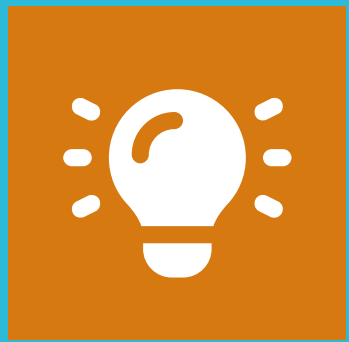




LIFE IN FOCUS 2025

Findings from Southern Housing's
annual socio-economic study

January 2026



“

Thank you to everyone that took the time to respond to the Life in Focus Survey, your feedback is invaluable. As an involved resident it's important to me that Southern Housing are looking at the wider context of resident wellbeing when designing services.

One of the key insights from these findings is the extent to which cost-of-living pressures and wider socio-economic challenges are shaping our everyday lives. These issues are influencing six key areas: neighbourhood and community, household finances, health and wellbeing, employment and education, digital inclusion, and satisfaction with public services. At the moment financial strain is widespread, with many households struggling to cover energy bills and essentials. Our younger residents, larger households, and those with disabilities are particularly impacted.

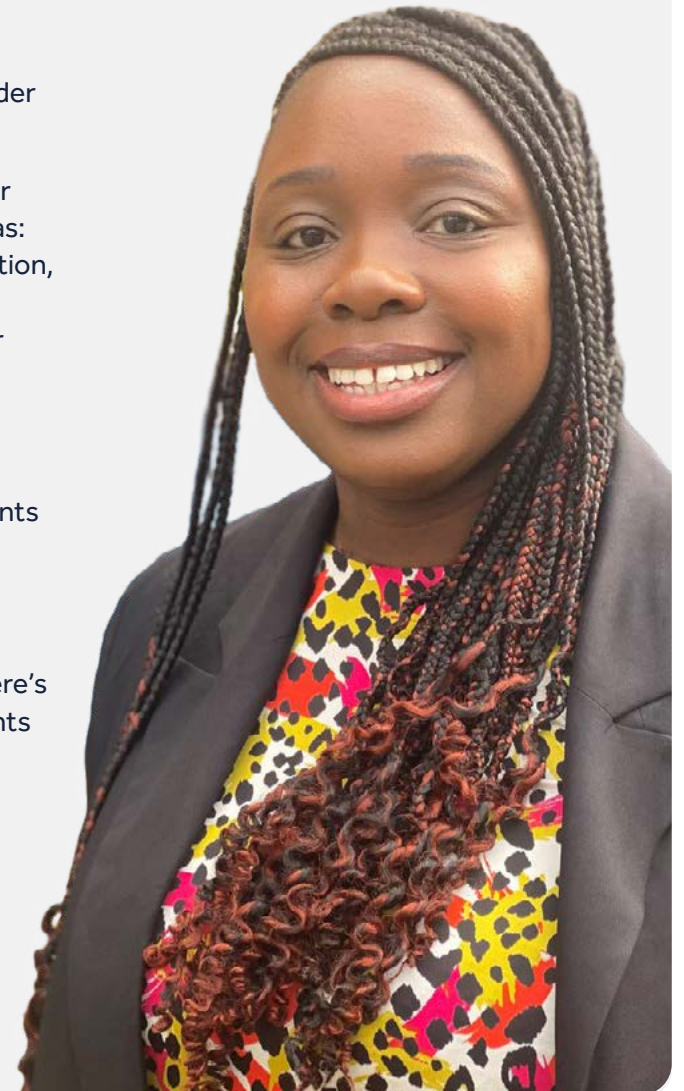
The second key point is that health and well-being emerge as a critical challenge. Only a minority of residents report good health, while loneliness and anxiety are markedly higher than national benchmarks. Life satisfaction and happiness lag significantly, with younger and middle-aged residents especially affected.

From a resident perspective, these findings highlight the need for a locally driven, person-centred service model that prioritises practical financial support (especially around energy costs), and accessible health resources. While many of these challenges extend beyond Southern Housing, there's still a role to play. Strengthening community connections through targeted projects, inclusive events and clear communications about available services are vital. Doing so can help reduce loneliness, improve financial confidence, empower residents, and enhance wellbeing across our communities.

”

Charlaine Nkum

Co-Chair of Resident Strategy Group



SNAPSHOT OF OUR FINDINGS

NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

61%

of residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live

54%

of residents feeling safe in public spaces and pathways

LONELINESS

47%

of residents feel lonely often, always or sometimes

GENERAL HEALTH

25%

of residents report their health being very good or good

57%

consider themselves to have a disability

FEELING ANXIOUS

38%

of residents rated their level of anxiety as high

HOUSEHOLD FINANCES

18%

of residents feel financially better off compared to last year

8%

feels it's easy to pay energy bills

DIGITAL INCLUSION

83%

of digital residents use the Internet daily

78%

feel confident navigating online

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

34%

in employment

25%

retired

37%

inactive (long-term sick and disabled, student, carers and looking after the home)

INTRODUCTION

At Southern Housing, our purpose is to provide secure and affordable homes, creating communities where everyone has a safe home in a place where they're proud to live.



We're committed to listening to residents, acting on their views, investing in safe and sustainable homes, and supporting thriving neighbourhoods, especially during today's social, environmental and economic challenges.

In the context of the rising cost of living, it's more important than ever for us to understand our residents' experiences. We're keen to know how residents are managing in their homes and communities, how residents feel about their health and wellbeing, their financial hardship, and any other challenges or pressures affecting their lives.



PURPOSE OF THIS SURVEY

We'd like to thank all residents who took part in the first **Life in Focus Survey**, launched in May 2025. Nearly 1,700 residents shared feedback, giving us invaluable insight that helps us shape our services and deploy resources so we can better support residents' wellbeing.

This annual study looks beyond day-to-day service performance and explores the wider factors that affect residents' quality of life, such as financial stability, health, wellbeing and community connections. These findings will help us improve services and support, with future surveys planned each May. Annual feedback will allow us to track changes over time and carry out further research when needed.



OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The insights from the survey show the significant impact that cost of living pressures and other socio-economic challenges are having on residents. While these pressures are felt nationally, they can be even more pronounced within Southern Housing communities, where more residents may be facing vulnerability.

Financial stress can influence how services are experienced and perceived, particularly when it affects overall wellbeing. This underlines the importance of continuing to improve service quality and providing support that helps ease these pressures.

OUR RESPONSE

There are many ways Southern Housing can positively influence residents' wellbeing. These include improving the quality of homes and neighbourhoods, tackling anti-social behaviour, and offering support around financial inclusion, tenancy sustainment and digital access.

Our commitment to strong resident engagement, meaningful social impact programmes, and consistently high-quality service, built on trust and respect, remains central to the difference we aim to make every day.



NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

61% of residents are satisfied with their local area, which falls below the ONS national average of 78%¹.

Feelings of belonging are closer to the national average, with 53% of residents reporting a sense of connection to their neighbourhood.

However, perceptions of safety in public spaces are notably lower than the national average, with only 54% of residents feeling safe (59% of men and 53% of women).

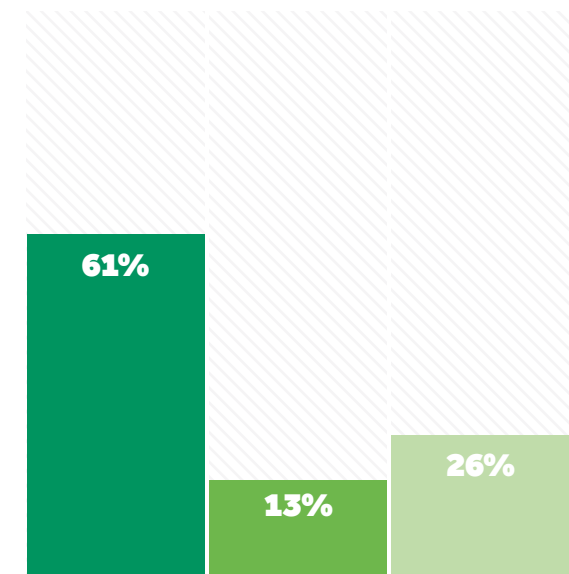
Residents who report a stronger sense of neighbourhood and community connection tends to be older, retired, without disabilities, or from non-white ethnic backgrounds. Residents who actively engaged in wellbeing activities such as exercise and social events also felt a stronger sense of belonging.

In contrast, younger, working-age residents, those with disabilities or long-term health conditions, and couples with children are generally less satisfied with their local area, report a weaker sense of community, and are less likely to feel safe in public spaces.



1. ONS UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboards UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard - Office for National Statistics

OVERALL, HOW SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR LOCAL AREA AS A PLACE TO LIVE?



- Satisfied
- Neither
- Dissatisfied

Number of responses: **1,697**

This question is also included in our Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) Survey. The results shown here relate to the Life on Focus survey only.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING?



53%

FEEL THEY BELONG IN THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD

54%

FEEL SAFE IN PUBLIC SPACES



WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW AND NEXT

We've restructured our frontline housing teams to give more localised support. This means we've area-based housing teams instead of individual named Housing Officers. So, we've a team of Housing Officers on hand to support all requests.

We also have specialist support including dedicated teams ready to help with income support, tenancy sustainment and anti-social behaviour (ASB). ASB reporting is also easier with new online tools, including a noise app.

The Social Impact Team involved 3,694 residents and 141 volunteers in community projects in 2024-25, with thousands using our 38 community venues. As we look further forward into 2026-27, they will continue working with us to deliver resident-led community initiatives.

A new **Making Positive Change** programme began with site visits and action plans to improve satisfaction. Cleaning services in the Isle of Wight and North and South London have been brought in-house, and East Sussex now has dedicated grounds teams based on resident feedback.

HOUSEHOLD FINANCES

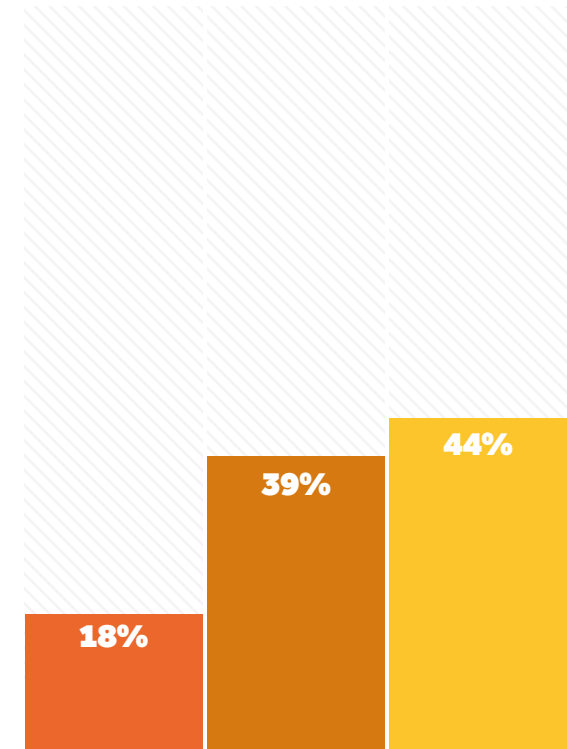
Financial strain is common among residents. Only 18% feel better off than last year, while 44% feel worse off. 78% do not expect to save in the next year.

In addition, 58% report struggling with energy bills, significantly higher than the national average (36%)², and 66% only have enough money for essentials or run out of money by the end of the week/month. 81% of our residents have taken actions to manage their finances such as reducing social and leisure activities, using their savings or going without heating.

Vulnerable groups include single parents, couples with children, people with disabilities or long-term health conditions, and those out of work. Younger adults (under 44) and larger households are also more likely to face financial strain, such as relying on credit or food banks.



HOW MUCH BETTER OR WORSE OFF DO YOU FEEL COMPARED WITH 12 MONTHS AGO?



- Better
- About the same
- Worse

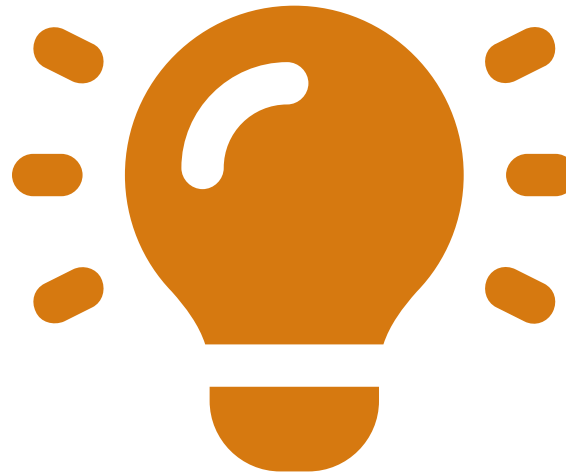
Number of responses: **1,653**

2. ONS Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain, March 2025
Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain - Office for National Statistics

DO YOU THINK YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SAVE ANY MONEY IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?



HOW EASY OR DIFFICULT IS IT TO AFFORD YOUR ENERGY BILLS?



- Easy **8%**
 - Neither **34%**
 - Difficult **58%**
- Number of responses: **1,599**

While residents aged 65+ are less likely to experience these issues, they are more reliant on savings to meet living costs than younger residents, showing a different type of financial pressure.

WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW AND NEXT

In 2024-25, our Financial Support Team worked with nearly 5,000 residents in urgent financial need and helped over 3,300 people manage the rising cost of living. Their work brought in €6.18 million in extra income, benefits and savings, and they distributed €628,000 in hardship funds alongside more than a thousand fuel and food vouchers.

Thanks to this support, 88% of households were still managing stable budgets six months later, and over 1,000 residents were able to access healthier, affordable food.

In 2024-25, our Social Value team supported residents to get on their feet again financially with 401 residents secured jobs and training opportunities, many through partnership with our supply-chain business partners.

As we look further forward into 2026-27, our teams will continue offering food support through food banks, pantries, community fridges and meal programmes, alongside financial guidance, debt advice and wellbeing support.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment levels are below national averages: only 34% are in work compared with 42% of social renters nationally. A quarter are retired (25% vs 27% nationally), while 37% are economically inactive compared with 26% nationally, including 26% inactive due to long-term illness or disability.

Among those employed, residents aged 55-64 make up 44% of the workforce, the same as those aged 18-44, indicating an ageing workforce influenced by longer working lives and financial pressures.

Health barriers are also notable: 28% of employed residents report a disability, 18% report poor health, and 42% describe their health as fair. This mirrors national trends of rising long-term health conditions among working-age people, with many continuing to work despite ongoing health issues.



34%

OF PEOPLE ARE IN EMPLOYMENT

25%

OF PEOPLE ARE RETIRED



WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW AND NEXT



We're committed to helping our community thrive, working in partnership with our sister charity, Fresh Visions, to make this possible. Fresh Visions supports people to gain confidence, motivation and skills so they can achieve their potential and build brighter futures. You can find out more about their work on their website.

Recently, the Fresh Visions team in Hastings held a celebration event to mark the completion of the latest Build Yourself programme. Funded by Southern Housing through our Fresh Visions charity, the project supports 18–28 year olds who may be facing difficult circumstances or low self-esteem, helping them develop confidence, gain practical skills and take steps towards employment.

The six-week Build Yourself programme brings young people together to work in teams on makeover projects for community buildings. Guided by trained professionals, participants learn painting, decorating and DIY skills and gain a CSCS card (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) to support their move into work.

You can find out more on our [Fresh Visions site](#).

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Just 25% of residents report good health, compared to 65% nationally³, and 57% consider themselves disabled, compared to 24% nationally⁴.

Our residents are facing deep wellbeing challenges: 47% feel lonely often, always or some of the time, compared to 34% nationally³, and 38% report high anxiety, compared to 22% nationally⁵.

30% rated their life satisfaction as low (vs 5% nationally⁵) and 34% reported low happiness on the previous day (vs 8% nationally⁵).

Younger and middle-aged residents, especially those under 34, show the lowest well-being, with lower life satisfaction, happiness, and trust, and higher anxiety and loneliness.

Single parents and unemployed people also report low control, purpose, and satisfaction, alongside greater loneliness and anxiety.

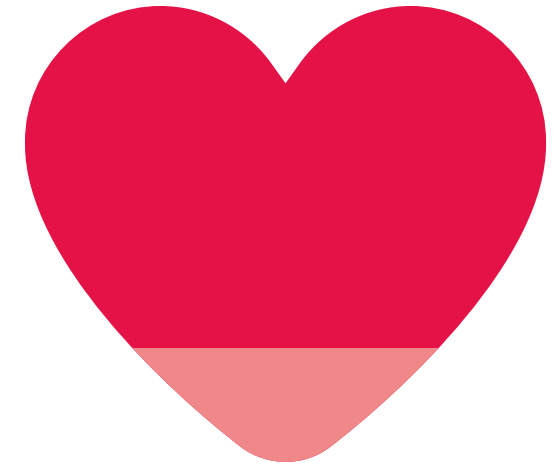
By contrast, retired adults aged 65+ without disabilities are among the least vulnerable, feeling happier, more in control, and less anxious or lonely. Couples without children also report higher satisfaction, greater sense of meaning, and lower loneliness.

3. ONS Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain, February 2025
Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain - Office for National Statistics

4. HoC UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences, 2022/23
UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences - House of Commons Library

5. ONS UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboards, March 2025
UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard - Office for National Statistics

HOW IS YOUR HEALTH IN GENERAL?



25%

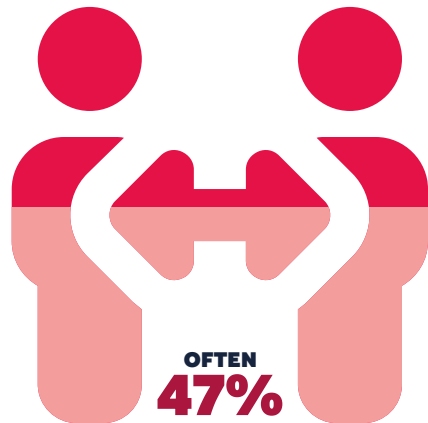
HAVE GOOD HEALTH

● Good	25%	Number of responses: 1,539
● Fair	36%	
● Bad	39%	

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO HAVE A DISABILITY?



HOW OFTEN DO YOU FEEL LONELY?



FEELING ANXIOUS



WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW AND NEXT

In 2024–25, our Community Development Team helped 1,057 residents access healthier, affordable food.

Our Fresh Visions charity supported Southern Housing residents, reaching nearly 2,000 people, survivors of domestic abuse, isolated older residents and vulnerable young people, providing safety, connection and personal development opportunities.

Next year, the charity will continue delivering projects that reduce isolation, build skills and confidence, and provide trauma support.

In 2025, we developed a report to identify which residents we hadn't heard from in a long time. This has enabled proactive outreach to check in on their wellbeing and ensure their home is safe, secure, and meeting their needs.

Our residents have told us language matters, so it's important we use compassionate and supportive wording when asking about any individual support or adjustment needs. Over 300 residents took part in our Vulnerability Language survey, followed by a workshop with our involved residents. Their feedback has helped us develop new guidance and training for our colleagues. We've also worked with residents to develop a standard question that we'll soon ask everyone when they request a service. The aim is to normalise these conversations and help reduce any stigma.

DIGITAL INCLUSION

Most of our digital residents go online every day, but people’s confidence and access still vary depending on age, work and digital skills.

Most residents who use our online services (83%) say they go online daily. A smaller group use it weekly (13%), and only a few go online less often (3%). Across the UK, daily Internet use is slightly higher at 91%⁶.

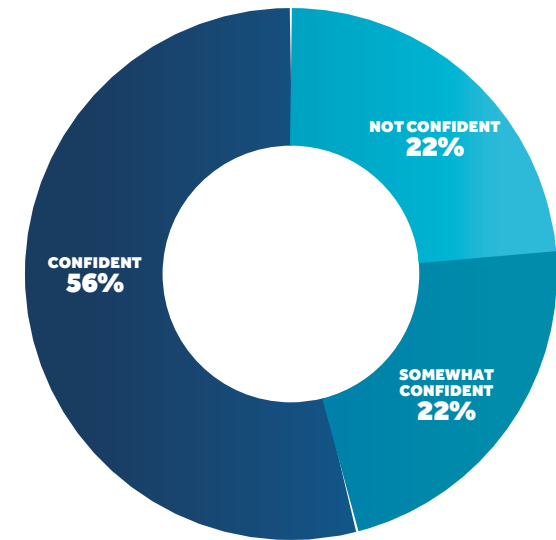
Around 78% of our digital residents feel confident navigating the Internet, while 22% say they don’t feel very confident.

Digital exclusion persists among older and disabled residents, who face barriers such as cost, lack of skills, and privacy concerns.

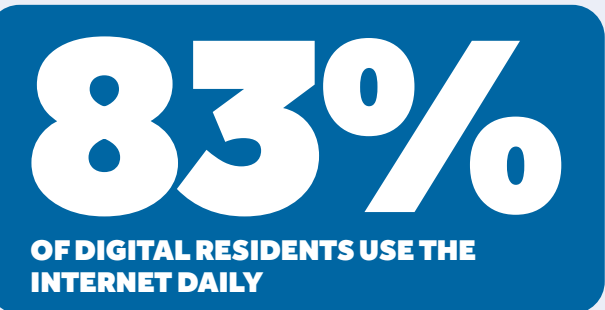


6. Ofcom’s 2023 Technology Tracker
Technology Tracker 2023
Data Tables

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU IN USING THE INTERNET?



Number of responses: 1,480





WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW AND NEXT

Since February 2025, the Communications Team has delivered major improvements to the Southern Housing website, including clearer content, a new Resident Rights section, better search and complaints visibility, and simpler contact details.

These updates led to strong results: page views rose by 35%, engaged users increased from 2% to 16%, and mobile use grew to 65%. Residents also tell us the site is now easier to use and helps them find what they need.

By 2026, the Communications Team will define the website's role in the wider communications strategy, gather more resident feedback on key areas, and launch a new tool to collect ongoing user experience insight

In 2024–25, Southern Housing also delivered significant improvements in digital access. This included coordinating 60,000 fibre broadband installations, generating £740k in income and social value, funding digital skills and digital inclusion work, and enabling around 2,800 free 12-month internet connections.

Additionally, we've supported 336 residents with digital access, recycled 200 laptops for those without devices, and secured affordable internet connections for 221 households.

METHODOLOGY

The Life in Focus 2025 survey was first conducted in 2025, from 22 May to 30 June. It was sent by email to around 18,000 residents living in rented and shared ownership homes. The contacts were selected at random and checked to make sure they met GDPR requirements.

Online surveys often encourage more open and honest feedback, especially on sensitive topics like finances and well-being. The survey included 29 questions, and it was timed to take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Residents who took part were given the chance to enter into a prize draw to win a £50 voucher.

Approximately 1,700 residents took part, giving us a 9.5% response rate. This provides a reliable picture of residents' views, with a margin of error of 2.4% at a 95% confidence level. We also carried out statistical testing to ensure that only significant and meaningful findings were reported.



LIFE IN FOCUS SURVEY 2025



9.5%

RESPONSE RATE 1,700 RESPONSES



FOR ANY ENQUIRIES, PLEASE CONTACT:

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