air to circulate inside.
- **Keep your home warm** to stop condensation on cold surfaces.

What is condensation?

When moist air meets a cold surface like a wall or window, it forms droplets. This is condensation.

Everyday activities like washing, cooking, and bathing create the most moisture in your home.

Condensation is one the main cause of damp in homes and can lead to mould spots growing.

One number for repairs

All Brighter Places residents now have a single number for our new repairs service from HRS Alliance. Improving our repairs was one of our merger promises to residents.

0117 942 4600

See advice on keeping warm during the cost of living crisis:
brighterplaces.co.uk/keeping-warm

Birds-eye view for roof repairs

Drones offer a fast way to see and plan high-level repairs. They also reduce disruption for residents and their neighbours.

Brighter Places is doing a three-month drone trial to explore the benefits of remote control photography to assess roof damage.

The trial includes maintaining privacy, giving residents notice of site visits and listening to any concerns.

Use of drone technology offers a much quicker and lower cost way to assess repairs than by using scaffolding (typically costing £750 a time). The high quality images are shared quickly by a single operator so our team can agree and plan repairs.

This also reduces disruption to residents and saves money that is better spent on improvements.

How do I...?

Finance matters, such as rent payments, Universal Credit and money worries, are the number one reason residents get in touch with our customer service team. Here are answers to questions residents ask us.

What is the easiest way to pay my rent?

- **Direct Debit** is the easiest way to pay as your rent will be paid direct from your bank account without you needing to contact us each week or month. If your payment needs to change, we will let you know and arrange this with your bank. **Call us on 0117 942 4600 and we are happy to help you set up Direct Debit.**

More ways to pay

- **MyPlace** is your own online account where you can make payments 24 hours a day 7 days a week and check your balance. Log in or sign up to activate your account. **See page 4 for details.**

- **Call us on 0117 942 4600** and use the option to choose the automated payment line 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. **You need your 19 digit Allpay number that is printed on your rent payment card.** Speak to us if you are having any problems.

I am worried about money. What support is there?

Contact your housing officer immediately if you get into difficulties paying your rent.
If you cannot pay the full amount, we can make a payment plan with you for regular manageable instalments.

Our income officers can review your household expenses and signpost you to support. Tell us as soon as possible to stop the problem getting out of control and so we don't need to take action to recover arrears.

Our tenancy sustainment team can help you to access benefits and appeal decisions and refer you to specialist support services.

See page 5 for advice, support and our own Tenant Support Fund brighterplaces.co.uk/tenancy-support

I claim Universal Credit. Do I need to tell them about the charges to my rent charge?

In April Universal Credit added 'Confirm your housing costs' to the 'To do' section. You must update your account before the end of your Universal Credit assessment period so you don't miss out on money due. Brighter Places will need to verify the housing costs you enter and we will be doing this up to the end of May.

Find answers to common questions about rent and service charges at:
brighterplaces.co.uk/rent-change-2023-24-resident-information-and-faqs

I have damp and mould in my home. What should I do?

Tackling damp and mould is a priority for Brighter Places. We have conducted a survey to prioritise works. See page 10 for an update on progress, tips to reduce moisture in your home and how to report damp and mould.

Will there be any improvements to my home this year?

We aim to spend £1.5 million on planned works between now and March 2024. This will cover replacement bathrooms, kitchens, doors and windows, heating, roofs and other repairs.

You don't need to contact us. We will get in touch with you two or three months before works begin.

Report a repair

On our website
brighterplaces.co.uk/report-a-repair

By phone
During office hours and for out-of-hours emergencies
0117 942 4600

Pay your rent

On our website
brighterplaces.co.uk/pay-your-rent

With your MyPlace account
brighterplaces.co.uk/myplace

By Direct Debit
Call us to set this up
0117 942 4600

By phone on our payment line (24 hours)
0117 942 4600

Please let us know if you would like this document in another format such as large print, easy read, braille or audio CD. A digital copy is on our website.

Translations

If English is not your first language and you need a translation, we can get one for you.

Brighter Places
Building better futures

brighterplaces.co.uk

Contact us

By phone
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

All information is correct at time of publication.

ALBANIAN
Nëse anglishtja nuk është gjuha juaj amtare dhe keni nevojë për një përkthim, ne mund t'ua sigurojmë atë.

BENGALI
ইংরেজী আপনার মাতৃভাষা না হলে এবং আপনার কোন অনুবাদের প্রয়োজন হলে আমরা তা প্রদান করতে সক্ষম।

CHINESE
如果英文不是您的第一語言，而您需要翻譯的話，我們可以爲您安排。

GUJARATI
જો તમારી પહેલી ભાષા અંગ્રેજી ન હોય અને તમને ભાષાંતરની જરૂર હોય તો અમે તમને તે આપી શકીએ છીએ.

HINDI
यदि अँग्रेज़ी आप की पहली भाषा नहीं है और आप को अनुवाद की आवश्यकता है तो यह हम आपको प्रदान कर सकते हैं

KURDISH
Heke îngilîzî zimanê we yê yekem nîne û pêwîstîya we bi wergêr heye, em dikarin yekî ji we re bibînin

POLISH
Jeżeli język angielski nie jest Twoim językiem ojczystym i wymagasz tłumaczenia, możemy to zapewnić.

PORTUGUESE
Se o Inglês não é a sua língua materna e precisa de uma tradução, nós podemos obtê-la.

PUNJABI
ਜੇਕਰ ਇੰਗਲਿਸ਼ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਅਤੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜ਼ਰੂਰਤ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਲਈ ਅਸੀਂ ਇਸਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਾਂ।

SOMALI
Haddii Ingiriisku aanu ahayn afkaaga kowaad oo aad u baahan tahay turjumaad, annagaa kuu samayn karra.

URDU
اگر انگریزی آپ کی پہلی زبان نہیں ہے اور آپ کو ترجمہ کی ضرورت ہے تو ہم آپ کے لئے فراہم کر سکتے ہیں۔

VIETNAMESE
Nếu quí vị không thạo Anh văn và cần bản dịch, chúng tôi sẽ giúp quí vị một bản.