



IPSWICH
BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

April 2023 – March 2024

WELCOME TO THE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

2024 has seen the Regulator of Social Housing start a programme of inspections of organisations who provide social housing, we welcome this initiative as we believe this can only benefit tenants. The Regulator has a set of Consumer Standards in place, so over the last 12 months we have been working hard to ensure we are compliant with those standards.

We have also continued our work from last year to ensure tenants have their say in the service via the Customer Engagement Panel.

One area that tenants have asked us to focus on is repairs, over 22,000 repairs were completed last year and over £25 Million was spent on repairs. We are still reaching our target of 80% of repairs being completed within the specified timescale. The introduction of our on-line reporting of faults has helped us improve the service and tenants who have used the new service have been very positive with their feedback.

We have also continued with our planned maintenance programmes, this has included, new roofs, new kitchens, and 198 homes had solar panels fitted.

2024 will also see more new council houses, with the first tenants moving into our new homes in Ravenswood.

I continue to be very proud to be the portfolio holder for housing at Ipswich. Our housing properties and our tenant's welfare continue to be our top priorities.

We hope you enjoy this report and thanks you for your contributions over the last year.

- Cllr Alasdair Ross

This annual report reflects on Ipswich Borough Council's performance against the promises we made with our Local Standards.

The Regulator for Social Housing has updated the expectations of how Social Housing Landlords, like Ipswich Borough Council, deliver services to tenants, how they engage with, listen and learn from tenants and ensure they provide high quality homes in safe communities.

The Local Standards are a result of a collaboration between tenants and the Council to set out in practical terms what tenants can expect and how the Council will be held to account.

We work with tenant representatives to look at how we can improve our services and meet these standards.

THESE STANDARDS ARE:

- **Transparency, Influence and Accountability**
- **Safety and Quality**
- **Tenancy**
- **Neighbourhood and Community**

You can request a paper copy of this report from the Tenant Engagement team by emailing tenant.participation@ipswich.gov.uk

We can provide a copy of this report in alternative formats (for example, in large print or Braille, as an audio file, or on coloured paper)

HOUSING SERVICE REVIEW

In the spring of 2024 we conducted a review, involving an independent expert, staff and tenants, of how the Council was performing against the Consumer Standards and the quality of services provided to tenants.

The main purpose of the review was to highlight any areas that could be improved to achieve better outcomes for tenants and residents. Whilst ensuring that we continue to work collaboratively with our tenants to ensure the Council are held to account

The review concluded that there is a renewed focus on Housing being a key priority for the Council and that there is clearly a willingness to learn and develop the service.

Areas which the review identified as requiring attention include:

- How we deal with reports of Anti-Social Behaviour
- Our approach to Safeguarding and identifying vulnerability
- Learning from complaints
- Expanding tenant engagement
- Achieving value for money

We are now working to address these areas requiring attention.



TRANSPARENCY, INFLUENCE and ACCOUNTABILITY

WE WILL TREAT ALL TENANTS WITH FAIRNESS AND RESPECT

We will take action to deliver fair access to, and equitable outcomes of, housing and landlord services for all tenants.

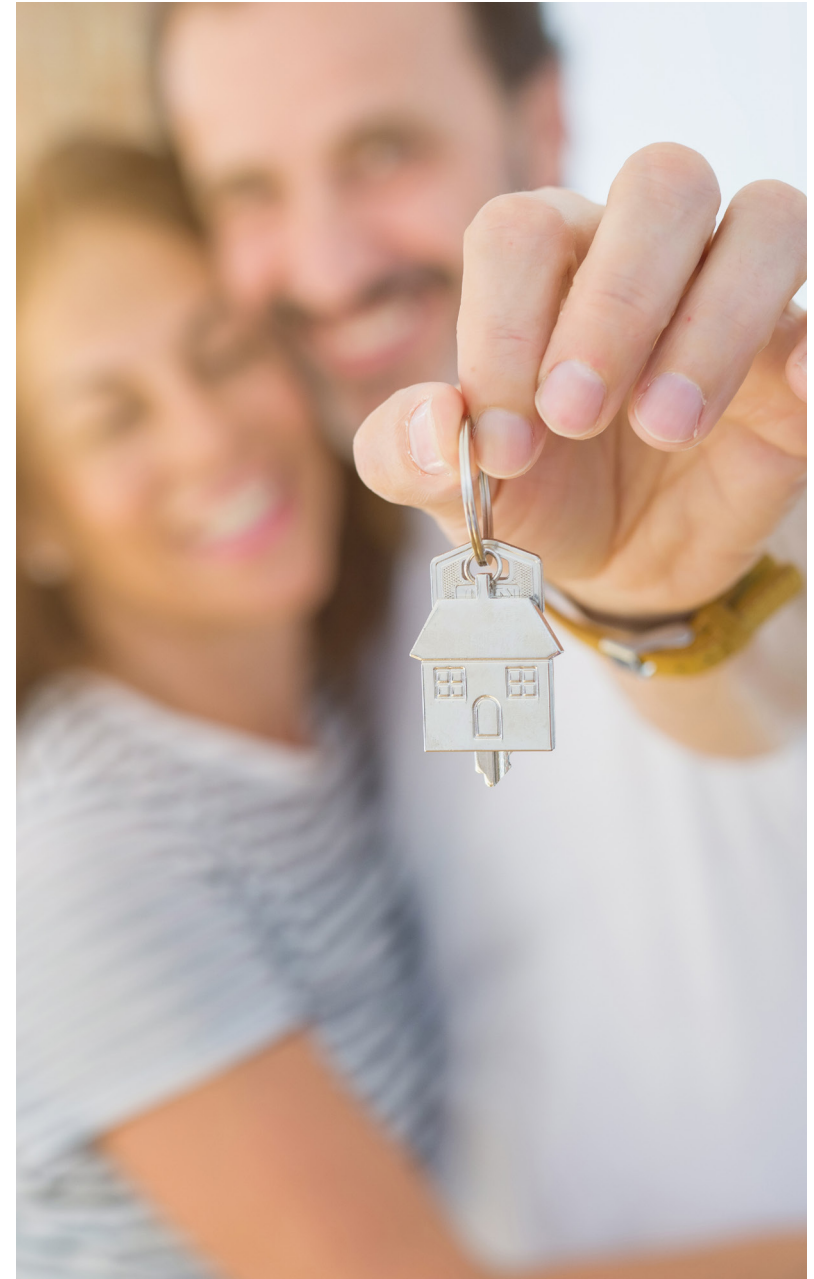
Our aim is to provide tenants with services that are accessible, efficient, and effectively managed. We continued to provide contact and assistance by telephone through the Customer Contact Centre. Our target was to answer at least 85% of calls.

We experienced a large increase in calls received for Tenancy Services and Repairs – 24% more than the year before. Overall, 82% of calls were answered.

- 18,618 calls received about Tenancy Services up from 14,245 calls received the year before. 80% were answered, up from 76% the year before.
- 3,463 calls received about Emergency Repairs an almost identical number of 3,472 compared to year before, 95% were answered, up from 94% the year before.
- 24,079 calls received about Standard Repairs, up from 19,548 calls received the year before. 81% were answered, up from 80% the year before.

We are continuing to improve our online services making it easier for customers to contact us via the website whilst also being able to use online forms to pay, apply and report services. You can report, request, apply or make payments online whenever and wherever you want. To sign up please visit <https://my.ipswich.gov.uk>

2166 tenants are now registered to access their rent account and request repairs online with the Housing Online, My Account portal. This is nearly a 50% increase from last year. This quick and easy online tool can be accessed anytime, anywhere from any device. To register please visit www.ipswich.gov.uk/housingonline





We will take tenants' views into account in our decision-making about how landlord services are delivered.

We have our new Tenant Engagement Strategy 2024/27 which was formally adopted by the Council in August 2024. Tenants have been closely involved in its development, with Tenants on the Steering Group and also tenants expressing their opinions through consultation with the Customer Engagement Panel.

Our vision is that our Tenants are empowered to hold us to account as their landlord and have opportunities to scrutinise and become actively involved in shaping their housing services.

The Strategy has three priorities:

- To improve the way we communicate with tenants.
- To promote and support tenant involvement.
- To use what we are told to improve our services.

A Steering Group that includes tenants will oversee delivery of the action plan and progress will be reported regularly to tenants and the Council's Housing Working Group.

The Customer Engagement Panel has contributed to the progression of the Asset Management Strategy, the Tenant Engagement Strategy and Local Standards. It has also scrutinised the Council's performance against Tenant Satisfaction Measures and been involved in the development of a suite of operational policies which are focused on enhancing the services we provide.

See <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/tenant-participation> for more information.

AREA HOUSING PANELS

Across the East and West panels, there was a total of £17,438 committed to improvements across Ipswich. This has included improvements to bin stores in addition to the introduction of benches and external based estate improvements such as wall repairs.

We will communicate with tenants and provide information so tenants can use landlord services, understand what to expect from us, and hold us to account.

We have developed our website content to provide more information to tenants and have publicised this content through the Tenant Times newsletter.

Content Includes:

Information about the relevant roles and responsibilities of senior level officers and the Housing Portfolio Holder, who have responsibility for compliance with the consumer standards as set by the Regulator of Social Housing: [Housing Services Management | Ipswich Borough Council](#)

Information about what Tenants can expect from the Council: A Decent Home, A safe home, A home fit for human habitation, notice when the Council wants to visit, accessible services for disabled tenants. [Council Tenants - Your Rights at a glance | Ipswich Borough Council](#)

We have also developed a number of policies, which when published, can be found at [Housing policies | Ipswich Borough Council](#) which clearly set out our approach to various matters such as how we manage our stock.



We will collect and provide information to support effective scrutiny by tenants of our performance in delivering Landlord services.

We publish information about tenant satisfaction and our performance on our website <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/tenantsatisfactionmeasures>. This information is also sent out to tenants who subscribe to Tenant Times and reported back to the Customer Engagement Panel.

This information highlights where the Council is performing well, for example 77% of surveyed tenants were satisfied in 2023/24 with the overall housing services provided by the Council and 100% of required gas safety checks were carried out.

The data also shows areas where tenants are not so satisfied and, for example, have led to the Council reviewing its approach to dealing with reports of Anti-Social Behaviour and handling complaints.

We will ensure complaints are addressed fairly, effectively, and promptly.

The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code sets out good practice to allow landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. The Borough Council completes a self-assessment each year to show how we comply with the Code.

A copy of our most recent self-assessment can be found at: <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/content/housing-ombudsman-service>

In the year we received a total of 247 new (stage 1) complaints related to housing, of which 100% were responded to within our target of 20 working days. 18 complaints, where the complainant was not satisfied with the Council's response at stage 1, were escalated to stage 2. Of these 88.8% were responded to within our target of 20 working days. 3 Complaints were subsequently taken to the Housing Ombudsman. None of which have been upheld by the Ombudsman.

We have revised our Complaints Policy to ensure it is compliant with the Housing Ombudsman Code of conduct and have developed processes to ensure lessons learnt from complaints lead to improvements in service delivery. This includes working with tenants and scrutiny from the Customer Engagement Panel.

SAFETY and QUALITY

This year the Council adopted a new Housing Asset Management Strategy for 2024 – 2030 with ten key priorities, which are important to meeting the housing needs of our community in relation to the Council's retained housing stock. The priorities are:

1. Ensuring our homes are safe and secure.
2. Delivering effective services (i.e., repairs and maintenance to those homes)
3. Improving the quality and decency of our homes and neighbourhoods
4. Ensuring intelligent, data led asset management.
5. Decarbonising our homes
6. Modernising our sheltered housing accommodation
7. Regenerating, developing, and evolving our portfolio of homes.
8. Embracing technology and digital approaches
9. Delivering an excellent customer experience
10. Having the right resources in place to deliver our work.

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of tenants in their homes and associated communal areas:

Where homes required gas safety checks, 100% have been carried out.

Where homes required fire risk assessments, 100% have been carried out.

Where homes required asbestos management surveys or re-inspections, 100% have been carried out.

Where homes required legionella risk assessments, 100% have been carried out.

Where communal passenger lift safety checks were required, 100% have been carried out.

We will understand the condition of our properties to inform the provision of good quality, well maintained and safe homes for tenants.

Our aim is to effectively maintain and improve the housing stock and local environment in order that our stock will meet, and exceed, the Decent Homes Standard set by the Government. This year 100% of our homes, 7810 properties, met the Decent Home standard (excluding those properties where the tenant refused the works). We continue to review and strengthen the standard. We have increased specifications to consider energy efficiency measures, and this will be a key focus going forward in meeting our carbon reduction aspirations.



We will provide an effective, efficient and timely Repairs, Maintenance and Planned improvements service for the homes and Communal Areas for which we are responsible.

We carried out significant programmes of repairs, maintenance, and improvements to our homes to meet the Government Decent Homes Standard investing around £25m.

A total of 22,984 responsive repairs were completed, an increase of 10% from the 20,790 repairs that were completed during 2023/23.

81% of those were completed on time within the allocated priority. This represents a decrease from the 89% completed within timescale the previous year but still met the target of achieving 80% of repairs within the specified timescale.

• PLANNED MAINTENANCE

During various Planned Maintenance projects, tenants are given the opportunity to decide on how their home looks. For example, with Kitchen and Bathroom upgrades tenants were able to have a say on wall, cupboards, and floor colours. In total, 137 Kitchens and Bathrooms were replaced in the year.

The Planned Maintenance programme ensures that the outside of all council houses are well looked after. We aim to repair and paint the outside of our council homes every seven years. 1450 External Stock Condition Surveys to detail the works required were completed (up from 1303 the previous year), all of which included an element of choice around external painting such as doors and walls.

• PROPERTY IMPROVEMENTS

- Work to improve tenants' homes over the year included:
- 253 Council homes were re-roofed – virtually the same number (254) as the previous year.
- 198 Council homes have benefitted from having solar (PV) panels installed, up from 115 the year before.
- 292 Secure by Design entrance doors were installed (compared to 501 last year) along with a further 96 Fire Doors (56 the year before) and 548 Shed Doors installed, a big increase from the 154 installed last year.
- 88 Council homes benefitted from having new Double-Glazed windows installed, a big increase from 9 last year.
- 30 electrical re-wiring to homes, whilst a fall from 362 the year before
- More homes had Electrical condition reports completed. 1612 up from 1162 the year before.
- Another 541 homes received new central heating installations with A rated boilers.

• EMPTY PROPERTIES (VOIDS)

454 properties were refurbished when they were empty prior to being re-let. The average number of days where a property was empty before the new tenancy started fell from 59 days the previous year to 43 days this year.

• GAS MAINTENANCE AND SERVICING

All our properties are required by law to have an annual gas safety inspection and service. This is to help keep tenants' homes safe and we work hard with tenants and our contractor to keep services up to date. This year we again managed to keep the number of outstanding services at a very low level with Gas safety inspections completed at 7998 homes.

We will assist tenants seeking housing adaptations to access appropriate services

417 Disabled Adaptations were completed to Council homes, an increase of 9% over the previous year including some major adaptations, to allow tenants to live independently in their homes.

We have reviewed and updated our Disabled Adaptations Policy which will be formally adopted by the Council in September 2024.



TENANCY

We will allocate and let our homes in a fair and transparent way that takes the needs of tenants and prospective tenants into account

The Accommodation Team manages the Choice Based Letting scheme which assesses applications in order to offer new tenancies and transfers on Gateway to Homechoice. They shortlisted 100% of properties advertised within 24 hours of the end of the bidding cycles.

During the year we received 3,874 applications from people wanting to move into a social housing property compared to 3,990 applications the previous year and 4,307 in the year before that. We aim to process all housing applications within 20 days and this year we averaged 13 days.



We will support tenants to help maintain their tenancy

- **RENTS**

We want to provide tenants with a fair and supportive rents service, so they can maintain rent payments and rental income is maximised. This is achieved by setting rent payment as a priority. Collecting the rent on our properties ensures that we can continue to deliver a good housing service and develop and maintain homes.

This year we collected 98% of the total rent due. At the end of March there was £827,013 outstanding rent owed to the council, compared to £899,053 the previous year. This represents 1.97% of the whole rent due to be collected this year.

We are currently reviewing and updating our Income Management Strategy to ensure we continue to provide appropriate support and assistance to tenants.

The new Strategy is due to be published in early 2025.



• TENANCY SUPPORT

The tenancy support scheme offers help and assistance to our tenants to successfully maintain their tenancy.

- **431** tenants provided with floating support through the Tenancy Support Scheme, up from 387 the previous year.
- **115** Household Support Fund applications approved.
- **101** referrals made to Anglia Care Trust for debt, budgeting, and welfare benefit advice.
- **130** households received assistance from the Tenancy Support Officers to move into or transfer between Council homes.
- **71** households supported with making a Gateway to Homechoice application to move to more suitable accommodation, similar to the number (76) the previous year.
- Enabled **69** households to downsize up from 59 the previous year freeing up **96** bedrooms (from 81 the previous year) through the Tenant Incentive Scheme."

• SHELTERED HOUSING

The sheltered housing schemes offer a safe and supportive housing option for older tenants.

The sheltered team continued to offer a daily wellbeing check to sheltered tenants, including at weekends. The overall occupancy rate for sheltered properties was 98.34%. The occupancy rate is slightly higher with the previous year. In addition 99.3% of tenants have up to date support plans, an identical rate to the year before.

• PROPERTY VISITS

Property visits are used both to assess the condition of property and to check on the welfare of the tenant. If the Housing Officer believes that some help is needed they can make a referral to the Tenancy Support Officers or another agency. Where a property has been identified as a cluttered home or in poor condition, the aim will be to provide support through the same routes depending on what the need is.

We visited 1990 properties in the year a significant increase from the 1550 visits in the year before.

NEIGHBOURHOOD and COMMUNITY

We will work co-operatively with tenants, other landlords and relevant organisations to contribute to the upkeep and safety of shared spaces associated with our homes.

- **COMMUNITY CARETAKERS**

Our Community Caretakers carried out 1886 individual jobs tackling door entry issues, fly-tipping, dog fouling, removal of drugs (sharps) and minor repairs, along with 3913 pledge visits to communal areas.

We will co-operate with relevant partners to promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing in the areas where we provide social housing

Our Corporate Strategy, Proud of Ipswich, clearly set out the aims the Council has to achieve this:

We will work towards becoming a council that focuses on preventing the causes of poor health, a lack of skills and low incomes in our community. We will work hard to ensure that our residents enjoy the best quality of life that they can.

The council and its partners have huge ambition for the area – an ambition backed by Government, who have provided £25 million of Towns Fund to deliver 10 projects; with many of these concentrated in the town centre and are focused on delivering economic growth.

For more information see: [IBC Corporate Strategy](#)



We will work in partnership with appropriate local authority departments, the police and other relevant organisations to deter and tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the neighbourhoods where we provide social housing

Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) can take many forms and may include domestic abuse, aggression, harassment and hate crime, threatening or unlawful behaviour or, any action that causes disturbance, alarm or distress. We want our communities to be safe and secure places to live and will neither tolerate nor condone antisocial behaviour.

The Council recognises that preventing and tackling ASB effectively will have a positive impact within our communities and neighbourhoods and, where appropriate, we work in partnership to prevent and resolve ASB and support tenants and leaseholders effectively by; working with partnership agencies such as the Police, identifying hotspot locations; providing professional advice and support to our tenants; taking appropriate enforcement action and delivering initiatives to reduce ASB effectively.

The ASB (Housing) Team oversee high harm cases which covers the most serious or urgent types of ASB. This includes allegations involving serious risk to tenants or the community which may involve a serious threat of violence or other serious criminal activity. Some cases can often be complex, requiring more Officer time from commencement to conclusion of the case. It is essential that Officers utilise and work within a range of strategies and legislation and are confident with the use of the legislative guidance. There is a commitment to using the tools and powers available under legislation and should a case go to court, the judge will decide whether an action, like an Injunction or eviction, is justified.

During 2023/24 the team have:

- 100% of cases investigated have been managed to an agreeable outcome
- Issued 4 Community Protection Warning Notices (CPWN)
- Issued 3 Community Protection Notices (CPN)
- Obtained 3 Civil Injunctions
- Issued 4 Notice of Seeking Possession
- Obtained 4 Outright Possession Orders proceeded by eviction
- Worked in partnership with Police to gain 2 Closure Orders

Following a successful bid to the Home Office, £333,300 from the Safer Streets 5 Fund was granted to Ipswich to support a variety of initiatives to address Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in Ipswich.

The Council's focus is on hotspot areas across the town which experience sustained anti-social behaviour. These include small shopping parades, churchyards, riverside locations and areas within the town centre. Measures include CCTV, Crimestoppers Zones, an ASB awareness campaign, improved lighting in public spaces, better gating and fencing, youth and adult outreach support and environmental improvements.

The Home Office funding was conditional on partner contributions to the total of 50% of the funding granted. Match funding was generated through a contribution from the Pooled Business Rate fund and in-kind contributions from Ipswich Borough Council, Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Constabulary and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.



CATCH22 MEDIATION SERVICE

Funded by Ipswich Borough Council, Catch22 provides a free service that helps our tenants to safely resolve disputes with their neighbours. This sometimes means organising a meeting, where an impartial mediator makes sure everyone is properly heard and helps them to find practical solutions to the problem. If the parties don't want to meet, they can still find ways to resolve the issue by communicating through the mediator and they can also provide support and advice about how to cope with difficulties with neighbours even if only one household wants to talk.

**catch
22**

In the last year, Catch22 has worked with nearly 40 families and made over 100 phone calls as well as carrying out mediations and home visits to help people work towards practical solutions to issues with their neighbours, or to help them to build confidence and cope with the impact their neighbours are having.

Feedback from people using the service have said:



100% said communication with Catch22 was good



86% said their situation was resolved after intervention from Catch22



100% said they felt more confident to deal with future conflict



100% felt less stressed after working with Catch22



We will work co-operatively with other agencies tackling domestic abuse and enable tenants to access appropriate support and advice.

Our Domestic Abuse policy has been developed to reinforce the Council's understanding that anyone can experience domestic abuse. We aim to provide a supportive response that helps reduce risk and enhance safety and will do this by leading a culture that takes the subject seriously, with staff who have a positive, non-judgmental attitude.

An example of the support we can now offer is to provide additional security features to our properties in order enable survivors of domestic abuse to staff safe in their property rather than to flee from the abuser.