



HOUSING SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

April 2022 - March 2023

WELCOME TO THE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

The cost-of-living crisis has meant that many of our tenants have faced hardship over the last year and continue to do so.

As a council, helping tenants during this crisis has been our number one priority. Our Housing Officers are dedicated to assisting our tenants and we also continue to collaborate with partners to provide new services.

We continue to fund improvements to our properties, such as improved insulation and the installation of Solar PV panels; we are committed to resolve Damp and Mould in our housing stock. We have expanded our service to include an online repair service, making our service more accessible.

Fire safety is still a high priority for the council as we have spent over £10 Million on Fire safety improvements to our stock, and we will be spending more over the next year.

To influence our services, we have condensed our area housing panels to ensure more funding to the local projects and introduced the Customer Engagement Panel to provide Tenant Scrutiny and strengthen tenant voice across our services.

I am 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 in "the Offer: Local Standards." The period covered is April 2022 to March 2023.

You can 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).

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.

TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021-2024

Using feedback from the tenant survey, The Tenant Engagement Strategy set out the following priorities to improve Customer Experience and Engagement:

PRIORITY 1: To improve the way we communicate with tenants.

PRIORITY 2: To promote and support tenant involvement.

PRIORITY 3: To use what we are told to improve our services.

The effects of the Covid 19 pandemic had a major impact for the introduction of this strategy. Resources were re-prioritised and focused on delivering front line services meaning that work on implementing the Tenant Engagement Strategy was delayed. In addition, because of Covid, there was a move away from in person meeting which made it more difficult for the Council to engage with Tenants. In person meeting have now been re-established with a Customer Engagement Panel established to enable Tenants Representatives to have an overview of and ability to scrutinise the Councils Landlord services in addition to the Area Housing Panels.

There have been considerable achievements in meeting the aims of the strategy but there are some areas where work is yet to be completed. The new Tenant Engagement Model has been developed and is in the process of being implemented.

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT PANEL

The Customer Engagement Panel, consisting of Tenant Representatives and meets every 2 months, has been established to provide Tenant scrutiny of the Councils Landlord functions.

AREA HOUSING PANELS

The number of Area Housing Panels has been rationalised from 3 to 2 Panels to reflect the way Landlord services are provided on a geographical basis within the Borough.

Ward Councillors, Staff and Tenant Representatives meet quarterly and have a budget they can allocate to improvement projects, for example, in communal areas.



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. In addition, we help with advice for tenants who wish to Mutually Exchange.

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. 1303 External Stock Condition Surveys to detail the 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.

We answered:

- Of the 14,245 calls made about Tenancy Services, 76% were answered.
- Of the 3,472 calls made about Emergency Repairs, 94% were answered.
- Of the 19,548 calls made about Standard Repairs, 80% were answered.

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

www.my.ipswich.gov.uk

Over 1470 tenants have now registered to access their rent account online with the 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

COMPLAINTS

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, completed in December 2022, can be found here www.ipswich.gov.uk/sites/www.ipswich.gov.uk/files/code_self-assessment_dec_2022.pdf

In the year we received a total of 219 complaints related to housing, of which:

- 41 were for Tenancy Services
- 162 for Housing Maintenance & Contracts
- 16 were for Choice Based Lettings/ Gateway to Homechoice

We replied all complaints within 20 working days, meeting our target of responding to 100% within our deadline.

The Council updated its Complaint Policy in July 2022. You can find a copy here www.ipswich.gov.uk/complaints along with our Complaints procedure. 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.

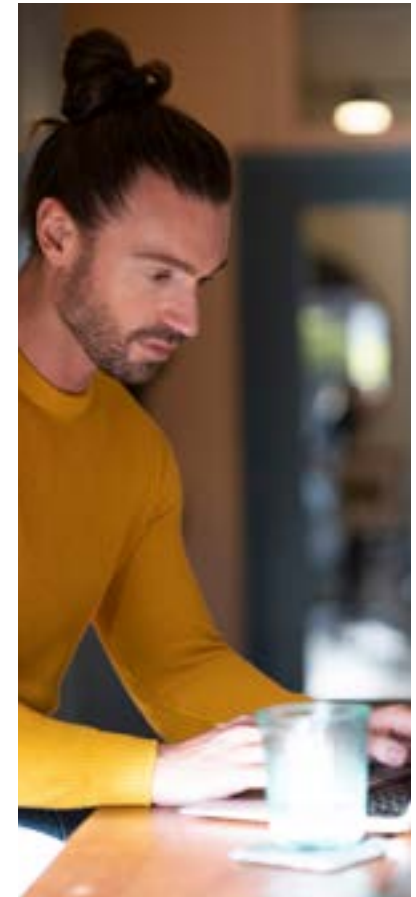
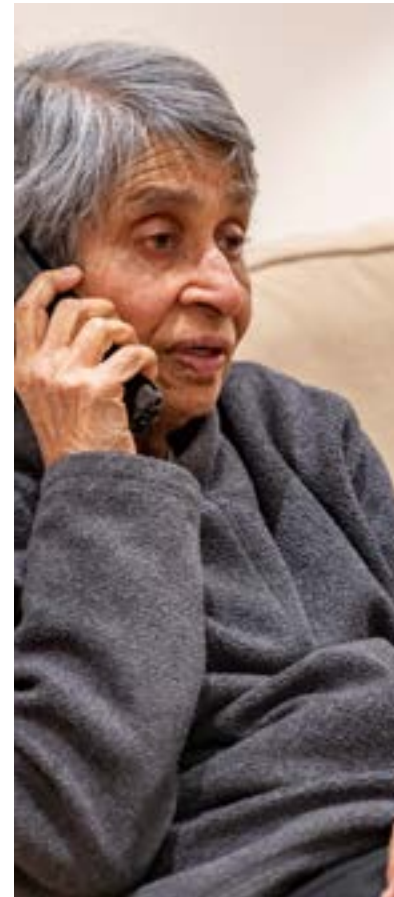
A big issue from complaints we received this year was around tenants having problems with damp and mould. As a result, we have updated our process and procedure in dealing with reports of damp and mould and developed a new Policy to demonstrate our commitment to resolving such issues in our housing stock.

The Housing Ombudsman did not publish reports for landlords with five or more cases determined between 1 April 2022 and March 2023 as they considered it was not possible to make a meaningful performance interpretation. As such there was no report published by the Housing Ombudsman regarding Ipswich Borough Council as we did not meet this criterion.

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO DIVERSE NEEDS OF TENANTS

We recognise the immense value of diversity. We understand that our tenants come from varied backgrounds, have unique needs, and deserve equitable access to all our services.

This commitment to inclusion lies at the heart of everything we do. For individuals with disabilities, equal access is not just a principle, it's a legal obligation. We are fully committed to the Equality Act 2010, and implement reasonable adjustments wherever needed. This allows us to tailor services and communication to specific requirements, ensuring everyone can participate fully. Last year's new Reasonable Adjustment policy further strengthens this commitment; we actively partner with local organisations to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse needs and potential barriers faced by different segments within our community.



We know a "one-size-fits-all" approach doesn't work. Instead, we offer a variety of communication channels and participation methods, ensuring everyone has a voice. Our Tenant Engagement Strategy, developed through inclusive consultations, paves the way for this vision. Recognising the multilingual nature of our communities, we actively utilise language line services and translate key documents and communications into various languages. This ensures clear and accessible information reaches everyone.

Our collaborative approach helps us identify language preferences, cultural nuances, and accessibility concerns that might otherwise go unnoticed. Our goal is to create a range of engaging opportunities for everyone that reflects the unique makeup of our tenant population.



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. This year 100% of our homes 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.

Work to improve tenants' homes over the year included:

- 254 Council homes were re-roofed.
- 115 Council homes have benefitted from having solar (PV) panels installed.
- 501 Secure by Design entrance doors were installed along with a further 56 Fire Doors and 154 Shed Doors installed.
- 9 Council homes benefitted from having new Double-Glazed windows installed.
- 385 electrical re-wiring to homes.
- 1162 homes had Electrical condition reports completed.
- 720 homes received new central heating installations with A rated boilers.

DISABLED ADAPTATIONS

382 Disabled Adaptations were completed to Council homes including some major adaptations, to allow tenants to live independently in their homes.

RESPONSIVE REPAIRS

A total of 20,790 repairs were completed during 2022/23. 89% of those were completed on time within the allocated priority, a significant improvement from 2021/22 where 83% of the 17,220 completed repairs were done within the timescale.

EMPTY PROPERTIES (VOIDS)

423 properties were refurbished when they were empty prior to being re-let.

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 7629 homes.

CENTRAL HEATING INSTALLATION

720 homes received new central heating installations with A rated boilers.

TENANCY

ALLOCATIONS

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 3990 applications from people wanting to move into a social housing property compared to 4,307 in the previous year. We aim to process all housing applications within 20 days and this year we averaged 13 days.

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 97.99% of the total rent due. At the end of March there was £899,053 outstanding rent owed to the council. This represents 2.29% of the whole rent due to be collected this year.

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 visited over 1550 properties in the year.

TENURE

We aim to visit every new tenant within the first 6 weeks of their tenancy. We completed 183 (45%) of visits of our target of 95%.

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 98.31%. 99.3% of tenants have up to date support plans.



TENANCY SUPPORT

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

- 387 tenants provided with floating support through the Tenancy Support Scheme
- 249 applications made to support tenants with Charity funding/Local Welfare Assistance
- 152 Household Support Fund applications approved.
- 209 referrals made to Anglia Care Trust for debt, budgeting, and welfare benefit advice.
- Safe systems of work and risk assessments regularly reviewed and updated.
- 304 households received assistance from the Tenancy Support Officers to move into or transfer between Council homes.
- 76 households supported with making a Gateway to Homechoice application to move to more suitable accommodation.
- Enabled 59 households to downsize freeing up 81 bedrooms through the Tenant Incentive Scheme.



NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT

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

- Clean up day Whitehouse Ward
- Fencing improvements Mountbatten Court and Magdalene Close
- Communal garden improvements Defoe Road
- Communal garden improvements Serpentine Road
- Provision of additional parking bays Coniston Square
- Malcom Road wildlife project
- Replacement of low-level railings Austin Street
- Installation of a bin store area Cardiff Avenue
- Mobility scooter storage provided at 3 Sheltered Housing Schemes

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.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (ASB)

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.

We issue a tenancy agreement to every new tenant and inform our customers at sign up stage of their rights and responsibilities and what will happen if they cause ASB. We expect tenants to be aware of and adhere to the conditions of tenancy relating to ASB.

The main focus when managing an anti-social behaviour case is to effectively resolve the issue at the earliest opportunity using early intervention and prevention methods. Where enforcement action is considered necessary, legal sanctions will apply where other methods are deemed to be inappropriate.

During the year, the Housing ASB Team worked on over 54 cases, proactively continuing to use the methods available and have overall:

- Issued over 30 Warning letters.
- Referred 12 cases to a multi-agency group/panel.
- Taken 32 Community Impact/Witness statements.
- Issued 6 Community Protection Warning Notices (CPWN)
- Issued 3 Community Protection Notice (CPN)
- Issued 4 Notice of Seeking Possession
- Obtained 1 Closure Order
- Obtained 2 Outright Possession Orders (Eviction)



CATCH22 MEDIATION SERVICE

Catch22 provides a service, funded by Ipswich Borough Council, which helps people to safely resolve disputes with their neighbours, sometimes by 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.

During this year, Catch22 mediators have made over 90 phone calls to Council tenants, provided home visits and held face to face mediation, in order to assist participants to work towards practical solutions to their issues with neighbours.

The feedback from participants using the Catch22 Mediation service:

- Everyone who responded to our request for feedback said they felt less stressed, more able to cope with future conflict and more able to enjoy their lives as result of contact with Catch22 whether or not their situation had been resolved.
- Of those who felt it was relevant, all respondents felt safer and that their mental health had improved.
- 100% of respondents said they would recommend Catch22 to others.
- 83% felt the situation was resolved and 100% said their issue had improved.

TENANCY FRAUD

86 Housing tenancy investigations resulted in **6** homes being returned to the Council.

126 investigations into 'Right to Buy' have directly resulted in **34** 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 www.ipswich.gov.uk/corporatefraud

DEVELOPING NEW HOMES

This year, the Council (via Handford Homes) have developed and let 20 new Council flats over two blocks in Grimwade Street and Emmanuel Close. These were all let as affordable rented units and all ground floor properties are fully wheelchair accessible.

Looking forward, during the financial year of 2023/24, much larger sites are programmed to be developed at Ravenswood and Bib way, with other housing sites in various stages of being planned.



VALUE FOR 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.

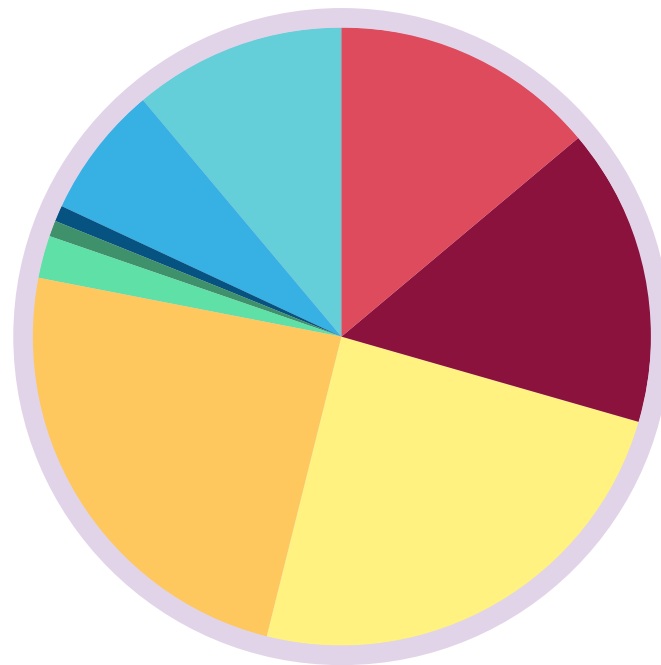
HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2022/23 EXPENDITURE

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 2022/23 (excluding service charges) was £35,235,426 and the chart below summarises where this was spent.

The largest proportion of spend was invested in the housing stock:

- 31% were used for revenue repairs (responsive repairs)
- 31% for capital works (improvement work)
- 18% as a contribution to capital projects (improvement projects)



SPEND PER £1 OF RENT

- **Capital Financing | 18p.** This is for costs such as debt repayments and interest payable on debt charges.
- **Supervision & Management | 20p.** This is the cost of the housing management service including staff costs.
- **Repairs – Revenue | 31p.** This is the cost of responsive repairs.
- **Repairs – Capital | 31p.** This is the cost of improvement works such as kitchen and bathroom modernisations.
- **Revenue Contribution to Capital | 3p.** This is the contribution made towards the cost of new build housing.
- **HRA – Provision for bad debts | 1p.** This is the money set aside to meet the cost of potential bad debts during the year.
- **Rents, rates, taxes, and other charges | 1p.** This is for costs such as business rates and council tax for empty properties.
- **Sheltered Schemes | 9p.** This is the cost of the Sheltered Housing Schemes.
- **Other income / contribution from HRA balance | 14p**



PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Our performance in delivering services to tenants is reported both to the Customer Engagement Panel and to Councillors.

For the Annual Report next year we will be reviewing our performance against new Tenant Satisfaction Measures and updated Consumer Standards - expectations of how Social Housing Landlords, like Ipswich Borough Council, deliver services to tenants.

