

Runnymede Borough Council
Housing Service Annual Report
for Tenants
2021-22



Delivering for you

The Regulator of Social Housing sets the minimum standards that social landlords, including councils, must meet. This annual report gives information on our performance between April 2021 and March 2022. It is set out using the five themes of the Regulator's standards.



Cllr Jacqui Gracey

I am pleased to be sending you this annual report. It includes highlights from last year, plus work that is ongoing, to deliver quality services to the Council's tenants and leaseholders. This includes improving repairs and maintenance, modernising houses and flats, taking better care of communal areas and updating the way we deliver services to you.

We aim to exceed the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing. One way we are achieving this is by listening to our tenants – both in person and digitally.

Please look out for more ways you can engage with us, including our surveys, website and digital newsletters and let us know where we can do better.

Jacqui Gracey,

Chair of Runnymede Borough Council
Housing Committee



Andy Vincent

I am proud of our achievements in 2021-22. This included spending an extra 46 per cent on the previous year on caretaking and cleaning and an extra 52 per cent on maintaining and improving our homes. After the challenges of Covid, we invested £1.4 million more than the previous year, ensuring our tenants' homes are safe, comfortable, and modern.

More details are in this annual report. I hope you find it interesting. If you have any comments, please contact me at Runnymede Borough Council. I am committed to improving the services we deliver for you, despite the current financial difficulties.

We will soon be asking all tenants to take part in a survey to rate the services we provide and I promise to listen to your views.

Andy Vincent,

Corporate Head of Housing



Rent

The Rent Standard requires registered providers to set and increase rents in line with government policy.

Social rents are set using Government methodology and take into account property size, local earnings and relative property values.

Rents currently increase by Consumer Price Index +1 per cent every year. The government is considering capping social housing rent increases in 2023.

Rent from tenants pays for housing services and improvements. For example during the year we have completed a refurbishment of Surrey Towers, which included several kitchen and bathroom refurbishments, as well as essential fire safety works. We also installed a new door entry system.

During the year we finalised the details of a programme to deliver 225 new kitchens and bathrooms in 2022-23.



An example of a newly fitted kitchen in Chertsey



You recently completed work in our bathroom... we are writing to express our gratitude for the amazing service you provided and the way everything was done. Thank you for completing the work so quickly and making the process so comfortable. Everyone was hard-working, very polite and professional.

TENANT FROM ADDLESTONE

Net cost of new homes:
£1.2m / 10%

Money retained for future investment:
£3.3m / 26%
Includes Decent Homes investment for the next five years and new build homes.

Staff costs:
£2.4m / 18%
Dealing with anti-social behaviour, rent collection and service improvement etc.

How your rent was used in 2021-22

Loan repayments to Government:
£3.3m / 25%

Maintaining homes:
£1.3m / 10%
Day to day repairs, and property improvement.

Corporate services:
£1.4m / 11%
Legal, HR, IT, insurance, and Safer Runnymede.

Rent facts

Just **2.14%** Rent still to be paid.

37 more tenants in credit at the end of the year than at the start.

24 households pay an Affordable Rent on one of our new homes.

4.38% of tenants 7+ weeks in arrears.

Home

To achieve value for money spent on Council homes we balance planned upgrades, responsive repairs, work on empty properties and adaptations. We also aim to ensure that the quality meets or exceeds the Government’s Decent Homes standard.

We developed nine new energy efficient apartments close to Victory Park and local facilities in Addlestone.

We are committed to building 125 new homes over five years.

Additional investment is going into our planned works programme, with a budget that is almost four times as large in 2022-23 for planned works compared to 2021-22 - at £9million.



Apartments near completion in March in Addlestone

Supporting the environment

Through winning government funding, 38 homes had solar panels installed in the year 2021-22.

Adaptions policy

A new policy was approved so no disabled tenant should wait longer than 12 months for an approved adaptation to be progressed, but we will usually only carry out adaptations if the home is not under occupied.

“ I cannot begin to tell you how much this move has helped me. Being safe in your home is something I had forgotten how it felt until now. I could not of wished for anything better.

TENANT FROM EGHAM

“ 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

Works programmes

The percentage of homes with a valid Electrical Condition Report was 99.6 per cent (other councils average 91.4 per cent).

The percentage of homes with a compliant Gas Safety Certificate was over 99.3 per cent every month in 2021-22 and 100 per cent by April 2022.

We aim for all homes to meet or exceed the criteria of the Government’s Decent Homes. We carried out 817 improvements in 2021-22 including:

- 262 boilers replacements, with many properties also receiving extra loft insulation as a result.
- 157 kitchen replacements.
- 148 bathroom replacements.
- 25 roof refurbishments.

Repairs service

● 96 per cent of tenants who answered a survey were satisfied with the repairs service received. This score beats our repairs satisfaction score in 2019-20 (91.9 per cent) and 2020-21 (93.7 per cent).

- 96 per cent of our responsive (non-emergency) repairs were completed within their target timescale.
- The total number of repairs completed was 6,265.

Neighbourhoods and Communities

We aim to keep neighbourhoods and communal areas clean and safe. We have a good track record of working in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour.

Our Estates Services Team of caretakers make a visible difference to estates and communal areas across the Borough. They also supported engagement events at Stoneylands Court, Audley House and Heronfield.

- No parking signs and new fencing were put up in liaison with residents.
- Extra, ad hoc rubbish collections were arranged to improve the environment.
- A mixed recycling centre at Surrey Towers has also been introduced, with extra recycling bins on the estate.
- Regular hot spot checking and clearance and tidy up of garage sites across the borough.



Estate Services Team caretaker on duty in Addlestone

Anti-social behaviour policy

The Council approved a new anti-social behaviour policy in June 2021. This lays out options for residents to record incidents of ongoing ASB including using a smart phone 'Noise App', diary sheets, directly emailing or phoning a named member of staff and online reporting.

- 80 people responded to our survey on anti-social behaviour in Addlestone and this informed a successful bid for Safer Streets funding in partnership with Surrey Police.

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

Government Neighbourhood and Community Standard



“ Thank you for your support making this a more secure place for tenants here. ”

AUDLEY HOUSE RESIDENT

Tenancies

There is huge demand for social housing. To make best use of Runnymede’s council housing we offer flexible tenancies, promote mutual exchanges and support tenants who are under-occupying to move to a home that is a better fit for them.

We have worked hard during the year to create a suite of policies and processes which govern the way we operate and manage our tenancies so that all our services are fair and transparent.

We continually review the supply and demand for social housing. A new Housing Allocations Scheme was approved in June 2021. The following are examples of delivering to those in need:

- Emergency bed and breakfast accommodation was used sparingly again in 2021-22, with just 16 households over the year having to stay in a B&B for more than two weeks. That matches the figure for 2020-21.
- A new policy was approved in March by the Housing committee which commits the Council to “no second night out” for street homeless people in Runnymede.
- We helped 5 people under the protect and vaccinate scheme.
- In March we consulted on a new Financial Wellbeing Strategy to help support tenants with the increasing cost of living.
- The tenants annual report provides an insight to your housing services and we welcome your feedback.
- We recruited a new Tenancy Sustainment Officer. His role is to offer advice and support, targeted to tenants who are struggling financially.

Housing Register stats



Please contact us if you need help with registering for a transfer, or with bidding for available properties.

“ Homes must be let in a fair, transparent and efficient way. Tenancies must make efficient use of housing stock. ”

Government Tenancy Standard

Evictions and fraud

The Council takes any fraudulent behaviour very seriously and any wrong doing will be investigated.

- There were no evictions in 2021-22.
- The Council prosecuted a mother with two children who applied as homeless and provided fraudulent bank statements to support her application. She later pleaded guilty.

Lettings

The number of properties we re-let in 2021-22 went up by 43.5 per cent compared to the previous year.

- 178 properties let.
- 20 Independent Retirement Living properties let.
- 24 mutual exchanges.

Tenant engagement

During the past year we have changed the way we engage with residents. There are now far more ways for tenants and leaseholders to share their views and for us to show we are really listening.

The Involvement and Empowerment Standard expects social landlords to provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of tenants.

Our new approach to tenant engagement has delivered:

- A full time Engagement and Inclusion Officer
- More opportunities to be involved and to find out what we are doing through our website.
- Communicating with residents to sample opinions on policies, estate improvements, and how we can improve services.
- More digital communication as it can be more convenient and saves you money.
- Visits to the Housing pages on the Council's website increased by over 200 per cent between August 2020 and August 2022.
- We also posted printed newsletters to all tenants in March and July and we asked residents to proof read these newsletters before they were published to be sure the articles in them were useful and clear.
- Set up focus groups and estate walkabouts.

This annual report is also a way we communicate with and involve our tenants. We created a dedicated email address for tenants to get involved: Listening@runnymede.gov.uk

Listening to your feedback

Thank you to everyone who spared the time to give views on the surveys and other consultations we carried out about our policies and practices.

These policies govern the way we deal with cases or issues which arise, so your views can make change happen. In response to your feedback we made the following revisions to our policies:

- Ensuring tenants have access to essential items including furniture, bedding, and making children's needs a particular focus.
- Working to ensure prospective tenants are aware of and preparing for paying rent in advance.
- Providing advice to new tenants on seeking competitive energy providers.

“ 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

Your views shape our policies

Pet policy: We held a successful Pets in the Park Day to consult on our new Pet Policy.

Residents mainly agreed with the new arrangement around asking for permission to keep a pet.

We now ask pet owners to sign a contract that commits them to be a responsible owner. For dogs, we added that they must ensure their pet receives exercise and training.



Recharge Policy: We consulted on recharging tenants for repairs, cleaning and maintenance where it is their responsibility.

Respondents thought this policy might impact unfairly on vulnerable residents, so we have adopted a new procedure to ensure fairness for tenants with additional needs.

Complaints

The Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code says landlords must deal with complaints in a way that is fair, transparent and effective.

We received 37 complaints in the year. 10 were upheld or partly upheld. The most common reasons were repairs and property condition, the Housing Register, staff, fencing and empty homes.

Runnymede Borough Council

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