

Annual Report

to council tenants
& leaseholders

2017

Welcome to our annual report, letting you know how we've been performing over the last year and the real difference your feedback has made.

The report also highlights the plans we have for the coming year and our commitment to working with you to make lasting improvements to your service.

A welcome from the Chair of Housing & New Homes Committee



I'm pleased to present our 2016/17 annual report giving details of our achievements, plans for the coming year and the areas we feel we can improve on. I'm delighted to say we've continued with

our promise to help address the housing crisis by building 23 new homes in 2016/17, with a further 131 due to be completed in 2017/18.

Over the last year, I've seen first-hand the amount of work Housing do to ensure we provide services that are customer-focussed and deliver value for money. The procurement of the new gas contract has led to savings of £591,000 in the first year and we've invested £9.517m in repairs and maintenance of your homes. I would particularly highlight the great team work that helped to return six much needed homes during the tenancy fraud amnesty.

Looking forward, some of our goals for the year ahead are to provide you with a more efficient and cost effective grounds maintenance service, keep you better informed and continue with our commitment to invest in refurbishing your homes.

There will be challenging times ahead, including the introduction of Universal Credit and I welcome the opportunity to work with you to meet these challenges and provide a service we can continue to be proud of.

We've received over 2,500 responses this year to a range of consultation and customer feedback opportunities, including customer surveys, the Service Improvement Groups, Area Panels, and the Citywide Conference.

Thank you for providing us with your valuable feedback on how we're doing and what you'd like us to improve. We know there's more work to do, so please continue to talk to us about what matters to you. I look forward to working with you in the year ahead.

Councillor Anne Meadows

Key improvements

What we have achieved

- Our innovative 'Hidden Homes' programme has made the best use of redundant storage spaces at St James' House, Normanhurst and Swallow Court to provide eight much needed new homes.

Contacted over 7,500 tenants impacted by welfare reforms for the 'Your Rent Matters' campaign



- We ran a campaign called 'Your Rent Matters' contacting over 7,500 tenants impacted by welfare reforms and gave individual specialised support to 220 of you.
- We reviewed how council housing is allocated to make sure we're prioritising local people most in need, informing those we're unable to house at an earlier stage and signposting them to where they can get further help.
- For 12 consecutive months, we've achieved 100% gas safety compliance with boiler servicing, keeping you safe in your homes.
- We're committed to investing in our properties, in 2016/17 we delivered a Housing Investment Programme totalling £24.309m of capital funding to maintain and improve your homes and estates.
- We worked in partnership with East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service to invest in improving fire safety in your homes, which included a pilot project to fit a sprinkler system in a high rise seniors housing block.
- We invested a total of £1.132m in adapting your homes and completed 183 major adaptations helping to make your homes suitable for your needs.

Next we will be...

- Completing the Brooke Mead new build extra-care housing scheme, similar to Seniors Housing with social care services provided on site.
- Bringing the tenancy agreement up to date, making sure it's written in plain English and providing clear information about your and our tenancy responsibilities.
- Creating jobs and training opportunities for three apprentices in Housing's Property & Investment, Customer Service and Adaptations Teams.

Customer service, choice & complaints

What we have achieved

- We reviewed our assisted bidding process to provide better knowledge across the Housing Customer Service Team and increased support to help you bid independently.
- Increased the number of tenants signed up to the customer online system (COS) to 2,209 so that more of you have 24 hour access to your housing account information.

Reviewed both the alterations and pet permission processes and introduced simpler application forms and quicker customer response times.



- We kept you informed with 21,815 text messages about important information, such as lift breakdowns and gas appointment reminders.

How your feedback makes a difference

- All members of the Housing Customer Service Team have attended Deaf Awareness & Communications Training in response to a request to provide more help for our deaf residents.
- You asked if we could provide a speedier response to email enquiries. We've increased the number of staff who respond to your emails, reducing the time you have to wait for a response.

Next we will be...

- Paying closer attention to your individual written responses to our customer service survey, so that we can make specific improvements and feed back directly to you on what these are.
- Working closely with other council services such as libraries, council tax and housing benefit - offering you additional ways to access services at a time that suits you and provides better value for money.

Supporting you

What we have achieved

- We ran a number of sessions in Seniors Housing Schemes inviting opticians, chiropodists and doctors to help you improve your health and wellbeing.
- Supported 146 tenants to manage their tenancies and prevent the loss of their homes.
- Our discretionary decorating and gardening schemes helped:
 - 365 households with grass and hedge cutting
 - 230 households by decorating a room for them
 - 55 households with a decorating pack
- Our Occupational Therapists worked closely with Homemove to ensure we made the best use of existing adapted and accessible properties.

“I was well impressed, I got a really quick response when I applied and the free pack delivery was a great surprise.”

Discretionary decorating scheme applicant

Next we will be...

- Continuing to promote Digital Brighton & Hove, a local partnership set up to help people in Brighton & Hove develop their digital skills and make the most of using the internet and the benefits it offers.
- Running a project in partnership with the fire service, to reduce the risk of fire, by installing sprinklers in properties where we have identified high risk vulnerable tenants who hoard.

“I was fortunate to be put in the hands of the right person, someone who had knowledge and expertise to make some positive improvement in my life”.

Feedback about the Tenancy Sustainment Team

Building new homes

What we have achieved

- Completed and let another 23 new build council homes for rent in 2016/17 at five schemes, including two homes that are fully wheelchair accessible.
- Obtained planning permission to build another 41 new council homes.
- Built all new homes to high design and sustainability standards. At least one in ten are designed for wheelchair users and we work closely with the council's Housing Adaptations Team on affordable accessible homes.
- Our innovative New Homes for Neighbourhoods new build programme on brownfield sites was shortlisted in the Housing Initiative category of the Local Government Chronicle Awards 2017.

How your feedback makes a difference

- We really value the feedback of local residents when plans for new homes are drawn up. For example, the design and position of the new Robert Lodge North block was changed as a result of resident consultation.
- We also ask for feedback when tenants move into their properties on all aspects of their brand new home. We use this to learn where we can make improvements when building other new homes. For example, recent feedback about the window openers at Darwell Court led us to review and change the window types and winders for Kite Place.

Next we will be...

- Completing Brooke Mead extra care scheme which is made up of 45 one bedroom flats.
- Continuing with the development at Kite Place, which will have 57, one, two and three bedroom council flats. We expect these to be ready to let in the autumn.
- Continuing with the development at Hobby Place, which will have 29, one, two and three bedroom council flats, we expect these to be completed and ready to let early 2018

Resident involvement and empowerment

What we have achieved

- Supported residents to set up a new association in Pett Close and revived an existing association in Hollingdean.
- You helped us to review and update the tenant and resident association code of conduct, making sure it's up to date and easy to understand.
- Consulted with you on budget proposals, to find out if you felt we had the balance right and to get your ideas for saving money and increasing income.

How your feedback makes a difference

- You told us you wanted to be more involved in the repairs and maintenance of your homes. We've offered opportunities for you to become resident inspectors to help give a resident's perspective on your housing and arranged for shadowing of repairs and gas operatives so you can see at first-hand how the work is done.

You told us that you want more modern ways of being involved. We invited you to give your views in an online survey and more of you than ever before responded.



Next we will be....

Putting in place the agreed recommendations from the Resident Involvement Service Review, providing you with the opportunity to get involved and influence your housing services in ways that suit you.

“My new home is perfect. The property was spotless and really well finished, the layout is excellent and I don't hear any of my neighbours.”
Robert Lodge South resident.

Your home

Housing Revenue Account's repairs and maintenance spend in 2016/17 was £9.517m. The money was invested into the following areas:

Responsive Repairs	£4.628m
Empty Properties	£1.660m
Servicing and other repairs (eg gas boilers, lifts and door entry systems)	£3.229m

The capital investment programme sets out how the council invests in homes and neighbourhoods. In 2016/17, we spent £24.309m, invested in the following areas:

Planned maintenance programmes (eg kitchens, bathrooms and doors)	£8.362m
Major projects (specific projects to blocks in the city)	£9.234m
Mechanical and electrical programmes (eg boilers, lifts and water tanks)	£6.713m

What we have achieved

- Answered an average of 334 calls to the Repairs Helpdesk every working day, 74% of which were answered within 20 seconds.
- Carried out 32,571 repairs - an average 126 repairs every working day.
- Relet 538 council homes and helped 128 households move through mutual exchange.
- Successfully bid with a number of partners for international funding for SHINE, the 'sustainable houses in an inclusive neighbourhood' project - to tackle carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions in our housing stock and help you to reduce your fuel costs.

Next we will be...

- Starting our SHINE energy efficiency advice project which will be delivered over the next four years. We will give you more information on how this can help you over the coming months.
- Carrying out a full review of customer contact, complaints and compliments on the repairs partnering contract.

“Being allocated a council flat is a life changing and emotional experience. The Rehousing Officer was by our side through the whole process, making it special and helping reduce the stress of such a momentous event.”

Resident feedback

Welfare reform

What we have achieved

- Conducted a highly successful visiting project helping those of you affected by the new lower benefit cap to find work, claim extra benefits and improve your overall situations. The project has already helped nearly a quarter of people affected by taking them out of the cap altogether.
- All 7,500 of our working-age tenants were contacted to alert them of the introduction of Universal Credit, resulting in over 220 people being referred for support by staff volunteers. We also knocked on over 1,300 doors to talk to you face to face about the changes.
- Our Housing Employment Support Team worked with tenants to help them access benefits, particularly disability benefits. They also provided support with medical appointments and claims. The team were 100% successful in getting the appeal claims they supported overturned.

How your feedback makes a difference

- When we visited, many of you told us that you weren't aware you would be affected by Universal Credit. We provided information on the potential impact and will continue to give support and advice in the coming months.

Next we will be...

- Continuing our 'Your Rent Matters' campaign to target groups likely to be affected by Universal Credit when the full service is introduced to the city in October 2017 – look out for a poster campaign this summer.
- Completing our 'Better Start' online guide. This is expected to be ready for the end of summer 2017 and will give new and potential tenants the best start in managing a home and their tenancy.

Seniors Housing

What we have achieved

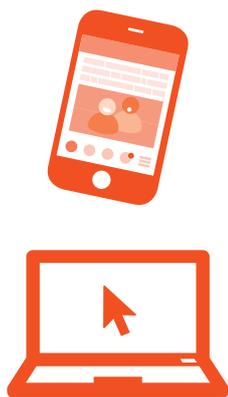
- Reviewed the written information we provide about each of our schemes to help you to decide on the best accommodation for your needs.

We opened a 'men in sheds' wood working project at Leach Court in partnership with Fabrica, a visual arts organisation in Brighton. The project encourages skill sharing and informal learning in a friendly environment.



- Replaced six warden call alarm systems with a modern version that has extra features, including a button on the speech module that lets the scheme manager know the tenant is alright.
- Introduced a music based dementia intervention programme at Lavender House where residents are now engaged in scheme and community based music activities.

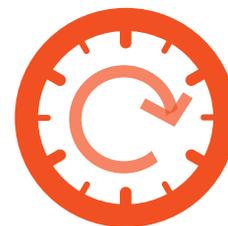
Delivered gadget workshops to over 100 tenants in partnership with citizen online, something we'd not done before. Helping tenants to become more confident and familiar with using their tablets, phones and laptops.



Next we will be...

- Widening the activities offered in our schemes, at no extra cost to you or the council.

Working together with the fire service to increase safety in council owned homes by fitting Stoveguard (an auto timer turn off switch for cookers) in our new Brooke Mead scheme to help improve safety when cooking.



Your neighbourhood and community

What we have achieved

- We redesigned our landlord services, creating area teams with local knowledge, to manage the issues that you've told us matter to you.

How your feedback makes a difference

- You asked about how we could reduce the financial cost and environmental damage of fly tipping on our estates. We provided information on the cost to Housing and the different ways you can help by donating your unwanted furniture or disposing of it responsibly. We received lots of furniture donations that we recycled and distributed to those in need.

"The Estates Team provided a great service collecting our unwanted furniture and we're so pleased it's going to help someone in need."
Resident feedback

Next we will be...

- Working with the Business & Value for Money Service Improvement Group to review the grounds maintenance of your estates, making sure we are providing a great service that represents value for money.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

What we have achieved

- We tackled drug dealing and drug production in our properties robustly throughout the city, working closely with the police. Using the powers available to us, we closed eight properties and ended the tenancies of six households, stopping some difficult experiences for neighbours.
- We reviewed how we deal with low level nuisance complaints. The Customer Service Team now become involved at the first point of contact to resolve these, allowing Housing Officers to deal with more complex cases.

Next we will be...

- Working with the legal powers available to protect communities and reduce the impact of anti-social and criminal behaviour.

Leaseholders

What we have achieved

- Offered confidential meetings with leaseholders to discuss flexible payment options where high cost major works are proposed or taking place.

Collected £3.6m of leaseholder service charges, an increase of £500,000 from last year, meaning more money to invest in maintaining current homes and building new ones.



Next we will be...

- Offering a full range of competitive gas services from a boiler service to a complete new heating installation in partnership with K&T Heating, our gas contractors

Tenancy fraud update

Tackling tenancy fraud remains a key priority for Housing. Our recent tenancy fraud amnesty campaign resulted in the return of six properties. Each property recovered is estimated to save the public purse £18,000 per annum (according to national statistics) as well as providing much needed homes. We have also:

- Detected five possible cases of fraud through the gas access process
- Investigated and closed 258 cases of suspected fraud, resulting in 15 properties being taken back, bringing the total for the year to 21 properties

If you suspect someone acquired their council home fraudulently, is illegally subletting their home or keeping their tenancy while living elsewhere, please contact our fraud team in confidence by calling 01273 291847 or emailing anti-fraud@brighton-hove.gov.uk.

Value for money

What we have achieved

- Our end of year rent collection rates were up 0.19% from last year to 98.96%. The total amount of rent arrears was £533,206.
- Saved £591,000 through our new gas contract with K&T Heating, giving us more money to invest in maintaining your homes.
- Increased the number of tenants paying their rent by direct debit from 1866 to 1999.
- Our targeted investment programme has reduced the amount we've spent on responsive repairs by nearly a million since 2010/11.

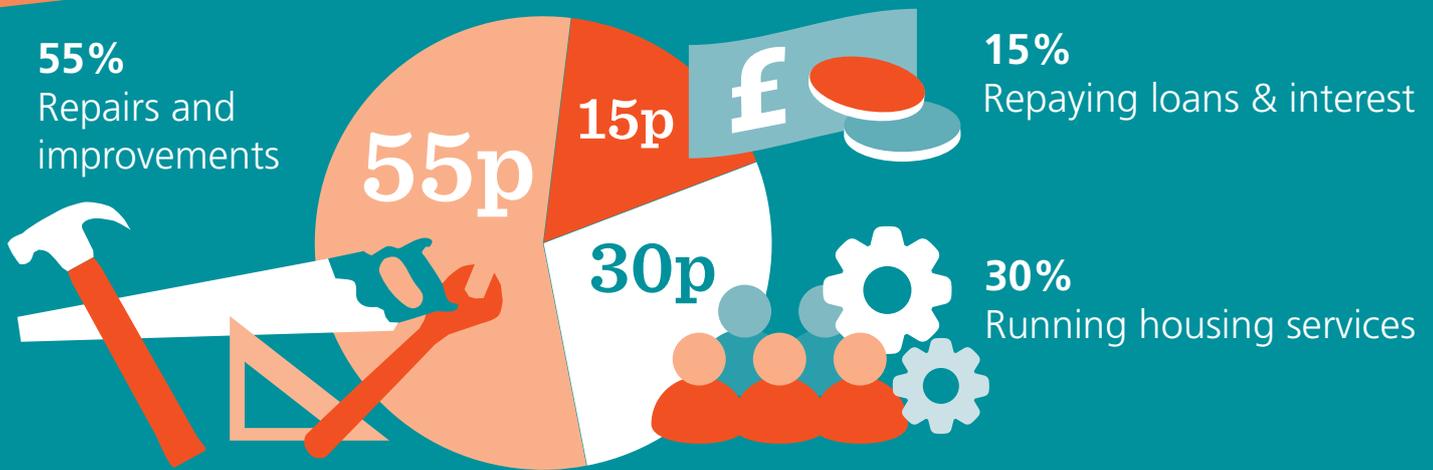
Next we will be...

- Developing a strategy to make the best use of our parking and garage sites to:
 - increase income
 - improve garages and spaces
 - identify areas where you'd like us to introduce enforcement.
 - identify areas for redevelopment into new homes.

How do we spend the money

Income and expenditure

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



Total income: **£59,200,000**

Total expenditure: **£57,000,000**

The difference in income of £2.2 million has been added to reserves in the Housing Revenue Account to fund future investment in your homes.

You can find more information on our performance at 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