

How residents made a difference

2007-2008



Taking your views into account

Why we involve you

Every year, we invite literally thousands of our residents to get involved in our work. We want to know how you experience our services and what we can do to improve them.

As a social landlord our aim is to provide good quality homes and services to all our residents, whether you rent, own or part-own your home. We also have to demonstrate to our regulators that we are efficient, well-managed and provide good value for money.

We constantly monitor and report on our performance, and we regularly compare our results with those of other landlords. But there is no doubt that our best reality check is you – because our services directly affect you.

In this report, we tell you about the many ways residents worked with us from April 2007 to March 2008 and we show how they made a difference. We hope it will encourage even more of you to get involved in future.

If you would like more detail about the results of our focus groups and surveys, or to find out more about getting involved, call the Service Centre on **08456 066 366** and ask to speak to our Resident Involvement team. They will be delighted to hear from you.

Contents

Boards and committees	3
Getting services right	7
Resident events	10
Resident focus groups	13
Resident surveys	17
Involved in your communities	21

CASE and SHINE

When we report to you next year, we'll be able to give you some of the results of the brand new project we're launching during 2008-2009.

We have designed our CASE (Clean and Safe Estates) and SHINE (Sheltered Housing Involvement in Neighbourhoods and the Estate) projects to look at local issues, draw up firm service standards and improve resident satisfaction levels.

If your estate or sheltered scheme is selected for the programme, we will:

- carry out a local survey to find out how satisfied you are with the services you are getting
- meet with you or consult you further via a local newsletter
- invite you to help us draw up local service standards
- carry out another survey to see if you think things have improved.

To make the most of the projects, we will be encouraging as many of you as possible to take part.

Boards and committees

A small number of our residents played a very important role in our organisation in 2007-2008, as members of our boards, Customer Services Committee and regional forums.

The main Southern Housing Group Board

David Kelly, who rents a home at Market Estate in Islington and **Jim Hitch**, who is a leaseholder on the George Downing Estate in Hackney, both joined the main Board of Southern Housing Group last year.

Together with the independent members of our Board, David and Jim share overall responsibility for the work of every part of the Group.

This means they:

- review our aims and objectives
- approve our annual budgets, strategies and plans
- agree our policies for setting rents and service charges
- decide how we should measure our performance and check we are meeting our targets
- make sure we identify any problems we could face in future and have plans to tackle them.

For Jim, it's been an interesting year. "I've had a real overview of the organisation. As I've found out more about Southern Housing Group, I've seen that it may not be perfect, but its heart is in the right place," he says.

David's highlight of the year was taking part in a Board away weekend at the Hitchin Priory hotel in Hertfordshire. "I enjoyed the oversight we got into the workings of the Group and it was good to get to know other Board members," he says.

David particularly likes showing visitors around Market Estate, where he lives. In January, his visitors included MP Caroline Flint, who was given the job of Minister for Housing just days later. "I was impressed by how engaged she was with residents at the estate," he says.



Above: Jim Hitch (left) and David Kelly (right) are the resident members on the Group Board.

Below: David Kelly with MP Caroline Flint at an event held at Market Estate in January 2008.



To find out more about the Board, call the Service Centre on **08456 066 366** and ask to speak to our Resident Involvement team.

South Wight Housing Association Board

Anita Knights, Jan Berkley and Sandy Ciccognani, served on the Board of South Wight Housing Association during the year. All three rent homes on the Isle of Wight.

As Board members, they share responsibility for directing South Wight Housing Association's work.

Anita, who is registered disabled and lives in Shanklin, was one of the residents interviewed by the Audit Commission during South Wight HA's recent inspection. She was asked about the role of the board and the work of the organisation.

However, asked about her personal highlight of the year, she says: "We had finance training and for the first time in my life, I really understood it! It's hard to get a grip on budgets and so on, if you aren't great with numbers. The training has helped me enormously when we look at the accounts."



Left to right: Sandy Ciccognani, Jan Berkley and Anita Knights are the resident members of South Wight Housing Association's board.

James Butcher Housing Association Board

Peter Savery who rents a home in Reading and **Paul Ruchpaul** from David Smith Court retirement rented scheme, also in Reading, sat on the Board of James Butcher HA during the year.

As Board members, they share responsibility for directing James Butcher Housing Association's work.

Peter has been on the board for more than two years now. "It's all very interesting – very busy and there is regular training. We're also keeping in touch with other board members around the country to see how they do things. But you would have a job to find a better mix than we have."

Last year was memorable, because James Butcher HA was inspected by the Audit Commission. "We got one star and good prospects for improving, which was a great step forward," he recalls.

"As a team and on my own we spoke to the inspectors. It was a bit worrying, but the team were really good and I think they were quite impressed with our resident involvement."

Left, Peter Savery and right, Paul (Satyagrahi) Ruchpaul are members of James Butcher Housing Association's board.



Customer Services Committee

There are currently five resident members on our Customer Services Committee. They either rent or own a home with Southern Housing Group Ltd or Southern Housing Home Ownership.

The committee is responsible for overseeing the management and maintenance of our properties, and the services we provide to residents who rent and own their homes. The residents sit alongside independent volunteers.

During 2007-2008, the resident members included:

- **Jim Hitch** from George Downing Estate in Hackney (also a Group Board member)
- **David Kelly** from Market Estate in Islington (also a Group Board member)
- **Ann Fitzgerald** from Ixworth Place in Fulham
- **Dennis Katungi** from Tulip Close in Beckton
- **Roy Mitchell** from St Barnabas Close in Ashford.

As committee members, these residents:

- approve our housing, maintenance and lettings policies
- check the standards of service we provide
- monitor our performance and budgets
- oversee our supported housing agreements and our partnerships with other organisations
- take note of our resident involvement work
- monitor complaints
- provide members for appeals and eviction panels
- check how we handle bad debts.



A recent Customer Services Committee visit to Royal Arsenal in Woolwich. Left to right: Dennis Katungi, Tony Hughes (currently Acting Director of Thames Gateway Region) and Jim Hitch.

James Butcher Housing Association's Consultative Panel

Six James Butcher Housing Association residents are members of the Consultative Residents' Panel. The panel is an independent group of people who meet once a month to discuss our services, the events we are planning and the way we consult with residents.

During 2007-2008, our panel members included:

- **Debbie Hall** from Swindon
- **Iris Hunt** from Mitchell Lodge in south Reading
- **Barry Jenkins** from Swindon
- **Sandra Jewell** from Reading
- **Martin McCathie** from Shroder Court retirement rented scheme in Englefield Green
- **Peter Savery** from Reading
- **John Sleeman** from Brain Court retirement rented scheme in Stratton St Margaret.

For Debbie Hall, one of the highlights of the year was being invited to visit the James Butcher board in September. "It was very interesting because it showed us what happens when things go up to the board. For example, if we talk about the situation with repairs, they have to deal with the bigger picture. They have to think about the money spent and how to meet Decent Homes. It was really illuminating."



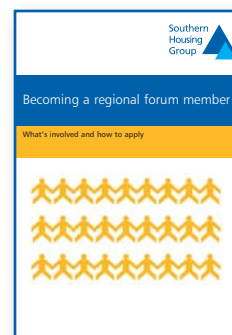
The Consultative Panel, left to right: Peter Savery, Sandra Jewell, Iris Hunt, Martin McCathie, Resident Involvement Officer Jane Rodd, John Sleeman, Debbie Hall and Barry Jenkins.

Regional forums

When we advertised in Open Door residents' newsletter last year for people interested in joining new regional forums, around 100 of you expressed an interest.

We are currently setting up three forums for Southern Housing Group Ltd and one for South Wight Housing Association. There will be up to 12 residents on each and we will select a good mix of owners and tenants with a range of backgrounds.

The forums will not make formal decisions, but they will meet with senior regional managers, consider reports, discuss local performance and suggest ways to improve services.



To find out more about any of these formal boards and committees, call the Service Centre and ask for the Resident Involvement team.

Getting services right

We invite some residents actively to help us do our job better. Some of you carry out checks on our performance, while others work with us to shape the way we deliver services.

Customer service monitors

Nine Southern Housing Group Ltd residents, three from each region, have been carrying out formal estate inspections for us in a pilot scheme designed to help us raise standards.

During 2007-2008, our service monitors included:

- **Reg Burbidge** from Liverpool Road in Islington
- **Bob Leader** from George Downing Estate in Hackney
- **Sabiha Patel** from Stamford Hill Estate in Hackney
- **Tom Heaney** from Dagenham
- **Karen Pannell** from Cyprus Street in Bethnal Green
- **David Longstaffe** from Chatham
- **Granville Cosier** from Aylesham
- **Christine Custodero** from Hove
- **Adebisi Alaba** from Brighton.

The monitors each made several visits to a number of schemes in their region, giving a score out of 10 each time. By September 2007, most of the estates were getting higher scores, as we responded to their feedback.

Reg Burbidge inspected three schemes during the pilot – Brewery Square in Clerkenwell, York Way Court in Kings Cross and Myddleton Grange in Manor House. "It was quite revealing and quite good to see that our properties compare very favourably with the properties next door," he says.

The pilot scheme has proved so successful that our monitors recently began inspecting a new batch of estates in their regions.



Pictured on a recent inspection of schemes in Thurrock and Dagenham are, left to right: Resident Involvement Officer Rohima Khatun, with customer service monitors Tom Heaney and Karen Pannell.

Cross-landlord resident inspection report

During the year, James Butcher Housing Association worked with five other landlords on a resident inspection training project led by Windsor Housing.

Pooling our resources, we arranged for the Tenant Participation Advisory Service to run a training course for residents willing to volunteer their time to carry out formal inspections at schemes owned by their landlord.

These inspections are a good way for us to check that our estates are in a satisfactory and improving condition.

After advertising in Open Door residents' newsletter, we heard from over a dozen people and selected three residents. They went on to attend training in June 2008.

Contractor review meetings

Three Southern Housing Group Ltd residents have been taking part in the monthly meetings we hold with our repairs contractor partners.

Roy Mitchell from St Barnabas Close in Ashford attends meetings with MHS Homes, the company that covers the Kent area. **Ann Fitzgerald** from Ixworth Place in Fulham attends meetings with Axis Europe plc, our contractors for London and Thames Gateway. And **Patrick Garnem** from Wellend Villas in Brighton attends meetings with Connaught plc, the company that covers part of South region.

As part of our monitoring teams, the residents monitor our contractors' performance month by month and suggest changes that will improve our repairs service.

Roy Mitchell has found the meetings very informative. "They allow you to look at where there are weaknesses and repeating issues that need to be resolved. We're not there to build walls or say to the contractors – 'here's a hurdle you need to jump over' – it's more of a team effort than a confrontational effort. You listen to the contractors' perspective as well.

"Of course, at the end of the day, it's got to work for the Group and the residents. As I'm on the receiving end of the service, I can bring a resident's perspective. But I've been made aware of the difficulties contractors have, and there are times when residents have to be flexible."

Roy Mitchell attends meetings with MHS Homes, our contractor for the Kent area.



Selecting new contractors for South Wight Housing Association

Four residents who rent homes on the Isle of Wight – Bryan Harris from Freshwater, Steve Weston from Totland, Maureen Askew from Niton and Pat Kimpton from Chale – worked with us during the year as we got ready to select contractors for our new repairs contracts. They went through the contract documents, discussed the issues involved with staff and made suggestions that had a real impact on the final selection process. They also took part in site visits to contractors Mountjoy, Connaught plc and Banks Builders.

Pat Kimpton found the site visits particularly interesting. “We had to assess health and safety, look at what they had on site and find out about their carbon footprint. We also met some of the workers and it was nice to see a different side to the workforce.

“I’ve taken part before, but we were more involved this time. South Wight were getting feedback from us that they were actually listening to.”

We also consulted 15 residents from our mental health supported housing to make sure our contractors take the needs of our more vulnerable residents into account.



A Mountjoy contractor fits a new kitchen on the Isle of Wight. We reselected the company for one of our new partnering contracts.

If you would like to work with us to improve a service, call the Service Centre and ask for the Resident Involvement team.

Resident events

Every year, we hold resident events to give you the chance to meet us face to face, so that you can discuss what matters to you.

Residents' conference: Southern Housing Group Ltd

On the theme of 'Making a difference' more than 100 residents attended our conference at a central London hotel, at the end of March 2007.

They heard the results of our latest major survey, took part in workshops and a lively quiz. They watched a DVD about how we are working to make a difference and heard from our guest speaker, former boxing champion Barry McGuigan.

Granville Cosier from Cornwallis Avenue in Aylesham was impressed by the day. "It was very informative and pleasant. It encouraged residents to get involved and most people did speak up in the anti-social behaviour workshop that I took part in."

The workshops gave us valuable feedback on estate services, our contact arrangements, how good we are at communicating with you, our repairs service and the problems you experience with anti-social behaviour.



Boxer Barry McGuigan meets residents at the Southern Housing Group Ltd conference.

Residents' conference: South Wight Housing Association

In September 2007, more than 70 residents, including 15 who live in supported housing, took part in the first annual South Wight Housing Association residents' conference, at the Riverside Centre in Newport.

We presented the results of our recent major satisfaction survey, then invited residents to take part in workshops hosted by our housing, property services and supported housing teams. There were also talks led by The Footprint Trust and members of the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership.

The day's highlight was a lively game show in the style of 'The-Price-is-Right', where three members of staff members quizzed residents on our properties and repairs.



The residents' conference was hugely enjoyable for both residents and staff.

Residents' conference: Thames Gateway region

At the end of March 2008, around 80 Southern Housing Group Ltd residents attended our annual Thames Gateway region conference, held at Dexter House, Tower Hill.

We used the event to find out if the changes we made last summer to the way we manage homes had made any difference to resident satisfaction. We also asked for suggestions as to how we could improve services.

We heard that while some residents were still not very satisfied with our repairs contractors and the companies we use for cleaning and gardening, others thought things had got better recently. We also heard positive comments from residents who had met their new resident services staff. The general view was that we were handling anti-social behaviour better too.

Residents made some good suggestions about how we could continue improving and we have since passed these on to the relevant departments.



Pam Bhamra (second left), who was Thames Gateway Region Director at the time of the conference, presents awards to a group of residents.

Open day at Downsview Estate

In April 2007, more than 200 people joined us for a fun day designed to welcome residents to our brand new Downsview Estate in Sandown on the Isle of Wight.

The event was designed to introduce residents to staff from several departments, as well as giving them the opportunity to meet some of our repairs contractors and representatives from other agencies that work in the area.

With glorious weather, plenty of refreshments and fun activities for the children, it was a very successful event.



Residents and their children get to know each other at the open day for Downsview Estate on the Isle of Wight.

James Butcher Housing Association roadshows

In November 2007, we took to the road to meet up with around 100 residents from our general needs and retirement rented schemes at Jubilee, Feilden, Selkirk and Penny Royal Courts, and at Katesgrove Lane.

We wanted to talk with residents about the work of James Butcher Housing Association and its relationship with Southern Housing Group.

Residents gave us lots of useful feedback. They told us we are listening more and providing a good service through the Service Centre. Our sheltered scheme managers are popular and our properties generally very good.

However, some people had concerns about pets, anti-social behaviour, and gardening and cleaning standards, which we are working to address.



We are delighted when you join us at conferences and open days. Watch out for details of our next event.

Resident focus groups

We regularly consult residents when we carry out service reviews or when we are planning changes, to find out what you think. We are grateful to those of you who met with us to share your views during 2007-2008.

Many of the people we invite to take part in consultations first expressed an interest in getting involved by signing up to the Residents' Panel for Southern Housing Group Ltd and Customer Panels for South Wight and James Butcher Housing Associations. These panels now include several hundred residents.

Focus groups: New housing management structure

With plans to make major changes to the way we manage your homes, we carried out a major consultation exercise in May 2007, meeting with focus groups at our London region, Newport and Theale offices, as well as at estates in Hackney (English and Turkish-speaking events), Islington, Southwark, Brighton and Hove.

We wanted to know what residents thought of our plan to manage our rented and leasehold homes side by side and to introduce new specialist staff to focus on rent arrears and anti-social behaviour. We explained that our overall aim was to manage homes better and to improve the services we provide locally.

Overall, residents were positive about our plans and had lots of good suggestions to add. We took many of these into account when we launched the new system last September. For example, we sent out letters and leaflets introducing the new teams by name. We're also increasing the number of scheme newsletters to keep you better informed.

At the same time, we have tightened up our monitoring of contractors and we're prioritising estate inspections, inviting more residents to join us. We are working with our repairs contractors to get even better value for money. This year, we will launch 'CASE', our Clean and Safe Estate project, at 22 selected schemes. We'll be working with residents to draw up local service standards, checking 'before' and 'after' satisfaction levels to make sure things have really improved.



Carrying out an estate inspection at Wellend Villas are, left to right: A representative from RGS gardening contractors, resident John Loveday, Resident Services Officer Chris Cook and resident Fred Allen. Estate inspections have become even more important following our reorganisation of local housing management.

Introducing new anti-social behaviour caseworkers has been a popular move. We now plan to survey people who report problems, to check how well you think we handled things.

Focus groups: New online services

In August 2007, we held workshops with 15 residents at our offices in London, Ashford and Horsham, inviting them to try out the new online services we were about to introduce.

As a result, we made changes to the website pages before they were launched. For example, on the pages where you can view your rent account, we made it clearer when balances are in credit or arrears. We also added links to our contact details and the allpay website, so that a payment can be made straight away.

The residents wanted changes to the font sizes and the design, and suggested improvements for the repairs pages. We will include these in the further redesign and improvements we have planned for the year to come.

Paolo Lacchini who took part in the London workshop liked the idea that the new features would give him more control and be very convenient. "Everything online is better, especially for someone like me who has an accent," he says.

Phone discussions: Lettings pack

During October 2007, we rang a dozen or so residents to find out how they felt about the lettings pack we give you when you first move into one of our properties.

Taking on board their comments, we decided to streamline our written pack, by replacing it with a short booklet giving details about the services you can expect and your responsibilities as a tenant.

Our housing staff will also run through the essentials when you come in to sign your tenancy agreement – that is how to pay your rent, your responsibilities as a tenant, how to order a repair and how to contact us. You will still be given a detailed residents' handbook to take away with you.



Residents at sign-up are now given a streamlined lettings pack.

Focus groups: Disability equality strategy

In December 2007, we held an all-day workshop at the Kings Fund Conference Centre in central London, inviting 10 disabled residents and a carer to join us. Their feedback helped us write a new strategy designed to make sure our services are accessible to all residents and meet the needs of disabled people.

Taking up their suggestions, we plan to consult disabled residents to help us draw up separate service standards for disabled residents. We are also setting up a new lettings system so that we can match our adapted properties to the residents who need them.

We are reviewing our aids and adaptations process and, in future, will give more support to residents who are having them installed. We are working on ways to improve the way we communicate with residents with different forms of disability.

To test that our disability equality action plan is working to improve services, we plan to set up a forum for disabled residents, who will meet with us regularly.

Eileen from Ashford, who took part in the focus group, told us: "I'm hoping something really good comes out of this. There were lots of good ideas, for example about how the Service Centre could handle things better."



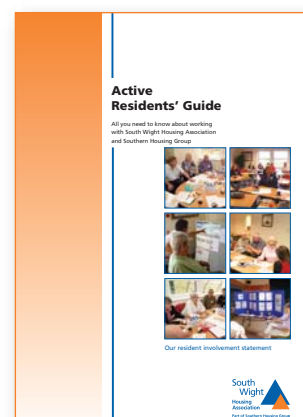
Aids and adaptations are an important service we already provide to disabled residents.

"When you're disabled, you do feel quite vulnerable at times. You feel you're not listened to. Southern Housing Group gets full marks for being prepared to listen as far as I'm concerned."

Focus groups: Active residents' guide for South Wight Housing Association

Five Isle of Wight residents were sent a draft copy of the new Active Residents' Guide for South Wight Housing Association residents, which sets out how residents can get involved in our work.

We then invited the residents to a focus group in June 2007 with our Community Initiatives Worker. Their comments and changes were included before we went to print.



Taking your views into account

Focus groups: Major repairs service standard

During March and April 2008, we ran focus groups to find out what residents of Southern Housing Group Ltd and James Butcher Housing Association thought of our plans to improve the way we communicate and liaise with you when we carry out major repairs to your homes.

The focus groups were held with a total of 34 residents from Leonard Court in Theale, Mander Court sheltered scheme in Caversham, Courtney King House sheltered scheme in Brighton, Ixworth Place in Fulham and Grays in Essex. All of these schemes have recently been part of one of our major works programmes.

The residents most wanted us to communicate better in future. They liked the proposed new information sheet we showed them, which sets out our new service standards. They made suggestions to help us improve the standard letter we planned to send with it, giving scheme-specific details.

After taking into account some of the improvements suggested by the residents, we have finalised these documents and will now send them to all residents who have works done on their homes.



Residents from Mander Court in Caversham took part in the focus group, telling us how the major works at their scheme had gone.

If you would like to join one of our residents' panels, or take part in a focus group, call the Service Centre and ask for the Resident Involvement team.

Resident surveys

In 2007, we carried out our major, three-yearly surveys of residents living in general needs rented homes. These surveys are designed to track the trends in your views about our services.

Every year, we also send satisfaction surveys to people who have used particular services. The surveys we report on here were all carried out during 2006-2007 and the results fed into our work during 2007-2008.

Major survey: Southern Housing Group Ltd

More than 2,000 residents replied to our survey and overall 71% were happy with our service – a similar result to our last survey.

However, there were aspects of our service residents wanted us to improve. In particular, they wanted us to communicate better and focus on getting customer service right. They wanted better local services and more support to tackle anti-social behaviour. They wanted us to continue to improve the repairs service.

Sharon Buxton is one of the new anti-social behaviour caseworkers we introduced as part of our new housing management structure.



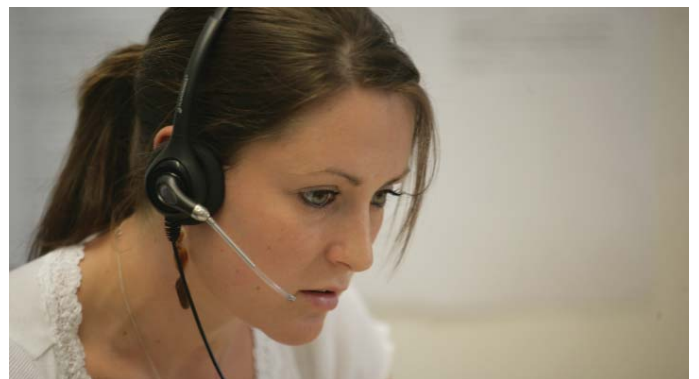
We took these views into account as we designed our new housing management structure. We are also working with our contractors to improve the repairs service and plan to improve the way we book repairs appointments.

Major survey: South Wight Housing Association

More than 1,300 residents responded to our survey – representing almost half of the homes we own on the Isle of Wight. Around four out of five told us they were satisfied overall with our services – a slight rise compared to our result in 2002.

The results showed that we should continue to develop our resident involvement work. We now have a database of residents to call on for group discussions. We also ran information days last year and held our first annual residents' conference in the autumn.

Since the survey, residents began using the Service Centre, we introduced our new way of managing your homes and we improved our website. We think you now get a better service and we hope for higher satisfaction scores in our next major survey.



South Wight HA residents now use the Service Centre.

Major survey: James Butcher Housing Association

Nearly 2,000 residents responded to our survey and 78% said they were happy with our service overall.

The results showed us areas where we can make improvements. For example, we plan to involve more residents in our work and in more ways. Enterprise plc, our new day-to-day contractor, is going to make appointments with you directly to speed up repairs.

We will also try to communicate with you better so that you don't have to make so many follow-up calls. We're working to improve our website. We are also working more closely with you to resolve neighbourhood problems like litter and vandalism.

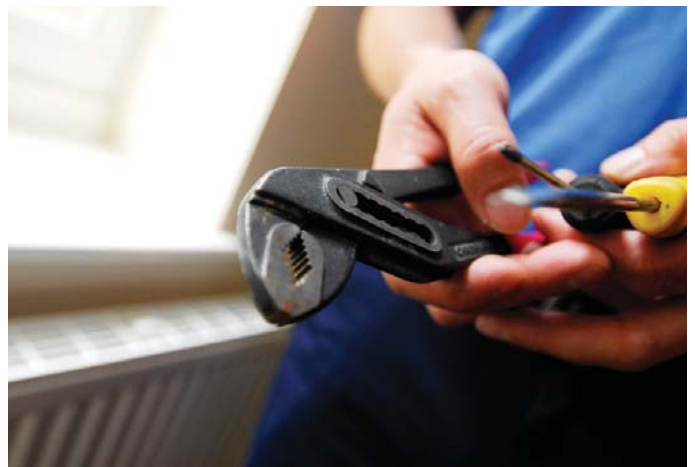


Signing contracts with our new repairs contractors.

Survey: Work to your home

More than 400 residents whose homes had received major repairs responded to our satisfaction survey during 2006-2007. We were pleased to see that overall satisfaction levels rose that year compared to the year before

Responding to resident suggestions, we are now improving our communication and liaison with you when carrying out major works to your home. For example, we have prepared new leaflets telling you what to expect – both in general and while your own scheme is being improved – and what we require from our contractors and consultants.



Survey: Brand new homes

Many of the residents who moved into a new home with us during 2005-2006 responded to our new homes survey a year later. We were pleased that overall satisfaction levels were 92%, which was higher than the year before.

Residents were less satisfied with some aspects of our service and we have been focusing on improving these areas. For example, we are trying to improve the standard of service you get from the builders of your home while they are responsible for fixing defects during the first year. We also piloted a scheme at one development where we took over the landscaping from the developer straight away. Resident satisfaction levels were higher as a result.

We are also changing our design brief to try to increase the amount of storage space. We will make kitchens more flexible to allow space for tumble driers or dishwashers. We will provide clothes-drying facilities as standard in future.



Resident Ray Maxey enjoying his new home at Market Estate in Islington.

Phone survey: Repairs and maintenance

We phoned nearly 4,000 residents of Southern Housing Group Ltd and James Butcher Housing Association during 2006-2007 to find out how their repair had gone.

Around 87% gave us a score of 7 or more out of 10 – our measure of satisfaction.

While the results showed that residents are satisfied overall with all our contractors, they highlighted some areas where people were more likely to be dissatisfied. We took these detailed results to our contractors at our winter 2007 forum, asking them to present their improvement plans.

We are monitoring our contractors' performance at our monthly partnership meetings and will check whether you are more satisfied when we analyse our next set of survey results.



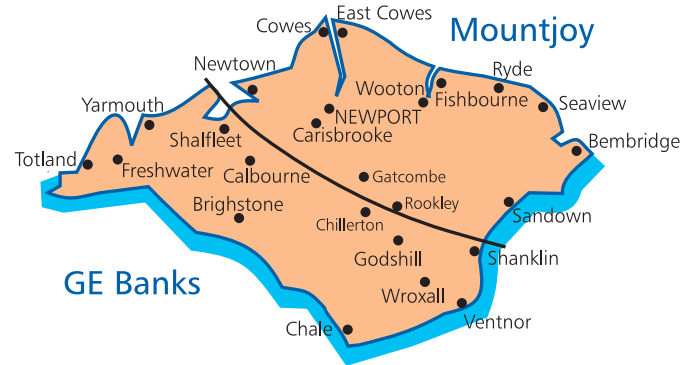
Axis Europe plc are our repairs contractors for London and Thames Gateway regions.

Phone survey: Repairs and maintenance on the Isle of Wight

We phoned many South Wight Housing Association residents during 2006-2007 about their repair. A total of 91% rated the service at 7 or more out of 10.

Residents were satisfied overall with both our contractors on the island, but we did identify that the phone service needs to improve, some repairs are taking too long to complete and we need to communicate better with the contractors.

Last year, our contractors' contracts came to an end and we carried out a new selection process, in line with EU regulations. We went on to reselect Mountjoy and Banks Builders to continue as our partner contractors. Their new contracts reflect the feedback residents gave us.



Phone survey: Complaints

During 2007 we ran a pilot phone survey, calling residents who had made a complaint to check how well they thought we'd handled it.

Fewer than 40% of the residents were satisfied with our complaints service – a disappointing result that we are keen to address. We have since reorganised, introduced new complaints handling software and retrained our staff. We now emphasise the importance of keeping residents informed and responding to queries. We also monitor cases better. In future, we will offer more advice to any resident who decides to take their complaint on to the Housing Ombudsman.

We will continue to survey residents and hope to see your satisfaction levels rise.



Noel Khine, our Complaints Service Manager, makes sure that all your complaints are handled as efficiently as possible.

When we send you a survey, remember, your views count. We will be pleased to get your completed form and we will enter your name in one of our prize draws.

Involved in your communities

Last year, as always, many of you got involved locally. Some of you took part in our estate inspections or acted as informal representatives. Others ran resident groups or worked with us on projects to improve life at your schemes. In this section, we mention some of the residents who were active locally during 2007-2008.

Area panels: Cyprus Street Area Project Panel

In some areas, we work with residents to set up an area panel to look at ways to make a difference locally. For example, the Cyprus Street Area Project Panel worked with us throughout the year, as well as organising social events like the fun day they held in September, with funding from our Foundation Projects arm.



Cyprus Street fun day.

Estate committees: Market and Nightingale Estates

As we continue to regenerate their estates, the Market Estate Committee in Islington and the Nightingale Estate Development Committee in Hackney both play a key role, working closely with staff and contractors and representing resident views.

Resident involvement is one of the keys to success at both of these estates, because new homes don't create a community by themselves.



Chair of the Nightingale Estate Development Committee, Gordon Gibbs (right) and his wife (second right) are pictured showing off their new-build home to French Ministers Roger Karoutchi and Fadela Amara during a visit in March 2008.

Resident-led community groups: Durrington and Farncombe

In Durrington, we've been supporting the resident-led **Phoenix Youth Club**, whose founders this year went on to develop an ambitious plan to open a youth centre. Andrea Lees and her fellow resident volunteers have worked tirelessly to secure premises and get the project off the ground. To refurbish the former nursery, we arranged for our South region contractor, Connaught plc to donate work worth around £30,000 and contributed funding of our own. The centre will open this summer.

With our support, the **Northbourne Action Group**, run by residents at the Northbourne Estate in Farncombe in Surrey, have continued to make a huge difference to their community. During the year they organised day trips and family fun days, cleaned up the estate, ran an arts project, helped set up a youth café at the local children's centre and raised over £58,000 for a new play area. They also launched their own newsletter.



Left to right: Resident volunteers Andrea Lees and Debbie Fuller, together with their ward councillor Diane Jones.



Left to right: Gayle Smith, Julie Coombes, Julie Jones, Clare Marshall and Sue Fuller from the Northbourne Action Group.

Working together to improve estates: Melton Hall, Treefields, Timber Wharves

Residents at **Melton Hall** in Ryde improved the grounds of their estate this year, when we helped them organise replanting and arranged for a new bike rack, compost bins, a wormery and water butts. The children worked with wood sculptor Paul Sivell on the design for an impressive wooden bench that has since been installed.

More than 50 residents at **Treefields Estate** in Ryde on the Isle of Wight took part in another successful day clearing the estate's historic pond with voluntary organisation The Footprint Trust. This is now an annual event that residents enjoy and look forward to.

Over 200 adults, children and members of the Timber Wharves Youth Forum have been involved in planning and helping to design an ambitious under-13s play area for the **Timber Wharves Estate** on the Isle of Dogs, in a project set up by our Foundation Projects arm.



Above: The bench at Melton Hall. Above right: Clearing the pond at Treefields. Below: Taking part in the play area consultation at Timber Wharves.



People with mental health needs get involved: Isle of Wight

During the year, we set up a forum for people with mental health needs who get support from South Wight HA, either in the community or as one of our supported housing residents.

As a result, we launched coffee clubs in Ryde, Sandown, Freshwater and Newport, which are now being largely run by their members. The clubs are helping to cut down on the isolation people with mental health needs experience and are encouraging them to go further afield.



Sandown on the Isle of Wight.

Young people get involved: Shanklin and Lake, Isle of Wight

Throughout October 2007, we surveyed over 300 young people on the Isle of Wight, before calling meetings in Shanklin and Lake and inviting the police, Sandown High School, Shanklin Youth Club and staff from Lake Community Centre to join us. We went on to set up a project with the youth club to provide new evening sessions.

Older residents get involved: Jubilee Crescent and Lea Bon Court

Residents in our sheltered and retirement rented schemes are amongst our most active groups, organising regular social activities and outings, as well as raising money for charity, doing voluntary work and helping us to improve our services.

For example, last year residents from Jubilee Crescent on the Isle of Dogs hosted bingo sessions for a dozen youngsters from Cubitt Town Infants School, while residents from Lea Bon Court in Stratford were involved in a similar project with West Ham Church of England School. Bingo is a good way to help young children improve their concentration and number skills.



A Lea Bon Court resident teaches a local primary school pupil about bingo.

If you live anywhere except on the Isle of Wight, phone us on **08456 066 366** (8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday)

If you live on the Isle of Wight, phone us on **08456 581 654** (8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday)

Email us at servicecentre@shgroup.org.uk

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

In an emergency, when the Service Centre is closed, if you live anywhere except the Isle of Wight, phone Homeserve on (Southern Housing Group) **08457 573 764** or (James Butcher HA) **08456 013 225**

In an emergency, when the Service Centre is closed, if you live on the Isle of Wight, phone Wightcare on **01983 821 030**

Visit our website at www.shgroup.org.uk

Front page pic: An inspection at Wellend Villas in Brighton. Left to right: resident John Loveday, Resident Services Officer Chris Cook, resident Fred Allen and a representative from RGS gardening contractors.

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

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

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

French Si vous souhaitez recevoir de l'aide avec vos traductions, appelez le 08456 066 366.

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

Spanish Si necesita que le ayudemos con alguna traducción, llame al Service Centre: 08456 066 366.

Turkish Tercüme konusunda yardım için 08456 120 031 'dan Hizmet Merkezi'ni arayın.

Cantonese 若需要提供翻譯，請致電服務中心 (Service Centre) 08456 066 366。

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