

Annual Report

to council tenants & leaseholders

2014

**Welcome to the annual report covering
the year from April 2013 to April 2014**

Inside you will find features and highlights from the past year, 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 out how Housing is working with community providers and how we are changing to provide you with a better service.



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

Getting in touch



A quick guide to some of the different ways to stay up to date and get in touch with us.

brighton-hove.gov.uk/council-housing

The council website has all the latest information, including answers to the most common questions and housing forms.

facebook.com/tenantandleaseholder

Follow our page for news, photos and information. You can also contact us by direct message, and we will take up your enquiry for you.

twitter.com/BHCCtenants/@BHCCtenants

Follow our twitter feed to find out what's going on in our teams, and updates on everything from team meetings to events like the #CityAssembly. We retweet and share the news we think could be of interest.

bhccresidentcommunity.ning.com

The BHCC resident community is more about you. A space has been created for you to share your skills, knowledge and ideas about housing. We're looking for associations, blocks and other groups to get online and join the conversation.

Brighton & Hove TR Forum

Open to all council tenants and leaseholders to discuss issues affecting council housing and its environment, community development and resident participation in Brighton & Hove. To subscribe go to bhctrf-subscribe@yahoo.com

For all housing enquiries, contact the Housing Customer Service Team on 01273 293030.



Housing highlights

Apprenticeship scheme

We have funded two housing apprentices, to tackle unemployment in the city. The year long apprenticeship scheme provides the opportunity to gain work experience through placements with different teams within Housing, as well as studying with our training partners, City College. On completion, the apprentices receive a nationally recognised level 2 apprenticeship qualification, putting them in a much better position to apply for jobs.

“A door has opened up for me. I come into contact with so many people. I hope to apply for a job here when my apprenticeship ends.”

Housing Apprentice Jack Weallans

Mutual exchange

Last May we held a mutual exchange event to help people in homes that are too large exchange with people who need more room. We are also running a new scheme to match under occupying tenants with overcrowded families. Over 100 tenants have been contacted so far and visiting officers have begun to meet people to help them find a match and support them through the moving process.

Service Improvement Groups

The five Service Improvement Groups are up and running. They are Home, Neighbourhood & Community, Business & Value for Money, Involvement & Empowerment and Tenancy. In this report, you will see a brief description of the groups and some of the improvements they want to achieve over the next year.

The Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel

The panel has completed its first two reviews:

Standard Letters – the review made recommendations to ensure letters are clear and easy to read, are free of jargon and encourage residents to address concerns.

Housing Customer Services – the panel recommended upgrading our computer system and producing an action plan to carry this out, to help provide a more efficient service to tenants.

If you have any suggestions of what the Tenant Scrutiny Panel could look at next, please email tenantscrutiny@brighton-hove.gov.uk, call 01273 291110 or share your thoughts on <http://bhccresidentcommunity.ning.com/tenant-scrutiny-forum2>

Going local – improvements to tenancy services

As part of the review of the changes we introduced in 2012, residents, members and partners raised concerns about the lack of localised working and that officers working citywide did not have a connection to, or local knowledge of, an area.

In April 2014, we changed the service to work in three teams, with dedicated staff covering each area of the city. We hope this will result in improved local knowledge and better customer service from officers who know the area and are aware of local situations.

Reviewing Sheltered Housing

We have worked with the Chartered Institute of Housing and the sheltered residents to review our sheltered service.

- Residents said that they wanted a policy for sheltered housing so we've consulted on the findings of the review with residents and staff so we can agree a new policy or 'offer' for sheltered housing.
- Residents said that they valued the role of the scheme manager, so we've changed our service charge so we can recruit more scheme managers.
- Residents said that the common ways need improving so we've decorated several of our schemes and are working with the Fabrica art gallery to develop more vibrant communal areas.
- We've also started an asset review of all our schemes so we can see what more we can do to improve our homes for older people.

Resident involvement and empowerment

The Involvement and Empowerment Group will find ways to make it easier to join in and enjoy resident involvement. It will start by focusing on how our services promote all forms of engagement especially through social media.

What we have done

- Set up the five new Service Improvement Groups – these groups are meeting regularly and working through their action plans.
- Helped residents make a difference by encouraging Estate Development Budget bids from new areas not covered by a residents association.
- Placed contact details for our resident associations on the council website to make it easier for you to get in touch with your local group.
- Worked with the resident associations to create their own web page.

What we are doing

- Continuing to strengthen area panels to increase resident consultation prior to decision making.
- Publishing the results from resident meetings on the website.
- Capturing three ideas from resident associations about what they would like to achieve over the coming year and working with them to achieve it.
- Residents have worked together to help families get involved and held an event on the 14 June at the Level.



Reaching out at the Level

Customer service, choice and complaints

“Sometimes it’s hard to get a return call from 293030. They email officers to call back and it takes ages.”

“Have a phone that people can text to.”

“The knowledge, professionalism and compassion was excellent.”

Quotes from Housing Customer Services survey 2014

What we have done

- Carried out our leaseholders satisfaction survey – leaseholders main concerns were around building maintenance, building and tenancy management and customer service.
- Developed the use of a text service to communicate with residents. This is currently being piloted for lift breakdown alerts.
- Learnt from complaints to ensure we provide the best service possible. The number of complaints upheld last year was 31%.
- Began a new email newsletter, the Homing In update for a few bite size pieces of housing news each month. You can sign up for this on our website at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/homing-in.

What we are doing

- Working with residents to produce improvements to our website.
- Carrying out our tenant satisfaction survey to find out what you think of our service and how we can improve.
- Exploring the use of digital recording equipment in training to improve customer service standards when dealing with enquiries over the phone.

Supporting diversity and reducing inequality

What we have done

- Reduced the number of under-occupying households affected by welfare reform from 949 to 695.
- Carried out transgender awareness and Traveller awareness training for staff with further sessions planned in 2014.
- Created 29 new scooter bays at Leach Court, Ellen House, Clarke Court and Normanhurst.
- Extended 22 properties to help those most in need of a larger or adapted property.

What we are doing

- Developing a mobile housing customer service to run alongside partner organisations. We will attend local community events, surgeries and provide drop-ins.
- Investigating how to provide a priority service from the housing office reception points to deal with matters relating to welfare reform.



The Housing Customer Service Team took 52,537 calls last year – an average of 208 each working day.

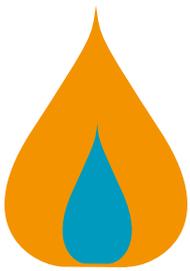
Your home

The Home Group will look at the issues that directly affect your home and building. It will be reviewing discretionary gardening and decorating schemes, and monitoring the Estate Development Budget programme, and helping procure the new gas contract.

- The repairs and maintenance budget is £11.3 million in total. Money is invested into three main areas:
 - **Responsive repairs – £5.6 million**
 - **Empty properties – £1.7 million**
 - **Servicing and other repairs – £4 million**

What we have done

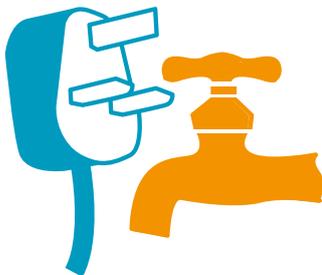
- Met the Decent Homes Standard. Achieved 100% decency targets for council-owned homes.
- Introduced a new Brighton & Hove Standard.
- Agreed a new lettable standard for our empty properties.
- Developed a programme with Mears to improve customer service.



Achieved 100% gas compliance during the year for the first time

What we are doing

- Running a pilot scheme to create more accessible accommodation by installing level access showers in suitable ground floor properties when empty.
- Continuing our major work programme to refurbish blocks and replace lifts throughout the city.
- Starting a programme of installing solar panels, to help reduce tenants' electricity costs.
- Using energy grant funding to install heat networks to supply heat through a central source and insulation works in our properties.



Completed 39,619 repairs this financial year - an average of 157 repairs every working day.

Your tenancy

The Tenancy Group will promote respect and pride on our estates. It will be developing better links with isolated and vulnerable people, and looking at the latest anti-social behaviour legislation and our allocations policy.

What we have done

- Helped 211 households move by exchanging their homes with other tenants in the past year - including 36 who were under occupiers affected by welfare reform.
- Our tenancy sustainment team successfully helped 109 tenants stay in their home.
- Continued to improve how we resolve tenancy issues, ensuring swift resolution of cases where possible.

What we are doing

- Changing the tenancy service teams to work in areas across the city to increase our local knowledge and improve our connection to an area.
- Reviewing our tenancy policies.
- Tackling tenancy fraud by working in partnership with the council's Corporate Fraud team.

“The under occupancy charge was being made at my home for an extra room I didn't need. I wanted to move and a visiting officer came to my home to co-ordinate everything. I thought the service was brilliant and has really taken the stress out of moving.”

Quote from tenant in mutual exchange matchmaking scheme

Sheltered housing

“A smoking cessation worker came into the scheme. My main motivation for joining was to save some money as the cost of buying cigarettes was constantly on the increase. I am now in my 12th week of not smoking and with the money saved I have recently purchased a new laptop computer.”

Quote from sheltered housing resident

What we have done

- Completed a series of promotions on cancer prevention with the Early Detection Service.
- Trained sheltered scheme managers to help tenants stop smoking ahead of national No Smoking Day, ensuring they are able to support tenants give up.
- Established a pilot drama therapy group in February at Jasmine Court with The Dramatherapy Partnership to look at ways of encouraging better mental health and wellbeing.
- Held health checks at our Laburnum Grove sheltered scheme in partnership with the NHS Health Check programme and are now promoting this to applicants applying for sheltered housing.
- Worked closely with East Sussex Fire & Rescue to carry out home safety visits to residents at risk of fire.

What we are doing

- Participating in MIND’s ‘Well-being for Older Carers’ pilot programme.
- Piloting community based arts projects as part of internal decoration schemes at sheltered schemes.
- Formed a partnership with The Fed – a charity led by disabled people – to work together in the Hollingdean area as part of The Fed’s ‘Out and About’ pilot.

Inclusion

“I came to you looking to upgrade my IT skills and now I am in an alcohol recovery programme, doing voluntary work. My flat where I just existed is now a home and I feel like I have a future again! Thank you so much.”

“I feel so much more positive about life, because I am disabled it’s easy to think our life is over but you have helped me to see there is a world out there that I can be useful in.”

Quotes from Learning and Participation Team clients

What we have done

- Provided individual money advice and support to 312 residents.
- Referred 234 people to Money Advice & Community Support (MACS) for money and debt advice.
- Developed and delivered our Digital Champions training to residents so they can help residents get online and benefit from the internet.



Set up the Online Skills Bank forum for residents to share their talents and build networks.

- Ran six energy efficiency awareness sessions for staff and residents and are recruiting energy champions.
- Learning and Participation officers worked with 155 residents on skills, learning and employment, with 74 people progressing into learning, training, volunteering or employment.

What we are doing

- Launching the city-wide Money Mentors Programme, teaching residents to manage their finances, save money and support other people in the community to do the same.
- Targeting work around energy efficiency with residents.
- Continuing to help people get online and promote the Online Skills Bank.
- Running pre-employment and self-employment workshops.

“They did a lot. I’m happy I went along to the appointment. It took a lot of persuading to get me to go, but I’m glad I did.”

“Your help was very quick and you helped me to help myself again.”

Quotes from MACS clients



MACS have brought in £670,000 financial benefits for tenants so far

What we are doing

- Reviewing security arrangements in high rise blocks.
- Reviewing and strengthening our policy towards hate crime.
- Responding to new powers in the ASB Crime and Policing Act 2014.

Your neighbourhood and community

The Neighbourhood and Community Group will be checking into the communal cleaning and safety on our estates. It will be tackling fly tipping, promoting community clean up days, developing growing projects and working with the Probation Service Community Payback Team.

What we have done

- Worked with the Estates Regeneration Team to identify potential sites for much needed new homes.
- Continued to deliver minor adaptations with 89 households benefitting last year.

What we are doing

- Changing the way estate inspections are carried out.
- Reviewing our estates service offer and service standards in consultation with residents.
- The Neighbourhoods Team are exploring possible sites for community food growing around council homes.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

What we have done

- Introduced risk assessments for all victims and witnesses of ASB, ensuring support is provided and actions put in place where needed.
- Improved our information sharing with the police and agencies through using one system to record ASB cases.
- We have family coaches in place to provide intensive family support.
- Ended the tenancies of nine people who caused serious ASB.

Sheltered Housing Review

During 2013, we worked closely with our sheltered tenants, the Sheltered Housing Action Group (SHAG) and our staff to review our service. We were helped by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), who are the professional body for the housing sector. We're now working on improving the service based on the review findings.

SHAG said that they wanted to see a new policy for sheltered housing. We're consulting on a new policy, which we're pleased to say reflects a more positive and active approach to ageing.

Residents said that they valued their scheme managers, but thought they were stretched too thinly. Staff agreed with this. So this year, we're recruiting an additional four full time scheme managers.

Residents said that our schemes were looking dull and institutional. So we've now decorated three schemes from top to toe, and are working with local artists and residents to create homely living spaces.

The CIH said we should work closely with other services to keep our residents healthier. We've now trained our staff on stopping smoking and

food poverty and have promoted a range of activities and services, such as the NHS health checks and winter flu vaccination.

The CIH said we should undertake a comprehensive review of our sheltered buildings so we can better plan improvements for the future. We've now started this asset review as well as continuing our investment in our sheltered schemes.

There was a general agreement that we should do more to create active and sociable communities, and tackle loneliness. Our new draft policy reflects a more enjoyable approach to community living, and we're working with a wide group of organisations, including voluntary groups, to achieve this, including befriending groups.

There was also a general agreement that we should do more to improve the way in which we let our sheltered homes. We're therefore looking again at what we can do to make moving into sheltered housing a better experience.

Of course, they'll be more to do and during 2014/15 we'll work closely with our Sheltered Housing Action Group and staff on implementing further plans to make our sheltered schemes a great place to live and age well.

For further information please contact sheltered@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Leaseholder Updates

Leaseholders Satisfaction Survey 2013

In April 2013 all leaseholders were sent a satisfaction survey to complete. 68% of respondents said they were satisfied with the council as their leasehold manager. This compares less favourably than 72% in 2010.

When asked to rate the service out of 10, the highest proportion scored the council at 8. 38% rated us from 1-5, while 62% scored us 6-10.

We asked what we could do to make it a 10. Almost half said we should maintain the building better, around 20% said we should manage the building and tenancies better, while the same number said we should look to improve our customer service.

Service Charge Disputes

During the year the Leasehold Team dealt with 85 Stage 1 disputes about service charges, 24 Stage 2 disputes & 6 Stage 3 disputes. 93% were resolved at either Stage 1 or Stage 2.

Leaseholder Enfranchisement

Leaseholders of 1-43 and 44-85 Park Royal, who made up more than two-thirds of the number of flats in each, completed their enfranchisement of the buildings on 21 March 2014. Park Royal Brighton Ltd is now the new freehold owner of the buildings. The council has taken leasebacks of 24 flats where we have secure tenants.

Leaseholder Updates continued

Service Charge Collection

The council's service charge recovery strategy is now bearing fruit. In a year of high major works billing, 98% of undisputed service charge had either been paid, instalment arrangements agreed, or legal recovery measures actioned.

Leaseholders fire doors

The council has continued its work in ensuring all flat doors leading on to escape routes comply with 30 minute fire and smoke resistance standards. We obtained three County Court judgements in our favour enforcing leaseholders to bring their doors up to grade.

Apprenticeship schemes

The Housing department agreed to fund two Housing apprentices to join us for the first time, to meet our priorities and council wide objectives to tackle unemployment in the city.

The apprenticeship course affords the opportunity to gain work experience through placements with different teams within Housing, some of which include Homelessness, Homemove, Estates Services, Housing Customer Services and Neighbourhoods.

The apprentices gain experience through placements within housing teams, and they study for 12 months with our training partners, City College. On completion the apprentices will receive a nationally recognised level 2 apprenticeship qualification which will mean they are in a much improved position to apply for jobs.

Here is Jack's appraisal for his first six months on his apprenticeship.

"Before starting my apprenticeship, I had very limited knowledge about the housing sector and had no idea just how broad it was. In the first couple of weeks I spent all my time reading up about policies, procedures and legislation in relation to housing. It was fairly overwhelming as there was seemingly endless information. I was always fairly certain that I wanted to focus on homelessness, and through my research this was only confirmed.

Fortunately my first port of call for placement was within Housing Needs, and my passion for homelessness prevention was nurtured by having the opportunity to spend time within various different teams, shadow officers, and take on different workloads. I also have access to extensive training and workshops, and have completed training around Welfare Benefits, Youth Homelessness, and Mental Health Awareness among others.

Everyone I have worked with - both within the council and its partners - have been very supportive and accommodating. Everyone is happy to answer any questions I have, and show me first-hand how they work and how their role fits in in the bigger scheme of things. Through this I have built solid professional relationships and gained contacts within the field I wish to be a part of.

I am now at a point where I am confident enough in the knowledge, skills and experience I have gained that I am applying for jobs within the sector, and can hopefully get my career in housing started very soon."

Jack

A recent and welcome update from Jack has highlighted that he has accepted a new role as a support worker in the Traveller Liaison Team.

Housing Customer Services Team

Housing Customer Services Team celebrated their second birthday in July. We have taken this as an opportunity to reflect on our achievements since 2012.

What we have done

- Successfully set up one phone number for our customers to call us on 01273 293030. We took 52,537 calls last year.
- Helped over 380 tenants each year with their decorating by referring them to Mears to have a room decorated or by providing decorating vouchers.
- Used our email address housing.customerservices@brighton-hove.gov.uk to answer residents enquiries.
- Expanded the range of means for you to contact the service including by social media. You can contact us on: [facebook.com/tenantandleaseholder](https://www.facebook.com/tenantandleaseholder) and [@BHCCtenants](https://twitter.com/BHCCtenants)
- Helped over 370 tenants each year with their gardening.
- Enabled our gas contractors (Mears and PH Jones) to gain access to 1151 difficult to access properties for their annual gas safety checks.
- Helped tenants who aren't able to bid for themselves make bids on available properties and through the moving process.
- We have successfully ensured all our tenants and leaseholders are set up on our contacts system to enable us to deal with their enquiries efficiently.
- Have worked alongside our tenancy enforcement team to train our staff in being a single point of contact for victims and witnesses of ASB, providing regular support both to the victims and witnesses and to the officers working on their cases.
- Carried out a customer satisfaction surveys to identify and improve the service, the most recent one taking place in September and the next one due in March 2015.
- Worked with the Tenant and Resident Scrutiny Panel to look at the service and how better IT can support better services to customers.

Value for money

The Business and Value for Money Group will be making sure that your rent is spent in the best way possible, looking into our work on equalities and financial inclusion and our response to the government's benefit changes. It will also be the representative link with the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

What we have done

- Raised a total of £16.2 million in receipts, from the start to date, from Seaside Homes to be reinvested in council homes.
- Reduced the number of evictions due to rent arrears – five this financial year down from 10 the previous year.
- Installed 766 new 'A' rated central heating boilers, resulting in carbon reduction and saving an average £105 on annual fuel bills for residents.
- Continued to encourage residents to sign up for our Customer Online Service (COS) – 1537 of you are currently signed up.
- Ran focus groups to gain feedback on changes to service charges.
- Expanded our use of social media to keep you up to date with our service, and help you get in touch.

What we are doing

- The Business & Value for Money Service Improvement Group is reviewing the lasting impact of the support tenants receive from the Money Advice & Community Support service (MACS) and whether this is changing financial behaviour.
- Building new council homes – 45 extra care flats and 48 homes are planned on garage sites and spare land on our estates in the next two years.
- Delivering the final transfer of improved homes to Seaside Homes, with the receipts reinvested in council homes.

Income & Expenditure

Total income: £56,331,000

Total expenditure: £55,565,000

The difference in income of £766,000 has been added to reserves for the Housing Revenue Account and can be used at a future date.

Per £10 spent:



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

If you have any comments on the annual report, would like to find out more about our service or if there's anything you'd like to see in a future issue, please let us know by emailing housing.performance@brighton-hove.gov.uk

