Brighter Places

Building better futures

Customer Services Strategy

2022-27

Contents

- Why this strategy is important
- Where we are now
- What our services will look like in 2027
- How we will get there
- What the journey will look like in terms of key measures
- Supporting strategies

Why this strategy is important

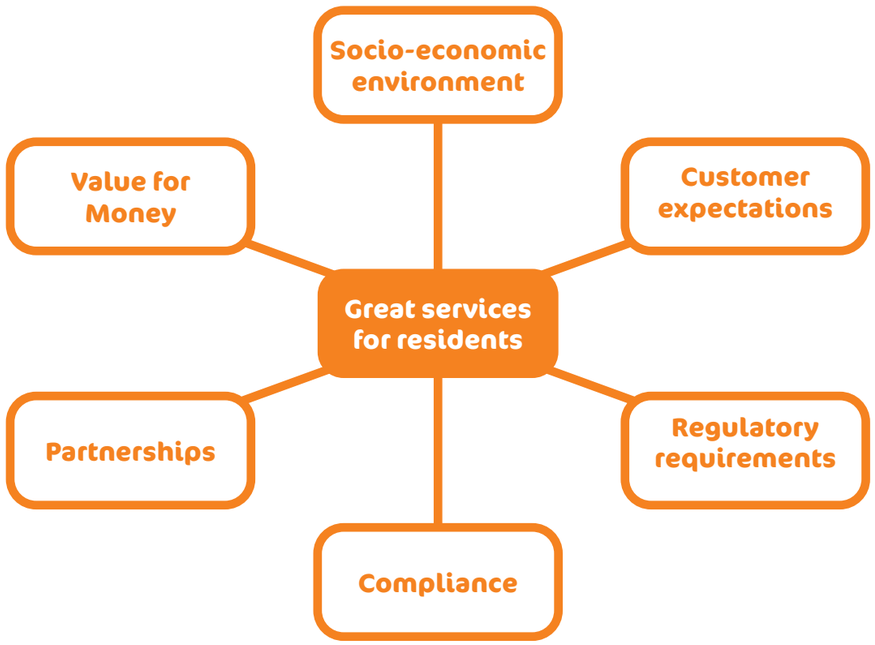
The Brighter Places **Corporate Strategy 2022-27** has set out three strategic priorities for the next five years: Great customer experience, Great place to work and Great homes and partnerships.

All parts of the business will contribute to the delivery of all three strategic priorities. However, this strategy sets out its contribution, in particular, to the delivery of the Great customer experience and outlines the strategic aims for the services which are at the very centre of the purpose of Brighter Places.

It covers all services provided by the Customer Services Directorate, and these include:

- Working with residents to enable them to enjoy a sustainable tenancy and neighbourhood – through effective allocation of homes, tenancy and estate management, income management and dealing with anti-social behaviour.
- Keeping residents' homes in a good state of repair – by responding to any responsive repairs reports and ensuring any new homes meet our voids standard.
- Engaging with residents and communities on issues that affect them – by providing a wide range of options for involvement and feedback and ensuring these make a difference to the way we make decisions about our service, and to deal effectively with any complaints.
- Providing a range of wider support to ensure our residents can maintain their tenancies, make life improvements and develop their careers, as well as provide direct support in our homelessness scheme.
- Making it easy to access all our services, be it by phone, mail, in person, via digital communication or a self-service portal.
- Keeping up to date, meaningful and compliant data, and effective systems to enable a personal, tailored and effective service delivery.
- In summary, this strategy outlines the journey of Brighter Places core services over the next five years, and our commitment to our residents on how we will provide great customer experience.

There are also a wider set of drivers as to why this strategy is important:



Socio-economic environment

Our residents and communities are currently faced with one of the most significant cost of living crisis in a generation. This places stresses on household finances, creating greater challenges for households to make ends meet and to pay their essential outgoings, including their rent. We are ready to provide help to our residents as part of our core services, direct support or in co-operation with specialist partners.

Customer Expectations:

Residents have articulated very clearly the expectations they have of Brighter Places as a merged organisation, and the strategy includes all commitments made as part of the customer promises made at the time of our merger.

Regulatory Requirements:

We welcome the Housing Green Paper, and the subsequent widening of the focus of the regulator to have a greater emphasis on the consumer standards and customer satisfaction. This very much reflects Brighter Places perspective, which places the resident experience at the heart of its business model, supported by a strong financial and organisational framework.

Compliance

The service areas covered by this strategy are embedded in a wider framework of regulatory and legal requirements, such as Health and Safety regulations, Housing Legislation and sector good practice.

Partnerships

The strategy reflects the full commitment of Brighter Places to working closely with its internal and external partners: internally with the other business areas across the organisation, as well as in close partnership with our residents and communities. Externally, it reflects the wide range of partnerships with third parties including the local authorities, emergency services, housing providers and charities.

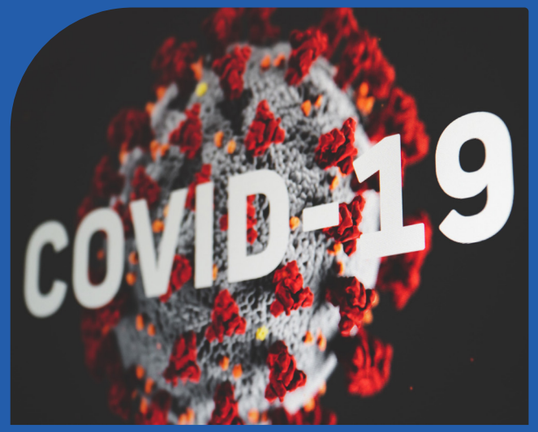
Value for Money

The work that Brighter Places does is primarily financed by the rent we receive from our tenants, and as such we consider ourselves fully accountable to our residents to use our funds wisely and to operate in an efficient manner, while providing a great quality service.

Where we are now

At the launch of this strategy, Brighter Places, its residents, and its colleagues will have been through an incredible change journey:

For two years we have been operating during a global pandemic, which has turned the way of working upside down, and has required housing providers to find new ways for supporting our customers, our communities and each other. We are very proud of the resilience of our residents and the commitment and resolve of our colleagues to deliver caring and professional services throughout lockdowns, restrictions and an ever-changing environment. We have supported not only our residents, but have invested £100,000 in support to community groups and agencies to help our communities to help themselves.



Brighter Places

Building better futures

In April 2021, Brighter Places was created through the merger between Solon South West Housing Association, and United Communities Housing Association. The ultimate aim of the merger is the ongoing improvement of our services, embedded in a strong ethos of customer care and the commitment to meaningful and sustained resident and community engagement. The delivery of merger promises has been the focus of our work throughout the past year and has informed this strategy going forward. We have created a new and enhanced engagement framework, working closely with residents to set up the Engagement panel and Connected voices, a flexible and targeted engagement and feedback tool. Brighter Places, together with residents and colleagues, have developed a new set of customer care standards and approach to complaints management and have created a customer services team as a first point of contact for Brighter Places customers.

In summer 2021 we went live with the first phase of our ICT transformation programme, creating an integrated management system across the new organisation, and are set to complete the transformation programme later in 2022/23. The programme is laying the foundations for more effective working processes, and a more tailored service based on accessible and up to date information.

While we have taken important steps towards the goal of consistent and improved service offer for all Brighter Places residents, this pace and volume of change has created challenges for our day-to-day service delivery. We have also been impacted by an increasingly volatile sector, especially with regards to maintenance services. As a result, the quality of our current services is currently at a level which does not always meet our ambitions and our customers' expectations. This has been frustrating for customers and colleagues alike.

However, this position is further fuelling our resolve and passion to make our vision of a great customer experience a reality, and this strategy is designed to set out this vision and the steps to achieve it in more detail.

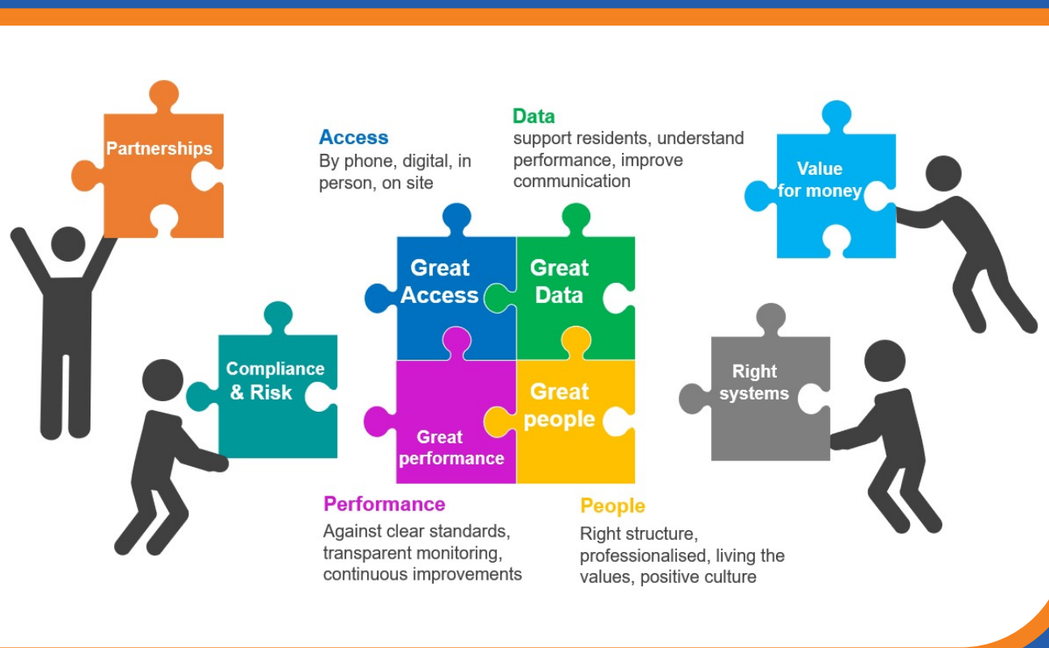
What our services will look like in 2027

In a nutshell: in 2027 we will deliver consistent and robust services to our residents, leading to a positive service experience for our residents and partners.

It is no more, and no less than that. To deliver this, our focus is to do the basics brilliantly and build on these strong foundations going forward.

To illustrate this vision in more detail, this strategy sets out below the different elements coming together to make it a reality.

At the centre of this strategy are the themes around great access to services, delivery of great performance by great people who are proud of their work, and have access to and use great data:



Great Access

In 2027, residents will be able to access our services through multiple channels, tailored to their needs, interests and lifestyle, and receive a consistent service irrespective of the way they contact us.

In five years:

- Our one stop customer service centre will be fully embedded
- We will deliver top quartile phone performance and satisfaction
- Our customer portal is accredited by our residents
- We will be present in our neighbourhoods and run a programme of estate walkabouts with residents and partners established

Great People

By 2027 we will be clear on the capabilities and capacities needed to deliver a consistent service quality and will be implementing personal and team development plans to inspire colleagues and create resilient teams. This will be demonstrated by:

- Reduced colleague turnover and sickness levels
- Work satisfaction levels which have significantly improved
- Personal and team development plans are in place
- Evidence for lived values through feedback and performance management
- Diverse team bringing diverse skills and perspectives.

Great Performance

In 2027 our performance measures will show a high-quality service, demonstrating significantly improved satisfaction levels as well as efficient service delivery. This will reduce avoidable complaints, and deliver a service we are consistently proud of:

- Satisfaction with landlord services will be at a minimum of 85%
- Repairs satisfaction will be top quartile compared to other social landlords
- Avoidable complaints will have reduced by 50%
- Our arrears performance will be top quartile in the sector
- Voids turnaround will be top quartile in the sector
- We will consistently measure top quartile satisfaction with dealing with ASB
- Colleagues will feel proud of our services
- Our customer service quality will be accredited by our customers
- Great services are delivered when colleagues are empowered and supported.

Great Data

In 2027, we will have embedded best practice on data management, have a system in place which ensures key data is up to date, secure and accessible, and is used to tailor services to residents and drive service improvements. We will have implemented:

- Self-management for residents of their customer data available via portal
- Performance data and reporting for all key areas and shared with stakeholders
- A data analysis tool to support analysis of services and communities and to drive service improvement
- Data management systems (GDPR, cleansing etc.)

Right Systems

In 2027, we will have completed our ICT transformation programme, and the new systems will be fully embedded. We will take ownership of our systems and data and will be actively engaged in developing our systems to support our ways of working. We will have in place:

- Our ICT system and data strategy, supported by appropriate leadership and business plan
- An effective partnership with MRI and other key system providers (incl. basecamp membership)
- A system support group supported by clear operational ownership
- A procurement plan to manage our hardware costs.

Compliance & Risk

We will have processes and systems in place which will ensure full compliance with regulation and legislation and strive to reflect best practice across our area of operation.

This will be demonstrated by:

- A system of monitoring and reporting of regulatory KPIs
- 100% performance against compliance targets
- 100% compliance with Health and Safety Assurance framework
- Robust data protection management
- 100% delivery of Internal Audit actions.

Partnerships

Great service delivery is only possible by working closely with internal and external partners and stakeholders, and by 2027 we will have established strong relationships supported by effective communication, collaboration and engagement. We will have in place:

- An established Engagement Framework
- Satisfaction levels with 'feeling listened to' at a minimum of 80%
- Adoption of the 'Together with Tenants' charter
- Community profiles to inform services, our engagement and our community investment programme
- Key operational partnerships to deliver core services (i.e., repairs)
- Effective contract management standards and responsibilities
- A 'one team' approach to cross departmental service delivery

Value for Money

We are conscious that we are the custodians of the homes of our residents, and our operations are funded by the rents and charges paid by our residents.

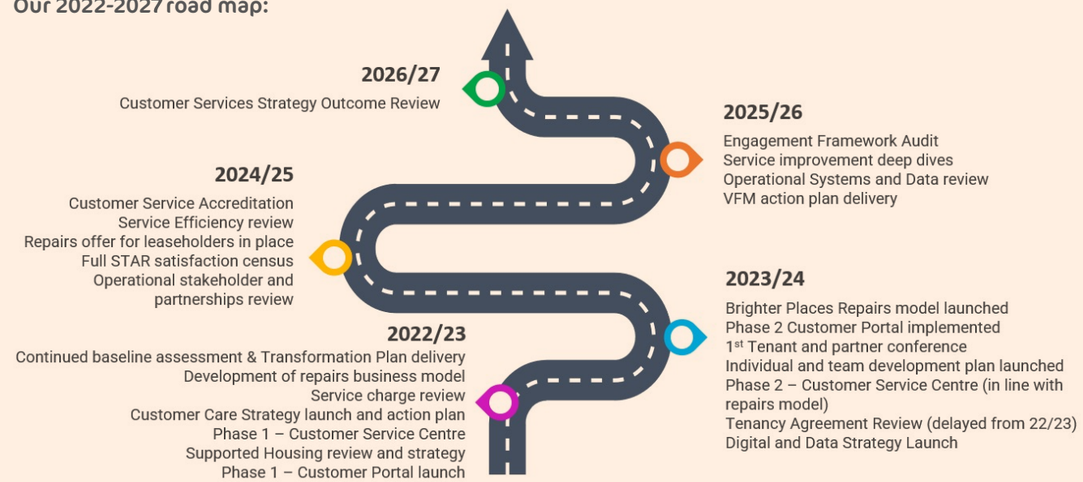
We will take great care in utilising these funds to achieve maximum return for our residents, demonstrated by:

- Benchmarking against performance measures and key spending
- Return on investment analysis of ICT transformation programme completed
- Efficiency review of housing management cost structure
- Ongoing operational VFM action plan delivery

How we will get there

The roadmap below highlights the key milestones we are planning to reach in the five years ahead to deliver our aims outlined above.

Our 2022-2027 road map:



The first years will enable us to review and reset key operational areas, in particular the repairs service, where our Brighter Places delivery model will be launched in Spring 2023, and fully embedded in the following few years. This key milestone will facilitate other services improvements, such as the full launch of our Customer Service Centre and Full Customer Portal.

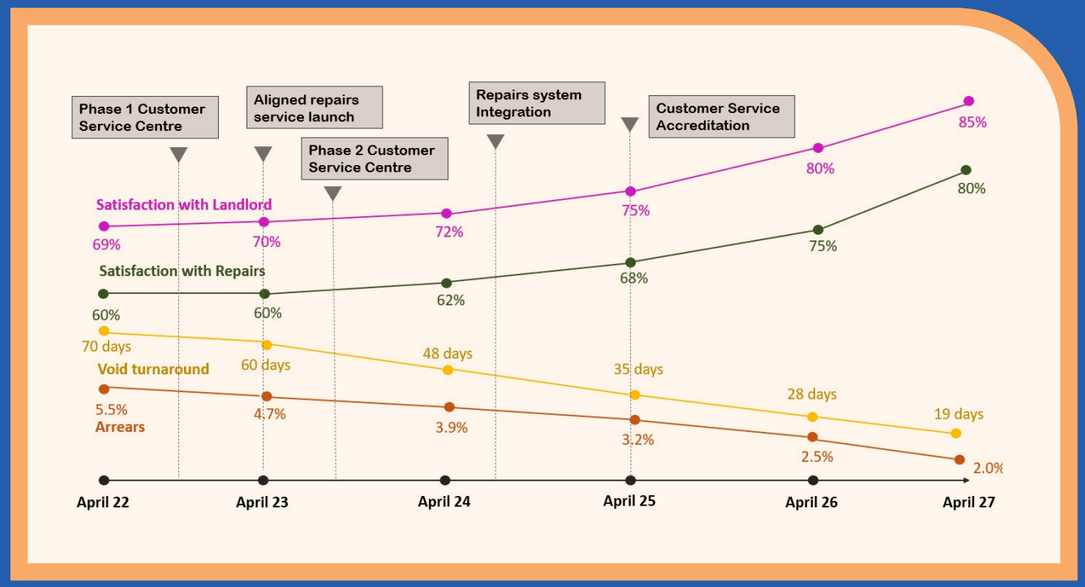
Further delivery of key customer promises made at the time of merger will include the overhaul of the service charge system by 2023 and a leaseholder repair offer in 2024.

In the latter years of this strategy, we will focus on the review of the newly established services to ensure we deliver the outcomes and drive further improvements, as well as tightening up on our efficiencies and value for money.

What the journey will look like in terms of key measures

We start our journey from a position of low performance across many key areas. In the first years of this strategy, we will work tirelessly to build the services we can be proud of, and our customers expect. We will measure meaningful data, including performance indicators, complaints analysis, satisfaction analysis and many more, to understand our starting point and the progress we make to reach our goals.

The improvements in our performance will be immediately visible in some areas, in other areas this will take time to improve as we deliver the key changes and improvements. We expect greater momentum through the second half of this strategy. The journey for some key performance indicators can be seen here, and set in relation to the delivery of some key milestones:



Supporting strategies

This strategy will be complemented by a number of supporting strategies which we will develop over the next five years:

2022/23

Customer Care Strategy

Digital Access Strategy

Supported Housing Strategy

Engagement Strategy

2023/24

Responsive Maintenance Strategy

2024/25

Stakeholder Strategy

2025/26

Operational VFM Strategy