

Annual Report

to council tenants & leaseholders

2012



Welcome to the 2012 annual report to all council tenants and leaseholders.

We've worked closely with residents to make sure we're giving you the information you want and, following your feedback, have produced this shorter annual report.

Inside you'll find information on how we're performing, how we use the money we get from rents and service charges, what we're doing well and where we need to improve.

You'll also find details of how we've met our commitments to you and the improvements we're making this year.



Brighton & Hove
City Council

Performance highlights

- Results from the STAR customer satisfaction survey – which 1,200 residents completed in December 2011 – showed 83% of residents are satisfied with the service provided by Brighton & Hove City Council housing services. This is a significant increase on 2008 when 72% were satisfied.
- An independent inspection in early 2012 identified that we deliver high quality services.
- Among the councils we compare our performance to who also directly manage their housing, we were the 'biggest improver' in terms of overall satisfaction.



Our new single number for tenancy enquires
01273 293030

Resident involvement and empowerment

We will provide a wide range of opportunities for you to be involved in what we do and how we do it, involving you in setting our standards and making sure we meet them. If you'd like to get involved, please contact the Resident Involvement Team on 01273 292112 / 294561, or email RIT@brighton-hove.gov.uk

What we have done

- Over 2,000 residents are involved in providing feedback to help us improve our services.
- We support 65 tenant and resident associations, and residents from these play an active role on the four area panels and other groups that help to improve the service.
- We have improved access to the City Assembly using social media.
- We have supported the £540,000 resident-led Estate Development Budget.

What we are doing

- Establishing a Tenant Scrutiny Panel to ensure residents are independently able to hold us to account and help improve our services.
- Exploring ways of involving under-represented members of the community.



4 out of 5 tenants are very or fairly satisfied with our service

Customer service, choice and complaints

We will be easy to reach, treat you with respect, listen and get things done.

What we have done

- We answered 230,000 phone calls, 5,000 emails and over 4,000 letters. While lower than last year, we also had 40,000 visits to our housing offices. That's a total of over 1,000 contacts every working day.



We've received **over 230,000** phone enquiries

- We launched the Housing Customer Online Service so residents can have direct access to their rent and other housing accounts whenever they want – over 1,000 people have signed up.
- Complaints about tenancy management fell but complaints about repairs rose.
- We have created a new Customer Service Team as a single point of first contact for general enquiries and tenancy management - you can call them on 01273 293030.
- Appointed a new Financial Inclusion Officer and a Money Advice Worker to help residents with money concerns, especially with the upcoming benefit changes.
- Updated our website (www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/council-housing) to make it more interactive.

What we are doing

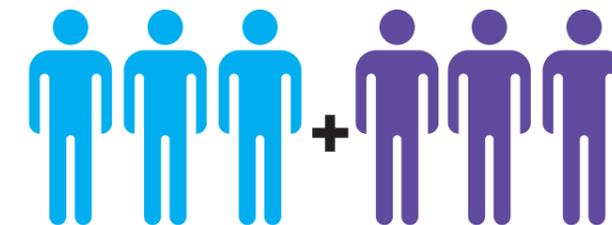
- We will be doing more work to respond well when you complain, and learn lessons from complaints.
- Introducing the Institute of Customer Service training to support staff in their new roles.
- The Customer Services Team are working to increase the number of calls resolved at the first point of contact.

Supporting diversity

We will ensure we communicate and deliver our services in a way which meets the diverse needs of our community.

What we have done

- Provided translations and alternative versions of leaflets and handbooks.
- Worked with the 'Trust for Developing Communities' to provide training for our staff to help us better understand the diverse needs of the community.
- Carried out 556 adaptations to council properties to support residents with disabilities.
- Increased the number of Tenancy Sustainment Officers from three to six to provide support to our most vulnerable residents.



An extra three Tenancy Sustainment Officers to provide support for our most vulnerable residents.

What we are doing

- Looking at how we can improve our services to the transgender community.
- Reviewing our services to the black and minority ethnic community to see where changes need to be made.
- Starting skills training for tenants who would like to improve their reading, writing, maths or computer skills.
- Doing more kitchen and bathroom adaptations for tenants with disabilities.

Your home

We will advise you of major home improvements and work to agreed timescales. We will make sure all empty homes meet the locally agreed standard before we let them.

Repairs and maintenance

- The repairs and maintenance budget totals £10.4 million, divided into three main areas:
 - Responsive repairs - £6 million
 - Empty Properties - £1.4 million
 - Servicing and other repairs - £3 million
- 41,252 responsive repairs were completed – an average of 160 each working day.
- The STAR survey records satisfaction with the last repair tenants had done at 81%.



An average of 160 repairs carried out each working day

Other improvements

- We fitted 30 new solar installations to properties in Woodingdean, Hollingdean and the Bristol Estate.
- 90% of our properties now meet the Decent Homes standard and we are on target to complete all homes by 2014.
- 99.87% of properties had a current gas safety certificate at 31 March 2012.
- Our Neighbourhood Response Team completed minor adaptations for residents in an average of three days of the request.
- We installed 736 new kitchens and 273 new bathrooms during the year.

What we are doing

- We are continuing to make homes more energy efficient, with programmes on over-cladding, and tackling damp and condensation.
- Working hard to reduce the number of repair jobs cancelled by doing more to get the correct information.

Your tenancy

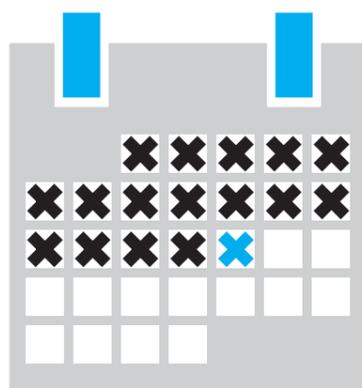
We will provide the advice and information to maintain your tenancy. We will carry out tenancy visits at least once every three years.

What we have done

- We visited over 8,000 people in their own homes (excluding repairs), including the most vulnerable and disabled residents in the city.
- We started work on building 15 new council homes at Ainsworth House and prepared other sites for development.
- 56 people moved into smaller homes through the Transfer Incentive Scheme – up from 50 the previous year.
- Our average time to re-let a property is 17 days – down from 18 – saving over £60,000 for the year. (The national average is 23 days).
- We brought 161 empty homes brought back into use – eight above target.

What we are doing

- Re-housing Officers are spending more time with new tenants to make sure we know of any concerns as early as possible.
- We have appointed a mutual exchange officer to help tenants who want to transfer.
- Providing advice to residents on the impact of the government's welfare reforms.



On average, we re-let a home in

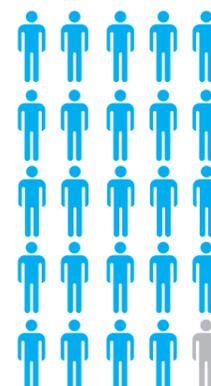
17 days

Sheltered housing

We will provide every tenant with a support plan to aid their wellbeing. We will prioritise support for the most vulnerable tenants.

What we have done

- In a survey of 124 people living in sheltered housing, 96% were satisfied.



96%
are satisfied with our service

- Opened a 'digital centre' in Leach Court, to provide residents with free access to computers and the internet.
- Worked very closely with agencies such as MIND, AgeUK, the Alzheimer's Society and Diabetes UK to increase the wellbeing of our residents.
- Developed flats in two sheltered schemes with shared bathrooms into self-contained flats with showers.
- 97% of tenants have a support plan to aid their well-being.
- Worked closely with Brighton University to help run the 'Active Pharmacy', where pharmacy students and their tutors meet groups of older residents.

What we are doing

- Working closely with the Sheltered Housing Action Group to further improve services.
- Continuing to train staff in the Chartered Institute of Housing Level 3 Certificate in Supported Housing to provide the highest level of support.



Getting it fixed!

One Sunday afternoon I returned to my flat to find the bathroom floor wet – not a flood exactly but enough to cause concern. I called the Repairs Helpdesk on 0800 052 6140 and some 20 minutes later I had just finished mopping up when a Mears plumber rang my bell. He identified a leaking stopcock and fixed it, he also said that this was a problem that had been going on for some time, as the hardboard panel was sodden. He took measurements and a picture and said that a colleague would come and fit a new panel the following Thursday. Sure enough, as promised, on Thursday I had a new panel and my bathroom left clean and tidy.

The 0800 number is great for emergencies and for those without the internet but for most repairs I prefer to use email - bhcc.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk

In addition to the repairs service there is also the Estates Service Team for things such as hallway lights out and making safe potential hazards – they are on 01273 294769 or email them when you will see a full list of the tasks they undertake - estateserviceteam@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Barry Hughes, Sylvan Hall Estate

Tackling anti-social behaviour together

Anti-social behaviour is a problem that has been growing and affecting our communities for many years. It comes with varying levels of nuisance; the neighbour's budgie chirping non-stop, bikers tearing up and down the street, and unfortunately escalating to cases of violence, threats and intimidation. Brighton & Hove has its fair share of anti-social behaviour like any other sizeable city, but I feel that the dedication and thoroughness of our anti-social behaviour team make them some of the best in the country.

The highest number of reported crimes in Brighton & Hove since January 2012 has been for anti-social behaviour, far out weighing any other reported crime. Tenants and residents working together with the police and the council can help to reduce these crimes. Many people feel intimidated about reporting these types of crimes. Don't, the support available to you when you do is the best. Just dial 293030.

Leon Delaney, North Whitehawk

!@#?%!

#\$&!

Your neighbourhood & community

Neighbourhood management

We will make sure common areas and estates are clean; carry out estates inspections and provide a budget for residents to decide on improvements.

What we have done

- Extensively cleared potential fire risk items in hallways and common areas.
- Worked with residents and the council's City Parks service on a Grounds Maintenance Review to co-ordinate actions and improve services.
- Introduced the Estate Development Budget quick bid process to allow tenants to bid for smaller items of up to £500 to improve their estate.



What we are doing

- Providing training for staff in our Neighbourhoods Team so that they are able deal with a wider range of issues.
- Planting wildflowers to make estates like Craven Vale and Albion Hill look more colourful and encourage wildlife.
- Improving the way we publicise and report back on estate inspections.

Anti-social behaviour

We will not tolerate anti-social behaviour (ASB). We will take action, keeping you informed and offer support to all those who are victims of anti-social behaviour.

What we have done

- Trained more officers to help victims and witnesses receive greater support with their case.
- Worked with other services in the city as part of a nationally recognised partnership approach to tackling high risk anti-social behaviour
- Of 73 people surveyed about ASB, 68 were satisfied with the service provided – far above the national average.

What we are doing

- Frontline housing staff are being trained in the use of the police monitoring system for victims of crime to co-ordinate actions between the police, Community Safety Team and housing.
- Working closely with residents, police, and the Community Safety Team to reduce drugs offences and hate crime.
- We are a pilot local authority for the government's new 'Community Trigger' scheme.

Local area co-operation (working with other organisations)

We will work with other agencies in the city to increase safety and support for residents. We work to try to increase local employment.

What we have done

- Worked closely with the police and the Community Safety Team to do risk assessments on all victims of anti-social behaviour.
- Worked with the Community Payback Team on a number of projects, such as decorating work in Coldean and cleaning on the Bates Estate.

What we are doing

- Mears took on another 20 apprentices in September.



- Working in partnership with an independent money advice service (MACS) to provide advice to residents.
- Working with the fire service on safety exercises in our blocks of flats.

Value for Money

To assess annually the Housing Revenue Account and seek to produce high class services at the lowest cost.

What we have done

- Continued to deal with new tenants' benefit claims as quickly as possible to stop them getting into rent arrears.
- Collected 98.75% of rent due – in line with last year and among the top performing councils on rent collection.

Almost
99%
of rent
collected



- Reduced tenancy management costs from an average of £17.85 per unit per week in 2011/11 to £17.09 in 2011/12.
- Lowered the number of evictions for rent arrears from 26 to 16 (an eviction can cost over £10,000).
- Improved tenancy services creating more frontline posts and saving over £150,000.

What we are doing

- Leasing properties to Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes, generating revenue so far of £10 million.
- Following a self-financing model, which means we can control more of our income locally.
- Looking at further ways to reduce costs to allow us to invest more in your homes and neighbourhoods.

Dealing with anti-social behaviour

Richard Jordan Penswick

Brighton & Hove City Council has been at the forefront of improving support for victims and witnesses of crime. Every high risk victim and witness of ASB now has a named officer supporting them with their case, who will update them regularly on progress. We have moved much further than other authorities on this matter by using the same computer system as the police and the community safety team to co-ordinate actions against specific deadlines– thus speeding up the resolution of issues.

When it comes to reporting ASB we recognise that residents sometime feel that situations go un-investigated by the police, housing, or other agencies in the Community Safety Partnership for Brighton & Hove. To tackle this, we are piloting the 'Community Trigger', a new measure recently unveiled by the government. The trigger is intended to tackle persistent ASB which has not been

addressed by a member of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and will place a duty on the CSP to take action. It is intended that the Police and Crime Commissioner will hold the CSP to account.

The Community Trigger gives victims and communities the right to require action is taken where an ongoing problem has not been addressed. It helps us and you by making sure that no-one suffering the harmful effects of anti-social behaviour and hate crime falls through the net. It will also ensure that all that can be done, is being done. The criteria for activating the trigger are:

- You have reported the issue or concern at least once before [and](#)
- no action has been taken [and](#)
- more than one week has passed since you reported the issue or concern [or](#)
- the issue or concern affects more than one household or business premises

Resident involvement and empowerment

Becky Purnell

Following our major review of resident involvement and empowerment, we're offering more choice in the ways you can let us know what you think about housing services.

The community participation officers have come together as a team

called the Resident Involvement Team and are sharing information on what works best and working to make it easier for you to join in. We are getting your feedback through short telephone, postal and email surveys, mystery shopping and focus groups. You can also give us your views on Facebook.

We are supporting tenant and resident associations to set up their own Facebook pages and to have more community projects to capture the interest of new and existing members. The Housing Scrutiny Panel, currently being set up, will have 12 trained and supported

Tenancy Management

Helen O'Connell

We have restructured our tenancy management to provide a more customer-focused responsive service, and allow specialist officers to concentrate on the more complex issues.

We have streamlined our customer contact arrangements, with knowledgeable Housing Services Advisors answering the telephone lines, working at our five reception points and answering emails. We have common systems and procedures across the city which allows a member of staff anywhere in the city to help any tenant, no matter where they live. This means you'll no longer need to wait for a specific member of staff to be available to deal with your enquiry, which helps avoid delays and frustrations.

Most enquiries should now be resolved at the first point of contact – usually by a Housing Services Advisor. Where issues

are more complex, the Housing Services Advisor will refer your enquiry on to a specialist team.

We no longer have 'patch-based' Housing Officers, but our Neighbourhoods Team work in area-based groups – they are the staff you'll see around the estates most, wearing a light blue shirt with the council's logo and black trousers. They are responsible for a range of issues including estate inspections, tenancy visits, problems with homes or gardens, pet issues, etc.

Tenancy Officers manage issues including tenancy breaches (other than for arrears which are dealt with by our Housing Income Management Team), helping people fleeing violence and harassment, and tenancy successions and assignments. We have a specialist Mutual Exchange Officer attached to the Tenancy Team who leads on mutual exchange requests.

There is a duty service to deal with emergencies quickly, for example when someone needs to leave their home because of an emergency. Where something is urgent, we are able to provide a fast same day response. If you have such an emergency, a Housing Services Advisor will refer to the duty officer.

Tenancy Officers manage most cases involving anti social behaviour, referring more complex cases to the specialist team of Anti-social Behaviour Housing Officers.

Where someone's tenancy is at risk because they are vulnerable or experiencing a crisis, the Tenancy Sustainment Team can help. They can refer tenants for short term intervention support or work with them for a limited time to help resolve issues and put things in place to help prevent them losing their tenancy.

residents and will play an important part in holding housing services to account.

You can also get involved in specific projects helping us develop our services, such as setting up 'Rate Your Estate' across the city.



Improving Leasehold Services

Dave Arthur

Introducing flexible payment options

We have now introduced some new options for leaseholders having difficulties with payments who live in their flats and are facing high major works costs of £5,000 or more.

In addition to already offering loans over 10 years to any leaseholder to help spread the cost of major works, we are now able to consider applications from leaseholders in residence for:

- equity loans
- maturity loans
- 25 year loans
- extension of the interest-free period

Leaseholders Action Group

We have worked effectively with the Leaseholders Action Group Committee over the past year to make improvements in our service.

Council leaseholders are now able to take advantage of the prices the council pays to Mears (and PH Jones) for various items. The following are available for purchase directly through Mears

based on our contract prices, plus an administration charge:

- Exterior doors, including fire doors
- Gas servicing
- Installing cookers
- Boiler replacements
- Electrical checks and rewires
- Central heating installations
- Kitchens
- Bathrooms

Amount	Interest-free repayment period
Up to £2,000	12 months
£2,000 - £5,000	24 months
£5000 - £10,000	36 months
£10,000 - £15,000	48 months
£15,000+	60 months

Repairs & improvements

Glyn Huelin

The repairs & improvement partnership with Mears has developed well over the last year. The partnership has been focusing on delivering major projects across the city and has already completed external works on a number of blocks. We're also continuing to improve the condition of homes and 90% of council homes in the city now meet the Decent Homes Standard.

Resident representatives worked hard with staff to publish the new repairs handbook. We've also developed a strategy to help combat condensation and damp in homes and



developed a handy leaflet giving tips on reducing condensation. You can pick up copies of the handbook or leaflet from housing offices or order through our Partnership & Resident Liaison Team - email contractsteam@brighton-hove.gov.uk or call 01273 293427.

Property & Investment is the council team which manages the partnership with Mears, our gas partnerships with Mears and PH Jones, and our other service contracts for lifts, aerials, water tanks and door entry systems/CCTV.

Sheltered housing

Peter Huntbach

We have improved on a key service pledge standard by increasing the number of people with an annually reviewed support plan, which sets out how we can improve the wellbeing of residents living in our schemes.

This year, research on our support plan performance by the University of St Andrews shows that we've been better able to meet the needs of those with physical and mental health needs, as well as helping people maximise their income and reduce personal debts.

Wellbeing is very important to us, and this year we have worked closely with a number of different organisations to ensure that our residents get all the advice and support they need to live a more active, healthy and independent life.

We've held sessions at our schemes by MIND, AgeUK, the Alzheimer's Society and Diabetes UK. We've also supported campaigns by the

Cancer Prevention and Early Detection service to promote better cancer screening amongst the elderly. As inter-generational work is also important to us, we've worked with the University of Brighton supporting their 'Active Pharmacy' programme, where pharmacy students and their tutor meet with groups of elderly residents.

We're also keen to encourage active and happy ageing. A new activity centre with a computer suite has opened at Leach Court run by a group of volunteers working with the council. We've developed a new healthy exercise club at Jasmine Court and there's a singing and healthy breathing class at Elizabeth Court. We continue to support Grey Matters, an older person's radio production company based in one of our schemes, and a series of lunch and social clubs in our schemes open to older people living nearby.

We continue to work closely with residents and the sheltered tenant movement. Our work

with the Sheltered Housing Action Group continues to explore how we can work better with other parts of the health

and social care sector for the benefit of our most vulnerable sheltered residents. We also worked with the resident mystery shopping team and are improving the information we give out to prospective tenants following their recommendations

The investment in our sheltered schemes continues to improve the homes where people live. We've also helped keep costs down and provide support to local community projects by working closely with the Community Payback Team (supervised offenders on a community sentence) to improve communal gardens and the decoration of common way areas.

With satisfaction surveys continuing to show a widespread satisfaction with the sheltered service, and with our support charge for residents remaining the same for 2012/13, we're pleased to be able to provide welcome and cost effective sheltered housing service.

We're focused on making sure that we deliver an excellent service to all tenants and leaseholders. Examples of improvement to service include:

- Looking at how best we can adapt kitchens or bathrooms to help disabled tenants
- Extending homes where possible to prevent issues of overcrowding
- A commitment to learning from customer comments – for example, introducing a planned programme of works to tackle condensation.

Income & Expenditure 2011/12

Total income

(from rents, service charges, grants, etc)

£50,197,000

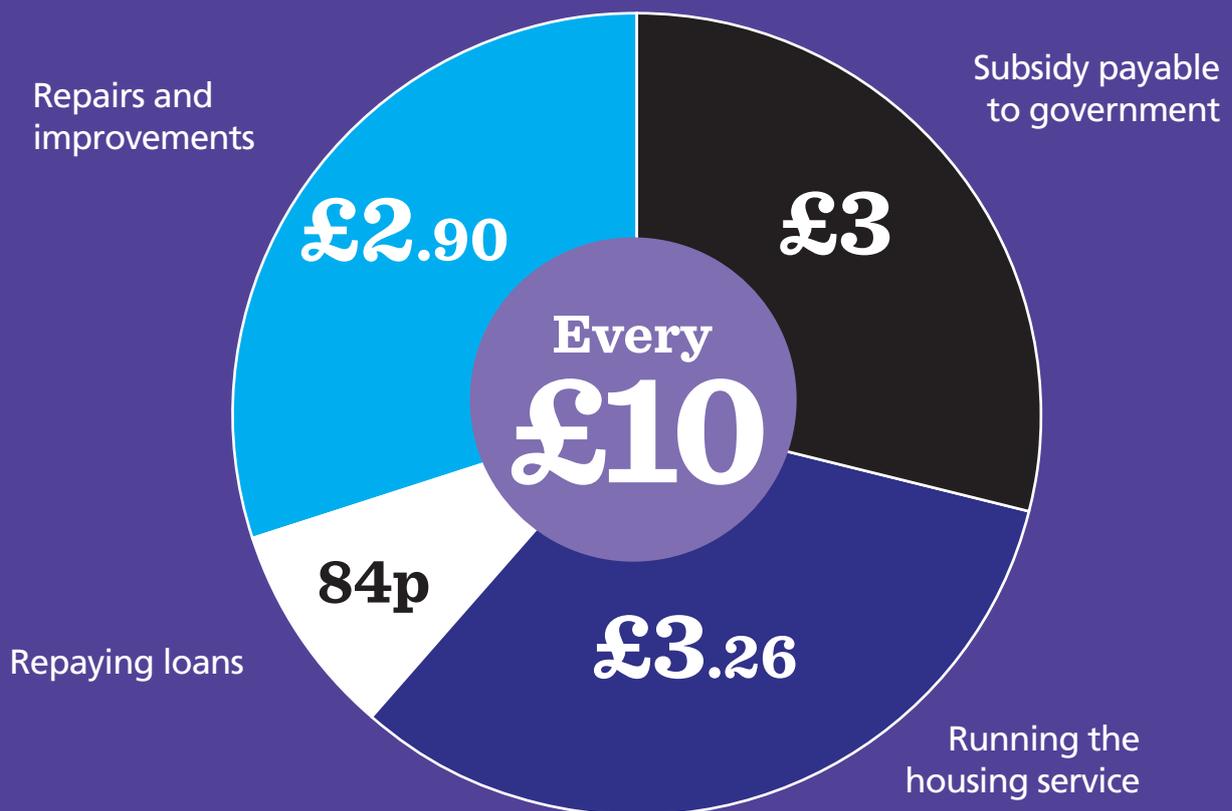
Total expenditure

£48,178,000

Housing Revenue Account Revenue Reserves: £2,019,000 reinvested in the capital programme in 2012/13.

How we spent tenants' rents and service charges in 2011/12

Of every £10, we spent:



You can find more information on our performance at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/hsi-performance.

If you have any comments on this annual report or if there's anything you'd like to see in a future issue, please let us know. Contact James Pemberton, Performance & Improvement Officer on 01273 290562 or e-mail james.pemberton@brighton-hove.gov.uk with your suggestions.