

# Annual Report

to council tenants  
& leaseholders

2016

This year's annual report to council tenants and leaseholders lets you know how we have been performing from April 2015 to April 2016.

Inside you will find details of our key improvements from the past year, some of the achievements from across the service and what we plan to do to build on our successes and make lasting improvements.



Brighton & Hove  
City Council

## A welcome from the Chair of Housing & New Homes Committee

It has been a busy first year as chair of the Housing & New Homes Committee, and I have enjoyed the opportunity to work with so many residents over this time.

A great deal of work is continuing in Housing to ensure you have well-maintained, good quality, secure homes and safer places to live; and you are able to influence the services we provide to you, as your landlord.

Our new build programme has gone from strength to strength, helping to provide some of the desperately needed homes in the city. Seniors Housing are also providing lots of activities to help create social contact and reduce the feeling of loneliness.

However, in order for us to continue to deliver our service to you and provide extra support to those who need it most, we need to keep up-to-date with external changes that will impact on council homes and work with you on how we can make the very best use of limited resources in these challenging times.

The year ahead will bring challenges and opportunities, and your feedback on the areas you would most like to see improvements is very much appreciated. If you would like to give us your views, or would generally like to be more involved in your housing service, please contact our Resident Involvement Team by emailing [RIT@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:RIT@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or calling 01273 292112.

For the first time a video will accompany your Annual Report 2016. You can watch it at [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/ctl-annualreport](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/ctl-annualreport) and we'll share it on our Twitter @BHCCtenants and [www.facebook.com/tenantandleaseholder](http://www.facebook.com/tenantandleaseholder).

*Signature*

**Councillor Anne Meadows**

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## Key improvements

### What we have achieved

#### Built 11 new homes

- Started issuing decorating packs instead of vouchers to new tenants. The packs provide more equipment at no extra cost and help tenants improve their homes.
- Launched an online interactive map so you can see car parking spaces and garages available to rent, offering more convenience and choice.
- Helped tackle loneliness and isolation in Seniors Housing by enabling a range of activities provided by voluntary groups.

### What's next...

- Making better use of the space available at high rise blocks in the city to create new homes. We'll initially be working with residents to look at opportunities at St James House.
- Continuing to support tenants claiming Universal Credit and those impacted by other welfare benefit changes.

#### Reviewing the way we carry out resident involvement, supporting more residents to have a say on their housing services.

- Supporting employment opportunities by continuing to offer housing apprenticeships
- Completing our review of how council housing is allocated.

## Customer service, choice and complaints

### What we have achieved

- Sent over 15,000 text messages to provide immediate service information, such as issues with water or electricity supplies, or lift breakdowns. Text messaging saves time and

money when compared to communicating by letter.

- Six of the Housing Customer Service Team have now completed the Institute of Customer Services qualification to help improve our service to you.
- Introduced parking schemes at new sites across the city to improve residents' parking.
- Processed 164 complaints, of which 44 were upheld. Lessons learnt for future service delivery include changing the height of signage advising of a lift breakdown to allow a wheelchair user to read and reminding teams of internal procedures
- Supported #housingday which celebrates the positive impact of social housing across the UK. We shared stories and pictures from proud tenants to show all the improvements being made here in Brighton & Hove.

Answered 184 calls every working day on 01273 293030

184



### Your feedback

- Thanks to customer feedback, we changed our phone greeting to be more consistent and put checks in place to ensure we are talking to the tenant.
- All members of the Housing Customer Services Team have been trained to process decorating and gardening scheme applications, to make our customer responses quicker.

### What's next...

- Our Twitter account @BHCCtenants now has over 1,000 followers. Your feedback and news will be key to continue with the increase in followers and make our social media pages relevant.

1000+ Followers



- Carrying out our customer satisfaction survey, STAR, with 3000 tenants during the summer. Results will be published in Homing In later in the year.

## Supporting you

### What we have achieved

- Supported 106 tenants to help them manage their tenancy and prevent the loss of their home.
- Worked in partnership with East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service to support residents whose hoarding has caused concern.

### What's next...

- Working with residents impacted by the Benefit Cap and Universal Credit through, for example, the Housing Employment Support Project.

## Resident involvement and empowerment

### What we have achieved

Working with the Service Improvement Groups we have:

- made letters about tenancy succession easier to understand
- developed a housing jargon buster for you to explain common abbreviations and acronyms in housing, for example EDB – Estate Development Budget
- produced a leaflet showing how you can get involved in ways that suit you
- Rebranded the City Assembly to Citywide Conference, working to make the event more relevant to everyone.
- Awarded 204 Estate Development Budget quick bids and completed 158 projects by April 2016 with all remaining in progress.

### Your feedback

- Residents reviewed the Area Panels and put the 'blue page' items (issues raised by residents) at the start of the meeting to allow for a full discussion.
- Your feedback has helped shape the revised code of conduct for resident meetings.

## What's next...

- The Resident Involvement Review is actively seeking residents' views on how we can broaden involvement and increase your influence on your housing services.
- Sixty resident groups successfully bid for Estates Development Budget improvements including landscaping, cycle storage, flooring and fencing which will be provided this year. Residents have worked with designers and local councillors to successfully provide a new children's playground area in the Wickhurst Rise area.
- Residents will be creating a video to be shared on YouTube about how being involved has benefited you and your communities.

## Your home

The Housing Revenue Account's repairs and maintenance budget is £11.5m. The money is divided up and invested into the following areas:

Responsive Repairs	<b>£6.4m</b>
Empty Properties	<b>£1.9m</b>
Servicing and other repairs	<b>£3.2m</b>

## What we have achieved

- Answered 219 calls to the Repairs Helpdesk every calendar day, 85% of which were answered within 20 seconds.
- Carried out 33,895 repairs, on average 93 repairs every calendar day.

## Welfare Reform

Welfare reform refers to government changes to benefit entitlements. Some tenants have faced increasing challenges over the past year. We have seen our first tenants claim Universal Credit, and there are more changes on the way. To help tenants with these changes we:

- Secured funding from the Department of Work and Pensions for two officers to provide intensive employment support, already achieving positive outcomes. We have helped:
  - 39 people move into work related activity
  - 35 people into training
  - 8 people into employment
  - 23 people became volunteers
  - Provided a six week employability course for 13 residents in April and plan to hold another course in September 2016
- Held four mutual exchange events attended by 303 visitors, and assisted 34 households to move during the last year.
- Provided intensive financial support to 80 tenants, which reduced rent arrears by nearly half for all those visited and made a difference to how they manage their money.
- Extended incentive payments to mutual exchanges to help people affected by under-occupancy deductions move to a smaller home.

## What's next...

- We will provide a 'Better Start Guide' online to help new and potential tenants settle into their homes more easily and manage their tenancy. The guide will include helpful advice on budgeting, utilities, moving home and much more.



- Carry out more home visits to provide intensive support to those facing the largest shortfalls when the new lower benefit caps are introduced
- Keep up to date with any new government policies, in particular those coming from The Housing and Planning Act 2016. This will see the introduction of flexible tenancies and 'Pay to Stay' where tenants earning over £30,000 may be expected to pay a higher rent.

**Contact the Customer Services Team on 01273 293030 for more help and advice.**

- Awarded a new city-wide gas servicing contract to K&T Heating which started on 1 April 2016. K&T will also be providing you with advice to reduce your fuel bills
- Achieved 100% gas safe compliance for nine consecutive months. Performance was 99.97% at the end of the year.

Re-let 549 council homes within 20 calendar days and helped 118 households move through a mutual exchange.

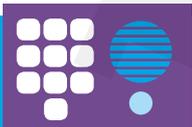


- Introduced new quality and cost monitoring when inspecting repairs jobs.
- Our adaptations service continue to make a real difference to tenants lives, over £1m was spent last year with 258 households benefiting from major adaptations.

“Thank you for giving me back my independence to shower safely by myself. You have made such a difference to my life!”

### Your feedback

- Thanks to your feedback we have launched a new Asset Strategy, setting out how we will invest in safe, well managed homes.
- You raised concerns with safety and security in blocks of flats. We have upgraded and installed 41 new door entry systems with 20 of these blocks also benefitting from new ‘Multisteel’ main entry doors.



**41** new door entry systems fitted

### What's next...

- Working on plans for budget consultation for future years.
- Improving the way you can report repairs online.
- Training more resident inspectors to gather your satisfaction responses after repairs or major works have been completed.



## Building new homes

**Our New Homes for Neighbourhoods programme is working with residents in some areas to improve your local neighbourhood and build much needed new homes on council land.**

### What we have achieved

- Invested almost £10m in building new homes in the city.
- Built and let 11 new council homes for rent. This includes two fully wheelchair accessible family bungalows and nine flats for tenants with varied mobility needs.
- Began work on more schemes on site so we now have 125 new council homes under construction across Brighton, Hove and Portslade.

### Your feedback

- We consult with local residents while plans for new homes are worked up. Your feedback allows us to make changes. Lighter colour bricks and a new mobility scooter store were provided at Robert Lodge South as a result of consultation.

### What's next? We are...

- Applying for planning consent for 41 new homes on three different sites.
- Aiming to provide at least 500 homes under the New Homes for Neighbourhoods programme by 2020.
- Continuing to provide updates on both local and citywide projects through Homing In, social media and our website at [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/nhfn](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/nhfn).

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## Seniors housing

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### What we have achieved

- Worked with Fabrica Art Gallery to introduce creative groups for residents living in our schemes. This has generated a new passion for art for many residents and helped create social contact to reduce loneliness.
- Worked with Brighton University to enable pharmacy students to meet with residents and promote the role of the pharmacist. The aim is to encourage residents to seek medical advice from this service early on.
- Trained all our scheme managers in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) awareness in partnership with the LGBT switchboard and Stonewall Housing Association. This has helped us be more responsive to some specific needs of this community.
- Supported a Senior Housing gardening competition, resulting in a presentation by the mayor for the winning entries
- Successfully applied for funding to help voluntary organisations provide activities in our schemes. 'Cycling Without Age' provides free cycle rides on rickshaws to our residents; this is currently being trialled at our Hazelholt scheme.

### Your feedback

- Your views on the Seniors Housing Allocations Policy has helped shape the future guidance on who can move into Seniors Schemes
- Amended the programme of studio conversions to take into account your feedback regarding the size of the bedroom and design of the kitchen.

"I am very happy in my new flat, it is a great improvement having a separate bedroom, the first night I was able to sleep so peacefully as it was so quiet."

Tenant who moved into a newly converted flat

### What's next

- We will widen the activities offered in our schemes, at no extra cost to residents or the council. This includes a new project aimed at increasing social skills and contact amongst older men.

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## Your neighbourhood and community

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### What we have achieved

- Visited almost a third of you at home to provide advice and check everything is okay.
- Introduced 'scores on the doors' involving you in rating how you feel about cleaning, gardening and neighbourhood management.

Introduced an 'I've been reported sticker' to let you know that an issue has already been reported and is being dealt with.

I've been reported

Housing.CustomerServices@brighton-hove.gov.uk  
Tel: 01273 293030



### Your feedback

- We're working on making the tenancy welfare process more customer friendly thanks to your suggestions.
- Provided start-up funding to help improve the playground area and support a food growing project to benefit residents living at Kingswood and Milner flat.

### What's next...

- Working with residents to look at the grounds maintenance service.
- Piloting a 'menu of options' for cleaning services in blocks of flats.
- Exploring the use of Fixed Penalty Notices to tackle fly-tipping and messy gardens.

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## Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

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### What we have achieved

- Focussed on early work to stop situations from becoming more severe – by doing so we have reduced the number of serious cases.
- Increased information sharing with the police and other agencies to tackle drug related nuisance in the city centre.
- Carried out five evictions this year and obtained five possession orders, putting an end to some difficult experiences for residents and neighbours.

- Applied for and granted eight injunctions to protect residents and stop ASB.

## Your feedback

From the satisfaction of tenants and residents survey, 88% of you were satisfied with the way Housing deals with ASB.

88%



- Consulted with residents about removal of the 'trades' button to increase security, 22 high rise blocks in total agreed to the change.

## What's next...

- Working with new legal powers to take possession action under the mandatory ground for possession. This could be after conviction of a serious criminal offence or failure to comply with a notice or order obtained to manage the ASB.

## Tenancy fraud update

Tackling tenancy fraud remains a key priority for Housing and we...

- Detected five possible cases through the gas access process alone
- Investigated and closed 101 new cases of suspected fraud

Regained 26 properties that have provided much needed housing for applicants on the waiting list



If you suspect someone has fraudulently got their council home, or is not living there and has maybe let it to someone else then please contact us on 01273 291847 or 01273 291700 or email [anti-fraud@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:anti-fraud@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk).

## Leaseholders

### What we have achieved

- Worked with 78 leaseholders to resolve disputes.
- Collected £3.2m of leaseholder service charges, an increase of £300,000 from last year meaning more money to invest in new homes and maintaining current stock.
- Completed the sale of 75 properties under the Right to Buy in the past year.

### What's next...

- Consulting with leaseholders about a proposed investment of £8m in five council owned blocks on the Clarendon Estate, to ensure the homes are maintained to a decent standard.
- Continuing to offer a range of support and helpful loan options to resident leaseholders when we undertake major works.
- Reviewing and updating the Guide for Leaseholders.

## Value for money

### What we have achieved

Our end of year rent collection rates were up 0.38% from last year to 98.77%.

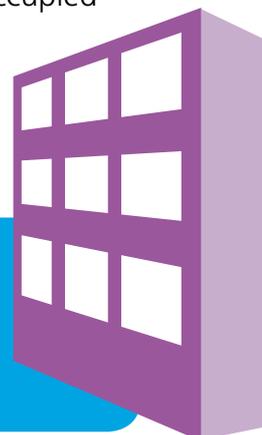
98.77%

£

- The total amount of rent arrears were £640,000.
- Reduced the arrears from under-occupied properties by 46% – down from £116,000 last year to £63,000.
- Tenants paying by Direct Debit increased to 1,866 this year, up 114 from last year.

16% of tenants are now paying by Direct Debit as of 1 April 2016

16%



- Money Advice Plus Service (formally MACS) secured £790,861 extra financial benefits for the 284 new tenants using this service.

### Your feedback

- Changed the financial support services based on individual situations and feedback received. For example we can attend meetings with Jobcentre Plus or help build confidence and motivation to help you move into learning, training, volunteering or employment.

"I finished my course, best thing I've ever done, thank you for sorting it out for me, I can't wait to start the next level"

### What's next...

- Increase the number of Direct Debit payment dates available during the month, from two to four to offer more choice and convenience.
- Improve our online services to enable you to access a range of information in the same place.
- Consult with residents on the priorities for next year's budget.
- Review a proportion of our services to ensure they are customer focused and efficient.

## How do we spend the money

### Income and expenditure

Each £1 of rent and service charge income pays for:



Total income: **£59,871,000**

Total expenditure: **£57,834,000**

The difference in income of £2,037,000 has been added to reserves in the Housing Revenue Account to fund future capital investment.

You can find more information on our performance at [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/hsg-performance](http://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. Contact us at Housing.

performance@brighton-hove.gov.uk  
 twitter.com/BHCCtenants  
 facebook.com/tenantandleaseholder

