

Annual report to council tenants and leaseholders 2019

Welcome to the 2019 annual report for all council tenants and leaseholders. It has been another busy year, in which we have made real progress in our commitment to provide you with high quality housing services.

Inside you will find updates on how we are performing, how we use the money we get from rents and service charges, what we are doing well and where we need to improve. We are always looking at ways to improve your homes to ensure they are safe, warm and secure, while searching for opportunities to build more homes to meet the needs of the city.

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Improving our webpages

We have improved our housing webpages to a style similar to the 'gov.uk' website. The aim is to make the webpages more user-friendly to help you find the information you need quickly and easily.

You can now also apply for council parking spaces or a garage online, and check the availability of the nearest space or garage to you.

At Bartholomew House, we offer support sessions three days a week to help visitors use the council's website. Residents are finding this a useful service in helping them access council services at a time that suits them.

Our Seniors Housing team has run 'gadget drop-in sessions' across the city helping people become more comfortable using computers and smartphones. We are also installing free wi-fi to all communal lounges in our seniors schemes to help residents access the internet.

We promise to work hard to improve our housing service even further. We want to make it as easy as possible for you to find information or contact us. Here is a quick guide to some of the different ways to stay up-to-date and get in touch.

- brighton-hove.gov.uk/council-housing – you will find easy ways to request services and answers to common questions on our website. You can make rent payments at brighton-hove.gov.uk/pay-rent.
- For 24 hour access to your account information, sign up to the Housing Customer Online system at housingcos.brighton-hove.gov.uk
- www.facebook.com/BHHousing – follow our Facebook page for news, photos and information. You can also make enquiries by directly messaging us.
- twitter.com/bhhousing – Twitter is a direct way to connect with people, with updates on everything from what our teams are doing on your estates to events like the Citywide Conference. We retweet and share the news we think could be interesting to you. Ask us questions, get in touch, tell us about exciting things happening in your area and what you think of what we are doing.
- Sign up to read Homing In online at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/homing-in. You can help us reduce paper and postage costs and we'll email you when it's available on our website.

Customer service

The difference we've made

- We've answered your calls in an average of one minute. The Customer Service Team responded to 32,000 phone queries last year, 12,000 emails, and 9,000 reception enquiries.
- We have three staff taking phone calls, four working on reception and two answering emails every day.
- We've let 363 car parking spaces and garages in the last year.
- We've had 100% gas safety compliance record now for three years.

Looking ahead

- We're introducing a new housing computer system to improve the service we provide to you - this will include being able to access the system yourselves from 2020. We're still in the early stages of setting it up and will keep you updated through Homing In.
- We will be introducing a new, improved customer portal on our website so you can do more online.

"Excellent customer service –
going above and beyond."
Resident feedback

Supporting you The difference we've made

- Since the untidy garden project began in January, we've dealt with 122 (45%) of the 273 untidy garden cases.
- We've changed how we do mutual exchanges, with all applications now made online. During 2018/19, we helped 127 households move through a mutual exchange.
- We've helped 330 households through the discretionary decorating scheme and given out decorating packs to a further 80 residents to help them improve their homes.
- With our partners Mears and K&T Heating, we provided 11 new apprenticeship opportunities - five in administration and six in a trade.

"I've had a call from a tenant thanking
you for getting the gardeners to come
back and trim the hedges and grass
at Lindfield Court. She said to pass
on a big thank you for being so polite
and helpful!"
Resident feedback

Your home

We invested **£9.131m** for repairs and maintenance in the following areas:

- **£3.848m** on responsive repairs to complete 29,758 emergency and routine repairs in your homes - an average of 118 every working day. The repairs helpdesk answered an average of 301 calls every working day.

- **£2.034m** on empty properties, carrying out repairs needed to make 391 homes ready for new tenants.
- **£3.249m** on servicing and other repairs, including safety checks to over 9,900 gas boilers in tenants' homes.

The capital investment programme sets out how we spend on improving your homes. We invested **£21.815m** in the following areas:

- **£9.004m** on planned maintenance programmes, including replacing almost 400 kitchens, 100 bathrooms, 400 windows and 200 doors.
- **£7.564m** on major projects, such as external improvements to blocks of flats.
- **£5.247m** on mechanical and electrical programmes, including upgrading six lifts.

For residents with mobility issues, we have also:

- Helped 208 households by funding major adaptations to meet tenants' needs and to promote independent living and wellbeing.
- Improved access into and out of homes by installing ramps or regrading steps.
- Made it easier to get around indoors by, for example, installing level access showers and providing height adjustable work surfaces to make kitchens accessible.

We currently operate a 10 year partnering contract with Mears to deliver the following work to your homes:

- Responsive repairs and empty properties maintenance
- Planned maintenance and improvement programmes
- Major capital works projects

This contract ends on 31 March 2020 and we've been working with residents, councillors and staff to consider how best to deliver these services in the future. We have engaged residents by:

- Running workshops for tenants and leaseholders to share their views on what does and doesn't work well with the current service, and what we should change in the future.
- Carrying out over 1,000 door-to-door surveys of tenants and leaseholders across the city.
- Having an online survey available to all tenants and leaseholders.

Looking ahead

We have set up two new groups to work alongside the current resident engagement group to engage new volunteers, and a residents' group to help shape and design the new repairs and improvement service.

Fire safety [pull out box]

We continue to work closely with East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (ESFRS) on the safety of your homes.

Fire risk assessments for council tower blocks take place every year and fire precaution work is carried out whenever required. The assessments are published on our website.

We are monitoring all information on the Grenfell Tower fire and will continue to review our properties and practices in line with official government advice following the outcomes of

the investigation.

- We've fitted 10 new dry risers to blocks in Hove to improve access and fire fighting for the fire service.
- We're consulting with residents of eight blocks on installing sprinkler systems.
- We're carrying out work to remove some bins from around blocks and some internal storage areas
- We will be carrying out a high rise block exercise to help ESFRS train fire fighters in tackling fires on high rise blocks.

You can find more information on fire safety at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/fire-safety-in-flats.

Your carbon footprint

The difference we've made

Water saving project

- We've been working with Southern Water and 500 homes have benefitted from free water saving home advice visits.

SHINE project

The European Union (EU) funded Sustainable Housing Initiatives in Excluded Neighbourhoods (SHINE) project has continued, with benefits including:

- Over 140 residents received free home energy advice visits and been helped to switch energy tariffs, supported to claim winter home discounts or had small energy saving measures installed.
- 16 resident volunteers have been trained to become energy experts.
- Over 100 improvements have been made to heating systems through either weather compensators or installing smart thermostat controls.

For more information, visit www.shine-brighton-hove.eu.

Ty-foam project

- We are replacing Ty-foam - a very inefficient form of insulation used in the 1970s – in council homes. We've started in the Freshfield Road area and have completed 80 homes so far, with more in the pipeline this summer.

Looking ahead

- We have successfully bid for funds to deliver innovative solar photovoltaic installations on three housing blocks. The aim is to reduce resident fuel bills by using our roof spaces. Feasibility studies were carried out in spring 2019, with the first installations due to take place later in the year.

Involvement and empowerment

The difference we've made

- Our Housing Employment Support Team has worked with around 160 households. They've helped 88 people into employment, volunteering, learning or training, and helped tenants bring in a total of around £200,000 of additional income through benefit claims and appeals, charitable donations and grants.

- Resident Inspectors are continuing to feedback on empty property work before homes are let, as well as looking at agreed Estate Development Budget projects. The inspectors can now shadow Mears Project Managers viewing repairs and survey tenants about their experience of the repairs.

Looking ahead

- We are setting up a new community engagement team. This team will bring together engagement and involvement officers from both Housing and the Communities, Equality & Third Sector services. The new team will continue to support residents to engage with the council to improve the services they receive and the neighbourhoods they live in. Having a single team will allow residents to meet as a community, regardless of tenure, and communicate with any of the community engagement officers across a range of council services.

Building new homes

The difference we've made

- In order to increase the pace of new affordable homes, we've put additional resources into a council-wide housing supply team. This includes project managers, legal and planning support.
- Completed six new council-rented houses and two flats in Salehurst Close.
- Completed the conversion of ten houses for use as council-owned temporary accommodation in Stonehurst Court.
- Started development of 25 new homes at Tilbury Place and Oxford Street for council-owned temporary accommodation.
- Brought back 14 ex-council homes sold under the Right to Buy as part of our Home Purchase Policy.

Looking ahead

- Nine new council-rented flats and three houses in Kensington Street, in the North Laine area, are nearing completion. These will be let through the council's Homemove scheme.
- Starting work on 30 flats on the former housing office site in Selsfield Drive, Brighton, and 12 flats in Buckley Close, Hangleton.
- Increasing our housing through the Home Purchase Policy with a budget to purchase a further 28 homes this year.
- Increasing resources to progress our hidden homes and conversions programme – we're planning to deliver 19 new homes this year with further units in the pipeline.

Welfare reform

The difference we've made

- Introduced new training for over 100 staff to spot the signs where tenants are struggling with benefits.
- Increased specialist training for staff providing advice and support to tenants claiming Universal Credit.
- Launched the Better Start Guide at www.betterstartguide.co.uk to provide important information to people on the housing waiting list.

Looking ahead

- We will be offering tenants a new independent search engine, and improving our own online offer, to help tenants find a mutual exchange.

Leaseholders

The difference we've made

- We've listened to leaseholders and are now engaging with them at a much earlier stage when major work is proposed for their block.
- We're keeping leaseholders involved by providing regular updates and easy to access information through various stages of the project.

Looking ahead

- We're recruiting to a new post of Senior Leaseholder Liaison Officer, following feedback from the Leaseholder Action Group. They will be able to meet leaseholders to discuss concerns earlier and improve overall communication.
- Updating the Leaseholder Handbook.
- Undertaking a leaseholder satisfaction survey.

Seniors Housing

The difference we've made

- Won Older People's awards from the 'Elderly Accommodation Counsel', gold for Hazelholt, and bronze for Churchill House.
- Worked with Age UK to deliver visiting advice and information sessions so residents and people living nearby can easily get specialist information
- Worked with the council's fall prevention co-ordinator and circulated information to all residents on how to stay strong and prevent a fall. Some schemes have set up regular exercise classes to support people with their health and mobility.
- Worked with The Paley Trust, a local charity who funded a successful art club at Lindfield Court, to create a mosaic for the communal lounge.
- Agreed with residents to set aside a proportion of the Estate Development Budget for seniors housing, with decisions made by the Seniors Housing Action Group.

Looking ahead

- We'll be completing the review of Seniors Housing to help us plan where we can invest and improve the service.
- We want to make it easier for people to know about and to apply for Seniors Housing.

"Good to talk with you earlier, it just goes to show how much help is out there as long as you ask the right (lovely) people. Many thanks to all."

Feedback to Seniors Housing

Your neighbourhood and community

The difference we've made

- We've passed over 400 items of recycled furniture to tenants giving them much needed help to furnish their homes.

- Our Estates Services have had more involvement with new build projects, providing advice on types of locks to increase security and floor finishes.
- Set up the Hard Surfaces Team to improve estate areas by removing weeds, moss and overgrown shrubs.
- Ended the tenancies of three households causing a nuisance, making a big improvement to the lives in the neighbourhood.
- Worked with Brighton & Hove Independent Mediation Service (BHIMS) to help resolve resident disputes. Over 80% of clients felt they had benefitted and seen an improvement as a result of the referrals.
- The council's new Field Officer team are supporting Housing by gathering intelligence about anti-social behaviour within and outside office hours. The team is also responsible for carrying out initial investigation of noise complaints and have been developing strong relationships with police prevention teams (formerly known as neighbourhood policing teams).

"I've always considered our estates team to be a service that just keeps on giving."
Resident feedback

Looking ahead

- Launching an online survey in May 2019 to gather more resident ideas for neighbourhood improvements.
- Holding estate improvement community meetings during the summer to focus on setting priorities from the results of the survey.
- Increasing security to the main entrance doors to 20 blocks of flats where there are concerns about anti-social behaviour (ASB), with more to follow.
- Delivering workshops for residents to raise awareness of the ASB service, how to report ASB and the type of action we can take. This will include the need for evidence and reporting.
- Introducing one phone number for residents to report all ASB in the city.

Tenancy fraud update

Tackling tenancy fraud remains a key priority for the council. During 2018/19, we took back 18 properties following fraud investigations and a 'tenancy fraud amnesty'. Getting these homes back helps us provide secure homes for people on our waiting list.

If you suspect someone got their council tenancy fraudulently, is illegally subletting their home, or keeping their tenancy while living elsewhere, please contact our fraud team in confidence by calling 01273 291847 or emailing anti-fraud@brighton-hove.gov.uk.

How we spend our income?

Each £1 of rent and service charge income pays for: [insert pie chart]

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|
| • Repairs and improvements | 52% | 52p |
| • Running housing services | 38% | 38p |

- Repaying loans and interest 10% 10p

Total income: **£60.5 million**

Total expenditure: **£59.5 million**

The difference in income of £1 million has been added to reserves in the Housing Revenue Account to fund future investment in your homes.

You can find more information on our performance at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/hsg-performance

If you have any comment on this annual report or if there is anything you'd like to see in future editions we would welcome your feedback. Please contact us at:

housing.performance@brighton-hove.gov.uk

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