

Appendix 1: Annual Report to council tenants and leaseholders 2013

Please note: this is a text version of the annual report only. A version with design graphics will be sent to members of Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee before the meeting.

Cover text

Annual Report to council tenants & leaseholders 2013

Welcome to the 2013 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.

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Performance highlights:

- Balchin Court is the first new council homes built for over 20 years in Brighton & Hove. It 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. It opened on 13 May. 12 of the 15 homes were allocated to council tenants.
- 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.
- A restructured service designed 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.
- 293030 number and graphic to stay – as per 2012

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 EDB to all residents to widen the involvement of residents without an association.
- Launched a 'quick bid' scheme which allows residents' associations to make bids for funding of up to £500 for local neighbourhoods.
- Increased support for the 65 residents associations and areas without associations.
- Introduced the use of electronic voting for decision making at Area Panels and at 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 residents' associations and report on decisions at housing meetings.
- Gathering more positive information about what has improved as a result of residents being involved.

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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. 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%.
- Achieved our best ever performance on gas safety where 99.97% of tenants had a current gas safety certificate at the end of financial year.
- Increased our use of social media to reply 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 MOSIAC and other organisations to support Black and Minority Ethnic tenants.

What we are doing

- Increasing transgender and traveller awareness training for staff.
- Producing a video version of the annual report.

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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 new 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 citywide implementation of the resident led satisfaction surveys that are currently carried out in Whitehawk.
- Continuing our major works 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.

Page 5: 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 ensuring that better information is available to the emergency services in the event of a fire or other major emergency.
- Broadfields won 2nd prize in City in Bloom.

- 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 the most vulnerable of all our residents.

What we are doing

- Working with East Sussex Fire & Rescue's Care Provider scheme and ensuring that we get better 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 residents' 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's 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 be-be 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's association – I think you'll be surprised at the amount of change you can bring about.

Lyn Bennett, South Whitehawk.

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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 on 01273 293178
- Financial Inclusion: 01273 293317 or 293173

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 sharking and being a learning champion.

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 those 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 that I got was great and I feel some much better for having sorted things out.”

JB

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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.
- Using in-depth surveys, initially at Kingswood and Milner Flats, to gain knowledge of residents' priorities and act accordingly.
- Encouraging residents to be involved in their neighbourhood using the 'Text a photo' campaign to speed up improvements to your estate. 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 at the lowest cost.

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 down from £161.74 per property (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 in 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 in running council housing more efficiently. As a result extra resources are now available for projects such as major repairs work and building new homes.

Page 8 - Income & Expenditure

To be produced as a pie chart as last year.

Total income: £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.

Per £10 spent:

Repairs and improvements:	£5.95 – 59.51%
Running housing services	£3.01 – 30.06%
Repaying loans:	£1.04 – 10.43%

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 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.