

HOUSING SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17



IPSWICH
BOROUGH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

OVERVIEW

The Council has continued to invest in the quality of our housing, with all properties (except tenant refusals) meeting the Ipswich Standard. The Affordable Warmth programme has been expanded and this year has upgraded solid wall homes with external wall insulation and seen the start of the boiler upgrades programme replacing old inefficient boilers and heating systems with new 'A' rated boilers and new systems which will continue into 2017/18. This year has also seen the start of the major upgrade of Cumberland Towers sheltered housing scheme with new high energy efficient heating systems having been installed in the first phase, with the second phase being completed during 2017/18 upgrading the roof covering and insulation, windows, balconies and external wall insulation. The annual programmes of planned maintenance which upgrades roofs, windows, entrance doors and other external components, rewires and kitchen and bathroom refurbishments also continues.

To continue with the Council's aim to provide 1,000 new council homes in Ipswich by 2025, building will begin this year for another seven houses, two in Ainslie Road and five in Widgeon Close.

This annual report feeds back on our performance as your landlord against the promises we made in 'The Offer: Local Standards'. This period covers April 2016 to March 2017. The 'Offer: Local Standards' is available online at <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/content/tenants-handbook-and-local-standards> or request a copy from the Tenant Participation team by telephoning 01473 433313 or emailing tenant.participation@ipswich.gov.uk



TENANT INVOLVEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

CUSTOMER SERVICE

We continued to provide face-to-face contact and assistance at the Customer Services Centre at the Town Hall and telephone contact through the Customer Contact Centre. Our target was to answer 90% of calls and we answered **89%** of the **54,875** calls made about housing and **90%** of the **24,182** calls made about repairs. Welfare reform still impacted call volumes.

We are improving our services online and making it easier for people to contact us via the website while also being able to pay for, apply for and report services. Using the online service is quicker than calling at peak times and is available 24/7.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS

This year we received a total of **77** formal complaints related to housing, of which:

- **31** were for Tenancy Services
- **32** for Housing Maintenance & Contracts
- **14** for Housing Options

We replied formally to **68** complaints within 20 working days against a target of 100%.

CHOICE

We aim to provide a choice in the general look of the tenant's home. Each of the **554** kitchens and/or bathrooms replacements were offered a choice of wall, cupboard and floor colours where they were fitted. Some **1634** Planned Maintenance Surveys to detail the external works were completed, all of which included an element of external painting such as doors and walls.

TENANT INVOLVEMENT

Tenants' support and involvement has been instrumental to work in housing this year.

Tenants were kind enough to give feedback

and recommend improvements to our My Ipswich Portal and our New Builds. Some tenants were also able to provide their feedback regarding the bay cladding tender for the Maintenance and Contracts service.

Tenants have supported a wide range of measures to benefit neighbourhoods through funding from the Area Housing and Sheltered Improvement Panels. Projects included garden clearance for vulnerable tenants, new bin stores, improved parking, anti-social behaviour deterrents and environmental improvements.

Tenants have also been given the opportunity to come along and learn about the services we provide as a Council and specific subjects relating to housing. These sessions are able to provide them with in-depth knowledge and allow them to signpost other tenants correctly.

If you would like to know more about being involved contact the team on 01473 433313 or tenant.participation@ipswich.gov.uk

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO DIVERSE NEEDS OF TENANTS

This year Tenancy Services started collecting profile information about all tenants so that it could ensure services were being delivered in a way that was fair to all. A target was set to collect **90%** of information about the main tenant by March 2017 and **96%** was achieved.

We have continued to deliver Tenants' Times in large print and audio versions for those that wanted it. Housing and Benefits services were offered with translation through the Language Line service.

HOME

QUALITY OF ACCOMMODATION

At the start of the year **100%** of our homes met the Ipswich Standard (excluding those properties where the tenant refused the works). We continue to review and strengthen the standard. This year we have increased the specification to include upgrading all gas boilers to 'A' energy rating, over the next four years.

Work to improve tenants' homes over the year;

- **32** homes had new windows
- **376** homes had disabled adaptations to allow tenants to live independently in their homes
- **147** homes were rewired; the majority being whole house rewires
- **193** homes were externally insulated
- **346** homes had new entrance doors
- **3** homes were re-roofed
- **261** homes had a new bathroom installed
- **293** homes had a new kitchen installed
- **145** more homes had a new bathroom and new kitchen installed

Housing Maintenance & Contracts continue to work hard to maintain and improve our houses. The Planned Maintenance programme covers the major repair or renewal of external components and external decoration. This year it was focused in Maidenhall, Whitton, Castle Hill, Bramford Road and Triangle estate areas. In all, **1409** properties were externally redecorated as part of planned maintenance.

GAS 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 **30** outstanding during the year of which there were **3 months** with **zero** outstanding.

CENTRAL HEATING INSTALLATION

A total of **621** properties had central heating systems installed including new 'A' rated energy efficient boilers, well above our target.

As part of the Cumberland Towers sheltered scheme refurbishment project, **69** flats had the heating systems upgraded to high efficiency heaters.

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

Our repairs teams worked on **19,515** repairs. **99%** of repairs were completed within their target time and an average of **84.9%** was completed on a right first time basis.

DISABLED ADAPTATIONS

Approximately **£640,000** was invested in our disabled adaptations programme. This included the completion of **406** adaptations.

RIGHT TO BUY

77 homes were sold under the Right to Buy scheme however **2** properties were brought back giving a nett loss of **75** properties to the overall housing stock.

TENANT HOME UPKEEP

Tenants are responsible for keeping their homes and gardens in a tidy and healthy state and we monitor how well properties are kept through property inspections, rating them good, fair or poor. We targeted to show an overall improvement of property condition of **10%** for all properties previously rated not good by visiting and working with tenants. We achieved improvement in **10.04%** of those properties by the end of the year. Housing officers made **1,772** property visits throughout the year.

TENANCY

ALLOCATIONS

The Accommodation Team has been working hard on the Choice Based Letting scheme which deals with assessing applications in order to offer new tenancies and transfers on Gateway to Homechoice. They shortlisted **100%** bidders on property advertised within 24 hours.

During the year we received **4,423** applications through Choice Based Lettings, from people wanting to move into a social housing property compared to **3,685** in 2015/16. We aim to process all housing applications within 20 days and this year we averaged **15** days. We aim to have a general needs property brought up to standard and re-let within 15 working days and this year we achieved an average of **19.03** days. The average time taken to re-let a property within sheltered housing was **21.34** days.

RENTS

Collecting the rent on our properties underpins the upkeep of tenants' homes and provision of housing within the town. At the end of the year there was **£709,996** outstanding rent owed to the Council. This represents **1.94%** of the whole rent due to be collected, which means that we are performing in the top 25% of housing providers in the country. Rent arrears are an area that we are working hard on as we expect some tenants will struggle with the benefits changes and difficult jobs market. Our housing officers have supported many tenants with money management and benefits and along with our tenancy support team have been working even more closely with local debt and advice agencies.

42 Housing tenancy investigations resulted in **11** homes being returned to the Council.

112 investigations into 'Right to Buy' have directly resulted in **29** 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 through the website or via 01473 433999.

TENURE

First-time tenants that move into a Council property are given an introductory tenancy where they will receive x4 visits within the first year. The aim is that we deliver a greater level of support to get people started and sustain their tenancy. This year we were due to complete **768** visits to introductory tenants and we managed to complete **1113**.

TENANT SUPPORT

We assessed the support needs of **138** vulnerable tenants with debt, extreme financial hardship, under-occupancy, mental health and substance misuse and other difficulties in a variety of ways including resettlement, claiming appropriate benefits, accessing grants, obtaining food parcels and handling anti-social behaviour issues including domestic violence. This year we have strengthened our partnership with external agencies offering help to tenants, such as SNAP and IHAG, to enable a rounded support approach for over **56** tenants.

SHELTERED HOUSING

The sheltered housing schemes offer a safe and supportive housing option for older tenants. The Sheltered team continued to offer a daily well-being check to sheltered tenants, including at weekends. The overall occupancy rate for sheltered properties was **98.8%**. **99%** of tenants have up to date support plans.

NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY



NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT

We worked to support local communities in areas with council housing through a variety of community groups. This year the Area Housing Panels used funding to support communal garden projects, additional signage, communal washing lines, environmental improvements and improvement works to tenant properties through the community payback scheme.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Living peacefully in your neighbourhood is important for all tenants' wellbeing and inconsiderate or confrontational behaviour can blight people's lives. We take anti-social behaviour (ASB) seriously and work hard to support good neighbour relations. We have

two dedicated ASB officers and there are processes in place to ensure consistent interventions occur across the town. During the year we worked on **133** ASB cases and we continue to use mediation services to resolve neighbourhood disputes and legal action is a last resort.

COMMUNITY CARETAKERS

The Community Caretaking team went from strength to strength. A total of **134** one-off projects were completed for the benefit of the community and **98%** of customers that responded told us they were satisfied with our service.

- **98.2%** of communal pledges were completed in target (communal cleansing)
- **3,768** minor repairs were completed
- **338** fly-tipping cases were dealt with and were investigated
- **759** evening patrols were made



VALUE FOR MONEY

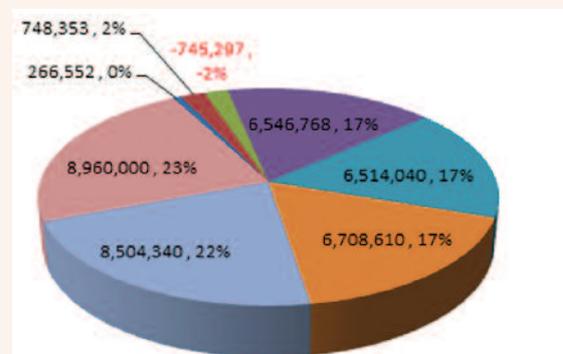
During 2016/17 a key aim for Tenancy Services was to reduce the number of tenants being evicted for non-payment of rent. Pre Warrant Panel meetings were introduced and after a six month review it was clear that these not only reduced the number of evictions that were needed but provided indirect savings by reducing the number of empty properties that the Maintenance and Contracts Team needed to work on and reduced the amount of money spent on legal fees.

Housing 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 16/17 EXPENDITURE

The annual rental income for 16/17 was **£34,983,216.98** and the chart below shows where this money was spent. The largest proportion was spent on investing in the housing stock with **17.4%** being used for revenue repairs, **23.9%** for capital works and a further **22.7%** as a contribution to capital projects.



- Transfer to/from reserves
- Contributions to Other A/cs
- Surplus for the year
- Supervision & Management
- Repairs Revenue
- Capital Financing
- Revenue contribution to capital
- Repairs Capital

LOOKING FORWARD

There are challenges and great opportunities for the service in the 17/18. We will continue progress towards our target of 1,000 new homes by 2025 by identifying and developing new sites. Our process of transformation will allow us to meet the challenge of the reduction in rental charges by providing more efficient and tailored services to tenants. Universal Credit will play a role in the lives of more of our tenants and we will work with them and adapt to provide the best support in managing their tenancies. There will be a change in the way tenancies are handed out by the new introduction of fixed term tenancies in April 2018 therefore, the Council will work on the delivery of this change. The Housing Service will continue to provide innovative and quality services to its Council tenants.

The Council will continue to invest in the quality of housing this includes the ongoing affordable warmth central heating and insulation programmes, kitchen and bathroom refurbishment programme, Cumberland Towers refurbishment; planned external maintenance programmes, a programme to upgrade the thermal insulation to cladding and roofs of bay window flats starts, as well as, projects to improve the neighbourhoods and the environment for tenants.

MONITORING

The performance of services to tenants is reported to the Housing Working Group and the Area Housing Panels. This includes a key performance indicator for the Local Offer that is made up of several different performance measures that tenants agreed were the most important to them.

RECOGNITION

Tenancy Services staff started working towards an accreditation for our rent collection practices through the Housing Quality Network. This is a significant piece of work reviewing our approaches to contacting tenants, collecting payment and taking enforcement action.

