

Runnymede Borough Council

Housing service annual report for tenants

2020-2021



FLORAL HOUSE

Hello from your housing team

Aiming for high standards in an unprecedented year



Cllr Jacqui Gracey,
Chair, Runnymede
Borough Council
Housing Committee.



Andy Vincent,
Corporate Head
of Housing.

We are pleased to provide this annual report covering our activities during the 2020-2021 financial year as landlord of 2,852 social homes in Runnymede.

The Government requires the Council, as your landlord, to be regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing.

The regulator has powers to ensure social housing is efficient, well-governed and providers can deliver homes that meet a range of needs.

Standards

The regulator does this through a set of standards which we have to meet. Our performance is set out in this annual report in line with these standards, which are:

- Rent Standard,
- Home Standard,
- Tenancy Standard,
- Tenant involvement and Empowerment Standard, and
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard.

This annual report shows you the services we have delivered to meet these standards and how we collect and spend your rent money.

Supporting local people

Underpinning our operations and our efforts to meet these standards are two high level documents.

The Council's Corporate Business plan commits our whole organisation to supporting local people and enhancing our environment, as well as improving

our local economy and developing as an organisation.

Flowing from this plan, our Housing Strategy aims to:

- ensure good-quality affordable housing is available to local people,
- support local people to access appropriate housing,
- increase the provision of affordable housing, and
- identify local housing need to plan effectively for the future.

We hope this report demonstrates how we are acting on these commitments and striving to improve our services, despite the challenges of the pandemic.

Covid-19 response

The year 2020-2021 broadly overlaps with the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

During that time, our staff went above and beyond to maintain our services and to support tenants, prioritising urgent work and the most vulnerable people.

During the lockdowns we contacted vulnerable residents to ensure that they had medication, food, and essential supplies if they did not have a support network in place to do this.

At our Independent Retirement Living sites all residents received a daily phone call and more if they needed additional support.

On top of their usual job and while working mainly from home, our staff made regular calls to vulnerable residents.

Your rent payments

Managing rents

The rents we charge our tenants are set in accordance with a Government Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing.

The formula includes data such as property values and average earnings.

Annual rent increases are also calculated in line with Government guidance and have to be approved by our Housing committee.

All the money we receive from rent payments is kept in a separate Council account called the Housing Revenue Account. This is separate to other income the Council receives. The rent money is used to pay for things like management and maintenance costs related to your homes, major repairs, loan charges, depreciation costs plus the cost of building new homes.

Managing tenancies

We know some of our tenants and leaseholders have suffered financially during 2020-21 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We urge anyone who is having money problems to get in touch with their Area Housing Manager.

We can support people in arrears to get back to having a clear rent or service charge account.

To contact your Area Housing Manager, call the Council on 01932 838383.

Net cost of new homes:

£670k / 4%

Money retained for future investment:

£4.8m / 33%

Includes decent homes investment for the next five years and new build homes.

Staff costs:

£2.3m / 16%

Dealing with anti-social behaviour, collecting rent and service improvement.

How your rent has been used

Loan repayments to Government:

£3.4m / 24%

Maintaining homes:

£1.9m / 14%

Day to day repairs, and property improvement.

Corporate services:

£1.3m / 9%

Legal, HR, IT etc.

Rent facts

1.71%
rent still to be paid.

20%
rent paid by Universal Credit.

Over **£9.91**
of every £10 in rent owed collected.

38.6%
rent paid by Housing Benefit.

£17,950,049
Total rent collected from our tenants (thank you).

116
fewer tenants in arrears at the end of the year than at the start.

3.46%
tenants +7 weeks in arrears.

Homes

Providing good quality homes



New flats in Addlestone

The Council is committed to developing more affordable housing and in 2020-21 we started building nine flats in Addlestone. Five new flats were completed in the town during the year.

We secured planning permission for 10 further homes in Egham and started the process of buying two privately owned homes, to turn them into social housing.

During the year we also began discussing how we could buy land and new development sites. This will significantly step up the number of homes we can build.

Keeping your home safe

Homes with a valid gas safety certificate: 99.89 per cent.

Homes with a valid Electrical Condition Report: 85.8 per cent by the end of the financial year (92.4 per cent by July 2021).

Homes with works done to meet the Decent Homes Standard: 678.

“ The Home Standard sets expectations for providers of social housing to provide tenants with quality accommodation and a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service. ”

Government Home Standard

Future plans in this area

- ✓ We are due to replace 250 boilers in the year ahead, helping improve energy efficiency and thermal comfort of your homes.
- ✓ We are planning to upgrade many of our door entry systems to flats.
- ✓ New software will allow us to continue a rolling programme of condition surveys. We plan to cover 10 per cent of homes every year.
- ✓ We are writing a Climate Change Strategy to inform our approach to making our housing stock more environmentally sound.
- ✓ A specialist consultant is working with us to improve the quality of your homes.
- ✓ The Council approved a target to build to build 125 new homes over five years.

The Council's repairs service facts for 2020-21

29,650 repairs carried out to homes, and 89 per cent completed to agreed time frames.

29 adaptations to disabled tenants' homes were carried out, costing £67,592.

94 per cent of residents who completed a survey were satisfied with our repairs.

Tenancies

Tenancy facts

There are 575 Runnymede residents who have flexible tenancies with the Council, and 2,186 people with secure tenancies.

Flexible tenants have the same rights as other tenants for the duration of their tenancy.

Flexible tenancies are reviewed near the end of their term to make sure that the property type, size and tenure is still suitable for tenant's circumstances.

For example, if a tenant has more bedrooms than needed, a tenancy at another address that suits the size of the household may be offered.

“ Homes must be let in a fair, transparent and efficient way. The Council must make the best use of available housing and promote sustainable communities. ”
Government Tenancy Standard

Pandemic support for Independent Retirement Living tenants

During Spring/Summer 2020, our focus was on the welfare of our Independent Retirement Living (IRL) tenants as we endured the pandemic.

Every tenant received a welfare call every day to check they were ok and whether help was needed, for instance with shopping or collecting prescriptions.

We started partnering the NHS by conducting a trial using our IRL homes as 'step down' accommodation for older people who are ready to leave hospital but might not be able to live on their own straight away.



Darley Dene Independent Retirement Living site in Addlestone

1,000
welfare calls
per week to
IRL tenants.

Reducing nights spent in bed and breakfasts

Just 29 per cent of homeless households who spent a night in a bed and breakfast needed to spend more than two weeks

in one during 2020-21. In 2018-19, this figure was 63 per cent, and we are proud to have reduced this figure by half.

It means we're providing a better service to people who may be at their most worried and vulnerable.

Future plans in this area

✓ Following consultation with independent retirement living tenants, we will carry out a four year, £1.7m investment plan.

✓ We plan to upgrade the alarm systems that operate in all of our Independent Retirement Living sites to give tenants more reassurance.

✓ To make best use of our temporary housing, we are reviewing all properties so they are up to scratch and efficiently managed.

Involving our tenants

Listening to your views so we can improve our services

We asked for your views on a proposed Housing Allocation Scheme and received more than 200 responses to changes.

We suggested applicants should only be entitled to one suitable offer of accommodation.

After listening to your views, we agreed the current two offers would continue to apply in most cases.

You also said the 12 month local employment criteria should be raised to three years.

This would bring it in line with the existing residency criteria, and we have agreed with your suggestion and included it in the new scheme.

We also launched a consultation on a new repairs policy and have published a new antisocial behaviour procedure.

Complaints

A new complaints policy was created and in total 41 complaints were received about our Housing service, and 10 were upheld during 2020-21.

Main topics of complaints:



Housing Ombudsman

The Housing Ombudsman Service exists to resolve disputes involving tenants, leaseholders and their social landlords like the Council. As a Runnymede tenant you have the right to take your

complaint to the Ombudsman if you feel it has not been properly handled. You can find our self-assessment against the Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code on our website.

“ All tenants must have opportunities to influence and be involved in policies and services and will be treated with fairness and respect. ”

Government Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

Future plans in this area

✓ The Council's new website provides better access to services and tenants can open a secure account to deal with us.

Paying rent, updating contact details, adding documents like letters or photos, reporting antisocial behaviour and responding to surveys will all be possible using the new website.

Where possible we aim to bring new functions into the website so tenants can do more online at whatever time suits them. This includes publishing our policies.

✓ A Tenant Engagement Strategy will set out how we listen to and consult with tenants and show how we are accountable.

✓ We've brought in a new team member who is responsible for engagement. Her role will be to create better ways to understand what tenants feel about the service we provide.



Neighbourhoods and Communities

Antisocial behaviour

We're committed to providing a robust response to antisocial behaviour, helping to support local people and enhance our environment.

A new Antisocial Behaviour Policy and Procedure was recently brought in and more detail has been added on the Community Trigger.

This means that if you report the same complaint three times or more in six months, a meeting of agencies (Police, NHS – where relevant, Surrey County Council) must be called to decide what to do.



“ The Council must maintain and improve communal areas and neighbourhoods. It must promote environmental, social, and economic wellbeing and tackle antisocial behaviour. ”

Government Neighbourhood and Community Standard

Future plans in this area

✓ The Tenancy Audit programme will continue. This is important work so we can identify any repairs and check people are living within the terms of their tenancy agreement.

We carried out 335 tenancy audits since June 2019 and 218 audits were finished by early 2020. A further 117 have been carried out since lockdown restrictions were lifted.

✓ Progress our plans to improve our mobile caretaking service.

✓ Consult residents on options for estate improvements to increase community safety and confidence.

✓ Expand options to make recycling easier at more locations.

✓ Offer improved support packages for tenants, especially those with health and financial difficulties.

Practical neighbourhood and community responses to the Covid-19 pandemic

Additional temporary accommodation was provided to homeless people to ensure that no one in Runnymede was rough sleeping.

Communal areas at our Independent Retirement Living sites had to be closed due to Coronavirus but extra cleaning regimes were implemented.

New recycling initiatives were introduced to combat the increase in rubbish put out by tenants, which in some cases was beyond what could be held in bins. The aim of these initiatives was to avoid extra charges for tenants.

For all information contained within this document contact:

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Further copies of this report, or copies in large print or other formats are available using the above details.

www.linkedin.com/company/runnymede-borough-council/

www.runnymede.gov.uk

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