

Homes and Landlord Services

Annual Report for

Tenants

April 2017 – March 2018



Homes and Landlord Services is the new name for the directorate of Bristol City Council, which manages the city's Council Housing and a number of other housing services, including Homelessness Prevention and Home Choice Bristol.

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Welcome

Welcome to the 2018 Homes and Landlord Services annual report for tenants. Here we share information about our performance in the last financial year, between April 2017 and March 2018.



Julian Higson,
Director: Homes and
Landlord Services

I've just joined Bristol as Director of Homes and Landlord Services and I'm proud to be working in this great city. It's good to see positive feedback and improved satisfaction in areas such as caretaking, getting repairs right the first time and our planned improvements. However, there are several areas where performance has not improved, or is below expectations. We are actively tackling these with targeted improvement programmes.

This year, council housing was overshadowed by the terrible tragedy at Grenfell Tower in London. In Bristol, we have a strong fire safety track record; since last June our teams have focused on making doubly sure that all of our blocks are safe for residents – this remains a top priority.

We've also identified our other priorities for 2018/19. These include challenges that you've told us about and areas where we must improve outcomes for residents. Foremost is a renewed emphasis on working together with tenants, to identify what matters most, and finding practical solutions.

We have an exciting and ambitious programme to build much-needed new council housing, from one-bedroom flats to four-bedroom family houses. So far we have completed 81 new homes across the city and this year we aim to complete another 32, with a further 85 under construction. Our new homes have been nominated for, and won, several national awards for quality, design and sustainability.

I'm really looking forward to working with tenants and colleagues to ensure our homes and communities remain great places to live.

Priorities 2018/19

- **Reducing the number of empty council homes.** We want as few of our homes to be empty at any one time as possible. We are exploring ways to repair and let vacant homes more quickly (see page 3).
- **Reducing arrears and managing the transition to Universal Credit.** This year, many households in Bristol will start receiving Universal Credit if they make a new claim for any of the benefits and tax credits it replaces. For some people managing this change is difficult and they end up in debt or crisis. As your landlord, we want to prevent more tenants falling behind with their rent (see page 4).
- **Hate crime.** We are focussed on responding better when hate crime incidents are reported to us (see page 5).
- **Fire safety.** Keeping residents in our blocks safe from fire is a top priority, particularly following the tragic fire at Grenfell last year (see page 6).
- **Tenant engagement.** It is important to us that your voice is heard and you feel empowered to influence decisions that affect you. We want to increase the ways in which you can participate in the management of your homes and communities (see page 8).



Development of new council homes
at Kingsmarsh and Baynton, Lawrence Hill

Repairs and improving your home

Repairs

- **90%** were satisfied with how we dealt with their repair. (2016–17: 94%)
- **96%** were satisfied they could book a convenient appointment time for a repair. (2016–17: 96%)
- **88%** of appointments were kept. (2016–17: 89%)
- **87%** of repairs were completed in one visit. (2016–17: 84%)
- The average time to complete a standard repair was **seven working days** for our internal workforce and 11 working days for repairs overall. (2016–17: 7 days)
- **94%** of new tenants were satisfied with the quality of their new home. (2016–17: 97%)

We have invested in new handheld devices for our operatives, so they can do more work on site and need to spend less time in the office. This helps our workforce to be more efficient.



Improving your home

- **94.4%** of our homes met the government's Decent Homes Standard. (2016–17: 94.0%)
- **1,011** new boilers and/or heating systems installed.
- **2,566** homes had their exteriors repaired and/or painted.
- **1,755** new kitchens were installed.
- **99.8%** of properties with working gas supply had a gas safety check in the last year. (2016–17: 99.9%)
- On average, **97%** of people were satisfied with planned works done to their home. (2016–17: 95%)

Reducing the number of empty council homes

This year, we reconditioned 46 properties for use as temporary accommodation for homeless families.

The homes would have been expensive to fully repair. This has successfully supported families and is also better value to the council than using alternative accommodation such as bed and breakfasts.

We continually look for ways to repair empty properties more quickly. In December 2017, our work with a new contractor did not result in faster turnaround times, because they were not sufficiently set up to repair the number of properties required. However, working together we have put measures in place to improve this. We are also looking to streamline how we allocate and let empty homes.



Managing your tenancy

Rent management

- **11%** of tenants had more than seven weeks arrears. (2016–17: 12%)
- **37** tenants were evicted because of rent arrears. (2016–17: 56)
- **543** tenants were referred for money advice.

Tenants account

Our online **tenants account** gives you easy access to account balances and payments. To access your online tenant account, visit our website at: www.bristol.gov.uk/tenantaccount



Managing tenancies



empty properties were let.

172 tenants downsized to a smaller home.

On average, it took us **44** days to re-let a vacant home (not counting time for major repairs, such as installing a new kitchen or removing asbestos). (2016–17: 44 days)

80% of new tenants felt they had a successful start to their new tenancy. (2016–17: 80%)



97% of new tenancies lasted longer than one year. (2016–17: 97%)

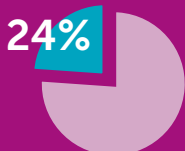


We gave extra support to **609** tenants who were at risk of losing their tenancy.

Our tenants

Tenants who are aged 65+

24%



Tenants who identify themselves as disabled

20%



White British



Black/Minority Ethnicity



White other



Unknown/ prefer not to say

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is being introduced in Bristol throughout 2018 for working-age households who need to make a new claim for benefits.

It replaces the six means-tested benefits and tax credits (including Housing Benefit) and is claimed from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

It has already been introduced in Bedminster, Bishopsworth and Temple Street Jobcentre Plus areas. It will be introduced in remaining Jobcentre Plus areas in September and October 2018.

Universal Credit is usually paid straight into your bank account

for you to spend on rent and bills. This is different to Housing Benefit, which would be paid directly to us. This means that there is a risk that more tenants could go behind on their rent payments.

We will provide advice and support to tenants who would like help to make a Universal Credit application, set a budget, or plan rent payments.



Responding to hate crime

In 2013 Bijan Ebrahimi, a Bristol City Council tenant and refugee, was murdered in Bristol by one of his neighbours.

Mr Ebrahimi had previously made several complaints to us about the abuse he was receiving. Two independent reviews published during 2017 identified serious failures by our department, other agencies in the council, and the police force in responding to Mr Ebrahimi's complaints.

We want to ensure that we and our partner agencies learn from this tragic case and work together to try to prevent this ever happening again. Since 2013, we have taken steps to improve how we deal with hate crime and keep residents of our homes safe.

These include:

- Working with the charity Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI) to review how we deal with hate crime cases.
- Commissioning Bristol Hate Crime and Discrimination Services to provide better support to victims of hate crime.
- Specialist training and refresher courses for housing staff, to better understand and respond to hate crime.
- Reviews of our policies and procedures in dealing with cases of racial harassment and in assisting vulnerable tenants.
- Reviewing high-level protocols to improve how we work with partner organisations, such as the police.
- Monitoring statistics about the race hate incidents that are reported to us.

For further details about the case and our response, visit: www.bristol.gov.uk/saferbristol

Dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB)

- **2,057** cases of ASB were reported to us.
- **166 (8%)** of these cases were hate crime reports.
- **51%** of tenants were satisfied with the way their ASB complaint was dealt with. (2016–17: 60%)
- We investigated **1,811** cases of breach of tenancy conditions (for example leaving homes/gardens in poor condition or having unsuitable pets).
- **360** cases of possible tenancy fraud were investigated, resulting in 39 homes being recovered.

Services to older people and adaptations

- The Services to Older People team responded to **1,091** emergency call-outs from elderly or vulnerable tenants.
- **85%** of response teams arrived within their 30 minute target. (2016–17: 91%)
- **474** major adaptations were made to tenants' homes to help them live independently.

Find support to live independently at:

www.bristol.gov.uk/caredirect



Caretaking



After a period of being managed by the council's parks service, caretaking is once again being managed by Homes and Landlord Services.

We are keen to ensure consistently high standards of caretaking across the city. Alongside cleaning and maintenance responsibilities, our caretakers have an important role in checking for potential fire hazards, or other safety issues, in our blocks and reporting them so they can be resolved.

- Around **8,500** homes (including tenants and leaseholders) receive a caretaking service.
- **97%** of site inspections judged our cleaning as satisfactory. **89%** of inspections found the standard of cleaning to be high. (2016-17: 95% and 85%)

Fire safety

The safety of residents in our homes is a top priority.

Since 2012, we have invested around £2.5 million per year in improvements to the fire safety of our blocks of flats. This has included replacement of fire doors to modern standards; compartmentation work to stop fires spreading between flats; and ensuring that each flat has a smoke detector fitted on every level.

We have worked closely with Avon Fire and Rescue, who have endorsed our safety procedures. All our housing blocks have a fire risk assessment in place, which is reviewed every year.

Following the Grenfell fire in June 2017, teams have focussed on fire safety projects including safety checks of our blocks; reassurance visits; and other tenant communications such as leaflets and posters designed to keep residents informed about fire.



In blocks that have exterior cladding, we have commissioned and started independent fire safety checks. If any improvement work is required, it will be a priority and we have set aside money for this.

Finance

We receive no funding from the rest of the council or central government. Most of our money comes from the rents and service charges we receive from you. This can only be spent on Bristol City Council homes and related services.

What we spent:

Repairs and maintenance	£27.8m
Managing tenancies	£26.7m
Improvements to existing housing stock	£24.3m
Repaying our debt	£11.1m
Special services (e.g. caretaking, services to older people)	£7.6m
New build and acquisitions	£7.1m
Bad debt	£1.5m
Our new computer system.	£1m
Total	£107.1m



Reducing your rent by 1%

every year until 2019

Following government policy, we have reduced your rent by 1% every year since April 2016. It will be reduced by a further 1% next year as well. This does mean that we have less money to spend on services you receive and on repairs and improvements for homes. We have worked hard to reduce the money we spend without impacting the most essential service areas.



Understanding and responding to your needs

Contacting us

- We received **251,365** calls last year. 80% were answered. (2016-17: 82%)
- The average wait for a call to be answered was **2 mins 49 secs** (2016-17: 2 mins 4 secs)
- We received **1,119** complaints last year. (2016-17: 783)
Note: we are now directly responsible for rent collection and management again. This is one reason why we received more complaints.
- **73%** of complaints were dealt with inside our target of 15 working days. (2016-17: 52%)
- We recognise that performance needs to improve in this area and we will work with colleagues in other service areas to address this.

Having your say

We recognise that it is really important that we listen to your views and that you are able to shape the decisions that we make. You can now get involved in the following ways:

- **Involvement register:** a new, easy online registration form to join a panel – take part in events and complete surveys or consultations.
- **Three service user groups:** for estates, planned programmes and response repairs.
- **NEW six Local Housing Forums:** where council tenants from across the city can discuss local housing services with us.



- **Housing Scrutiny Panel:** helps improve our performance and standards by taking a closer look at housing services and making recommendations.
- **A reinvigorated Housing Management Board:** where elected tenants meet with senior housing managers and councillors to discuss and shape services.

Check out all of the ways you can get involved at: www.bristol.gov.uk/tenantparticipation

For any enquiries, please contact us on: **0117 3521 444** or email: tpu@bristol.gov.uk

You can follow us on Facebook: facebook.com/bristolcouncilhousing



You can access housing services quickly online

- Set up and manage your online rent account at: www.bristol.gov.uk/tenantaccount
- Over 10,400 repair requests were made online last year. Request a non-urgent repair at: www.bristol.gov.uk/ReportARepair
- Find support to live independently at: www.bristol.gov.uk/caredirect
- There's much more for tenants on our website. To apply for a mutual exchange, parking permit and many other services, visit: www.bristol.gov.uk/councilhousing



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