

TENANTS

Newsletter

February 2020

For Runnymede Borough Council tenants

Proud to build more Council housing

Last year marked the 100th anniversary of the Addison Act, which kick-started council house building in England and Wales. Creating more Council-owned homes in the borough is a priority and late last year tenants moved in to four new one-bedroom flats at Farm Close in Egham.

These properties are energy efficient, cost effective and have solar panels. They are ideally situated for local facilities and Staines town centre. This development follows the completion of 12 new Englefield Green homes in 2018.

This year we are developing new temporary accommodation within the borough to provide a better range of emergency housing for households that become homeless, including single people.

We have also achieved planning permission for more new homes in Addlestone and Egham, which will become available for letting in the next few years.

Could you downsize to help another family?

Priority for the new flats at Farm Close were given to social housing tenants vacating a larger home. With more than 1,000 households on the Housing register, some people with children are



waiting many years for a family home. If your children have grown up and moved out, would you consider moving to a smaller property so a young family can have the space yours has benefited from?

If you would like to discuss your options for downsizing, please get in touch.

To assist people in relocating we sometimes:

- Help with the cost of your removals;
- Decorate your new property;
- Assist with a free overlap of rent;
- Arrange for the clearance of old furniture;
- Provide carpet for your new property.

For more information, contact:
housingsolutions@runnymede.gov.uk

To talk to the Council about any items in this newsletter call 01932 838383



Serving our customers

We know that having a safe and secure home is one of the most important aspects of anyone's life and that the services the Council provides for its tenants and prospective tenants are vital.

Last year we recruited extra staff in order to respond better to our customers' needs, especially those struggling to pay their rent or dealing with debt or benefit issues.

The new Housing and Neighbourhood Services team, which replaces the Tenancy Management team, includes Area Housing Managers and two Senior Area Managers. Their aim is to help and advise, support people in their tenancies, promote sustainable neighbourhoods and if necessary take enforcement action against breaches of the tenancy agreement which is our contract with each tenant.



We will be more proactive about neighbourhood issues including joint inspections between your Area Housing Manager and your Maintenance Inspector.



We will take action on tenancy fraud, which deprives those waiting for a council home.



We will be reviewing fixed term tenancies for households which do not have a tenancy for life, to see if people are still in the right property for their needs.

Advice and support

The Housing Solutions Team supports people looking for appropriate housing. As well as managing the Housing Register and dealing with applications for transfers from tenants needing a different home, the team provides housing advice and assists people who are homeless.

Janet's story is an example of how the team can help:

Janet asked the Council for help, she has a learning disability and was also at risk of losing her home. Janet previously had a bad experience sharing a house with people she didn't know but the team explained how they could help her find a room in a suitable house, with the support she needed.

A Housing Officer accompanied her to an interview with Transform, a local housing association, as she was worried about it.

Following that interview, Transform offered Janet accommodation in one of its supported housing schemes.

Now she has a safe and secure place to live, Janet has developed ambitions about what she wants to do with her life, and is actively looking for work caring for animals.

Transform is helping her find voluntary work. She is also taking steps to improve her literacy and confidence.

To find out if the Housing Solutions Team can help you, email housingsolutions@runnymede.gov.uk

To find out more about Transform visit: www.transformhousing.org.uk/ourstories

Stock Condition Survey Q&A:



As part of our commitment to checking homes meet the Decent Home Standard, we are currently carrying out a Stock Condition Survey of all housing properties.

What does it cover?

The age and condition of the major elements of your home such as the kitchen and bathroom, the energy efficiency of the property and any health and safety risks.

What needs to be checked?

All inside and outside areas of your home including any loft space. The survey also covers the building structure including roof, windows and doors.

How long will the survey take?

A full survey can take 90 minutes. If your time is limited the surveyor can concentrate on the internal survey first and then carry out the external survey afterwards.

Who are the surveyors?

All surveyors are directly employed by Runnymede Borough Council and will arrive at your home carrying Council photo ID.

If you are in any doubt, call the Council to check their identity.

Do not let anyone into your home unless they have ID.

Please treat your surveyor with respect.

Their role is to report on the condition of the property, not make decisions. The surveyor will bring equipment like a ladder and data recording equipment.

Will I have to take time off work?

Ideally the tenant will be at home at the time of the survey, but if this is not possible it is your responsibility to arrange for someone who you trust to be in your home while the survey is conducted. The surveyors will do their best to arrange an appointment time which is convenient for you. The surveyors can normally carry out the survey between 8 am and 5 pm Monday to Friday.

How will the information be used?

The information gathered will be used to inform our future programme of planned works. When your property is due for renewal work, we will contact you confirming your inclusion in the programme and all the details.

When will my home be surveyed?

If your home hasn't yet been surveyed, you should be contacted over the coming few weeks by a surveyor. This may be by phone or they may call at your home if they are in the area.

Day to day repairs should still be reported online or by calling Customer services on: 01932 83 83 83

Housing by numbers

In 2018/2019
Runnymede
Borough Council
prevented 43
households from
becoming homeless.

We set up private
sector tenancies
for 17 homeless
households, 12
of which were
families.

In 2018/2019
the Council
gave
261 households
new tenancies.

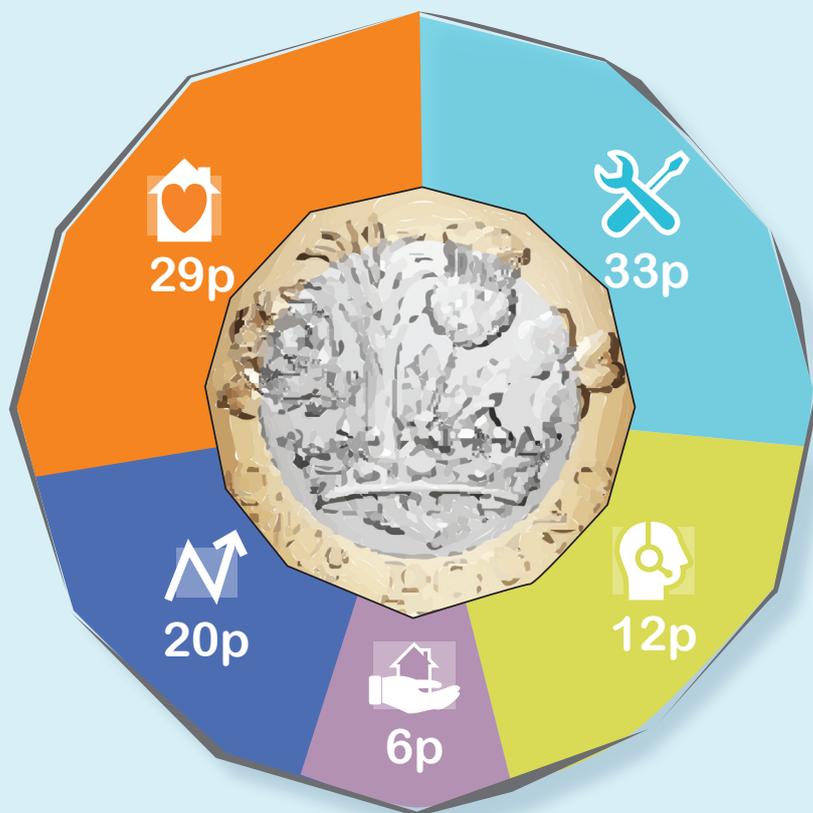
Runnymede
Borough Council
owns and
manages 2,921
properties.

70 households
(54 families with
Children) who had
been homeless were
offered permanent
social housing
accommodation in
2018/2019.

We approved 12
mutual exchanges
where tenants
swapped
properties with
each other.

Working to make
our communities
safer, there were
three evictions
following the courts
awarding absolute
possession.

For every £1 spent:



Housing Improvements



New Housing



Financial Loans



Independent Retirement Living



Tenancy Management

If you would like more information on how we plan to use your rent to improve Council Housing in Runnymede, please see our business plan:
www.runnymede.gov.uk/article/14622/Strategies-and-plans

Kitchens and bathrooms

If your home is part of the coming improvement programme, we will contact you to discuss design and colour choices and for a pre-works survey.

Our contractor will then be in touch with a start date for the work, which should take around 14 days. Our Liaison Officer will be in regular contact, to assist with questions or queries.

Better living in retirement

Following the modernisation of Beomonds in Chertsey, residents of the Council's other Independent Retirement Living schemes have been involved in proposals for the interior design of their communal areas.

With design suggestions from a specialist company, Access 21, tenants have given the Council their views and the final plans are being drawn up for work to start in the near future.

Repairs service

New contractors have been appointed to keep the 3,000 Council homes in good repair. When the decisions were made about which firms to appoint, both the cost to the Council for the work, and customer care and quality of service were assessed.

If you report a repair to the Council the contractor attending could be from Laker BMS, Mills BCE, K&T Heating or another specialist firm.

You may be asked to provide a photo to help resolve the problem without and inspection. For heating issues phone K&T Heating on 020 8269 5999.



News in Brief

Regulator of Social Housing update

The Council wrote a personal letter to all tenants in October explaining that the Regulator of Social Housing had reviewed our housing maintenance processes. The Regulator had concluded that there had been a breach of the required standard in some instances in respect of electrical certification, fire risk assessment work management and records on compliance with the Decent Home Standard.

We advised all tenants whether their property was affected by any of these issues and what action was needed. The discussions with the Regulator were shared with the Chair of the RCRA as the tenants' representative during the process.

Since October we have put in place an Improvement Plan to rectify all the issues raised and the Regulator has approved the steps being taken. We are speeding up the Stock Condition Survey and the programme of checking electrical certification. We are also investing in better IT to modernise our record keeping and working practices.

If you have any issues regarding the above please email: tenancy.management@runnymede.gov.uk

Nectar points for local charities

Close to £1,000 worth of Nectar Points has been donated to two local charities after Housing staff at the Council saved up points on a Sainsbury's loyalty card.

The points have been transferred over to both charities' the Runnymede Food Bank and Just a Helping Hand, own Nectar cards, giving them each £450 to buy personal and essential items for their users.

Megan Bainbridge from Just a Helping Hand said: *"We feel honoured to have received the Nectar points. They have been a real blessing in providing essentials that we had run out of to give to those who are homeless or in need."*

Six key facts about Universal Credit

- 1 Almost all new claims for benefits will now be for Universal Credit instead of tax credits, Housing Benefit or out-of-work benefits like Income Support, Job seeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance.
- 2 If you get help with your rent, this will be included in your monthly payment – you will then need to pay your rent to the Council directly. Once your claim has been agreed, it's best to pay by Direct Debit the day after you get your Universal Credit payment to ensure rent is prioritised.
- 3 People on benefits who have a change of circumstance such as starting or leaving a job, or a partner leaving or joining the household, will have to claim Universal Credit.
- 4 Claimants apply for and manage their claim through an online account. You can use it to report changes and get support and use your journal to send messages to your work coach.
- 5 Couples living in the same household receive one payment between them and Universal Credit is paid monthly to match how most salaries are paid.
- 6 Only couples who have both reached pension credit qualifying age can make a new claim for pension credit and/or pension age Housing Benefit. Mixed age couples (one working age and one pension age) may claim Universal until both have reached pension age.



Rents from April 2020

This January, the Housing Committee approved a rent increase of 2.7 per cent for all properties in line with Government recommendations. This follows four years of rent decreases.

The average rent for a three-bedroom property will be £121.06 per week which is lower than it was in 2015.

Your Housing Benefit or Universal Credit will cover the increase if all other circumstances remain the same.

Letters confirming the details of the new rent are going out to all tenants soon.

Tenancy audits to combat fraud

We have launched a rolling programme of Tenancy Audits.

A Tenancy Audit is undertaken in your home to check that the person who holds the tenancy agreement is the person who is actually living there.

Housing staff carrying photo ID will visit your home. Do not let anyone into your home unless they have an ID badge. They will also ask you to prove your identity and details of who lives with you.

You can provide any of the following, one of which must have your photo on it:

- ✓ **Utility bill**
- ✓ **Bank statement**
- ✓ **Passport**
- ✓ **Birth certificate (for children)**
- ✓ **Driving licence**
- ✓ **Official document from government agency, DWP etc.**

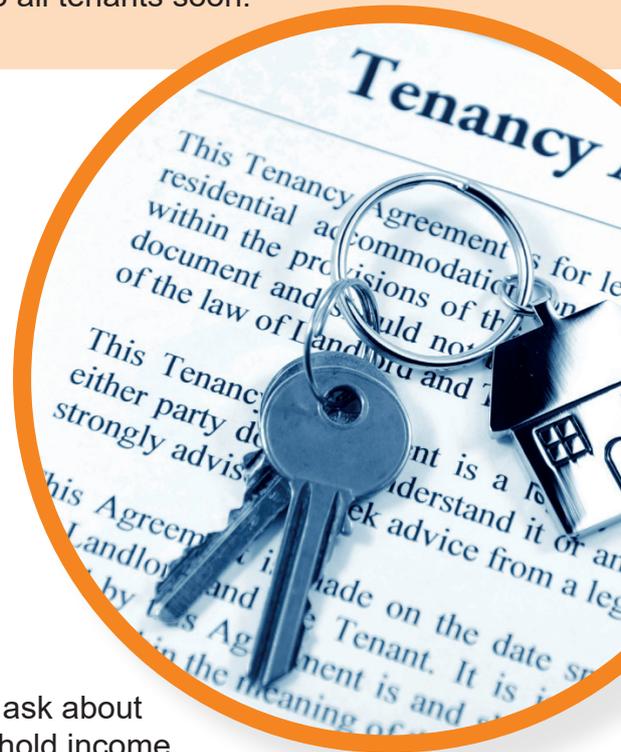
Staff will verify your ID using a secure mobile device. They will not ask to take away any ID you show them. Staff will check your contact

details and ask about your household income.

As part of the audit, the Council also needs to check your property and garden are being looked after in accordance with your tenancy agreement. They will also be on the lookout for any fire risks or safety issues.

Tenancy Audits are intended to ensure all tenants are acting fairly and no one is committing tenancy fraud which makes it harder for other people to get a home. There is a waiting list for social housing, therefore action is likely to be taken against anyone who does not have the right to be in a property, including homes being sub-let.

If the Tenancy Audit highlights fraud, overcrowding, under-occupation or issues that would benefit from referral to other agencies, we will explain what action the Council plans to take.





RCRA

RUNNYMEDE COUNCIL RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Making your views heard



Dear resident,

Runnymede Council Residents Association (RCRA) is the overarching group to represent all council tenants in the borough and our aim is to make the service the Council provides the best it can be.

RCRA has been involved in the appointment of contractors. The new gas contractor, K&T Heating, has been in place from the beginning of January 2019, and I hope that, if they have been to your home, you have had a positive experience.

We also offer input on Council policy and strategy, such as the Tenancy Strategy which sets out the types of tenancy the Council offers. Following feedback from the RCRA, some of Runnymede's Independent Retirement Living schemes are being revamped. Residents in those schemes have been involved in choosing new colour schemes and styles of furniture.

One of my passions is the "See the Person" campaign. Its report, 'Overcoming the Stigma of Social Housing', is available on its website and is well worth reading. If you have experienced any prejudice as a tenant then please let me know. It is 100 years since the Addison Act first rolled out social housing in England and Wales and I believe we should do more to recognise the role it has played in strengthening our communities.

Runnymede Council is a member of the Association of Retained Council Houses (ARCH) and there is a Tenants Group. I was fortunate enough to be elected Chair of this national association recently and attended a reception at the House of Commons to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Addison Act.

The Tenants Group have regular updates on housing legislation and have been involved in roundtable workshops to discuss ways forward with fire safety following the Grenfell Tower fire.

If you wish to become a member of the RCRA, or wish to set up a new residents' association to represent your street or building as part of the RCRA, please contact:

Amanda Kendall by phone: 01932 425872 or by email: amanda.kendall@runnymede.gov.uk

Yours faithfully,

Jenny Hill

(Chairman, RCRA)

Tel: 01932 568405 or 07811 863565 Email: jennihill@ntlworld.com Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/RCRA1/