

Streets Ahead

Summer 2018

Getting to know our
customers

Our new development
programme

Universal Credit and
Welfare Reform update

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Getting to know you



At the heart of everything we do is ensuring that our customers are happy, comfortable and satisfied with their homes. This year we are getting out and meeting our customers face to face.

Questionnaires are a great way to gauge how customers feel, but there is no better way to check on customer confidence and monitor if we are focusing on their true needs, than to meet with them face to face. With that goal in mind the Exec Team sponsored a “Getting to Know You” event to meet the silent majority of our customers. It also gave Housing Solutions an opportunity to be seen as a positive presence in the local community.

On Thursday 24th May we closed our offices and despite heavy rain, took to the streets of Maidenhead. Our aim was to meet as many of our customers as we could in person, to gather their feedback on the services they receive from us. We also wanted to encourage our customers to take advantage of our broad range of online services that are available via our customer website portal. www.housingsolutions.co.uk/portal-home/

Over 75 colleagues from all departments, partnered up to cover nearly 2000 properties across the Borough. We met 705 householders who shared positive comments about their property and the interactions they have with the HS Team. Our customers were impressed by the personal interest that we continue to take in them, with one customer commenting “you really look after us and we love our property.” For our office based colleagues it helped humanise the fine work they do as they could see the value they bring to customers.

The day was deemed a real success and the insights that were gathered will be used to refine and improve our services. We have now written to all customers, that we made contact with on the day, to outline some of the changes we will be making as a result of their feedback.

Theresa May Visit

Maidenhead Local MP and Prime Minister, Theresa May visited our offices in May. She met local residents who have been helped back into employment or have got onto the property ladder with the help of schemes run by Housing Solutions.

Chief Executive, Orla Gallagher said: “It was fantastic to have been able to welcome the Prime Minister, Theresa May to Housing Solutions, to see first hand the work we are doing to tackle the housing shortage in the area.”

Theresa May met with Housing Solutions customers who have been helped on to the property ladder through the extremely popular, do-it yourself shared ownership (DIYSO) scheme, which is run in partnership with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) - freeing up valuable rented housing in Maidenhead and Windsor.

As part of the visit Theresa May also met some of our talented

and ambitious residents who have successfully started their own business. With the support of Housing Solutions, RBWM and Enterprise Cube, this initiative was set up to support our customers into work by starting their own business and some of our successful tenants were delighted to show the Prime Minister their products and services.

Prime Minister, Theresa May said: “It was a pleasure to go back to Housing Solutions to hear of the developments taking place and to meet local residents who have benefited from their affordable housing scheme. I was particularly encouraged to meet tenants who, through a joint initiative with the council, have been able to start up their own businesses and showcase their services and products.”

Find out more about business support on the next page.



“
Housing Solutions
are one of the
good ones that are
actually building
homes. We need
to encourage more
to do that.
”

Theresa May, Prime Minister

New van fleet coming soon!



With our new branding roll out almost complete you will soon start to see shiny new Housing Solutions maintenance vans on the road sporting our new livery. The vans will be more cost effective and efficient to run, as well as environmentally friendly with the addition of AdBlue which reduces nitrous oxide in vehicle exhaust by 90%. The vans will also be able to hold more stock so there will be less necessity to visit suppliers. This change will enable our teams to complete more jobs and free up repair appointments.

Want to reskill? Fancy a new job?



Not sure how and where to start? We offer 1-1 support and can give you the help you need.

That could be a personalised action plan, signposting you to useful agencies and links, finding relevant training, helping with your CV and more.

We'd love to meet you to understand your circumstances, interests and how we can help. Contact the Community Engagement Manager now to book your Employment Support 1-1 on 01628 3079.

Make sure you keep an eye on our Facebook page to learn about new local job vacancies, training opportunities and dates for our next free start-up business course.

Our new developments

To help improve the shortage of housing locally. We are continually looking to build more homes locally for rent and shared ownership.

We currently have plans to build over 500 new homes for local residents and have a number of up and coming development projects, listed below:

Loddon Park

A development of 125 new homes in Woodley

Pine Trees, Wycombe

A development of 50 new homes at Daws Hill, Wycombe.

The Loftings, Maidenhead

A development of 23 new flats at Stafferton Way, Maidenhead.

Manor Place, Maidenhead

A development of 16 new homes at Manor Lane, Maidenhead.

Brill House, Maidenhead

A development of 11 supported living flats and 7 houses at Mercia Way, Cox Green.

Top grades by the regulator

On 28 March 2018, the regulator of Social Housing confirmed our regulatory grade as G1 V1. This means we have received the top grades for governance and viability which puts us in a great position to improve our services and build more homes. At the same time we also had our existing credit rating confirmed as A+ by Standard and Poor's Global Ratings. These results allow us to continue to build more homes and showing our commitment to local communities.



Staff raise £10,000 for Thames Hospice

We have been supporting our corporate charity, Thames Hospice throughout 2016-2018. Our staff have come up with a whole range of fundraising and volunteering activities including baking to eating (a lot!) of cakes, wearing their craziest Christmas jumpers and raffles and auctions to raise funds and awareness. The total raised was an amazing £5,000 which was matched by the Association's Board bringing the donation to just over £10,000. We have now said a fond farewell to Thames Hospice and welcome our new nominated charity, Young Carers, which we will support throughout 2018-2020.



An update on our Welfare and Support Team and Universal Credit

The full Universal Credit service has now gone live in most of our local authority areas including, RBWM, Slough, Basingstoke and Wokingham.

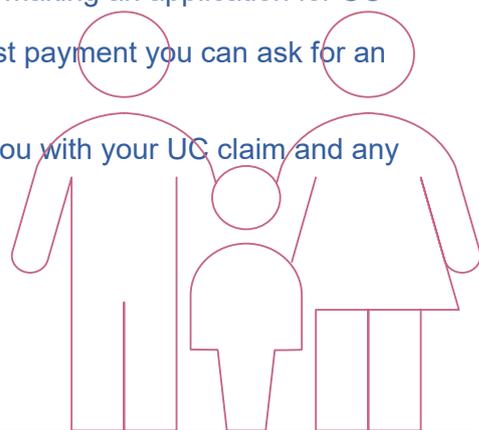
You may have heard about Universal Credit (UC) which is a new benefit designed to support you if you're working and on a low income or if you're out of work. UC will replace 6 benefits;

Housing Benefit
Child Tax Credit
Income Support
Working Tax Credit
Income-based jobseekers allowance
Income-related employment and support allowance.

You do not need to do anything until you hear from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) about moving to Universal Credit, unless you have a change in circumstances. If you are a new claimant, applications are managed online. There is a wealth of help available on the Gov.uk website or check out our handy guide on our website: www.housingsolutions.co.uk/supporting-you/benefit-support/universal-credit/

- Once you have made your online application please contact the Jobcentre to arrange an appointment with your Work Coach otherwise your claim will not be complete
- UC will only apply to working age customers, pensioners are not affected
- If you have 3 or more children you cannot claim UC and will have to apply for the legacy benefits listed above
- Remember to apply for Council Tax Support (CTS) separately after making an application as CTS is not part of UC; backdating is limited to 1 month so you may lose out on the benefit if you don't apply within 1 month
- From April 11th 2018, new UC claimants who are on Housing Benefit (HB) immediately before their UC claim was made and whose HB ends due to the claim for UC, are entitled to a 2 week Transition to UC Housing Payment
- You will need to have a bank account for payments of UC to be made into. Please ensure you are able to set up Direct Debits and standing orders from this account as you will be responsible for paying your rent to Housing Solutions
- Please ensure you have an email address or set up one before making an application for UC
- If you think you will struggle financially until you receive your first payment you can ask for an advance payment from UC

Please remember we have a Welfare and Support Team to assist you with your UC claim and any other benefit related queries you may have.



The Housing Solutions Service Improvement Team

Our Service Improvement Team was formed to ensure that our customers receive a level of service that meets their genuine needs.

The SIT responds to customer feedback on our services and gives us an insight into our performance which helps identify areas that require improvement.

The Regulator of Social Housing, has set a Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, which we adhere to. This guarantees that our customers have a voice and they can actively influence policy.

By listening to customers we can:

Feedback the information to area managers to implement improvements.

Focus on poor performing service areas and identify customer groups to carry out an annual review.

Look at any major, national or local changes in housing related policy of legislation and consider how it may affect our customers and service

A right royal celebration

Customers at the new extra care scheme The Birches had a “right royal celebration” for the Royal Wedding in May. The residents’ art club created the decorations which were used throughout the celebration. On the day of the wedding residents got dressed up in their finery to watch the celebrations in the community lounge and enjoy a celebratory street party lunch in the on site Landing Spot Cafe.



CIH and ITN Productions

In May we took part in filming a piece with The Chartered Institute of Housing and ITN Productions. The film was part of a larger segment that is focusing on the work the sector is doing to “solve the housing crisis.” Our film will be available on our website following the launch at this year’s Housing Conference. Make sure you head over to our website to watch it and let us know what you think. <https://www.housingsolutions.co.uk/corporate/corporate-videos/>



Worried about how to pay your rent?

Have you fallen behind with your rent payments? Perhaps you are struggling due to a change in circumstances. A loss of job? Illness or perhaps an unexpected expense that has left you short. Money worries can weigh heavily on your mind and make you feel very stressed, but it's vital that you act quickly and let us know, rather than letting the situation roll on. We are here to help our customers and the sooner you talk to us, the sooner we can help you! It's our number one priority to keep you in your home.

If you give us a call on 0800 876 6060 you can be assured that your call will not be met with criticism. We will do everything we can to help you research what options are open to you. Perhaps the solution will be to set up a payment plan. This

could be an agreement that allows you to continue making your normal monthly payment, whilst making an extra payment towards the money you owe. Together we can work out how much you can afford to pay towards your arrears, so that it's manageable and reasonable.

It could be possible that your change in circumstances means that you are entitled to some Government help in the form of benefits. Some people find the benefit system daunting and complicated. Housing Solutions have a knowledgeable and helpful in-house Welfare and Support Team who will talk to you, in confidence, about the options that are open to you. Our team have helped a considerable number of our customers navigate their way through the benefit system.

For example; one of our customers was struggling with arrears. Our Welfare Support Team were able to assist her to get a reconsideration which culminated in a back dated benefit payment of £994.98. This cleared her arrears and enabled her to remain in her home. To contact the Welfare Team go our website, search for Benefit Support and complete an online form. One of the team can arrange a time to call you or arrange to meet you in your own home if that's more convenient.

Our aim is to offer support to our customers. Life is stressful enough without worrying about if you will lose your home. Contact us as soon as possible so we can support and advise you. We are on your side and prepared to help.



Get in touch

Streets Ahead is the newsletter for Housing Solutions customers. Don't forget that this is your newsletter, so if you have any suggestions for improvements or ideas for stories or local news, please let us know by dropping an email to:

pr@housingsolutions.co.uk or by calling Holly Price on 01628 543126.



Opening times

Main office

Our offices are open:

Monday to Thursday:
8.45am to 5.15pm

Friday: 8.45am to 4.45pm

Cash office

For the payment of rent, our cash office is open:

Monday to Thursday:
8.45am to 4.45pm

Friday: 8.45am to 4.15pm.

Or call 0800 876 6060 to use our automated telephone rent payment line.

Customer contact centre

Monday: 8.45am to 5.15pm

Tuesday: 8.45am to 5.15pm

Wednesday: 10am to 5.15pm

Thursday: 8.45am to 5.15pm

Friday: 8.45am to 4.45pm

Emergency repairs

For emergency repairs outside our normal office hours, at weekends or on bank holidays please call:

0800 876 6060

Contact details

Email
contact@housingsolutions.co.uk

Website
www.housingsolutions.co.uk

Facebook
facebook.com/Housing.Solutions.UK

Twitter
[@HS_Homes](https://twitter.com/HS_Homes)

Freephone
0800 876 6060

