

Annual report

to council tenants
& leaseholders

2020



This report gives information about
Housing services between **April 2019** to
March 2020 and our plans for this year.

If you have any comments about this report,
or have suggestions for next year's, we
welcome your feedback. Please contact us at:
housing.performance@brighton-hove.gov.uk



Brighton & Hove
City Council

Welcome

Welcome to our annual report for 2019-2020. This is my first as chair of housing and it's certainly been an eventful introduction to the role!



The end of this period coincided with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, when our council services adapted quickly to support the city's residents at a time of unprecedented disruption and need. Thank you for your patience and understanding during this time of change.

Housing played a vital role in the council's response, making contact with thousands of vulnerable households to ensure they could access essential items and were safe. It was heartening to see so many residents help neighbours and forge new community links over this time. We will continue to support residents while the impact of Covid-19 unfolds beyond the immediate crisis.

Last year marked the centenary of the Housing & Town Planning Act, 1919 – also known as the 'Addison Act' after the then Minister of Health. This led to the first mass building of council housing by local authorities. We celebrated with presentations on the history of council housing in the city at the winter round of Area Panels.

A hundred years on, we're continuing to add to the council's housing stock by building new homes and buying back former council properties.

Over the next three years, we have ambitious plans to provide a minimum of 800 additional council homes and, through our 'Homes for Brighton & Hove' partnership with Hyde Housing, aim to deliver 1,000 new lower cost homes for rental and sale.

This year also marked the end of our ten-year partnership with Mears. Over that time, the partnership provided nearly 200 apprenticeships, achieved many savings for the council and delivered improvements to make all our council homes meet the Decent Homes Standard.

On 1 April, we launched our new in-house repairs and maintenance service, albeit in circumstances limited by Covid-19. Residents have helped us to shape the service, influencing how performance will be measured, the style and colour of the new staff uniforms and the contractual arrangements for major work.

We will continue to work with you as we deliver our plans this year and go through the Covid-19 crisis.

Councillor Gill Williams
Chair of Housing

Customer experience

This year...

- Our Housing Customer Service team:

Responded to:



Began handling calls about Homemove, reducing call-waiting times for residents with these types of enquiries

Let 485 car parking spaces and garages, an increase of 122 since last year. This is due to the online application process which makes it easier for residents to apply for spaces.

- Rental from these and other parking assets contributed over £1,064,000 of income to the Housing Revenue Account.
- In response to the Covid-19 crisis, contacted over 4,000 of our most vulnerable households in March and April to make sure they had essential items such as food and prescriptions. We're continuing to support residents through the impact of the Covid-19 crisis.

Looking forward...

- 2021 will see the introduction of a new housing computer system to support and deliver services to residents. It will include improved self-service options. You can register to check out your rent and other related accounts, order a repair, or simply get in touch using a smartphone, tablet or laptop.

Supporting you

This year...

- We helped 227 households through the discretionary decorating scheme, gave decorating packs to a further 61 tenants and helped 456 households maintain their gardens through the discretionary gardening scheme.
- We helped 132 vulnerable households to keep their tenancies, where they were at risk.
- Tenants received around £200,000 additional income through benefit claims and appeals, charitable donations and grants. We also helped them get £25,000 of their personal debts written off.
- Over 400 items of recycled furniture were given to tenants helping to furnish their new homes.
- We completed 138 mutual exchange applications from residents, all within the required timescale of 42 days.

Looking forward...

- We will provide advice and support around benefits, money, food and fuel poverty to the many households impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as our vulnerable households.
- We will continue to work with partners to tackle social isolation and promote digital inclusion among our tenants and help get people back into education, training and employment.
- We will be working with House Exchange so tenants can access a free service to register their interest in a home swap.

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

This year...

- Over the last year, we have reviewed the way we manage your data across housing to make sure we are doing so in a secure and safe way. Here are some examples of this work:

Writing over 100 privacy notices to let you know what we do with your information

Completing Data Protection Impact Assessments for new data systems to ensure they meet GDPR standards

Supporting colleagues and resident inspectors by holding data management training

Looking forward

- We will be doing much more over the coming months to make sure how we manage your data continues to improve as part of everyone's job.

Your home

This year...

**We invested
£9.869
million
in repairs and
maintenance:**



£4.813m on responsive repairs to complete 27,337 emergency and routine repairs in your homes - an average of 108 every working day

£1.830m on empty properties, carrying out repairs needed to make 391 homes ready for new tenants

£3.226m on servicing and other repairs, including safety checks to over 9,900 gas boilers in tenants' homes

- We invested £23.456m in improvements:

£9.843m on planned maintenance programmes, including replacing almost 400 kitchens, 100 bathrooms, 400 windows and 200 doors

£7.079m on major projects, including external improvements to blocks of flats

£6.534m on mechanical and electrical programmes, including upgrading three lifts and installing a new lift in a seniors' scheme

- The Housing Adaptations Service delivered 292 major housing adaptations and funded over 2,000 minor adaptations and equipment, investing a total of £1.35m in council tenants' homes.

- We carried out structural surveys on our eight 'large panel structure' tower blocks to update our records on the buildings. The survey found the buildings to be generally in good structural condition and highlighted a few non-urgent repairs, which were scheduled into our planned maintenance programme.

Looking forward...

- We will offer one apprenticeship per £1 million spend across the repairs, planned maintenance and major projects services. We are currently recruiting 10 plumbing apprentices to join the new service.
- Planned maintenance and improvement programmes, such as new kitchens and bathrooms, roofing, windows, doors and rewires will be delivered through a number of new contracts.
- A new competitive approach for larger major work projects will provide value for money and an opportunity for residents to be involved in the contractor selection process.
- Resident Inspectors will be involved in carrying out surveys with tenants about their experience of the new in-house service.

Fire safety

This year...

- We carried out a project on the Clarendon Estate in Hove, to reposition the communal bins away from the high-rise blocks, as this was a fire risk. These are now located on the street with more regular collections. This project took longer than expected and the temporary bins we provided were too small and often overflowing. We have apologised to residents for this and will use the learning we gained in other projects to re-site communal bins.
- In December 2019 working with East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service, we carried out a training exercise at Dudeney Lodge, a high-rise block in Hollingdean. This involved trainee fire fighters who gained valuable experience of dealing with this property type. Thank you to the residents for supporting this exercise.

Looking forward...

- Working with our colleagues in the East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service to increase the take up of Fire Home Safety Visits. For fire safety advice, visit the fire service website www.esfrs.org or call 0800 177 7069 to arrange a home safety visit.

Our carbon footprint

This year...



SHINE

This European Union funded project, 'Sustainable Housing Initiatives in Excluded Neighbourhoods' (SHINE), has continued with benefits including:

- Over 500 residents have received free home energy advice at events across the city or via home visits. Residents have been helped to switch energy tariffs and many have been supported to claim the winter homes discount.
- 110 households have had small energy saving measures installed in their homes.
- Smart thermostat controls and weather compensators have been fitted to over 200 heating systems to increase the efficiency of the boiler.

For more information, visit www.shine-brighton-hove.eu.



SOLARISE

- The European Union funded Solarise project has paid for the installation of solar panels at three sites in Buckley Close, Oxford Street and Elwyn Jones Court. This project is piloting ways to increase the benefit of communal solar photovoltaic systems for residents.
- We have switched vacant properties to a 100% renewable electricity supply, which offers incoming tenants competitively priced tariffs. This also contributes to the council's ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030.

- We have installed our first ever air source heat pump for the Hampshire Lodge meeting room after the gas supply was removed. This provides low carbon heating and will act as a pilot as we look to roll out more of these in the future.

Looking forward...

- We have bids for funding to install multiple energy saving measures in up to 70 homes. This will help to improve the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings of our least energy efficient properties. If successful, this project will inform a wider programme to improve the energy efficiency of all of our stock, ensuring our homes contribute to the council's net zero carbon city ambitions.

We will install the first ground source heat pump in our housing stock, which will provide low carbon heating and hot water for residents in Elwyn Jones Court.



- The HRA Energy Strategy was agreed by Housing Committee in 2018, and we have since committed to a zero carbon target by 2030. We will be reviewing the strategy and developing a delivery plan outlining how we can achieve this in our housing.

Delivering new homes

This year...

We have added to the council's housing stock by:

- Completing three new council-rented houses and nine flats at Kensington Street.
- Completing the conversion of 15 flats for use as council-owned temporary accommodation at Tilbury Place.
- Delivering six new flats by converting disused spaces as part of the Hidden Homes programme (three at Swallow Court, two at Elwyn Jones Court and one at Woods House).

- Bringing back 43 ex-council homes sold under the Right to Buy.
- Agreeing to lease land at Dunster Close, Brighton, for the development of community led housing.

Looking forward...

We will add to the city's housing by:

Increasing our housing stock with a budget to purchase a further

60 homes



- Delivering 50 new homes as part of the New Homes for Neighbourhoods programme at Selsfield Drive, Buckley Close, Rotherfield Crescent and Frederick Street.
- Increasing resources to progress our Hidden Homes and conversions programme – we are planning to deliver 13 new homes this year with more in the pipeline.
- Delivering 10 new flats for council-owned temporary accommodation at Oxford Street.
- Supporting community led housing providers to deliver affordable homes on small housing owned sites.

Income and money advice

This year...

- Housing and Adult Social Care jointly commissioned a money and debt advice contract, which started in April 2020. The previous year's contract helped tenants and leaseholders obtain £206,036 of extra income by the end of 2019.

- Housing Income Management worked closely with Money Advice Plus to obtain £18,103 of Discretionary Housing Payments and obtain Council Tax exemptions where appropriate by the end of 2019.
- Our Rent Accounting Section has made it easier to set up Direct Debit payments over the phone or via the council website.

Looking forward...

- We are increasing the number of Income Advisers to provide dedicated financial inclusion advice and assistance to tenants experiencing financial difficulties.
- We will continue to work with the council's Discretionary Help and Advice Team, Welfare Rights, Tenancy Sustainment, Employment Support and Revenues & Benefits officers to maximise support and income for tenants.
- We will work with external organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to make sure tenants are in the best position to claim Universal Credit (UC).
- We will continue to use a range of preventative strategies to ensure our eviction rate remains one of the lowest among councils in the country.

Leaseholders

This year...

- We've listened to leaseholders and are now engaging with them at a much earlier stage when major work is proposed for their block.
- We're keeping leaseholders involved by providing regular updates in Homing In and we've held leaseholder events specifically focusing on the future repairs service.
- We've recruited a new Senior Leaseholder Liaison Officer who will be able to meet leaseholders to discuss issues of concern around service changes and to improve overall communication.
- The Leaseholder Action Group (LAG) has been represented at the Future Repairs and Maintenance Task and Finish Group, helping to shape the new in-house service.

Looking forward...

- We will produce information leaflets on each of the extended payment options available for resident leaseholders when paying major work charges.
- We will update the Leaseholder Handbook.
- We will carry out a leaseholder satisfaction survey.

Seniors housing

This year...

Free wi-fi was installed in the majority of schemes to support digital accessibility.



- We've improved the number of our empty seniors housing homes by including decorating and carpeting as part of our lettable standard, leading to a reduction in the number of properties being re-advertised.
- We opened a new community room at Woods House and celebrated residents being awarded £10,000 by the National Lottery to develop a new breakfast club.
- We held a celebration of Windrush Day for residents, with a performance of 'Streets of Gold' by actor and playwright Victor Richards.
- We've upgraded the warden call system in all of our schemes enabling residents to use a new 'I'm OK' facility to help monitor wellbeing.

Looking forward...

- We will be investing in our schemes to implement the findings of our seniors review.
- We will be working with the Seniors Housing Action Group to better recognise and celebrate the achievements of residents and staff in improving their communities.
- We will increase promotion of our schemes.

Your neighbourhood and community

This year...

We took back nine properties following fraud investigations.



- We dealt with 744 cases of anti-social behaviour, with 95% of victims satisfied when surveyed at the closure of their case.
- Introduced a new Environmental Improvement Budget to fund projects to improve the public areas of the council's housing estates. Projects approved include the installation of bin stores and areas, landscape improvements, planters, funding the Phoenix Mural, improving play areas, providing new benches and cycle racks.
- Staff working on our 'Untidy Gardens Project' engaged positively with residents to resolve 386 of 510 cases identified. We're continuing work on the remaining cases.
- As part of a volunteering event in July, staff from across the housing service swapped their normal day jobs and decided to clear away weeds, and cut back overgrown shrubs, from pathways leading to flats in Stephens Road, Hollingdean.
- We introduced our Environmental Improvement Survey to replace estate inspections, asking residents to identify their priorities for improving their neighbourhood improvements. The Field Officers are using the responses to work with communities to bring about improvements to housing areas across the city.
- At the same time, we introduced the 'Don't walk by' policy encouraging all residents and staff to report repairs to public areas.

Looking ahead...

- As part of the celebrations to mark 100 years of council housing, residents were invited to bid for funding for small community art projects. We are looking forward to see these develop over the coming year.

Community engagement

This year...

- Resident involvement work transferred to the new Community Engagement team, bringing resident involvement together with community development. This has brought resident associations closer to a wider range of community work, such as developing community run spaces, youth projects, community cafes and food banks and developing Neighbourhood Action Plans.
- The team worked with tenant and leaseholder groups to support their input into the management and maintenance of their homes through Area Panels, Service Improvement Groups, the Citywide Conference and Estate Development Panels.
- The Home Service Improvement Group worked on the new repairs and maintenance service, feeding into governance, engagement and contract procurement strategies.
- The Estate Development Budget (EDB) has delivered over £300,000 worth of community projects including community gardens and allotments enabling residents to grow and share produce.
- During the Covid-19 crisis, the Community Engagement team worked with residents to:

Hold EDB meetings remotely, engaging new residents in the decision-making process

Deliver a newsletter with emergency information for residents with no online access

Develop local food hubs, for example, supporting the Bristol Estate Leaseholders and Tenants Association to provide food seven days a week

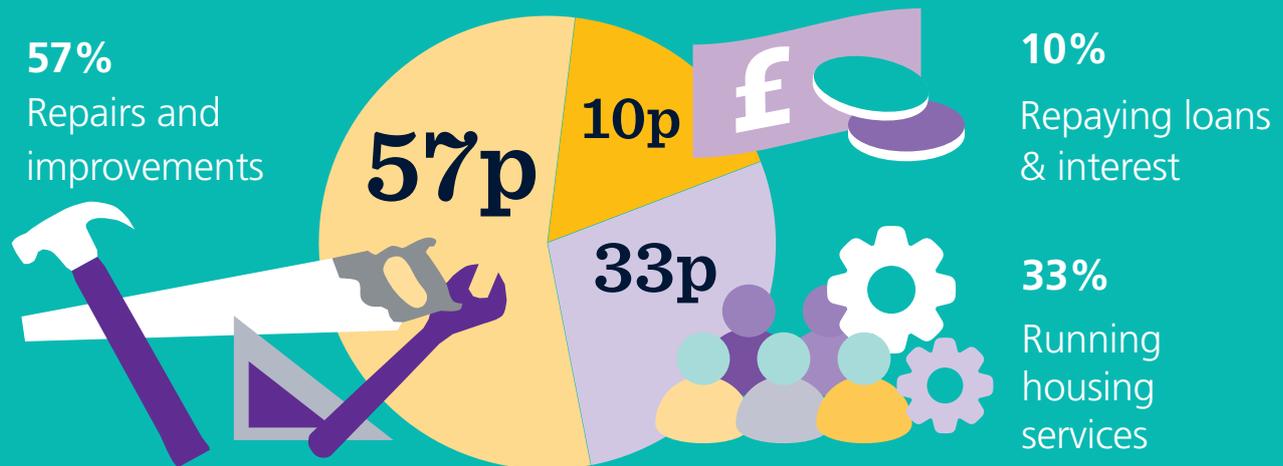
Looking ahead...

- The Tenant Disability Network plan to work with a local taxi provider to improve the service provided for residents with disabilities and wheelchairs.
- Build on the success of online meetings, support tenants and leaseholder to use more digital platforms to access service improvement and Area Panel meetings.

How we spend our income

Income and expenditure

Each £1 of rent and service charge income pays for



Total income: **£59.3 million**

Total expenditure: **£58.6 million**

The difference in income of £0.7 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 comments on this annual report or there's anything you'd like to see in future editions, we would welcome your feedback. Please contact us at:

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