



HOUSING SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2020 - MARCH 2021



IPSWICH
BOROUGH COUNCIL

This annual report reflects on Ipswich Borough Council's performance against the promises we made in 'the Offer: Local Standards'. The period covered is April 2020 to March 2021.

You are able to request a paper copy from the Tenant Participation 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)



WELCOME TO THE ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

I am pleased to introduce you to this report, covering the range of services provided to tenants of Ipswich Borough Council.

The focus of what we do, is to meet the Ipswich Standard. I am proud to report that we are providing a housing service meeting this standard, which is higher than Decent Homes Standard, the minimum requirement for council housing.

Obviously, Covid-19 had an impact on the housing service. However, thanks to a lot of hard work just over 15,000 repairs were completed, 336 empty homes were refurbished, and 288 properties received new gas central heating. Keeping your house maintained and up to date is a key part of what we do.

I was pleased to see the completion of 41 council properties on the former Tooks bakery site, early in 2021. I am also pleased to see 40 more properties building on six sites around the town, due to be completed in the winter. Finally, I am delighted that work is underway on four sites at Bibb Way (Handford Road),

Ravenswood, Fore Hamlet and Hawke Road which will deliver nearly 300 houses and flats over the next three years. Making sure that even more high quality, affordable homes for rent are available in Ipswich.

Councillor Neil MacDonald
Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health

TENANT INVOLVEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

The Council is committed to improving the way we work and engage with you. We want our tenants to feel able to hold us to account and have opportunities to become actively involved in shaping the housing service.

During the Summer of 2020, we conducted a tenant satisfaction survey. The aim of the survey was to provide current data on tenant satisfaction, which would allow the Council to:

- Understand tenant satisfaction with their homes and the services the Council provides
- Compare the performance of the Council as a landlord with that of other landlords
- Inform development of a tenant engagement strategy

We are very grateful to all those tenants that responded to the survey. The overall satisfaction rate was an average of 7.3 out of 10. Following analysis of the results we have identified three priority areas for improvement for this year

- Complaint handling
- Anti-social behaviour
- Ease of dealing with the Council

We have developed an action plan to make some key improvements and address the concerns that you told us about. We will report progress to our Area Housing Panels and provide updates in our Tenants Times Newsletter. We have used this feedback from the survey to shape development of a new tenant engagement strategy, which we have consulted on this year.

Area Housing Panels

The three Area Housing Panels meet quarterly, and membership is for both Ward Councillors and Tenant Representatives. Each year our Area Housing Panels are allocated a budget to help improve the quality of communal areas. We commenced our quarterly Area Housing Panel meetings in September 2020 and meetings have been held virtually for the first time as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tenant Get Togethers

We host informal Tenant Get Togethers once a month and all tenants are welcome to attend. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic Get Togethers were suspended during 20/21. We plan to resume these once restrictions are lifted. Get Togethers are a good opportunity to find out more about Housing Services and put forward ideas for service improvements or how we can use funding to improve your area. It also gives you a chance to meet other tenants who are already working with us.

We continue to communicate with our tenants about housing- related news online. You can sign up here to be part of our mailing list [Online Tenants' Times Bitesize](#).

If you would like to know more about how you can become involved or would like to come to a future Get Together please contact the Tenant Participation team on 01473 432000 or email tenant.participation@ipswich.gov.uk

CHOICE

We aim to give people the choice about where they live and the general look of their home. All tenants registered to move are offered the choice about where they live through Gateway to Homechoice.

Kitchen and bathroom replacements were put on hold last year but resumed again in April. Tenants are offered a choice of wall, cupboard and floor colours as part of the programme.

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. **1727** Planned Maintenance Surveys to detail the external works required were completed, all of which included an element of choice around external painting such as doors and walls.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

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 90% of calls and we answered 89%.

We answered:

- **16,949 calls** made about housing
- **19,534 calls** made about repairs

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>

Over 900 tenants have now registered to access their rent account online with the new Housing Online, My Account portal. This quick and easy online tool can be accessed anytime, anywhere from any device. To register please visit www.ipswich.gov.uk/housingonline This year we will be introducing an online repairs service for tenants.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS

In July 2020 the Housing Ombudsman published a new Complaint Handling Code setting out good practice to allow landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. Landlords were asked to self-assess against the Code by 31 December 2020 and publish the results. A copy of our self-assessment can be found here - www.ipswich.gov.uk/content/housing-ombudsman-service

Last year we received a total of **102** complaints related to housing, of which:

52 were for Tenancy Services

41 for Housing Maintenance & Contracts

9 were for Choice Based Lettings/ Gateway to Homechoice

We replied formally to 95 complaints within 20 working days. 93% against a target of 100%.

The Council introduced a new Complaint Policy and procedure in March 2021. You can find a copy here www.ipswich.gov.uk/complaints. We are keen to resolve disputes at the earliest possible opportunity and encourage you to contact us if something has gone wrong or you are dissatisfied with the standard of service you have received.

The new Complaint Handling Code requires landlords to share its learning from complaints in its Annual Report. We will include this information in our 21/22 Annual Report.

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO DIVERSE NEEDS OF TENANTS

We recognise that our tenants have different needs and aim to tailor our services to meet these. In particular we are committed to making sure that disabled people are not disadvantaged when getting access to or using our services. For this reason, we will make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled people and last year we introduced a new policy to support this commitment and our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

We are committed to working with local organisations to ensure we fully understand the needs of our communities and potential barriers that may prevent some from sharing their views with us. We want to develop an appropriate menu of engagement opportunities that reflects our tenant profile and responds to the different needs of our tenants. To help with this we have consulted on a new Tenant Engagement Strategy.

HOME

QUALITY OF ACCOMMODATION

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.

At the start of the year 100% our homes met the Decent Homes 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.

Work to improve tenants' homes over the year:

223 homes had disabled adaptations to allow tenants to live independently in their homes
288 properties benefitted from having new gas central heating installed and a further 11,300 gas servicing / repairs were undertaken
172 homes were rewired; the majority being whole house rewires
123 homes had new roofs
114 Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) were carried out.
94 homes had new entrance doors installed including **22** new communal entrance doors and **15** new door systems on blocks of flats
139 housing Defects were identified, and the remedial works were rectified as a result
83 solar Panel systems installed to improve environmental impact
3 installations of Mobility Scooter Stores at Sheltered Housing schemes
8 neighbourhoods benefitting from environmental improvements to help alleviate anti-social behaviour

Significant projects during this year have commenced helping us keep homes to a good standard that include major schemes to renew boilers, central heating and electrical wiring. Kitchen and bathrooms replacements started in April 2021 and the new 5 year Planned Maintenance commenced in Sep 2020 which includes renewing roofing, windows, doors and externally redecorating homes as well as fitting Solar PV to many homes.

New passenger lifts have been installed at the Holywells Court and Mayo Court Sheltered Schemes. Door entry systems have been upgraded to fifteen blocks of flats.

DISABLED ADAPTATIONS

86 'A' category adaptations were completed last year ('A' category are simple adaptations such as handrails)

28 'B' category adaptations were completed ('B' category require more design input such as flat floor showers)

3 Bungalows have been adapted to be fully wheelchair accessible, 2 bungalows have workmen on site to adapt to wheelchair standard and a further 5 properties are in the pipeline to convert.

RESPONSIVE REPAIRS

The normal repairs service was suspended in March due to the Covid-19 pandemic and only emergency repairs were carried out until August.

Despite this a total of **15,068** repairs were completed during 20/21. 98.5% of those were completed on time within the allocated priority. Repairs completed on a right first-time basis were around or above 90%.

The target of completing all repairs and in addition catching upon the backlog from March – August by 31 March 2021 was achieved.

EMPTY PROPERTIES (VOIDS)

The void service was suspended for a two-month period during April and May due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Between June and March **336** voids were refurbished and **291** of these properties were relet and the remaining are in the process of being re let.

GAS MAINTENANCE AND SERVICING

All of 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, achieving a total of 35 outstanding during the year of which there were 2 months with zero outstanding.

29 Abatement Notices were served during the year on those tenants where the gas safety certificate had expired, and we were unable to gain access and of those 4 applications were made to Magistrates Court for a warrant of entry. At the end of March 2021 all outstanding services had been completed.

We also undertake repairs and maintenance of boilers and associated pipework. Our contractor is Aaron Services.

A total of **5178** repairs visits were made, 93.98% of these were fixed at the first visit.

CENTRAL HEATING INSTALLATION

A total of properties had **339** central heating systems installed including new 'A' rated energy efficient boilers. Our contractor is TSG Building Services.

TENANCY

ALLOCATIONS

The Accommodation Team has been working hard on 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 **4,394** applications from people wanting to move into a social housing property compared to **3,897** in the previous year. We aim to process all housing applications within 20 days and this year we averaged **12** days.

RENTS

Collecting the rent on our properties ensures that we can continue to deliver a good housing service and develop and maintain homes. 96.26% of the rent was collected in 20/21. At the end of the year there was **£930,687** outstanding rent owed to the Council. This represents **2.55%** of the whole rent due to be collected for the year.

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen substantial financial pressures on individuals and families. We are committed to helping tenants pay their rent on time, with those needing help and financial support receiving the necessary assistance. Our Housing and Tenancy Support Officers supported many tenants last year where income had been affected by Covid-19. 164 referrals were made for specialist money or debt advice.

Last year the Council procured a new debt, budgeting and welfare benefit advice service and Anglia Care Trust will be providing this service from April 2021.

This year we will be implementing new software that will allow the Housing Officer team to provide targeted support to tenants who are in rent arrears or in risk of getting into rent arrears to help sustain tenancies and reduce the risk of tenants being evicted and becoming homeless. We will also be updating the Housing Income Management Strategy for 2021 – 2024 and publishing the achievements for the 2018 – 2021 Strategy.

2 households were evicted last year for non-payment of rent and arrears. The Council does not evict anyone from their home as a result of financial hardship, where they are working with us to get their payments back on track. We would encourage anyone who is worried about paying their rent or have fallen into arrears to contact us so we can help.

PROPERTY VISITS

Tenants are responsible for keeping their homes and gardens in a tidy and healthy state and we monitor how well properties are being kept through property inspections. We targeted to show an overall improvement of property condition of 10% for all properties marked as poor or fair by visiting and working with tenants. Property visits were suspended during 20/21 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. They will be resumed again this year.

TENURE

We now offer a secure tenancy to all new tenants moving into one of our properties. We aim to visit every new tenant within the first 6 weeks of their tenancy. Last year we were only able to complete **26%** of those visits against a target of **95%** due to Covid-19 restrictions however contact was made by telephone to all new tenants to check how they are settling into their new home.

TENANCY SUPPORT

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

Last year **251** tenants were referred for support for various reasons including debt, financial hardship, under-occupancy, mental ill health, substance misuse, domestic violence and support to manage anti-social behaviour issues.

124 applications were made for charitable funding and food parcels

10 referrals were made to MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) for domestic abuse issues

20 tenants were supported to downsize to more suitable accommodation.

During the Summer of 2020 contact was made with all of the general needs tenants aged 70 or over, and some disabled tenants under the age of 70 to check on their welfare. 2,313 calls or visits were made by the Housing and Tenancy Support Officers and 45 direct referrals were made to Suffolk's Home but Not Alone service.

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 **96.71%**.

99% of tenants have up to date support plans.

Ensuring the Sheltered Housing Schemes were Covid secure and supporting tenants to keep them safe through the pandemic were key priorities for the Sheltered Housing team last year.

NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT

Last year our Area Housing Panels used funding to support environmental improvements that included

- Cutting back overgrown vegetation along Aster Road and Hawthorn Drive
- Installing a bin store at Cardiff Avenue
- Installing a handrail for steps leading to Violet Close flats
- Fitting a combination lock and chain to the communal car park at Stone Lodge Lane
- Provision of signage for communal doors at Mountbatten Court
- Provision of door intercom signage for flats in Wellington Court

Community Caretakers

Communal pledge visits were suspended from March until August. Despite this a total of 2,664 visits were carried out last year and 100% of the pledge visits were completed by the end of the year. In addition, 569 fly tipping cases were dealt with and investigated, and 2,668 other jobs were carried out at a completion rate of 99.8 percent.

NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPROVEMENTS

A range of neighbourhood improvements were carried out last year in consultation with tenants to prevent and deter anti-social behaviour

Bell Close / Vernon Street

- New more secure steel doors fitted to the front edge of communal area door recesses and canopies removed, this has helped prevent unauthorised access and eliminated areas of hiding/shelter.
- Fencing and digital lock gates fitted preventing access to non-residents and eliminating rat runs.
- Bin store alterations helping to alleviate fly tipping

Stone Lodge Lane / Jasmine Close

- Metal lockable barrier gate installed to the car park and new lockable metal gates installed to pedestrian areas.

Mountbatten Court

- Metal post and railings installed to the bin store
- Lockable mesh gate installed
- Digital locks fitted to existing gates
- New secure communal entrance doors being fitted in January 2021
- Improved external LED lighting to be installed early 2021

Ulster Avenue/Barnes Square

- New LED lights installed at the rear of the shops

Hawthorn Drive

- New LED lights being installed early 2021 at the rear of the shops
- Rendlesham Court and St Georges Street
- bin stores re-sited.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

We recognise Anti-social behaviour (ASB) can have a serious impact on the lives of our tenants, leaseholders and communities. The Housing ASB Team work in close partnership with police and partner agencies to ensure that cases are addressed and resolved appropriately, establishing the most effective methods of managing ASB using the tools and powers available.

During the year we have worked on over 50 housing related cases. Although the pandemic introduced delays at Court, we have still achieved successful outcomes using methods such as ASB Injunctions. Last year we began a review of the ASB service and consulted tenants about a new ASB policy. This will be introduced later this year along with updated procedures and a more efficient process for ASB reporting. We also procured a new mediation service and Catch 22 will be providing this from April 2021.

You can find further information and advice here www.ipswich.gov.uk/content/anti-social-behaviour-advice-for-council-tenants

TENANCY FRAUD

33 Housing tenancy investigations resulted in 4 homes being returned to the Council.

61 investigations into 'Right to Buy' have directly resulted in 13 applications being refused or being withdrawn once the fraud team have become involved.

Investigations are ongoing in these areas and tenants can report any concerns online at www.ipswich.gov.uk or telephone 01473 433999.

You can find further information about tenancy fraud and what to look out for here

DEVELOPING NEW HOMES



A scheme consisting of 60 homes (houses, flats and bungalows) has been developed on the former Tooks Bakery site, 41 of which are Council homes and now fully occupied.

A total of 20 properties were acquired by the Council through purchase on the open market and these were all refurbished and re let to new tenants.

This year the Council is developing 16 new Council flats in Grimwade Street and 24 homes across small sites in Sheldrake Drive, Coltsfoot Road, Halton Crescent, Mallard Way and Emmanuel Close. These will all be let at affordable rents.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Tenants will continue to have a role in reviewing our services with regards to quality and value from money. Ipswich Borough Council is committed to empowering tenants to play a real part in improving our services.

Ipswich Borough Council continually seeks to ensure it is achieving value for money and an important element of this is the procurement of supplies and services.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 20/21 EXPENDITURE

The Council is required to operate a separate account for the management and maintenance of its housing stock. This is called the Housing Revenue Account. The only income to this account is your rent money and service charges, whilst all expenditure must relate to the cost of the housing services we provide for our tenants.

The annual rental income for 20/21 (excluding

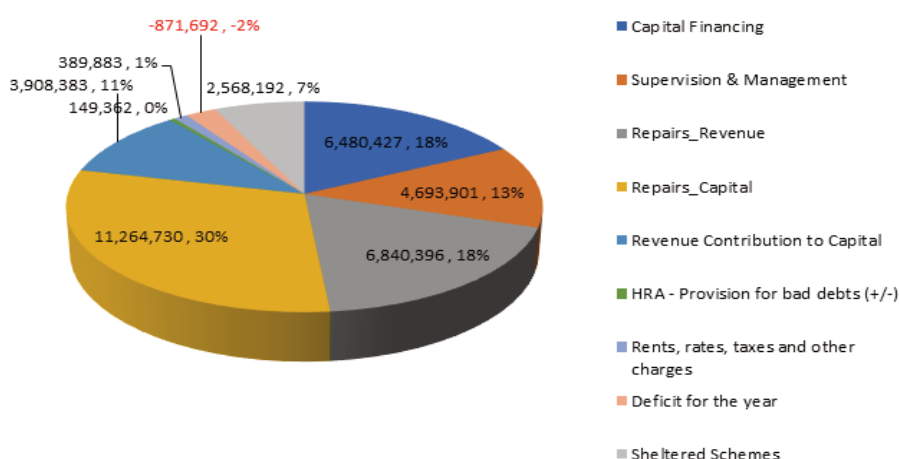
service charges) was £33,115,274.13 and the chart below summarises where this was spent. The largest proportion of spend was invested in the housing stock:

18% were used for revenue repairs (responsive repairs)

30% for capital works (improvement work)

11% as a contribution to capital projects.(improvement projects)

HRA Expenditure 20/21



Capital Financing	this is for costs such as debt repayments and interest payable on debt charges
Supervision & Management	this is the cost of the housing management service, including staff costs
Repairs Revenue	this is the cost of responsive repairs
Repairs Capital	this is the cost of improvement works such as kitchen and bathroom modernisations
Revenue Contribution to Capital	this is the contribution made towards the cost of new build housing
HRA – Provision for bad debts	this is the money set aside to meet the cost of potential bad debts during the year.
Rents, rates, taxes and other charges	this is for costs such as business rates and council tax for empty properties
Deficit for the year	this is the net financial variance for the year funded by the cumulative money available from previous years
Sheltered Schemes	this is the cost of the Sheltered Housing Schemes

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The performance of services to tenants is reported to Senior Managers within the Council. This includes a key performance indicator for the Local Offer that is made up of several different performance measures that tenants agreed were most important to them.

This year we will be reviewing the Local Offer to ensure that our commitments are based on tenants' priorities.

LOOKING FORWARD

Whilst we are required to provide information to tenants in the form of an Annual Report, we are keen to ensure that tenants have a say in the information they are provided with and how it is being presented. We will be asking you for your feedback on this report to help us plan future reports, ensuring the information provided is useful and relevant.

We will also be carrying out a review of the Local Offers this year. Local Offers are standards agreed between Ipswich Borough Council as a landlord and their tenants on issues that matter at a local level. They are a way to tailor the services that we provide based on what tenants want. If you would like to be involved in helping us review these standards, please email the Tenant Participation team -tenant.participation@ipswich.gov.uk.