



Regional strategy for the south east

2024 - 2027

silva

PART OF THE ABRI GROUP

Abri

Creating communities,
empowering lives



1.

Context (external and internal analysis)

The south east region is the pathfinder for Abri's new regional approach to the delivery of services, being the first of Abri's three regions to be established. As the pathfinder region, the south east will help determine the optimum design for the other two regions. Following the addition of Silva Homes to the Abri Group, the region comprises the group's housing stock in Berkshire, Oxfordshire, South Buckinghamshire, Surrey and parts of Hampshire.

In total, the group's stock in the south east region comprises 13,939 homes, and 17,018 customers of which 82% are rental customers and 18% are homeowners (shared owners and long leaseholders). Including the number of people known to live in our homes, the south east has a total of 28,056 customers, although more will benefit from its wider community offer.

While the south east region overall has the lowest deprivation and is the most affluent compared with Abri's other regions, it does feature some pockets of extreme deprivation. It is one of the most unequal income areas in England.

In 2024, Abri had already established four community investment zones to address deprivation in the region: Great Hollands and Priestwood in Bracknell; Longwood Park; and Clewer and Dedworth in Windsor.

The south east is also home to Abri's largest ever potential regeneration project at Sawyers Close in Windsor, and has the biggest share of Abri's current development pipeline at 2,942 homes up to 2030.

In terms of customer profile, as at February 2024, 72% of customers are general needs, 12% leaseholder, 7% supported/independent living, 6% shared ownership, and 3% other. The south east has more customers from a minority ethnic background and customers with the longest tenancy length.

Critically, the south east has the lowest rental customer satisfaction scores (60% for Abri customers living in and around this area, and 68% for Silva customers compared with c.82% for the south west and c.76% for the south). This is a pattern that is seen in other housing associations (that satisfaction gets lower the closer to London) and is not exclusive to Abri. The key drivers to this appear to be repairs (quality, time taken and outstanding works), communication, condition of communal areas and grounds maintenance.

Abri has established a south east regional board with a diverse range of skills and experience. The regional board includes three residents of Abri/Silva that bring lived experience and the voice of the customer into Abri's governance.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

In formulating a strategy for the south east, consideration has been given to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that Abri faces in the region. These may be summarised as follows.

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional Model: empowered and accountable teams close to customers• Critical mass• Strengthened work in progress• Customer insight and engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lower customer satisfaction• Recruitment and retention of staff• Silva Integration circa Oct 24• Organisation redesign |
| OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Customer dividend• Regional strategy• Partnerships with local authorities• New relationship with press threats | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consumer regulation• Housing Ombudsman• Negative media coverage |

As with any customer-facing organisation, people are the biggest asset, and this is true of Abri’s colleagues in the south east. Recruitment and retention in the south east has posed a particular challenge. Work is necessary to understand and address the root causes of this so that the region has a workforce that is sufficient to meet the needs of customers across the region and can deliver a consistently high standard of service.

There is an important piece of cultural work that needs to be done, given that the south east is the only Abri region where colleagues are being

brought together from two organisations. There is also a need to complete systems integration which means that working practices will not be as good as they could be in the short term. The speed and success of integration will be a factor in how quickly Abri can realise the benefits of the regional model the south east.

There is an opportunity to look at the policies and processes of both Abri and Silva and applying the best of both. These can then be replicated across the Abri group which will improve the strength of our relationships with customers as an outcome.





2.

Summary of overall strategy

This strategy covers the three-year period from 2024 to 2027. It will be refreshed early in 2025, once Abri's new corporate strategy is agreed, to ensure continued alignment.

As a regional strategy, it focuses on those things that are under the regional board's direct control (e.g. housing and customer services) and indirect control (e.g. long-term group investment plans, especially development and strategic asset management) but without seeking to duplicate or add unnecessarily to governance arrangements or slow down group decision-making.

Given the above strategic position assessment, the regional board is clear that its focus in the early years of the strategy should be on what is most important to customers, namely an effective repairs and maintenance service, support during the cost of living crisis, strong communication, community cohesion and the provision of visible, accessible and empowered housing teams who know their customers well and have the time to ensure that their day-to-day needs are being met. This approach aligns with the group's housing services strategy which may be characterised as 'brilliant basics'.

Accordingly, the south east region will take the lead on delivery of two of Abri's corporate priorities:

- › **Get really good at customer service**
- › **Create thriving communities**

The south east regional pathfinder model offers a unique opportunity to do things differently in pursuit of the brilliant basics, with a particular focus on freeing up housing and community teams to offer a more proactive service that anticipates rather than simply reacts to customer issues and concerns.

Underpinning this strategy will be a relentless focus on learning from service failure by developing deep insights into the root cause of customers complaints and ensuring that this is reflected in the regional operating model to prevent reoccurrence.

3.

Customer and community objectives

The overarching customer and community objectives in the south east region are to:

1. Develop deep insight into the needs and priorities of customers in the south east region
2. Target reinvestment of efficiency savings (the 'customer dividend') on a programme of service improvements based on priorities identified through customer consultation
3. Ensure that regional customer needs and priorities are understood by and inform providers of customer services that are managed centrally but delivered in the region, and central services that support the region.
4. Improve customer satisfaction and close the gap with Abri's other regions.

In terms of outcome measures, Abri has committed to:

- achieve top quartile satisfaction with our peers by April 2024 (all landlords of 30,000+ homes in London, SE and SW)
- achieve top decile satisfaction with our peers by April 2025
- achieve top 10 sector performance by April 2026. (all landlords of 30,000+ homes in London, SE and SW).





4.

Strategic priorities

To achieve these overarching customer and community objectives, the south east regional board has established four long-term strategic priorities:

1. Customer insight and service improvement
2. Targeted community investment and stakeholder engagement
3. Strong leadership and colleague engagement
4. Supporting and influencing group strategy, investment and performance

In the short-term (for 2024 or until integration is completed), a fifth priority will be added:

5. Integrating systems, policies and processes and a common new operating model and 'one team' culture.

A set of actions has been developed for each of these strategic priorities. The intention is to convert these high-level actions into an obligation tracker with clear responsibilities and timelines that the regional board will monitor on a quarterly basis.

Strategic priority one: Customer insight and service improvement

Led by the regional board, a strategic priority for the south east team is to develop deep insight into its customer profile, household composition, and customer needs and priorities based on lived experience. This will be achieved through data analysis and by establishing strong relationships between the regional team and customers across the region, including seldom-heard groups. Once analysis of existing data is completed, consideration will be given to completing any gaps in our understanding, for example through further research.

A new customer panel will be established to give the south east customers' a strong voice. Increasing the visibility and presence of frontline housing teams will also provide other opportunities for customers to have their say, and for Abri to listen and respond to their feedback.

The regional customer panel will:

- help Abri understand local variations in need and priority
- monitor progress on the delivery of key customer priorities and performance
- increase our understanding of the needs of our diverse communities, ensuring that our homes and services are inclusive.

The south east board will devise and oversee the delivery of a programme of service improvement, reinvesting efficiency savings on customer priorities highlighted in pre- and post-merger consultations and through the informal engagement opportunities highlighted above. This programme will focus on getting the basics (i.e. the things most important to customers) right first time.

Strategic priority two: Targeted community investment and stakeholder engagement

Building on its customer and community insights, the regional board will focus community investment and activities on the areas that need it most by understanding the specific needs of its communities and commissioning the necessary services and investment from the group's central community function.

The group's three-pillar community investment strategy of employment, wellbeing and community empowerment will form the basis of the region's approach but will be adjusted and prioritised in line with local need. It is known that cleanliness of communal areas and community safety are high on the south east customer's list of priorities but Abri's approach will go beyond 'clean and safe', with clear outcomes set and tracked for all community investment activity.

In support of this, the regional managing director will establish strong relationships with local authority leaders, cabinet members and ward councillors, MPs and other regional delivery partners, ensuring wherever possible that there is alignment with Abri's strategic priorities and those of our partners.

An important part of this regional stakeholder engagement will be to make visible the investments Abri is making into initiatives covering employment, wellbeing and community empowerment.

Strategic priority three: Strong leadership and colleague engagement

We know that colleague satisfaction and overall engagement is lower for Abri’s former Windsor colleagues and that the new region (based on the first Peakon staff survey) has lower Peakon scores than Abri as a whole.

68% of Silva colleagues completed the Peakon survey in November 2023 and achieved a Peakon score of 7.3 out of 10. Abri group scores 8.2. High engagement scores were around goal setting and autonomy with areas to focus on including strategy (‘Our organisation does a good job of communicating’), freedom of opinion (‘At work, my opinions count’) and workload (‘My manager encourages me to strike the right balance between my work and home life’).

Strategic priority four: Supporting and influencing group strategy, investment and performance

The south east region relies on centrally provided services to meet its commitments to customers, including development, asset management, planned and responsive repairs and maintenance, health and safety compliance, building and fire safety and sustainability.

A key role of the regional board and wider team is to ensure that central functions have a clear understanding of the needs and priorities of customers in the south east, acting as a conduit between local customers and the centre. The south east regional board chair will represent the needs and priorities of the region through a seat on Abri’s group board.

Additionally, the south east regional board will work collaboratively with the other regions once established so that collectively as a group there is parity with customer satisfaction and shared learnings can be replicated. The regional board will also review performance data from time to time and challenge central functions on their investment plans and service performance where appropriate to ensure the needs of the south east region’s customers are fully considered.

The region will support delivery of Abri’s corporate priorities, taking the lead on Abri’s customer and community corporate priorities for the south east region, and supporting the group’s activity on:

- › **Build more homes**
- › **Invest in our homes**
- › **Inclusive communities**
- › **Great place to work**
- › **Manage business to the highest standard**
- › **Environment and climate change**

The regional team will play an important role in working with development and strategic asset management teams to ensure that the local needs of customers and other stakeholders are reflected in Abri’s investment plans for the region. One area of focus will be the location and nature of new developments and stock acquisitions and disposals to ensure that these meet local needs and that they do not compromise the efficiency and effectiveness of local housing and community teams that should continue to be located close to the homes they serve.

The south east region has a pivotal role to play in the regeneration of Sawyer’s Close, in carrying out and supporting effective resident communications and engagement and working effectively with local stakeholders to maintain their support for the scheme.

For 2024 only, subject to completion of the full integration of Silva Homes to the Abri Group, a fifth strategic priority will be added as follows.

Strategic priority five: Integrating systems, policies and processes and a common new operating model and 'one team' culture.

The south east region has the unique challenge of being the first and only region that has to integrate colleagues from Abri and Silva and establish a new, consistent way of working or the pathfinder regional model.

A priority for the strategy is the successful integration of teams onto Abri's terms and conditions and the subsequent integration of teams.





Monitoring, evaluation & reporting to the Abri Group Board

The South East Regional Board is responsible for monitoring the performance of the south east region, including the delivery of the 'customer dividend'. Critically, the regional board will scrutinise the progress made with reducing the repairs backlog and quicker completion of repairs, the provision of an enhanced damp and mould service, achieving parity across the group with call answering, providing more housing partners and dedicated employment support and investing more in communities.

The priority metrics for the south east in terms of monitoring and reporting will those that reflect the commitments set out in the Abri and Silva final business case and which cover the following areas:

- repairs and voids
- damp and mould
- lettings
- contact centre
- complaints
- community engagement and investment.

The regional board will also review the Group Board Scorecard on a quarterly basis to gain knowledge and insight into the performance for the south east with a view to identifying further key performance indicators.

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