



On Board

January 2017

Welcome to On Board - the quarterly news round-up from Southern Housing Group

As one of southern England's largest housing associations, we provide homes for more than 67,000 people. Our challenge is to provide excellent services for our customers, develop a portfolio of new homes for a range of needs, remain an employer of choice, and continue to build on our financial strength. We believe that succeeding in meeting these challenges will fulfil the needs of all our stakeholders.

New Group Appointments



Andy Berridge - Development Director

We recently appointed Andy Berridge as Development Director to further the Group's development strategy. Andy has significant experience working in architectural firms, construction firms, and other housing associations, including a g15 member. Andy is working closely with colleagues and external stakeholders to progress schemes to site and deliver high quality developments to our customers. His team manages the financial, contractual and regulatory aspects of the development strategy, ensuring we minimise our exposure to risk and maximise opportunities.

Paul Pember - Group Head of Customer Experience

Paul Pember has joined the Group as Head of Customer Experience. He previously worked for two charities; Cancer Research UK and Macmillan Cancer Support. He is responsible for customer services, customer insight and policy, customer data and analytics, complaints and service improvement. A key project he is working on at the moment is redesigning the customer experience training we provide to new colleagues to ensure our customer service excellence culture is a priority for all new joiners.



Recognition for our development projects



Second Steps won the National Housing Award 2016

Second Steps, our mobility service for shared owners, was named 'Most Innovative/Specialist Solution' at the National Housing Awards 2016.

[Find out more about Second Steps](#)

"Second Steps creates mobility for those who are already living in a shared ownership home, enabling our customers to choose a home from the open market that they would ordinarily be unable to buy. This award shows how important it is for shared ownership to become a mainstream tenure option because it offers customers stability, security and affordability. We're thrilled our work has been recognised." – Vikki Walker, Sales Manager.

Bow River Village won the 'Best Large Development' at the First Time Buyer Readers' Awards 2016

Bow River Village, one of Southern Housing Group's biggest new multi-tenure developments in London, was awarded the 'Best Large Development' at the First Time Buyer Readers' Awards.



"We're delighted to have won the 'Best Large Development' award for Bow River Village. Our teams work hard to give first time buyers the chance to get onto the property ladder and help make their dream of owning their own home a reality. It's great to see their efforts recognised." – Alan Townshend, Group Development Director.



Cameron Close is shortlisted for the 2017 Housing Innovation Awards

Cameron Close was built to PassivHaus standards, an environmentally friendly approach to building design and development, in Freshwater on the Isle of Wight. The scheme has been shortlisted for the 'Most Innovative Affordable Scheme' at the Housing Innovation Awards, to be held on 8 February 2017.

A new initiative for Southern Housing Group in the private rented sector

The Spruce logo consists of the word "Spruce" in a black, sans-serif font, centered within a yellow trapezoidal shape that tapers to the right.

Private renting in the UK is on the increase as the financial prospect of home ownership for many becomes less affordable and out of reach. Many people have had experiences in the private sector or know others that have been affected by rogue or amateur landlords with inadequate customer service, poorly repaired

properties and rising rents.

The Group recognised that it could play a part in helping to re-shape and bring some professionalism into this sector when it offered its first private rent homes back in 2010 at Oak Vale on the Isle of Wight. Since then the portfolio has grown to its current size of 127 homes across six developments – Oak Vale, Vega in Hove, Franklin Road in Gosport, Fivash House in Horsham, Weymouth House in Margate and Bow River Village in London E3.

In early 2016 the Group made a decision that we could do more to develop our private rent product. The result is Spruce. Spruce is aimed at customers who will appreciate flexible rental agreements and the scope to personalise their home.

Spruce launches in April 2017 when Fivash House in Horsham will be transferred over and Tabard Street, a brand new development in Southwark, London, will be offered to the market in May. Roman Road, a new scheme adjacent to the Vega building in Hove, will be added in June with existing Weymouth House customers joining in October 2017. We're starting small but have big plans to grow and are aiming to have 500 homes by 2015.

Spruce will have its own distinctive visual identity and website:



Our plan to excel at customer service



Building our Future
excelling at customer service

Building our Future, the Group's transformation and change programme, aims to improve the service we give our customers, in part by introducing new, innovative and agile ways of working. Over the past few months, we've made some significant changes internally to improve our service:

- We have reviewed our high-level operating structure to help us deliver better frontline services.
- Our new Customer Experience Team and Customer Dynamics database ensures customer enquiries are dealt with as quickly and effectively as possible.
- Our staff have started to work in a more agile way, on or near our housing schemes meaning our customers can reach Home Services Managers with access to the information they need, much more easily.

For 2017, we have focused our priorities into five working groups that encompass how we want to work and what we want to collectively achieve. The five groups are:

- People and Communications
- Customer Experience
- Performance and Data
- Technology, and
- Operational Service Delivery and Strategy

Celebrating our colleagues' achievements at the Long Service Awards 2016



Over 90 colleagues with a combined total of more than 800 years' service to the Group were recognised at the Long Service Awards held in December 2016. Among those recognised were, Vida Small, Sales Consultant, Rose Dunn, Support Worker and Dorothy Charman, Laundry Assistant, who have each worked for the Group for 20 years.

"This past year has presented the sector with unprecedented challenges; and it is more than ever essential for our organisation to ensure that we recruit, develop and retain talented people. Our employees are the face of our organisation and play a critical role in our success. Their wealth of knowledge, skills and experience make a positive difference to our customers' lives and continue to shape our future as a business with social objectives. The Long Service Awards are our way of saying 'thank you' to our members of staff for their hard work, time and ongoing commitment to the organisation, our customers and their colleagues." – Tom Dacey, Group Chief Executive.

Retaining our Moody's credit rating at A1



Southern Housing Group's steadfast position in the sector has been endorsed by credit rating agency Moody's Investor Services, which has maintained our A1 rating after carrying out a detailed credit analysis.

The strong rating is a vote of confidence in the way we organise our finances and manage risk. Despite the widespread financial challenges over recent years, we have maintained focus on improving our performance and worked hard to increase our efficiency and strengthen our financial position. The Moody's rating will help assure our stakeholders that, in uncertain times, Southern Housing Group remains independent, reputable, financially sound and well managed.

HCA In-Depth Assessments



In April 2015, the 'Governance and Financial Viability Standard' was published by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). In its subsequent statement of regulatory approach, the June 2015 'Regulating the Standards', the HCA set out how they would assess compliance. This included the introduction of In-Depth Assessments or IDAs. Registered providers who own a thousand or more social housing units will be subjected to periodic IDAs. Each IDA will be a bespoke piece of work and will be designed taking into account a housing association's size, risk profile and structure. This means that no two IDAs will be exactly the same. The HCA anticipate conducting IDAs on qualifying providers every three years.

Southern Housing Group received notice that the HCA would conduct an IDA in early 2017. The Group Strategy Team and the non-executive members of the Board worked together with colleagues to ensure that we were fully prepared for the IDA which is now underway. All of our Board members have been briefed and the HCA conducted interviews in mid-January.

Keeping our customers at the centre of it all

We strive not only to provide excellent homes for our customers but also help improve the quality of their lives. Here are some positive stories that we are proud to share.

An enterprising journey for two of our customers



One of our Employment Skills Officers, Kate Wainwright, was involved in setting up a training programme to help customers start their own businesses.

She worked closely with Enterprise Exchange, who specialise in business startups, and together they delivered a course which took place in Brighton over seven weeks.

Two of the attendees, Ceri and Peter, have since set up their own businesses. Ceri has launched StreetPups, a dog clothing company that offers graffiti-themed t-shirts, bandanas and hoodies for dogs. Peter, who had a long-standing ambition to becoming a qualified therapist, says the Enterprise course provided him with invaluable help to pursue his ambition. Peter has now set up his business, Whole Mind Counselling.

"It has given those who took part the chance to receive professional support and guidance to develop their business ideas, access funding and grants and, in some cases, the chance to undertake a work placement with one of our contractors." – Kate Wainwright, Employment Skills Officer.

Getting more for our customers from the companies we work with



Trainee Jamie with his manager, Paula Arkell-Waller from Breyer Group

Two of our customers, Adam and Jamie have recently completed a four week traineeship with companies we work with.

Adam, applied for a traineeship with Southern Maintenance Services (SMS) after seeing an ad for the role on our website. He spent four weeks working alongside experienced SMS staff providing plumbing services to our customers. Adam has now decided to apply for an apprenticeship with SMS.

Jamie spent four weeks with Breyer Group on a multi-trade traineeship and worked alongside Breyer operatives undertaking various tasks such as roof tiling, plastering, felt roofing and other repair work. Jamie is currently applying for a full time, multi-trade role with Breyer, and should hear back soon if he's been successful.

A royal visit for Quarr Abbey



On 14 October 2016, HRH Prince Edward visited the Group's Quarr Abbey gardening project on the Isle of Wight.

The project offers a way for local residents to gain new skills in a social setting that benefits the community. For some volunteers, it provides them with a work opportunity for the first time, and the confidence and skills to change their lives for the better.

The project was launched in 2011 and is run by the Care and Supporting Independence (CASI) Team in partnership with the Abbey and No Barriers, an Isle of Wight Council-led scheme. Those who volunteer on the project plant, grow, and sell their produce in the abbey shop. During his visit, Prince Edward met and spoke with some of

the volunteers who work on the project and his visit was part of a number of engagements across the Island.

“The Quarr Abbey project is a unique and engaging initiative that empowers vulnerable people who live on the Island. It has helped around 50 people gain new skills and abilities that benefit them – and the community around them. His Royal Highness’ visit highlights the value of small-scale, community-led projects like this, and recognises those who have contributed to its success.” – Naomi Keyte, Head of Sheltered and Care Services.

Empowering women in Barking



Jeorgina Soares and Fatuma Nalule are two inspiring women who are working to make a difference to their local community in Barking with the help of Southern Housing Group.

The pair set up TrainGoals in 2013 as a way to provide accessible and affordable activities that improve the lives of residents in Barking Reach and Barking Riverside. TrainGoals launched the Women’s Empowerment Group in January 2015 to provide support and guidance to women in the Barking community. The group meets monthly to network over dinner, and learn from motivational guest speakers.

The Women’s Empowerment Group is funded with help from Southern Housing Group and L&Q Housing, with other local organisations such as Barking Riverside Ltd and The Rivergate Centre providing additional support such as facilities, guest speakers, or catering. The group continues to grow considerably, with more people from outside Barking getting involved.

The Boiler House: building happier, healthier communities in Hackney



Launched in 2010 by two of our customers, **the Boiler House** community space in Hackney works with residents, local organisations and trainers to deliver projects aimed at creating happier, more cohesive communities.

Daily activities available include exercise classes for all ages, parties, general hire at discounted rates, courses, and seasonal celebrations.

The charity also organises day trips outside of Hackney, and host a twice-weekly football club for kids. This summer, the Boiler House organised a series of 'carnival' workshops. Over eight weeks, around 40 participants learnt how to design and make costumes, dance and play the steel pans, from experienced carnival teachers. They debuted their new-found talents at the Hackney One Carnival on 11 September, a celebration of Hackney's diversity and culture that attracted more than 28,000 residents and visitors.

Be social and follow us

Did you know you can get in touch with us on Twitter? To find out more about the work we do and how to get involved, follow [@SHGroupUK](https://twitter.com/SHGroupUK).

We're also on [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/southern-housing-group) where you can find out about our developments, resident initiatives, career opportunities, and more.



Southern Housing Group

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