

🏠 2021

Annual report

to council tenants
& leaseholders 2021

This report gives information about our housing services between **April 2020** and **March 2021** and our plans for this year.



If you have any comments about this report, or have suggestions for next year's, we welcome your feedback. Please contact us at:
housing.performance@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Welcome

In a year dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic, it's no surprise to see it being a key focus of this year's report.

As elsewhere in the council, Housing quickly adapted its services at the start of the first lockdown to concentrate on supporting residents – making sure they had access to essential items and the latest information on the help available.

Some of our services were paused, while others refocussed on helping provide food for vulnerable tenants. Our Estates Service redesigned their cleaning schedules in our public areas to help stop the spread of infection. Most of our staff had to adapt to working from home.

All services responded again as the national picture and lockdown restrictions changed throughout the year.

As this report illustrates, Covid-19 has impacted all our services, which unfortunately has led to some backlogs and delays.

In April, we welcomed 132 new staff into the organisation as we brought our repairs & maintenance service in-house.

The first few months corresponded with the first lockdown, with the team having to concentrate on urgent and priority repairs while the strictest limits were in place.

We were able to bring back more repair jobs with Covid-safe measures in place as the year progressed, but we are still catching up.

We experienced unavoidable delays with work refurbishing empty homes and are currently working to reduce the backlog. We also had to suspend our Homemove lettings scheme and exchanges through the first lockdown.

Our priority now is to get all services back on track as quickly as possible and we have brought in extra staff to manage Homemove and mutual exchange applications.

We thank you for your patience and understanding through this challenging period.

On a brighter note to finish, our ambitious plans to provide at least 800 additional council homes have continued at speed.

New homes were completed in Buckley Close in Hangleton and Selsfield Drive in Moulsecoomb, with work on new developments and conversions underway across the city.

We've also bought more properties through the expansion of our Home Purchase Policy.

In 20/21, we added 144 additional homes while losing 24 under the right to buy – a net gain of 120, the highest in a single year since we've been able to restart building council homes.

**Councillor Siriol Hugh-Jones and
Councillor David Gibson**

Co-chairs of Housing

Our housing stock

As at **31 March 2021**, we have **11,567** council homes made up of:

5,924

flats

345

studio
flats

4,047

houses

205

bungalows

169

maisonettes

877

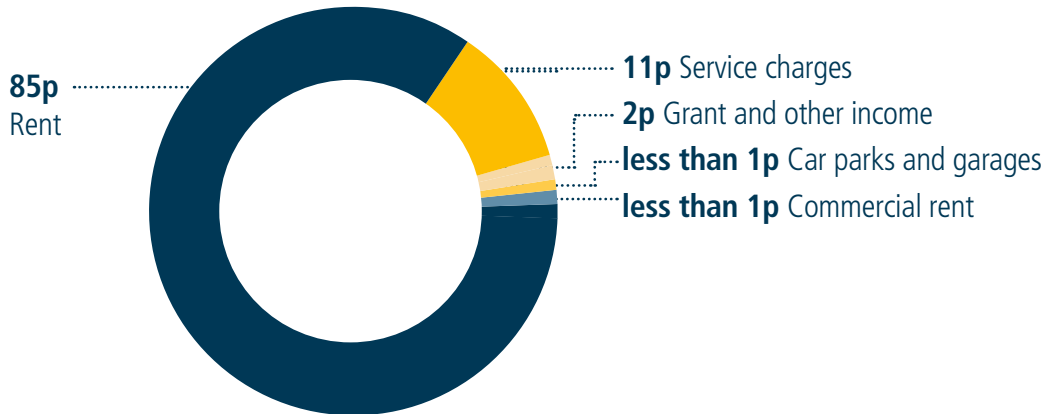
seniors
housing
homes

There are also 2,360 leasehold flats in council blocks.

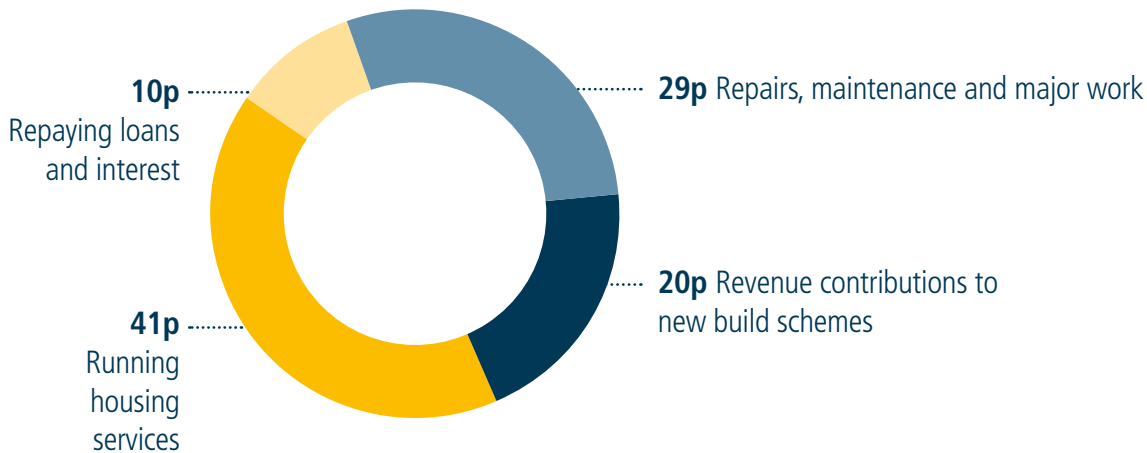
Value for Money

Housing Revenue Account income and expenditure

Where every £1 of our income comes from



How every £1 is spent



Total income £61.7m
Total expenditure £61.3m

The difference in income of £0.4 million has been added to reserves in the Housing Revenue Account to fund future investment in your homes.



Service changes in response to the Covid-19 pandemic

During the last year, we needed to adapt our services to meet the challenges of the pandemic and provide vital support for residents, while most staff worked from home.

Keeping in touch with residents

One of our first priorities when the pandemic began was to contact all residents in seniors housing about their support needs and advise them how they could keep safe, healthy and well.

Between April and June last year, officers from all parts of the service contacted **4,618** residents to offer support, for example, by arranging delivery of food parcels and advising how to get help with shopping deliveries. The service received positive feedback from residents in response to these calls.

“It is heartening that you are caring for everyone, thank you for this. Covid-19 has brought the best out in... people caring for others. Thank you.”

Housing Customer Services

The Housing Customer Services Team continued to offer advice and support throughout the year to tenants and agencies working with them.

At the start of the pandemic, we didn't have the equipment in place to provide a live call service with staff working from home. Callers were asked to leave voicemail messages, and we then got back to them. By January, the team were able to begin taking live calls again, using laptops and headphones. This equipment will allow the team to work flexibly into the future.

During the year, the Housing Customer Services team responded to **27,615** emails

and **13,620** voicemails and, after an initial period of adjustment, continued to provide a wide range of other services.

The team processed **456** applications for parking and managed the stock of car parks and garages across the city, bringing **£1,007,000** into the Housing Revenue Account.

Rehousing

We paused letting properties between April and July and resumed as soon as we could do so safely.

Through the year, we let **211** introductory tenancies and supported **32** households to downsize, with a further **24** eligible for Transfer Incentive Scheme payments to support their move to smaller homes.

The Mutual Exchange service was paused between March and late autumn. When it resumed, we prioritised the applications that were on hold from the first lockdown.

We restarted work on new applications in February 2021. We've put more resources in place to support mutual exchanges, as we have a large backlog, which will take some time to clear.

Estates Services

In consultation with public health colleagues, we redesigned the team's schedules at the start of the Covid pandemic to give more priority to cleaning the 'hot spot' areas which are touched more often, such as door handles, handrails and lift buttons.

Our Estates Services worked throughout the pandemic, with the team's response technicians completing **3,537** jobs, 99% of which were completed within three days. The bulk collection service completed **2,025** jobs, with 96% done within seven working days.

Seniors Housing

The seniors housing service continued to provide a personalised scheme manager service throughout the pandemic, with over **850** residents having a direct mobile number for staff. Our daily call service remained unaffected.

At the beginning of the pandemic the service teamed up with Impact Initiatives to provide hundreds of low-cost meals to seniors housing residents when access to food was a worry – 50% of these meals provided were free to residents.

All 23 schemes were reviewed with signage upgraded to reflect the UK guidance and additional sanitisers installed to make them more Covid-safe.

The extra measures in our senior housing schemes played a key role in keeping down the infection rates among our residents.

Income collection

Our current rent arrears stand at around **£2 million**, with 96.4% of rent collected.

We helped tenants get **£60,314** in discretionary housing payments.

We made **76** referrals to Money Advice Plus service, which has helped tenants and leaseholders to obtain **£237,245** of extra income.

While legal action to recover debt was halted by emergency Covid related legislation, the team has been focussing on contacting tenants in arrears to offer debt advice and referrals to specialist services.

Tenancy services

There were no evictions last year for anti-social behaviour. We completed **725** anti-social behaviour cases and there were **770** new cases opened during the year, slightly up from the 744 the previous year.

While all planned five-year tenancy visits were paused from March 2020, we focussed on carrying out necessary home visits under individual risk assessments.

We installed CCTV systems in **ten** locations across the city where we had an increase in reports of anti-social behaviour.

Housing Adaptations Service

We invested **£1.41 million** to carry out **197** major adaptations in tenants' homes to support residents with disabilities to live independently and well.

The team also worked on the design and delivery of new accessible and adapted council homes.

Occupational Therapists also dedicated time to viewing council properties to make sure that all new and existing homes were let to residents with a matching need.

Fire safety

We carried out **two training exercises** with East Sussex Fire & Rescue. The first in the safe evacuation of immobile occupants at a house in Woodingdean and the second to test a new piece of equipment to help the safe evacuation of high-rise buildings at Dudeney Lodge in Hollingdean.

Following arson attacks in bin rooms on the Wellington Road estate, we installed sprinkler systems to three bin rooms with linked alarms that go straight to a receiving centre, where the emergency services are called.

Sustainability

Brighton & Hove City Council has pledged to become carbon neutral by 2030.



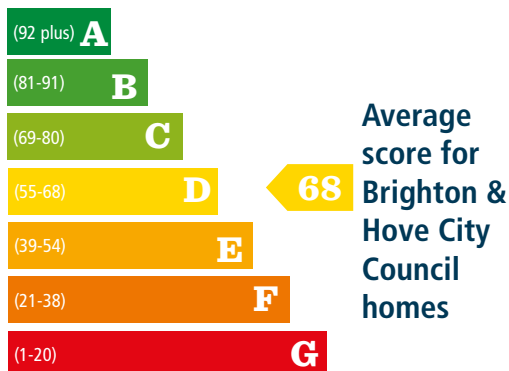
Housing Committee has approved up to **1,000 new solar panel installations** on homes and bungalows across the city, with the first of these being delivered in 2021.

The European Union funded project, 'Sustainable Housing Initiatives in Excluded Neighbourhoods' (SHINE), ended in February this year. In the four years it ran, **544** households were given advice on small energy saving measures, and energy saving improvements were made to **250** of the homes.

We have installed **three air source heat pumps** as trials in our existing homes. We will be looking for opportunities to develop a programme to deliver more of these over the next few years.

Energy performance of our homes Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP)

Very energy efficient - lower running costs



Not energy efficient - higher running costs

New homes

We have built or purchased a total of 144 new homes over the last year, with the net number of council-owned homes increasing by 120.

- **42** new build flats at Buckley Close and Hawkridge Court.
- **40** new homes added to the council's stock under the Home Purchase Policy.
- **24** new homes have been purchased to house some of the city's rough sleepers.
- **38** were purchased to provide a block of council owned emergency accommodation flats.

42 new homes are planned as part of the New Homes for Neighbourhoods project in Victoria Road.

226 homes will be delivered by September 2023 in the Moulsecoomb area.

The council is also working with Hyde Housing to provide an additional **176** homes, due to be available in 2023.

Funding for new builds £31.2m

£12.3m from direct revenue funding

£10m from borrowing

£6.8m from capital receipts

£1m from reserves

£1.1m from grants

Repairs & Maintenance

On 1 April 2020, the Repairs & Maintenance service transferred to the council from a ten year partnership with Mears, and we welcomed **132** members of staff into the organisation.

Despite the restrictions, the Repairs & Maintenance teams completed **98.7%** of emergency repairs within 24 hours and kept **97.4%** of appointments. The team achieved **98.1%** satisfaction with customer service and **95.5%** with the standard of work.



We spent **£11.23m** on repairs:

- £6.988m on responsive repairs
- £1.359m on empty properties
- £2.884m on servicing and other repairs

A total of **21,903** responsive repairs were completed - **11,486** emergency repairs and **10,417** routine repairs.

At 31 March 2021, we had **5,040** outstanding repairs.

We invested **£6.572m** in our properties:

- £2.515m on planned maintenance
- £1.556m on major projects
- £2.501m on mechanical and engineering programmes

100% of council-owned homes with a gas supply have a valid Landlord's Gas Safety Record.

We've installed **791** new boilers. All new boilers are rated 'A' at 94% efficiency and meet the Energy Related Products Directive on energy efficiency.

We have installed **12** bathrooms and **21** kitchens.

Currently, **91.9%** of our council homes meet the decent homes standard.

Our planned maintenance work and major projects programme was significantly impacted by Covid-19. However, we were able to complete the following projects:

- Structural work to Saxonbury
- Refurbishment work at St Aubyns, Tyson & St Johns
- Concrete coating to Leach Court
- External repairs to Somerset Point, including work to the windows and balconies
- Roof replacements at Laburnum Grove and Burstead Close
- Tyfoam extraction to 35 properties

Working in the community

The Community Engagement team adapted how it engaged with residents over the year to ensure we could continue to hear the views of as many people as possible while unable to hold face to face meetings.

At the beginning of the pandemic, we were very aware of the many people who had little or no access to the internet for information on how to manage and the emergency support in place. We quickly developed a newsletter with a wide range of information for residents.

In April and May, the Community Engagement Team organised and worked with over **750** volunteers to deliver around **200,000** of these newsletters throughout the city.

The team continued to hold their tenant and leaseholder meetings by moving them online. We've held more than **55** of these online meetings so far.

The team also played a key role in helping residents access food and set up the Central Food hub, serving the central area of the city. Between May 2020 and February 2021, the team sent out around **50** food parcels every week for **36** weeks.

Environmental Improvement Budget

During the year, **£500,000** from the Environmental Improvement Budget has been spent on local projects. The total investment since the beginning of the project in 2019/20 now stands at **£964,747**.

Improvement projects include the repair and replacement of play equipment, landscaping, replacing signage and benches, creating new bin stores, providing security fencing, and improved accessibility through raised planters, paths and ramps.

Estate Development Budget

The Estate Development Budget funded **69** projects over the year, with a total investment of **£230,069**.

Projects funded include new communal fencing and sheds, communal kitchen improvements and lounge furniture in seniors housing schemes. Smaller items include new benches and notice boards, computer equipment and garden tools.

Looking ahead

Looking to the future and the reduction of Covid-related restrictions, we are making plans for staff to return to the workplace, open offices and resume services paused or altered during the past year.

As part of this work, we're reviewing how customer contact has changed and the increasing demand for digital contact.

This includes how we can support residents to access services better this way.

In-person meetings will return as part of our resident engagement work. We will continue to offer online meetings to extend our reach to people in our communities. We aim to reintroduce home visits and tenancy enforcement action from

the end of the summer, in line with government legislation and safety guidance in place at that time.

The Repairs & Maintenance service is working through the backlog of repairs from the past year. We are recruiting extra trades and office staff to help with this work.

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 there's anything you'd like to see in future editions, we'd welcome your feedback. Please contact us at: housing.performance@brighton-hove.gov.uk, twitter.com/bhhousing, facebook.com/BHHousing