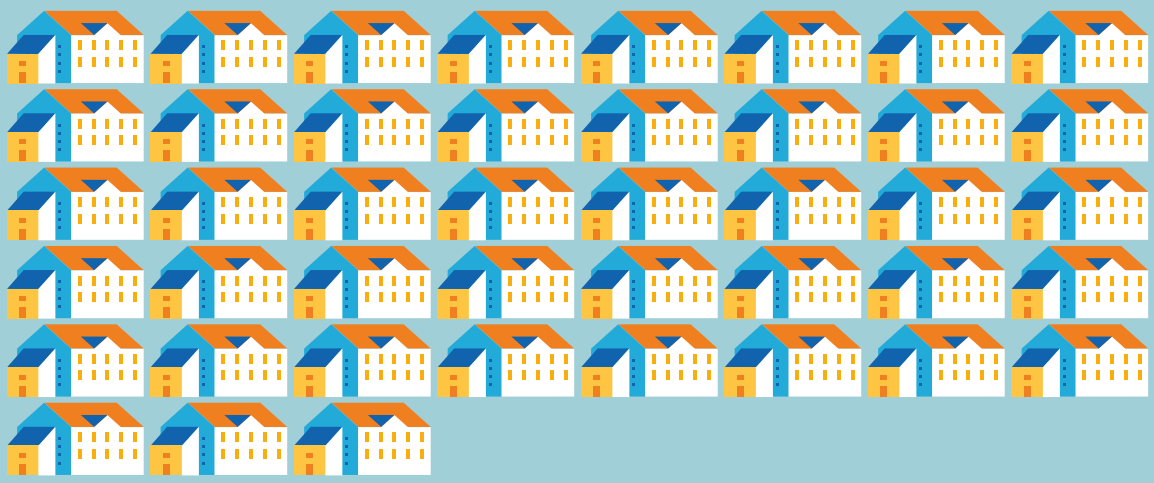
ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

SOUTH WEST solon HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

Progress in 2018-19

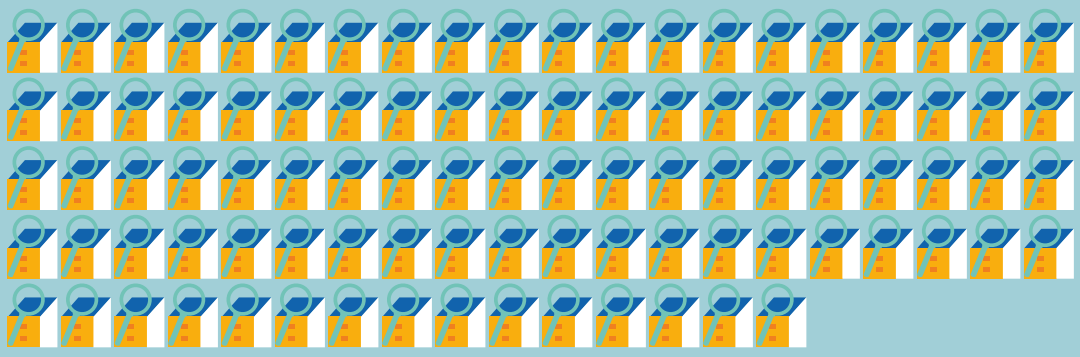
43

New flats + houses for Bristol + South Glos



95

Scheme inspections for quality + local concerns



2.9%

Increase in homes, above our 2.3% target + high performance in the UK housing sector

Inside this report

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16 Repairs + maintenance
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19 Income + spending
20 How to contact us

We are now making some big changes to the way we handle repairs to ensure work is carried out to your satisfaction.

I am proud of the things Solon got right over the year – £2.4m invested in existing homes to make them safer and better, 43 new homes built, to tackle homelessness and replace older property no longer fit as affordable housing, and sound financial planning to enable future investment.

Customer satisfaction is a high priority. You have told us that we could do much more to improve our maintenance service and resolve other issues, such as landscaping and cleaning. You raised important concerns that repairs and maintenance requests are not done quickly enough or completed right the first time. You think we don't always listen when you report issues, and don't always take the action you expect.

I am sorry that, despite our efforts, we haven't got this right yet, so we are now making some big changes to the way we handle repairs to ensure that work is carried out to your satisfaction. We have created a new Customer Service team to answer your calls and ensure quicker solutions. Other changes, including new staff, are designed to ensure that repairs are completed quickly and properly, and that we inform you of progress.

Next year I hope to be able to report that the changes we are making have made a big difference to your experience of the way we repair and manage your home. I also want to see that customer complaints are being eliminated. However, if you have any concerns about the way things are going in the meantime, please contact us.

Don't forget that we are also keen for residents to get involved in shaping services and standards that meet your needs and you are happy with. Drop me a line or join our special resident meetings – see below.

Paul Ville Chief Executive

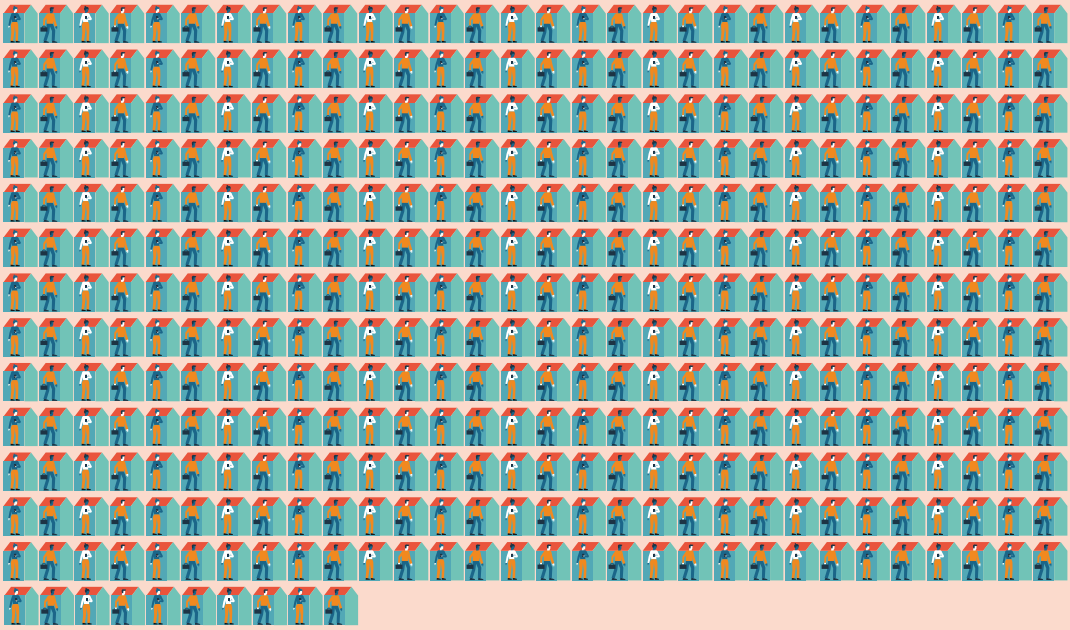
How to get involved

All residents can have a bigger say by coming to the Maintenance Action Group and other resident-led meetings. Or you can share your views with staff during estate walkabouts and other visits. You could also get right to the heart of decision-making by joining the Solon Board or the Customer Service Improvement Committee. Call or email for more info.

0117 924 4071 **solon@solonswha.co.uk**

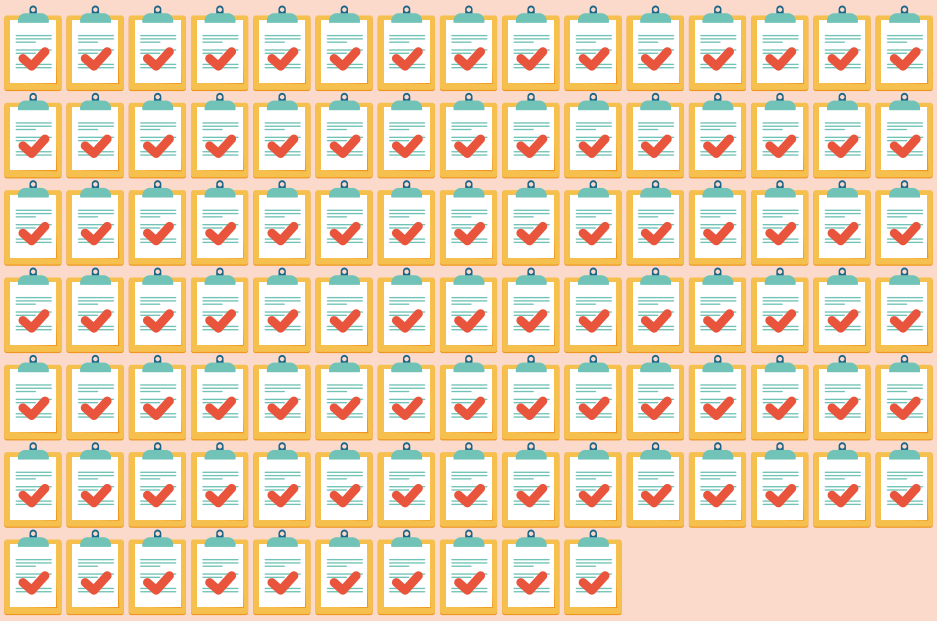
400

Visits at home, reaching 37% of residents



100%

Complaints were resolved at the first stage, without any need to take them to a higher level



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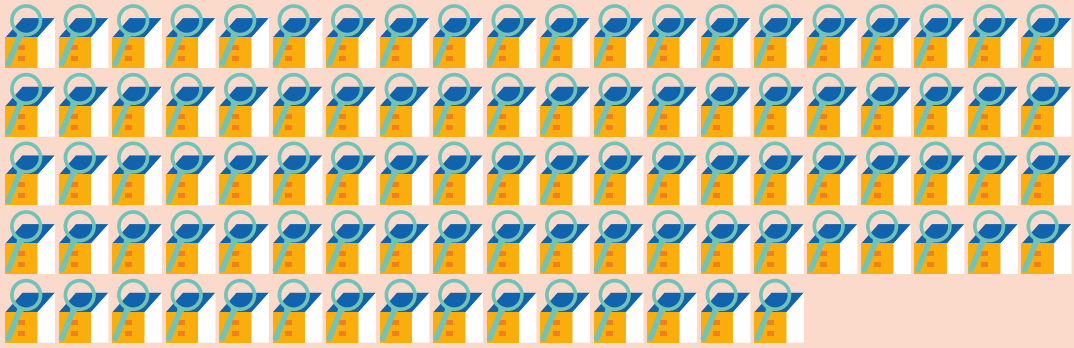


Tell it like it is

Residents have more say than ever before

We rely on our residents to speak up about things that matter: likes and dislikes! That's why we work so hard to hear your views and make changes to deliver the service you expect.

Out and about in the holidays

In 2018-19 our focus was local. We set up outdoor events for the Easter holidays, took along experts from Talking Money and the fire service, and offered creative fun for kids. Most residents confirmed to us that they prefer to meet us closer to home – a challenge for Solon as we do not manage traditional estates. We received 31 completed surveys from these events and valuable feedback on what helps residents to be involved. This will shape our events in 2020.

Local fun days reached residents closer to home so more people could attend – including the local fire service, offering advice.

Our eyes and ears

Estate Management Officers carried out regular visits to talk to residents, speak to contractors and discuss environmental improvements. Our Fire and Communal Safety Inspector went weekly to inspect fire alarms and emergency lighting and to make sure communal areas were clear of any hazards in case of fire. This regular check has become an effective route to see where improvements are needed to any property and to identify neighbourhood concerns.

Summer survey 2018

In July to September we conducted our two-yearly customer satisfaction questionnaire to understand our residents' points of view, get feedback on our service and celebrate success. This led to a radical re-organisation of our customer service team and resident-led changes to the way we manage cleaning and gardening contracts.

Your calls are at the heart of our service

Solon analysed customer feedback in 2018 and identified that 75% of customer complaints related to works that were not ordered, started or finished. We looked at all 'stage zero' complaints and discussed them in our regular team meetings. Stage zero means a customer call that is not 'officially' a complaint but raises a concern that needs urgent action in the same way a complaint does.

In 2019, based on feedback, we began a staff restructure to build a new customer service team to improve service and address resident concerns. The post of Customer Service Manager was created to lead a new six-strong team. A separate manager now oversees all repairs, maintenance and contractor performance. This puts more resources and strong focus into repairs quality and customer satisfaction.

Community-minded

We began joint inspections with other housing associations on some estates in 2018-19. This approach identified work we could do more effectively together, such as tackling pockets of ASB and improving grounds maintenance and cleaning contracts. We also resolved some issues for communal spaces, such as bin stores, bike sheds and tree management.

International Women's Day

Residents came along to our special event to recognise and encourage contributions of people from all backgrounds and experiences for International Women's Day in March. Four influential, inspiring women from the Bristol BME and Asian communities (Jean Smith, Ruth Pitter, Shaheen Chaudhry and Hanna Ahmed) shared their stories of determination, hardship and success with an audience of residents and colleagues from across Bristol – including our event partner, United Communities.

International Women's Day

Our International Women's Day guests included (top) Diversity Trust and (left) resident Mrs Adekanye (r) and her sister-in-law.

What's next for 2019-20?

We are confident that our new Customer Service Manager and team will deliver improved service. To involve more residents in our work, local consultations will be held as six events over six weeks. We will closely monitor all supplier contracts, with resident input, to make sure they are high quality and value for money.

It pays to ask

Income and debt support

Nick Leaman of Talking Money works from our office one day each week.

We offer help with rent arrears, benefit claims and debt management as part of our promise to residents. Our Talking Money adviser is an expert in maximising income.

Our aim is to help you to access support services so you can pay the rent on time. In 2018-19 our Talking Money expert, Nick, helped release £300,000 of extra income that residents were entitled to receive.

Money matters

Since September 2012 Solon has invested in the Talking Money service to offer help for debt management, benefit entitlement and charitable funding applications. Time and again we have proved what a difference good information and direct support can make for residents who are struggling.

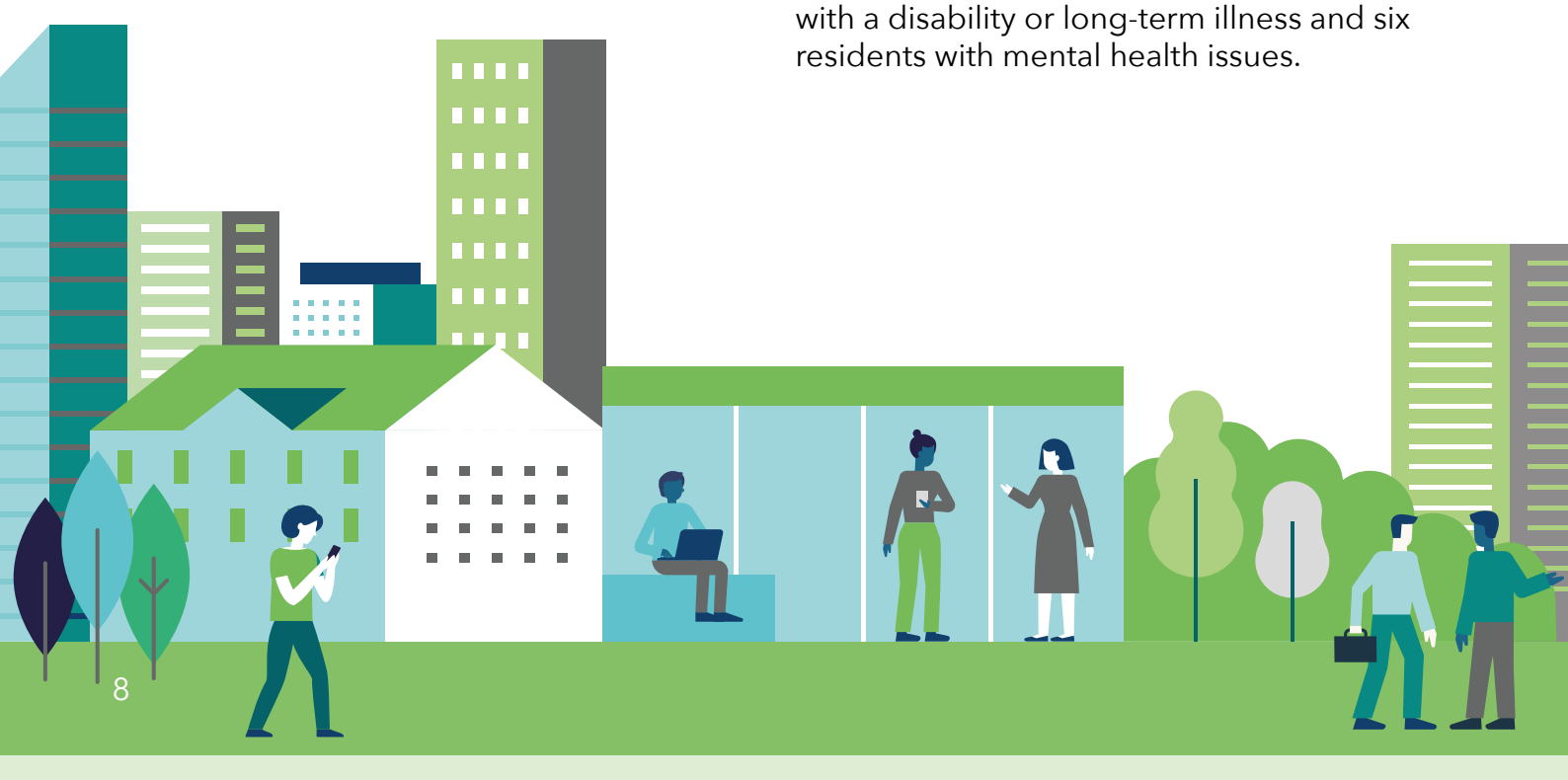
> "Nick from Talking Money has really helped with my situation.

One-to one-advice

In 2018-19 Nick contacted 198 residents by email or phone to offer help and 139 residents took one-to-one advice. Of these, 79 residents benefited from increased income and support in kind over the year, worth a total of more than £271,000 and an average of £2,976 extra income. Just over half of this amount was benefit entitlements that Nick helped residents to claim.

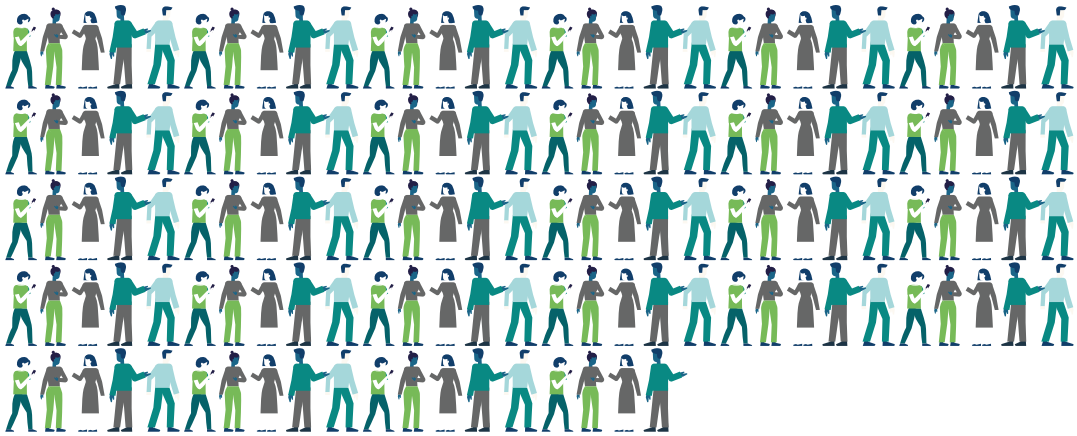
Extras that might help you

More than £8,727 of charitable applications on behalf of residents were successful. These included help for essential white goods and carpets and to pay off historic rent arrears and. Talking Money helped to have almost £7,132 of unmanageable debt written off. Support was put in place for over 90 residents with a disability or long-term illness and six residents with mental health issues.



139

Residents took one-to-one advice from our Talking Money adviser Nick



£271k

Entitlements claimed for residents

£7k

Unmanageable debt written off

Understanding rent arrears

In 2018-19 rent arrears increased by £12,909 or 0.1% of our annual income, at a time of severe pressure on rental income due to Universal Credit. Most arrears were linked to Affordable Rent tenancies. More than half of these were due to new benefit claims as many residents were being migrated to Universal Credit.

Analysis of 25 Universal Credit applications showed an average increase in arrears of £200 for tenants, with higher arrears among more recent claims. Impacts on individuals varied widely, and the average figure of £200 was driven by a few cases with sizeable arrears. Overall, rent arrears were stable in 2018-19 (excluding write-offs and Debt Relief Orders). However, the trend of upward pressure continues for Affordable Rent tenancies relying on Universal Credit.

talking money
advice, support & information

CASE STUDY

With expert help...

A Solon resident with children who suffers with a severe disability had his Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) stopped and failed a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessment. His Housing Benefit had been capped so he had a shortfall of £112.44 a week. Talking Money applied for a discretionary housing payment until his PIP tribunal, which he won, and then helped him with the legal submission for his ESA tribunal, which he also won. Now in receipt of all his entitlements, the overall financial gain for the resident is more than £18,000 per year.

What's next for 2019-20?

In 2019-20 our Income Management team will continue to work closely with residents to make sure the impact of Universal Credit is addressed. Talking Money will continue to support residents with arrears and debt advice. We will also offer help in making benefit claims, appeals or emergency applications for other essentials.

Building a better service

The Board backed a 3-step plan to improve

Solon will always keep in mind what you, our customers, say are top priorities:

- **Good customer service, particularly for repairs and maintenance**
- **More new homes for people in Bristol.**

I am proud of what we have achieved over the past few years, creating capacity to build homes at a time of widespread uncertainty in the construction industry. During 2017-18 we added the highest number of new homes, relative to our size, of any housing association in England, making the best use of our resources to help house people in Bristol and South Gloucestershire.

We know that we have not done enough for you as a customer. Don't get me wrong, we do plenty of good work to maintain safe, warm and comfortable homes, and our team works hard for this. But customers said they were not getting the service they expect. For that reason the Board backed a 3-point plan from the Solon team to improve things. This is a substantial investment and demonstrates the commitment of the Board, management and staff to address what residents say are top priority.

1. A staff restructure has created a new customer service team to answer calls and makes sure queries are dealt with efficiently.
2. Work has begun on a new IT system to track repairs jobs, inform you of progress and offer ways to get in touch with Solon.
3. Our move to a new office will bring our teams closer together, geared to serving customers better.

> **"Solon will continue to offer a secure housing community within Bristol at a time when it is needed more than ever before.**

I head into my third and final year as Chair seeing a strong team committed to making these changes work, and I want to thank them for their huge efforts to get us to where we are today. I know that together, and with your help, Solon will continue to offer a secure housing community within Bristol at a time when it is needed more than ever before.

G Oliver

Graham Oliver
Chair of Solon Board

We stand with you

Solon protects the right to enjoy where you live

Our commitment to provide safe and secure homes includes a stand against hate crime and work with community partners.

In 2018-19 we strengthened our position on hate crime and ASB in order to protect residents and neighbourhoods. We brought in our own expert legal services and we also supported some of the more vulnerable people in Bristol.

Expertise in tackling hate

We worked closely with Bristol-based SARI (Stand Against Racism & Inequality) in tackling hate crime affecting our residents. SARI supported the development of our staff Equality Champions group, to make sure Black and Minority Ethnic residents are aware of their rights. They also delivered racism awareness training for Solon staff, contractors and Board members.

Tools against ASB

Our approach to anti-social behaviour included swift legal action and a focus on the support needs of all tenants – both victims and perpetrators. Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) were used effectively for minor tenancy breaches. We also partnered with Avon and Somerset Constabulary to carry out walkabouts and build local trust. For serious tenancy breaches we sought injunctions and in two cases evicted tenants – our absolute last resort.

> "Thank you for your support recently over my neighbour shouting. It's really made a difference and helped keep me sane.

Mental health and ASB

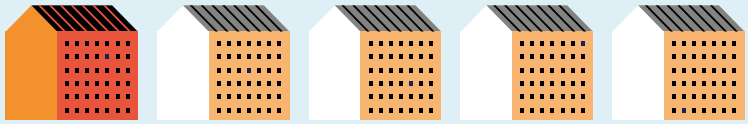
Solon has noted an increase in ASB cases involving mental health, which may well be a direct result of the financial cuts within mental health services. Many people are suffering and not receiving or knowing how to access help they urgently need.

'Housing First' Bristol pilot

Housing can be the vital first step to address cycles of homelessness, addiction, mental health difficulties and repeat offending. As part of the Golden Key project group in Bristol, Solon provided self-contained flats for the Housing First pilot. This provided homes as a first action to five people, one of whom has had the longest rough sleeping history in Bristol.

24/7 Round-the-clock phone support from SARI for hate crime in or near your home. Call 0800 171 2272. Website response in office hours from: sariweb.org.uk

5 Flats for a pilot project to support vulnerable people included 1 flat from Solon.



Shared legal support

Early in 2019 Solon joined with United Communities and Brunelcare to set up shared, cost effective legal services for residents of all three housing associations. This gives Solon office-based local support every two weeks and dedicated staff training. We now have access to housing legal support and anti-social behaviour advice and can tackle legal issues relating to tenancies, service charges and disrepair.

ABCs in action

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts were effective in dealing with minor tenancy breaches in 2018-19, particularly when used at the first sign of ASB. They were put in place to counter noise nuisance, substance misuse (cannabis) threatening behaviour, unauthorised storage (communal hallways) and tenant disputes. Those residents who broke their contract were found to be in need of further support and we assisted those in urgent need rather than taking further legal action.

What's next for 2019-20?

Support from SARI will continue and our internal Equality Champions will track ethnic and gender access to services and monitor staff equality. Our legal expert will look at improving tenancy conditions and make sure that we operate in line with best practice. In 2019-20 our ASB strategy will be adapted to take account of mental health problems in our communities. Working with Housing First in Bristol, we hope to further support vulnerable homeless people.

> You were extremely helpful leading up to buying our shared ownership property and really made it a smooth process, right up to receiving the keys.

Growing together

New and restyled homes 2018-19

17 houses + flats

Lyde Green, South Gloucestershire
(6 shared ownership + 11 rented)

16 flats + houses

Imperial Park, Bristol
(6 shared ownership + 10 rented)

10 rented flats

Bedminster, Bristol
(upgraded flats bought from a private landlord)

What's next for 2019-20?

We have started work with a Bristol developer who employs and trains ex-offenders. This project will provide much-needed homes in Knowle West. We will also develop 29 flats in Bedminster. In Yate we are working with South Gloucestershire Council to refurbish a disused care home and create 18 homes for 16-25s moving out of care and becoming independent.

It's your call

Improvement on day-to-day repairs

In 2018-19 satisfaction with your most recent repair was 88%, below the target 96%. We took swift action and some big steps.

We first analysed all customer feedback to understand your concerns, then we worked with our contractors to develop communication and began a staff restructure.

Around half of our £2.5 million budget is spent on reactive repairs as follows:

- Resident contacts to report a new repair needed
- Unplanned maintenance, such as essential damp work identified by our surveyors
- Improving homes before they are relet to a new tenant.

The rest of our budget is spent on planned works: new kitchens and bathrooms, replacement roofs and new boilers. In 2018-19 we also carried out significant works to four houses that were suffering from major leaks. Costs for this were mostly covered via the building project insurance from NHBC.

> "Thank you so much for the new kitchen… and for your help, understanding and patience when things seemed to be not going smoothly.

Value for money contracts

In autumn 2018 we appointed a new cleaning contractor to address concerns raised in our customer survey relating to cleaning of communal areas. With resident help we appointed a new contractor to begin work in April 2019. Garden maintenance company Pro-Tidy also produced a report of all Solon sites, with photos to clarify the schedule of works and a system for monitoring each site's works and agreed standards.

Changes to make life easier

Aids and adaptations are vital to help people to live independently and with confidence. We installed extra handrails, ramps and lever taps where needed. For larger works, such as level access showers, we continued to work with local authorities and to support residents who receive a Disability Facility Grant.

CSIC leads action on the issues you report

Our Customer Service Improvement Committee (CSIC) analyses all feedback and works hard to understand resident views. They backed work to make us:

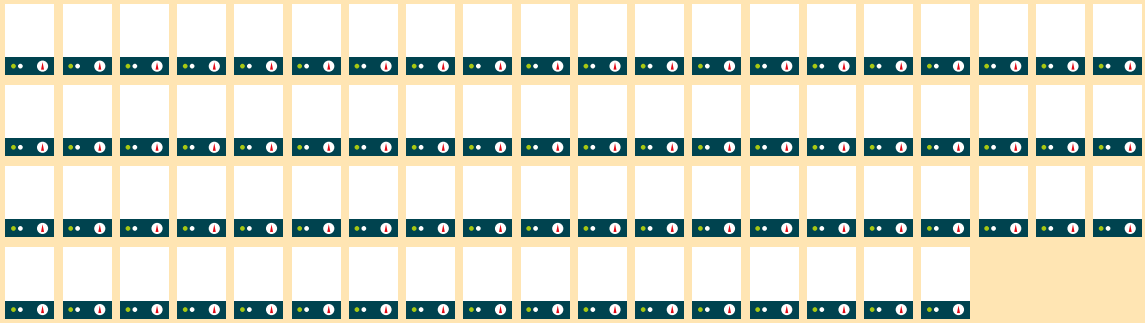
- Respond fast, listen better and act on what you say.
- Review and improve our repairs and maintenance contracts – to complete jobs first time, communicate well and follow up on any delays.
- Upgrade communal areas contracts and agree higher standards to give much better value for money, and begin closer scrutiny of all communal works.

8
New roofs

20
New kitchens

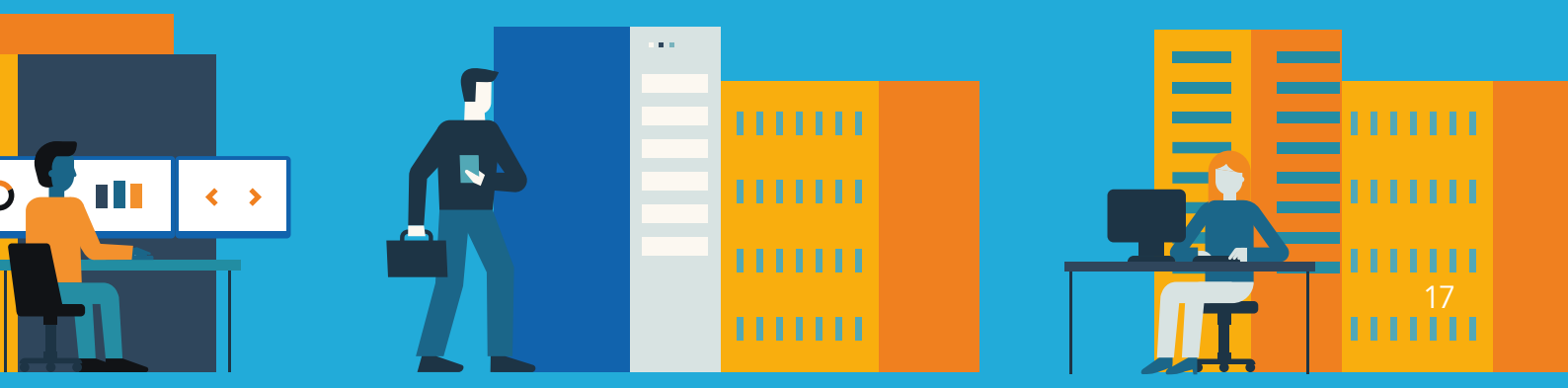
33
New bathrooms

71
New boilers



What's next for 2019-20?

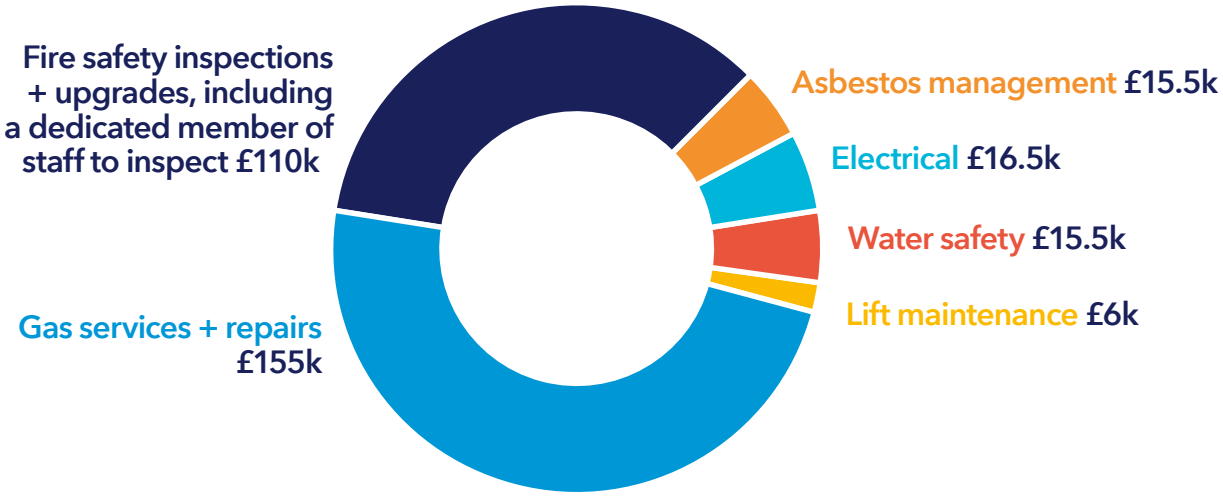
Our fire safety improvement work continues, checking front doors of flats, and we will maintain inspections of communal areas to keep hallways and doorways clear. More kitchens, bathrooms and boilers will be replaced. A new contractor will carry out cyclical painting and repairs and we will continue to work closely with Novus and our resident Maintenance Action Group (meeting every 3 months) to improve and monitor day-to-day repairs.



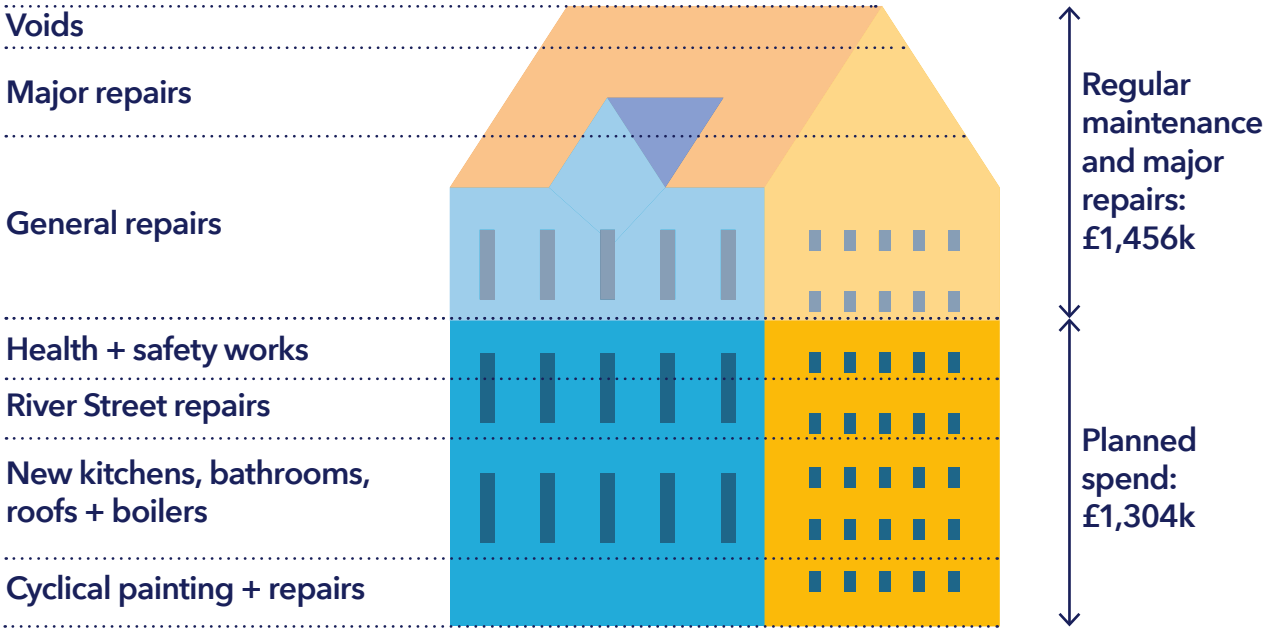
Spending on essentials

Keeping homes safe, secure and up-to-date

Health + Safety 2018-19

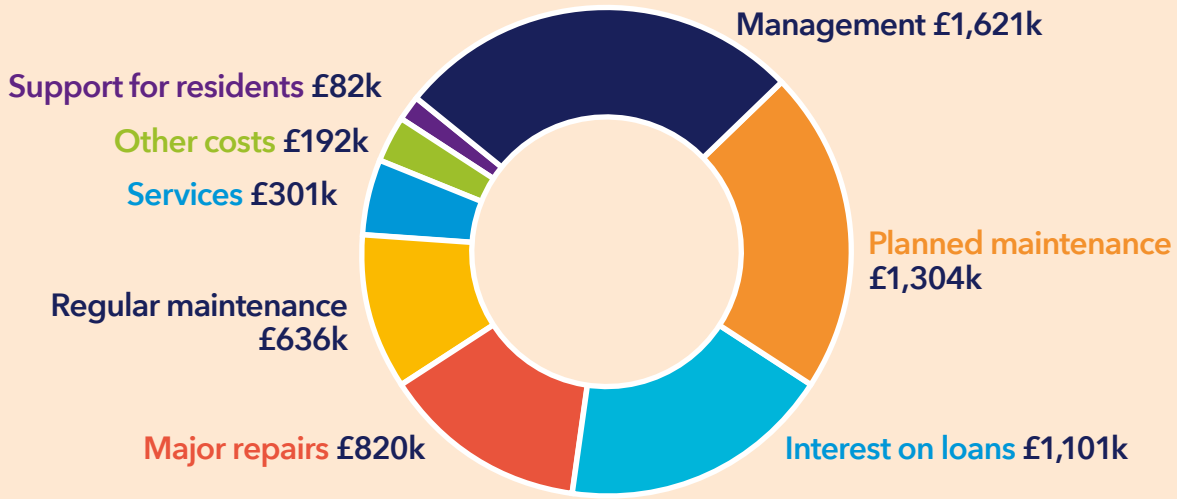


Repairs + Maintenance 2018-19

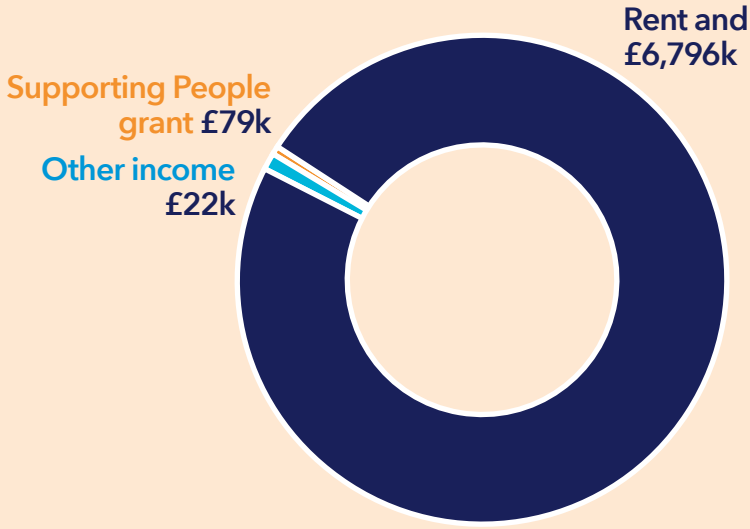


Balancing the books 2018-19

Money spent 2018-19 £6,057k (k = 000s)



Money received (before government grants) £6,897k



Net funds before sales = £818k

We had a smaller surplus than usual in 2018-19 because we increased investment in the following works.

- Fire safety measures
- Planned maintenance
- Roof rectification work
- Damp rectification work

Our office is open Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5pm

Telephone
0117 924 4071
Email
solon@solonswha.co.uk
Website
www.solonswha.co.uk

Maintenance
0117 916 7777
WhatsApp
07712 670 228

Emergency repairs
Office hours
0117 916 7777
Out of hours
0117 924 4071
(message gives contact number)

Face-to-face visits
Come to our office or call us to arrange a home visit (translation and interpretation available)

Language Line
0117 924 4071
We will connect you immediately.

Solon South West Housing Association
1 Newfoundland Court
St Paul Street
Bristol BS2 8AN

How do you want information from us?

Please tell us if you would prefer us to communicate in a different way. For example, you may want a translation in your first language, Braille, large print or an audio CD. We can also discuss things over the telephone or meet you face-to-face.
Call 0117 924 4071 or email us at solon@solonswha.co.uk for more information.

We communicate in many languages

Did you know that our website is offered in different languages and can be viewed in large text? Go online and view the buttons in the top right hand corner of the home page at:
www.solonswha.co.uk

ARABIC
إذا لم تكن اللغة الإنجليزية هي لغتك الأم وتحتاج إلى ترجمة فيمكننا القيام بذلك من أجلك.

BANGLADESHI
ইংরেজী আপনার মাতৃভাষা না হলে এবং আপনার কোন অনুবাদের প্রয়োজন হলে আমরা তা প্রদান করতে সক্ষম।

BENGALI
ইংরেজী আপনার মাতৃভাষা না হলে এবং আপনার কোন অনুবাদের প্রয়োজন হলে আমরা তা প্রদান করতে সক্ষম।

CHINESE
如果英文不是您的第一語言，而您需要翻譯的話，我們可以爲您安排。

FRENCH
Si l'anglais n'est pas votre langue natale et que vous souhaitez une traduction, nous pouvons vous la fournir.

POLISH
Jeżeli język angielski nie jest Twoim językiem ojczystym i wymagasz tłumaczenia, możemy to zapewnić.

PORTUGUESE
Se o Inglês não é a sua língua materna e precisa de uma tradução, nós podemos obtê-la.

PUNJABI
ਜੇਕਰ ਇੰਗਲਿਸ਼ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਅਤੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜ਼ਰੂਰਤ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਲਈ ਅਸੀਂ ਇਸਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਾਂ।

SOMALI
Haddii Ingiriisku aanu ahayn afkaaga kowaad oo aad u baahan tahay turjumaad, annagaa kuu samayn karra.

THAI
ถ้าภาษาอังกฤษไม่ใช่ภาษาแรกของคุณและคุณต้องการการแปล เราสามารถเพื่อจัดหาการแปลให้คุณได้

TURKISH
Eğer İngilizce ilk lisanınız değilse ve bir çeviriye ihtiyacınız varsa, sizin için bunu yapılmasını sağlayabiliriz.

URDU
اگر انگریزی آپ کی پہلی زبان نہیں ہے اور آپ کو ترجمہ کی ضرورت ہے تو ہم آپ کے لئے فراہم کر سکتے ہیں۔