

2005/06

annual report



For residents of
Southern Housing Group



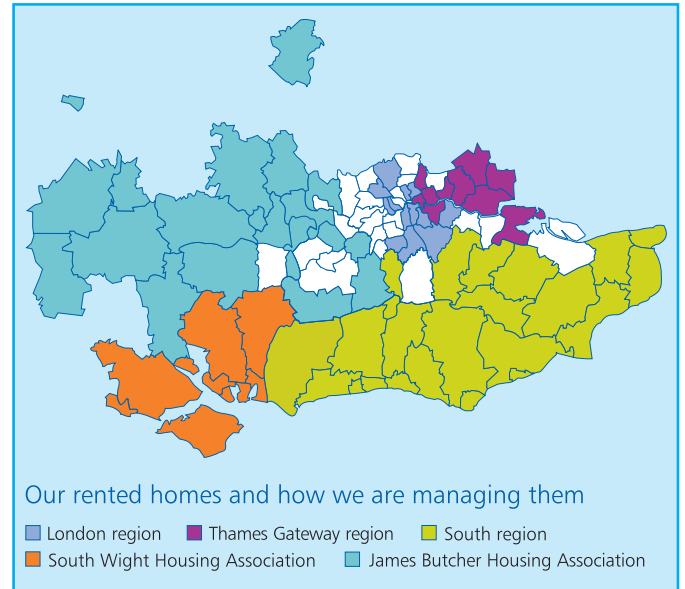
Our work in 2005/06

Growing more efficient

In the past year, Southern Housing Group has grown by a quarter. As well as developing 732 new homes for rent and sale, we also joined forces with two smaller organisations: Isle of Wight Housing Association (IOWHA) and, just after the period covered by this report, James Butcher Housing Association (JBHA).

Although mergers are quite common in social housing at the moment, we only want to grow when it means we can give a better deal to people living in affordable housing. We decided to work in partnership with IOWHA and JBHA for three key reasons.

- We can cut costs and become more efficient by providing services together. For example, JBHA residents now use the Service Centre and our EasiPay rent payment system.
- We have expanded the number of areas we work in. People living further to the south and west can now benefit from the homes and services we provide.
- We can learn from these organisations and develop our skills in areas such as supported housing, which has been a significant part of the work of both JBHA and IOWHA.



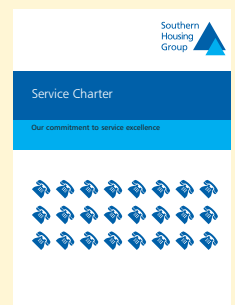
Improving services: Keeping you informed

Last year, we worked to improve the information we provide. Our Residents' Handbook was out of date so, with residents, we took the opportunity to rethink its content and look. The handbook is available in English, Turkish and Bengali – in book form as well as online. We can also provide copies in large print, in Braille and as an audio CD.

Following our review of Open Door resident newsletter, we have gone over to a full-colour format and a smaller, more convenient size. Focus groups tell us that Open Door is popular, easy to read and informative, but we wanted to find ways to make it more relevant to you, so we now give

regular updates for those of you looking for a move, and provide more advice and coverage on anti-social behaviour. To meet a need for more local information, we are producing an increasing number of newsletters for your individual estates.

We also reviewed our Service Charter in consultation with residents. This gives our service standard promises for key areas of our work.



Our work in 2005/06

Improving services: The Service Centre

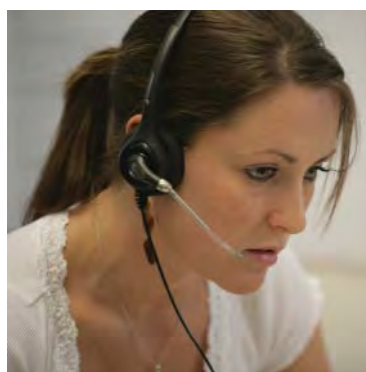
Our Service Centre answered over 177,000 calls this year, at an average speed of 21 seconds. Around 73% of calls were answered in 20 seconds or under.

In July 2005, we introduced a separate phone number for Bengali residents. When they call this number, they get recorded messages in their own language and our customer service advisors know straight away to arrange for a three-way conversation with an interpreter. By the end of March we had received almost 200 calls on this line.

Our use of Language Line interpreters grew by a quarter during the year. Around 65% of callers requested a Bengali interpreter, but we also used interpreters in 16 other languages, with Turkish the second most requested.

During 2005, our rents team worked to bring down rent arrears and in the process helped many residents get back on track before their arrears became too serious. As well as answering calls more promptly, the team made nearly 64,000 calls to residents about their rent accounts – a third more calls than in 2004. We also followed up Housing Benefit overpayments with local authorities, in many cases getting them to review a decision that benefit had been overpaid to one of our residents.

These changes meant that fewer residents got into serious problems. We agreed 15% more arrangements to pay arrears in instalments, we sent out fewer notices of seeking possession and took 239 cases to court, compared with 500 the previous year. We also slashed evictions for rent arrears by half – down to 33 compared with 66 in 2004.



Meanwhile, our tenancy team took over 48,000 calls and answered nearly 5,000 letters. The calls included over 1,100 applications for homes, including nearly 550 residents who asked for a transfer and over 100 residents who were referred on because they

wanted to move to another area or a home owned by another landlord. We also recorded 870 incidents of anti-social behaviour that we went on to investigate. The team is now working to improve our system for handling these reports, and we are also looking into the possibility of issuing parking permits and community hall bookings from the Service Centre in future.

Our repairs team took nearly 90,000 calls and logged over 41,000 repair jobs during 2005/06. Over one in 10 of your repair requests were issued to caretakers, including the two caretakers who were piloting our popular mobile repairs schemes in Dover and Hackney.

The team continued to monitor your satisfaction with repairs, calling over 2,700 residents once they'd had a repair done. We report the results on page 9.

By the end of its first year, our EasiPay rent payment system was proving very successful. By March 2006, around 59% of you were paying at the post office, while 17% were using PayPoint outlets. The number of you paying by direct debit is growing. By March over 2,500 people, around 15% of the total, were paying in this way. In March, around 1,000 of you opted to pay by debit or credit card.

Improving services: Local services

Improving local services was the top priority for each of our regions in 2005/06. We continued to inspect your estates regularly, inviting residents to join us, so that we could keep a close eye on the cleaning, gardening and repairs work done at our schemes by our caretakers and contractors. It also gives us a chance to hear about any local problems at first hand.

Using funds from our environmental improvements budget, we can often respond with small changes that help improve security or make your scheme more attractive. For examples of the local improvements we made this year, see the regional pages of this report.

Improving services: Letting homes



We took a good look at the way we let our homes last year, with a review led by a team of staff from around Southern Housing Group. In the near future, we will be making changes designed to:

- make our processes simpler, fairer and clearer
- give existing residents and new applicants more choice when we offer them a home
- reduce the rent we lose because properties are empty
- speed up the time it takes to relet a property.

During the year, we provided much more information on your options for moving, both in the new Residents' Handbook and in the pages of Open Door.

As well as offering tips to help you increase your chances of a move, we have also been explaining how 'choice-based' lettings will affect you now and in the future. For more details about this, look out for articles in Open Door.

Improving services: Maintaining your homes

During 2005/06 we completed the first full year of our new repairs contracts, which are being run in partnership with our contractors.

Although we decided to bring our Thames Gateway contract with Eurica to an early end, on the whole, we're pleased with the way the new system is working. We know from our customer satisfaction surveys that we're giving you a steady and consistent service that you are mostly happy with. Working closely with our contractors is already bringing some real service improvements. But we are still aiming to reduce the time it takes to get your repairs done.

In February, following a comprehensive selection process in line with EU procurement guidelines, we awarded Axis Europe our Thames Gateway contract. Axis already held our contract for London region, where they have been providing a good service.

After the period covered by this report, Axis began offering residents training opportunities. We also started running special training courses for contractors. Our involvement in Buy4London – a group of social landlords who have joined together to bulk buy items like boilers and windows – will shortly pay off, as the consortium makes its first purchases.



During the year, we began surveying homes for our Decent Homes programme and started work on the first homes. Under Decent Homes, all our properties must meet Government standards by 2010. The surveys show our current failure rate is around 12%, which is unusually low compared to other social landlords. We have set ourselves the challenge of doing more than the minimum and, by the end of March 2006, we were on site with £6m of Decent Homes repairs, covering almost 1,000 homes. Over the next four years, we expect to spend £45m.

We completed our digital TV satellite installation programme during the year, well ahead of the change over to digital signals.

Our work in 2005/06

Tackling anti-social behaviour

We take anti-social behaviour very seriously. In fact, it now takes up around 40% of our housing officers' time and increasingly involves us in costly court action. In the regional pages of this report, you can read about some of the cases we dealt with during 2005/06.

Last year, we drew up a new strategy for handling anti-social behaviour, taking into account the views expressed by residents in focus groups and surveys. Overall, our approach is to work with residents, with mediation services, and with other local partners, to take the most appropriate action in each individual case.

During the year, we began meeting with the Office of the

Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to talk about our role in tackling anti-social behaviour. The Government's Respect Action Plan makes social landlords responsible for tackling and preventing nuisance among residents.

We are being asked for our views because we already have a good record in this area. But it's also a good opportunity for us to influence policy and make sure our residents can benefit from new Government money.

In the near future, our legal powers are likely to get stronger and we will make sure we make the best use of them. We will keep you up-to-date in our regular articles in Open Door.

Working in your communities

Last year, in consultation with residents, we reviewed the work of Southern Housing Foundation, the charity we set up to help improve the quality of life in your neighbourhoods. As a result, we decided to change our funding priorities and our staffing structure. Our new priorities include:

- providing opportunities for young people
- 'financial inclusion' – widening the financial choices open to people who are usually turned down by banks
- older people
- the external environment
- boosting your skills and resources to help you improve your lives and your neighbourhoods.

To deliver our projects, we now have:

- project managers who develop partnerships and find funding
- community regeneration officers who work with you at your estates and in your neighbourhoods alongside your patch managers and staff from other departments.

You can read about some of the local projects we ran last year in the regional sections of this report.

In addition, our 18-month Benefits to Banking project, run in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions,



ended in March. The project gave us the resources to help a large number of residents to convert to direct payment of benefits, to open bank accounts and claim new benefits.

We continued to back projects designed to improve your access to affordable banking and loans, by supporting credit unions in Islington, Hackney and Hammersmith & Fulham, as well as Fair Finance, who offer affordable loans and financial advice to people living across East London.

We continued to make individual study awards from the Sir Ashley Bramall Fund, changing the rules so that any resident can apply. We also simplified our small grant system, making it easier to get funding for the activities you organise for yourselves. (Call the Service Centre to apply for these funds.)

Involving you in our work



In July, Stephen Stevens retired from our main Board, after serving as a resident Board member for the past nine years. In October, he retired from the Board of Southern Housing Foundation, which he chaired. Stephen brought residents' concerns to the very top of our organisation.

At the end of March, our Customer Services Committee included four resident members. The committee oversees our key policies and services. As well as meeting four times during the year, members also took part in visits to estates in London and to the Service Centre in Horsham.

Members of our 450-strong Residents' Panel joined us for events in Hove, West Ham and central London, taking part in focus groups designed to give us feedback that would help us to improve our services. Our smaller Readers' Panel commented on some of our reports and publications.

We held a series of special focus groups as we developed the new Residents' Handbook, taking on board many of the comments and suggestions residents made about the content and design. Resident focus groups also helped us to improve our Service Charter, which sets out the standards of service you can expect in key areas of our work.

In May 2005, we ran five focus groups designed to find out what you most want from our charity, Southern Housing Foundation (see page 4).

Our patch managers and staff from Southern Housing Foundation are continuing to work with residents to draw up service agreements for their schemes. Last year, agreements were finalised with residents at White Lodge in Hove and Warner Road in Camberwell and we worked on an agreement with residents at Dalmeny Avenue in Islington. At schemes in all our regions, we continue to offer support to help you start your own community groups.

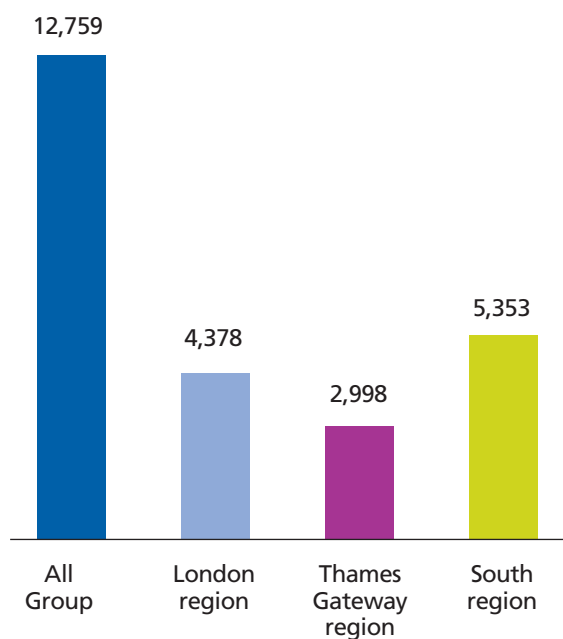
In Dover and West Durrington, we surveyed residents to find out more about their needs locally, how they feel about the services we provide and about their neighbourhoods. We will use this information in future to help us work with residents to make improvements.

We needed to produce a new resident involvement statement during 2005, to set out formally how we involve you in our work. We included a summary of the statement at the start of our Active Residents' Guide, which is designed to explain our approach in detail to interested residents. You can get a copy of this guide by phoning the Service Centre or from our website at www.shgroup.org.uk



Facts & figures 2005/06

The homes we owned



By the end of March 2006 we owned and/or managed **12,759** rented homes in **53** local authority areas across London and the South East – 411 more than the previous year. Some of these were homes for people who have special needs, including **1,209** units in sheltered or supported schemes for older people.

We also had **687** leaseholders and **447** freeholders who had taken up their right to buy or acquire their home from us, as well as **269** shared owners. They are not included in the figures we provide in this report, because we report to them separately.

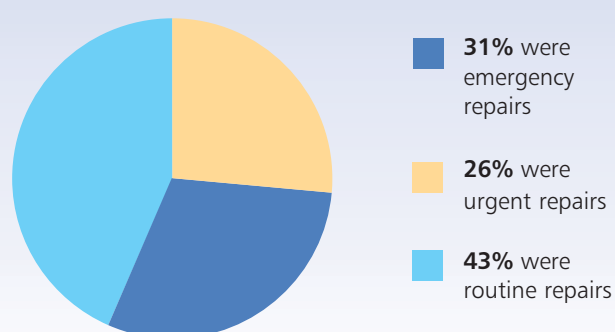
South Wight Housing Association

As well as the homes listed, South Wight Housing Association, the part of Southern Housing Group that operates on the Isle of Wight and in Hampshire, had **3,146** rented homes. This was 756 more than the year before, mainly due to merging with Isle of Wight Housing Association (see page 3). South Wight also had **74** right to buy and acquire leaseholders and **74** shared owners. South Wight reports on its annual performance direct to its residents.

The repairs we carried out

We carried out **47,627** repairs last year. This year, for the first time, our figure includes gas repairs and repairs carried out by your caretakers.

Our contractors carried out **6,632** more non-gas repairs than in 2004/05 – an increase of over 20%.



Repairs completed on time

Type of repairs	Target	On time
Emergency repairs	95%	91%
Urgent repairs	90%	83%
Routine repairs	90%	90%

We measure our repairs service by:

- the length of time it takes to get a repair carried out
- resident satisfaction with the service (we report on this on the next page).

These figures for repairs completed on time show that we are getting it right most of the time, but that we still need to improve (see page 5).

How satisfied you were with our contractors and caretakers



Every month we phone a random 5% to 10% of residents who have had a repair done. When we call, we ask you to rank the service you got from 1 to 10. If you score below 8 out of 10, we ask you to tell us what could have been better. We discuss what you tell us with our contractors at our regular monthly meetings.

The figures opposite cover from April 2005 to the end of March 2006.

Contractor	Residents phoned	Average score
Axis Europe	597	7.5
Eurica (until Jan 2006)	480	7.6
MHS	632	7.9
Mountjoy	1041	8
Robert Heath Heating	657	7.9
Our caretakers	269	8.6

The rents we charged

At the end of March 2006, the average weekly rent for a general home with a secure or assured tenancy was **£71.63**. (Including service charges, the figure was **£76.42**.)

Our average weekly rent for a sheltered scheme or supported home before service charges was **£60.27**.

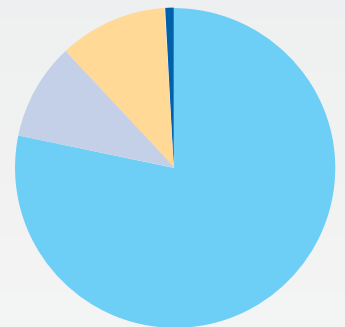
Home size	Average basic rent	
	General	Sheltered/supported
Bedsit	£51.59	£53.14
One bed	£61.00	£60.72
Two beds	£72.39	£75.54
Three beds	£80.45	£71.71
Four+ beds	£90.93	None

The rent residents owed

At the end of March 2006, rent arrears were reduced to **5.95%** (from 6.64% in March 2005). The improvement is because we now handle housing benefits more efficiently and we get in touch with people who are getting behind with their rent more quickly (see page 4).

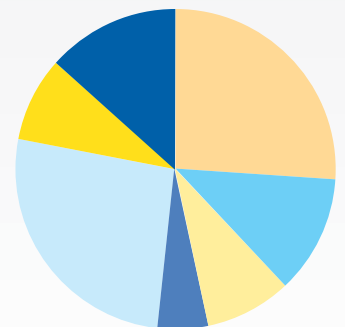
Our income

- **79%** Net rental income
- **9%** Other income
- **11%** Gift Aid (surplus made by non-charitable parts of the Group)
- **1%** Surplus on sale of assets



Our expenditure

- **26%** Routine repairs
- **12%** Major repairs
- **9%** Estate costs
- **26%** Staff costs
- **8%** Overheads
- **4%** Property depreciation
- **15%** Interest paid on loans



Facts & figures 2005/06

Our empty homes

At the end of March 2006, **338** of our general homes were empty. Of these, **77** were in the process of being let. At the same time, **66** of our sheltered and supported homes were empty. Of these **24** were in the process of being let.

The remaining **255** general homes and **42** sheltered and supported homes were empty because they were having major repairs done, or they were being improved, converted or awaiting sale.

We again reduced the time it took us to relet our empty homes, to **40** days to relet a general home in 2005/06 from 47 days in 2004/05. In the same period, it took us **38** days on average to relet a sheltered or supported home.

Why homes became available

When our general homes became empty, it was because:

- they were newly-built (**30%**)
- we gave the resident a transfer (**14%**)
- the resident transferred to another affordable rented home (**11%**)
- the resident died (**10%**)
- the resident was now renting privately or had other accommodation (**15%**)
- we evicted the resident (**13%**)
- the resident abandoned the property (**7%**).

Our new homes

In 2005/6, we built **732** homes:

- **270** for affordable rent
- **30** for rent to key workers
- **408** for shared ownership
- **24** for outright sale.

The homes we let

Last year we let **850** general homes, including **258** in brand-new developments. Of these, **380** were one bed homes, **344** were two bed homes and **126** homes had three or more bedrooms.

We also let **88** sheltered and supported homes.

These figures don't include the homes we let to residential staff or the mutual exchanges you made.

Types of household

Single adult (all ages)	49%
Single person aged 60+	15%
Couples with no children (all ages)	9%
Couple where at least one is aged 60+	4%
One adult with one+ child under 16	20%
Two adults with one+ child under 16	16%
Other family combinations	6%
Household includes someone disabled	11%

Most common reasons for rehousing people

Overcrowding	18%
Health problems or a disability	14%
Needed independent accommodation	10%

We rehoused other people because:

- they were asked to leave by family or friends (**6%**)
- they were suffering domestic violence, harassment or abuse from neighbours (**6%**)
- their current home was in a poor condition (**5%**)
- they needed to move to housing with support (**5%**)
- they had suffered a relationship breakdown (**2%**)
- they wanted to move to be near family, friends, schools or work (**2%**).

Immediately before moving, **22%** of these households were homeless.



Most common reasons for letting

Put forward by local authority	77%
Internal transfers	15%
Put forward by another agency	3%
Direct applicants	4%

Lettings to different communities

Our new residents were:

- British white (**69%**)
- British black (Caribbean, African, other) (**11%**)
- British Asian (**5%**)
- Other white/European (**7%**)
- Other (**8%**).

The complaints we received

During 2005/06 you made a total of **576** complaints. By the end of March 2006:

- **418** complaints were resolved
- **6** complaints were awaiting an appeals panel, because the resident wasn't happy with our decision
- **5** complaints had been referred to the independent Ombudsman, because the resident was unhappy with the final outcome
- **158** complaints were being put right.

Most common reasons for complaints

Repairs/major repairs	63%
Anti-social behaviour	9%
Lack of response	7%
Rehousing	4%
Staff attitude, discourteous or offensive behaviour	4%
Rent account/arrears	2%
Car parking	2%

London region

Improving local services

Regular inspections and the help of active residents helped us make improvements at many of our London schemes during 2005/06.



We made changes to improve security at schemes including Asker House in Tufnell Park, Hawthorns in Norwood, Goodmans Crescent and Bellasis Avenue in Streatham Hill, and Hatchard Road and Sussex Way in Islington.

We improved the cleaning and/or gardening at schemes including Liverpool Road and Edward Mews in Islington, Ford House in Barnet and New Kingshold in Hackney.

We improved play areas, including the ball park at Amhurst Road in Dalston, and improved fences, for example at Myddleton Grange in Stoke Newington.

Residents at Vanston Place in Fulham worked with staff on a planting project. And Dawson Heights in Southwark saw an unsightly area at the heart of the estate transformed with landscaping and a new play area (pictured left).

Decent Homes for Redlands Court

From September to March, Redlands Court in Bromley became part of our Decent Homes programme.

This small scheme has 30, two bedroom flats and almost half have been sold under the right to buy. The homes were built in the late 1970s and originally belonged to Coastal Counties Housing Association. It's a great example of how our Decent Homes programme is gradually improving all our properties, not just the homes at our largest schemes.

Under Decent Homes, every home has to be individually assessed, to confirm the work needed to bring it up to modern standards. Not surprisingly, the assessments tend to be similar throughout a scheme. At Redlands Court, as well as concrete renewal and new windows throughout, the repairs to rented flats have typically included new kitchens and heating upgrades.

Mr and Mrs Jordan's flat was the first to be completed and they soon became quite used to contractors and staff popping in to check on standards. Mrs Jordan has nothing but praise for contractors PH Kenyon & Son.

"The work was done efficiently and they were so protective of residents. They treated us with respect and kindness, and I couldn't praise them enough. My husband was sick with Alzheimer's at the time, but they were so understanding."



By keeping disturbance to a minimum, the Jordans were able to enjoy their newly-refurbished home all the sooner. "They gave us a new kitchen, double glazing front and back, repaired the balcony and checked out the lights because of the new kitchen. They also took out an alcove and painted the whole place so that it would be the same colour," said Mrs Jordan.

Redlands Court was one of the first schemes to benefit from the Decent Homes programme in 2005/06.

Improving homes

At Vanston Place in Fulham, we completed the last phase of refurbishments to rented homes. We also began our London Decent Homes programme by surveying homes and starting work at Ixworth Place in Chelsea, Amhurst Park in Hackney and Redlands Court in Bromley (see opposite).

We completed the last phase of work at the Southern Homes estates in Hackney, transforming the look of Keates House, Hindle House and Stamford Hill Estate with new landscaping, as well as upgrading play areas.

Market Estate in Islington, which transferred to us from the council in February 2005, saw major changes as we cleared a backlog of repairs, as well as cleaning, repairing and decorating most of the common parts. By the end of the year, work had begun on our ambitious five-year programme to replace the existing estate with brand-new homes.

Tackling anti-social behaviour

Sadly, anti-social behaviour continues to take up much of our time and resources. During 2005/6, we took determined action in a number of serious cases.

At Warner Road, we secured an Anti-social Behaviour Order against a resident's 15-year-old son, who had been disrupting life for his neighbours, as well as verbally abusing and threatening people working on the estate.

We took a nuisance family from Vanston Place in Fulham to court in October, gaining a possession order against one family member and Anti-social Behaviour Orders and injunctions against the tenant and other members of her family. Residents had been putting up with noise and constant police raids to the property, which was a base for heroin users and being used to store stolen goods.

One long-running case involved a 68-year-old evicted from Orchard House sheltered scheme in 2003 for being intimidating and racially abusive. At the time, we also took out a three-year Anti-social Behaviour Order to exclude him from the scheme and the area. In June 2005, we took him back to court for ignoring the order. The court extended the order till 2010 and enlarged the exclusion area.

Working with your communities

Young people were our main focus as we worked with Southern Housing Foundation at your estates last year.

The Junior Youth Inclusion Programme at Amhurst Road Estate in Hackney is proving very successful at involving eight to 12-year-olds in a range of positive activities. The project, which is being delivered for us by Dalston Youth Project, and which is funded by Southern Housing Foundation and the Children's Fund, is also helping to reduce anti-social behaviour at the scheme.

With support from Dalston Youth Project, young people from Amhurst Road also worked with the Okai Collier Company to produce a film and book about life on the estate, entitled 'The 411, the bottom line on Amhurst Road'. Children from the estate are pictured below.

Southern Housing Foundation awarded a grant of £40,000 over three years to Hackney Modern, a highly-successful, voluntary, resident-led arts project on Stamford Hill Estate in Hackney. In addition, we have refurbished a flat on the estate for use as a community arts centre. Residents also got the chance to work with Groundwork East London on a project to provide sculptures for the estate.

Last summer, a dozen young residents at Nightingale Estate in Hackney made a documentary about their lives, working with film and TV production company Mouth That Roars. The project was paid for by the Nightingale Community Development Fund, which is funded jointly by Southern Housing Foundation and Countryside in Partnership plc, with support from Hackney Council.



London region

Involving you in our work

In January, we held our second Residents' Panel event at the King's Fund in Central London. Over 50 residents from a number of our London schemes attended.

The residents were asked what they thought of our performance as a landlord, as well as their views on our maintenance service and the support we give to vulnerable residents. We also wanted to find out what they knew and thought about the Government's respect agenda, which gives landlords new responsibilities when it comes to tackling anti-social behaviour.

Residents from around the region took part in the focus groups we ran to help us draw up the new Residents' Handbook and Service Charter, and when we were reviewing the work of Southern Housing Foundation.



Areas with over 100 homes in London Region

Brent

- We own or manage **108** homes.
- We let **no** homes last year.
- **92** homes were empty at the end of the year.
- We have no two bedroom properties in Brent.

Hackney

- We own or manage **1,635** homes.
- We let **96** homes last year.
- **29** homes were empty at the end of the year, 26 because they were being improved.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£71.68**.

Hammersmith & Fulham

- We own or manage **569** homes.
- We let **35** homes last year.
- **18** homes were empty at the end of the year, 11 because they were being improved.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£72.34**.

Islington

- We own or manage **1,135** homes.
- We let **111** homes last year.
- **14** homes were empty at the end of the year, 7 because they were being improved.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£77.76**.

Kensington & Chelsea

- We own or manage **298** homes.
- We let **11** homes last year.
- **3** homes were empty at the end of the year because they were being improved.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£80.77**.

Southwark

- We own or manage **490** homes.
- We let **34** homes last year.
- **11** homes were empty at the end of the year, 6 because they were being improved.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£67.80**.

Annual report to residents

Southern Housing Group grew by a quarter during 2005/06, after we merged with Isle of Wight and James Butcher Housing Associations so that we could cut costs and become more efficient by providing services together. We are now working across a much wider area.

We worked with residents to update our **Residents' Handbook**, producing book and online versions in English, Turkish and Bengali. We changed **Open Door** resident newsletter to full colour and a more convenient size, as well as introducing Turkish summaries. We began producing more **estate newsletters** and we reviewed our **Service Charter**, involving a Turkish focus group in our consultation with residents (pictured).

Our **Service Centre** answered over 177,000 calls this year, at an average speed of 21 seconds. Our use of Language Line interpreters grew by a quarter. Turkish was the second most requested language.

We worked to improve your **local services**, involving residents in estate inspections and following up their suggestions for improvements to shared areas.

We reviewed the way we **let our homes**. In the near future, we will be making changes designed to make our processes simpler and fairer, give you more choice when we offer a home, speed up the time it takes us to relet a property and reduce the rent we lose while it is empty.

We completed the first full year of our new **repairs** contracts, which are being run in partnership with our contractors. Our customer satisfaction surveys show you are mostly happy with the service. However, we are still aiming to reduce the time it takes to get your repairs done. Our contractor for London region is Axis Europe, who are now offering residents training opportunities.

As well as finishing the refurbishment of Vanston Place in Fulham and landscaping work at the Southern Homes estates in Hackney, we began surveying homes for our **Decent Homes** programme. We went on to start work on the first homes at Ixworth Place in Chelsea, Amhurst Park in Hackney and Redlands Court in Bromley. By the end of March 2006, we were on site with £6m of Decent Homes repairs, covering almost 1,000 homes. Over the next four years, we expect to spend £45m.



Last year, we drew up a new strategy for tackling **anti-social behaviour**, taking into account the views expressed by residents in focus groups and surveys. In the near future, our legal powers are likely to get stronger. Over this period we took residents from Warner Road in Camberwell and Vanston Place in Fulham to court for nuisance, as well as a former resident of Orchard House in Fulham.

In consultation with residents, we reviewed the work of **Southern Housing Foundation**, the charity we set up to help improve the quality of life in your neighbourhoods. As a result, we changed our funding priorities and staffing structure. We now prioritise young and older people, widening people's financial choices, the external environment and boosting your skills and resources to help you improve your lives and your neighbourhoods. In London region, we ran projects for young people at Amhurst Road, Stamford Hill and the Nightingale Estates in Hackney.

We continued to **involve residents** in our work and produced a new resident involvement statement. Our Customer Services Committee, which oversees our key policies and services, included four resident members. Members of our 450-strong Residents' Panel joined us for an event in central London in January, while our Readers' Panel commented on some of our publications. We held special focus groups throughout the year on particular areas of our work. We worked with residents to draw up service agreements and continued to offer support to help you start your own community groups.

Thames Gateway region

Improving local services

Estate inspections with residents helped us to improve local standards at many of our estates during 2005/06.

Cyprus Street in Bethnal Green (pictured below) now has better communal lighting and entrance doors, and we have removed a disused former play area that was attracting problems from local youths.

Residents at Treal Road in Rochester are happier after we met with contractors to change the services they provide for the estate, and with the council to get them to manage trees better. We have also taken action to reduce problems with untaxed cars and car repairing at the scheme.

There are now fewer abandoned cars and gardens are tidier at Marks Gate in Dagenham.

At Menotti Street in Bethnal Green, we've fitted a new security gate, railings and an entry system to help combat illegal rubbish dumping and unauthorised access by the public.

In January, we changed round some of our patches to make them more efficient and wrote to tell you if your neighbourhood housing manager had changed.

To improve our day-to-day repairs service, we set up our own in-house surveying team. It is their job to check out our more complex or expensive jobs and to inspect the work done by our contractors.



Improving local homes

Our region is continuing to grow as we develop new schemes in the area. This year, we completed more homes at Royal Arsenal in Greenwich, as well as Ordell Road in Tower Hamlets. Together with Berkeley Homes and ASRA, we recently won a major contract with LB Greenwich to redevelop the Ferrier Estate in Kidbrooke.

Residents at Boundary Estate in Shoreditch will shortly be voting on whether they want us to become their new landlord. A 'yes' vote will mean us spending £20 million over the next five years to improve their homes. We will also tackle serious problems with overcrowding and provide community projects.

We began our Decent Homes upgrading programme in the region by starting work at Goldsmiths in Grays and at homes in Beckton.

Tackling anti-social behaviour

Last year, our anti-social behaviour work was dominated by the problems caused by feuding families from Sophia Road in Canning Town.

What started as an argument between children, later escalated as members of the two families were involved in a number of incidents that made life unpleasant and unsafe for local people and users of a nearby primary school.

Working closely with the police, the local authority, street wardens, the school and the community safety teams, led to Anti-social Behaviour Orders being issued against two teenagers after they were convicted of criminal offences including assault.

In January, we went on to secure Suspended Possession and Anti-social Behaviour Orders against two residents, Anti-social Behaviour Injunctions against three members of their families and the right to go back to court to seek eviction of a third resident, if there is further trouble. Another resident's tenancy has been downgraded for 18 months, making it easier for us to evict her if we need to.

Building a safer community at Durrell Gardens

Residents at Durrell Gardens in Chatham Kent, got together to set up a neighbourhood watch scheme a year ago, to make sure their quiet cul-de-sac stayed peaceful and secure.

Ten residents expressed an interest in launching the scheme when we called a meeting last August. It was seen as a good idea for a street with a large number of older and vulnerable residents.

Over the past year, resident and co-ordinator Kath Gilbert has been keeping her neighbours informed about what's happening locally by running off leaflets that are then distributed to all the homes at the scheme. We have also put up prominent signs to deter wrong-doers.

"It's prompting people to be extra vigilant and having a positive effect on the scheme generally," says patch manager Rosemary Rolfe.

"Although it's been quiet for the last two years, there's been a lot of police activity here in the past. We had some serious anti-social behaviour, with squatters and a drug den, which attracted cars to the road at all times of the day and night."



"We thought it would be nice, once we'd got rid of these problems and finished with the court action, to give residents back a sense of security and somewhere to report their problems."

"Most of us are elderly and some don't get out very much, but we feel pretty safe – especially the people who live upstairs. It's very quiet round here," says Kath.

Neighbourhood watch schemes are just one of the ways we can help you improve the security at your scheme. They can also help to build a sense of community as neighbours get to know one another.

Working with your communities



'The Legend', a film written, acted, filmed and produced by young residents from Timber Wharves on the Isle of Dogs won a prestigious award for Mouth That Roars, the film and TV production company who worked with young people at five of our estates last year.

The film was later judged the best child-produced film at the Chicago International Children's Film Festival. In December, 'The Legend' and a second film,

'Being Me', produced by youngsters at Fieldgate Mansions in Whitechapel, were shown on BBC2.

Young men from Timber Wharves got the chance to take part in a motorcycle maintenance course earlier this year. Other projects begun at the estate at the end of the period covered by this report, involved adult residents designing decorative security gates for the car parking areas and young residents producing a graphic novel.

At Moore Paragon Estate in Canning Town, we have given the former rent office a new lease of life as a community room and we are talking to residents about the activities and services they would like to see based there.

Thames Gateway region

Areas with over 100 homes in Thames Gateway Region

Barking

- We own or manage **481** homes.
- We let **25** homes last year.
- **No** homes were empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£74.75**.

Greenwich

- We own or manage **101** homes.
- We let **31** homes last year.
- **1** home was empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£74.93**.

Medway

- We own or manage **189** homes.
- We let **19** homes last year.
- **No** homes were empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£73.80**.

Thurrock

- We own or manage **354** homes.
- We let **25** homes last year.
- **No** homes were empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£71.23**.



Involving you in our work

With the theme of 'Working in partnership', we held an event for Thames Gateway residents at West Ham Football Club in March (pictured). It was a chance for residents and staff to get

together to talk about how you can get involved in your communities.

With medal-winning swimmer Giles Long as guest speaker, the event was also attended by our maintenance contractors Axis Europe and other local agencies. One highlight of the day was a video made by residents, featuring some local examples of resident involvement.

Residents from around the region also took part in a focus group on repairs and maintenance as part of an event on working in partnership with Axis, the new regional maintenance contractor.

Newham

- We own or manage **539** homes.
- We let **48** homes last year.
- **5** homes were empty at the end of the year, 2 because it was being improved.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£76.82**.

Tower Hamlets

- We own or manage **1,191** homes.
- We let **100** homes last year.
- **6** homes were empty at the end of the year, 2 because they were being improved.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£76.76**.

Waltham Forest

- We own or manage **100** homes.
- We let **16** homes last year.
- **3** homes were empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£84.25**.

Annual report to residents

Southern Housing Group grew by a quarter during 2005/06, after we merged with Isle of Wight and James Butcher Housing Associations so that we could cut costs and become more efficient by providing services together. We are now working across a much wider area.

We worked with residents to update our [Residents' Handbook](#), producing book and online versions in English, Turkish and Bengali. We changed [Open Door](#) resident newsletter to full colour and a more convenient size, as well as introducing Bengali summaries. We began producing more [estate newsletters](#) and we reviewed our [Service Charter](#), involving residents in our consultations (pictured).

Our [Service Centre](#) answered over 177,000 calls this year, at an average speed of 21 seconds. In July 2005, we introduced a separate phone number for Bengali residents with recorded messages in Bengali. By the end of March we had received almost 200 calls on this line. Our use of Language Line interpreters grew by a quarter, with around 65% of callers requesting a Bengali interpreter.

We worked to improve your [local services](#), involving residents in estate inspections and following up their suggestions for improvements to shared areas.

We reviewed the way we [let our homes](#). In the near future, we will be making changes designed to make our processes simpler and fairer, give you more choice when we offer a home, speed up the time it takes us to relet a property and reduce the rent we lose while it is empty.

We completed the first full year of our new [repairs](#) contracts, which are being run in partnership with our contractors. Although we decided to bring our Thames Gateway contract with Eurica to an early end, our customer satisfaction surveys show you are mostly happy with the service. However, we are still aiming to reduce the time it takes to get your repairs done. Our new Thames Gateway contractor is Axis Europe, who are now offering residents training opportunities.

We continued to develop new schemes in the area and residents at Boundary Estate in Shoreditch will shortly be voting on whether they want us to become their new landlord. We began our [Decent Homes](#) programme in the region by starting work at Goldsmiths in Grays and at homes in



Beckton. By the end of March 2006, we were on site with £6m of Decent Homes repairs, covering almost 1,000 homes. Over the next four years, we expect to spend £45m.

Last year, we drew up a new strategy for tackling [anti-social behaviour](#), taking into account the views expressed by residents in focus groups and surveys. In the near future, our legal powers are likely to get stronger. Over this period we took feuding residents from Sophia Road in Canning Town to court for nuisance.

In consultation with residents, we reviewed the work of [Southern Housing Foundation](#), the charity we set up to help improve the quality of life in your neighbourhoods. As a result, we changed our funding priorities and staffing structure. We now prioritise young and older people, widening people's financial choices, the external environment and boosting your skills and resources to help you improve your lives and your neighbourhoods. In Thames Gateway region we ran projects for young people at Timber Wharves and refurbished the former rent office at Moore Paragon Estate in Canning Town for community use.

We continued to [involve residents](#) in our work and produced a new resident involvement statement. Our Customer Services Committee, which oversees our key policies and services, included four resident members. Members of our 450-strong Residents' Panel joined us for an event in West Ham, while our Readers' Panel commented on some of our publications. We held special focus groups throughout the year on particular areas of our work. We worked with residents to draw up service agreements and continued to offer support to help you start your own community groups.

South region

South region had a change of Director last year, when Guy Collar, who was formerly our Customer Services Director, took on the job. Guy's main aim from day one has been to make sure you have good quality homes in clean and safe environments.



Following our merger with James Butcher Housing Association just after the period covered by this report, we began managing some of each other's homes, so that we could make better use of local resources.

Improving local services

Estate inspections with residents helped us to improve local standards during 2005/06.

Residents at Gilligan Close and Peacehaven worked with us to replace poorly-performing cleaning contractors with contractors who would do a better job.

We sorted out problems with the bin stores at Wellend Villas in Brighton, while in Dover, at Cornwallis Road and Selkirk and Villiers, we replaced fencing to stop rubbish collecting in garden areas.

A communal garden project at Turner Close, bulb planting at Peacehaven and arranging for trees and shrubs to be cut back at Churchlands House in New Romney, all improved the look of these schemes.

We put up fences and gates to improve security at Churchlands House and at French's Court in Seaford. At Bushfield Shaw Estate in Redhill, Surrey, we removed a disused play area that was attracting troublesome young people.

At Coolinge Lane in Folkestone we tackled problems with rubbish, graffiti and anti-social behaviour by inviting residents and young people to form a youth forum.

Improving local homes

Last year, we continued with planned works to homes at York & Brunswick Roads in Brighton and Mount Pleasant in Bracknell.

Residents at Freemans Way in Deal, Kent, were among the first to benefit from our Decent Homes upgrading programme (pictured below). We also began work at Lakeview, Oliver House and Windlesham Gardens in Brighton.



Tackling anti-social behaviour

Tackling anti-social behaviour is never easy and our residents in West Durrington have had to put up with more than their share. Loud music, graffiti, street drinking, young people hanging about, abusive language and, in one of the worst incidents, the loss of their community hut in an arson attack, have all cast a cloud over the year. But we are continuing to work with residents and a number of local agencies, including the police, local schools and the council, to find as many ways as we can to resolve local problems.

We secured evictions during the year against two residents whose teenage children were attracting youths to their schemes to drink and take drugs, vandalise property and create unacceptable noise. As a result, Carisbrooke Drive in Durrington enjoyed silent nights by Christmas and we restored peace to Queen's Court in Thanet, a scheme for the over-55s.

Working with your communities

The Golden Valley Committee at Coolinge Lane Estate in Folkestone has been the undoubted success story of the year in our work with resident communities (see page 23).

In December, 'Last Orders', an innovative and hugely enjoyable play designed to alert young people to the dangers of under-age and binge drinking was performed to 360 Year 9 pupils at Durrington High School in West Sussex. The play was produced by Solomon Associates and funded by Southern Housing Foundation, to increase awareness of the dangers of alcohol and encourage responsibility.

The George Spurgen School Breakfast Club in East Folkestone got a reprieve, when Southern Housing Foundation stepped in with a further year's funding. The Club was set up four years' ago to provide a healthy, balanced breakfast and a calm start to the day for children from the school. Around half of the regulars are residents' children.

The Foundation also agreed a large grant of £30,000 to Shepway Sure Start, which is based in Hawkinge in Kent. The funding will allow the scheme to befriend and support a larger number of young families in difficulty.

In September, 'Trickster the Musical', a highly successful play tackling the problem of distraction burglary (pictured below), was performed for over 1,500 older people across Kent. The tour was organised by Southern Housing Foundation and produced by Solomon Associates, with support from the police and other local agencies.



Involving you in our work

In September we held a Residents' Panel event at Hove Town Hall (pictured above) and met with 35 residents who live in South region. We particularly wanted to find out how satisfied they were with us as a landlord, as well as their views on the Service Centre and our handling of anti-social behaviour.

Residents from around the region also took part in the focus groups we ran to help us draw up the new Residents' Handbook and Service Charter, and when we were reviewing the work of Southern Housing Foundation.

South region

Respect for the Golden Valley Committee

It's been an exciting year for a group of young residents from Coolinge Lane in Folkestone. Their impressive efforts to improve life in their area have won them the support of their estate, as well as awards and recognition from the wider community.

The Golden Valley Committee, whose seven members are aged between 11 and 19, began meeting to find ways to change their neighbourhood.

Supported by Jenny McDonald from Southern Housing Foundation, patch manager Jane Rush and other agencies, they were given the resources to draw up and cost a plan to provide equipment for the grounds of the estate. They were also sent for mediation training with Shepway & Dover Mediation Services, to learn about ways to prevent anti-social behaviour.

As well as designing the equipment, the Committee actively raised money to add to around £15,000 already secured. "We held a big fun day event and sold cakes. We also put a trampoline in the field and got people to pay to use it," recalls Committee member Shelly Cole (14).

The youngsters have won over the estate by their sheer enthusiasm and for thinking of all generations in their planning. But it's their direct approach to tackling anti-social behaviour that has attracted particular attention,

because, thanks to their efforts, recorded nuisance at the estate has reduced by a staggering 70%. "The mediation training taught us a lot. The most important thing was how to keep calm. We've just been telling other people to behave and warning them that, if they don't, the police will come," says Shelly.

Over the past few months, Shepway District Council have produced a DVD about the group, which was shown at a local government conference in Birmingham. A local paper ran a half page story on the fun day and the Committee featured in a radio interview. In November, the youngsters scooped the main prize at the Kent Messenger Young People's Respect Award, winning trophies, £20 gift vouchers and £600 towards their project. Later in the year, they were nominated for the Kent area Try Angle awards.

The work at Coolinge Lane also received recognition with a Home Office Respect Award for Taking a Stand.



Members of the Committee enjoying the new teen shelter.

Areas with over 100 homes in South Region

Adur

- We own or manage **187** homes.
- We let **29** homes last year.
- **7** home was empty at the end of the year because it was being improved.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£71.98**.

Arun

- We own or manage **168** homes.
- We let **9** homes last year.
- **1** home was empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£75.91**.

Ashford

- We own or manage **271** homes.
- We let **35** homes last year.
- **1** home was empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£73.00**.

Bracknell Forest

- We own or manage **288** homes.
- We let **37** homes last year.
- **1** home was empty at the end of the year because it was being improved.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£81.23**.

Brighton & Hove

- We own or manage **898** homes.
- We let **61** homes last year.
- **40** homes were empty at the end of the year, 20 because they were being improved.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£68.93**.

Crawley

- We own or manage **203** homes.
- We let **16** homes last year.
- **1** home was empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£80.02**.

Dover

- We own or manage **658** homes.
- We let **77** homes last year.
- **11** homes were empty at the end of the year, 7 because they were being improved.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£71.86**.

Havant

- We own or manage **116** homes.
- We let **3** homes last year.
- **No** homes were empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£74.74**.

Horsham

- We own or manage **329** homes.
- We let **111** homes last year.
- **6** homes were empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£77.17**.

Lewes

- We own or manage **287** homes.
- We let **45** homes last year.
- **2** homes were empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£64.17**.

Portsmouth

- We own or manage **155** homes.
- We let **7** homes last year.
- **32** homes were empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£71.81**.

Reigate & Banstead

- We own or manage **112** homes.
- We let **7** homes last year.
- **No** homes were empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£76.75**.

Shepway

- We own or manage **448** homes.
- We let **43** homes last year.
- **4** homes were empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£71.95**.

Thanet

- We own or manage **289** homes.
- We let **23** homes last year.
- **6** homes were empty at the end of the year.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£69.87**.

Worthing

- We own or manage **482** homes.
- We let **49** homes last year.
- **5** homes were empty at the end of the year, 3 because they were being improved.
- Our average weekly rent for a two bedroom property is **£71.74**.

Phone us on **08456 066 366** (8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday) or on **08456 120 041** to hear messages recorded in Bengali.

Email us at service.centre@shgroup.org.uk

Write to us at **Service Centre, Southern Housing Group, PO Box 643, Horsham RH12 1XJ**

Order gas repairs by phoning Robert Heath Heating on **0800 169 2337** (8.30am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday)

In an emergency, call the Service Centre during opening hours. When the Service Centre is closed, phone Homeserve on **08457 573 764**

Visit our website at www.shgroup.org.uk

For help with translations or if a large type, Braille or taped summary would be useful, please contact the Service Centre.

Bengali

অনুবাদ সাহায্য পেতে হলে সার্ভিস সেন্টারে 08456 120 041 নম্বরে ফোন করুন।

Gujarati

અનુવાદ સંબંધી મદદ માટે સર્વિસ સેન્ટરને ટેલિફોન નંબર 08456 066 366 પર ફોન કરો.

Turkish

Tercüme konusunda yardım için 08456 066 366'dan Hizmet Merkezi'ni arayın.

Vietnamese

Muốn được giúp đỡ về dịch thuật, xin gọi Trung Tâm Phục Vụ (Service Centre) điện thoại số 08456 066 366.

Somali

Wixii ah caawimo turjumaan ka soo wac Xarunta Adeegga telefoonka 08456 066 366.

Chinese

若需要提供翻譯，請致電服務中心(Service Centre) 08456 066366。

Arabic

لمساعدتك في الترجمة يرجى الاتصال بمركز الخدمة على هاتف 08456 066 366.

Urdu

ترجمہ میں مدد کے لئے سروس سنٹر کو اس نمبر 08456 066 366 پر فون کریں۔