

Providing specialist housing, care and support for vulnerable people in Sussex since 1972.



Annual Report

for Tenants

2020-21

We are a specialist housing association committed to preventing homelessness and supporting vulnerable people's health, wellbeing and independence. We are a not-for-profit organisation and exist for the benefit of local communities.

Director of Housing's Welcome

Welcome to the 2020-21 Annual Report for Tenants.

The past year has certainly been one that none of us will forget as the Covid-19 pandemic changed our lives like never before.

The pandemic has challenged us to find more agile ways of working and our Housing team has risen to the challenge tremendously.

I am immensely proud of our Housing team for the adaptability they have shown and determination to carry on letting properties and carrying out essential inspections, repairs and maintenance.

They made use of technologies such as Docusign and video calls to enable our tenants to sign tenancy agreements (and other forms) online and attend remote viewings and sign-ups.

With in-person meetings ceasing and Housing Officers not able to undertake in-person visits due to lockdown restrictions, staff have dedicated more time to keeping in touch with tenants over the phone. Feedback from our tenants has been that they appreciated the extra support and found it helpful to get to know our team better. Although much contact moved to phone support, our housing and support staff continued to provide visits in-person to our most vulnerable tenants.

Southdown is in a recovery phase now that the peak of the pandemic appears to have passed and have caught up on most of the property safety and compliance works that were temporarily suspended at earlier phases of the pandemic.

We have plans in place to catch up on the lower risk areas of non-compliance such



as PAT testing and the testing of thermostatic mixing valves in our Learning Disability Services.

Whilst we are looking forward to gradually increasing our face to face work, it is important for us to understand what your concerns are, particularly as Covid-19 is likely to be in our lives for some time yet, and how Southdown can continue to adapt its delivery of housing management and property maintenance services going forward.

We would like to say an enormous thank you to our Housing team who worked so hard during the pandemic, often through their own personal anxieties and grief to make sure we delivered a good service to our tenants.

Likewise, we'd like to extend our thanks to contractors' Hedley Visick, CDS and Prestige Cleaning for working flexibly and with empathy towards the need to keep our tenants safe, especially those in our Learning Disability and Registered Care Services.

In addition, we'd like to pay a special tribute to all the support staff working in our Learning Disability Services who worked tirelessly to protect clients under challenging circumstances. This includes our partner agencies; Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Grace Eyre, Mencap & Dimensions.

I hope you enjoy this report, best wishes,

Jim Aspdin
Director of Housing at Southdown



About Southdown

We're Southdown, the largest not-for-profit provider of housing, care and support for vulnerable people across Sussex.

We are a specialist housing provider and landlord for 509 people currently. In addition, we provide support for over 10,000 people a year through a range of housing support, mental health, employment and learning disability support.

Our mission is to offer vulnerable people the support they need to develop, maintain and improve good health, wellbeing and independence.

Contents

| | Page |
|--|------------|
| Southdown as a landlord | 3-4 |
| Highlights 2020-21 | 5-6 |
| Value for money | 7 |
| Plans for 2020-21 | 8 |
| Focus on Financial Inclusion, Complaints, Planned Maintenance and Compliance | 9-12 |
| Update on Services | 13 |
| Update on Tenant Matters | 14 |
| How to contact us | Back cover |

Cover image: Southdown tenant.



Pictured: Sarah Murphy, Southdown's Housing & Property Services Senior Manager

Services we provide:

- Housing Management Support
- Repairs & Maintenance Service
- Property Development
- Welfare Benefits Support

How we're performing as a landlord **new website page**

We have recently introduced a new section to our website so that tenants can more easily access information about how we are performing.



We now regularly update this page with information about our rent collection rates, our response times for emergency, urgent and standard repairs and our monthly statistics around property safety and compliance. Visit www.southdown.org/how-we-help/housing.

You can also use this page to request compliance certification for your property. If you would like a copy of your gas safety certificate, electrical safety certificate or EPC energy efficiency certificate you can do this through our online form. In addition you can request a copy of the fire risk assessment for your block (where Southdown has responsibility).

If there is any other information that you would like us to make available on our website, please do let us know at housing@southdown.org.

How to access our housing

People needing Supported Housing should approach their local council who can make a referral to us. As we provide Supported Housing, people referred to us need to have identified support needs.

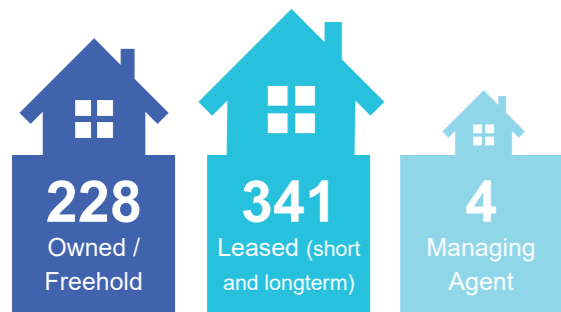
Once someone is referred, we will make contact to discuss their housing and support needs and, if they meet the criteria, arrange for them to view a property once one becomes available.

Southdown as a landlord

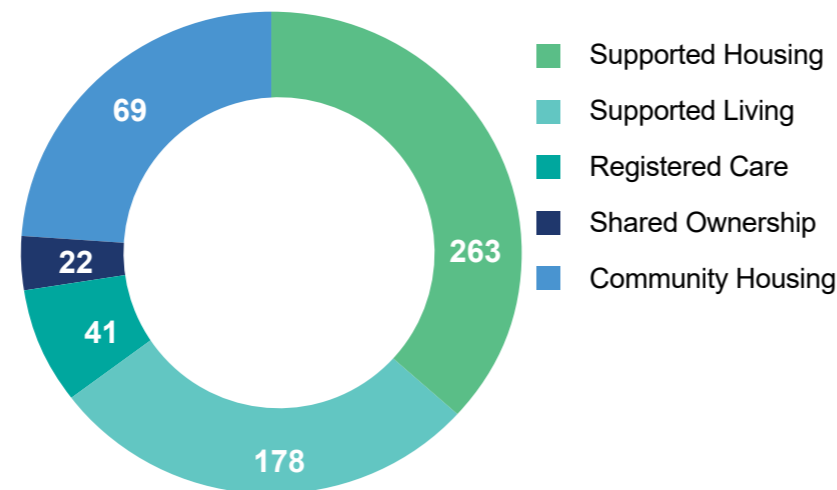


As a specialist housing provider and landlord, we provide Supported Housing for vulnerable people. This means we provide both housing and additional personalised support to enable people to live as independently as possible in their community.

Our property types



Ways our properties are used



Tenant Story

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Southdown's housing management were contacted by the team at one of our Supported Living learning disability services in Hove to ask if they could help a tenant with hoarding issues.

The tenant's hoarding had escalated to the stage where his flat was a fire and health and safety risk. Newspapers and magazines were piled up across the floor making it difficult to access the flat and move about. In addition, food waste not cleared away had attracted flies and maggots.

Working alongside the support team at the service, Housing Officer, Gemma, supported the tenant to address his hoarding which included agreement to having his flat cleared and deep cleaned and regular support to maintain a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene.

Southdown's Positive Behaviour Support team and Operations Manager for Learning Disability Services in Brighton & Hove were also involved, guiding the process and providing direct support to the tenant.



"My home makes me feel great. It wasn't great when it had lots of stuff in. I can now relax and watch films and read books." – Southdown tenant

2020-21 Highlights

509
tenants and shared owners across Sussex we provided housing and support for.

1 in 4
of our tenants received additional support from our Learning Disability Services.



New Property
Identified and agreed terms to purchase and develop a 12 unit Supported Housing and Mental Health Wellbeing Venue in Brighton and Hove (for completion Summer 2023)

New lettings
We adapted to lockdown restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic by doing remote viewings, video tours and virtual sign-ups. We made 27 new lettings.




Sustainability
Started development of a Housing Sustainability Strategy to enable Southdown to achieve energy efficiency targets for social housing by 2050.

99.4%
of emergency repairs were completed on time.
This was against a backdrop of quarantine restrictions, self-isolating tenants and supply chain issues stemming from Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic.



Personalised Support
What makes us different is the personalised support we provide as our Housing Officers have fewer allocated tenants compared to general needs housing




2,000
keeping in touch calls made to 400 tenants during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Financial Support
Our Financial Inclusion Officer secured an additional £72,012 per year in ongoing benefit entitlements for our tenants.



Plans for 2020-21

New faces

Over the coming months, we will be welcoming new members of the team to our Housing Management and Property Services.

We have our new Tenant Involvement & Communications Officer, Carrie Croll, who started in August. Carrie has a background in customer service and promoting community projects. Carrie also has an extensive background working in the police and probation services. She is experienced at taking feedback from customers and really getting to the heart of the issue. She isn't afraid to challenge the status quo and that's exactly what we are looking for from someone whose role is to champion the tenant voice and to obtain constructive feedback.

We have also introduced a new post of Supported Living Partnership Assistant. This role will provide support to our Supported Living Partnership Officer in managing tenancy related issues in our Supported Living services. We are pleased to announce the appointment of Charlie Lowden as our new Supported Living Partnership Assistant. Charlie comes to us from a position as a Support Worker for the Royal Mencap Society and has a wealth of experience supporting residents with learning disabilities.

New buildings

We are also very excited to announce that in early September 2021 we completed on two acquisitions that we have been working on. We have since taken ownership of a block of ten flats in the Seven Dials area of Brighton which are specially adapted for people with a physical disability. We have also taken on an eight property block near Preston Park for younger residents being supported to move on into permanent settled accommodation. We are excited to expand our property portfolio and to support the residents who we are taking on from the previous landlord.

We are also in the very initial stages of scoping out feasibility, planning and design for a 12 unit development in central Brighton. We hope to build these units of accommodation with a view to providing both a Wellbeing Centre on the ground floor and 12 units of accommodation for people leaving acute mental health hospital settings.



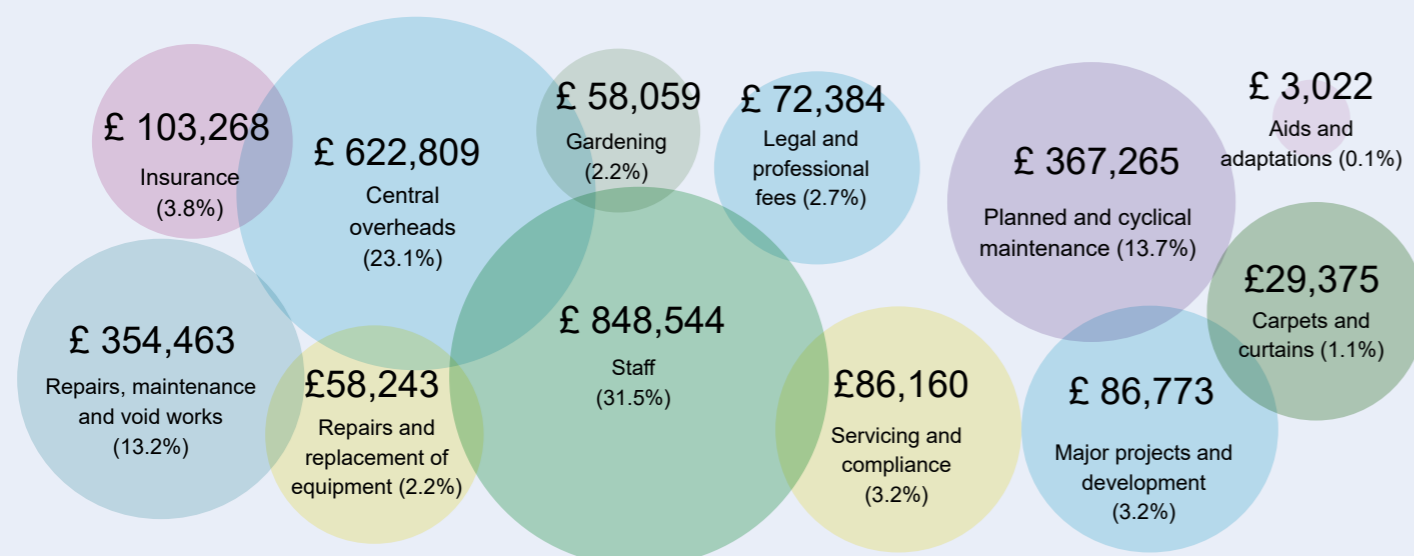
Value for Money how we spend our housing-related income

Value for Money, for us, does not mean simply doing things at the lowest cost. It is demonstrating how we deliver our vision and values by providing services at quality standards in the most cost efficient and effective way.

Our Housing Division is the second largest area of spending for Southdown with an annual budget of around £2.7 million in 2020/21.

We continually review the money we spend on our housing and property activities and aim to achieve year-on-year improvements, both in terms of quality and costs.

How every £1 of our housing-related income is spent:



Focus on Financial Inclusion

Our Housing Division has its own dedicated Financial Inclusion Officer who is committed to providing advice around benefits and financial and digital inclusion for our tenants.

Our Financial Inclusion Officer, Simon Egan-Payne (pictured right), helped 92 tenants in the 12 months to April 2021, securing £15, 243 in backdated benefit payments.

Simon also secured an additional combined total of £1,306 in weekly benefits, and £342 in monthly benefits, for tenants whom he has helped. This amounts to an additional income for our tenants of £72,015 per year.

If you know that your financial circumstances are likely to change (e.g. you are expecting to start or finish a job, you are going to become a student, you are expecting a baby etc) or if your financial circumstances have already changed, we'd encourage you to speak to our Financial Inclusion Officer at the earliest possible moment.

Not only can he help with crisis interventions like trying to secure backdated benefit payments, he can also check you are on the right benefits, getting everything you are entitled to and preventing debts and issues from piling up in the first place.

Simon will work hard to advocate for you and all we ask is that you engage with him when he tries to make contact and provide him with the supporting documents he needs quickly.



Pictured: Simon Egan-Payne, Financial Inclusion Officer for Southdown's tenants.

Case Study

A tenant's Housing Benefit had been reduced when she began her studies. This was because the Housing Benefit claim was linked to her Universal Credit (UC) account.

After much investigation by our Financial Inclusion Officer, it was ascertained that the incorrect student income rules had been applied to her UC account.

This was successfully argued and the correct rules applied resulting in a backpayment of £549.20 paid to the tenant. In addition, the tenant had re-implementation of her full Universal Credit and Housing Benefit payments.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding your finances and welfare benefits please contact Simon at simon.egan-payne@southdown.org or call 07825 319 133.

Focus on Complaints

Feedback from our tenants is crucial to helping us shape, develop and improve the services we provide. We recognise complaints as learning opportunities and investigate the feedback we receive in an open-minded, objective way.

We recently undertook a review of all the complaints we received in the 12 months up to April 2021 which we upheld or partially upheld.

A total of five complaints were reviewed and, whilst it is hard to determine themes from such low numbers, there were a couple of key things which we'd like to highlight:

- Sometimes, we are failing to give complainants in our Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) cases, sufficient and frequent enough updates on their case and the actions we intend to take. We have found that some staff, whilst responding to complainants, have still failed to answer pertinent questions about legal processes and next steps. These specific issues have been picked up with the staff involved. In addition, we have booked the team onto refresher training on ASB case management and training on ASB cases where either the complainant or perpetrator, or both, have mental health problems, as these cases need dealing with particularly sensitively. We've also had a session of legal updates and training from our solicitors. We hope that providing this additional training will enable our team to more confidently manage their cases and articulate to complainants what the next steps will be.
- There are also lessons to be learnt for us in taking a more pro-active approach. Rather than waiting for tenants to explicitly ask us for something, we could be doing more to provide them with the information or resources they need when we recognise from our discussions with them that assistance is required.

Complaints overview

- In 2020/21 we received eight complaints.
- All eight received response letters within our published timescales.
- Three were upheld and three were partially upheld.
- We made a goodwill payment to one of the complainants as we felt this was a fair resolution to the matter being complained about and helped to cover some of the expenses that were partially incurred by our failings.

- In addition, because our staff are having challenging conversations we need to do more to empower them to face difficult conversations. Assertiveness and empowerment are key themes we are working on with our Housing Officers.

As well as reviewing our complaints annually, we have also streamlined our internal complaints process, reducing it from a three stage process to two stages. This means that where tenants remain unhappy with the outcome of their complaint they are able to proceed to the Housing Ombudsman more quickly. We have also made other small adjustments to ensure that we comply with the Housing Ombudsman's new Complaint Handling Code.

We want all tenants to feel able to make a complaint if they are unhappy about the way we have handled something and to feel confident that they can do so without fear of discrimination. We will make reasonable adjustments wherever needed to help facilitate a tenant's access to the complaints procedure, including liaising with advocates, translators and interpreters to ensure the tenant's views are clearly understood.

As part of the changes we've made, we will now be undertaking an annual review of our complaints. This will involve a review of the complaints policy and procedure to ensure it has been updated to incorporate anything new that the Ombudsman requires or anything we have learnt from previous complaints handling. We will also look through all of the complaints received to identify common themes and lay to inform our plan of action for improvement.

Focus on Planned Maintenance

2020/21 was an incredibly difficult year for our Planned Maintenance because the fluctuating covid case numbers and changing Government restrictions made it impossible to properly plan the works we wanted to do.

Each year there are kitchens and bathrooms we want to modernise but we had to think hard about if and when was the right time to do those works because we didn't want to risk pulling out essential amenities such as the toilet or bath and then find that the tenant had to self-isolate in the middle of the works.

We did extra consultation with tenants this year to find out which people who were earmarked for a new kitchen and/or bathroom would feel comfortable with contractors in their home and then worked the plan around their wishes.

We also had to put lots of internal decoration works on hold during the winter peak in covid numbers and then had a big push in February and March to get lots of those works done all together in time for the end of the financial year.

In addition, we swapped out some planned works scheduled for 2020/21 in higher risk services for works we had planned to undertake in 2021/22 at lower risk services and vice versa in order to protect our tenants.

A big thank you to our Planned Maintenance Manager, Laura Williams (pictured above), and Property Services Manager, Paul Sharpington, for juggling lots of conflicting priorities to get essential works done.



Pictured: Laura Williams, Planned Maintenance Manager at Southdown.

Despite the challenges of lockdowns and the Covid-19 pandemic, planned maintenance we undertook in 2020-21 included:

- External decorations to four of our Learning Disability Services at Wish Road, Milchester House, Alinora Crescent and 4 Victoria Road.
- Major work replacing the roof at Billam House and East Park Road.
- Internal decorations work to 24a Victoria Road, 37 London Road, East Park Road and Islington House.

Focus on Compliance

We had to make some tough decisions around compliance in view of the pandemic and weigh up the usual risks of non-compliance with the new (and often uncertain) risks posed by covid to some of our more vulnerable residents.

We took the decision not to undertake PAT testing and thermostatic mixing valve servicing in our Learning Disability Services until April 2021 because we felt that the additional risk of having contractors into our services was too high when weighed against the risk of not doing these usual inspections.

The support teams were given strict instructions around carrying out visual inspections of the electrical cables on portable electrical equipment and around reporting anything they had concerns about. Likewise, staff are well aware of reporting any concerning water temperatures to our Compliance Manager. We felt that these measures gave us sufficient assurance around possible risk.

We were able to remain 100% compliance on our landlord gas safety checks most months and any months where 100% compliance was not achieved, this was down to either self-isolation or shielding of the resident.

Any gas checks which were non-compliant by the anniversary date had a visit booked for as soon as possible after that ended.

In November 2020, our external auditors Mazar's came in to review our Compliance and undertook a Landlord Health & Safety audit. We are really pleased to report that the audit gave a great level of assurance about our compliance management, with only a couple of house-keeping recommendations being made and where the improvements were immediately actioned.



Compliance Performance as of March 2021

- Gas compliance - 100%
- Fire risk assessments - 100%
- Fire alarm servicing - 100%
- Fire equipment servicing - 100%
- AOV's - 100%
- Legionella RA's domestic - 100%
- TMV servicing - 14.6%
- Asbestos visual inspections - 100%
- Mobility equipment LOLER - 100%
- Passenger lift LOLER - 100%
- PAT testing - 94.62%
- Electric installation condition reports - 100%
- Energy performance certificates - 100%
- Air conditioning servicing - 100%
- Vehicles (MOT's) - 100%
- Vehicles (LOLER) - 100%

Update on Services

Discharge to Assess pilot

Since October 2020 we have been pleased to be involved in a pilot scheme in partnership with Brighton & Hove City Council and Venture People, providing accommodation and intensive daily support to clients with mental health needs coming out of in-patient settings. The aims of the project are to help support people out of hospital settings, to make plans for their ongoing care and support and to help them back into safe, stable accommodation afterwards. Each stay is intended to be short-term, with placements lasting 6 weeks or so. Our support team have done a fabulous job providing daily support to people in real need. So far we have successfully housed and supported 11 clients through this service and hope to expand the service pending further investment and commitment from Brighton & Hove City Council.



Linked Support in West Sussex

Unfortunately, at the end of March 2021, the West Sussex Homelessness Prevention Service was decommissioned which meant the loss of directly linked support for many of our West Sussex tenants. It was also the catalyst for L&Q, one of the Head Landlords that we work with, to take back management of 34 units of accommodation where Southdown had previously provided both the Housing Management service and the support. We worked in conjunction with our support teams to try and refer tenants to other support services where eligible. However, unfortunately our Housing Officers and Housing Assistants are now trying to maintain an element of support to lots of tenants in need, alongside undertaking their normal housing management duties.



RISE partnership

In December 2020, we entered into a partnership once more with RISE, a local Domestic Abuse charity, to provide two units of accommodation for their LGBTQ Refuge Project. This project specifically aims to provide accommodation and support to people from the LGBTQ community suffering from domestic abuse. The project is funded until late September 2021. Since December 2020, we have housed four people in our designated RISE units.



Update on Tenant Matters

Evacuation Needs Work

Throughout the summer of 2020 our Housing Officers and Housing Assistants followed up with residents who felt that they might have some difficulties evacuating in the event of a fire. Person Centred Fire Risk Assessments were undertaken with all tenants who advised us that they may have difficulty evacuating in an emergency. We now hold this information centrally and can make it available to the fire brigade instantly in an emergency.

Our Housing Officers and Housing Assistant have now incorporated an evacuation needs question into their annual tenant visit so we will ensure we review all of our tenants' evacuation needs annually going forward. **If your needs have changed in the meantime though, please do contact your Housing Officer as soon as possible so that we can arrange to undertake a Person Centred Fire Risk Assessment with you.**

Digital Transformation Project

The past 12 months have forced us to look at our processes and how we can support tenants better through online working. We've made many of our daily processes more automated. Recently we have moved our problematic gas access process into a workflow which has freed up time for both our Property Services and Housing Management teams. We've also automated and streamlined our voids process. This means staff have more time to focus on giving tenants a better level of customer service. We are also in the process of automating other compliance processes.

As a whole organisation, Southdown is in the beginning stages of a Digital Transformation Project and the Housing Division is excited to see how new technologies can help us to further simplify and streamline our processes. This will mean we have more time to focus on improvements to other services which will most benefit our tenants.

Electrical Contract

We will be putting a tender out in early 2022 to seek an Electrical Contractor. Once the tender process is closed we will be scoring applications from contractors who submitted a tender. The successful contractor will be able to evidence an understanding of our complex and vulnerable client base and show how they will both tailor their services to meet those needs and prove that they will meet the contract in a cost effective way for Southdown.

First-time fix

We are starting to require first-time fix information from our two main contractors, Hedley Visick and CDS. We will be monitoring how many jobs are completed on the first day of attendance as we want to ensure that as many jobs as possible are completed quickly and effectively for residents. This will require the contractor to accurately diagnose the problem prior to the visit and to send operatives equipped with everything they need to fix the issue first time.

Fire & Building Safety Legislation

We continue to attend webinars and online training to keep ourselves up to date with the changing legislative landscape around fire and building safety. We anticipate that we will be required to audit all fire doors, including tenant's front doors and communal doors on an annual and quarterly cycle respectively although absolute clarity has not come from Government on this just yet. This is going to be new and time-intensive requirement for us and we will require cooperation from tenants to allow access to inspect their front doors. In addition, it is vital that tenants let us know immediately if the door closer on their front door becomes damaged or broken in any way. You can report this to us by email at: Property.services@southdown.org or call 01273 898 744.

How to contact us

We want to hear from you. Whether you would like to report a repair, make a complaint or provide feedback, please get in touch.



Reporting a repair:

To report a repair call our Property Services Team:

01273 898 744

An out of hours contact service is available for Southdown tenants when our main office is closed. If an emergency or urgent repair is needed overnight, at weekends or on bank holidays call our 24 hour cover service on: **01323 636 202.**



Tenants who are deaf or hard of hearing can also use the fax to contact this service on **01323 636 398.**

How to contact us:

Providing feedback or general enquiries:



01273 405 800



feedback@southdown.org

You can also write to us at:



**Southdown Housing Association
2 Bell Lane
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 1JU**

Share your feedback

We send out customer satisfaction surveys for every job and carry out random post inspection visits. Please take time to complete and return the surveys as it helps us to ensure our contractors are doing a good job. If there are any repairs or maintenance issues at your property, in addition to speaking to your Housing Officer, you can also email the Property Services direct at property.services@southdown.org

Southdown Housing Association

Registered Head Office

2 Bell Lane, Lewes
East Sussex, BN7 1JU

Phone: 01273 405 800

Email: info@southdown.org

www.southdown.org



@SouthdownHA



@SouthdownHA

Southdown is an exempt charity registered with the regulator of social housing (L1829).

Southdown is also a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 (20755R)