

Newsletter

November 2020

For Runnymede Borough Council tenants

Investing in Runnymede homes

The Council is investing in supporting local people and enhancing the environment.

With five new flats recently completed in Addlestone, work is due to start soon on another site in the town with a pair of semi-detached houses making way for nine new flats.

As well as those homes, we are also planning:

- ▶ 10 new properties including bungalows at Ripley Avenue in Egham for tenants wanting to downsize.
- ▶ The development of studio flats for single people.
- ▶ Work inside each flat at Surrey Towers in Addlestone to maximise fire protection with additional upgrade and roof works to follow.
- ▶ Expanding Magna Carta Lettings, our in-house lettings agency, to offer a greater range of options to single people in need of affordable housing.



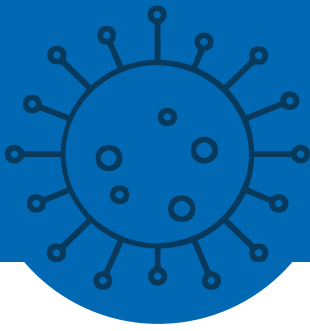
Example of new flats in Addlestone

Stock condition survey update

Following the Stock Condition Survey, the Council is developing a Major Works Programme. We hope to start work in the coming year on central heating and electrical upgrades and refurbishment of kitchens and bathrooms.

We will contact you if your home is included in the first phase starting in 2021.

To talk to the Council about any items in this newsletter call: 01932 83 83 83
or email: tenancy.management@runnymede.gov.uk



Our response to the Covid-19 pandemic

The Council is committed to supporting local people and running essential services, especially throughout these difficult times.

From the start, our priority in responding to Covid-19 has been the safety of residents and staff. We are following the latest government guidance. If we need to come to your home we carry out risk assessments, use PPE as appropriate and practice social distancing. However in most cases, our contact with residents is by phone or email.

Staff remain available to help and support residents even when the Civic Centre has to be closed.

During the national lockdown in the spring our front-line services: homelessness, caretaking and clearing staff responded quickly to the changing situation. Independent Retirement Living (IRL) residents received daily calls – over 14,000 calls between March and June.

Repairs

In the first lockdown, only emergency repairs and planned appointments for gas and electrical testing were carried out. The backlog of outstanding routine repairs was cleared as soon as it became possible. It has again become

necessary to restrict repairs to urgent and emergency. For example:

- Total loss of electric heating or hot water.
- Total or partial loss of cold water supply.
- Total or partial loss of electrics, or unsafe electrics.
- Leaking pipes or drains.
- Blocked drain or toilet, or no other toilet that can be flushed within the property.
- Making safe items if they are dangerous e.g. windows and external doors.

If you are unsure if your repair request is urgent or an emergency, please contact us.

Help available

The effects of the pandemic mean a serious financial impact for some households. The number of tenants receiving Universal Credit has increased by over 70%. While there is no reduction in rent liability, staff will continue to offer advice to tenants in difficulty. If you are struggling with your rent, help is available. It is very important to discuss your situation with us. Please let us know if you need help at this difficult time.

For more information on how the Council support local people in these unprecedented times visit www.runnymede.gov.uk/supportingvulnerablepeople

Keep in touch with the latest Covid-19 guidance and help on our social sites:



@RunnymedeBC



www.facebook.com/runnymedebc/



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

Like, comment and share...

HM Government

NHS

NATIONAL COVID ALERT

STAY HOME

5 NOV – 2 DEC

Only leave home for food, medical reasons, exercise, education or work
You must work from home if you can
Avoid travel unless essential
Schools and essential shops will remain open
Remember: wash hands, cover face, make space

Find the latest guidance and exemptions at gov.uk/coronavirus

Runnymede BOROUGH COUNCIL

STAY ALERT • CONTROL THE VIRUS • SAVE LIVES

Housing by numbers

Runnymede Borough Council owns and manages 2,921 properties.

In 2019/2020 we prevented 46 households from becoming homeless

In 2019/2020 215 new Council and housing association tenancies started

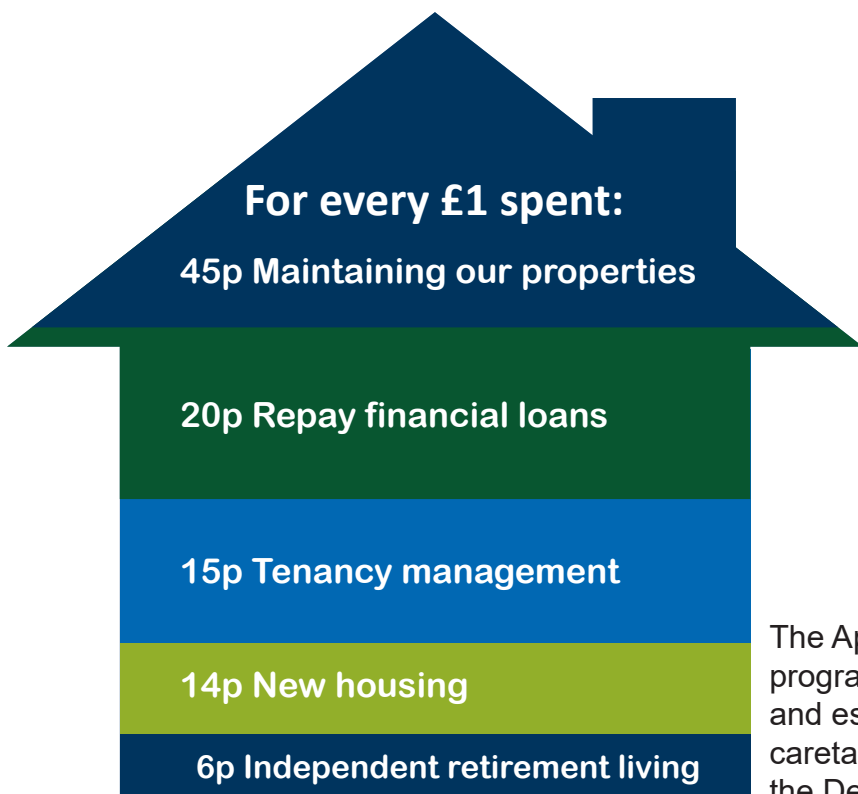
We collected 99.9% of the rent we expected to collect in 2019/2020

Since April 2020 we offered help to 49 households with managing their finances

We arranged 20 tenancies through Magna Carta Lettings, our in-house lettings agency

We reduced our spending on Bed & Breakfast by 74% between April 2018 and April 2020

This is how every £1 of your rent was spent:



Runnymede tenants completed 20 Mutual Exchanges (house swaps) in 2019/20

Four properties were sold under the Right to Buy scheme

The April 2020 rent increase will help us fund a programme of works to improve our properties and estates. This will include more money for caretaking, major renovations and works to meet the Decent Homes Standard.

Energy efficiency advice for you and your home!


If we all take some small steps to cut energy and water use, we could reduce our carbon emissions and save money. Getting to know your energy bills will help you understand what you are paying, how your usage changes throughout the year and ensure bills are based on your meter readings and not estimated.

Consider switching your energy supplier:


Shop around for the best fuel tariff for your circumstances by using an Ofgem accredited price comparison website.

Check if you are eligible for an allowance on your fuel bills through the government's Cold Weather Payment, Winter Fuel Payment and/or Warm Home Discount Schemes.


Tips to cut down on energy use:




Use the thermostatic radiator valves. Adjust heating/hot water controls.



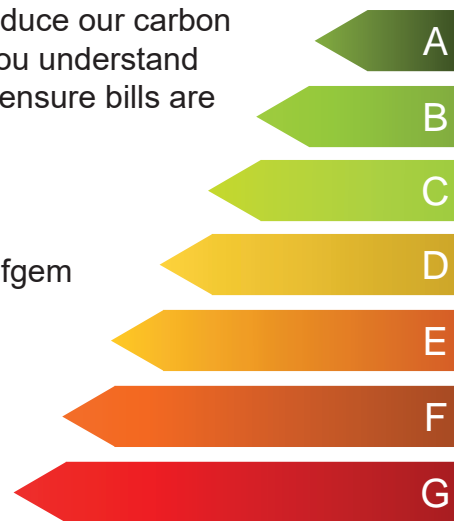
LED light bulbs are the most energy efficient. Switching off lights when not needed.



Use all electrical appliances minimally. Unplug chargers for mobile phones, laptops and tablets when they are fully charged.



Cut down on water usage: For example a fully loaded washing machine will use less energy and water than two half loads.



All this and more can be found at www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk or telephone **0800 444 202**

Helping a Runnymede resident

Every week our staff hear from residents who need help and advice or whose circumstances have changed.

This example shows how we could help you, or someone you know:

A number of our staff worked with an older man with mobility and mental health needs who was living in a two-bed property after his mum, who was the tenant, developed dementia and went into a nursing home. The family lived at the property for over 40 years but it had been neglected for some time. He now has home help twice a week and has moved to a Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association scheme for elderly people.

If your home is bigger than you need and you cannot afford to move, the Council can sometimes help so please talk to us.

To join the Housing Register and apply for a transfer to a more suitable property, please visit: www.runnymede.gov.uk/allocationspolicy

If you want to move, swapping your home with another tenant might be the answer. For more information please visit: www.runnymede.gov.uk/mutualexchange



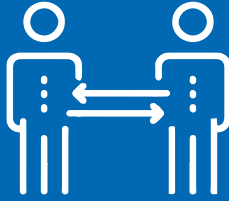
We must keep protecting each other



HANDS



FACE



SPACE

If you need help during lockdown, please call us on: **01932 838383** or visit www.runnymede.gov.uk

Tenancy Audits and positive outcomes

Tenancy Audits are carried out to check the person who signed the tenancy is the person who is actually living in the home. We also check the property and garden are being looked after and the welfare of the tenant. For those who do not have a tenancy for life, we review the Fixed Term tenancy to see if the household is still in the right property for their needs. Successes from the Tenancy Audit programme so far have included:

- ✓ A resident has been referred to adult social care for an assessment for a stair lift.
- ✓ A resident will be prioritised on the kitchen refurbishment programme after an audit found that his current kitchen was no longer suitable.
- ✓ A family will now have a potential fire risk alleviated by changing the layout of their property.
- ✓ A resident had a large credit on his rent account and did not realise. He has been refunded that money.

Our enforcement team works hard to keep our residents safe. They have, for example, issued Community Protection Notices regarding breaches of lockdown regulations.

Five injunctions have been taken against residents who persistently caused problems for neighbours this year.

The team also received a recent compliment for settling a noise dispute between neighbours in Englefield Green.

News in Brief

Garage numbering

We have hired CLC Contractors to re-paint the numbers on Council-owned garages.

There is no need to make an appointment as the work is outside.

Rent a garage

If you are interested in renting a garage from the Council, please call:

01932 838383 or visit:

www.runnymede.gov.uk/garagesforrent

Repairs and Maintenance

During a lockdown, the Council can only complete essential repairs. If your repair is urgent or an emergency please contact us by phone or email in the usual way. If you are unsure if your repair is urgent, please contact us to discuss it.

Routine repairs will be reinstated in line with government guidance.

housing.repairs@runnymede.gov.uk or call: **01932 838383** (including out of hours).

Now easier to pay your rent

The Council is now all set up to accept rent by PayPal on the website.

We will also be accepting Recurring Card Payments which allows you to set up regular payments to be debited from your card without the need to call us or make repeat online payments.

Simply set up a My Payments Account on the "Pay For It" button on the Runnymede Borough Council website.

Please contact Customers Services for assistance: **01932 838383**

Remembrance Sunday

While we couldn't mark Remembrance Sunday in the usual way this year, residents may like to know that RBC supports the Armed Forces Community Covenant for serving forces:

www.runnymede.gov.uk/ArmedForcesSupport

Complaints and compliments

We welcome compliments and complaints about our housing services.

You can view the Council's Complaints Policy at: www.runnymede.gov.uk/comments-complaints-and-compliments

The Council's policy says that a complaint is "an expression of dissatisfaction about a Council service which requires a response." Complaints can be about the standard of a service, actions or lack of action by the Council or its contractors. If you need to make a complaint this can be in writing, through the website, in person or over the phone. We want tenants to be heard so please tell us if you want someone to make a complaint on your behalf.

All complaints received are reviewed so we can make improvements where possible. For example, we listened to concerns about the way we were handling complaints of anti-social behaviour and are now working with an expert advisor to improve our approach. We recently received a complaint from a new tenant that we hadn't made it clear what land was included with the tenancy. We are now using electronic mapping to improve the information we include in a Tenancy Agreement.

Complaints are looked at by a manager not involved in the original issue. They look into the details, check the Council's policy and if necessary, interview staff involved.

Occasionally we may not be able to treat an issue as a complaint if:

- it is part of legal proceedings or an insurance claim,
- the complaint has not been raised in time, and
- the complaints process has been completed.

Last year the complaints we received were:

Subject	Number of complaints
About a member of staff	3
Anti-Social Behaviour	1
Contractor delay	5
Homelessness Service	6
Housing Register	6
Property Maintenance	9
Tree Surgery	2
Total	32

If you are still unhappy with the Council's service as a landlord, after it has reached the final stage of the Complaints Procedure, you can take your case to The Housing Ombudsman which is set up by law to look at complaints about social landlords.

For more information visit:

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Going digital!

The Council is investing in technology to improve how we serve you.

During the next year, all residents will see improvements to the Council's website and the way we respond to enquiries. As we have got used to banks, retailers and utility suppliers being online, tenants will be able to choose to switch to some self-service options for convenience.

In future, sending publications like this newsletter in a digital format will be more convenient for most people and has environmental benefits too. Recently we asked you to update your preferences on how we should contact you; either by email, text or post. If you have not done so, please update your details here: www.runnymede.gov.uk/Update-Tenancy-Details

We are looking for feedback on what transactions residents would like to see online. We expect to make these services live in the coming year:

- Update your contact details
- Upload documentation and supporting correspondence
- Check your rent account
- Request a repair
- Right to Buy
- Set up a direct debit,
- Choose a payment date
- Report anti-social behaviour
- Apply for a Transfer or Mutual Exchange



Dear Resident,

I hope you are keeping well in these challenging times. Some people have and will experience exceptional circumstances. If you are struggling to pay your rent, do contact the Council to explain your difficulties. They may be able to suggest ways to help.

Last year I was re-elected as Chair of the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH). We get involved in looking at government policy, new initiatives like the Complaints Handling Code and ways to share best practice to raise standards across all council housing. I am also involved in the See The Person campaign which works to combat the stigma sometimes associated with those who live in social housing. If you feel you have been discriminated against because you are a tenant, please let me know.

I am pleased with the Council's plans for Going Digital as most tenants will find this very convenient, for example checking your rent account or ordering a repair online. I have been given assurances, however, that residents who can't email or use the internet will not miss out. If you would like to get involved in this project or have any comments about the Council's Housing services, I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

Jenny Hill

(Chairman, RCRA)

If you would like to get involved with the Residents Association, or raise any issues contact me on: **01932 568405, 07811 863565 or jennihill@ntlworld.com**

Help protect the environment and your purse...recycle!

Recent recycling improvements at sites including Surrey Towers, Hampshire, Middlesex and Oaklands Courts have helped to reduce the amount of rubbish produced. New weekly food waste collections have also been introduced to divert food waste to make electricity.

See www.runnymede.gov.uk/foodwaste for more information.

We are keeping the existing schemes under constant review to ensure they are working well for residents. We will let you know if any more changes are made. To help promote recycling a small competition was run to design a poster to encourage more tenants to recycle. We had some great entries so deciding on a winner was very difficult. In the end, one family's collective creativity won the day and has been printed on the back page of this magazine.

We encourage you to cut it out and keep it with your bins as a reminder.


Recycling is really important, so it is essential that everyone keeps up the good work.

If you are unsure what to recycle please see www.runnymede.gov.uk/recycling to find out more.




Thank you for recycling!

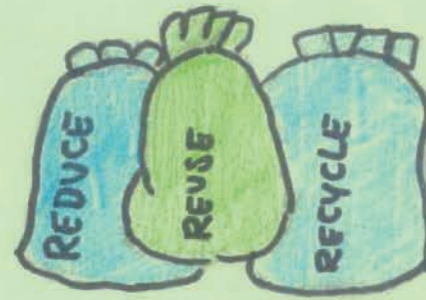
Recycling competition winner!

 **R**unnymede recycling



 **E**nvironmentally friendly

 **C**ommunity building

 **Y**ouths helping



 **C**are for our generation

 **L**ove our world 



 **E**scape pollution 

