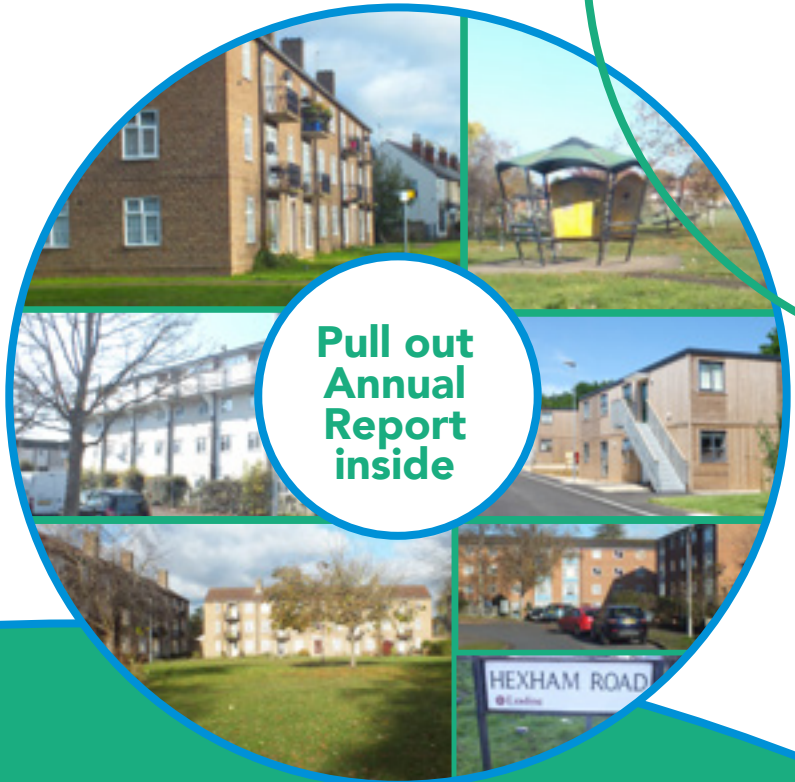
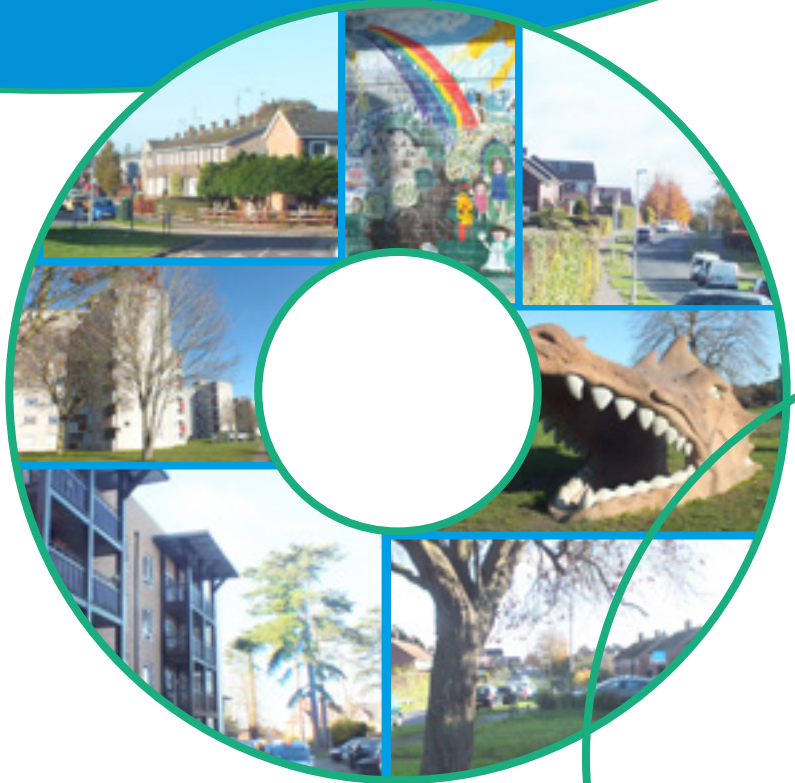


Housing News

Spring 2020



**Pull out
Annual
Report
inside**

Housing



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you



Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2020 – Your Views Matter

Welcome to your new edition of Housing News – your newsletter from Housing Services which provides up to date information on housing and community issues, activities the service is undertaking and information on local organisations. You will also find your copy of Housing Annual Report which shows you what we've been up to over the last year and how we have performed.

We take pride in being your landlord and always look for ways that we can provide better services that meet your priorities. There are several ways we do this. We compare ourselves to how other landlords are performing, and we actively seek and encourage feedback from tenants. Over the coming months we will be contacting tenants for your views. You may receive:

- a phone call
- text
- email
- or postal survey*

This maybe from the Tenant Participation Team or an independent company called 'NWA Social and Market Research' asking what you think of the Housing Services provided to you. If you are contacted, we'd be very grateful if you would take the time to give your views. These surveys are important to us as the results help us to understand where we need to target resources and make improvements to service areas that will benefit you.

If anyone is interested in accessing the Tenant Participation Team, the telephone number is **0118 937 2730** and the email is **Tenant.Participation@reading.gov.uk**.

* please let us know if any of your details change so we can keep our records up to date and contact you quickly if there is an emergency

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Please take the time to get involved so you can tell us what's important to you.



Housing Information Event

17 September 2019



We are delighted to report that over 100 Council tenants attended the Housing Information Event at the Civic Offices on Tuesday, 17 September 2019.

The event was run as a drop in to maximise the number of Council tenants attending, with services and teams showcasing their work to tenants via stalls covering repairs and maintenance, sheltered housing, allocations, universal credit/welfare reform, tenancy management, community involvement and new build housing in Reading. The format also offered tenants the chance to talk to officers and managers face to face about their concerns and provide valuable feedback about the services they receive.

Thank you to everyone who turned up and then took time to fill in one of our event questionnaires. Results show that it was a success and of the 80 people who filled in one of our questionnaires:

88% thought it was either good or very good

9% thought it was ok

3% thought it was poor or very poor

It wasn't all work though and one of the side rooms was set up for refreshments and chat. Here tenants were able to relax over a cup of tea or coffee and cake, enjoy a short video about Reading's new Community Hubs and chat to housing staff in a more informal setting.

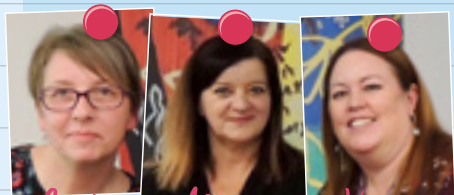


Thank you once again to everyone who turned up and gave us your views, which will be used to develop housing services and a huge thank you to our tenant volunteers who worked with us on the day to help make the event a success.





Focus on... Tenant Involvement



Ant Mary Kerry

Meet the Tenant Participation Team

Tel: 0118 937 2730

Email: Tenant.Participation@reading.gov.uk

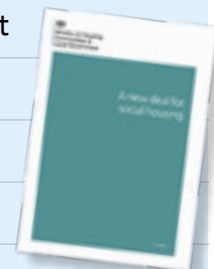
As a landlord we know that if we want to provide good quality cost effective services we need to listen to our tenants and respond to their feedback. We provide a wide range of ways that we collect tenant's views and use the information to improve our service delivery, from completing a satisfaction survey through to joining our tenant scrutiny panel.

2018 was a very busy year in Social Housing both locally and nationally and Reading Tenants ensured that their voices were heard.

INFLUENCING NATIONAL GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Social Housing green paper – A new deal for Social Housing

The Government issued their consultation paper 'A New Deal for Social Housing' on 14th August 2018 following a series of roadshows and an online survey, in which Reading tenants took part. The paper identified 5 areas of concern that tenants had raised. These were:



- Ensuring homes are safe and decent
- Effective handling of complaints
- Empowering residents and strengthening the Regulator
- Tackling Stigma and celebrating thriving neighbourhoods
- Expanding supply and supporting home ownership

Reading tenants formed a working group to consider the content of the green paper and form a response to Government on the proposals. They were clear in their response back to Government. They wanted

- the Decent Homes Standard to be reviewed
- clear performance information so that tenants can compare landlords performance
- a national tenant body that can campaign for tenants rights but also provide an advocacy role for tenants struggling to get their voices heard with their landlord
- more focus and money for new council housing

At this time the Government is considering the responses and will issue a white paper in due course.

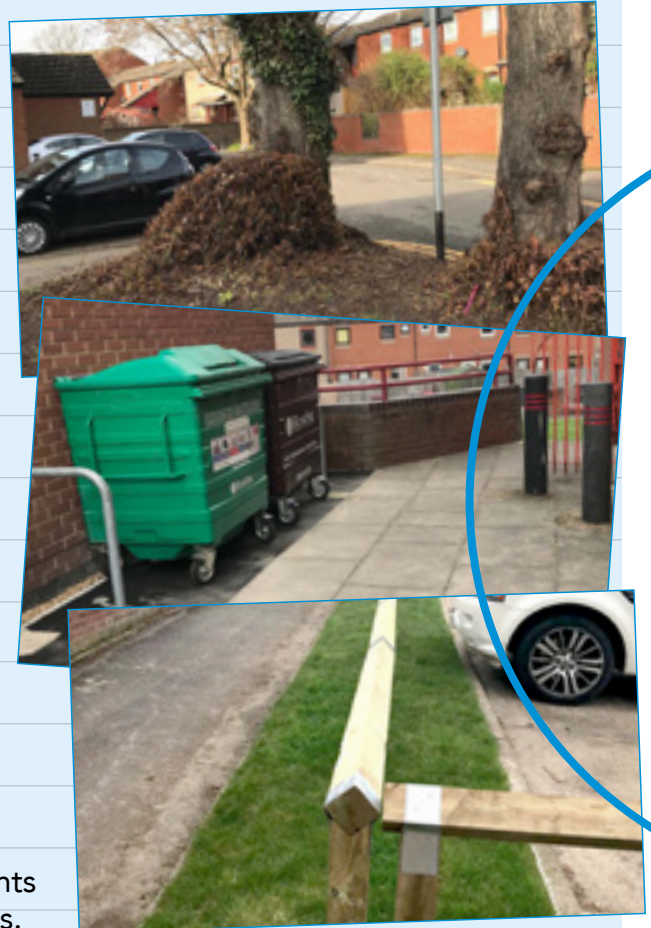




Orts Road Improvement Project

In 2018/19 we found additional resources to take a long look at the estate which was looking a bit tired and we worked with the community to identify improvements required. Following a postal survey and door knocking, a number of estate improvements were identified and bids were made to the Tenant Improvement Fund and Decent Neighbourhood Fund to carry out landscaping works such as:

- cutting back or removing tired trees, shrubs and bushes and replanting where necessary
- replacing a hedge with knee high fencing to make it safer for children to cross the road
- working with the police and Anti-Social Behaviour team to take action against tenants who were dealing drugs
- installing better bin stores which have significantly decreased the amount of recycling contamination.
- carrying out consultation to look at moving the park to a new location and once agreed with the community, consultation with local children on suitable new equipment
- improving the gardens around Lock Place
- held a community event on 22nd June
- keeping all informed



Did you know...?

We offer a wide range of free training courses for tenants who wish to get involved in improving Housing Services.

Courses offered include Equalities and Diversity, Contract Monitoring, Conflict Management, and an indepth look at the variety of teams and services across Housing. The courses are relaxed and informative and provide an opportunity to meet like minded tenants and officers from RBC.

If you would like to know more please contact the Tenant Participation Team on 0118 937 2730.

Guess the Estates

Just for fun – how many estates can you name?



Answers: 1. Hexham Way (Whitley) 2 & 3. Cedar Court (Whitley) 4. John Rabson Recreation Ground (Whitley) 5. Granville Road (Southcote) 6 & 7. Southcote 8. Dwyer Road (Southcote) 9. Grove Hill (Caversham) 10. Elizabeth House (Caversham)

Council Tax Reduction

If you are on a low income you may be entitled to a reduction on your Council Tax bill. You can apply for a Council Tax Reduction online at www.reading.gov.uk/claiming

REMEMBER: If you were receiving Council Tax Support and have since moved to Universal Credit, you need to reclaim Council Tax Support.

You should also check the Entitledto website to see if you could claim any other benefits www.entitledto.co.uk

Discounts and Exemptions

If you think you are entitled to any of the discounts listed below please continue to pay your Council Tax bill and contact Customer Services on 0118 937 3727.

A full Council Tax bill is based on at least two adults living in a home. If you or someone you live with does not need to pay Council Tax then you may get a discount or exemption on your bill. The following are not counted for Council Tax purposes:

- Under 18
- Those on apprentice schemes
- 18 and 19-year-olds in full-time education

- Full-time college and university students
- Young people aged under 25 who receive funding from the Skills Funding Agency or Young People's Learning Agency
- Student nurses
- Foreign language assistants registered with the British Council
- People who have a severe mental disability**
- Live-in carers who look after someone who is not their partner, spouse or child (up to 18 years old)
- Diplomats – someone with diplomatic privilege or immunity who is not a British citizen

** Both of the following must apply for someone who's severely mentally impaired to qualify for the council tax discount/exemption:

- They've been medically certified as being severely mentally impaired
- They're eligible for (but not necessarily actually receiving) a qualifying benefit

Disabled Person Discount

If you use a wheelchair indoors or have an additional room to meet the needs of a disabled person you may be entitled to the disabled band reduction scheme.

We may need to inspect your property to confirm the adaptations meet the required criteria.

www.reading.gov.uk/claiming



Focus on... Neighbourhoods and Community

Meet the Tenant Services Team

Team Leaders

- Sam Bainbrigge
- Jamie Hill
- Charlotte Roberts
- Clare Woodhouse

Housing Officers

- Louise Newton – Dee Park Caversham and Emmer Green
- Bianca Powell – Whitley Wood
- Andrea Richards – Norcot and Tilehurst
- Raz Khan – Minster and Katesgrove
- Pete Bloomfield – Southcote
- Patrick Wiseman – Orts Road, Hexham and Woodley

What makes a home a home is not just the bricks and mortar but also who your neighbours are, the street you live in and your local community. Tenant Services are responsible for seeing that your estates are well managed by ensuring they are clean, tidy and trouble free. A variety of teams provide services to your estate and your Housing Officer oversees your estates and makes sure everyone is carrying out their responsibilities including the tenants.

Did you know...?

We have two pots of money that tenants can apply for to get small scale environmental improvements in their area. This money – the Tenant Improvement fund and the Neighbourhood Fund – has funded a wide variety of projects across our estates from cutting back hedging and improving pathways, installing external taps, improving signage, washing lines, bin stores and notice boards and improving play ground equipment. All bids are passed by a panel of trained tenants who check the suitability of the bid and that consultation has been carried out before they pass it.

Over 2018-19 we completed Tenant Improvement and Decent Neighbourhood Fund Projects at:

Virginia Way, Southcote Patriot Place, Orts Road Corwen Road, Tilehurst Wensley Road, Coley Park Brunswick Street Florian Gardens, Southcote Orts Road Estate Coley Park Towers & Lesford Road Southcote Lane Ringwood Road, Norcot Knights Way, Emmer Green Caversham Road Hexham Road Estate

If you have ideas for projects that would benefit your local area please contact your housing officer to arrange to submit a bid.

Case study – Virginia Way



Before

Overgrown hedges attracted fly tipping and made it difficult for residents to access the paths.



After

The communal garden has been opened up, making it much easier to maintain the grounds. The new boundary fence has given the residents back their garden and it is easier and safer to access the block.

Tenant quote:

"If you have housing concerns, first stop is your RBC housing officer. They will listen, process your problem then find a solution. So ask for help don't just gossip about it."

Pat Watson

Focus on... Neighbourhoods and Community



Meet the Anti-social Behaviour Team

- Jo Middlemass

Antisocial Behaviour Officers

- Siobhan O'Connell
- Matt Lo
- Emma Langran
- Lisa Digweed

Tel: 0118 937 2161

Email: asb.team@reading.gov.uk

We have a specialist Antisocial behaviour team who work with tenants and residents to tackle more serious forms of antisocial behaviour such as drug related activities, persistent noise and disruptive behaviour. We offer a range of services to help neighbours get along including advice and support, mediation, and we can take action for persistent offenders to remove them from their homes.



Case study – Closure Order

In December 2017, Reading Borough Council was successful in applying to Reading Magistrates Court for its first closure order. This was a partial closure order due to ongoing anti-social behaviour and exploitation and it allowed the tenant to remain living in the property and only named individuals to visit him. Any other individuals found in the property would be in breach of the order and can be arrested and imprisoned.

The order was applied for because the tenant living at the property had a learning disability and was being targeted by known individuals operating in the Whitley area causing ongoing issues of anti-social behaviour and exploitation. This included rowdy behaviour, drug related issues and disturbances which impacted on both the tenant and the other residents in the block.

The closure order was extended for 3 months in March 2018 and this allowed agencies time to find a suitable placement for the tenant to safeguard him and provide him with the support he needed to prevent these issues occurring again in the future for him. The Anti-Social Behaviour team worked in partnership with the police to ensure we were successful in our application and with social services to ensure a suitable placement was found.

Tenant quote:

"Although ASB did not stop overnight and it took a while I couldn't ask for a better outcome. I only wish I had reported it sooner and followed it through. Matt Lo was great all the way through my problem and he always made me feel I had someone on my side. I would tell anyone to report ASB and follow it through not to suffer alone which is what I did for a long time. I am now enjoying my home again."

Terry



Meet the Debt Advice Team

Team Leader

- Jamie Webb

Debt Advice Officers

- David Pidduck
- Micheal Downey
- Cecilia Kelly
- Phil Collins
- Olivia Gardner
- Rachel Dimes

Tel: 0118 937 2197

Email: debt.advice@reading.gov.uk

We have a specialist team who delivers free, confidential and impartial advice for Council tenants and any resident of Reading who are at risk of homelessness and who are working with the Council's Housing Advice Team.

We are a friendly team of trained debt advisors who offer advice and support on ways to increase your income, reduce your outgoings and options to help you manage your debts.

The team is also responsible for administering and managing the Discretionary Housing Payment budget.

Case study – Debt Advice

The Debt Advice Team worked with a client who was not able to work due to ill health. Initially the client contacted us to discuss a utility bill they could not afford to pay but during the initial appointment we went through the clients situation with them to explore ways to increase income, prioritise and reduce outgoings and finally to explain their debt options giving them hope their situation can improve.

They were receiving Employment & Support Allowance, Personal Independence Payments and Housing Benefit but during the appointment we realised that the client was not receiving the correct amount of benefits and supported the client to provide the information needed to have her claims updated. The financial statement completed with the client helped them to budget and make sure important goods and services were paid. The client was also able to make an informed decision about what they wanted to do to deal with their debts that were taking a significant amount of her income.

The client received a backdated payment of £10,500 in benefits. This relieved the financial pressure they were under and gave them peace of mind. Through the advice given a plan was put in place to deal with their debts, and they were receiving more money to live off. The client was extremely happy with the outcome, and surprised at the extra support available.





Universal Credit Sanctions

Mr Bloggs lives in Council flat and claimed Universal Credit as he was unemployed. Mr Bloggs had a sudden offer of work in Slough but was unable to afford his bus and train fares to get to the job. As Mr Bloggs had already had a budgeting loan via the Department of working pensions that he was still paying back he was advised by the Job centre that he could not have another loan.

Mr Bloggs asked if the Council for help as he really wanted to get back to work. The Universal Credit Officer reviewed Mr Bloggs circumstance and it was thought that the best chance of getting funding to assist him to get to work would be to apply for a Flexible Support Fund grant through the Job Centre.

Although Mr Bloggs been turned away by the Job Centre as he was not entitled to a further Budgeting loan, the UC officer was able to assist him to attend the Job Centre and make an application for a Flexible support fund grant. The application was approved and Mr Bloggs was able to start work the following week.

Universal Credit (UC)

Continues to be rolled out in Reading and at the end of December 2019 there were 1311 tenants in receipt of it.

The specialist teams continue to provide tenants with support to help them get online and to make and maintain their UC claims along with budgeting support to help manage their transition to UC and the financial challenges this brings.



Please contact us if you would benefit from getting advice on your financial situation. Getting help quickly can help to stop money problems getting worse.



Focus on... Repairs



Did you know...?

TACT (Tenants and Council Together) is Tenant Scrutiny panel and in 2018/2019 it reviewed housing's approach to fire prevention in flats. In particular it looked at any actions housing would take in the event of fire, the quality of information provided to tenants and if tenants thought they were able to communicate concerns to the Council and if those concerns would be listened to and acted on.

TACT found overall that Housing's response to tenants was good and its relationship with Royal Berkshire Fire and Safety Service was strong. They recommended further tenant consultation to confirm their findings and an improvement action plan (2019/2020) is now in place and almost completed.

100 years of Council Housing

100 years ago, the Housing and Town Planning Act 1919, (known as the Addison Act after then-minister for health and housing Lord Christopher Addison), was passed into law. It is credited with establishing the principle of large-scale, state-funded provision of council housing at low rents.

In Reading, the first council houses were built in 1921 on the Shinfield Road estate but in response to the housing shortage following World War II the council stepped up its Council Housing Programme creating new estates in Whitley, Southcote and Tilehurst throughout the 1940s and 50s.



The building of the Shinfield Road Council housing estate 1924. Materials were moved by horse and cart and by a steam traction engine. 1920-1929

New houses under construction on the Whitley Housing Estate, the first council houses to be built after the Second World War. 1946



Plans and elevations of two types of council house, to be built on the Shinfield Housing Estate c 1921. One type has one reception room and two bedrooms and the other has two reception rooms and three bedrooms.



The architect is J.S. Paton, the Housing Architect for the County Borough of Reading 1920-1929.

2020 Walkabouts



Caversham

Meet: Front of Elizabeth House,
Gosbrook Road 10-11am

14 Apr 14 Jul 13 Oct

Meet: Star Road, RBC Flats Car Park,
11-11:30am

14 Apr 14 Jul 13 Oct

Meet: Scott Close Car Park, 12-1pm

14 Apr 14 Jul 13 Oct

Dee Park

Meet: Catalyst Office, Spey Road
10am - 12pm

8 Apr 1 Jul 7 Oct

Norcot

Meet: Lyndhurst Road 10-11am

14 May 6 Aug 5 Nov

Tilehurst

Meet: Corwen Road Notice Board
10-11am

9 Apr 9 Jul 15 Oct

Whitley Wood

Meet: Swallowfield Community Centre
11am

8 Apr 8 Jul 7 Oct

Whitley Green

Meet: Whitley Advice Shop 10am

8 Apr 8 Jul 7 Oct

Hexham

Meet: Hexham Road Community Centre
10am - 12pm

8 Apr 8 Jul 7 Oct

Woodley

Meet: Chequers Way Shop 11am - 12pm

15 Apr 15 Jul 14 Oct

Orts Road

Meet: Weirside Court 10am-12pm

14 May 13 Aug 12 Nov

Southcote

Meet: Jimmy Green Court
52 Coronation Square 10am - 12pm

24 Apr 24 Jul 23 Oct

Coley Park

Meet: 205 Wensley Road 10am-12pm

7 Apr 7 Jul 6 Oct

Katesgrove

Meet: Elizabeth Walk Notice Board
10am - 12pm

5 May 4 Aug 3 Nov

Contact Us

Allocations Team

☎ 0118 937 2172
@ allocations@reading.gov.uk

Antisocial Behaviour Team

☎ 0118 937 2161
@ asb.team@reading.gov.uk

Contact/Call Centre for Housing Services

☎ 0118 937 3757

Complaints

☎ 0118 937 3787
@ housing.complaints@reading.gov.uk

Debt Advice

☎ 0118 937 2197
@ debt.advice@reading.gov.uk

Environmental Services (rubbish and recycling)

☎ 0118 937 3787

Housing Benefits

☎ 0118 937 3707
@ benefits@reading.gov.uk
www.reading.gov.uk/counciltaxsupport

Housing Officer

☎ 0118 937 2161
@ neighbourhoodservices@reading.gov.uk

Rent Helpline

☎ 0118 937 2784

Repairs

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm
☎ 0800 318296 (freephone) or
☎ 0118 937 3757 from a mobile
www.reading.gov.uk/rbctenantrepairs

Repairs (out of hours emergencies)

☎ 0118 937 3737

Tenant Participation Team

☎ 0118 937 2730
@ tenant.participation@reading.gov.uk



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you