Brighter News

Spring 2024

Cost of living
Rapid support

Shared dreams
Elderberry Walk

Great outdoors
NEW service contracts in place from August

Get involved in shaping our repairs service

See flyer inside

Warm welcome
Family stays are back for resident Lynda

It's inside!

NEW tenant handbook
Packed with resident info – page 4

Career opportunities
Progress with us – page 8

Resident representation
Your voice at the top – page 9

200 safety checks a week
Our inspections team – page 10

PLUS lots more...

FREE seeds with our summer photo competition page 6

Our performance

brighterplaces.co.uk/how-we-are-doing

Our Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) help us see what residents think of the services we provide. Data and feedback are collected every three months and shared on our website and in Brighter News.

LATEST: Quarter 3 (Q3)	PREVIOUS: Quarter 2 (Q2)
October – December 2023	July – September 2023

In the next few months we will share our first annual TSM report with residents and the housing regulator.

Brighter Places also sets targets using performance data from us and from other social housing providers.

The targets are designed to be realistic and achievable and to show us how we can improve our services.

Overall satisfaction
This remained at the same level as last quarter

Q3 61% Q2 61%

Repairs satisfaction
This was at the same level and close to our target of 60%

Q3 59% Q2 59%

Satisfied your home is safe
This has improved. Our target is 80%

Q3 75% Q2 72%

Gas compliance
We have continued to meet our 100% target. This is great news

Q3 100% Q2 100%

Spotlight on...

Complaints resolved at Stage 1
Our major project to improve how we manage and resolve complaints has worked. We nearly met our target of 70% and are on track to reach this.

Complaints resolved at stage 1

Q3 69% Q2 31%

Treating residents with respect
Our result is similar to last time. We have more to do and this is very important to us. Our target is 80%.

Treating residents with respect

Q3 70% Q2 69%

info@brighterplaces.co.uk

Latest

How we set the rents for 2024-25

In March we sent you a letter with details of your new rent and service charge from 1 April.

Each year we agree a rent that is as fair as possible. This is in line with rules set by the government and means we can maintain our services and planned investment in homes.

This is always a difficult decision and we never want to see charges rise. However, our costs have gone up in many areas. To keep providing safe, good quality homes and support for residents, we felt a rent increase was required. Our planned investment in 2024–25 includes £7.8m to improve and maintain existing homes.

After discussions with the resident engagement panel our board approved the rent increases of 7.7% for social housing and 9.4% for shared ownership.

Are you struggling with finances? See page 5 for support we offer

The 1% rent rule

Under government rules social housing rents can go by 1% on top of the inflation measure called CPI – consumer price index. Last September the CPI was 6.7% and we added 1% to get 7.7%. Shared ownership uses a different measure, set out in the lease – the retail price index (RPI) plus 0.5%. In September the RPI was 8.9%.

Service charge shared costs

Residents who pay a service charge received a letter in February detailing the works charged for the 2022–23 year. This showed any overspend and underspend and set out proposed charges for 2024–25.

Many of you got in touch about these charges in March and most queries have been answered. The service charge pays for:

- your share of the communal services
- an adjustment for our 2023–24 final costs
- the cost of services – we make no profit from this

Gardening, cleaning and upkeep of communal areas have new contracts from August. High quality is priority – see page 6

Investing in your homes – page 11

In 2023–24, we maintained our investment in regular repairs and maintenance services and prioritised damp and mould surveys and repairs.

Last autumn we also began our pilot project to retrofit existing homes, with funding from the West of England Combined Authority.

A home of our own Moving in to Elderberry Walk page 7

Information and support

Get in touch by phone or online

0117 942 4600

brighterplaces.co.uk/tenancy-support

Your tenancy

Got a question? Ask the handbook

Our latest tenant handbook answers many of the queries we get from residents about being a tenant, our services and support. Find it online or ask us for a printed copy.

brighterplaces.co.uk/tenant-handbook

- **Top 10 resident questions and answers**
- **moving-in checklist**
- **tenancy rules**
- **repairs information**
- **useful contacts**

Golden farewell when you leave

If your home is clear and clean, your meters have some credit and you drop us the full set of keys, we say thank you with cash.

When you give us notice to quit, we arrange a leaving inspection and give details of our cash thank you.

Depending on the size of property, this 'golden goodbye' is between £100 and £250.

Once you give us notice, we arrange to meet you at your home to discuss how you need to leave the property.

On the last day of your tenancy, we can then come to meet you so that you can hand over the keys.

brighterplaces.co.uk/moving-out

Support to deal with anti-social behaviour

Brighter Places works closely with local partners to resolve anti-social behaviour (ASB). These include SARI (Stand Against Racism and Inequality), to tackle hate crime, Resolve West, the Police and other groups.

Our anti-social behaviour process has been improved to make sure all reports trigger an action plan. This usually includes asking a resident to gather evidence of behaviour so we can build a case. There is a phone app to help.

Use this QR code to get the smartphone **NoiseApp 2.0** that records noise and photographic evidence.

Download NoiseApp 2.0

Contact your housing officer or call us on 0117 924 4600 if you need support to deal with anti-social behaviour.

Cost of living

We help you turn things around

When worry takes over, it can be hard to ask for support. With a five minute call to us you can begin to sort things out.

> "I'm grateful – it gives me a budget for food without guilt"

Cover the big stuff first

With a tight budget, your rent, food and bills are priority. But in a cost of living crisis, this can be a constant pressure. Contact your housing officer about:

- **cover rent**
- **affordable ways out of debt**
- **income checks**

How it works

Our specialist team can link you to advice, check income and spending with you and apply for support in kind – such as furniture or white goods.

In the past year we supported residents over several months or with one-off help for things like:

- having no money left to buy food
- struggling with bills or repayments
- health issues that became a crisis
- domestic pressure or struggling alone
- career support – **see page 8**

We act quickly for food

Brighter Places also partners with local food banks and can make a rapid referral if you need one.

Use the details at the top of page 4 for support or contact your housing officer.

Our tenancy support fund

We have a special fund put aside for resident support. We can award up to £350 for a family, often for food, and we assess each case within a few days.

Who else can help?

We sent this leaflet with your rent statement. It has a list of organisations you can contact.

> "You will never understand what you just did for my family – right now, I have no money, I mean no money"

Your home

Loving the outdoors

Communal area services are under new contracts from August and we're always keen discuss the works.

Who keeps it clean and green

Communal spaces

Last autumn we surveyed all residents who pay a service charge about the grounds maintenance and cleaning of shared spaces.

Our consultation involved face to face chats at resident homes and an online survey. We wanted to know your priorities and include them when we set up the new contracts. All residents could also comment on the draft contracts we prepared for tender and several of you wanted to help us select the new contractors.

We also asked about which are the most important works. The order was: litter picking, clearing leaves, weed control of hard standings, and sweeping of kerbs and paths. Most residents wanted quality as priority over (reasonable) cost.

More than 70% of residents wanted fortnightly cleaning and seasonal outdoor jobs.

We will work closely with our contractors when they are appointed to make sure the service is good.

Walk with us and talk to us

Our housing officers inspect communal areas every few weeks. If you are not happy with any cleaning or ground maintenance works, tell your housing officer. You can ask for a home visit or join them on an inspection.

If you don't pay a charge

Residents who do not pay a service charge do their own garden upkeep.

This includes jobs such as mowing, pruning, weeding paths and clearing rubbish. It also means looking after sheds, outbuildings and fences with the neighbours. Brighter Places looks after any fences that border a public space.

Mr.Fothergill's

FREE seeds for the first 15 entries

Send us your summer snaps

Our 2023 summer photo call was so popular that we're running it again this year. What's more, our first 15 entries will each be sent a packet of seeds, sponsored by Mr Fothergills. Share your garden view, sunny day out or growing space (no photos with children, please – we can't share these). Images go into our online gallery and on social media. Check the rules at brighterplaces.co.uk/send-us-your-summer-snaps or contact us on the email below. Your resident engagement panel will select the best shots. Email entries or questions to: engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk

Closing date: 31 July 2024

> *"For people on lower incomes, it is one of the best ways to get a house"*

Please keep communal hallways clear

We put a sticker on anything left in a communal area. This is a safety risk in case of fire or other hazards where you need to get out quickly. If we remove things and store them, we must charge you.

Shared future at Elderberry Walk

Ultrasound specialist Megan and her partner Paris moved into their shared ownership home in Elderberry Walk 18 months ago. Megan says they are loving their new-found freedoms and can now plan a whole new future together.

"One of the good things is that we were able to get our first dog and that's been a great way to get to know other people."

The couple walk their rescue pup in nearby green spaces. It also takes just 20 minutes for Meg to walk to work.

The two-bed terraced house is triple glazed and highly insulated. Upstairs and downstairs are on separate heat controls for energy efficiency.

"I think the bills are quite good," says Megan, who currently pays £100 per month for combined gas and electricity. Megan applied online for her house.

She bought a 52% share with a mortgage and pays rent on the other 48%.

"It's our first home, not our forever home, and I wanted to get as much as possible," she says. "Without shared ownership I wouldn't have been able to buy, especially in Bristol.

Security

"I rented in Bristol for about ten years, always in shared houses. I didn't realise the feeling of security you have as a homeowner.

"I definitely feel like I've grown up. We lived in separate shared houses before. Now we can cook more and have people over more. We've started to think about kids, which we couldn't have done before.

"For people on lower incomes, it is one of the best ways to get a house."

Visit bphomes.co.uk to find out more about shared ownership

Role models

What drives the people who work directly with residents? Brighter News talked to customer experience champion Layla Goldsworthy and housing officer Rob Chivers.

> *"My manager recognises my passion and ability"*

See the person

"I'm here for the residents as much as for the business," says Layla Goldsworthy, our customer experience and insight administrator, who is often on reception.

Layla is a former resident who became an active member of the engagement panel. When she saw her role advertised in our email newsletter, Brighter Places encouraged her to apply. Despite feeling out of her depth at the interview, her passion and determination won through and she was offered the post.

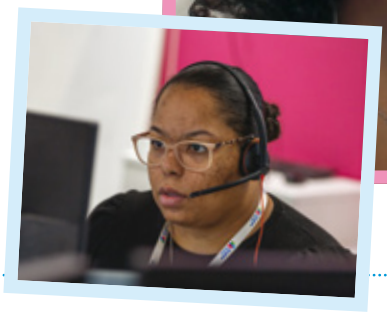
"Having grown up in social housing, I know we can't pick you up and move you, but we can support you."

That means making sure residents are heard and acting quickly to address their concerns, she says.

With both positive and negative experiences as a resident, Layla says it's her mission to make sure everyone feels listened to. "You have to see the person every time," she says.

"My manager recognises my passion and ability and many people in the team come to me for advice," she adds.

Layla has now progressed to a job-share contract for a further year in her fixed-term post.



Learning along with the job

Rob Chivers joined Brighter Places as a customer service adviser in 2021 after teaching abroad. He has since qualified to become a housing officer.

Rob's first contacts with residents were mostly sorting out repairs. "This gave me an overview of the whole organisation," he says.

Rob wanted to progress his career and make a positive impact on our residents and he was encouraged to train on the job and study to become a housing officer. The Brighter Places university fund covered 90% of the cost of his qualification.

"This is genuinely the best place I have worked for how staff are treated," he says.

Now Rob has his own areas in south Bristol, Frome, Bath and Wells and says: "I like the engagement with residents and being proactive." He still wants to become a manager and plans further study via the funded Brighter Places scheme.

> *"The best place I have worked for how staff are treated"*

Work with us brighterplaces.co.uk/careers-home

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Find your happy at work
Take the next step to the job you love, better pay and new opportunities. Ask us about a FREE career coach.
Call 0117 942 4600 or **email futurebright@brighterplaces.co.uk**

Resident voice

ASB response is top of the agenda

Residents on the new customer experience committee (CEC) are bringing tenant expertise to the heart of decision-making within Brighter Places and helping to set priorities for action.

For the January CEC meeting, the three residents asked about how we manage anti-social behaviour (ASB). Housing manager Simon Gray presented recent work by our team to analyse ASB data and our level of service.

ASB action plans

Simon's report showed that ASB is handled well by colleagues but we need to make it clearer to residents how we respond when they make a report. We now create an action plan from the start, whenever a resident reports ASB. This makes is easier to follow up cases.

Landlord report

In the May CEC meeting residents will see the first tenant satisfaction (TSM) yearly report. It shows our performance against measures all housing associations use. Any questions or comments they have about the report will go to the board at the end of May. In June the report will be sent to the Regulator of Social Housing.

The CEC meets every three months and has regular contact with the resident engagement panel (see below). This offers a route for sharing resident views and influencing decisions at the highest level.

ASB support

Speak to your housing officer, call 0117 924 4600 or use the form at:

brighterplaces.co.uk/antisocial-behaviour

Tenant satisfaction
See page 2 and read reports on our website brighterplaces.co.uk/how-we-are-doing

Get active via the resident panel

The resident engagement panel is a group of 12 residents who look carefully at the work of Brighter Places. They meet monthly and blog on our website. They also encourage residents to get in touch to raise issues and discuss things.

Engagement panel chair Pete Kennedy-Watson said: "We really want people to contribute to meetings. We include extra topics for discussion that are not on the original agenda – you can send them ahead of the meeting. Dates are on the website.

"We are also available to chat one-to-one and sometimes have closed, tenant-only meetings."

To join a meeting or give feedback call 0117 924 4600 or email: engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk

Visit our website: brighterplaces.co.uk/residents

Repairs and investment

Co-design of repairs service begins

We recognise that some residents are still waiting a long time for repairs. A review of the whole service will use your feedback and our data to improve.

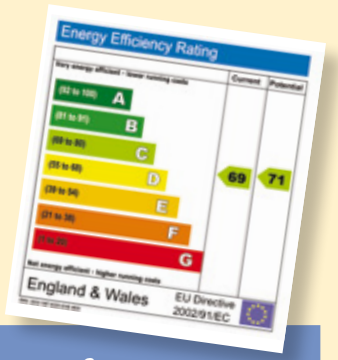
Our customer service centre continues to take many calls about jobs and we have agreed extra spending again this year to tackle what we know are frustrating waits for repairs.

In March we contacted 300 households about how we can make improvements to our repairs service and we are asking all residents to get involved this summer.

Read the flyer inserted in this magazine to find out more. Your feedback is essential to help us to co-design an improved repairs service for all residents. We offer training to support you so you can be involved.

Our resident satisfaction phone surveys carried out every three months by Acuity give vital information on what works and what needs to change. **See page 2** for the latest report on tenant satisfaction.

In the meantime, we continue to meet fire and gas safety compliance for all properties, including 100% of gas servicing, and we respond quickly to emergency call-outs.



Energy performance

To reduce carbon emissions from homes towards our climate targets we are looking at ways to improve existing homes. This includes our retrofit project (page 11). We want all Brighter Places homes to have an energy efficiency rating (EPC) of C or above by 2030. More than 80% of homes already meet this standard.

Fire safety checks

Brighter Places property inspectors Rob Manser (left) and Lucian Wilson (right) are familiar faces for many residents. They carry out around **200 inspections a week** to test communal fire alarms, emergency lighting, automatically opening vents (AOVs) and fire exits. Where required, they also inspect fire doors.

Resident experience

Works to improve quality of homes

Residents share their experiences of major projects to tackle damp and mould and upgrade homes for warmth and energy efficiency.

Share your experience with us engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk

Family room is back in use

Resident Lynda had a recurring damp problem that previous repairs had not fixed. So Brighter Places sent in our damp and mould task force to find the source.

Tackling damp and mould is a priority for our repairs team and our dedicated task force was set up to tackle the increasing numbers of problems reported. We are making progress on these but there is some way to go with our backlog as it is difficult to get the contractors needed for this type of work – there is huge demand and a limited number of professionals available. We appreciate how residents work with us when we address these types of repairs.

Do you have concerns about damp or mould? Get in touch or use the form on our website: brighterplaces.co.uk/damp-condensation-and-mould

Together again

For Lynda, the damp in her spare bedroom had meant she could no longer invite family to stay. With works complete, she is looking forward to the next visit from her son's family.

"I can start to put the room together again. I'm so pleased with that," said Lynda (above). "I must again thank you for your ongoing support, attention to detail and positive attitude, and getting such a good company for the works."

We follow up on damp and mould repairs every three and six months and again after a year.

Retrofit projects' vital feedback

Our pilot scheme to improve the warmth and comfort of nine homes is complete. Brighter News visited residents to talk about their experience of this vital retrofit work that will help cut carbon emissions and tackle climate change.

We greatly appreciate the involvement of residents who took this walk with us into the world of zero carbon. We couldn't have done it without their support.

Funded by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, the pilot tested full, medium and minor works to increase energy efficiency, using solar panels, air source heat pumps, external wall insulation, loft insulation, ventilation and temperature zone control monitors.

Resident Ann-Marie (above) had medium level works and is pleased with the progress. She wanted to be fully zero carbon so hopes future works will achieve this. Initially her zoned heating valves did not work, but this issue is now resolved. Her home also had new external doors, vents, loft insulation and rear windows.

Engage sooner

One home which had major works created many challenges and disruption for the resident. Although pleased with the solar panels, the resident felt that involving the household early on is vital. "Engage with tenants as stakeholders, not as an afterthought."

We are very grateful for all the feedback as this has been an ambitious local programme. Our learning will be shared across all partners in the project.

“My coach helped me continue with my career without losing drive”

DARYL

Future Bright Participant

www.futurebright.org.uk

Contact Brighter Places

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
10 Eastgate Office Park
Bristol BS5 6XX

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Do you need large print, easy read, braille or audio? Ask us. A digital copy is on our website.

WEST OF ENGLAND Combined Authority

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

FUTURE BRIGHT Support Advice Skills

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Manage your tenancy + rent online using the link below to sign up
brighterplaces.co.uk/myplace
Or email us if you need some help
info@brighterplaces.co.uk

Report a repair

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

Call any time (and for emergency)
0117 942 4600

Pay your rent

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

Direct debit + phone payments
0117 942 4600

If you need a translation, we can get one for you

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

Jeżeli język angielski mie jest Twoim językiem ojczystym i wyamagasz tłumaczenia, możemy to zapewnić.

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

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

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

Haddii Ingiriisku aanu ahayn afkaaga kowaad oo aad u boadan tahay turjjumaad, annagaa kuu samayn karra.

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。

Nëse anglishta nuk është ghuja amtare dhe keni nevojë per një përthim, ne mund t’ua sigurojmë atë.

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

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

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

Nếu quí vị không thao Anh văn va cần bản dich, chúng tôi sẽ glúp quí vị một bản.