

# Streets Ahead

Winter 2018



Applying for transfers  
online

How technology is  
helping improve our  
estates

Supporting you into  
work



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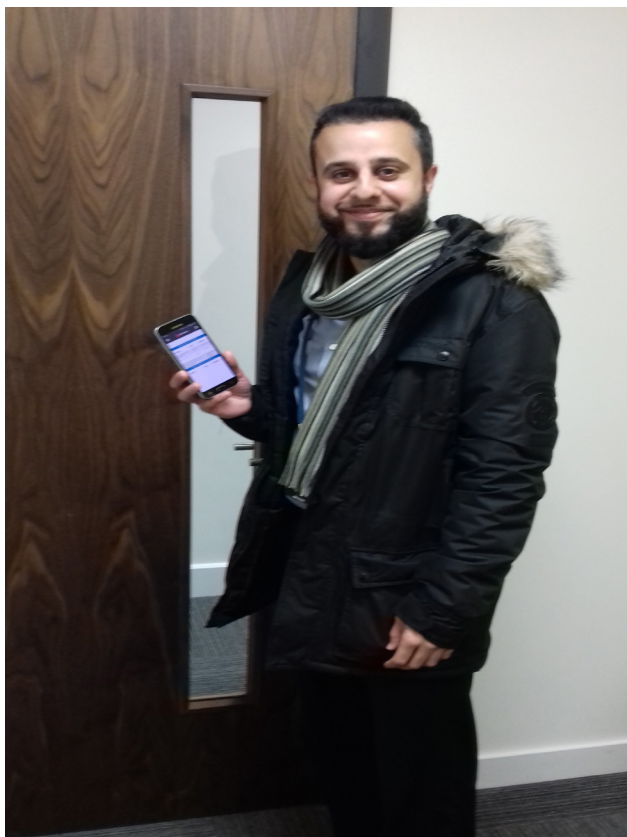


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# Combining tech and efficiency

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We live in a world where everything is becoming more and more instant. There seems to be an 'App' for everything and we can now say that is true for housing management.



Mohson Razaq  
Tenancy and Neighbourhood Officer

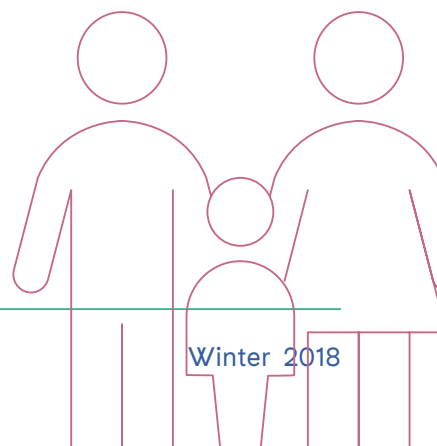
The App is designed to make our Tenancy and Neighbourhood Officers (TNOs) become more responsive when they are out and about in the patches and communities they look after. During the last year we have been working with Housemark and their developer, Kore Support to help them design and develop their very successful 'Housemark' app.

The App enables them to make estate inspections easier to do by reducing paperwork and helps us to keep a more accurate record of all our estates and community areas.

TNOs can instantly take pictures of such problems as fly tipping, graffiti and abandoned vehicles and immediately raise a request for a job there and then to be carried out. Mitigating delays meaning we can address problems, quickly.

The App also helps the TNO's log the consistency and quality of our grounds maintenance, cleaning and general look and feel of our estates, which over time will help build a picture of where we need to improve.

As improving customer satisfaction is one of our key aims we are proud to be one of the first housing associations in the country to use the new App to help respond to our customer's needs. We are also procuring further technology which will enable our TNOs to become fully mobile and responsive. This will help us with our aim of giving you, our customers, more time so we can help you deal with the issues that really matter to you.





# Paying Rent at Christmas

Christmas can be enjoyable and fun, for many it's the highlight of the year. However, pressure to spend a lot of money on presents and entertaining over the festive period can cause stress.

We know it's an expensive time, but it's really important to prioritise your rent and utility bills during this period. We want all our customers to enjoy the holidays without having to worry about money problems in the New Year. Failure to keep your rent account up to date could cause unnecessary stress and possibly put your tenancy at risk. Here are a few helpful tips for all our customers at this busy time:

Make sure all your priority bills are being paid (i.e rent, council tax, gas, electric and water). The best way to pay your rent is by Direct Debit straight from your bank account on a regular basis. It is a condition of your tenancy to ensure that your rent is kept up to date

- Inform the relevant bodies, such as the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Housing Benefit Office promptly of any changes in your circumstances which could affect your benefit entitlement.
- Decide on how much you can spend on Christmas and stick to it.
- Find the cheapest deals online. Scour the web for discount codes and consider purchasing through cash-back sites
- Avoid taking out extended credit agreements or borrowing money for Christmas

If you are experiencing difficulty in paying your rent or would like to discuss how to reduce your arrears, please contact your Tenancy and Neighbourhood Officer

<b>Shannon Lowe</b>	<b>01628 543074</b>
<b>Martine Mills</b>	<b>01628 543 114</b>
<b>Kym Pearce</b>	<b>01628 543057</b>
<b>Charlotte Prior</b>	<b>01628 543067</b>
<b>Mohson Razaq</b>	<b>01628 543138</b>
<b>Elizabeth Walker</b>	<b>01628 543160</b>
<b>Carly Ford/Rachael Timson</b>	<b>01628 543135</b>

You can also email using the

format [firstname.lastname@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:firstname.lastname@housingsolutions.co.uk)

We also have a helpful Welfare and Support Team who offer free impartial advice and assistance with all aspects of benefits and can make sure you are not missing out on your entitlements. All enquiries are handled in total confidence. Email [welfareandsupport@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:welfareandsupport@housingsolutions.co.uk)

The following organisations also provide debt advice:

**Citizens Advice**

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

**National Debt Advice**

[www.nationaldebtline.org](http://www.nationaldebtline.org)

**Money Advice Service**

[www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk](http://www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk)

**Pay Plan**

[www.payplan.com](http://www.payplan.com)

We hope that these suggestions will be helpful and we wish all our customers a very happy festive season.





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# Visually impaired or registered blind?

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**D**o you know of anyone who is blind or visually impaired (VIP)? Would they like the opportunity to meet and socialise for a couple of hours?

We are gathering interest for an afternoon group that could meet, chat over issues and enjoy spending time together. Please pass this information onto anyone you know and encourage them to message Housing Solutions via our Facebook page or contact Jill Taylor via email [jill.taylor@guidemail.co.uk](mailto:jill.taylor@guidemail.co.uk). Once we have gauged interest we can get the group set up!

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## Need to find work? Struggling to juggle working and childcare? Want to become computer confident?

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**T**hese are just a small sample of the enquiries that our Employment and Community Partnership Coordinator has helped with over the past 18 months. Whether you need to upskill, retrain or just need some help with job searching we're able to support you.

Once you meet us for a confidential review, we can help calculate how much work you can do within your benefit parameters. Our Team can signpost you to support with your CV, provide interview tips and a variety of free courses via the 80 different agencies who partner with us; to support you in breaking down barriers into work.

One of our tenants, Mrs M, moved into one of our properties. She was claiming UC but was keen to get back into work. She felt her circumstances would limit her options as her children were still in school and she couldn't drive. Through support and 'better off' calculations she applied for a job at a local college, working in the kitchen. This has resulted in Mrs M being £40 a month better off including travel costs. We continue to check with her to ensure she has the support she needs. Whatever your circumstances contact our Employment and Community Partnership Coordinator Jenn; [Jennifer.Platt@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:Jennifer.Platt@housingsolutions.co.uk) or phone 01628 543124 and find out how Housing Solutions can help you.

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# Meet the Welfare Team

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Our Team is here to help you and includes a Welfare & Support Team Manager, Welfare Benefits Officer, Universal Credit Officer, Employment & Community Partnership Coordinator & Tenancy Sustainment Officer. We can assist you with any benefit queries, help in returning to work, starting your own business, unravelling the ongoing changes under the Universal Credit system as well as giving you tenancy support.



Pal Sandhu is our Welfare & Support Team Manager who is responsible for leading on welfare reform and keeping the organisation informed of any legislative changes.



Hadikah Chaudhri is our Universal Credit Officer who helps support our tenants in a whole variety of ways, from helping with online applications to liaising with work coaches to get issues resolved.



Stacey Yarrow is our Tenancy Sustainment Officer. Stacey is dedicated to helping new resident's sustain their tenancy within the first 12 months. She is on hand to offer help & assistance.



Jenn Platt's role is Employment & Community Partnership Coordinator who offers our resident's employment support; whether you are starting work, returning to work or need start-up assistance.



Rose Dent is the Welfare Benefits Officer who is available to help with all benefit queries, completion of benefit forms & disputing benefit decisions



# Housing Solutions transfer system is going online!

We have some great news to share with our customers. Housing Solutions along with Radian and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) have worked together to simplify the way we manage the housing transfer system for residents who would like to move within the Royal Borough.

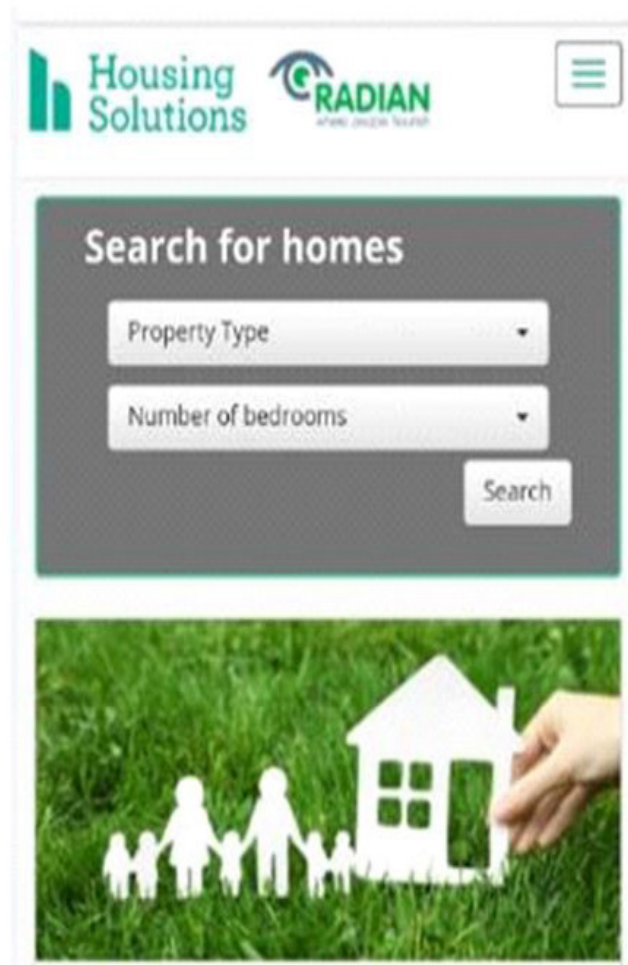
The new process for applying for a transfer is called Choice Based Lettings (CBL). From early 2019, for the first time, available transfer properties within the Borough will be advertised online. These adverts will contain property descriptions with photos, property features, location maps as well as details about the neighbourhood and surrounding areas, so that applicants can make informed choices before applying. In addition, as we are working in partnership with Radian, this will broaden the available options as applicants will have access to Radian's transfer properties as well as those managed by Housing Solutions.

Customers who wish to transfer to a different property will be able to apply online by going onto the Housing Solutions website and following the link entitled **Thames Home Choice**. From this new link, eligible residents will be able to apply via their phone, PC or tablet. As well as registering, customers can view homes that are available, register their interest in properties that they qualify for and update their details. Properties will then be allocated according to the bidding process.

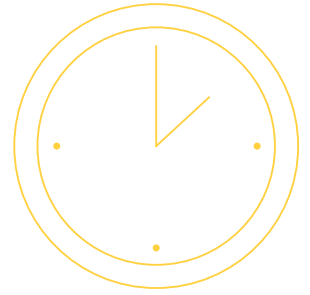
In order to ensure that our database is up to date and everyone is treated fairly, anyone who is currently on the transfer list will receive a letter in the New Year inviting them to re-register online. They will also receive information on how to step through the application process as well as more in-depth details of the scheme. Thames Home Choice is an exciting new way of allocating our homes to our customers, using a tried and tested

online system that is used by other Housing Associations and local authorities across the UK to assist individuals in moving. As the website is dynamic it will mean that keeping an eye on what is available and checking how an application is progressing will become a lot easier for our customers. We are confident that you will find this a transparent and simple way to apply, search and track from any device. Of course, help will be on hand to answer any questions and we are happy to help anyone who isn't online.

**Look out for the new link on our website to Thames Homes Choice in the New Year!**

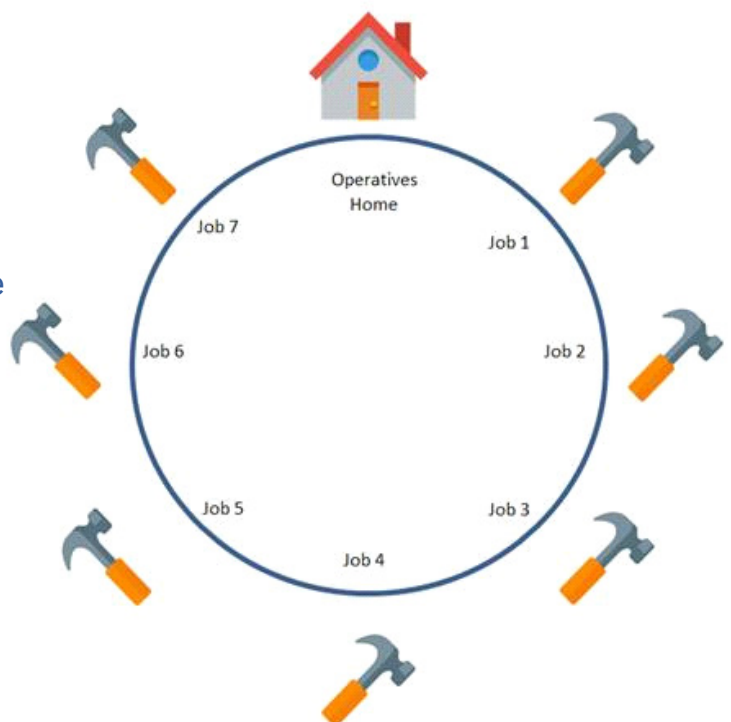


# How we plan our Trades Team's time



Good planning and scheduling benefits our customers, so we have implemented Dynamic Resource Scheduling (DRS) software. Utilising this software means that we identify workers with the right skills, equipment, geography and availability for each task.

The system schedules work in a loop based on the operatives home address; scheduling the first job closest to their home, then a job at the middle of the day at the furthest point and the final job brings them back into the vicinity of their home again. For example, a household in Larchfield in West Maidenhead requires some plumbing work. Our software will allocate a qualified plumber to fix the the problem within that area. The software is intuitive enough to highlight that another property within a mile of Larchfield requires a plumber, so rather than sending another operative out, the software will schedule for the plumber to go from one job to another on the same day. This cuts down on travel time, thereby optimising time and efficiency by allowing our operatives to complete more jobs in a day with reduced travel.



## Fact:

Rostering six operatives in a 20 day window requires the software to do over 3 million calculations!



# Are you entitled to Attendance Allowance?



**A**re you aged 65 or over and have a care need? Does your disability or illness make it hard for you to look after yourself? If the answer is yes, then you may be entitled to Attendance Allowance. If you think you might be entitled and would like further information or need help applying, please call Rose Dent on 01628 543060 or email [Rose.Dent@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:Rose.Dent@housingsolutions.co.uk).

## Customers taking ownership

**A** big thank you to our tenants at Alpine Close who have worked together and improved the fountain and gated garden area.

Is there outdoor space that you would like to maintain or perhaps you have some ideas on how your communal area could be improved. Contact Lyndsey our Customer Involvement Officer [Lyndsey.storey@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:Lyndsey.storey@housingsolutions.co.uk) or phone 01628 543123 to discuss your ideas.



## Mayor of Woodley opens flagship scheme, The Birches

**I**n October we were proud to officially open The Birches, Lower Earley a contemporary development of 60 one and two bedroom apartments for social rent and shared ownership to people over 55. The scheme has been specially designed to make the transition of moving from home to home as seamless as possible, whilst giving residents the freedom to live independently in their own highly specified, self contained apartments. The scheme was recently nominated for the Sunday Times British Home Awards in the Best Community Living category. The Woodley Town Mayor, Counsellor Sam Rahmouni, was present to cut the ribbon and declare the development open.



# The Housing Solutions Service Improvement Team



Our key aims are to provide more affordable housing locally and to achieve happy customers so we really value our Customers input. Understanding what our customers expect, want and need is what drives our strategy.

We were delighted that during 2018, 72 different customers attended a range of meetings to help improve our services. Customers spoke to us about Grounds Maintenance, Shared Ownership and Leaseholders departments, got involved with asset management meetings and worked with us to manage ASB on our estates. We held a 'Streets Ahead' Focus Group, helped our customers get 'online' during National Get Online Week. We also worked closely with customers at York Court to improve their communal garden.

In addition to these meetings, the Service Improvement Team (SIT) also met throughout 2018. The SIT is a group of customers that live in our properties and meet to scrutinise our services. Their feedback is vital and we appreciate the time that they give. They have been reviewing our current rents service against Homes England standards, our key performance indicators, as well as policies and procedures. From this we were able to come up with improvements

to put in place. This report is being reviewed by our Senior Management Team and many of the recommendations have already been implemented.

To enable more customers to get involved with our meetings, who may not be in a position to attend in person, we recently trialled live streaming via our Housing Solution's Facebook page. The first live stream meeting was at the event we hosted to discuss the Government's Social Housing Green Paper. This paper outlines fundamental reforms ensuring social housing providers provide an essential, safe, well managed service. We are now proposing that more meetings will be live streamed which will allow more people to be involved in these discussions.

Are you interested in attending meetings with staff and learning more about how Housing Solutions works? Contact Lyndsey on [Lyndsey.storey@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:Lyndsey.storey@housingsolutions.co.uk) or text Lyndsey on 07585301615.



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# How to manage Anti Social Behaviour

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**ASB** includes a wide range of behaviours that negatively impacts the quality of life of our customers and others in the community; for example verbal abuse, misuse of communal areas, harassment, hate related incidents, noise nuisance as well as littering, fly tipping and vandalism to property.

We are committed to creating an environment where ASB and hate crime is not tolerated. It is our aim that customers can live free from violence, disturbance and nuisance.

## What to do if you are suffering from ASB

Not all reports of nuisance are ASB; for example one off parties and BBQs, general household living activities (mowing the lawn, DIY, washing machine noise) at reasonable times of the day, noise caused by playing children or parking disagreements. We encourage customers, where appropriate, to try to resolve the issue informally before escalating it to us. However, if you are at immediate risk of harm or if a crime has been committed you should contact the Police immediately.

To report incidents of ASB to us you can go to our website > customer information>problems in my neighbourhood>report ASB> where you will find a form that allows you to report in the strictest confidence. You can also meet us in person at our office, contact us via email [contact@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:contact@housingsolutions.co.uk) or you can speak directly to your Tenancy & Neighbourhood Officer, Sheltered Housing Officer or Supported Housing Officer.

## What happens after you have reported an incident of ASB?

We will meet with you to discuss the ASB and agree an action plan with the aim of resolution. This may require us to work with partner agencies, such as the police or other bodies. All cases are dealt with in confidence.

We will investigate reports of ASB and support victims in gathering evidence for example helping

complete diary sheets, collating statements, taking photos, using the [Noise App](#) to capture the volume of perceived disturbance and reviewing disclosed information from the Police.

The evidence collected will determine whether the alleged perpetrator of the ASB has a case to answer. If they do, interceptive action will be taken by ourselves to encourage regulating of behaviour. If these intervention actions fail to result in the ASB stopping then proportionate enforcement action will be taken against the perpetrator. The victim will be updated, without breaching confidentiality on the action being taken.

## Mediation

Neighbours in dispute often find it difficult to talk to each other or make each other understand their point of view. Sometimes an impartial third party is needed and, in these circumstances, Housing Solutions would encourage consenting to a referral to resolve our partner mediation service. Mediation provides support to both parties involved with the aim of reaching a realistic agreement and resolution. A mediator is neutral, professionally trained and experienced. They cannot force either party to accept the demands of the other. These meetings give you a chance to say how you feel and sometimes an apology from either party is enough to resolve a problem.

## Closing cases

A case will be closed when both the victim and perpetrator are as satisfied as reasonably possible with the agreed solution or Housing Solutions believes that no further action can be taken.

We are fully committed to promoting a secure and safe environment where our customers can live together in an environment of respect and tolerance. The welfare of our customers is vitally important to Housing Solutions.

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# Get in touch

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Streets Ahead is the newsletter for Housing Solutions customers. 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](mailto:pr@housingsolutions.co.uk) or by calling Holly Price on 01628 543126.



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## Opening times

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### 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

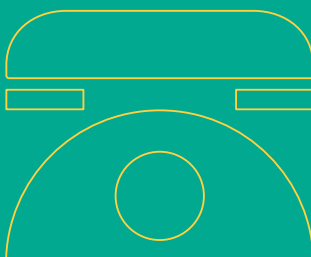
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## Emergency repairs

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

**0800 876 6060**



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## Contact details

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Email  
**[contact@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:contact@housingsolutions.co.uk)**

Website & Live Chat  
**[www.housingsolutions.co.uk](http://www.housingsolutions.co.uk)**

Facebook  
**[facebook.com/Housing.Solutions.UK](https://facebook.com/Housing.Solutions.UK)**

Twitter  
**[@HS\\_Homes](https://twitter.com/HS_Homes)**

Freephone  
**0800 876 6060**