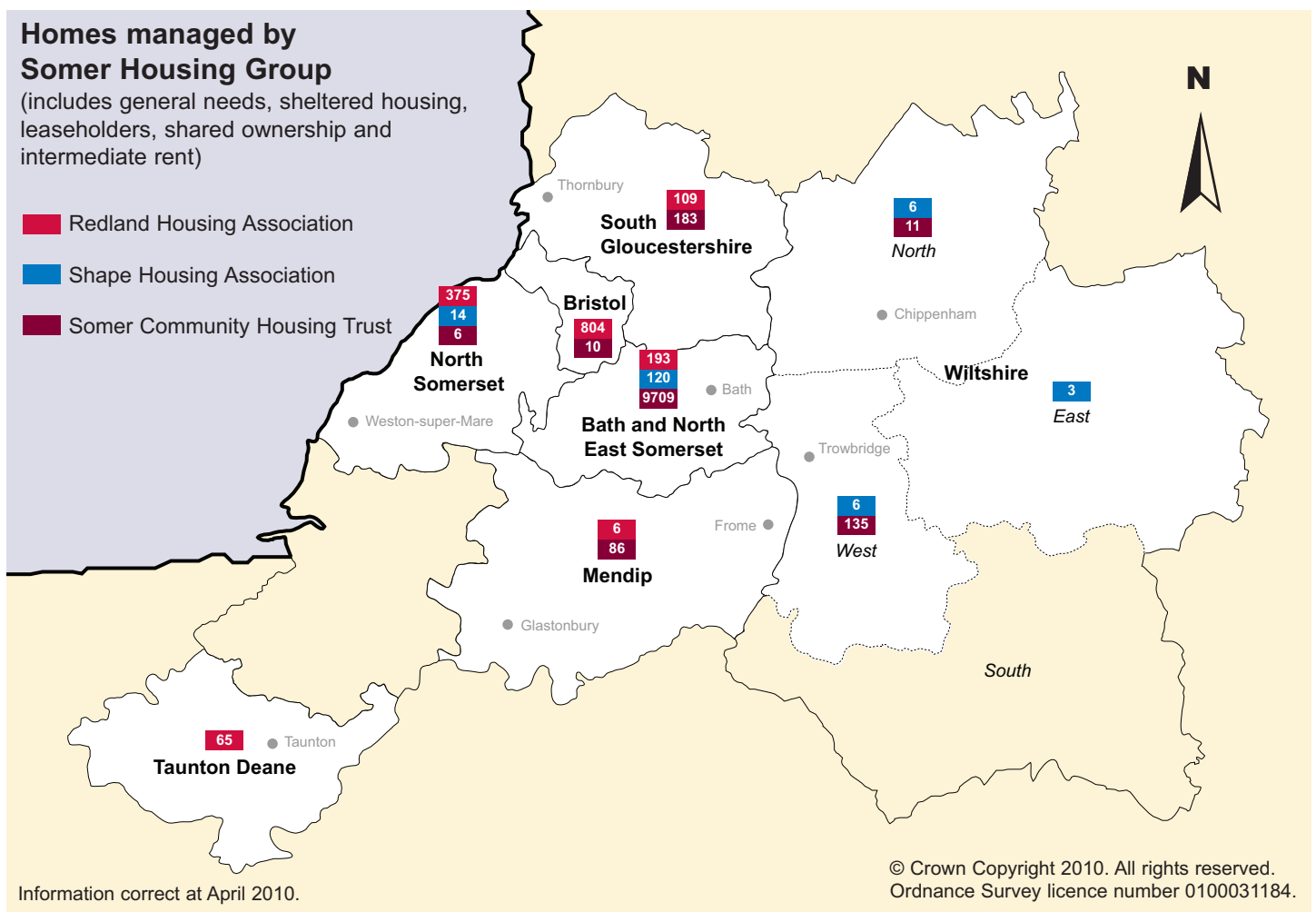


Somer Housing Group corporate plan 2010–11

Welcome to our corporate plans for Somer Housing Group. This is a summary of our priorities for the coming year, based on our work with residents and our shared aim of achieving service excellence for our customers.

Somer is a group of housing associations, based in Bath and operating in the West of England, Wiltshire, Mendip and Taunton areas. Its members are Somer Community Housing Trust and Redland Housing Association (which both manage affordable homes for rent and shared ownership), and Shape Housing Association, a specialist supported housing provider.



Setting the scene

We take a lot of external factors into account when drawing up our plans. Here are some of the things we believe will have a significant impact this year:

- **Economy:** The economic slowdown has inevitably impacted on our customers, and we are working hard not to let it affect our ability to meet our objectives in the short term.
- **Public spending:** Local authorities and other public bodies are facing reduced budgets and tough decisions on prioritising services, which will directly impact our residents.
- **Affordability:** Although house prices have fallen in the last two years, house prices in the South West have risen five times faster than earnings. No other region comes close to the affordability problems experienced here.
- **New homes:** At a national level, grant funding for new homes is likely to decrease, and we will need to look at other ways of funding our programme.

- **Regulation:** The Tenant Services Authority took over as our regulator in December 2008. It has brought in a new framework of six national standards for social housing and a co-regulatory approach with social landlords.
- **Equality and diversity:** Across the Group, we're looking at further understanding our customer profile, so that we can build on the work we're already doing to provide better access to our services.
- **Older people:** The South West has the highest population of people aged 65 and over, coupled with the longest life expectancy in England. We are working to address issues such as: a rising

need for dementia services, fundamental funding changes, and a drop in demand for the type of sheltered housing we currently offer.

- **Homelessness:** A major push from the government has reduced the number of households being declared statutory homeless, which is impacting on our temporary accommodation services.
- **Young people:** Demand for accommodation and support remains consistently high and a number of ongoing national and local initiatives will change how we prevent and respond to youth homelessness.

Somer Housing Group



- **Strategic direction:** Over the last two years, all Somer Housing Group's members have adopted 'the achievement of service excellence' as their prime objective, rather than actively pursuing non-organic growth (through acquisition or merger). Boards, residents and staff have been involved in creating a new vision and values for the Group, leading to a strategic review of the organisation, which will be implemented this year.
- **Regulation:** All of the Group's members will be working with residents on 'local offers', a local framework to deliver the national standards being introduced by our regulator, the TSA.
- **Excellent services:** Both the Trust and Redland have run pilots on the principles of 'whole systems thinking' to evaluate and redesign their day-to-day repairs and maintenance services; both of which have led to significant improvements and a change of thinking in the way we measure service outputs. In the coming year, we will be formally adopting systems thinking as the 'Somer way' and it will become the basis of how we approach service reviews and evolve our culture.

- **Support services:** A major project this year will be the review and delivery of new, Group-wide housing management system. Financial systems are also being reviewed to make sure they can be fully integrated with the proposed housing management system.
- **New homes:** We plan to deliver a programme of new homes that will provide sustainable growth for the Group, and are aiming to be part of the new West of England strategic housing delivery body. We are also planning a 'whole systems thinking' review of the Business Development service.
- **Value for money:** We already do a lot of work around value for money and to formalise this we recently introduced a VFM strategy. This year we will ensure we have a consistent understanding of VFM across the Group.
- **Contract management:** This is another area we will concentrate on this year, making sure performance is pro-actively managed and that we measure and realise the procurement outcomes we expect.

Somer Community Housing Trust



- **Our vision:** We've been asking residents, Board members and staff what we stand for, and where they think our focus should be for the next decade, to refresh our purpose, values and long-term goals.

Somer Housing Group Ltd has also been reviewing its values and we will publish our findings once they have completed that work.

- **Excellent services:** We believe that unless we can generate 100 per cent satisfaction and our customers are excited about what we are doing, we have to improve. A resident satisfaction 'STATUS' survey is planned for spring 2010, which

will check our progress and highlight areas where we could do better.

- **Resident feedback:** We will use the 'whole systems thinking' approach to improve resident scrutiny of how we deliver services and also to develop a new approach to performance management, which is focused on customer feedback.
- **Better Places:** During 2009, we surveyed residents in the 15 neighbourhoods we established through 'Better Places'. They told us what they felt about their homes and their neighbourhood, and we are analysing that feedback to produce plans for each area.
- **Managing our housing stock:** Following an investment of £120million over the last decade, we asked Savills to conduct an independent survey of our homes to help plan our next investment programme for 2010–15. Their detailed findings have also allowed us to develop a new asset management strategy in partnership with residents, which will inform decisions about the future use, management and replacement of our property portfolio.
- **Repairs and servicing:** A detailed evaluation last year, using the 'whole systems thinking' method, has been very successful at bringing this service more into line with customer demand.

A Responsive Repairs Working Group of staff, Board members and residents meets regularly to consider how further improvements can be achieved and this year we will develop a new repairs and maintenance strategy.

- **Support for older people:** More than half of the Trust's residents are over 60. Like all housing providers, the Trust is seeing a fall in demand for some of its traditional sheltered housing. So, we commissioned research into accommodation and support needs in the area and our capacity to respond to it. We will work this year to develop a service that offers choice, quality and affordability for residents to choose the level of housing and support they want.
- **Resident safety:** We are prioritising health and safety measures, particularly with regard to fire risks, asbestos management and water safety. Currently five per cent of our homes require remedial work to reduce background levels of Radon gas and that work will be completed this year.
- **Growth:** We will continue to build new homes where we can best deliver quality services to residents and contribute to balanced and sustainable communities, with Bath and North East Somerset as our core area. We will also secure new loan finance for the Trust, so that it can commit to new development schemes.

Redland Housing Association



- **Our vision:** We recently carried out an audit to monitor our customer service and one of the areas that it was felt could be improved was in more clearly expressing our organisational mission. We are planning a review in the coming year with the Board, residents and staff.
- **Excellent services:** This is Redland's primary objective and in spring 2010, we will be carrying out an independent resident satisfaction 'STATUS' survey. In the last survey in 2008, we asked residents to rate their overall satisfaction with the service experience, which set a benchmark for measuring our progress.
- **Customer service:** A key priority in achieving excellence has been to introduce high-level customer service training through Mary Gober Ltd. We will continue our investment through further training and coaching with staff.

- **Residents and communities:** We now have around 300 residents involved in some way in the shaping and influencing of our services. This year, we will develop a team of resident auditors who will develop the 'mystery shopping' work already carried out and look more closely at our strategic direction and service delivery.
- **Housing management services:** Following a review last year, we are looking at the accessibility of the service and the developing a model of 'neighbourhood excellence'. Stage one is nearly complete and will set clear standards of service residents can expect and how they can get involved in monitoring them. Stage two will look more closely at enhanced standards that take account of residents' aspirations.
- **Sheltered housing:** We have been making good progress on the modernisation of our sheltered housing services, where we are moving from support tied to accommodation, to a more flexible model that can benefit other residents who may not live in specialist housing.

- **Asset management:** A survey of our all of our housing stock by Savills is helping us to plan investment in our homes over the long term. We want to develop a 'Decent Homes Plus' standard with residents. They have already told us that environmental issues are a priority for them. Following this work, we will review our asset management strategy.
- **Affordability:** This is a key theme that has emerged from both the Board and residents, and ranges from how we set our rent to the running costs of our homes. We have started looking at the work we do already within Redland, and will develop a new strategy.
- **Partnerships:** Our relationships with the six local authorities where we operate are crucial. We have particular emphasis on Bristol and North Somerset, where we aim to be a registered social landlord of significant strategic importance. We are playing an increasingly active role within the Bristol Housing Partnership and through this we hope to have significant input in the place-shaping agenda of the city.
- **New homes:** Redland's approach has been to build high-quality homes, and our financial assumptions reflect this ambition. We will continue to do this in order to enable us to deliver a high quality service to future residents.

Shape Housing Association



- **Excellent services:** Inspection and monitoring of Shape's support services is provided through Supporting People (SP) review and the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). Providers who do not reach the minimum 'C' rating are at risk of losing their SP funding. In line with our approach to service excellence, we are aiming to achieve 'A' ratings across all our services. Young people's services likely to be reviewed this year.
- **Resident feedback:** We have comprehensive and well-developed processes for capturing feedback from residents and their personal outcomes, or 'distance travelled'. This year, we will review these to make sure we are producing evidence in line with the QAF Refresh regime.
- **Managing our housing stock:** Last year, we carried out a survey of our properties and are aiming to use this information to complete detailed options appraisals for all our schemes. We will assess the ongoing maintenance costs against income, to make informed decisions about future investment and delivery plans.
- **Staffing:** As our biggest resource and expenditure, the way we recruit and retain staff is critical to Shape. We will continue to introduce new ways of recruiting to vacant roles more quickly, and to address turnover.
- **Partnerships:** In Bath and North East Somerset there has been a considerable reduction in the number of households considered statutorily homeless as a direct result of our joint efforts with the council. However, this success means we have high numbers of empty homes within our temporary accommodation service, and we will tackle this issue as a priority.
- **Business development:** While we want to remain as competitive as possible, this can only be achieved by understanding where we may need to find alternative sources of funding in a difficult and competitive support funding market. This year we will continue to look at how we can broaden and diversify our services from young people and homeless households, to consider other client groups such as victims of domestic violence, ex-offenders, and those with drug and alcohol dependency, or mental health problems.

Somer Housing Group

The Maltings, River Place, Lower Bristol Road, Bath, BA2 1EP

Tel: 01225 366000

Email: enquiries@somer.org.uk

Web: www.somerhousinggroup.co.uk