

Special 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition

 Housing  
Solutions

# Streets Ahead



25 YEARS



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# Welcome!



## We are delighted to be celebrating 25 memorable years of Housing Solutions serving the residents of Maidenhead and beyond.

In April 1995, we became Maidenhead & District Housing Association, a separate entity from the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead Council. This change was to establish a dedicated organisation, that was focused on providing secure, affordable, and high-quality housing in the local community. Our aim was to create communities, that not only enabled people to be settled and content in their homes, but to enjoy their neighbourhoods too, an aspiration that we continue to support today.

Ten years later, in 2005 we became Housing Solutions. This name change was to emphasise how much 'excellence in customer service', is at the heart of our organisation. Housing Solutions are recognised for continuing to make a positive impact on the community and are very much part of the fabric of the local area. In addition, our approachable teams have enabled us to continue maintaining a high level of service to our residents, throughout our 25 years.

In 2016, I was delighted to take over as Chief Executive. One of my key priorities was to make sure resident

services remained front and centre at Housing Solutions and that our resident's lives were enhanced by the services we provide. One of the areas, helping us achieve this vision is how we have embraced digital innovation. Our online services, such as our Customer Portal and chatbot, offer more accessibility to our residents and boost our business efficiency. Embracing 21st-century technology this way has also proved extremely valuable during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It had been our hope to commemorate our anniversary with our residents, but the current pandemic has sadly delayed these plans. The restrictions and subsequent lockdowns have impacted all of us and we have worked hard to ensure that we continue to provide services to our residents throughout this difficult time. This includes expanding our housing teams, so we can move quickly when someone is struggling financially and make sure they can access the benefits they are entitled to. We have also worked closely with our local charitable partners by coordinating care packages and delivery of prescriptions, as well as making over 900 welfare calls to our more vulnerable residents. It's certainly at times like these, I have seen empathy in action and have been moved by what a fantastic close-knit team can do in a crisis.

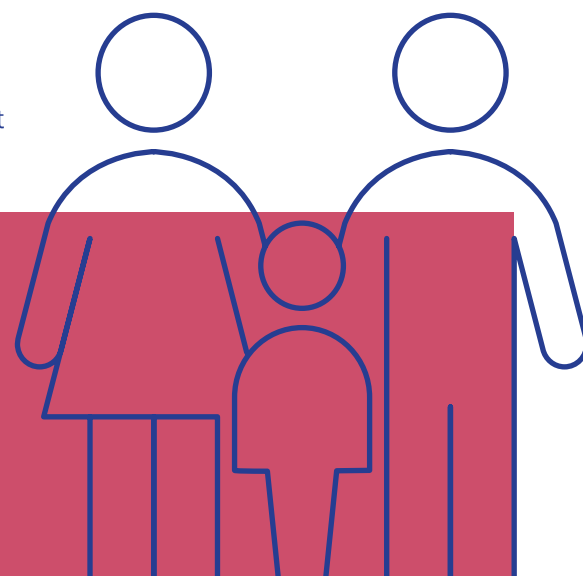


I am pleased to share some highlights of our achievements over the past 25 years, through the pages of this special edition. It has been a pleasure to hear some of our long-term residents' comments, and I'm pleased that Housing Solutions has played such a significant role in enhancing our very special community. I want to assure you that everyone at Housing Solutions remains committed to our residents and our communities. We all look forward to celebrating many more milestones in the years ahead.

**All the best**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Orla".

**Orla Gallagher**  
Chief Executive



# Housing Solutions

remains committed to our residents and our communities



# 25 Years – History in the Making



## Highlights of the last 25 years

### 1995

We broke away from RBWM to form Maidenhead & District Housing Association with a pledge to modernise all existing homes & build new ones.



### 1997

By this year we had started on new projects in Phoenix Court, Cope Court & Harrow Lane. Completed first new homes in Maidenhead. Neve House was our first sheltered scheme to be modernised.

### 1999

By this year we had introduced Caretakers, & employed our first apprentices. We had also started work on properties at Whurley Way. Introduced a decorating scheme for our older customers & won our 1st Charter Mark.

### 2000

We became Housing Solutions and launched a £25m kitchen & bathroom improvement programme. Delighted to build our first new homes at Razzaq Place, H Wycombe. We also introduced extra care service at Maudsley House our sheltered scheme.

### 2005

By 2005 we had completed new homes in Henry Court, Slough. We were extremely proud to complete the UKs biggest development of environmentally friendly integer homes at Alpine Way. Awarded Investor in People. Invested £30m in building new homes.

### 2010

All our homes met the Decent Homes standards. Opening of Lady Elizabeth House by Sophie of Wessex. Improved recycling facilities for customers. Won Customer Focus Award, NHMF Best practice Award for Customer Service & Gold ROSPA. Refurbishment of Furnival.

### 2016

Orla Gallagher joins us as our new CEO. She achieves Sunday Times Top 100 Best 'Not for Profit' Employer. We had built first extra care scheme in Aylesbury, The Elms. Undertook a £10m regeneration of properties at Evenlode. Completed Lent Rise, Burnham & Cherry Garth, Holmer Green Care Homes. Completed Glasford House.

### 2018

Warren Close completed. Theresa May visits our refurbished offices. By this point in our journey we had invested £40m in schemes for people with disabilities.

### 2020

In the last few years we have completed The Birches, our state of the art sheltered scheme. Broken ground at York Road, Completed redevelopment of Brill House, Launched a new van fleet. Increased our stock to 5,705 & invested over £100m in improving our homes.

**In 2020 we celebrated 25 years!**

## Highlights in numbers

1997

**1st**

Neve House was our first shelter to be modernised.

2000

**£25m**

We became *Housing Solutions* and launched a £25m kitchen & bathroom improvement programme.

2020

**25**

We celebrate two and half decades of supporting our local community.

2020

**5,705**

In 2020, we increased our stock to 5,705 & invested over £1m on fire safety measures.





# Satisfied Customers



I've lived in one of your houses for over 10 years. We really appreciate your **excellent customer service**.

I'm a long-standing tenant and I have always received **nothing but good customer service**. I feel that you always look out for your residents.  
– *Wallingford Way*

A short but very important letter to thank you for your efforts on my behalf over the last few months. **Living here is a pleasure and thanks to you now it is even better**. I imagine you get letters of complaint on a fairly regular basis, so I hope it makes a nice change to get one of praise and satisfaction.

I wish to let you know we are **so happy in our new home**. Thank you.

I can say that I always find staff **helpful and polite**, I have lived here 6 years and have no issues with Housing Solutions. – *Brockton Court*

I am very **proud of my home** and I am happy.  
– *Wallingford Way*

## Want to make a difference to your community?

When our residents tell us they are happy in their homes, enjoy their neighbourhoods and feel part of their community, it makes our hard work at Housing Solutions worthwhile.

Our resident's feedback is vital to us so we are delighted to welcome our new Community Engagement Officer to Housing Solutions, Lorna Collisson. Lorna will be working with our resident's to help examine our services in detail. Lorna will be hosting a number of virtual resident meetings throughout 2021. Want to share your thoughts? You can get involved by joining our Resident

panels called the SIT group (Scrutiny and Improvement Team) and E Panel. Being a part of these groups means you can take an active share in how our services are shaped and delivered. As you live in the community you can help us to decide what is important for the local areas and help us to oversee improvements.

To sign up and learn more please go to our Customer Involvement pages on our website: <https://www.housingsolutions.co.uk/supporting-you/customer-involvement/involvement-opportunities/>



# Innovation – Making our Services Accessible

25 YEARS

## Being creative and imaginative in finding solutions that work for our residents has been the ongoing goal for our technology team.

When we first became Housing Solutions we had a team of two; one IT Manager and a support technician. 25 years on we have grown to a team of 6 full time IT professionals, plus an apprentice, Business Performance Project Manager and two business performance analysts. But what does that mean to you, our residents?

Digital technologies are taking the world by storm. We don't give a second thought to booking a GP appointment online, banking via an App, or catching up on worldwide news via our tablet. It's vital that as your Landlord we offer the same online services and accessibility that you have come to expect, day to day.

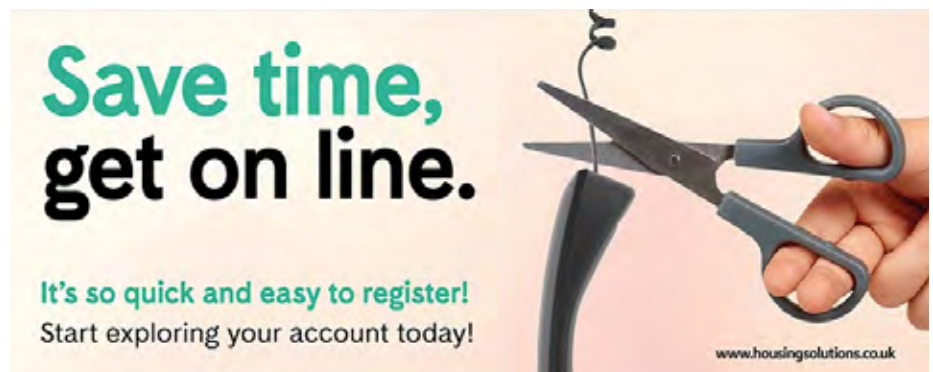
We have always tried to move with the times and implement changes that will work for our residents as well as improve efficiency. Data is a vital, we use your feedback to monitor our performance and address the services that need improving. Via our E Panels and SIT Panel, we check with our residents if our new ideas work for you, if they were user friendly and made your life easier! Only then would we execute changes.

One very popular change is our telephone payment system that is simple to use, anytime of day. We are also very proud that we are one of the first housing associations to lead the way in innovation by offering a self-service option on our website. Residents can use the **'My Customer Portal'** <https://www.housingsolutions.co.uk/portal-home/> to book repairs, as

well as view tenancy information and check their rent payments.

We have also installed Wi-Fi in our sheltered properties to encourage further digital inclusion. We also installed a payment kiosk in our reception area for residents who want to pay in person. Following customer feedback, we have

with colleagues and residents as well as pick up phone calls even if they are out and about. We have been excited to introduce an Alexa skill so residents can access their My Customer Portal account without pressing a single button. By allowing most actions to be completed online, there are no time restrictions.



redesigned our website to make it 'mobile friendly' and easier to use. As more and more people are connecting with online content, we have helpful videos on the website. These easy to follow video guides cover handy tips such as how to get a boiler to ignite and other common boiler problems.

The last 3 years have seen some of our biggest strides in digital enablement. We have launched a Webchat service which saves the need to wait on the phone for our busy Contact Centre. We have a robust cloud-based infrastructure which has enabled our office-based staff to work from home. This has brought massive benefits during the Covid crisis, the office may have temporarily closed but our staff have been able to support our residents seamlessly. We also communicate via text and email to save on costs. We also utilise software so that our staff can hold meetings remotely

But what of the future? There is even more to get excited about. We are currently looking at an easy to use Housing Solutions App. Plus, we are researching options that will allow our residents to take photos of common problems (such as a fault light on a boiler) and send the photos to us, which will speed up repairs. However, it's not just about efficiency. You are at the heart of everything we do, and we have not lost sight of the fact that not all our residents are confident with technology. It's important that we continue to offer personal, face to face services, as well as communications by post to make sure that our services remain inclusive. We will work hard to ensure our approach to digital delivers services that are right for each of your unique needs.

Almost  
**20%**  
of repair requests  
booked online

**60%**  
of our customers  
either have a portal  
account or use Alexa

Around  
**900**  
webchats  
per month



# Neighbourhood News

**As our residents you know about your neighbourhood better than anyone. We have used your feedback to create a new and practical Housing team structure, with a clear focus on specialist roles. So what do these changes really mean for you?**

## Neighbourhoods

We have a newly created **Neighbourhood Team** that puts a real emphasis on tackling anti-social behaviour and improving your neighbourhoods. The new officers are:

- Anti-Social Behaviour Officers
- Resident Liaison Officers (RLOs)
- Tenancy Audit and Fraud Investigation Officer

You may have already see the **RLOs** out and about on our estates. Their focus is on getting to know you; our customers and helping you to access the services you need. They are also available to help with:

- Dealing with nuisance behaviour such as noise or rubbish being left
- Reporting fly-tipping
- Transfer applications if you want to move to a new home
- Queries about whether you can keep a pet
- Queries about making improvements to your home
- Letting us know about changes to who lives with you
- Applications to succeed to a tenancy



Southgate House

- Applications to assign your tenancy to someone else
- Mutual exchange applications
- Estate Inspections

The **Anti-Social Behaviour Officers** are also be very visible on our estates and they are proactively focussing on

- managing anti-social behaviour
- enforcement and prevention
- safeguarding

## How to contact the Neighbourhood Team

### Customer portal

<https://www.housingsolutions.co.uk/portal-home/>

### Resident Liaison Officers

[RLO@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:RLO@housingsolutions.co.uk)

### Antisocial Behaviour Officers

[ASB@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:ASB@housingsolutions.co.uk)





# The Neighbourhood Team



**Cherise Williams**  
*Resident Liaison Officer*  
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07824 145 874



**Kerry Foster**  
*ASB Officer*  
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**Christie Sibley**  
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**Oliver Carthew**  
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**Lucy Harrison**  
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**Michelle Purdy**  
*Tenancy Audit & Fraud Officer*  
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07584 235 581



**Drew Mann**  
*Resident Liaison Officer*  
Drew.Mann@housingsolutions.co.uk  
07824 145 031



## What did we achieve last year?

Take a look at our Resident Report

<https://www.housingsolutions.co.uk/corporate/annual-reports/>





# Supporting You

25 YEARS

**We are also pleased to let you know that we now have a dedicated Income Team which also includes our Welfare and Benefit Officers.**

These teams are on hand to support you with any questions around paying your rent and helping you to keep your home, as well as offering your benefit advice.

### Welfare & Benefit Officers

- Provide benefit guidance including Universal Credit
- Giving you help and support if you are struggling with your income
- Help you to sustain your tenancy

### Income Officers

- Rent queries and advice
- Arrears advice and payment plans



## How to contact the Income Team

### Customer portal

<https://www.housingsolutions.co.uk/portal-home/>

### Welfare Team

[welfare@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:welfare@housingsolutions.co.uk)

### Income Team

[income@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:income@housingsolutions.co.uk)

At the

# heart

of everything we do is you, our residents.

We are confident that these changes will help deliver this.

We really value your ongoing feedback so that we can continue to provide a high-quality service that helps create thriving, positive neighbourhoods within the local community.

Chat with us here:

-  **Chatbot**  
on our website
-  **Customer Contact Centre**  
Call 01628 543 101
-  **Social media**  
Facebook & Twitter

## WE KNOW YOU LOVE YOUR HOME

### DON'T PUT IT AT RISK

**Are you in arrears?**

Did you know we have a dedicated team to help guide you around the benefits system?

**TAKE ACTION AND CALL US TODAY. WE ARE HERE TO HELP YOU.**

 **Housing Solutions**

# The Income Team

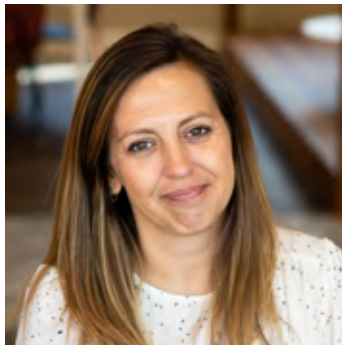
25 YEARS



**Stacey Yarrow**

*Income Officer*

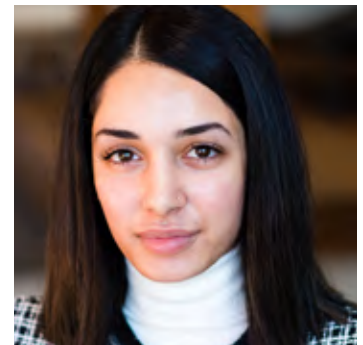
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**Nana Badoo**

*Income Officer*

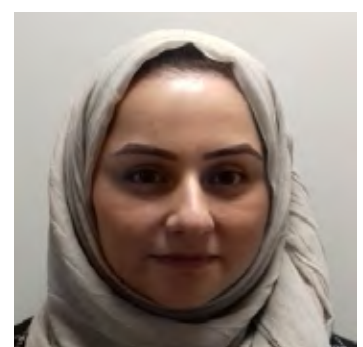
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**Tania Bibi**

*Welfare & Benefits Officer*

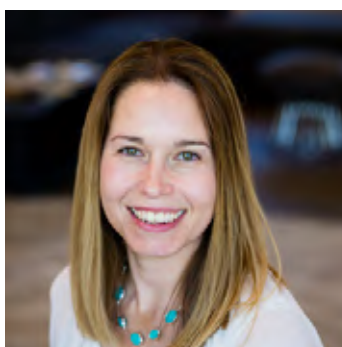
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**Carly Ford**

*Income Officer*

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07720 496 306



**Katy Darlow**

*Welfare & Benefits Officer*

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07720 496 317





# New Deal for Home Owners

**We are pleased to share with you our 'New Deal Promises'. This is our charter of how we will continue to support you and the steps we are taking to enhance the services we provide.**



We have listened to our home owners and leaseholder's feedback. Where you have told us things could be better, we have been working hard to improve our services.

**You said:** "It is hard to speak to someone in the Home Ownership Team directly and it takes a long time to get a response."

**Our Solution:** **Make it easy for home owners to deal with us.**

- You can contact the Home Ownership team during our advertised office hours.
- We will acknowledge all queries within 2 working days and provide you with a full response within 10 working days. If we need more time to resolve your enquiry we will let you know and keep you regularly updated.
- We will ensure our staff will be polite, helpful and professional.
- We are creating a dedicated Home Ownership section on our website; it will contain information specifically for leaseholders and shared owners.

**You said:** "You want value for money services that are of consistent quality, and clear and accurate bills that state what you have paid for."

**Our Solution:** **Deliver value for money.**

- We are reviewing all service costs to make sure we provide value for money.
- Where possible, we will challenge the costs of third-party managing agents to ensure charges are reasonable and fair.
- We are redesigning our service charge invoices so they are easier to understand with clearer information. You will get the new look invoices in Spring 2021.
- We will include better supporting notes with service charge demands to explain the charges.

**You said:** "The standard of cleaning has slipped in recent years."

**Our Solution:** **Improve the cleaning in the communal areas.**

- We are reviewing our estate cleaning and caretaking standards.
- We will consult with you on these standards.
- We will publish the standards you can expect.
- We will publish a schedule of estate cleaning visits on our website and noticeboards.



**You said:** "Home security is at risk if front doors are left open or broken for too long."

**Our Solution:** **Improve the security of your home.**

- We will review our response to reports of communal repairs and how we can make our service better.

**You said:** "When there are problems, we want you to sort them out quickly and do what you say you're going to do."

**Our Solution:** **Stick to our promises**

- Publish service standards setting out what you can expect from us.
- Occasionally things go wrong. When this happens, we will do everything we can to put things right, we will keep you informed, and we will apologise.



# Development over 25 years

## Providing safe, homes for our residents is at the heart of everything we do.

We offer a wide range of housing options, including affordable homes to rent, properties to buy under shared ownership, market rent properties, and specialist accommodation for older people and people who need care and support to live within the community. We are proud of what we have achieved over the past 25 years.

### Phoenix Court

**54 units 1996/1997**

Our first project taking out the only high rise in the stock and creating the first purpose build flats non-sheltered flats for the over 55's designed to be adaptable to their changing needs over time without moving until care was needed.

### Howell and Mabett Close

**47 units 2002/2003**

Part of the redevelopment of the former Arborfield brickworks, our first step in to Wokingham DC.

### Peddle Court

**14 units 2004/2005**

Small development and our first step in to High Wycombe.

### Alpine Close

**27 units 2000/2001**

Integer Houses and flats. The largest single development of what were the then ground breaking Integer Design.

### The Cloisters

**10 units 2000/2001**

Small development and our first step in to Slough



I have been a HS resident ever since you changed your name, so that's a long, long time! I have no complaints. I am very satisfied with my home and the service you give. I have always been very happy with Housing Solutions.

– **Phoenix Court**



Phoenix Court



Alpine Close



# Development over 25 years



## Seabrook

**28 units 2005/2006**

Our first joint venture with Bucks CC and Fremantle (Care providers). The precursor to Project Care. A mix of Key Worker flats and purpose built accommodation for people with Learning Disabilities.

## Lady Elizabeth House

**29 units 2005/2006**

The first redevelopment of our former Sheltered Housing schemes and our first venture in to Extra Care housing.

## Meadowcroft

**78 units 2006/2007**

The first of the Extra Care homes built as part of Project Care. This project covered both the elderly and people with learning disabilities and spread our presence right up as far as Bourton in Buckinghamshire.

## Ronald Young House

**20 units 2007/2008**

This was a continuance of the redevelopment of redundant former sheltered housing sites. A mixed development, it incorporate both general needs and purpose built flats for people with learning disabilities and was the first of its type with the borough.

## Castleviev

**120 units 2013/2017**

This marked a major step up in the sheer size of the sites we were taking on. In its way, quite revolutionary in that the social housing is 'Pepper Potted' throughout the development. It has proved to be a very successful blend of tenures and a model for integrated housing going forward.

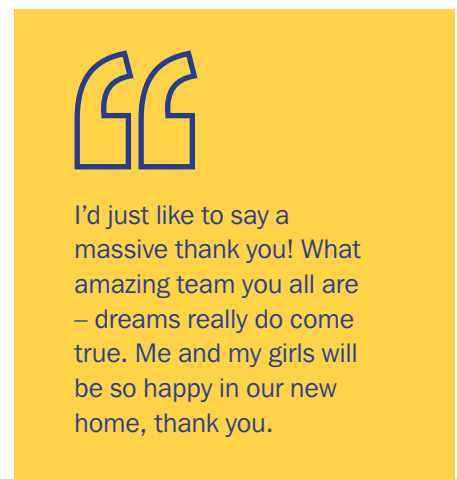
## The Birches

**60 units 2014/2017**

The 60 flat centre piece of an attractive development on the former Bulmershe school campus. This was a first for us in that it combined private sale with social rent in specialist housing for the over 55s.



Lady Elizabeth House



I'd just like to say a massive thank you! What amazing team you all are – dreams really do come true. Me and my girls will be so happy in our new home, thank you.



The Birches



# Development over 25 years



Brill House



Wick Hill



York Road



## Brill House

**18 units 2017/2019**

This was a sensitive site overlooking an important open space in the area. Here we replaced a redundant sheltered housing scheme with a mix of flats and houses, which have actually enhanced that space finally creating that longed for village green feel.

## Garth and Wick Hill

**37 units 2018/2021**

A mixed development of flats and houses, a stone's throw from the newly regenerated town centre and our first step in to Bracknell.

## York Road

**61 units 2019/2021**

Our part of the major redevelopment of Maidenhead town centre. High spec and radical design, the overall development is intended to capitalise on Crossrail and help to kick start a new future for the town.



We are looking forward to collecting the keys to the new home you have kindly provided for us. I would like to sincerely say thank you for your **kind assistance, help and understanding** during this extremely challenging time for us. You have been amazing, and I am so grateful for all you have done.



The HS staff **deserve a clap**. If it wasn't for people like you continuing your services, and being there when we really need it, I would be totally lost.

I've been with Housing Solutions since around 2000. I moved to Bailey Close in 2002, which has been lovely! It's in a good location and **you are always at the end of a phone** when I need you whether it is for problems or advice.



**FINALIST**





# Keeping our Residents Safe during Coronavirus



**As the Coronavirus crisis continues to dominate the national and global landscape, many of us have appreciated being able to get outside for some fresh air or daily exercise.**

With outside space being such a necessary feature of our resident's wellbeing, our Grounds Teams have made it a priority to make sure that the communal areas remain well maintained so our Caretaking team and their vans are a regular sight around our estates. Our staff have worked hard to keep the shrubbery and bushes cut back, hard areas are swept and ensure that the lawns are kept tidy. During the high winds we have also promptly responded to repair fences. Our teams have also carried out tree surveys across all our outdoor spaces to check if trees need lopping due to age or weathering.

With more people being at home, many have seized the opportunity to have a good clear out of sheds, outhouses and wardrobes. In some cases, this has caused a significant increase in fly tipping. So, on top of regular maintenance we have also seen an increase in the amount of rubbish that we have had to clear. Our diligent



team have cleared some 44 tonnes of dumped rubbish; that's the equivalent of shifting 4 African Bush elephants or 22 large cars, to keep our public areas safe and clean. Now that its easier to book a slot at the dump, we hope to see this figure decrease. In addition, our teams have worked closely with our Housing team to get void properties cleared and prepared ready for re-let. Since June last year we have cleared and prepared 223 properties ready to be occupied by our residents.

Our caretaking team have also increased the cleaning of our communal areas. Robust, regular cleaning regimes are important in order to keep surfaces free of contamination. Our staff have paid attention to high touch areas such as door handles, lift buttons, door entry panels and stair rails. On some of our sites where we have a high number of vulnerable residents who are high risk, we have wiped down the high touch areas twice a day. We have also made sure that there is clear signage reminding our residents of the specific measures in place to reduce transmission.

We want to make sure that you continue to be happy in your home and neighbourhood so our neighbourhood officers (RLOs) carry out regular site inspections. These



inspections are to make sure that the communal areas of our buildings and estates are well-maintained and that we keep high standards of cleaning, caretaking and grounds maintenance. We encourage residents to take part in these inspections as your feedback is very important, please look out for inspection dates on our website. As the restrictions lift, we will continue to support our residents to make sure that all our residents feel reassured, safe and well looked after. Please get in touch if you have any questions about our services or would like more information. We are here to help you.



**We are carrying inspections to make sure that the communal areas of our buildings and estates are well-maintained and kept to**

**high cleanliness standards**



# Your Finances in Uncertain Times

25 YEARS

**The coronavirus pandemic has had a huge effect on all of us in one way or another. Many of us have felt a lot of uncertainty over the last few months around our day-to-day life, but one of the biggest areas that causes worry is finances.**

Perhaps you have had your hours cut, been made redundant, been off work sick, on furlough or your business has struggled. You may already know that there is help out there. But a lot of people don't know how much help is available, if they are eligible and how to get the help they need.

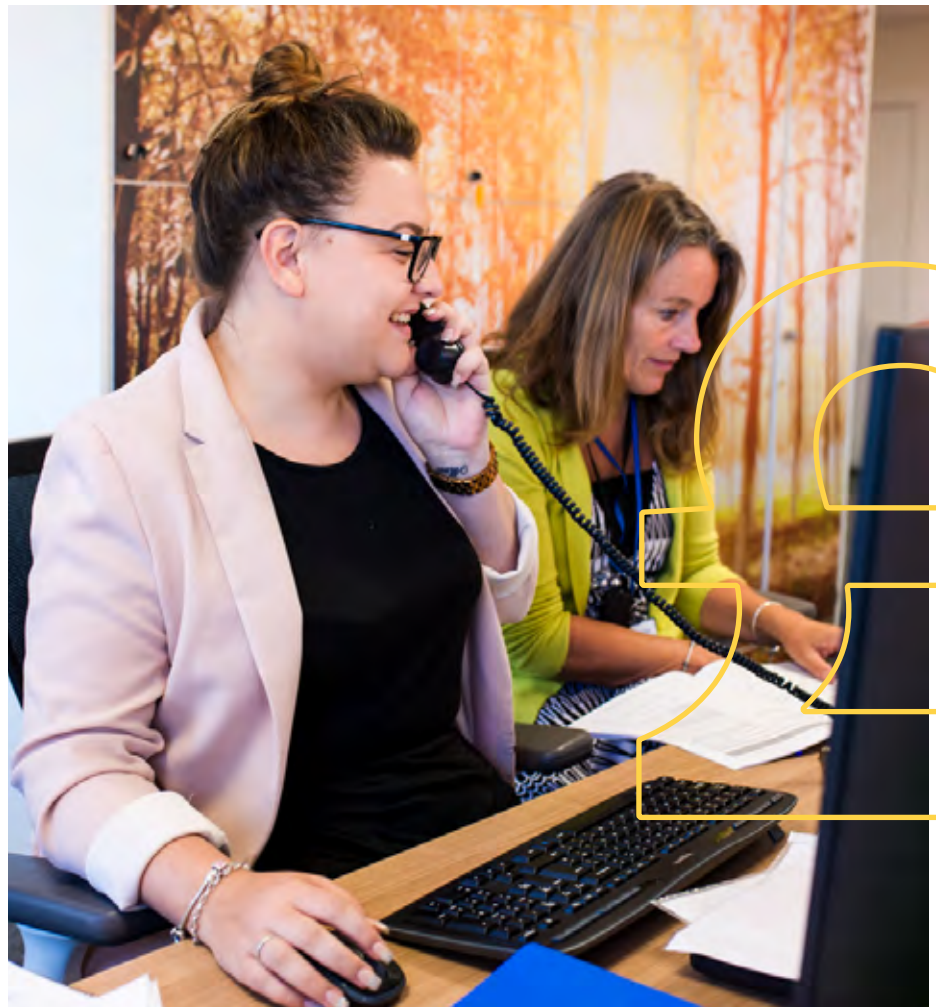
This is where our Welfare and Benefits Team can really help! Our helpful, friendly and knowledgeable team can offer unbiased practical advice as well as helping you through the process to apply for benefits.

## **Universal Credit**

Many people have heard of Universal Credit. Universal Credit is a means-tested benefit to help meet your basic living costs. It's surprising to find that you could work for an employer, be self-employed, have been recently furloughed, been made redundant or have had a wage cut and still apply! In response to the crisis in April the Government made changes to Universal Credit, including increasing the monthly standard rate, as well as offering special help to self-employed people by removing the 'minimum income floor' whose income has dropped.

## **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)**

In addition to UC, you can also receive other benefits to help with your daily living costs such as Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs). These can provide extra money when your local authority decides that you need



extra help to meet a shortfall in rent payments.

## **Personal Independence Payments (PIP)**

These can help you with some of the extra costs if you have a long-term ill-health or disability (this also includes mental health conditions). You can claim PIP whether you're working or not.

Our Welfare Officers are trained to give advice on benefit entitlement and to assist in the claims process; whether it is making a claim over the phone, helping you to fill in a form, assisting you to appeal a decision you disagree with or representing you at a benefit appeal. These services are

confidential and entirely free for Housing Solutions residents. Contact our team via the customer portal and [welfare@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:welfare@housingsolutions.co.uk).

Do not worry, Housing Solutions can give you financial advice and support in these uncertain times.

Our

**Welfare Officers**  
are here to help

[welfare@housingsolutions.co.uk](mailto:welfare@housingsolutions.co.uk)





# Meet the team

