

Neighbourhood

# Matters

Issue 18: **Winter 2023**



**Westfield House makeover**

**Garages revamped into affordable homes**

**New Corporate Strategy launched**

Cover photo: Garden Competition winners receive their prize



# Hello...



As we welcome you all to our winter edition of Neighbourhood Matters, we hope you're looking forward to the festive season.

The last time we wrote we'd only just transitioned to the new unitary authority of Somerset Council and are now continuing to work hard at further strengthening our solid relations with councillors and stakeholders.

There's plenty to report from over the past six months – achievements for which we are very proud. Based on customer and colleague feedback, we were recognised by the Institute of Customer Service with a ServiceMark accreditation, demonstrating our commitment to all our customers and our high service standards.

We are excited to have signed off on key developments of new homes that satisfy the needs of customers with specific requirements. Our new Bespoke Homes project included the transformation of disused garages in Sydenham to create a rare and much needed six-bedroomed property, as well as a number of smaller homes. These are just a couple of successes that will help to improve the lives of our customers and their families.

Working with customers to understand their needs has always been a top priority for us here at HiS. Our work with Involved Customers, Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee members and our customer Board members informs our decisions and service priorities. We have also worked with customers at a grassroots level, by engaging

with them in project work that ensured our customer focus. Engagement through coffee mornings, competitions and awards opportunities all strengthens that bond, and we hope demonstrates how valued all our customers are. There's always lots of opportunities to get involved with varying levels of time requirements so if you are interested, please do get in touch for a chat.

In April the Regulator of Social Housing introduced Tenant Satisfaction Measures, to measure how well we are doing based on your views about the services we deliver. They also help you to hold us to account when compared with other housing providers. These results are shared on our website so we are transparent and open with our successes and challenges.

We are now looking to the future with our new Corporate Strategy. This outlines our intentions to build on the solid foundations from past years and to grow as a company by investing more in sustainable development. This starts with green solutions within our office spaces, to thinking more sustainably in the wider environment; we are committed to doing our bit for the planet. Our Corporate Strategy lays out our plans for the next three years, and we are excited to see what innovations and developments we can bring for our customers and stakeholders.

Please enjoy reading this issue of Neighbourhood Matters and best wishes to everyone for the holiday season!

**Claire Tough**  
Director of Communities and Customer Service

## Building on successes and looking to the future

We're delighted to reveal our new Corporate Strategy which takes us right up to 2026.

This is an exciting time for our customers, as we deliver our new Corporate Strategy, building on the successes of recent years.

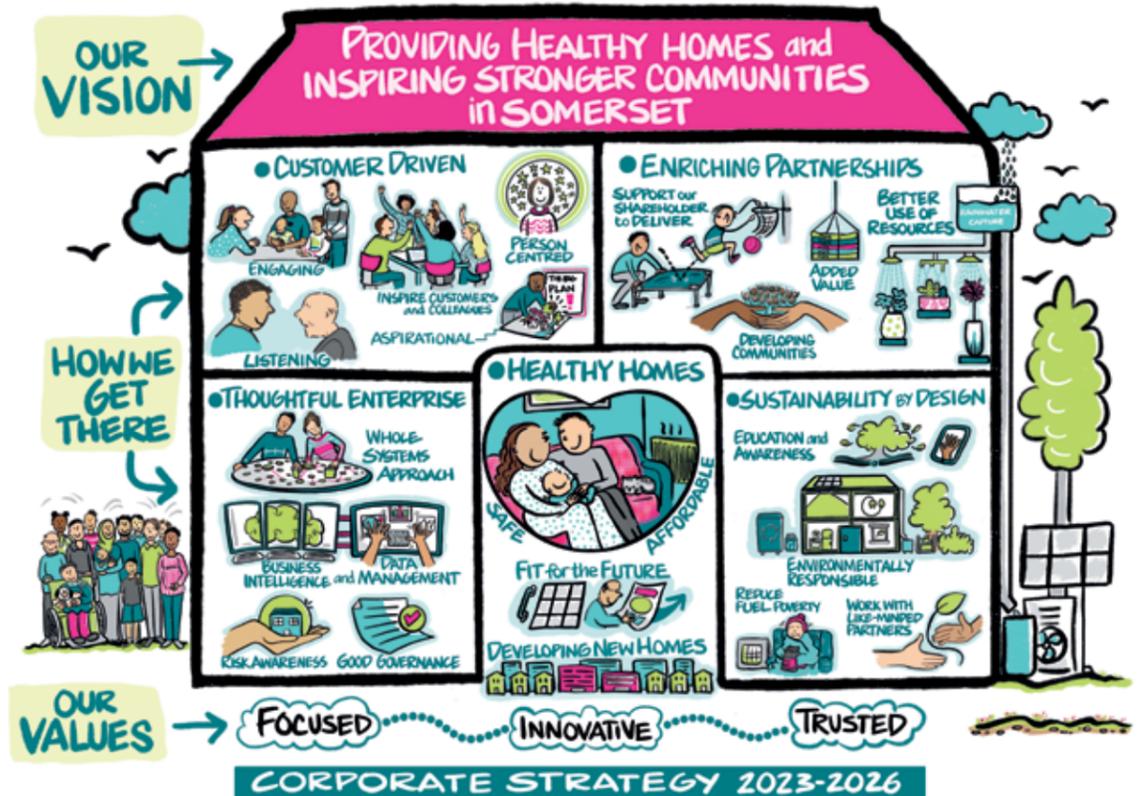
Working in partnership with Somerset Council, we aim to deliver sustainable, safe, affordable homes, which are fit for the future, while looking at opportunities to develop new homes in the community.

Our Corporate Strategy champions your voices, and sets out the long-term vision and primary objectives for Homes in Sedgemoor.

To achieve this, the strategy is constructed upon five core strategic themes:

- 1 Healthy Homes
- 2 Customer Driven
- 3 Enriching Partnerships
- 4 Thoughtful Enterprise
- 5 Sustainability by Design

Visit our website for the full strategy at [www.homesinsedgemoor.org](http://www.homesinsedgemoor.org) or scan the QR code.



Cheddar, Axbridge and North Sedgemoor Villages

Burnham-on-Sea, Highbridge, Brean and Berrow

Hamp, North Petherton, South Bridgwater Villages and La Ciotat

Sydenham and the Levels

Woolavington, Puriton and Polden and Parrett Villages

Bridgwater Central and West Bridgwater Villages

### Corporate News

- HomesinSedgemoor
- @HomesSedgemoor
- customer.services@homesinsedgemoor.org
- www.homesinsedgemoor.org
- 0800 585 360 / 01278 552400
- Homes in Sedgemoor, Bridgwater House, King Square, Bridgwater TA6 3AR

Don't forget to follow us on social media and check our website!



# Keeping our communities safe and tidy

Throughout the year we hold dedicated walkabouts to give customers and councillors the opportunity to take an in-depth look at the areas managed by Homes in Sedgemoor, and to identify any issues, including antisocial behaviour, fly-tipping, or structural damage.

These walkabouts provide valuable time when customers can raise issues and see what we're doing in the area.



CUSTOMER DRIVEN



We've had plenty of success stories from recent walkabouts including:

**Hamp** – we showed councillors around one of our major voids to detail the condition they can come back in, and the extent of the work required to get it to standard. We visited Penlea House development to see the progress being made on the build. We continue to be proactive at picking up potential issues on the estate including untidy green spaces in the community and any properties where we identify possible welfare concerns. On the last visit the estate was looking great with only a small number of untidy gardens requiring attention thanks to the work of the Housing Officers and Clean Surrounds.

**Sydenham** – Following on from estate walks, we have identified many issues such as fly-tipping and how improvements could be made to Coronation House. We are now in talks with our Asset Team regarding more suitable rubbish disposal options such as a bin store and we worked with the Asset Team to get new fencing and additional gates to improve the overall look and safety of Coronation House.



Walkabouts will continue and we hope to see more of you out and about over the next six months! Visit our website to see your local walkabout dates.



# My Life with Animals – our winners from this year's photography competition

This year our Photography Competition is entitled Our Life with Animals – where the entries were focused on the pets and wildlife that form part of life for members of our community.

We were absolutely blown away by the amount, and by the quality of entries. A voting process, promoted through social media and in-person events, saw more than 100 votes come in and our voting system ensured we had hundreds of people getting involved.

After a huge flurry of interest our worthy winners were announced as:

**First Place:** Burnham Beach Buddy, by Paul

**Second Place:** The Thinker, by Aimee

**Third Place:** Two's Company, by David

The winners received their photograph mounted and framed, along with vouchers.

Thank you to everyone who took part, and we look forward to seeing next year's entries.



Second Place



Third Place



Overall Winner

# Apex Play Day



**A successful day was had by all at the Apex Playday held this summer, where members of Homes in Sedgemoor attended.**

Sharon Collard, Homes in Sedgemoor Community Enabler, said: "I'd just like to say thank you to Kaylun, Steve and Chrissy for their efforts at the Apex playday. And also to Darren from MD for transporting the trailer. It was a very hot and busy day with thousands of people enjoying the activities. Craig, HiS Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee member, joined us for the day and was a huge help, setting up talking to visitors and handing out goodie bags. This year Ian and Mandy from the Fire Service joined us and gave advice about fire safety and even booked in some home safety visits and we also had Amanda, a willow artist, who was teaching the children to make things from willow. Another successful year!"



## Way Ahead Care rated 'Good' in CQC inspection

Homes in Sedgemoor's Extra Care Schemes at Gibb House, Hilda Coles and Elizabeth Court, celebrated the good rating of Way Ahead Care in a recent CQC inspection.

Way Ahead Care provides services to the three schemes and Darren Clayton, HiS Housing Manager said: "This again shows the great service our customers receive in our Extra Care Schemes."

The rating, which was good in all areas, was marked with a celebration and cake at all three schemes.



## Plans for Penlea continue apace



Working in partnership with Somerset Council and contractors Classic Builders, we are converting the former Penlea House into 33 new apartments at Rhode Lane, Bridgwater. This is a £5.5m

investment which commenced in September 2022 and will be completed by October 2024, providing one and two-bedroom thermally efficient homes, ten of which will be ground floor disabled adapted homes with wetrooms.



## A complete makeover for Westfield House

Westfield House, the tallest residential building in Sedgemoor, will be getting a million-pound refurbishment – the first major overhaul since its construction in 1965.

The block in Bridgwater comprises ten floors and 61 flats, and Homes in Sedgemoor is funding a raft of planned works starting with new lifts and fire doors, followed by windows, balconies, and a general facelift.

Pete, Compliance Team Leader at Homes in Sedgemoor, is overseeing the first stage of works. He said: "Although Westfield House is fully compliant with current regulations, it's time for this building to be future-proofed and get the makeover it deserves."

"Bitumen has started to come away from the balconies, and the fire doors are ready for upgrading. We set aside money for projects such as this, and it's just part of the work we do across all our properties in Sedgemoor. Customers can look forward to a new-look block of flats with minimal disruption."

The first phase will focus on replacing fire doors – of which there are more than 60 and putting in two new lifts to replace the current ones. Work will be carried out in a way

that minimises disruption to customers, and contractors will have a site office over at St Matthews Green, just across the road.

The lift works will be carried out by Deltron Lifts, and the fire doors are being installed by Ventro.

For further updates on works, keep an eye on the Homes in Sedgemoor website and social media.



## New communal space for customers at West Bow House

Customers of Bridgwater's West Bow House have a completely refurbished Communal Hall.

Funding from the former Sedgemoor District Council means that West Bow is the first of three communal hubs to get a makeover, following a review of the Sheltered Housing Service.

The refurbishment was carried out in partnership with the council, Impart Links as the Principle Designer and the works were delivered by MD Group.

At a ribbon cutting ceremony for the new hall, Len, resident and HiS Involved Customer, said: "I've lived at West Bow now for five years and I come in this hall on Tuesdays and have a cup of tea and to have a natter and put the world to rights. I think we will use the communal hall much more now it's been refurbished, and I hope people will continue to use it."

Now customers can enjoy an open-plan kitchen and communal area, with new WC facilities, new heating, a thermal upgrade of the whole building, new flooring, soft furnishings, decorations and bi-fold doors onto a new patio area. New windows, an alarm system and an electrical upgrade all complete the new look hall.

West Bow House was built in 1976 and is made up of 39 flats.



With 53 current leaseholders, the new hall provides a space for them to come together and enjoy a modern environment to hold their social events and groups.

Speaking at the opening, Peter Hatch said: "This space is for you, our customers, and we are really excited to share new activities that will support customer health and wellbeing, reducing isolation and supporting links into the local community."



# Disused garages revamped to affordable, environmentally friendly homes



Homes in Sedgemoor was joined by Councillors from Somerset Council, residents and representatives from organisations responsible for building the new homes, at Chamberlin Avenue, in Bridgwater, in October, for a ribbon cutting ceremony at the first new affordable houses from the Sydenham Garage Project.

One bespoke six-bedroom property, one three-bed and two two-bed houses were “unveiled” at Chamberlin Avenue following months of dedicated work from Homes in Sedgemoor, Somerset Council, and Rigg Construction.

The Chamberlin Avenue homes form part of a larger project of four former redundant garage sites, involving a £4.2 million investment which was overseen by Homes in Sedgemoor, with the six-bedroom property developed specially for a family with specific needs. In total the project has seen 14 homes created from redundant garages in areas which were previously run down and subject to antisocial behaviour.

The new homes are environmentally friendly, with added electric vehicle charging points.

On visiting the properties, Councillor Theo Butt Philip, said: *“It’s absolutely fantastic to see social housing coming on the scene. To see Homes in Sedgemoor bring on 14 desperately needed homes is really encouraging.”*

Homes in Sedgemoor Chief Executive Peter Hatch said: *“This is a huge team effort across the four garage sites (in Chamberlin Avenue, Saxon Green and two sites in Avalon Road), providing 14 new homes for the local community. It’s a perfect example of partnership working, and these homes are environmentally friendly and offer affordable rent options which is exactly what we need for the future.”*

Former Sedgemoor District Council Chairman, Councillor Alan Bradford had broken ground back in January 2023 and he praised the speed at which the development had come to fruition. *“It’s tremendous,”* he said. *“It’s all about teamwork. There’s a real quality to this development.”*

Homes in Sedgemoor has just started work on the next phase of building more bespoke homes designed to meet the unique housing needs of families who others cannot help.



## HEALTHY HOMES



# First of affordable homes let out in Nether Stowey



**Homes in Sedgemoor (HiS) joined with councillors to sign a £3 million contract to provide affordable rental housing with development company Strongvox Homes.**

In a celebratory signing event, staff from HiS, the Leader of Somerset Council Councillor Bill Revans, and members of Nether Stowey Parish Council, all gathered at the site for 16 new rented council homes on Strongvox’s land at Cricketers in Nether Stowey.

All ten homes have now been let, and we are looking forward to being able to offer a number of new flats when they are completed next year.

Following financial challenges for the development, Homes in Sedgemoor (on behalf of Somerset Council) stepped in to provide support and will work alongside Strongvox and the Parish Council to establish a rescue plan to safeguard this project.

Homes in Sedgemoor sourced £1.6M external subsidy and housing grants from Homes England and from the EDF Housing Mitigation Fund. The new affordable social rented homes will also be managed by Homes in Sedgemoor. Priority for these homes will be given to local people in housing need, who have the strongest of connection with Nether Stowey.

Duncan, Housing Development Manager at Homes in Sedgemoor, said *“Strongvox approached us with a problem. We rose to the challenge, formulating a rescue plan, which has ultimately worked. We helped safeguard the project and the affordable homes. None of this would have been possible without the mutual trust and commitment made by Homes in Sedgemoor, the Council, Nether Stowey Parish Council and of course Strongvox. We made a promise and we delivered on it.”*

# Homes in Sedgemoor customers get together to create Sovereign Nature giant

**A project to create a sculpture out of textiles has resulted in the incredible Sovereign Nature – a giant made from scraps that will be paraded around local festivals.**

Customers at Chichester Close and Penn Close benefited from a grant to make the giant on the theme of the seasons.

The two Independent Living Service schemes split the seasons between them, so Chichester Close focused on two seasons, and then Penn Close the other two.

They were led by a storyteller, funded by a grant from Somerset Council, and the customers created the giant’s costume from pieces of lace, silk, and scraps of cotton.

The giant’s cape represents the River Parrett, and the whole

sculpture is a celebration of nature throughout the seasons. The amazing creation will now be paraded around local festivals.

Leading the project, Chrissy, HiS’s Independent Living Advisor said: *“It’s absolutely amazing what they’ve all created. They’ve created the frame for the giant, and this incredible outfit out of just scraps. It’s really wonderful.”*



# Garden Competition

Every year our Garden Competition is so well subscribed, thanks to our lovely customers taking so much pride in their open spaces.

We want to say a big thank you to all our customers who entered this year and got involved.

We had a special afternoon to announce the winners, and this year the winners were:

## Large Garden

Mr & Mrs Beavis



## Small Garden

Mr & Mrs O'Brien



## Pots, Planters, and Baskets

Mrs Watts



## Sustainable Food

Miss Raven



## Communal Gardens

Mrs Llewelyn



## Judges Highly Commended Award

Miss Hart and Mr Stacy



# Sustainability credentials boosted thanks to funding

SUSTAINABILITY BY DESIGN



Customers of Homes in Sedgemoor will benefit from a share of £37.7 million allocated to improve energy efficiency for more than 3,000 social homes in the South West.

A successful funding bid from the South West Net Zero Hub has resulted in the cash injection, and a Homes in Sedgemoor project worth around £2 million to retrofit 108 of its least energy efficient properties will see half of the cost covered by this grant.

The grants support the delivery of £82 million worth of home upgrades which will reduce the environmental impact for many households working together with partners in two consortia, including local authorities and social landlords in the South West.

Lindsey, Compliance and Building Safety Manager at Homes in Sedgemoor, said: "I am so pleased we have been successful in our bid for funding. The additional funds will allow us to invest in our least energy-efficient properties and prioritise making them warmer and more efficient to run for our customers. We plan to install a mix of insulation measures along with low carbon heating systems and solar panels to help tackle energy bills and increase comfort, all while reducing our impact on the environment."

According to the Energy Saving Trust, 21 per cent of total carbon emissions in the UK come from our homes, and these home upgrades will help reduce emissions from households in the South West, helping to meet the UK's net zero ambitions.

**Lord Callanan, Minister for Energy Efficiency and Green Finance, said:**

*"This investment will help thousands of households to heat their homes for less, keep them warm for longer and could save hundreds on their annual energy bill."*

*"The green energy sector is growing, and this funding will support green jobs and provide the training needed to deliver these vital upgrades to homes."*

The money will be used to improve the fabric of homes to bring them up to an energy performance rating of "C". This is the minimum rating that the Climate Change Committee is proposing all UK homes should reach in order to help meet the UK's net zero carbon target by 2050.

The South West Net Zero Hub will work with two consortia to deliver the program of work over the next two years. Consortium members will deliver the projects with the support of the Net Zero Hub in a collaborative learning environment.

This is the second wave of funding for sustainable home upgrades that the South West has received in the past three years. The Net Zero Hub is currently working in collaboration with regional partners to deliver the first wave of Social Housing Decarbonisation Funding with the aim of helping over 270 households to reduce their heating bills by making their homes more energy efficient.



# Update from our Chair of the Board



Firstly, may I wish you all a very merry festive season on behalf of everybody here at Homes in Sedgemoor.

We recently held our Board Away Days where we were delighted to be joined by Duncan Sharkey the Chief Executive of Somerset Council. We received an update on the Somerset Council progress and now look to further develop our so far very productive partnership with members and officers of Somerset Council. We also received presentations from Eamon McGoldrick from the National Federation of ALMOs on the current policy priorities and challenges facing the social housing sector. Steve Partridge from Savill's, a nationally recognised finance expert in the sector provided an update on the current situation regarding the Housing Revenue Account. Other internal updates were also provided.

We also welcomed two new Board members, Chris and Olly, who were appointed at the September Board meeting, ensuring we now have a full complement of nine members.

We also recently held our AGM and it was great to have Councillor Fran Smith join us in her capacity as Associate Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Housing and for her to be very complimentary about HiS and the relationship already developed which is so important to both organisations.

Best wishes and happy Christmas to everyone from myself and Board in what continues to be a very difficult and challenging time for families and communities, not least because of the cost-of-living challenges being faced.

Paul Stephenson

## STAC report from member Martin Heard

The Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee or STAC (made up of eight Homes in Sedgemoor Tenants, members of Homes in Sedgemoor staff and a paid external chairperson) serves as our formal "customer voice" and is a sub-committee of the Board. The primary objective of the Committee is to ensure that we are meeting agreed service delivery standards for all tenants, shared owners and leaseholders, as well as meeting the expectations and outcomes of the Consumer Regulatory standards. The committee meets quarterly and recent activity includes:

- The approval of the new Corporate Strategy 2023/2026 which marks the signing off of a fresh plan for HiS, which focuses on delivering the five core strategic themes with a particular emphasis on being customer-driven.
- The commissioning of a thorough review of Homes in Sedgemoor's complaint-handling procedures following a decrease in customer satisfaction.
- Discussion around STAC's role in overseeing the development and implementation of the new Customer Influence and Engagement Strategy.

- An oversight of the Review of Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) Standards/Charter for Social Housing (CSH) Action Plan.
- Inviting Liberty Gas to attend a meeting to comment on customer complaints and missed or severely delayed appointments, as our goal is to ensure that our customers receive the best possible service and to work collaboratively towards improving the quality of services received.

**Martin Heard, a dedicated and passionate STAC member, shared exciting updates on the committee's progress and upcoming plans:**

*"The committee has played a crucial role in providing necessary challenges and assurance to the Homes in Sedgemoor Board. Since its formation, STAC has now progressed to a position where tenants really are able to influence decisions. I firmly believe that we are now a trusted voice of HiS tenants and that our views are listened to and acted upon, and we are looking forward to being involved in the new Customer Influence and Engagement Strategy."*



# Our panel of dedicated tenants

The Service Improvement Panel is a group of dedicated tenants who test and review various services provided by Homes in Sedgemoor. Members provide valuable feedback to improve customer experience and ensure that tenants' voices are heard.

Currently, the panel consists of ten tenants who meet monthly to review and test a range of services delivered by Homes in Sedgemoor. In 2023, the panel focused on reviewing and making recommendations on the following areas of service:

- **Void standards** – Inspecting the quality of work carried out on homes being re-let
- **Antisocial behaviour leaflet** – Providing information to tenants about antisocial behaviour

- **Complaint Handling** – Understanding the complaints handling process and identifying what works best for tenants
- **HiS journey to net-zero** – Supporting HiS in communicating its plans to tenants
- **Draft policies** – Providing recommendations on wording.

To promote community engagement, the Service Improvement Panel rotates its meetings around communal halls and invites other customers to join them for tea and cake. This is an excellent opportunity for customers to get to know each other and encourage others to join the panel.



# New system to make repair reporting even easier



**We've been working on a new system that will make our customer experience even slicker.**

Together with VerseOne, we will soon be able to put more control in the hands of our customers, to book repairs and to track progress.

Through the VerseOne system customers can book an appointment, then track an engineer and chat to them on the day of their appointment via LOCALZ.

The new system will enable customers to:

- Book a repair at a time that suits them
- Request a repair via the tenant portal and have full visibility of its progress
- Advise us of other issues, such as damp and mould problems

Repairs will log automatically in our system and in our main repairs contractor's system. Some repairs

will need to be logged manually by Customer Services, but customers will still be able to report them online and where we do not offer repairs for certain jobs (e.g. replacing a toilet seat), there are self-help guides and videos.

Customers will still be offered same day appointments but these will be via the Customer Services Team.

Rik, Properties Services and Investment Manager said: "This system offers customers even more convenience when booking and monitoring repairs, giving them the whole package from start to finish at the click of a button. It really brings repairs reporting into the 21st century."



## RAAC surveys across HiS

News circulating over the past few months about the use of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in schools and other buildings saw customers raising some questions about the safety of their homes.

We were quick to assure customers that safety has always been, and remains, our top priority. The official guidance from the Regulator of Social Housing is that the likelihood of RAAC in any Homes in Sedgemoor property will be

very low. To be totally sure, in partnership with Somerset Council, we initially undertook a desktop risk assessment to identify any buildings that could fall into the profile for RAAC construction. We then developed a programme of inspections which will be ongoing for the next few months.

We are pleased to confirm that so far we've not discovered any RAAC in any of our properties, and we will continue to update customers on our website.

In addition, HiS conducts continuous stock condition surveys of around 20% of its homes annually and this provides assurance over five years that all homes managed by HiS and owned by the council are safe and of good quality.

Please get in touch if you would like any further information or if you have any queries or concerns. You can contact our **Customer Services Team on 0800 585 360.**

## Fire safety advice

As we look forward to the festive season, we want to remind our customers to be vigilant and stay safe by taking some simple precautions over Christmas.

**Customers are reminded:**

- Not to overload sockets
- Water your Christmas tree if you have a real one as fires can catch very quickly if they dry out
- Test your fire alarms and detectors weekly to make sure they are in good working order
- Turn sockets off when you leave your premises
- Make sure you have a clear means of escape
- Do not leave fairy lights on when you go out or go to sleep



## Steps for helping to prevent damp and mould this winter

Although there is no cure for it, the main cause of mould within a property is condensation. Condensation is caused when moisture or water vapour within the property meets a colder surface, for example when you have a shower and water vapour goes into the air and settles against the ceiling, window or wall. If moisture is left on a surface, this can go on to cause black mould growth, which can cause health complications.

Other common areas for condensation are where there is little air circulation – for example – behind furniture if pushed up against a wall.

Steps can be taken to reduce the risk of black mould growing. It is important that you contact us if you have any concerns around mould, condensation and/or damp.

**The amount of condensation produced will depend upon the following factors:**

- How many people live in your home
- How you use your home
- How well ventilated your home is
- How warm/cold your home is

You can find detailed information on steps to take to prevent damp and mould on our website.

## Bridgwater tops the polls in housing applications in HiS area for 2023



Data collected by Homefinder Somerset reveals that 296 new or updated applications for housing were registered in June for the Somerset North Housing Options area, (formerly known as Sedgemoor District Council area), of which Homes in Sedgemoor manages the council-owned homes.

From January 1 to June 30, 248 homes were let in this area, and the highest number of bids for a single property was 411; a 1 bedroom bungalow in Bridgwater.

The highest number of houses let in the same timeframe were in Gold Band – a total of 43%, followed by Silver at 40%, and finally Bronze, at 15% of homes. The highest demand for homes, however, comes from people in the bronze band who make up over 50% of applicants.

Bridgwater, North Petherton and Westonzoyland were areas that saw the highest number of bids in our area.

As of July, 2,638 households are registered with Homefinder for the North area; over 11,000 in Somerset overall.

Commenting on the figures, Claire, Director of Communities and Customer Service at Homes in Sedgemoor, said:

*“As the demand for affordable homes continues to outstrip supply*

*we are continuing to work with the council, housing partners and housing development teams to increase the supply of good quality housing in our area.*

*“This is a long process, so to ensure a successful bid, help us by making sure your housing application is up to date and reflects your circumstances. If you are lucky enough to be shortlisted, we ask you to support our teams to let homes quickly by responding to our contact calls and provide information promptly.”*



## Rent Free Weeks 2023

Do you know we don't charge rent for the two weeks over Christmas? These are our 'rent free weeks'.

This year these take place on the weeks of 18th December and 25th December.

### Monthly or Direct Debit payer?

If you pay your rent monthly or claim Universal Credit the payments must continue in full in December. The two rent free weeks are accounted for in your monthly rent calculation so if you don't pay a full month, arrears will start to accrue.

### Rent paid direct?

If your rent is paid direct to us by Housing Benefit or Universal credit, you don't need to do anything – the rent free period is calculated in your payment already.

### In arrears?

If you are in arrears we expect you to still pay rent to reduce the balance owing.

### More support needed?

If you need help or advice, contact your Income Officer on 0800 585360

HomesinSedgemoor

@homesedgemoor

customer.services@homesinsedgemoor.org



# Independent Living Service

The past six months have been a busy time for the Independent Living Service (ILS) as we push forward with our covid recovery plan. We recognised that many customers had suffered a loss of confidence through the enforced social isolation and some of our customers in supported accommodation continue to experience some trepidation in socialising again.

We have worked hard to overcome this by introducing Chrissy as the Summer Hub Co-ordinator. Following in the footsteps of our Winter Warm Hub Co-ordinator, organised activities encourage participation in social activities again and Chrissy facilitates games and

craft sessions as well as health and educational opportunities from outside agencies including Age UK, St John Ambulance Service and the Devon & Somerset Fire Service.

Attendance at these organised events has steadily increased and has provided an excellent forum for gathering customer feedback.

The refurbishment of Chichester Close communal hall is eagerly awaited to provide an additional social hub for supported living customers, and there is a planned transfer of the current activities to Barton Close communal hall while the refurbishment takes place.

This great work to facilitate varying activities will be replicated across the whole area as the Independent Living Officers re-introduce social engagement events in several of the communal rooms and halls and we look forward to making this as successful as the summer hub activities.

We continue to strive to provide a better service, recognising the importance of continuity through periods of change and the importance of effective communication between our customers as well as between HiS colleagues.

CUSTOMER DRIVEN



## At Homes in Sedgemoor, we are always looking to improve our services to be better for our customers.

Many of our Bronze level ILS customers said they do not need a regular monthly visit from their advisor. As a result, we changed the way the service is delivered.

Earlier this year we introduced a telephony service which lets customers decide whether they would like any support or not. Following further feedback from customers, we have now improved this service. We now call customers once a week to check if they would like our support or not. This service change is designed to help us to support customers with a more personalised service – at a time that is more convenient for them.



Customers are always welcome to contact their ILS Advisor on **0800 585 360**, and do not have to wait for their weekly wellbeing call.

## Christmas opening hours



With the festive season upon us, we wanted to take this opportunity to remind you that we are still here.

We will be on hand throughout December to help when you need us, and our out of hours emergency repairs service will continue to run 24/7. Our general weekday opening hours are 9am–5pm, except Wednesdays when our lines open at 10am–5pm.

Our Christmas opening hours are:

<b>Monday, December 18</b>	–	<b>9am – 5pm</b>
<b>Tuesday, December 19</b>	–	<b>9am – 5pm</b>
<b>Wednesday, December 20</b>	–	<b>10am – 5pm</b>
<b>Thursday, December 21</b>	–	<b>9am – 5pm</b>
<b>Friday, December 22</b>	–	<b>9am – 5pm</b>
<b>Monday, December 25</b>	–	<b>Closed</b>
<b>Tuesday, December 26</b>	–	<b>Closed</b>
<b>Wednesday, December 27*</b>	–	<b>10am – 5pm</b>
<b>Thursday, December 28*</b>	–	<b>9am – 5pm</b>
<b>Friday, December 29</b>	–	<b>9am – 5pm</b>
<b>Monday, January 1</b>	–	<b>Closed</b>
<b>Tuesday, January 2</b>	–	<b>9am – 5pm</b>

At all other times we will continue to provide our out of hours emergency repairs service on our usual contact number – **0800 585 360**.

\*Please note, our reception at Bridgwater House will be closed between Monday, December 25 – Friday, December 29. The reception will reopen on Tuesday, January 2, 2024.

## Christmas lights switch on

Huge thanks go to MD Group who donated a Christmas Tree which has been put up outside Gibb House.

Local people, including the residents of Gibb House, Garden Walk, Edinburgh Road and Meads Court can now all enjoy the view of the tree throughout the festive season.

Hot drinks were served at the lights switching on event, and young people from nearby schools sang carols.

Homes in Sedgemoor (HiS) Chief Executive, Peter Hatch attended along with a representative from MD Group.

Kaylun Henson, Community Enabler at HiS, said: “We are extremely grateful to MD Group, who have provided this tree for local people to enjoy. We have a very close working partnership with MD Group and this generous donation has brought a wonderful show of Christmas spirit to the area.”

## Coffee and mince pies



Customers are welcome to join us for coffee and mince pie events in December.

Our first event will be held at Penn Close Communal Hall, Cheddar, on December 12, between 1pm–3pm, and our second event will be held at Baymead Hall, North Petherton, on December 14, between 4pm–6pm.

There will also be some extra goodies for children who attend on the day.

If you would like to join us, please RSVP by contacting our Customer Services Team on **0800 585 360**.

## Did you know...

Off The Page Cafe, Highbridge (with a pop up community library), is held every Wednesday, from 9am until 1pm, at the Morland Community Hub, Pearce Drive.

Enjoy breakfast baps, brunch, lunch and home-made cakes, with smaller portions available for children at the event. The café offers fresh Barista coffees, offered at community friendly prices. Cash and card payments are accepted, there's free on-site parking, dogs are welcome and Wi-Fi is available.

For further information, please contact the Morland Community Hub on 01278 782766 or email enquiries@morlandcommunityhub.org.uk.

# Homes in Sedgemoor hits the mark for Customer Services

Homes in Sedgemoor is celebrating after being awarded the Institute of Customer Services (ICS) "ServiceMark" accreditation.



ServiceMark is a national standard, which independently recognises an organisation's achievement in customer service and its commitment to upholding those standards.

HiS has been a member of the ICS since 2021, and has been working towards the ServiceMark accreditation.

This involved completion of customer and colleague surveys via the ICS, and then an independent assessment of service delivery.

On being awarded the ServiceMark accolade, Rachel, Customer Focus Manager, said: "We are very pleased to confirm that from the surveys and assessment we have demonstrated that we are meeting the ICS ServiceMark Standards and have been awarded the accreditation."

"This is a National Customer Service Standard and of the 46 housing providers that are members of the ICS we are one of only six who have ever achieved this accreditation."

"We believe this demonstrates our commitment to our customers and our service delivery and shows that our Customers First culture is embedded across HiS."



# TSM Satisfaction Measures

We produce monthly Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) performance reports which show how we're performing.

We measure ourselves against the (TSMs), which are set by the Regulator of Social Housing, as a system for assessing how well social housing landlords, including ALMOs like us, in England are doing at providing good quality homes and services.

This data helps us to identify our areas of strength and weakness. It enables us to identify areas of service which need to improve and ensures we can allocate resources accordingly.

Please see our website for the latest TSM results.

# Lessons learned and continual improvement

We've identified common themes for customers expressing dissatisfaction, one being issues taking too long to get resolved. Many customers want to have a quick resolution to their query or complaint, without the need for becoming part of a complaint process.

Whilst it is important that we are recognising any service issues or failures, we must also do all we can to resolve customer queries and issues at the first point of contact wherever possible.

We recognise that our customers want to know that we have listened, put the issue right, and that the relevant service lead is following up, and ensuring continuous improvement of their service delivery.

Ongoing antisocial behaviour (ASB), and complainants not being kept updated and informed is also a cause for customers to feel dissatisfied with our service

delivery, so we are reviewing our process to ensure regular contact is made so that victims of ASB are not left feeling forgotten.

We recently held a Customer Scrutiny Day on our complaints handling, and the most common theme identified for customer dissatisfaction was poor communication. We must ensure that we are recognising customers preference for channel of communication, and that we are ensuring they are aware of how to log a complaint or service failure or report any antisocial behaviour within their neighbourhoods.

With this in mind we are working on raising the profile for the estate walkabouts and hope that we will be able to use these as opportunities for customers and residents to voice any concerns and become more involved with their wider community.

# Our latest TSM results

	YTD Oct 2023	Target
<b>TP01:</b> Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with the overall service from their landlord.	81%	84%
<b>TP02:</b> Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the overall repairs service.	84%	81%
<b>TP03:</b> Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the time taken to complete their most recent repair.	84%	75%
<b>TP04:</b> Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is well maintained.	85%	70%
<b>TP05:</b> Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is safe.	87%	88%
<b>TP06:</b> Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them.	73%	73%
<b>TP07:</b> Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps them informed about things that matter to them.	86%	70%
<b>TP08:</b> Proportion of respondents who report that they agree their landlord treats them fairly and with respect.	88%	75%
<b>TP09:</b> Proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord's approach to complaints handling.	40%	75%

	YTD Oct 2023	Target
<b>TP10:</b> Proportion of respondents with communal areas who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained.	71%	75%
<b>TP11:</b> Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord makes a positive contribution to the neighbourhood.	79%	60%
<b>TP12:</b> Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with their landlord's approach to handling antisocial behaviour.	72%	60%
<b>CH01:</b> Complaints relative to the size of the landlord	19.7	28
<b>CH02:</b> Complaints responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales	96%	95%
<b>NM01:</b> Anti-social behaviour (ASB) cases relative to the size of the landlord	16.67	23
<b>RP01:</b> Homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard	0.18%	0%
<b>RP02:</b> Repairs completed within target timescale	92.9%	95%
<b>BS01:</b> Gas safety checks	99.8%	100%
<b>BS02:</b> Fire safety checks	100%	100%
<b>BS03:</b> Asbestos safety checks	100%	100%
<b>BS04:</b> Water safety checks	100%	100%
<b>BS05:</b> Lift safety checks	100%	100%

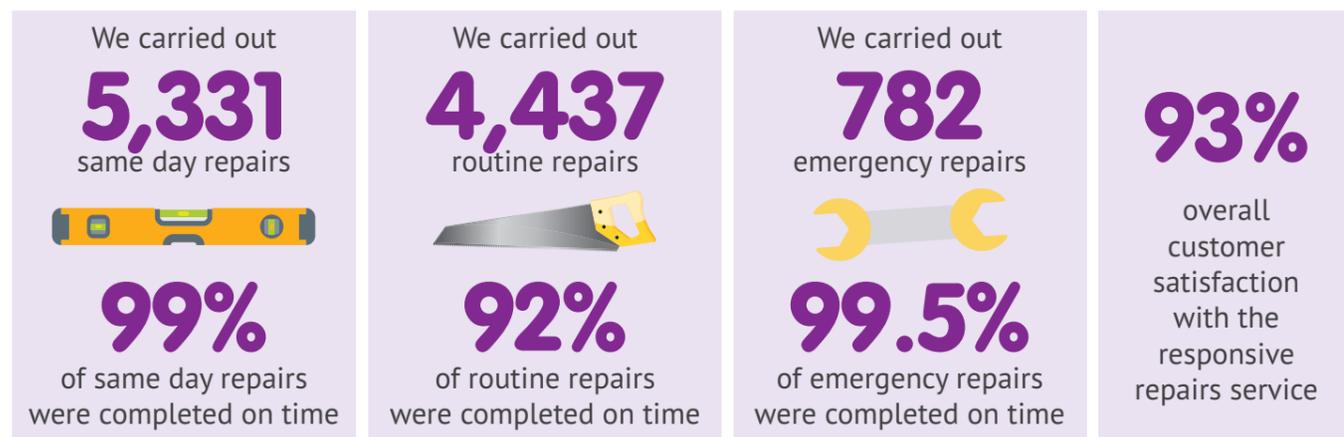
# Homes in Sedgemoor Annual Report 2022-2023 Summary

Every year we produce an Annual Report to showcase what we have been up to, how we have been doing and how you, as customers, have helped to shape our services. We have included a summary of our latest Annual Report in your newsletter. When reading it, we hope you feel we are doing the very best job we can for you. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all our customers for working with us and trusting us over the past year. To view the full Annual Report, please visit our website at [www.homesinsedgemoor.org](http://www.homesinsedgemoor.org) or call us on 0800 585 360 to request your own paper copy.

## Repairs and Maintenance



We always work hard to maintain customers' properties to a great standard to ensure they have good quality, safe homes. We're proud to work closely with customers and partner contractors to carry out responsive repairs safely and efficiently, which is evident in customers' positive feedback of our service.



## Upgrading Your Home



We carry out a large number of home upgrades every year to ensure we provide customers with good quality, safe homes. Last year, our capital expenditure was around **£6.2m**, which was spent on upgrading homes and communal areas. Our planned works schedule, which is created based on our stock condition surveys, was smaller last year, which allowed us to prioritise works in other areas.



## Customer Involvement



### Involved customers

Customer Involvement is our framework that provides opportunities for customers to influence decision making processes to help shape our service delivery. Last year, we were proud to have:

- 6 customer members of Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee (STAC)
- 10 customers on the Service Improvement Panel (SIP)
- 4 customers on the Making a Difference (MaD) Fund Panel
- 19 customers involved with the Scrutiny Group
- 6 customers as Neighbourhood Champions



### Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee

6 meetings held by STAC between April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023

It has been a busy year for the Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee (STAC), which ensures that agreed service delivery standards to all customers, shared owners and leaseholders are being achieved. The committee has welcomed two new members, Chair Sarah and tenant member Craig, and held six meetings.

#### Some of STAC's achievements include:

- Agreeing the Terms of Reference for all groups
- Agreeing the workplan for improvement groups
- Directing scrutiny on two business areas (Planned Maintenance and Procurement)
- Reviewing the Compliance Dashboard

- Developing a Statement of Intent for Social Value
- Developing the Customer Influence and Engagement Strategy
- Developing the STAC KPI Dashboard
- Providing feedback on our revised housing management model (Project Matrix)
- Overseeing the Customer-led scrutiny activity and action plan delivery
- Sharing feedback on Tenant Satisfaction Measures
- Sharing feedback on the new Corporate Strategy
- Participating in a joint working group as part of the Local Government Reorganisation
- Supporting the Rent Policy for new Somerset Council
- Playing a key role with the Audit and Risk Committee to review our approach to Damp and Mould

## Income and Expenditure



### Income

Management Fee	£9,225,000
Property Improvement	£5,806,000
Other Income	£477,000
Interest	£66,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£15,574,000</b>

### Expenditure

Property Repairs and Maintenance	£3,637,000
Property Improvement	£5,806,000
Staff Costs	£3,479,000
Service Level Agreements with Council	£1,283,000
Housing Management Costs	£1,799,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£16,004,000</b>

We funded **£430,000** from our reserves, which was planned in the budget.

This money was invested in several initiatives to help improve the services delivered to our customers and to maintain our high compliance standards.

**More expenditure than income £430,000**

# Supporting You



Our Neighbourhood Team works closely with a range of different agencies and charities across the district to make sure customers receive the correct support and continue to love where they live. As well as working collaboratively with organisations across the district, we are also proud to have launched our new way of working through Project Matrix to ensure customers receive a great service from their Neighbourhood Team. The new structure offers a localised way of providing our services. Instead of multiple parts of the organisation working separately, four new teams now provide a 'one-stop shop' for everything customers need.



To help tackle noise complaints, we use the Noise App with customers, which measures the volume of noise in a number of our cases. This makes it easier for the team to gather the evidence required to manage the increasing number of noise nuisance cases.



**Did you know...** we worked with **11** domestic abuse survivors, providing support where necessary.

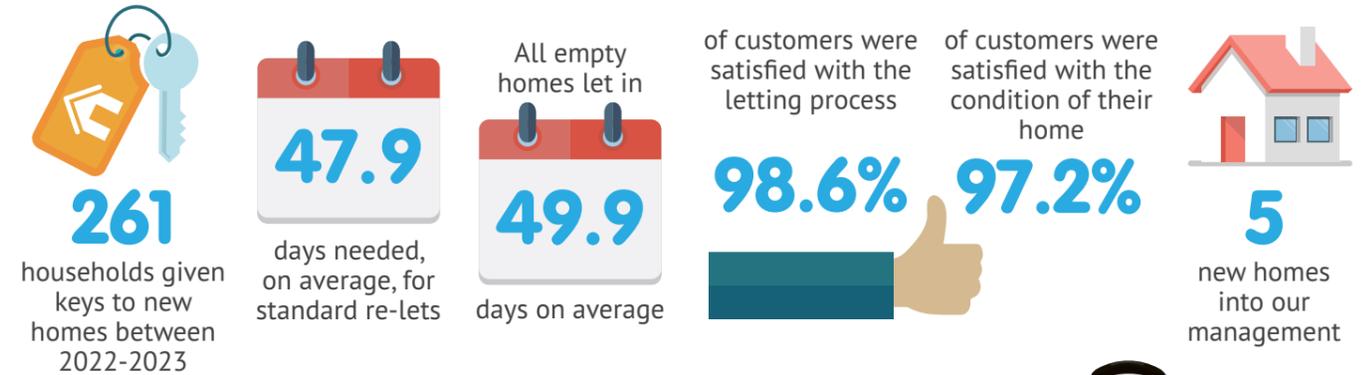


# Income

We collect rent and pay it to Somerset Council. The council then gives us some of the rent back as a Management Fee so we can look after customers' homes, carry out repairs and do work in the neighbourhood. Last year, rent was charged over 50 weeks.



# Lettings



# Customer Services and Feedback



Our friendly Customer Services Team is always on hand to help customers with any queries or concerns.

## Last year...



STAR satisfaction year end results – 2022/23	Actual	Target
Overall satisfaction taking everything into account	<b>81%</b>	<b>90%</b>
Satisfaction with overall quality of home	<b>82%</b>	<b>90%</b>
Satisfaction with HiS providing a home that is safe and secure	<b>86%</b>	<b>87%</b>
Satisfaction with how easy HiS is to deal with	<b>83%</b>	<b>90%</b>
Satisfaction with neighbourhood as a place to live	<b>83%</b>	<b>90%</b>
Satisfaction with rent providing value for money	<b>89%</b>	<b>89%</b>
Satisfaction with service charges providing value for money	<b>78%</b>	<b>80%</b>
Satisfaction with overall repairs service (experience from a recent repair)	<b>79%</b>	<b>80%</b>
Satisfaction with HiS listening to views and acting upon them	<b>70%</b>	<b>75%</b>

## Complaints



# Competition Time!

Enter our Christmas wordsearch.

Find all 16 words from the list, then return it along with the completed entry form.

J	V	H	G	X	L	Y	K	M	C	W	U	G	N	X	P	X
S	S	T	O	J	L	J	K	O	Y	V	E	O	W	E	A	S
C	Z	Z	B	I	E	G	B	W	R	E	A	T	H	T	T	B
L	J	Y	M	N	Z	V	J	Z	O	A	T	O	N	M	R	H
K	R	A	O	Y	U	L	E	T	I	D	E	A	L	J	E	H
P	F	B	R	C	W	N	L	I	Y	H	S	O	W	M	E	G
P	F	O	N	E	H	C	A	N	D	Y	C	A	N	E	I	I
R	P	T	A	I	D	R	B	M	S	B	J	J	W	N	Y	N
E	E	B	M	V	Y	T	I	S	O	M	S	S	Q	U	V	G
S	O	M	E	I	D	G	T	S	I	F	A	N	D	T	G	E
E	N	C	N	C	C	R	H	O	T	N	P	O	O	C	X	R
N	N	G	T	W	E	A	A	L	B	M	N	W	G	R	U	B
T	P	P	D	N	E	Y	R	R	L	U	A	Q	S	A	P	R
S	Y	D	X	K	O	M	N	O	U	I	V	S	S	C	J	E
M	H	H	S	J	V	A	D	I	L	C	N	L	Z	K	B	A
E	W	G	R	E	E	T	I	N	G	S	M	R	F	E	D	D
D	E	C	E	M	B	E	R	I	N	U	A	Q	H	R	K	R



- JOY
- PRESENTS
- GREETINGS
- DECEMBER
- FAMILY
- CANDY CANE
- WREATH
- YULETIDE
- CHRISTMAS
- SANTA
- TREE
- GINGERBREAD
- NUTCRACKER
- SNOW
- CAROLS
- ORNAMENT

Name:.....

Address:.....

.....

Telephone:.....

Please complete your details for a chance of winning a £25 voucher.

Send your completed entry form to: Homes in Sedgemoor, Bridgwater House, King Square, Bridgwater TA6 3AR, email [customer.services@homesinsedgemoor.org](mailto:customer.services@homesinsedgemoor.org) or message us on Facebook.

Closing date: Monday, January 29, 2024

## Congratulations

To Ian, of Highbridge, Sara, of Cannington, and Diane, of Bridgwater, who won the Summer Newsletter competition. We hope you each enjoy your £25 voucher!

## Congratulations

To Mrs Heath, of Pawlett, who won a £50 One4all gift voucher for taking part in one of our surveys.

HomesinSedgemoor @HomesSedgemoor

[customer.services@homesinsedgemoor.org](mailto:customer.services@homesinsedgemoor.org)

[www.homesinsedgemoor.org](http://www.homesinsedgemoor.org) 0800 585 360 / 01278 552400

Homes in Sedgemoor, Bridgwater House, King Square, Bridgwater TA6 3AR

Don't forget to follow us on social media and check our website!

