



# Housing Annual Report

2019 – 2021



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

# Welcome



Welcome to your Annual Report for 2019 to 2021, a publication designed to keep all of our tenants updated with how we are performing and what is happening around Reading to increase the services and value we provide and help you build the communities you live in.

I've been out around many of the sites that will come up as you read this publication, and I'm really excited by the future for our tenants.

The new build housing we're constructing is of really high quality, and what is particularly pleasing is that not only does it look fantastic inside and out, but we are building to passivhaus principles. This means not only do our new council homes help us fight the climate emergency by producing much less carbon, but they're more efficient and will help keep energy bills lower than they would normally be. We're also taking similar measures to upgrade our existing stock to be more environmentally friendly, efficient and cost effective.



On that subject, I'm sure everyone is feeling the pressures of rising bills, and that's another area we can help with. There are details of how we have helped tenants over the previous years and how we can help you if you are struggling. Our friendly team is ready to share and ease your concerns if you are worried about money. Just look at some of the statistics on those pages to see how much we've managed to earn clients in benefits they were eligible for.

Over the coming months we will be contacting tenants for your views. You may receive a phone call, a text, an email, or postal survey from our 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. Thank you.



*Cllr Emberson*

Cllr Emberson



## How every £1 of your rent is spent

2020/21

Service	Direct cost as % of rent due
Day to Day Repairs	22p
Major Repairs	29p
Housing Management	12p
PFI	12p
Rent Collection	4p
Interest and Debt Charges	21p



<sup>1</sup> Benchmarking comparison figures are provided by 'Housemark' <https://www.housemark.co.uk>

## Key to benchmarking figures



We have improved since 2019/20



We have got worse since 2019/20



We have stayed the same as 2019/20



We were among the highest in our benchmarking group

## How did we do?

**77%**  
of you were satisfied  
with the overall  
quality of your  
home

 **compared to 2019/20 (83%)**

Best	Average	Worst
93.5%	77.3%	50.8%

**74%**  
is the average  
SAP energy rating  
of our homes

 **compared to 2019/20 (74%)**

Best	Average	Worst
75%	69.9%	61%

The Tenant View

“

**I feel fulfilled by being involved and helping tenants and Council work together.”**

Pat Watson

# Tenant Involvement and Empowerment



The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard sets expectations for registered providers of social housing in the areas of:

- **Customer service, choice and how we deal with your complaints.**
- **How we listen and respond to your views and how we support you to get involved when Housing makes decisions on your homes and neighbourhoods.**
- **How we can help to deal with your individual needs.**

## Customer Service and Choice

You can contact us through a variety of channels including by phone, post, and online. In 2020 we launched our new **Customer Experience Strategy** for the whole council which recognises that customers increasingly want to be able to access services at a time and place of their choosing, on any device and at any time of day. It also recognises that some people may need extra support to access services and we need to make sure it is available. The Customer Experience Strategy puts our customers at the heart of service design and delivery and along with our digital transformation programme we are harnessing new technology to make it easier for residents to interact with us by improving our website, streamlining processes and making more services available online.

## Keep your details up to date

Thank you to all the tenants who keep us updated about changes to their contact details, making it easier for us to keep you informed.

Through our digital transformation programme, we are looking at how we can use modern technologies to keep you better informed about what is happening in your area. This includes an increased use in emails and texts which can get messages to you faster. Keeping us informed of any changes in your contact details also helps us offer a better service to you. You can do this by calling the Customer Fulfilment Centre on 01189 373 787 or via your self-service account on the website.

Go to  [www.reading.gov.uk/contact-us/sign-into-your-accounts/](https://www.reading.gov.uk/contact-us/sign-into-your-accounts/)

## Tenant Engagement

### Meet the Team

**The Tenant Engagement Team** – Mary Hull and Antoinette Solera

The Tenant Engagement Team recruit, train and support tenants to get involved in the decisions made regarding your homes and local estates.

 01189 372730     [Tenant.Participation@reading.gov.uk](mailto:Tenant.Participation@reading.gov.uk)



## In 2019/20 and 2020/21 we:

- Invested in equipment to get our involved tenants online so that they could continue to represent the tenants voice when we were looking to provide services under lockdown restrictions. They check and challenge our decision making, monitor the delivery of services and feedback on any issues or concerns that maybe happening across our stock or estates.
- Commissioned an independent company, NWA, to carry out our two-yearly Tenant Satisfaction Survey which provides valuable information on how our tenants feel about the services they receive. NWA interviewed 650+ tenants across a range of ages, ethnicity, property types and estates to find out how satisfied they were with the different aspects of the services we provide including repairs, housing management, how they are treated as customers, the condition of their home. Their findings and report were used to drill down further into areas where tenants weren't as satisfied. These were repairs, how we deal with Anti-social behaviour and how we listen to tenants and the opportunities for them to give their views. Further work was carried out to explore these areas in more detail and a number of measures have been put in place in response to these findings. More detail is given throughout this report.
- Consulted with tenants across a wide range of areas including the new allocations scheme (see page 16 – You said We did), the library service, new play equipment for local parks, the redevelopment at Wensley road, Tenant improvement fund schemes, Safer Street projects and the Oxford Road recreation ground.
- Texted and emailed more than 4000 tenants to ask them to come up with ideas for new Tenant Improvement Fund (TIF) projects after a survey of tenants told us we needed to promote the fund better. We received over 20 ideas which ranged from requests for better parking areas to bin stores, improved signage for blocks of flats and better security or street lighting (see page 9 for more details).
- Worked with our involved tenants to agree a response to the changes in regulation for social housing as set out in the Charter for Social Housing Residents – the Social Housing White Paper – see below.

## Did you know?

### The Charter for Social Housing Residents

In November 2020 the Government published 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents – Social housing' white paper. Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in London the Government promised a review of social housing and following consultation with tenants, landlords and other stakeholders, this white paper was the response to their findings. The new charter says that if you are a resident in social housing you should:

- Be and feel safe in your home.
- Have information from your landlord about the service they provide Have any complaints dealt with quickly and fairly.
- Be treated with respect.
- Be able to speak up and have your voice heard.
- Have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in Be supported to be able to own your own home.



There are many changes that are happening in social housing since the white paper was published, some which have already occurred such as giving new powers and resources to the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman and introducing a new complaint handling code for social housing landlords. Other commitments need further consultation and legislation such as introducing a new set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures which will enable tenants to compare how their landlords are performing against other landlords and reviewing the Decent Home Standard and the professionalism of staff. Our involved tenants are checking and responding to the changes as they are announced and working together to form a collective response to ensure Reading tenants are represented. If you would like to be kept up to date on any of the changes, please contact the Tenant Participation Team on the contact details above. You can find the Charter at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper)

## Case Study

We have always involved a small group of dedicated tenants who work with us on behalf of tenants to scrutinise and improve services and make sure the tenant voice is heard when making decisions about your homes and neighbourhoods. Previously a lot of these meetings have been in person either at the Civic offices or other public venues across the town. When lock down started we tried to move these meetings online through Microsoft Teams as we realised it was more important than ever to ensure we were hearing the tenant viewpoint when looking at how we could deliver services under restrictions. This proved difficult due to not all tenants either having or wanting access to virtual meetings or not having the equipment or the data to enable them to do so. We invested in digital equipment including laptops, modems and software as well as providing training to get these tenants up and running online. This means that all the tenant panels, for building cleaning, the Tenant Improvement Fund and the Scrutiny panel can now still meet but they are now carried out virtually through Microsoft Teams. As life gets back to normal now restrictions are lifted, we will be looking to carry out 'hybrid' meetings which will enable anyone to join in either in person as venues open to the public or virtually depending on their choice. Just one of the ways we try to get the tenant voice heard!

## Free training!

We provide a wide variety of training opportunities for tenants who wish to get involved. Previously this was mainly in person either locally or nationally depending on the course. We now also have access to a wide range of online training for any tenant who might not be confident enough to attend a group training session or whose time is limited. If you would like to get involved and find out more about the training we offer please contact the Tenant Engagement Team on 01189 372 730 or email at [Tenant.Participation@reading.gov.uk](mailto:Tenant.Participation@reading.gov.uk)

## Thank you

A massive "Thank you" to all our involved tenants who stepped up during lockdown and got to grips with a new way of working via virtual meetings to ensure the tenant voice was heard:

**Pat Watson**  
**Veronica Klopper**  
**Mark Byers**  
**Val Harding**

**Dave Watson**  
**Chris Matta**  
**Mark Bedwell**  
**Gordon Wylde**

**Audette Campbell**  
**Gary Saunders**  
**Norman Johnson**  
**Laurence Napier-Peele**



# Customer Complaints Update

## Meet the Team

The Customer Relations Team:

- **Customer Relations and Information Governance Manager** – Nayana George
- **Customer Relations Manager** – Stuart Lyons
- **Customer Relations Officers** – Neil Bullough, Elizabeth Cooke, Martyn Tarry, Julie Dacombe

We will take the details and make sure it is dealt with by the right service

You can tell us your comment or complaint:

✦ by going to [www.reading.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.reading.gov.uk/complaints) and using the online form,

☎ 0118 937 3787

👤 In person at one of our receptions

We always aim to provide the best possible landlord services to you. We know, however, that from time-to-time things do go wrong. When this happens, we would like to know – your feedback helps us to improve our services. We will try to resolve your complaint as quickly as possible but if you would like to make a formal complaint you can do so by contacting the Councils Customer Fulfilment Centre. You can do this either:

In writing (by letter or email), **by phone, online** at  
[www.reading.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints/make-a-complaint-or-comment](http://www.reading.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints/make-a-complaint-or-comment)  
or **in person** at the Civic offices.

We have a two stage complaints process so if you are not happy with the outcome of your complaint you can request a review (a Stage 2 complaint). If you are still not happy with the outcome following the stage 2 response you can refer it to the Housing Ombudsman.

For more information on our Complaints process see  
[www.reading.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints/make-a-complaint-or-comment/](http://www.reading.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints/make-a-complaint-or-comment/)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| • We received <b>13.3</b> Stage 1 complaints received per 1000 properties in 2020/21<br>↓ <b>by 11.1 on 2019/20</b> | • We responded to <b>48.6%</b> of complaints within our target timeframe<br>↓ <b>by 11.4 on 2019/20</b> |
|---|---|





# The Housing Ombudsman Service


The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) is set up by law to look at complaints about the housing organisations registered with it including housing associations and local authorities. Its service is free, independent, and impartial. It resolves disputes involving tenants and leaseholders of social housing landlords like Reading Borough Council and residents and landlords can contact it at any time for support in helping to resolve a dispute. Its service is free to tenants. The service it can offer will depend on whether the landlords complaints procedure has been completed and when and includes assistance on how to make a complaint and discuss what outcomes and actions would put things right for you and how to complain through to investigating your complaint once you have been through our formal complaints procedure but remain unhappy with the outcome.

For more information on the Housing Ombudsman Service go to:

 [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk) or <https://socialhousingcomplaints.campaign.gov.uk>

 0300 111 3000

 [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

 Housing Ombudsman Service, PO box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ

## How did we do?

91%

Calls answered  
per property  
in 2020/21



compared to 2019/20 (94.1%)

Best	Average	Worst
97.7%	84.9%	66.5%

69%

of you think that we  
listen to your views  
and act on them.



compared to 2019/20 (71%)

Best	Average	Worst
92.5%	61.1%	39.7%



# Neighbourhood and Community



The Neighbourhood and Community Standard sets expectations for registered providers of social housing to keep the neighbourhood and communal areas associated with the homes they own clean and safe, co-operate with relevant partners to promote the wellbeing of the local area and help prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour.

## Housing and Estate Services Team

### Meet the Team

**Housing and Estates Manager** – Sam Bainbrigge

**Housing and Estates Team Leaders** – Charlotte Roberts, Ashley Blackwood, Sonny Green

**Housing Officers** – Raz Khan, Xanthe Small, Sarah Chatterton, Dawn Guster, Louise Newton, Curtis Bryan, Sally Davis, Zoe Wyatt

**Block Maintenance officers** – Nathan Porter, Patrick Wiseman

**Housing Estate Wardens** – Ryan Sheehan, James Simpkin

**Environmental Officers** – Colin Young, Steve Hedges

Tenant quote

“

**Have your say on shaping Council Housing and your Neighbourhoods by being an Involved Tenant.**”

Dave Watson

### In 2019/20 and 2020/21 we:

- Adapted our working practices to respond to the pandemic including contacting over 3000 of our most vulnerable tenants by phone to check on their welfare and provide advice and assistance to ensure they received food, medicine and financial advice where needed.
- Continued support and debt advice to our tenants ensuring we maintained our rent collection levels of over 100.11% despite increasing pressure on our tenants due to the pandemic.

### Did you know?

#### The Tenant Improvement Fund Panel (TIF)

The Tenant Improvement Fund is a pot of money for small scale environmental improvements in your neighbourhood. This money has funded many projects across our estates from cutting back hedging and improving pathways, installing external taps for communal gardens, improving signage, washing lines, bin stores and notice boards and improving playground equipment. All bids are considered by a panel of trained tenants who check the suitability of



the project and if it meets the criteria required and if a consultation with tenants has been carried out. The Fund has been running for many years now, so in Summer 2019 we held a workshop with our tenant panel and RBC staff to come up with ideas to improve how the fund works and make sure residents are properly consulted before a project is carried out. Initially it was agreed that we would door knock anyone who hadn't responded to the consultation, and we contacted over 100 tenants over 2019/20. Due to the Covid lockdown and restrictions, we haven't been able to door knock so we contact tenants by phone and email instead. The panel had a break between March to August 2020 due to the lockdown but since the tenant panel members have been provided with IT equipment, they have met online every few weeks to review and approve bids.

The TIF has paid for the following projects:

2019/20	2020/21
New chicane gates at an alleyway at Sampage close in Whitley	Improved signage at Scott and Eliot Close in Emmer Green
Bin area improvements, a new gate and rotary dryers at Brayford House on Hartland road Whitley	Improved signage at Kingsgate Place and Orts Road in East Reading
New fencing around communal gardens at 54-56 Granville road Southcote and Gainsborough road Southcote	Additional parking spaces at Lulworth Road in Whitley

If you have ideas for your area, you can find our simple online form here [www.reading.gov.uk/tenantimprovementfund](http://www.reading.gov.uk/tenantimprovementfund). If you would like to find out how you can join the panel and receive free training and support contact the Tenant Engagement Team on 01189 372 730 or email at [Tenant.Participation@reading.gov.uk](mailto:Tenant.Participation@reading.gov.uk)

## The Block Cleaning Panel

The block cleaning service was restructured in April 2019 to improve the efficiency of the service and the standard of cleaning at blocks of flats across our estates. The main changes were to have cleaners working on a 'patch' in teams of four, working to a clear set of standards and with vans stocked with the right equipment to clean different types of buildings. The cleaning schedules were updated for block notice boards so that tenants knew about the days cleaners would visit their blocks and what tasks the cleaners would be doing.

Tenant inspectors carried out 6 unannounced block inspections to check the standard of cleaning in October 2019 in different areas of Reading including Emmer Green, Southcote, Brunswick street and Orts Road, after looking at complaints information and identifying 'hotspot' areas.

The tenant panel also produce 'Love Your Block' newsletter in partnership with Tenant EngagementTeam. The newsletter goes out to every household receiving the cleaning service



and keeps them up to date on the results of any inspections, advice tackling fly tipping and avoiding contaminating bins as well as interviews with RBC staff. In summer the newsletter featured Covid 19 safety tips for tenants and updates about how the cleaning service had changed in order to respond to Covid.

Since the pandemic the panel have continued to meet through virtual meetings on line and have been kept up to date on all the changes we have made to the service to maintain the cleaning standards as well as keep our cleaners safe. Additional cleaning staff were recruited to support with enhanced cleaning including focusing on 'high contact areas' such as door handles, handrails and lifts with a new anti-virus cleaning product and to cover staff shielding at home.



The council suspended formal complaints during the pandemic so that staff could work on the emergency response and the One Reading Community Hub. However, the cleaning managers continued to deal with complaints and issues raised by tenants with a focus on Lesford Road in Coley, Bob Green Court and Hadrians Walk in Whitley. These complaints were resolved, and we also received compliments for the cleaning staff working at Woodlands Court in Woodley and Granville Road in Southcote.





# Your Neighbourhood and Community



## Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

### Meet the Team


**Team Leader** – Joanna Slotwinska

**Anti-social Behaviour Officers** – Andrea Richards, Matt Lo, Kiar Greyfaulk, Siobhan O’Connell, Victoria Admans.

The ASB team helps tackle anti-social behaviour and supports victims by:

- Working with a range of services and agencies e.g. the Thames Valley police, Adult services, MENCAP, Change, Grow, Live (Drug and Alcohol support), Mental Health services, Brighter Futures for Children and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue service.
- Providing a mediation service to help resolve neighbourhood disputes offering advice and guidance to victims and witnesses when needed and signpost them to additional support services.
- Offering advice and guidance to victims and witnesses when needed and sign post them to additional support services.

 **01189 373 787**     **asb.team@reading.gov.uk**

 **ASB Team, The Police Station, Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7TH**

### In 2019/20 and 2020/21 we:

- Published a new Anti-Social Behaviour policy which sets out the Reading Borough Council view of what ASB is, what the ASB team wants to achieve for victims and witnesses of ASB and how the ASB team will deal with ASB in Reading.
- Introduced the ‘Noise app’ which is designed to simplify reporting noise nuisance. Tenants have the option of using the app to log in when noise happens and make an instant recording which will make it easier for tenants to provide evidence to support their cases.
- Following on from the success of the Noise App, the team went on to introduce the Reportable App, which allows residents to report wider ASB issues to the ASB team on their smartphones.

### In 2022/23 we will be

- Introducing a more efficient case management system for officers to track and manage cases due to the implementation of the new Housing IT system which provides a specialised ASB function.
- Implementing an updated ASB Procedure in line with the ASB Policy, which will introduce a new 6 stage procedure to sit alongside the policy and is designed to be flexible depending on the case.
- Supporting several ASB Officers to complete ASB Case Management Qualifications, as well as providing a wide range of front-line officers with ASB Training to help them give informed advice about how ASB can be tackled.



## You said we did

Following the Tenant Satisfaction Survey in 2020 (see page 5) we commissioned NWA to carry out further consultation with tenants to identify why some tenants weren't as satisfied with the service they received regarding ASB. The report highlighted a number of tenants concerns including how calls were handled at first point of reporting, communication during the time the case was being investigated and acted upon, being kept informed during investigations and as not all ASB is the same nor handled by the ASB team, clearer guidance for which service or team is responsible for handling each ASB case. The new ASB policy addresses these issues raised by:

- Setting realistic expectations in relation to how the ASB team can deal with ASB and what types of ASB the team will deal with.
- Providing support and advice to victims of ASB.
- Ensuring a partnership approach is taken to tackle ASB.
- A new procedure which provides flexibility to officer's to escalate actions to ensure that victims of ASB are protected and that the ASB behaviour is resolved.

### Case study

Reading Borough Council have a close working relationship with Thames Valley police and the Neighbourhood Policing Teams across the borough. We work in partnership to tackle ASB which has a detrimental effect of the lives of the people who experience and endure it.

One tenant in Severn Way had been causing problems for their neighbours through drug related activities, noise nuisance and problematic visitors at all hours. Through joint working between the ASB team, the Neighbourhood policing team and the tenants in the block, enough evidence, including powerful community impact statements, was gathered to take legal action and obtain a Partial Closure Order which allowed the tenant to remain at the address but receive support from agencies to address their problems. The tenant initially breached this order and then, when it expired after 3 months, returned to their Anti-social activities and did not engage with support services. The ASB team therefore obtained a Full Closure Order and an Outright Possession Order to prevent the tenant from returning to this property. Witness A described the eviction as 'brilliant'.

Reading Borough Council also worked in partnership with South Reading Neighbourhood Police team over an extended period to resolve ongoing ASB issues in Wrenwood Close, Whitley. There have been 2 closure orders at this address and a number of Positive Drugs convictions along with reports of ASB that have had a long term effect on tenants who live in this road. Despite several attempts to resolve the issues it became necessary to resort to legal action to end the tenancy and the eviction took place in February 2022.



Tenant quote

**I would like to thank you and the ASB Team for their effort and action related to the Motorbike issue at Courage Park. Reportable App and ASB officers actions made a difference. We will keep an eye on events this summer and will keep you posted.**

**Appreciate all your and the ASB Team efforts in making Minister ward safer for the families.**



Santosh (Edenham NHW Group)



# How did we do?



 **compared to 2019/20 (85%)**

Best	Average	Worst
96.8%	80.3%	60.1%



 **compared to 2019/20 (£155.27)**

Best	Average	Worst
£31.27	£170.75	£575.91

# Your Tenancy



## Allocations and Lettings

**The Tenancy Standard sets expectations for registered providers of social housing to let their homes to tenants in a fair, transparent and efficient way.**

### Meet the Team

**Team Leader:** Gemma Northway

**Lettings Officer:** Venera Young (RG1), Vicky Layzell (RG2), Donna Kennedy (RG30 and sheltered), Tina Djanie (RG4,5,6)

**Under Occupation and Transfer Officer:** Kevin Foley

**Voids and Allocations Administrative Support:** Lucy Rampling, Dennis Ma (apprentice)

We are a busy team of 8 over-seeing the administration of Homechoice - the choice-based system for letting council and housing association homes to rent in Reading – including assessing housing applications, dealing with enquiries, managing vacancies and carrying out viewings and lettings in accordance with our published allocations criteria. Our aim is to help customers in housing need access a permanent home, as well as minimising financial loss to the council by turning properties around quickly.

 **0118 937 2172**

 **[allocations@reading.gov.uk](mailto:allocations@reading.gov.uk)**

 **[www.reading.gov.uk/housing/find-a-home/homechoice](http://www.reading.gov.uk/housing/find-a-home/homechoice)**

### Highlights from 2019/20 and 2020/21

The Government issued guidance in March 2019, when the pandemic first began, to cease all viewings and lettings except in urgent cases. This had a big impact on our service. Once restrictions were lifted:

- We worked hard to advertise and let the back log of properties that had quickly built up over lock down. This included prioritising move on accommodation for homeless households, to ensure space was freed up for emergency homeless cases.
- Our Allocations team worked consistently hard with our partner Registered Providers to get customers moved as quickly as possible into their new homes.
- Due to our previous work to reduce the number of families in B&B accommodation, we were able to quickly respond to the Governments 'Everyone in' campaign to find emergency accommodation for 260 people who were at risk of sleeping rough sleepers and those at risk.
- We built and let 40 new modular units of accommodation providing intensive 24/7 support and staffing to help break the cycle of rough sleeping. We also developed a further 10 units of specialist accommodation for vulnerable females.



- We have reviewed the online applications form, making changes that ensure more applications can begin to be processed at the initial point of submission. 97% of applicants prefer to complete their form online.
- We reviewed our Allocations Scheme which was approved by committee in November 2021. The scheme has several changes which make it more transparent, supports us to better meet the needs of applicants and allows us to better manage our estates and communities.

## What's happening in 2022/23?

- Unsurprisingly we saw a decrease in the number of tenants moving during the last 2 years particularly people moving under the Under-Occupation Tenant Incentive Scheme with many tenants saying they wished to stay put until things settled down. We are now working with those who are ready to move to ensure that they are supported whilst increasing the availability of family sized accommodation for those who need it.
- We will be implementing the new revised Allocations Scheme (see You said we did).
- A new IT software system will be implemented which should make it easier for tenants to communicate with us as well as free up more staff time to concentrate on letting our properties quicker.
- We will ensure we communicate to let you know when and how any of the above changes will affect you.
- We will step up to meet the challenge of letting a significant amount of new build social housing that is becoming available in the forthcoming year (see the section on Homes).

## Did you know?

We let **547** Homes via HomeChoice in 2019/2020 which was an increase from 452 in 2018/19.

We let **347** Homes via HomeChoice in 2020/2021, a decrease due to the restrictions posed by the pandemic.

## You said we did

Feedback from our applicants and tenants frequently highlights that our Allocation Scheme, which details how priority for housing is awarded, is difficult to understand. Tenants and applicants are also concerned about anti-social behaviour on our estates. With this in mind, we looked to review the Allocation scheme with two main themes – Transparency and Fairness and Sustainable Communities.

We carried out consultation with the public and partners in Spring 2021 with a number of proposals supporting the above themes. After reviewing the 684 responses we received we proposed making several changes. The Scheme was approved by Councillors on 10th November 2021 and some of the changes were implemented in April 2022. The rest will be implemented over the coming year in line with the development of our new IT system. You can find details of our allocation scheme at [www.reading.gov.uk/allocationsscheme](http://www.reading.gov.uk/allocationsscheme)



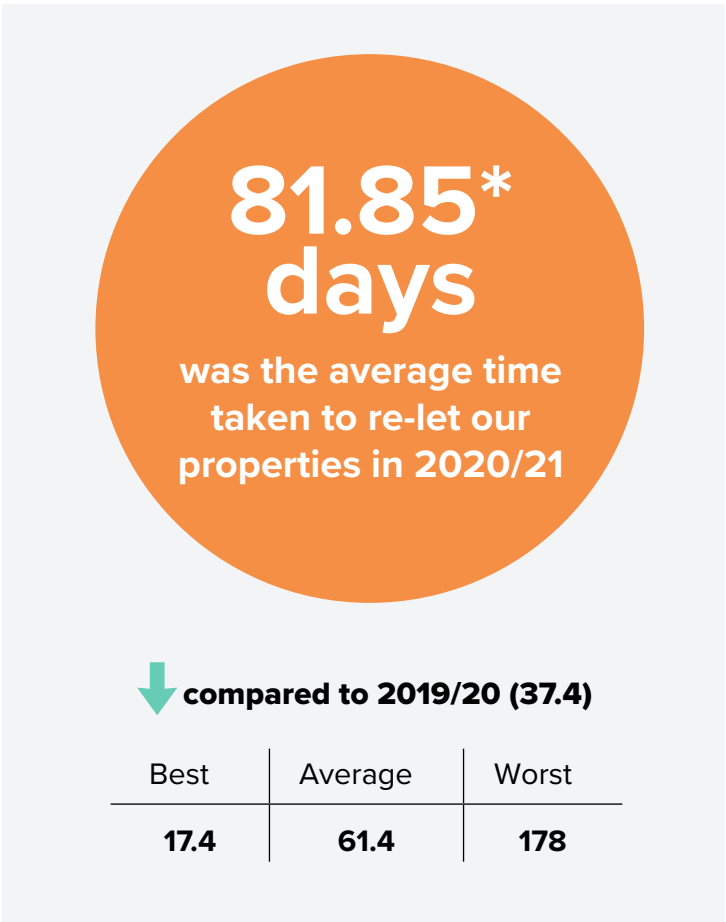


# Learning from Complaints

A key theme from complaints is communication or lack of, in relation to housing applications and medical bandings. We recognise this is an issue, and one which can be difficult to address in terms of resources given the number of applications and complex circumstances that need to be assessed and are implementing the following measures:

- 1. Reviewed the information held on housing IT systems to ensure that it is more accessible to officers in the call centre, ensuring that frequently made queries are quick and easy to resolve for both officers and customers, reducing the need for further calls.
- 2. Improved the case recording processes to ensure that all records are up to date, accurate and comprehensive.
- 3. Thirdly we have reviewed our standard letters. Our objective is to ensure that any letters sent out are timely, clear and concise. If further information is required, then we aim to be clear on what is needed and why.

## How did we do?



\* impacted by the lockdown during Covid 19



# Your Tenancy

**This standard sets the requirements around how registered providers set and increase rents for all their social housing stock in line with government**

## Rent and other Housing charges

### Meet the Team

**Housing Income Recovery Manager** – Jamie Hill

**Housing Income Team Leader** – Claire Woodhouse and Connie Cole

**Senior Housing Income Recovery Officer** – Sarah Edmond

**Housing Income Recovery Officers** – Kelly Swift, Stephen Blackmore, Alizae Ali, Rebecca Kavanagh, Kyle Adderley and Sharnee Bishop

**Specialist Housing Income Recovery Officers** – Kenny Martin and Hollie Williams

**Housing Debtor Income Recovery Officers** – We have a dedicated team of 4 Housing Income Recovery Officers who focus on preventative work and who offer advice and support to our tenants to help them pay their rent and sustain their tenancies.

We also have a team of 3 Specialist Housing Income Recovery Officers who deal with higher arrears cases that have moved beyond the early stages of recovery which sometimes require legal action being taken for non-payment of rent.

We have two Housing Debtor Income Recovery Officers that deal with the collection of former tenant arrears and rechargeable repairs and a two specialist officers that deal with the recovery of charges for emergency accommodation such as Bed and Breakfast and the income management of our Rent Guarantee Scheme.

### If you are struggling to pay your rent

Contact the dedicated team of Rent Officers who are trained to help you to overcome any issues you have making your rent payments, this can include making a referral to the Debt Advice Team or making referrals for further support including food parcels. You can contact the Rents Team on 0118 937 2784.

## Highlights from 2019/20 and 2020/21

Over the last two years:

- We continue to remain in the top quartile by collecting 100.11% of the rent due in the financial year 20/21.
- We have supported our vulnerable tenants throughout the pandemic by completing welfare checks and arranging for financial help including food parcels to those that needed it the most.



- We have reduced the number of Legal notices served by sustaining tenancies by almost two thirds.

## In 2022/2023 we will:

- Look to trial a pre tenancy counselling project which will enable future tenants to be 'tenancy ready'. This will mean new tenants will have the necessary skills to ensure that their tenancy is a success and have information and tools available to help them where needed.
- To maintain rent collection levels at a steady rate of at least 95% whilst we continue to recover from the Pandemic, the backdrop of continued roll out of Universal Credit.
- Outreach work by our Housing Income Recovery Officers to support tenants that might need help with their finances and specialist welfare benefit advice. Look out for them on your estates soon!
- Our specialist universal credit officer will continue to support to our tenants by providing advice and assistance on complex cases and those migrating from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit.

## Did you know?

- In the last financial year, we have only made 6 possession applications to Reading County Court due to non-payment of rent and carried out 2 evictions. This was due to early support and intervention by the teams as well as Government restrictions on what legal action could be taken. It is always a last resort to take such action and we have actively worked with tenants that are struggling to improve their financial situation.
- At the end of March 2021, we had collected 100.11% of rent due This enables us to invest back into your homes and thriving neighbourhoods.

### Debt Advice Team

## Meet the Team

**Debt Advice Team Leader** – Jamie Webb

**Debt Advice Officers** – David Pidduck, Cecilia Kelly, Olivia Gardner, Sarah Tudor and Sheree Wright

 **0118 937 2197**

 **debt.advice@reading.gov.uk**

 **www.reading.gov.uk/debtadvice**

We are a friendly team of trained advisors who can help you with any debt problem you have with free, confidential, impartial advice personalised to you.



## Helping you cope with the cost of living crisis

With record breaking energy bills and the increasing cost of everyday essentials including food, people's money is being squeezed more than ever before. Many of you may be worried about this, and what effect it is having on being able to keep a roof over your head.

### Money Matters

We have a Money Matters website to bring together all the advice and support available to residents of Reading who may be struggling financially with a number of issues including benefits, money advice, redundancy, and the cost of living. The website has both national and local support agencies that offer support at the level you need to improve your situation. Go to [www.reading.gov.uk/money-matters](http://www.reading.gov.uk/money-matters)

We do much more than just advise people on debt

We can help you to:

- Check you are receiving all the benefits you are entitled to.
- Explore ways to increase income and reduce outgoings.
- Advise on bills/debts that need to be paid to keep important goods and services.
- Support you to make an informed decision how you would like to deal with your debts.
- Understand benefit awards and help you to challenge decisions.
- Plan your spending and get back in control of your finances.

In financial year 2021/2022 we:

- Helped **515** residents who came to us for debt advice.
- Conducted over **798** telephone appointments.
- Helped residents claim **£46,732** of benefits per month.
- Enabled residents to receive **£181,376** in backdated benefits.
- Helped residents get debts totalling **£229,129** written off.

The team also administers the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme, this can provide people claiming Housing Benefit, the Housing Costs Element of Universal Credit or Council Tax Support extra financial support. For more information visit [www.reading.gov.uk/discretionary-payments](http://www.reading.gov.uk/discretionary-payments)

Don't miss out if you need help with your finances and contact the team, whatever the reasons we are here to support you. For more information:

 [www.reading.gov.uk/housing/money-matters](http://www.reading.gov.uk/housing/money-matters)

 **0118 937 2197**

 [debt.advice@reading.gov.uk](mailto:debt.advice@reading.gov.uk)

## Looking out for your interests

Last year we identified 313 tenants who could be at risk of financial crisis or struggling financially and reached out to them to offer support, completing benefit checks to identify unclaimed benefits to increase their income and offer further support including budgeting and debt advice.



## Did you know?

Due to early intervention and understanding our tenants needs we have managed to reduce the number of legal notices served by over 60%, ensuring that we do what matters the most – keeping our tenants in their homes.

## Winter Watch

A cold home can lead to serious health problems for you and your family, so it's vital that despite rising energy bills you keep your home sufficiently warm to stay well. Many of you will be concerned by increasing costs, but help may be at hand.

This winter if you are a Reading resident on a low income and are over 60, have very young children or have a disability or health concerns, you could qualify for help from Winter Watch with:

- Home energy checks
- Advice on your bills
- Insulation and draught exclusion
- Emergency support to keep warm

If you need help and think you may be eligible, please contact us.

 **01189 373747**

 **winterwatch@reading.gov.uk**

 **[www.reading.gov.uk/winterwatch](http://www.reading.gov.uk/winterwatch)**

## How did we do?



# Your Home



**The Home standard sets expectations for Registered providers of social housing to provide tenants with quality accommodation and cost-effective repairs and maintenance service.**

## To report a repair:

☎ 0800 318296 or 01189 372 757

☎ 01189 373 737

🌐 Website/self service: [reading-self.achieveservice.com](https://reading-self.achieveservice.com)

## Over 2019/20 and 2020/21 we:

- Improved the thermal comfort of 223 flats by replacing the windows and doors in Caversham, Southcote, Tilehurst and Whitley.
- Installed a new sprinkler system and fire alarm system in all the flats and communal areas in the three Coley Park high rise blocks. We also replaced the water distribution system to significantly reduce incidents of leaks within the flats.
- The council Housing Strategy was adopted with the vision ‘for all our residents to have the opportunity to live in a good quality sustainable home they can afford within a thriving neighbourhood’.
- Delivered 4 new homes at George Street and a further 18 plus a new community centre on the old Norcot estate with new families now moved in. These have all been built to the Councils standards for low carbon homes. A further 272 homes will be delivered in Park, Abbey, Redlands, Southcote and Minster Wards over the next 4 years.
- Completed the refurbishment of the fifth and final block of flats at Hexham Road which provided improved fire safety measures, new exteriors and new kitchens and bathrooms.
- Updated more than 300 central heating systems across our stock with energy efficient condensing boilers and controls, helping to tackle fuel poverty and improving the thermal comfort of homes.
- Introduced new improved specifications for voids, kitchens and bathrooms.
- Obtained a Green Homes grant which was used to install 40 air source heat pumps to properties in Granville Road.
- Installed external wall insulation and new triple glazed windows to properties in Kentwood.



## In 2022/23 we will:

- Continue to invest in our stock spending an estimated £2m on kitchens and bathrooms across the borough, and £14m on the maintenance and improvement of our housing stock.
- Begin work to carry out a range of improvements to the Coley Park high rise buildings including the removal and replacement of the external fabric of the buildings, install new triple glazed windows and entry doors, a new waste management system and improved play facilities and landscaping to the area around the blocks.
- Actively look at how we can cut our carbon footprint and use more environmentally friendly materials.
- Actively seek alternative materials and innovative heating systems along with renewable energy solutions to help lower running costs, improve the environment and reduce carbon dioxide emissions. This includes investing in more carbon neutral heating systems in line with our climate change ambitions such as air and ground source heat pumps.
- Continue the modernisation of our low rise Crosswall properties including installing triple glazed windows, improving insulation and refreshing the external appearance of the properties with low maintenance materials and the provision of alternative heating.
- We will be providing new flooring, replacing badly damaged flooring or concrete finish following a tenant survey which highlighted the appearance of communal areas as an area of concern for customers.

## You said We did

The Tenant Satisfaction survey in spring 2020 (see page 5) identified that 74% of respondents who had work carried out were satisfied with the way RBC Housing Services deals with repairs and maintenance, a decrease from 81% in 2018 and tenants under 35 were less satisfied with the Repairs service than older residents. We carried out further consultation with tenants under 35 to try to understand their experience of the repairs service and where we might improve. The consultation found that where we carried out a repair right first time, tenants were generally very satisfied with the service and the quality of the repair. It was noted though in cases where the repair could not be completed due to a variety of reasons tenants could become frustrated with the lack of communication as to when the job would be finished. We have listened to tenants and as a result we have changed the way that such jobs are done. Rather than closing the original job and raising another one for the additional work required or parts needed, the job stays open until the work is complete so that we do not lose the visibility of it and this makes chasing progress much easier. Tenants also reported being frustrated by only being offered AM or PM appointments. We are looking at how we can offer 2 hour slots for appointments and how we can use texting to make communicating with our tenants much better.



## Did you know?

READING Borough Council was crowned Homebuilder of the Year 2021 at the UK Housing Awards. The annual awards seek to reward teams and individuals who lead the housing sector by example with their passion and commitment. The only council to make the shortlist for the Homebuilder of the Year Award (16,000 homes or less), Reading beat six other contenders for the award, including construction companies, housing associations and development partnerships.

Reading Borough Council was recognised by the judges for its ambition to build over 300 new affordable homes over four years with a strong commitment to sustainability and excellent team working. This £80m investment in home building will help reduce the housing waiting list and provide affordable rent properties to Reading's residents, including provision for adult social care, sheltered housing, key workers and those on the housing register.

The judges' comments were:



**Reading were clear winners for this award, with the council's development plans ticking all boxes for the judges. Not only does it have ambitious development goals for the next five years, it is clear about how they will do this sustainably, and while engaging with and including the communities where the homes are being built. The judges were also impressed with the range of properties the council was delivering, with their projects aiming to provide much needed homes for a broad cross-section of society, from supported housing to housing for the key workers that have served us so well throughout the pandemic.**

The Council's innovative use of small pockets of disused land, alongside larger projects, has recently seen tenants move in to four high quality new homes in George Street and 18 new affordable flats in Lyndhurst road consisting of eight 1 bed and ten 2 bed flats over 3 floors with a communal garden, parking and a community centre have been built where the disused Norcot Youth and Community centre once stood. prospective tenants visited the site on 10th March to look around. Mrs Bird who is currently a council tenant said.



**The flats are lovely. The upstairs one I saw was great with nice views and a really good bathroom. I can picture myself in here. My current house is lovely but the garden is big and getting unmanageable, so I'm interested in downsizing.**

Three homes in Foxhays road two in Wentworth Avenue and further homes in Ian Mikado way, Circuit lane and Camelford Close are all progressing and will see tenants take possession later this year.





## How did we do?

**93.60%**

of repairs were  
fixed at the first  
attempt

↓ compared to 2019/20 (95.9%)

Best	Average	Worst
100%	88.9%	54%

**100%**

of homes have  
a gas safety  
certificate

↔ compared to 2019/20 (100%)

Best	Average	Worst
100%	99.2%	87%

**7.26**

is the number  
of days taken to  
complete a repair

↓ compared to 2019/20 (6.27)

Best	Average	Worst
1.89	13.42	44

**£109.07**

is the average  
cost of a repair in  
2020/21

↓ compared to 2019/20 (£89.40)

Best	Average	Worst
£51.61	£184.16	£422.06



# 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 & recycling)

☎ 0118 937 3787

## Housing Benefits

☎ 0118 937 3707  
@ benefits@reading.gov.uk  
🖱 [www.reading.gov.uk/counciltaxsupport](http://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](http://www.reading.gov.uk/rbctenantrepairs)

## Repairs (out of hours emergencies)

☎ 0118 937 3737

## Tenant Participation Team

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

As well as contacting us, it is worth noting that you can also go direct to the Housing Ombudsman Service which resolves disputes involving tenants and leaseholders of social housing landlords like Reading Borough Council. Residents and landlords can contact it at any time for support in helping to resolve a dispute and it is free to tenants.

🖱 [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)  
@ [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)  
☎ 0300 111 3000  
✍ Housing Ombudsman Service,  
PO box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ