

# Our annual report 2014-15



**Merlin**  
[www.merlins.co.uk](http://www.merlins.co.uk)



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**Cover:** Sam Stevens and sons Joseph, nine months, and Charlie, four, in their new home in the rural village of Cromhall.

**This page:** A young resident enjoys the view from the top of the helter skelter at our annual fun day in 2014.

# 4 Ian Hanstead Independent Chair Customer Assembly

## Welcome to our report on Merlin's performance for the year 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

Merlin is regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency, and the report is themed around the four standards that they have said organisations like Merlin need to be meeting. This annual report has been prepared jointly by staff and customers and it's an important document summarising the achievements of the last financial year, looking at what has gone well during this year, and what we will be improving in the coming year.

A lot of the input from customers has been from members of the Customer Assembly and our new portfolio groups which were formed in January 2015 and we hope you enjoy reading it.

On behalf of all customers involved, we have been working hard to ensure any services provided by Merlin are right first time. It is still early days for us as we learn the business and develop the skills to shape and scrutinise the services delivered to us all. Listening to and learning from complaints, compliments and suggestions is just the first step. We are working with staff across the organisation to ensure every customer is put first when services are improved or new ideas are brought forward

Those of us on the Customer Assembly have started to look closely at what Merlin is doing, getting monthly reports on important performance areas, and you can rest assured that we will be looking even more closely at trends in the coming year. We have direct access to staff at all level as well as the Board to question, query and ensure services are right first time and provide value for money.

You will notice a number of targets in this report and how services have performed against these. All targets are set by Merlin's Board, taking into account how Merlin compares to other organisations and also making sure the business improves year on year.

We hope you enjoy reading about the highlights of the year and hope this may spark an interest in you in shaping the business in future years. We look forward to hearing from you.

**Ian**



# Robert Nettleton

## Chief Executive

### This report covers my first full year as Chief Executive of Merlin and I'm pleased with the work that we've managed to achieve on your behalf.

When I joined in March 2014, one of the first things I did was initiate a review of our core business – I wanted us to be clear about what Merlin does for the foreseeable future. With input from customers and staff, our Board crystallised our core business as focussing on the management and maintenance of our current homes and investment in new ones. We're not going to be branching out into complete new fields like some other housing associations are doing. We're going to focus on getting the fundamentals right for you, our existing customers, and for new customers.

And there have been some real successes – the introduction of a new Income Management Team has seen real help delivered to many customers, which has in turn meant more rent being collected. Indeed, arrears reduced from 2.30% to 1.45% during the year. Efficiencies and smarter working has seen us deliver more repairs in less time, making things better for you and bringing the average cost to us of a repair down. Both of these things have resulted in more money being available for us to spend on the services you as our existing customers need, and the homes potential new customers so desperately want - at the end of the year we had nearly 100 new homes under construction.

There are still improvements to be made though - this means tackling things like our voids performance, your satisfaction with the way we listen to you and act on your views, and satisfaction with the ability to get hold of the right person when you contact us. It's not going to be easy given the current climate of austerity, but we will face the challenges of spending and benefit cuts together.

Our new Corporate Plan – developed with input from staff and customers – sets out a new vision for the organisation: Our goal is to be a world class organisation providing homes in communities people aspire to live in.

And to become world class, we have set four clear objectives to focus on over the next four years:

- Continuously strengthen the organisation
- Provide housing and related support services right first time
- Deliver repairs and maintenance right first time
- Invest responsibly in our current homes and new ones

We believe we can fulfill the ambitions of our Corporate Plan because our entire focus is now on managing and maintaining our properties and investing in new ones so everyone who lives in them now, and those that will in the future, receive the quality homes and exceptional services they deserve.

## Robert



# 6 Involvement & Empowerment

Involving and empowering our customers means giving you a voice and a platform to be able to make real changes and improvements to how we operate as a business.

It costs us just £41.34 per property per year to do this and over the last two years we have introduced a significant change in the way we involve customers to shape and scrutinise our services, meaning that this money is really working in your favour

During 2014-15, our involved customers reviewed how we engaged you in how services are delivered. We needed to understand how to get your input on how we could improve, and as a result, our involved customers created this structure

**Our Customer Assembly, which launched in January 2015, aims to:**

- Give the best scrutiny and co-regulation results to make sure money is well spent on services you want and need
- Be the most strategic customer engagement group with six groups supporting it, each dealing with particular service areas
- Continuously recruit so each group has members to deliver results in a timely manner and make sure membership is open to all customers
- Ensure the group is independent by recruiting



- an Independent Chair
- four customer portfolio holders: Home, Tenancy, Neighbourhood & Community and Sparks Involvement & Empowerment
- a Scrutiny Group portfolio member
- a Finance and Value for Money portfolio member
- two independent customers without portfolio to help communicate changes customers are making to the business
- three councillors from South Gloucestershire Council to provide an essential link with our local authority
- and space for three community or stakeholder co-optees – not necessarily tenants or leaseholders but people recruited specifically for their skills, knowledge and expertise to help the Assembly



Members of our newly formed Customer Assembly. Back row L-R: Les Good, Roger Chilcott, Lan Hanstead. Front row: Debra Nott, Mark Harris.

- Ensure clear communication between new groups and existing resident involvement groups, such as our Community Action Groups

### Supporting the Customer Assembly are four portfolio groups

- **Tenant Involvement & Empowerment** - is all about understanding who you are, reviewing complaint themes and understanding the reasons why you are dissatisfied with various services. The work this group does is inspiring great ideas for our work on diversity, equality and inclusion and the group has quickly become known as Sparks
- **Neighbourhood & Community** – covers everything outside your front door and the community around you
- **Home** – covers every aspect of repair, maintenance and investment in the physical aspects of your home
- **Tenancy** – reviews tenancy agreements, adopting new government policy around tenancies, how housing is allocated, the letting service you receive and how Welfare Reform will affect you.

Our customers also felt it was incredibly important to have a standalone scrutiny group, where customers have an 'access all areas' freedom to inspect areas of service that have poor customer satisfaction. So we merged our existing Involved Residents Inspecting Services group (IRIS) and the Resident Scrutiny Group to become the Scrutiny Group in our new structure. This group will be inspecting our repairs and maintenance service in the coming year.

Focused attention on the cost of services was also a top priority. Customers recommended new members be recruited to the Finance and Value for Money group to scrutinise how rent money was effectively spent on services.

## 8 Involvement & Empowerment

### What we achieved during 2014-15 through involvement and empowerment

The money we have spent in this area has enabled customers to help us:

- Shape our business plan and corporate vision
- Spent over £180,000 revamping the external communal areas around the flats in Staple Hill following consultation with residents
- Deliver community led improvements to The Parade in Patchway
- Finalise plans for refurbishing and redeveloping our precast reinforced concrete homes in Coalpit Heath, Iron Action, Little Stoke, Filton and Patchway as well as Cadbury Heath. Through customer input, we were able to ensure the works we delivered were targeted to your needs
- Deliver nearly 50 environmental clean up days, doorknocking exercises and walkabouts around our neighbourhoods
- Improve our understanding of your circumstances and needs (customer insight) and start looking at how we can use this to improve current and future services
- Create a dedicated customer group to focus on repairs as this was one of your priorities
- Increase our understanding of health and wellbeing in our Independent Living Services customers so we can work to improve their connections with friends, family and the wider community
- Strengthen our working relationships with partner agencies like the police, Support Against Racist Incidents, and Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership, to help us deliver our objectives around embracing diversity, improving health, removing inequalities and inclusion



We installed a new picnic area at Staple Hill after customers told us in a consultation that this was what they wanted.

## Involvement & Empowerment

### Using your feedback to improve

It's really important for us to understand what you think about our services as it gives us an idea of what we are doing well and where we need to improve. We send out a survey to a random selection of customers every three months. This year you told us that the most important things to you are:

- Repairs
- The quality of your home
- Listening and acting on your views

Our main focus within the repairs service over the past year has been to improve communication around appointments and choice of appointment time. This has already been noticed by you and **your satisfaction in being able to make an appointment has increased to 86%** from 83% in the financial year 2014-15. **Your satisfaction with repairs appointments being kept has also risen to 82%** from 77%

Next our key focus is on getting things right first time. It's one of our key corporate plan aims and as part of this we are multi skilling our repairs staff so they are able to complete more of the jobs whilst in your home, rather than us making several appointments.

#### **83% of you were satisfied with the quality of your home.**

This was exactly on our target for 2014 -15. We're aiming to improve on this and next year, we want to be at least 84%. By 2019, we aim to be at 90%

**66% of you were satisfied that we listened and acted on your views.** This is under our target of 70%. We hope that our new involvement structure will impact positively on this score.

All in all, **83% of you were satisfied with the overall service we provided.** This is just below our target of 84%. Our goal is to reach 90% over the next four years. It's really important to us to keep increasing customer satisfaction and



Customers of all ages at our fun day told us what was important to them.

to do this we need to be listening and acting on your feedback.

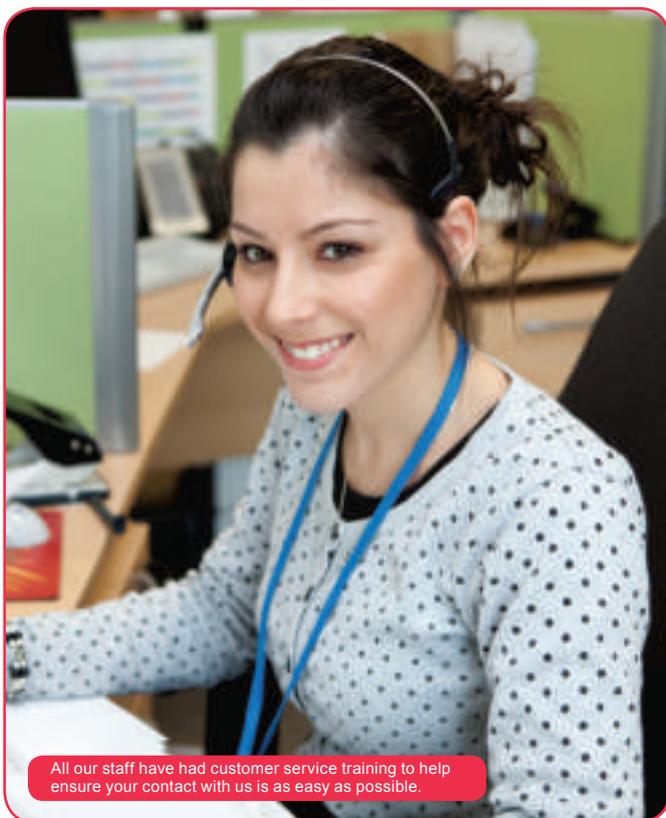
Everything set out in our corporate plan for 2015-19 works towards improving satisfaction with our services while maintaining a sensible business approach.

If you receive one of our surveys, please respond by filling it out and returning it to us, as this is how you will influence our services in the future.

## 10 Involvement & Empowerment

### Customer Service

Across the financial year 2014-15, on average **59% of people said they were satisfied that getting hold of the right person was easy**. We don't think this is good enough, and you also told us there were issues around our levels of customer service during the year. So we introduced compulsory customer service training for all staff, including dealing with complaints, phone calls and written communication. We're pleased to report an upward trend - as the financial year ended, we were at 65%.



All our staff have had customer service training to help ensure your contact with us is as easy as possible.

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Last year we

- Answered 84,500 phone calls last year
- Received 2087 letters at our three area offices in Kingswood, Patchway and Yate and responded to 93% of them within our target time.

During the year, we achieved the Centre for Housing Support's Service Excellence Standard accreditation for our work with older people and vulnerable customers. We achieved the award for best practice in housing and support and by embedding customer focus in everything we do.

There are only a handful of organisations across the country that have been awarded this standard, so we're incredibly proud of our achievement

Gaining this accreditation involved a rigorous assessment of our policies, procedures and working practices, including interviews with staff and customers. In achieving accreditation we demonstrated our commitment to responsible service management, resident involvement, continuous improvement and good practice.

Over the next year, we'll be focusing on making sure our customer service is world class. We will now be working towards Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation which will require us to look at everything we do as an organisation to make sure that our customers are at the heart of our processes.

## Involvement & Empowerment

### Dealing with your complaints

Of course, we don't always get it right. And when you do let us know we've failed to deliver a service to your satisfaction, we act quickly to make changes and learn.

Customers reviewed our complaints handling and worked with the teams to help shape a new complaints policy and procedure. There are now only two formal stages. Stage one requires an investigation and formal response within ten working days from the time the complaint is acknowledged. If a complaint is escalated further, it is heard by the Complaints Review Panel, made up with one representative from our Board, our Chief Executive and Head of Business Assurance

The aim is for our two complaints co-ordinators to support staff in dealing with stage zero complaints quickly and simply as part of delivering their services day to day.

As a result, performance in dealing and learning from your complaints improved steadily during the year. You told us you appreciate a 'customer focused' approach and we are getting better at considering the customer during the complaints

### DID YOU KNOW?

Last year we received 163 formal complaints during the year. Of these complaints, 11 were escalated to our complaints review. None of the complaints were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman

The three most common complaints themes were:

- Workmanship by operatives
- Property condition
- Anti-social behaviour



The quality of work our trades staff do for you was one of the most common complaint themes.

process. This is showing that customer care training for staff is really beginning to make a difference.

Any member of our staff can take a complaint either in person or over the phone. Complaints can also be made online or in writing, or on someone else's behalf.

## 12 Involvement & Empowerment

### Understanding you to make sure things are fair

Complaints are just one way that we can understand whether our services are being delivered fairly across our entire customer base. We also ask you questions throughout the year on things you may think are personal, such as your age, your ethnicity or whether you have a disability. We don't ask this information to be nosy, we do it because it's a great way of us understanding what services we should be providing to you and how.

Understanding our customers means we can plan our budgets better and spend money on services that meet your actual needs. We've already started to do this - in 2014-15, we bid for and won £9000 funding to deliver a wellbeing project across our independent living schemes, which will help older customers feel less isolated and be more active. We were also the first social housing provider to attend the South Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Board with our involved customers, championing more support for your

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Our customers are much older than the local population and 42% are aged 65+
- 44% of our customers class themselves as having a disability
- 24% of our customers have religions other than Christianity.

mental health and wellbeing needs. We also match customers with a disability to properties that are suitable for them and because we know we have an ageing population, our staff are being trained in understanding the signs of dementia and falls prevention, as well as strengthening our local links with partners such as Age UK.

Through analysis of our survey results, we know three key customer groups who have greater dissatisfaction than anyone else - younger customers, our lesbian, gay and bisexual customers, and also our customers with mental health needs. Now we know this, we can do something about it. The Sparks Tenant Involvement and Empowerment portfolio group will be getting to know these customer groups over the coming year and will identify ways to improve services together.



Activities at our Independent Living Schemes help older people feel less isolated.

**The customers championing this aspect of our work on your behalf are Les Good, Flora Chubb, David Webb and Earl Virgo.**

# Home

## We want all homes, new and old, to be in a fit condition for you to live in and look after.

This means we are committed to delivering an excellent repairs and maintenance service for you, planning in routine work and being able to react timely to any emergency or unplanned repairs you need. We're also focussed on updating and revamping properties, as well as developing new energy efficient homes.

Throughout the year, we completed **17,949 day to day repairs** to your homes with each repair taking an average **4.9 days** to complete from initial logging on our system to completion. This means we're one of the best performers in the country



Our in house workforce delivered nearly 18,000 repairs in 2014-15!

## Delivering repairs and maintenance

Our target was to save 10% on the cost of each repair and we achieved an **average cost of £189 per job**, down from £235 per job last year, beating this target.

In 2014-15, **79% of you were satisfied the repair you received was carried out right first time**. This is an increase on the 77% satisfaction you gave us last year, but we are aiming for 90% satisfaction by 2019.

## DID YOU KNOW?

When you call to report a repair, we categorise them into three categories – each category has a set time a repair has to be completed in. By the end of March 2015 we achieved:

	Completed within deadline	Last year
Emergency	<b>99.7%</b>	99.6%
Urgent	<b>99.9%</b>	99.5%
Routine	<b>99.1%</b>	98.0%

If you have a gas supply, we must test it every year. This is a legal requirement and one we take very seriously – we will take legal action if we can't gain access to your home to test your gas. If you have a solid fuel fire in one of your rooms, we will visit your home twice a year to check and sweep your chimney.

## Updating and revamping properties

As your landlord, the Government requires us to invest in your home so that it meets Decent Homes Standards.

These include making sure your home:

- Is free of health and safety hazards
- Is in a reasonable state of repair
- Has reasonably modern kitchens, bathrooms and boilers and
- Is reasonably insulated.

We carry out regular assessments of our properties so we know that each year, a certain number will not reach this standard and will need to be updated.

We programme work on these properties to replace items, such as kitchens, bathrooms or insulation. At the end of March 2015, we were able to report that all our properties were compliant with Decent Homes standard. This report doesn't count people who refuse to have the work done, and in 2014 -15, 49 customers did this.



Our team fitting new energy efficient double glazed windows to a property.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Our Resident Liaison Officers work closely with people to support them through improvements to their homes and help navigate any challenges that arise. By the end of March 2015, the programme delivered:

New kitchens	177
New bathrooms	241
New heating systems	247
New windows	398
External doors	390

We are expecting 47 properties to become non-decent in the coming year and work has already been programmed to ensure they will be compliant by the end of 2015-16.

As well as annual planned programmes of work, we have some exciting refurbishment projects that really ramped up this year.

Our non-traditional housing refurbishment project finished transforming properties in Cadbury Heath (and started in Filton, Little Stoke and Thornbury during the year, bringing the total completed up to 294. The work was given the accolade of highly commended at the South West Region Green Deal and Eco Awards. The project to refurbish around 1,000 of our non-traditional properties with new external wall insulation came third in the Project of the Year category.

## 16 Home

Residents at Prinknash Court in Yate were the first customers to have their homes modernised during the year through our programme to refurbish some of our Independent Living Communities. The £750,000 refit which will give the scheme a further 30 years of life, is part of a £15 million investment programme to ensure we have suitable housing available for our customers aged 55 and above.

The refurbishment of the building involved reducing 19 flats and bedsits to 15 one and two bed flats to give customers more living space. One of the two bedroom flats has been specially designed and adapted to make it suitable for disabled residents. Baths in all flats were replaced with wet rooms, a scooter store was created and windows and doors were upgraded.

In the coming year, we will carry out similar work at Ware Court in Winterbourne, Buckingham House in Filton and Langdale Court in Patchway.



A flat at Prinknash Court has been specially adapted for one of our disabled customers.

### Developing new homes

With more than 8,000 people in the housing waiting list in South Gloucestershire alone, it's important that organisations like us build new homes. We want to build 300 homes each year by 2019.

During 2014-15, we had 82 starts on site for new homes, and completed 19. We worked with Cotswold Homes to build six of these in Oak Tree Close in Downend. Two three-bedroom houses were created for shared ownership and two two-bedroom houses for social rent, one of which was fully adapted for wheelchair use.

Over the next year, we will be working with Bloor Homes to build 17 homes for social rent and five for shared ownership on the Barnhill Quarry site in Chipping Sodbury. Two flats and three houses will be available for shared ownership between 2015-17, giving first time buyers an opportunity to own 40% of their own home and get a foot on the property ladder. We're also building more properties in Bristol as part of the Weir House development.

Normally our ability to build new homes relies solely on any surplus we make each year. Surplus is the money remaining from your rent payments after all services and investments have been paid for.

However, during the year we were awarded £2.4m of funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to build 84 homes in South Gloucestershire over the next three years.

The money is part of the HCA's 2015-18 Affordable Homes Programme which saw £886m given out to building projects across the country. We are going to use the funding to help finance the redevelopment of our nine non-traditional housing sites in Coalpit Heath and Iron Acton, plus the Newleaze House site in Filton.

During 2014-15, we were busy preparing to start development work on these sites. We have carried out several public consultations and our customers, their neighbours and entire communities have commented and shaped the proposals for our new neighbourhoods.

We were given the go-ahead to build our first development of 39 homes in Coalpit Heath to replace 18 of the non-traditional properties and a rank of garages. The properties are in Newlands Avenue and Oldlands Avenue and, like all of our PRC properties, were built after the Second World War as a quick solution to the housing shortage. But they are now suffering from a number of issues including damp and draughts.

We also submitted plans to redevelop 18 properties in Algars Drive, Chilwood Close and Nibley Lane, plus some garages in Iron Acton, to make way for 27 new homes. The four properties in Nibley Lane being redeveloped are not non-traditional homes, but are one-bedroom bungalows that were built in the 1950s and would have needed tens of thousands of pounds of repair work.

These are the first of our PRC replacement programme. It's a huge programme of redevelopment and the biggest project we've ever undertaken. The first phase of the redevelopment programme will see properties replaced with a mixture of one and two bedroom flats, two and three bedroom houses and a two bungalows, specially designed for wheelchair users.

We also plan to build new homes on the sites of two of our former Independent Living Communities that were deemed too expensive to refurbish. Our plans have been scrutinised, shaped and challenged by our customers and local community members. We plan to build 30 new homes on the site of our former community in Irving Close in Staple Hill and a further 16 properties on the site of Newleaze House in Filton.



We consulted the community around Newleaze House on our plans for the site.

## 18 Home

During the year, we also completed a £650,000 development in Cromhall, which not only provided affordable housing in the village but also secured the future of its village shop after 20 years of being housed in temporary accommodation. The development was shortlisted as one of the top 60 small housing developments by Inside Housing magazine.

We worked in partnership with South Gloucestershire Council who donated the land and gave us £100,000 toward the build, and we funded the rest. The homes in Cromhall were the first we have built in a rural location and complement the two Knightstone family-sized properties in Falfield we took responsibility for last year.



**The customers championing this section on your behalf are Gerald Woodman, Roger Chillcott, Maggie Tarr and Pete Vinden**

# Tenancy

**We own nearly 9,000 properties, but we know these are more than just bricks and mortar - they are homes.**

We own **74% of the social housing available in South Gloucestershire**. This is our main operating area, but we also have properties in Bath and North East Somerset, and Bristol.

It's really important that we let our homes fairly, have different types of tenancies for different people and have a choice of housing and support options.

We advertise our properties in:

- South Gloucestershire through Homechoice – [www.homechoice.southglos.go.uk](http://www.homechoice.southglos.go.uk)
- Bath & North East Somerset Home Choice <https://www.homesearchbathnes.org.uk/data/asppages/1/93.aspx>

- Bristol Home Choice <https://www.homechoicebristol.co.uk/Data/ASPPages/1/30.aspx>

This year, **80% of you believe that your rent is good value for money**, beating our target of 75%.

When someone tells us they are moving out, we want the home to be ready for new customers as soon as possible. Our target time for this is 20 days based on good practice. Whilst we did better this year than last, with **our process taking on average 27 days**, we still would like to take a further week off this and are working hard to make this happen.



Another new customer moves in to their home.

## DID YOU KNOW?

At the start of the year, there were around 19,000 people on council waiting lists for a home across South Gloucestershire, Bristol and Bath.

During 2014-15, we housed 1200 people in 559 properties which became empty or available for rent during the year.

97% of our properties are either one, two, and three-bedroom homes. The rest are studio flats and four and five-bedroom houses.

### Your rent and how we spend it

The average rent for one of our general needs properties is £91.45, an increase on last year's figure of £87.17. By the

end of March 2015, we had collected £37.7m in rent and our total income for the year was £40.m

For every **£100** of that income:

We take arrears very seriously – without the money from your homes, we would not be able to fund all the work we need to do to improve them and the communities you live in.



**£85.79** came from rent payments



**£4.64** was income from service charges



**£2.03** came from support services



**£2.08** came from the garages and shops that we own and rent out



**£4.26** came from Right to Buy sales or the sale of properties that we no longer need



**£0.37** came from other sources



**£0.83** came from Grant money we received to build new homes

We're not-for-profit, which means that all this income was spent. For every **£100** we spent:



**£54.58**  
Maintenance and repairs of the properties that we own



**£10.42**  
Development of new properties



**£19.52**  
Staffing costs



**£7.49** Other services we provide – like housing management, ASB and community investment



**£6.76**  
Interest on loans we've taken out



**£1.24**  
Purchasing assets like systems and equipment

## Helping you keep your tenancy

In 2014-15 our arrears were 1.45% - this is our best result ever and makes us among the top 25% of all housing associations in the country.

However, we know there are challenges ahead. The benefit cap is being reduced to £20,000. Universal Credit will start being introduced in November 2015 for our Bristol customers and in early 2016 for those of you living in South Gloucestershire. These impacts, as well as plans to remove Housing Benefit for people under 21, mean that our efforts to support you in budgeting and managing your money are vital.



Our Incomes Management Team are happy to help anyone who needs advice on budgeting or finance.

As a result, we have invested in our Income Management Team during the year. This dedicated team have worked tirelessly to identify those of you who will be hit the hardest by welfare reform. The help they have delivered includes:

- Giving budgeting support to those struggling the most
- Advising on potential benefits that can be claimed
- Working closely to agree sensible repayment plans to help customers start to repay their arrears
- Helping with household budgeting
- Visiting all our customers due a service charge increase of £5 or more this new financial year.

As a result of bidding for grant to help build our new homes, Affordable Rent tenancies have been introduced, which are set at 80% of market rents. We will be monitoring the impact of these going forwards to ensure that they remain affordable for our customers.

In June 2014, we also introduced new fixed term tenancies. So far, 143 of these tenancies have been set up and we will also be monitoring them to make sure they remain appropriate for our customers and for the communities they live in.

We're also signed up to HomeSwapper. This is a national online scheme that lets you swap your tenancies with other social landlord customers across the country.

Swapping properties can help people avoid the Spare Room Subsidy - more commonly known as the Bedroom Tax, and through the year we have supported 708 HomeSwapper applications.

The customers championing this section on your behalf are **Carol Solan, Carmela Turner, Keith Mustoe and Sylvia Young**

## 22 Neighbourhood and Communities

**We believe making sure you receive excellent customer service extends to the neighbourhoods and communities you live in as well.**

One of the highest scores we give us in our satisfaction survey is satisfaction with your neighbourhood. **88% of you were fairly or very satisfied with the quality of your community.** This is a great result and higher than many of other housing providers of similar size.

We regularly arrange estate walkabouts, door-knocks, block inspections and even environmental action days to make sure your neighbourhood is clean, tidy and safe. Often other agencies, such as police and street care teams come with us to make sure they can pick up and fix any issues that have been earmarked as their responsibility.

We're determined to do even better than 88% so over the coming year we'll be continuing with our programme of neighbourhood walkabouts and environmental action days.



Staff clearing rubbish on an environmental action day.

We are committed to keeping our neighbourhoods safe and our Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) Teams are building stronger relationships with their local police teams every day. We continue to work with Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI) and other local agencies who help us support any of you who are experiencing hate crime incidents, our neighbourhood teams and customers are invited to be part of walkabouts arranged by other partners, such as town and parish councils to provide the same role in return.

Sometimes we have no option but to evict a customer due to their ASB. In one case in 2014-15, we tried to work with the perpetrator for some time, but they refused to engage. We had to go to Bristol County Court to secure an eviction order as the only way we could regain possession of this flat from this customer who was causing so much trouble. All the neighbours had been very supportive of our efforts and were willing to provide us with statements to help us gain the eviction.

### DID YOU KNOW?

We received 417 new cases of anti-social behaviour (ASB) over the year. Just under 100% of these cases were dealt with within our targets of one day for emergencies and five days for non-emergencies. The team resolved 68% of these cases but when asked, only 44% of you were happy with the way we handled your ASB complaint. Our target was 75% and we recognise that we need to do a lot of work here to understand what else we can do to improve this service.

## Our strategy for community investment

We want our impact in our communities to be as positive and effective as can be. Our Board approved a Community Investment Strategy in July 2014, which takes a focused approach on three themes:

### Knowing our communities and understanding the impact

We deliver services to a customer population with greater needs and diversity than the wider local population – 41% of properties are in Government defined Priority Neighbourhoods where people are more likely to face inequalities in health, employment, education and financial status.

The aim is to better understand our communities' needs, making sure any money, staff time and resources are given appropriately and that positive impacts can be measured. We have committed to this to make sure we plan and adapt services to support you.

### Building community resilience

We support communities to be sustainable and empower them to shape their own aims and ambitions.

We have dedicated Community Investment Officers in each of our area offices and a budget which funds projects or activities to increase the social or human capital within the local area. This includes supporting friendship groups for those living in isolation or with mental health needs right through to provision of community buildings and facilities to keep a community functioning well.

### Skills and employment

We provide support to you to get into or nearer to employment. Although our main operating area has lower rates of unemployment, economic activity and job seeker's allowance than the UK national average, break these figures down further and it is clear that Priority Neighbourhoods have over twice the local average take up of Job Seekers Allowance.

These areas also have low wage levels and in-work poverty and children and young people have much lower aspirations to do well and achieve "good" GCSE results.

Just over 20% of new customers said they were looking for work at sign up for their new homes during the year. Our Community Investment Officers can refer people to job clubs in your community, source free or low-cost training to help you get a job or improve your promotion prospects and much more.



Young customers at a carpentry taster day we organised with the Princes Trust and the Forest of Avon.

## 24 Neighbourhood and Communities

### Some of the ways we have been delivering against these three themes in 2014-15 are when we:

- Donated £10,000 to recruit a young person from Staple Hill to start a career in youth work at St Andrews Youth Centre (FACE) in Filton
- Purchased four bikes, accessories and training for residents at South Gloucestershire Youth Housing to learn bike maintenance, road safety and have access to job and training opportunities
- Funded a life skills residential trip for 12 adults with learning disabilities and a 14-week follow-on course for a larger group of 30 who are members of the Link Centre in Patchway
- Funded new equipment (parachute, balls, bean bags, stretch bands, games) and trips out for Kingsmeadow Community Flat customers
- Joint funded the Cashpoint community awards with 1625 independent people to encourage young adults to start community projects in their local areas
- Carried out a big clean up around Patchway Parade during the summer where teams cut back overgrown shrubs, painted railings, replaced benches and bins, litter picked, and swept up. Our young customers got involved in creating a 'love where you live' mural for the community.

### Focusing on the old and the young

We don't believe in a one size fits all way of building communities. For our older customers, we run a specialist activities service continues a programme of events and activities to reduce social isolation and build a sense of community.

Suggested by residents, the programme includes five-day getaways, exercise classes, belly-dancing classes and

speed dating. It's open to all customers aged 55 and over, regardless of whether they live in one of our independent living communities or our general needs properties. It's promoted through 'Choice', a magazine targeted specifically at this age group.

We're also helping younger people. Thanks to a £200,000 grant from Bristol City Council's capital programme, we purchased three one bedroom flats across the city to lease to 1625 Independent People.

1625 Independent People will support those living in them to gain independence skills and be on the right track to reach their potential and will manage the flats under a 10-year lease from us.

The new initiative has been set up to increase the number of small properties available to younger customers in need of a home and we plan to purchase another four this coming year.



Youngsters from Patchway getting to work on the mural.



The finished piece of art.

## Helping you improve your communities

We also work with the communities themselves to improve things. We have five community action groups that we support financially. Every year, these groups have £60,000 funding to spend on grass roots projects in their areas. Some of the varied projects that have benefitted during the year are:

### Filton CAG

- Funded anti-bullying workshops in four schools across the Filton / Horfield / Stoke Gifford area to try and prevent younger-aged bullying and ASB in the area
- Funded a grant to Filton Town Council to go towards new fencing around newly installed playground in Elm Park to provide a safe and secure area for local children to play

### Frome Valley CAG

- Converted shrub land at Pauls Place into allotments to give members with learning difficulties the opportunity to plan, grow, harvest, cook and eat the produce they have cared for
- Donated a new kitchen to Wickwar Village town hall
- Purchased stock for the Knitting Club in Frampton Cotterell to produce jumpers and garments for under privileged children in the local area
- Provided funding for the Carers Group in Frampton Cotterell to create a new singing group for carers of elderly people and those with dementia
- Donated to the play area renovations at Zion Community Pre-School
- Donation to the Yate branch of Cancer Research in memory of the CAG's former chair



### Kings Forest Community Group

- Contributed to renovating St Anne's Church of England Primary School's swimming pool as swimming lessons are so expensive and lot of parents in the locality would not be able to afford these
- Donated to improve the ICT provision at Redfield School by extending wireless access points to Key Stage 1 classrooms and the school hall
- Provided funds to cover meeting venue and transport for the Longwell Stroke Club to continue to support people who have suffered with a stroke and their families.
- Donated to the wild nature pond at St Barnabus Church of England Primary School

## 26 Neighbourhood and Communities

- Due to the rise of ASB in the area, donated funds to run a series of eight-week photography courses at Cadbury Heath Youth Club, particularly targeted at teens and young adults
- Provided a new toy kitchen and a PA system for story time and sing-along at a Toddlers group in Trinity Church, Kingswood. This supports a lot of Merlin families in the area

### Severn View CAG

- Worked in partnership with Merlin to brighten up Patchway Parade by providing 3 benches and 5 litter bins
- Provided funds to go towards a new community minibus for Patchway to transport the elderly to different clubs, church and lunches
- Provided equipment for a Christmas card workshop and party at Charles England House to develop entrepreneurial behaviours and community spirit at our young persons hostel
- Purchased a new storage shed for local allotment scheme to support local community growing

### One Voice CAG

- Purchased garden furniture and a bingo machine for Shrubbery Court independent living scheme to help reduce the social isolation felt by some of the customers living there
- Covered the cost of coach hire for residents of Hayward Road and Charles England House hostels for a day trip to Portishead to build social cohesion and supporting friendships
- Donated funds to Wick Sports Ground Social Club to help re-tile the clubhouse roof to tie in with Community Investment aims of upgrading communities facilities; making a community facility more appealing to potential users and enabling a community facility to be self sufficient
- Provided holiday activities for children and young people at Pucklechurch youth club to reduced neighbourhood ASB during school holidays

**The customers championing this aspect of our work on your behalf are Jim Whittaker, Janet Knight, Victoria Jones, Pete Szabunas and Tina Hasnain.**

# Looking forward to next year

Our corporate plan sets out how we will become a world class organisation providing homes in communities people aspire to live in. We won't be able to achieve this without working in partnership with you - our customers - to deliver the improvements that are necessary.

Your involvement is essential, whether it be responding to surveys, being part of a focus group, or actively helping

shape our business by being part of our new Customer Assembly or portfolio groups. If you are interested in being part of this work, contact your area housing office and ask to speak to our Co-regulation Assurance Manager.

# Merlin

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