

Annual Report

to council tenants & leaseholders

2012/13



Welcome to the 2012/13 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 in your annual report.

Inside you'll find updates 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

- Balchin Court in Wellington Road is the first new development of council homes to be built for over 20 years in Brighton & Hove. The court is named after Bryan Balchin, a much respected tenant representative who passed away in December 2011. It's made up of three four-bed family homes and 12 flats, including two wheelchair adapted homes, and 12 of the 15 homes have been allocated to council tenants. Balchin Court opened on 13 May.
- Over half a million pounds of Estate Development Budget (EDB) funds have been spent on community projects and improvements. This is one of the biggest budgets in the country decided on by residents.
- We've redesigned the service to increase the support for tenants. Changes include the creation of the Housing Inclusion Team and an increase in the number of officers to support tenants in managing their tenancy.



**Our new single
number for
tenant enquiries**

01273 293030

Resident involvement and empowerment

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

What we have done

- Established the new Tenant Scrutiny Panel to ensure the highest standards of practice and accountability.
- Extended the Estate Development Budget to all residents to widen the involvement of residents without an association.
- Launched a 'quick bid' scheme which allows resident associations to make bids for funding of up to £500 for local neighbourhoods.
- Increased support for the 65 resident associations and areas without associations.
- Introduced the use of electronic voting for decision making at Area Panels and City Assembly.

What we are doing

- Beginning to implement the actions from the 'Everyone Counts' report and increase resident involvement.
- Improving the resident involvement web page to promote resident associations and report on decisions at housing meetings.
- Gathering more positive information about what has improved as a result of residents being involved.

Customer service, choice and complaints

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

What we have done

- Improved answering phone calls across all departments, with 79% of calls answered within five rings at the end of March compared to 76% in June 2012. We accept performance can be improved further in this area.
- Appointed a designated Mutual Exchange Officer to help tenants move to more suitably sized homes in this way.
- Seen a fall in formal complaints from 563 to 439. This was in large part due to fewer complaints about repair issues.
- Increased complaints responded to within 10 days from 66% to 73%.



99.97% of tenants had a current gas safety certificate at the end of financial year.

- Achieved our best ever performance on gas safety with 99.97% of tenants with a gas supply having a current gas safety certificate at the end of the financial year.
- Increased our use of social media to reply to enquiries, allowing us to respond quickly (we have 750 followers on facebook).

What we are doing

- Continuing to train our newly dedicated Housing Customer Service Team to resolve 80% of the calls at the first point of contact.
- Reducing missed appointments by introducing a 'text ahead' service to keep tenants fully updated on their repair appointments.

Supporting diversity

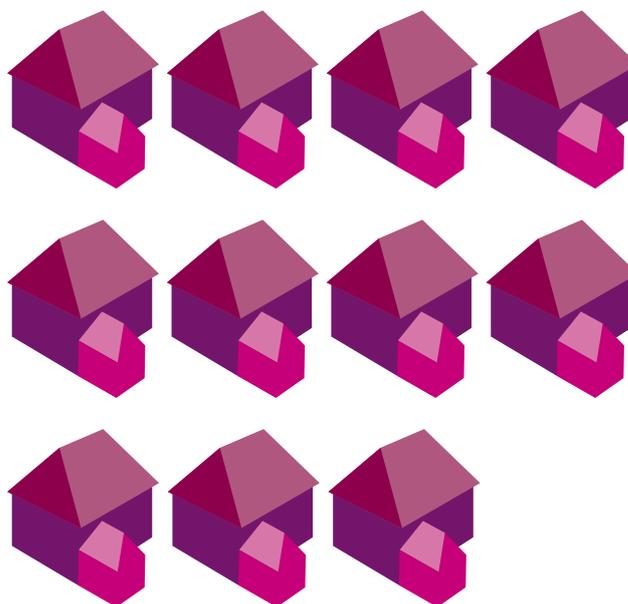
We will ensure we communicate and deliver our services in a way which meets the diverse needs of our community.

What we have done

- Increased the number of tenants receiving support from the Tenancy Sustainment Team at any one time from 80 in 2012 to 143 in 2013.
- Extended 11 properties to help those most in need of a larger property.
- Engaged in partnership working with MOSAIC and other organisations to support Black and Minority Ethnic tenants.

What we are doing

- Increasing transgender and traveller awareness training for staff.
- Reviewing and strengthening our policy towards hate crime.



Extended 11 properties to help those most in need of a larger property.

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.

- The repairs and maintenance budget is £10.2 million in total. Money is invested into three main areas:
 - Responsive repairs - £6.1 million
 - Empty properties - £1.4 million
 - Servicing and other repairs - £2.7 million

What we have done

- 42,812 responsive repairs were completed this financial year, that's an average of 117 repairs every calendar day.
- At the end of March 2013, 95% of homes met the government Decent Homes Standard.
- Installed 617 new kitchens and 295 new bathrooms during the year.

What we are doing

- Reviewing the Brighton & Hove Standard to make sure it reflects tenants' wishes.
- In 2013/14 we are focused on improving the customer service delivered by the repairs partnership with Mears.
- Carrying out an annual review of the partnership with residents from the Core Group which oversees the repairs contract.
- Planning a city-wide implementation of the resident-led satisfaction surveys currently carried out in Whitehawk.
- Continuing our major work programme to refurbish blocks and replace lifts across the city.

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

- The Re-housing Team continue to perform at the highest levels when compared with other authorities. The average re-let time for a property is 15 calendar days (it was 17 calendar days last year).
- Created a new tenancy casework team, which handled over 900 cases from July to March 2013 in such areas as anti-social behaviour, succession and ending a tenancy.
- Carried out 2,235 tenancy welfare visits as part of our rolling programme of visits to every home.

What we are doing

- Working very closely with tenants to help those who are affected by recent welfare benefit changes.
- Holding a mutual exchange event to further promote this method of moving for those who are under-occupying or overcrowded in their home.
- Developing a new pet policy in line with RSPCA advice on promoting responsible pet ownership in council properties.
- Working with the Estate Regeneration Team to identify areas for building new homes.



**Installed 617 new kitchens
and 295 new bathrooms
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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

- Introduced fire boxes at all our schemes to make sure that better information is available to the emergency services in the event of a fire or other major emergency.
- Set up a low cost complementary therapy service at Elwyn Jones Court involving Active Lightworks, who work with organisations such as Rise and Mind.
- Implemented a new welcome leaflet for new tenants at all schemes.
- Restored a full weekend call service for our most vulnerable residents.



Restored a full weekend call service for our most vulnerable residents.

What we are doing

- Working with East Sussex Fire & Rescue's Care Provider scheme to further improve fire safety advice.
- Working with the NHS to inform older people about cancer and encourage screenings to prevent it.

Getting involved makes stronger communities

Having lived in Whitehawk for 34 years, it is important to me that it maintains close neighbourhood links and excellent facilities for the community.

One of the key ways in which the resident associations in Whitehawk help maintain strong links is by organising a community event every summer.

During the event 30 local groups come together. These groups represent pastimes as diverse as the study of history, tending allotments and belly dancing (yes, we have a belly dancing group in Whitehawk and it has men as well as women).

They all meet up with representatives from key community groups such as the Whitehawk Inn, the police and fire service.

I passionately believe getting involved in a resident association can be a great way of keeping your community vibrant and strong. It also brings positive change. We have managed to get a ban on the sale of BB guns at local markets and worked closely with the police to prevent drug-dealing – helping the community to feel safer.

I would encourage anyone who wants to help make their community stronger and safer to join a resident association – I think you'll be surprised at the amount of change you can bring about.

Lyn Bennett, South Whitehawk.

Helping residents with money advice

Since October 2012, the Housing Inclusion Team has been jointly working with Money Advice and Community Support (MACS) to help residents manage their finances. Here are some quotes from some residents who have used the service.

"Some of my bills were becoming unmanageable. I contacted Housing Inclusion. They worked together with MACS and I can now pay my bills with the money I am getting. They were very, very helpful." FK



"I had been having problems with my water bill. Housing Inclusion and MACS did a tremendous amount of work to negotiate payments that I could afford. That's been a great help." KW

"I needed help with money in a number of areas. The help I had was great and I feel so much better for having sorted things out." JB

Inclusion

The Housing Inclusion Team was set up in 2012 for residents who needed help managing their finances or with reading, writing, maths or computer skills. It also provides advice in finding a training course, volunteering, or getting back into work. If you would like help with any of these, please contact the team by emailing HousingInclusionTeam@brighton-hove.gov.uk or calling:

- Learning Participation: 01273 293178 or 293718
- Financial Inclusion: 01273 293317 or 293173



MACS help has resulted in over £220,000 of financial benefits to tenants

What we have done

- 71 people have been referred to the Learning and Participation Team. Of these:
 - three have been helped back into work
 - three have undertaken work-based training
 - 32 have been helped into further education or training
 - nine have undertaken work on volunteering schemes
- 242 people have been referred on to MACS for further help with their finances, resulting in over £220,000 of financial benefit to these tenants.
- We have introduced resident assessors who are assessing the 'lettable standard'.

What we are doing

- We will be delivering more resident training in energy efficiency, money mentoring, combating loan sharks and being a learning champion.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

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

- Obtained closure orders on two properties where drug-dealing was taking place.
- Ended the tenancies of nine people who caused serious ASB.

What we are doing

- Improving support for victims of ASB so that each victim has a designated person to keep them informed on the progress of their case.
- Working with the police and social services to give greater protection to children at risk.

Your neighbourhood and community

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

- Continued with our safe and clear stance on fire safety for common ways.
- Used in-depth surveys, initially at Kingswood and Milner Flats, to gain knowledge of residents' priorities and act accordingly.
- Encouraged residents to be involved in their neighbourhood using the 'Text a photo' campaign to speed up improvements to their estates. You can also send photos of issues on housing land and e-mail it to Neighbourhoods. Team@brighton-hove.gov.uk



What we are doing

- Reviewing how we do Estate Inspections to ensure that they offer value for money and produce results.
- Working with residents to assess satisfaction on the grounds maintenance service and find out how residents want their service charge spent.
- Encouraging more people to get involved in growing projects, such as using containers to grow food and flowers on their balconies.

Value for money

To assess annually the Housing Revenue Account and seek to produce high class services which are value for money.

What we have done

- Raised a total of £11.8 million in receipts from Seaside Homes to be reinvested in council homes.
- Reduced the amount of rent lost due to empty properties to 0.8% (down from 1.8% last year).
- Lowered the cost per property for tenancy services from £161.74 per property a year (or £3.11 per property per week) in 2010/11, to £156.40 per property (or £3.01 per property per week). However, this still remains higher than other similar authorities.
- The number of evictions due to rent arrears continues to fall – 10 this financial year down from 16 the previous year.

What we are doing

- The council housing budget no longer has to make payments to the government every year, so we can use savings we make to run council housing more efficiently. As a result extra resources are now available for projects such as major repair work and building new homes.

A more thorough policy on pets

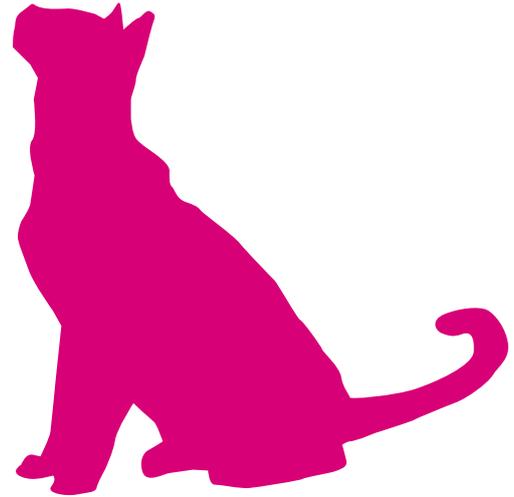
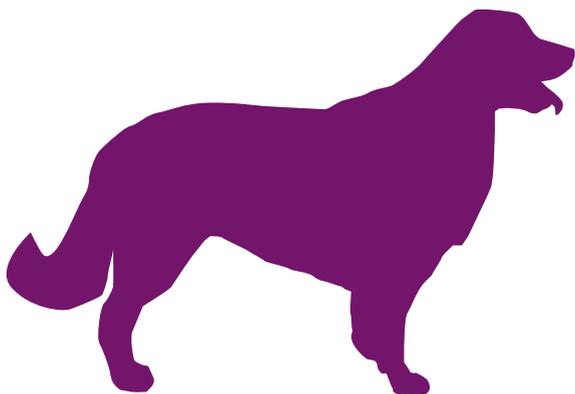
Housing's Pet Policy has been rewritten in line with RSPCA recommendations on promoting responsible pet ownership in council properties. We are introducing a more thorough procedure for giving tenants and leaseholders permission to keep pets, which will ensure that residents are aware of their obligations.

We recognise the enormous benefits that pets can have on a person's health and wellbeing. We will not withhold or withdraw permission unreasonably.

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However, we also recognise the need to resolve some of the most commonly reported problems involving pets, such as dog fouling, lack of control, and noise.

Education, appropriate penalties, and inter-agency working will be used to respond to problems swiftly. Rather than withdrawing permission, we will seek to employ a variety of measures, which will range from giving advice



for behavioural problems, imposing fines under Environmental Health legislation, or taking action against a person's tenancy for serious or repeated breaches.

To reduce anti-social behaviour caused by breeding, and prevent unwanted pets, we are introducing a 'no breeding' clause for pets in our properties. We also require that all dogs are micro-chipped for ease of identification if they are permitted to stray.

Stray dogs are currently an enormous problem in Brighton & Hove with the council's Animal Welfare Officers picking up around 360 dogs a year – only half of which are eventually reclaimed by their owners. This pre-empts the government's introduction of compulsory dog micro-chipping in 2016. Micro-chipping is offered free by the local Dogs Trust.

We will work in partnership with local rescue organisations to promote the adoption of unwanted animals, rather than buying from breeders or elsewhere. Rescue animals are usually carefully matched to an owner's lifestyle, which increases the chances of a smooth and problem free relationship. The rescue society will also usually provide ongoing support with any problems that occur and, if necessary, will take the animal back if an owner does not feel able to care for it properly.

A day in the life of a Housing Service Advisor

No two days are the same as a Housing Service Advisor. A single phone number – 01273 293030 – now covers the city as a whole. This means we need a wealth of general knowledge and experience about lots of different council teams, issues and subjects as well as in-depth knowledge about housing.

Being at reception and working in the city-wide phone team means that we get to meet and speak to many of our residents and help resolve their enquiries. It's important to be sensitive and tactful while offering the best advice and guidance possible to many different customers from a range of different backgrounds.

We are asked about a huge a range of housing issues from animal welfare, anti-social behaviour, tenancy issues, lost cats and dogs, when the rubbish is collected, how to apply to Homemove, housing benefit, noise and neighbour nuisance, anonymous calls, adaptations, welfare reform and many other issues.

It's about having information to hand and using your initiative to handle enquiries and complaints. However, there is always support from other team members if we need it.

When a call comes we will always try and deal with it ourselves. But if we are unable to deal with the enquiry straightaway, we call back within 24 hours.

In summary, being a Housing Service Advisor is about trying to improve the service we offer to all residents and encouraging community engagement.

Helping tenants through mutual exchange

Recent changes to the benefit system have meant finding a suitably-sized home is more important than ever.

One of the ways Brighton & Hove City Council can help tenants to find such a property is through the mutual exchange process.

Mutual exchange is an agreement where two (or more) tenants decide to 'swap' properties which suit everyone. This can be done within Brighton & Hove or elsewhere in the country. It can be done with tenants in other local authorities or in housing associations.

Finding the right property to move into is for the tenant to decide, but there are a number of ways we can help you. If you contact our Customer Service Team, they will be happy to help. We also recently arranged a 'mutual exchange information day' designed to help tenants through the process. Over 100 tenants came along and we are planning more of these events for the future.

Once you find a property, our mutual exchange coordinator will help you through each step of undertaking a mutual exchange.

There are a few things to check before a mutual exchange can take place. Your rent account must be up to date and not in arrears, and there must be no current tenancy action pending against you. Our surveyors also need to check your current home.

More and more tenants are finding mutual exchange a helpful way to find the right home for them. If you would like to know more about mutual exchange, please contact our Customer Service Team on 01273 293030.

Social media can help you connect with us!



You can keep right up-to-date with housing via our social media sites at www.facebook.com/tenantandleaseholder and www.twitter.com/BHCCtenants

We share news, photos, updates and advice, advertise community events and deal with problems. There are members from resident involvement, neighbourhoods and customer services and we have good links with repairs and community groups.

Residents who already use our facebook and twitter sites find it very useful.

Leila Jones said: "I use Brighton & Hove City Council social media to keep in touch with people as I am virtually housebound. This impacts on how I am able to receive information and participate in meetings. I attended the City Assembly in this way and hope to attend the Tenant Only meetings via Skype. I am acting secretary of North Whitehawk Tenant Association, so keeping in touch and responding to people quickly is highly important."

Elouise Upton-Pullen, talking about facebook, said: "I find it good that I can ask a question without having to use the phone and go

through all the options. I seem to get an answer fast without being put through to another department. I even asked about a repair I had put in – the facebook administrators sorted it out for me and they came around the same day. You do a brilliant job - keep up the good work!"

Sophie Hyder said: "I have found that you always get a correct reply – the administrators ensure they collect the relevant information from the correct department and then pass the information back to you. It's a very helpful page, even with the amount of questions they get asked, it is always done quickly."

Fran Benedetto said: "Without you being here I would have been lost many times – please keep posting!"

With our twitter site, users like the immediacy of being able to contact departments and be able to feedback instantly – for example commenting about paint finishes on new sashes. Others found the live updates from City Assembly useful.

If you have a phone with the internet, remember you can use social media on that too. Hope you give it a try, and come and join us online soon!

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Income & Expenditure 2012/13

Total income

(from rents, service charges, grants, etc)

£53,435,000

Total expenditure

£51,073,000

The difference in income of £2,362,000 is kept in reserve and used for major projects.

How we spent tenants' rents and service charges in 2012/13

Per £10 spent:



For more information on our performance, go to www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/hsg-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 housing.performance@brighton-hove.gov.uk with your suggestions.