

Forward together

Moving **forward together** as one, stronger organisation

Issue 6, February 2012



Welcome to the sixth edition of your regular newsletter keeping you up to date on the changes that are taking place across Somer Housing Group. Since I last wrote to you we have been working on our plans for the next five years.

We are clear that providing excellent services to our customers remains our highest priority, and we want to be able to invest in new homes for more people. The next stage in our planning is to work on the finer detail of the things we need to do to get there.

With help from residents and our colleagues we have decided our purpose for the next five years – our

‘mission’ – and set down our ‘vision’ to help guide us through these years (see inside, p2). We are setting priorities too so that we focus on the things that matter most to you.

There are lots of ways we would like you to get involved. If you have a great idea for the way we can involve residents in the decisions we make, or if you have any ideas for **a name for us** (p4) as we come together as one organisation, we would love to hear from you. **You can find more information about different ways to get involved inside.**

Victor da Cunha
Chief Executive, Somer Housing Group.

At a glance

What's happening?

- » Residents and colleagues have helped us plan for the next five years – so we know where we want to be.
- » We will be coming together to operate as one organisation and we need your help with **how that organisation will look and what it will be called.**
- » Following feedback from residents there will be another opportunity in the spring to help us develop the finer detail of our plans and the services we need to deliver in the future.

And why?

- » We want to be more efficient so that we can create more homes and better services for our residents.
- » In increasingly difficult economic times we want to plan for a strong future where our customers and residents remain our number one priority.



Please get in touch

Do you have any questions about the changes or would you like to help us develop our plans for the next five years? If so, please get in touch:

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Somer Housing Group
The Maltings, River Place, Lower Bristol Road
Bath BA2 1ZZ

forwardtogether@somer.org.uk
www.somerhousinggroup.co.uk/forwardtogether
01225 366370

Please ask us if you would like this newsletter in large print, audio or another language.

Where will we be in five years?

An effective organisation needs to know where it is heading. We have worked with residents to create a clear vision and mission which will direct everything we do in the next five years...

Our mission – the reason we exist:

▶ To make a positive and profound contribution to the neighbourhoods we work in – inspiring and empowering people to succeed in life.

What does this mean?

In the future we will continue to be a Housing Association at our heart but we will provide more than homes for people.

Why?

- We want to help to prevent homelessness.
- We want to help more people to live independent lives – sometimes in our homes and sometimes in the wider neighbourhoods we serve.
- We want to continue to make neighbourhoods happy, popular places to live, where people feel a part of a successful community.
- We want to provide more affordable homes for people who need them.

Our vision – where we want to be in five years time:

▶ We will be a modern, customer-driven ethical business, which makes a positive contribution to people and places.

What does this mean?

In the shorter term we will focus and invest our time and money on making our services more convenient and easier to access. We will also make sure that those who work for us, and with us, place customers at the heart of all we do.

Our values

We have also set down the values we will live by and how you can expect to be treated. We will be:

▶ Caring ▶ Fair ▶ Respectful ▶ Open ▶ Trusting

What does this mean?

Everyone who works or volunteers for us will be expected to sign up to behaving in these ways. All our training and recruitment will use the values too, to make sure our staff understand and live by them.



What residents said...

Last November we held four focus groups for residents and sent surveys to over 800 residents. We wanted to make sure we were heading in the right direction and that our priorities were the right ones for you - our customers. This is what we found:

- » 87% of residents asked felt positive about our new mission.
- » 86% felt positive about our new vision.
- » There was support for all organisations to share one name with 87% of residents feeling positive or neutral about all four organisations having one brand and name.

Thanks to everyone who took part and please watch out for the next opportunity to give us your views in March. Contact us at forwardtogether@somer.org.uk or on 01225 366053 if you would like to be involved.

It's all about satisfaction

We are committed to providing excellent services to all our customers. If things go wrong, we need you to let us know and give us an opportunity to put things right. We also want to learn so that we can improve the way we do things.

To make sure we know how you feel we have asked an external company to carry out surveys to a selection of our customers. We will be working with Voluntas Housing to carry out some initial surveys to find out how we are doing in some key services. Voluntas Housing will be able to look at how we are doing across the whole organisation.

Our Resident Service Improvement Panels and Resident Scrutiny Panel will be holding us to account on the feedback we get.

We really value your views. Please take part in the survey if you are contacted by Voluntas. We want to make sure we continue to improve and provide excellent services to you.



More information?

Please contact **Beverly Breeds, Customer Feedback Manager** on **01225 366007** or **beverly_breeds@somer.org.uk**.



A Board to represent you

We have four residents on our new Board to make sure residents' views are heard. The table on the right shows the targets we set for our Board to make sure its membership matches our resident profile in terms of gender, disability, ethnicity and age.

When recruiting to the new Board our priority was to make sure that all the skills needed on the Board were covered and that there was some continuity of membership between the old boards and the new Board. This made it more difficult for us to meet all our diversity targets. When vacancies occur on the Board we will make every attempt to attract applicants with the necessary skills who also help us to meet our targets fully.

	Preferred profile	Actual profile
Gender	55% Female 45% Male	27% Female 73% Male
Disability	2	1
Black and minority ethnic	1	2
Age	44 and under: 25% 45 and over: 75%	44 and under: 20% 45 and over: 80%

New direction

Somer Housing Group has a new team of Executive Directors who, with our Chief Executive, will be responsible for getting us to where we want to be in five years time. We asked the three Directors to tell us about their hopes and plans for the future...



Louise Swain
Executive Director for Customer Services

"I am passionate about delivering great places to live and a great service. I am looking forward to the opportunity to be part of the major change taking place within Somer to create a new organisation renowned for its great service."



"I am excited to bring my experiences of leading complex change in social housing and care to the Somer Group, and look forward to working with residents and colleagues to develop an organisation that we are all really proud of."

Donna Baddeley
Executive Director for Transformation & Business Improvement



"After 12 years experience of business growth and transformation in social housing I am delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to improving and growing Somer Housing Group for the benefit of all residents - both current and future."

Dominic Lynch
Executive Director for Finance & Resources

Getting involved

Shaping resident involvement for the future

A major piece of work to modernise resident involvement for Somer Housing Group and make sure it is fit for the future is calling on you to have your say.

The Resident Involvement review has involved looking at what, and how, things are currently done and there have been many interviews with colleagues and residents so far. The review is being carried out by consultants, Involvis, who are taking an independent view of what has worked well, what could be improved and what can be learnt from other organisations.

A workshop was held with residents called 'Shaping our future' and excellent feedback and ideas were generated as a result. In addition, a wider telephone survey of residents has started and will provide very useful insights about what works and what doesn't by way of communications and activities for residents. Once the review is complete a report will be produced which will recommend a way forward.

As part of the review process new options for our Resident Involvement service will be assessed, taking into consideration the best practice currently in the housing sector and the changes to the way that social housing is regulated.

Have your say!

We would like to know the ways you like to be contacted and what your particular interests are in getting involved. Are you someone who's interested only in your local neighbourhood, or do you want to have an influence in the way Somer Housing Group organises its services?

You can answer our questions online by visiting our website www.somer.org.uk/forwardtogether, or in person at your local office where the questionnaire will be available. Or we can post you a copy – just call Claire Abrahams on 01225 366162.



We look forward to hearing from you!



What's happening next?

Help us find a new name and look

Working together as one organisation we need to find one name and a look that works for everyone. We are working on our new name and we would love to hear from you if you think you can help us. **Do you have a great idea for a name? Are you a budding designer who could help develop the way we will look? Would you like to be involved and give comments on the different options?** Please contact us and let us know, we would love to hear from you – call Miranda Butcher on 01225 366053 or email forwardtogether@somer.org.uk.

One magazine and one website...

It also makes sense to bring together our different websites and magazines (Somer Times and Redletter). Having a single website will make it easier for you to find what you are looking for, and means we can focus more of our resources into one great site. Equally, a single magazine will offer better value for money and will also mean that

everyone gets to hear the big stories and receive the same information at the same time.

We are already working with a group of residents on both these projects to make sure that we end up with a website and magazine that residents will find useful and interesting.

We hope to have a new magazine ready for you in the spring with a new-look website hot on its heels. If you want to get involved in any of this work, please get in touch with our Communications Team on 01225 366043 or sam_platt@somer.org.uk or by writing to us at the address on the front page.

