

TENANTS

Newsletter

June 2021

For Runnymede Borough Council tenants

Vision for quality of life in retirement



Modernising the service we provide to older people at our five Independent Retirement Living sites is top of our agenda and we have committed £400,000 to pay for improvements.

We want to upgrade the communal areas, improve the gardens and digitise the alarm call system. This refresh is also likely to include upgrades to the scooter stores and other improvements.

We also want to ensure people who need our support to move into Independent Retirement Living accommodation receive it at the right time. Equally we want to be sure those who need care via Surrey County Council's Adult Care Service can get it.

Informal events will soon take place at the Independent Retirement Living sites to ask residents, carers and family members their views on our plans and to assist with us with implementation.

- 8 July, Floral House, Chertsey – combined event with Beomonds (with transport provided),
- 14 July, Grove Court, Egham,
- 20 July, Heatherfields, New Haw, and
- 28 July, Darley Dene Court, Addlestone.

To give us your views please come to one of the events or ring us on 01932 838383.

We will send you our illustrated vision, a questionnaire and a stamped addressed envelope

Runnymede's five independent retirement living sites were previously known as sheltered housing and provide a total of 210 flats and bungalows for our older residents.

They bring the comfort and security of your own front door but with extra facilities and the peace of mind of having support at hand.

Investing £40million on tenants' homes' upgrade

Each year for the next five years, Runnymede Borough Council has committed to spend £8million on substantial improvements to its tenants' homes.

The programme will deliver over 900 new kitchens and over 1,000 bathrooms, and energy efficient boilers.

New windows, and external doors, replacement of fascias, soffits and guttering, and new roof tiles and felt will also be installed.

The work will be paid for from the Council's Housing Revenue Account which is made up of rent payments, money from the sale of council homes and borrowing.

We are well on our way to

organising these works, which are due to start this summer and are the biggest in a generation.

We will be using specialist contractors to ensure high standards.

Residents have a choice of colours for kitchens units, style of worktops and flooring to suit individual tastes.

Antisocial behaviour advice

We want our tenants to enjoy their home and neighbourhood in a quiet and peaceful environment.

We're committed to providing a robust response to antisocial behaviour.

Council tenants who cause nuisance, or allow members of their household or visitors to behave in

an antisocial way will be dealt with where there is supporting evidence.

We have to do this fairly, proportionately and effectively. We do our best to resolve issues but sometimes it takes time and we appreciate your patience whilst we follow the processes outlined in the Antisocial Behaviour Procedure.

How issues are dealt with

Issues can often be resolved by speaking to your neighbour. If you feel safe and comfortable doing so, begin by explaining how what they are doing is impacting you.

Listen to the person, they may tell you things that cause them annoyance. Then see how you can work together to reach a resolution.

Mediation Surrey can also help to reach an amicable solution. Contact the Council if this could work for you.

If this is not possible, contact the Council and be prepared to work with us to help sort out issues.

This is likely to include keeping a log which could be very important evidence. This can be done using diary sheets or via The Noise app.

We will gather any other available evidence, for example from other neighbours.

You will be informed of what action we propose to take and we will discuss this with you. The action we take will depend on the complaint and or, evidence available.



Mediation may be able to resolve your concerns amicably

Actions we can take

- 1 Refer all parties to the mediation service.
- 2 Interviews with those causing the nuisance.
- 3 Working with other agencies, including the police.
- 4 Write to the person, either informally or as a formal written warning.
- 5 Make a referral to support agencies, such as LookAhead.
- 6 Drawing up a voluntary agreement such as a good neighbour agreement and/or an Acceptable Behaviour Contract.
- 7 Taking out court injunctions against the person causing the nuisance or Community Protection Notices.
- 8 In serious cases we may apply to the County Court for possession of a tenant's property, but eviction is only considered as a last resort when all other options have been exhausted.
- 9 If we take legal action against a tenant, you may be asked to provide a witness statement.

Using the Community Trigger

We will support people to use the Community Trigger if it could help resolve their situation. It can be used if an issue has been reported three or more times in six months.

Tenants can activate the trigger themselves, or someone can activate it on their behalf, including a Council staff member.

Our Community Safety Officer will decide whether or not the issue meets the trigger threshold.

If it does, agencies including the Police, councils, housing associations, the NHS and others will work together to see whether any further steps can be taken to resolve a problem and stop the antisocial behaviour, but there are no guaranteed outcomes.

Further details are on our website.

Why we carry out Tenancy Audits



Please help our staff when they visit your home - it's their job

Our Tenancy Audits are relaunching following lockdown.

The Tenancy Audit involves a Council worker visiting you in your home to check the details we hold about you and your household.

They will ask to look around to establish that your home isn't wholly let or sublet, and that it's looked after in accordance with your Tenancy Agreement. This includes keeping the property and garden tidy.

Tenancy Audits are carried out for several reasons:

- To make sure tenants are living in homes appropriate for their family size, ensuring best use of limited social housing.
- To ensure homes are maintained, to help avoid costly repairs at the end of a tenancy.
- To improve our service by providing advice, listening to concerns, following up on any repairs and arranging support for vulnerable tenants.
- To identify fraud. We will take action against people dishonestly occupying Council housing, which lengthens the waiting times for those who have a genuine need for housing.

Our staff will follow government current Covid guidance and keep to appropriate social distancing rules.

The first visits we will make will be to tenants who did not respond to the latest data questionnaire.

Action against fraud

We were alerted that a tenant was planning to swap their Council house with another tenant in exchange for money without telling the Council.

Our investigations revealed the tenant was not living at the property - in breach of tenancy conditions – but living with a partner and planning to end the tenancy of the “new” property once they had completed the sham exchange.

When we confronted the tenant, they gave up the property which is now let to an applicant from the Housing Register.

If you suspect housing fraud is taking place in a Council property, contact us on 01932 838383

What do you think about our Repairs Service?

The Council wants your help updating our approach to repairs. We're consulting on changes to what we will repair – and what repairs are the responsibility of tenants.

We have brought this together in a draft policy which also sets out how quickly we will complete repairs.

The draft policy also details what repairs should be carried out for leaseholders, how we will deal with fencing requests, repairing responsibilities following a mutual exchange etc.

Your views are important. Please come and tell us what you think to help us get the service right:

- Monday 9 August, 2-4pm, outside Surrey Towers.
- Tuesday 10 August, 2-4pm, Middle of the Forest Estate, Englefield Green.
- Wednesday 11 August, on 2-4pm, Hythe Centre playing field, Thorpe Lea Road, Egham.
- Thursday 12 August, 2-4pm, Chertsey Cricket Club.
- Friday 13 August, 2-4pm, Heathervale Park, New Haw.

Alternatively complete the questionnaire at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Q8CJ9D7

Dealing with rent arrears

During the pandemic the rules on councils taking possession action against tenants with rent arrears changed. As we return to something approaching normality these rules are being relaxed.

We have a proud record of supporting the small number of tenants who fall behind with their rent, to help them catch up and get their account into credit.

During the last two years we have not evicted any of our secure tenants for getting behind with their rent.

Using eviction to tackle rent arrears will be a last resort. We provide tenancy sustainment services and repayment plans to help support tenants. We're in the process of revising our procedures to reflect good practice from the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute.

We do know the last year has been very difficult for people and lockdowns, making benefit claims etc. have affected some of our tenants' abilities to keep up to date with their rent.

Please talk to us if you fall behind.

RCRA

RUNNYMEDE COUNCIL RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Making your views heard



The Runnymede Council Residents' Association was established in 2004 and is recognised by the Council as the representative body of our tenants and leaseholders.

Mrs Jenny Hill has been the Chair of the RCRA since it started and promotes residents' views on a range of matters. As the Chair she attends meetings of the Council's Housing Committee and organises and attends RCRA meetings.

The RCRA also gets involved in the selection of Council contractors.

Mrs Hill is also the Chair of the Tenants' Committee of the Association of Retained Council Housing and has organised responses to Government consultations aimed at tenants.

For details about RCRA contact Mrs Hill on 01932 568405 or email jennihill@ntlworld.com

IRL gardens get a boost



Darley Dene residents Mona Orosco and Jan Davies are pictured with Bourne Valley Garden Centre Manager Gary Davies and colleague Andrew Goodway, IRL Manager Donnalynn Dunn, and the Council's Corporate Head of Housing Andy Vincent.

Our five Independent Retirement Living sites each have beautiful communal gardens.

During lockdown, and following the Government guidelines, residents continued to enjoy the gardens. They brought much joy and pleasure: planting and tending flowers, sitting having a socially distanced chat with neighbours over a cup of tea, or a glass of wine. Others enjoyed watching the plants and wildlife from their windows.

Gardening, as we know, is good for health and wellbeing. So good in fact that some GPs have started prescribing gardening! The benefits can be as varied as reducing stress to increasing fitness and improving vitamin D levels.

The rewards of gardening can be profound and long-lasting. Being outside also boosts interaction with neighbours and the wider community. For all these reasons the Council has announced plans for an IRL tenants' gardening competition.

The competition will be launched formally next year, and categories may include:

Tallest Sunflower	Best indoor plant display
Best wild garden area	Largest Marrow
Best front garden	Best hanging basket
Best communal garden	Best patio area

Residents at Darley Dene Court, Addlestone, were delighted to accept a gift voucher for £100 from Gary Davies, Manager of Bourne Valley Garden Centre to help with their entry.

The Council will provide the other four IRL schemes with £100 each towards their communal gardens.

Building more social housing

There are more people on the Housing Register than we can offer homes to from the existing social housing in the Borough.

To help find homes for more people who need them, the Council is investing in buying or building more new homes over the next five years.

We are currently building nine new two bedroom homes in Addlestone. They are near Victory Park and it's likely they will be ready for families to move in to early next year.

Soon we will be tendering for a contractor to build 10 new homes at Ripley Avenue in Egham, to include bungalows for tenants wishing to downsize.

Ambitious plans for further development also include buying land in Chertsey to provide at least 48 new homes. It is hoped that some of these family size homes will be wheelchair accessible.

These properties will be available to people on the Housing Register, will be built to a good standard with a good energy efficiency rating. They will be near facilities and transport links.

We continue to work in partnership with local



New homes at Coombelands, Row Town

Housing Associations to deliver much needed rented housing for local people.

- At Bleriot Gate in Addlestone, 14 new homes have recently been completed.
- At Magna Square in Egham, 34 flats are under construction.
- At Coombelands in Row Town, nine houses are nearing completion.

New developments often include shared ownership opportunities. To find out about help to buy visit: www.helptobuyagent3.org.uk

What are the rules for social housing?

Every council is required to have a Housing Allocations Scheme to help it decide on letting social housing to people on the Housing Register. It applies to council and housing association homes.

Runnymede has a new Allocations Scheme which sets out how housing applications are assessed. It will make best use of the social housing available and deal with the urgent needs of local people, like overcrowding and acute medical conditions.

As part of developing the new scheme, we listened to residents' views, including asking everyone on the Housing Register for their comments.

As a result we made changes, like removing the proposal to make 'one offer only' to all applicants. This was not included in the new scheme because of the strength of feeling during the consultation.

The Government says councils should prioritise applicants who can demonstrate a close association with the area when making housing decisions.

Our new scheme increases the requirement for working in the Borough from 12 months to three years. This matches the three years required to live in the Borough before applicants qualify to go on the Housing Register.

The Government has also encouraged councils to help partners of armed forces personnel who need to move out of service accommodation. This has been implemented in the new scheme.

Another change we're making to our scheme is that people over 60 will be able to have assets of £55,000 if they are registering to live at one of our Independent Retirement Living sites.

Large print newsletter

If you would like to receive this newsletter in large print call the Council on **01932 838383** and ask for the Housing service.

You will need to give us your postal address and we will send a larger version to you.

What's happening at Surrey Towers?

With 97 flats, Surrey Towers is a significant building within Addlestone.



We're improving Surrey Towers

The Council is progressing a 56 week programme of works to ensure the building is fit for use and that residents' safety is paramount.

The work we're carrying out includes kitchen and bathroom

refurbishments along with passive fire remedial work.

The extent of the work in some flats means that a few families are moving out of the building and into a furnished property while the refurbishment is carried out.

Working in partnership with contractor CLC, we expect to complete the programme on time and within budget.

Meet our Tenant Support Officer



Renesh Manipersad

Our Tenant Support Officer Renesh Manipersad supports local people by providing a high quality in-depth, proactive service to tenants.

Renesh can offer debt management advice, impartial guidance and support to answer financial queries to help maintain your tenancy. He can give advice on topics like how to become job ready, maximise income and pay off debts.

One tenant said: "Renesh has been so helpful and clear in what he could do to help me. It has helped me manage my finances better and understand what I have to pay and when."

If you feel you would benefit for tenancy support and advice, call us on 01932 838383

Wordsearch answers:

1 cling film; 2 pizza box; 3 coffee cup; 4 crisp packet; 5 nappies; 6 bubble wrap; 7 plastic cutlery; 8 polystyrene

It's easier online

Our new website is launching soon!

one
account

The easiest way to deal with the Council.

- ✓ Pay rent
- ✓ Update your contact details
- ✓ Upload documents
- ✓ Report ASB issues
- ✓ Respond to surveys

www.runnymede.gov.uk

When a tenant passes away

It can be difficult for family and friends when a loved one passes away, and they may not want to think about the practicalities too much.

As a responsible tenant, please find time to talk to next of kin or a close friend about the importance of formally ending your tenancy if the worst happens.

Legally four weeks' notice has to be given to end a tenancy. If there is no one who can end a tenancy on behalf of the tenant,

we have to serve a Notice on the Public Trustee. It's helpful to nominate someone like an executor to liaise with us well in advance so there's no confusion in future.

Rent is still due and has to be paid by the tenant's estate, which we appreciate can be hard for families to deal with.

It's essential we have the Death Certificate and Will (if there is one) as soon as possible in order to prevent delays to the four week

notice period. It can only start when the correct documents have been received.

Two recent cases have shown us our correspondence wasn't clear enough, which made the situation more difficult for next of kin. We've changed things so we give more information and have a better approach in future.

To end a tenancy on behalf of someone who has died, contact tenancy.management@runnymede.gov.uk

Your repairs contractor

We will now be working solely with Mills BCE as our contractor for responsive and emergency repairs, out of hours responses and empty properties. If you need to report a repair or an emergency call **01932 838383** or email housing.repairs@runnymede.gov.uk

Don't waste the recycling!

Runnymede residents are recycling more and more, which is great news. However, recycling rates from flats are very low. Often material put out for recycling is mixed with items that can't be recycled. This can result in increased service charges for residents of these blocks.

Some things you can't recycle include greasy pizza boxes - the paper fibres in the box cannot be separated from the cooking oils during the pulping process.

Coffee cups contain a plastic lining which cannot be removed during the recycling process and thin plastics like cling film are hard to recycle.

If you've put the wrong items in your recycling bin, it might not be emptied. That's because the whole truck load could be rejected and everyone's recycling would then be thrown away.

Test your recycling knowledge by finding all the items in this wordsearch which cannot be recycled!



To find out what items you can and can't recycle, visit surreyep.org.uk and use our handy search tool or download the Surrey Recycles app.

Wordsearch clues

1. Material often used to wrap a sandwich (5,4)
2. Packaging for a classic round Italian takeaway (5,3)
3. Holds a caffeinated morning beverage (6,3)
4. This bag holds your favourite crispy potato snack (5,6)
5. These will keep babies dry all night (7)
6. A wrap that protects fragile items during delivery (6,4)
7. Helps you eat while on a picnic or when eating your lunch on the go (7,7)
8. Lightweight foam that ensures your package arrives safely (11).

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HM Government



**Join
the millions
already
vaccinated**

You're much less likely to get serious Covid-19 or be hospitalised if you've been vaccinated.

We'll let you know when your Covid-19 vaccine is ready for you.

EVERY VACCINATION
GIVES US

HOPE