

Council Housing Annual Report

What we did for our tenants and leaseholders

between April 2015 and March 2016

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1 Introduction



Welcome to this edition of the annual report where we reflect on what we have achieved over the last year and look at what could improve in 16/17.

Again we are making big strides to becoming the nation's best landlord. For another consecutive year we have received fewer complaints and have worked hard to act on customer feedback. We have continued to work on projects that are about more than just providing homes so that together we are improving lives and communities.

This has included investing in CCTV in Neighbourhood Centres, arranging community skips and litter pick days and installing measures to prevent parking issues.

Over the last year we have improved our communication and have made a commitment to improving the type and number of ways that tenants can get involved in shaping our services. We have also improved our service and communication to leaseholders to ensure all our customers are better informed about changes to ways of working.

Going forward we know that there are still more changes to make and we will strive for continuous improvement in all that we do.

Next year, we will continue to develop our approach to tackling anti-social behaviour and amongst other things we will be increasing our stock of new homes to meet increased demand – including specialist housing.

Improving turnaround times for empty properties and introducing smarter ways of working across services will also be a priority to ensure good value for money in everything we do.

Tom Bell

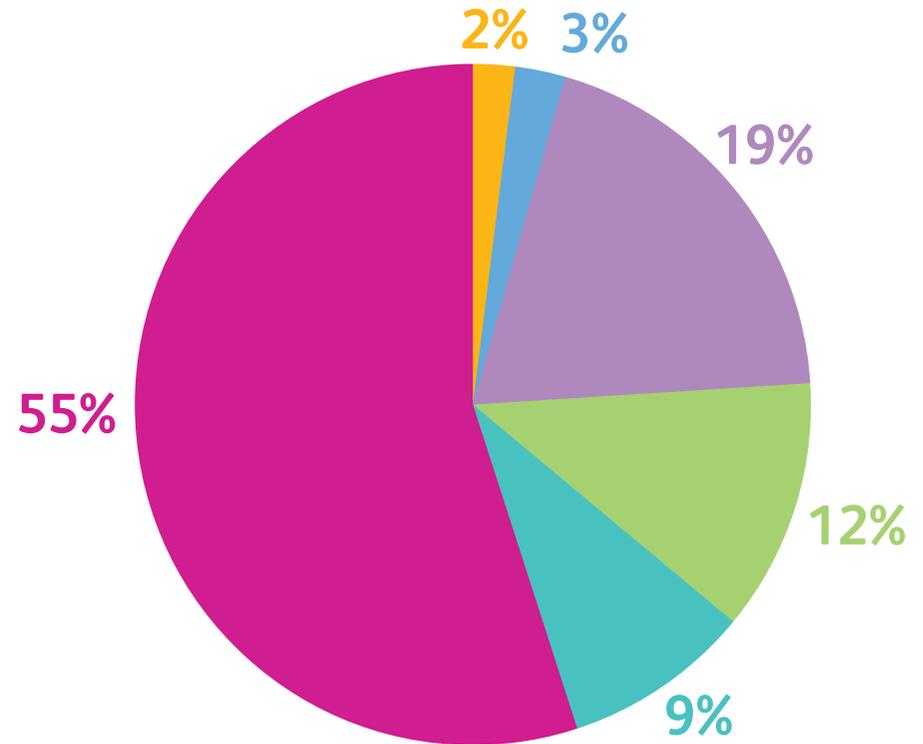
Assistant Director
Housing and Neighbourhood Services



2 How did we spend your money?

Money is spent across a range of services with the majority invested in repairs and maintenance to ensure we continually improve the quality of accommodation and respond to repair needs. Improving estates and neighbourhoods also continues to be a priority alongside ensuring investment in our stock and running of the Key Choices service

The figures:



- Sustainable Communities
- District Heating
- Stock Management
- Housing Development



- Management & Administration



- Key Choices
- Homelessness & Advice
- Adaptations Service



- Communal Centres
- Area Assemblies
- Neighbourhood Services
- Estates Management



- Repairs to Housing stock
- Void Properties



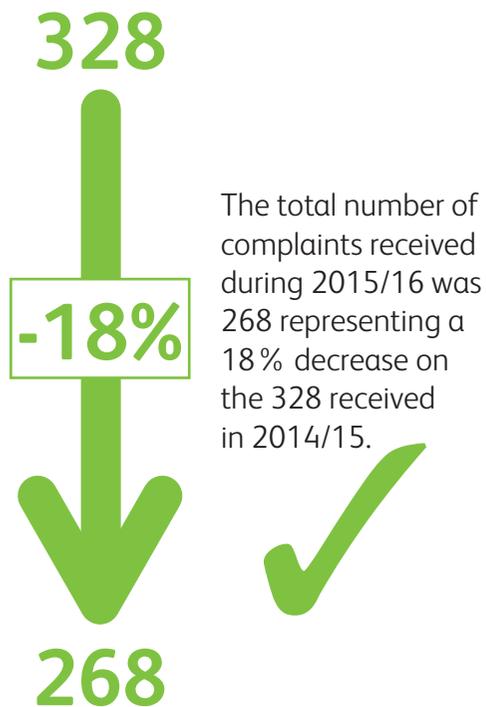
- HRA Area Assemblies
- HRA Community Involvement

3 Complaints, Compliments and Comments

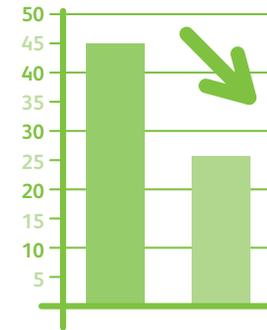
For a second consecutive year, the Council Housing Service has received fewer complaints than in the previous year. There was also a reduction in the number of complaints fully upheld and partially upheld and cases progressing to Stage 2 and Stage 3 remain low.

For a fourth successive year, the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) did not uphold any of the complaints referred.

The figures:



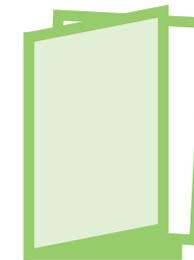
94% of all complaints were responded to within timescales.



Complaints about delays in service decreased by 39% to 44 from 72 in 2014/15.



The total number of complaints fully upheld at all levels was 66, a reduction on the 91 fully upheld in 2014/15. The combined total of upheld and partially upheld complaints was 100 compared to 137 in 2014/15.

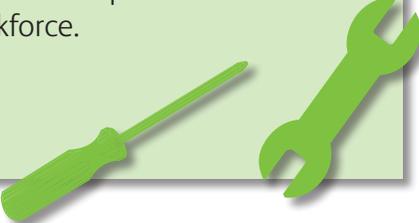


4 LGO / Housing Ombudsman judgements were received; no decisions were upheld against the council.

Overall there is a reduction in complaints across many of our services. The areas where complaints remain high are around damp in properties and anti-social behaviour. Work is underway to help address issues related to these areas.

Repair Contractor Performance

The number of complaints about contractors has reduced for the last four years, the current figure of 26 is less than half what were received two years ago. This reflects the time invested by CSD; ensuring feedback is provided to the partners, the partners' willingness to learn from complaints and the use of "tool box talks" to promote service improvements to the workforce.



Contract and Service Development

The service has had a reduction of 34% of formal complaints from 2014/15 although damp continues to be a significant cause of complaints. Officers have been given an improved toolkit to identify and advise on condensation related damp as well as a mould spray to show and advise tenants how to combat condensation related mould. Full mould / condensation / damp training has taken place for all Technical Officers and a consistent approach in identifying issues established.



Housing and Communities

The single largest cause of complaints is the perceived poor management of anti-social behaviour cases, The complaints were made by both the reporters and alleged perpetrators of the ASB. However only a small percentage of these were upheld. At the beginning of 2015/16 the service provided all its frontline Area Housing Officers with training to support officers dealing with conflict to help ensure action is taken in a timely and appropriate manner.



Safer Neighbourhoods

The number of Safer Neighbourhoods complaints rose slightly in 2015/16 although only 17% were partially or fully upheld. The highest numbers of complaints were about the perceived poor management of noise complaints and actions of staff pursuing enforcement.



Housing Options

There has been a decrease in the number of Housing Options complaints for the second successive year. The vast majority of complaints is from people who think their priority is not in line with the Allocation Policy, only a small percentage of such complaints were upheld.



Housing Finance

Almost half of the Housing Income complaints were partially or fully upheld. The highest number of complaints related to district heating caused by problems experienced with defective valves and late repayment of credits. In response to the complaints about the late repayment of customer credits the service created a list of all those meters where there have been difficulties obtaining an automatic electronic reading in the past and will manually read the meters to avoid delays.



MP Enquiries

180 MP enquiries were received in 2015/16, a reduction of **24%** from the **238** reported in 2014/15. Two thirds of all enquiries were received by the services managing tenancy and estate management issues and the allocation policy and allocation of council tenancies.



24% ↓

4 How we made things better for Council tenants and leaseholders

Empowering Tenants and Leaseholders; Involving Tenants and Leaseholders, Customer Choice and Service, Providing Support, and Responding to the Diverse Needs of Tenants.

We have improved our communication and have made a commitment to improving the ways that tenants get involved in shaping our services.

How did we do?

Launched the Council's Tenant Involvement Strategy at the RotherFed AGM which was developed in partnership with tenants and RotherFed.

Awarded the Tenant Federation Contract to RotherFed for a period of 4 years following a tendering process.

Sent out our first STAR (Tenants Satisfaction Survey) to a sample of over 4,000 tenants. The results will be fed back and published May 2016.



Relaunched our tenants newsletter called 'Home Matters'.



Continued our membership with TPAS to give staff and tenants the opportunity to share good practice and information with other services across the country.

Begun the process for securing TPAS accreditation to demonstrate that we are engaging our tenants effectively and making the necessary improvements to maximise opportunities to engage with our tenants.

Hosted our annual successful Garden Competition at the Town Hall where tenants are given the opportunity to put an entry in for their gardens to be part of the competition.



Generated over 100 followers on our new Twitter account to keep tenants and partners updated on the housing work we are doing.

A key area of tenant involvement is the Area Housing Panels. Each Area Housing Panel receives £28,000 Housing Revenue Account budget to spend in environmental improvements in their area. Below are some of the improvements funded this year.



Relocated the Key Choices service to Riverside House which means you can now access all housing related services under one roof. Following the move we are still providing all the same services as at the Old Town Hall plus more, in a spacious and welcoming environment. Also because we know that discussing housing benefits or concerns about becoming homeless is a personal matter we now have the added bonus of being able to provide separate interview rooms for anyone wishing to discuss their circumstances in private.

Organised a personal safety, home security and winter warmth event at Mark Grove Neighbourhood Centre. The day was organised by Wentworth Area Assembly with support from the Council and partners including South Yorkshire Police and Victim Support. Residents received free safety items including purse bells, personal alarms and lock packs helping them to feel even safer.

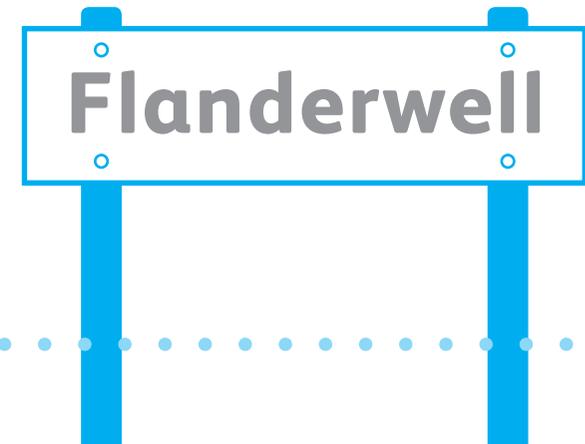
Purchased shed protection equipment in Maltby for older people. This project funded 100 shed security packs and the assistance of Yorkshire Housing was sought to install the equipment at no cost to tenants. The packs were prioritised for the Maltby area which was a burglary hotspot at the time. Priority was also given to tenants with sheds where mobility scooters were stored. Neighbourhood Development Officers sought some match funding to secure more packs for non RMBC tenants.

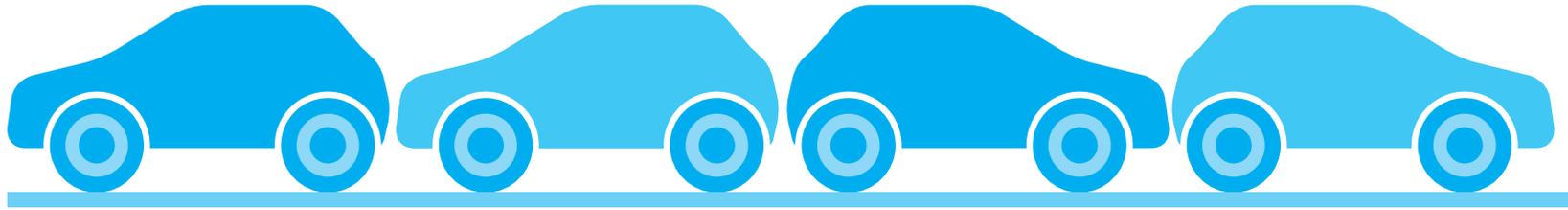


CCTV in neighbourhood centres – some centres now benefit from CCTV around the exterior. There have been some centres with instances of ASB occurring so the installation of these cameras has helped reduce the fear of crime and ASB, and encourage residents to use the facility. It is known that Police have had to retrieve footage on a number of occasions in order to investigate crime or ASB.

Flower bulbs for planting in various locations in Rother Valley South.

Improved signage to Flanderwell estate – residents were constantly reporting that the signage was inadequate around Flanderwell estate and there was confusion as to how the street and block numbering was set out.

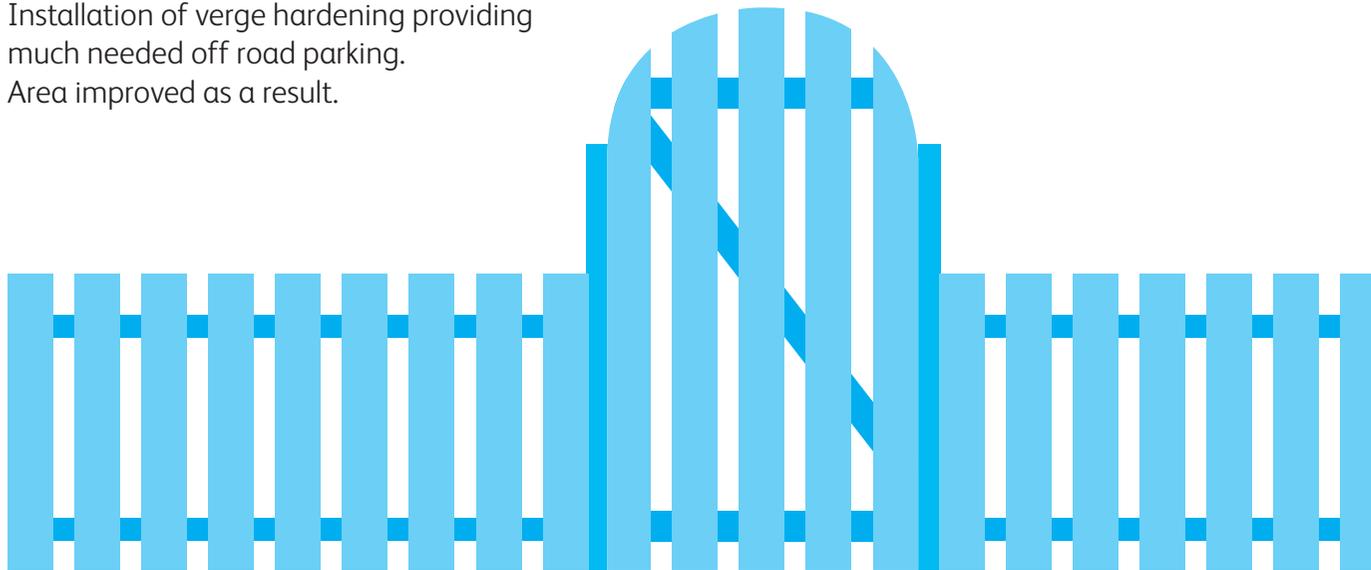




Wentworth North – Haugh Road on the edge of the Manor Farm Estate. Ongoing issues with parking on the narrow cul de sacs which back onto this main road. Resulting arguments over parking and cars parking on the main bus route and grass verge causing damage and unsightly street-scene. Installation of verge hardening providing much needed off road parking. Area improved as a result.

Renovation and replacement of dilapidated fencing and gates at Hawley Street, Rawmarsh. Residents were concerned over crime and fear of crime as well as the aesthetics of the area with the fencing looking shabby.

Wentworth South and North Community skips and litter pick days – both housing panels allocate a proportion of their budget to clean up days. Local members usually get involved and we tie in with caretaking service to blitz the area involved. Locals can get involved in litter picking too.



Quality of Accommodation, Repairs and Housing Maintenance

Our customer satisfaction levels in relation to repairs and maintenance continue to be high and we have extending our portfolio of new build properties

How did we do?

Excellent progress has been made by the Council to reduce the number of days it takes to prepare and re let empty properties. At the beginning of May 2015 it took the Council 42.95 days to do this but following the development and implementation of a number of key improvement actions this figure has been reduced to 36.75 days in March 2016.



99% of Council customers were satisfied with repairs carried out to their homes.

More than **96%** of repairs were completed “right first time” during 2015/16. Putting RMBC in the Housemark Upper Quartile national performance for housing providers.

99.37% of all repairs  appointments have been made and kept, which compares very favourably to the Councils performance in 2014/15 when the figure was 99.24% and of all repairs requests have been completed within target during the year.

The average waiting time taken by the Council or its contractor to carry out a major adaptation in a customer’s home following assessment of their need has been reduced to just over three weeks which compares favourably to four weeks for the previous year.



99.99% gas servicing has been achieved in the year compared to 99.98% in 2014/15. Putting RMBC in the Housemark Upper Quartile national performance for housing providers.



Quality of Service

"Thank you to the Adaptations Team. I had my bathroom made into a wet room and it is absolutely beautiful the men worked so hard, I can't thank them enough, they cleaned all the rubbish and dust and wiped everything down. Thanks again to Glyn, Billy, Andy, Paul and James."

"Thank you to the CSD Team for works carried out to his drive – I am delighted and want to thank Alison Morrison and Glen Lamb."

"A BIG THANK YOU to the gentleman of Wilmott Dixon who has been out to repair this promptly."



"Compliment for Morrison on the standard of work carried out to gate and wall."



Case Study

Our brand new Council Housing development at Barbers Avenue, Rawmarsh was officially opened in March and is a welcome addition to the Council's housing stock. The £2.3 million Carr Mews development, on the site of the old Cricket club and snooker hall, includes 25 new affordable homes and comprises a mix of two and three bedroom bungalows and three bedroom houses. This project has been successfully delivered in partnership with Reshape Housing.



Managing Tenancies – Allocations, Rents and Tenure

A lot of work has been undertaken to support tenants with the introduction of Universal Credit as well as ensuring the allocations policy promotes tenant sustainability.

How did we do?

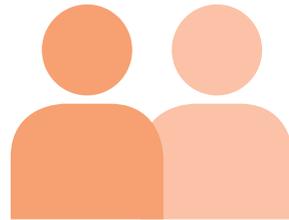


Implemented a new rents system in October 2015.

Universal Credit started December 2015 – Working in partnership with DWP to deliver Personal Budgeting and Digital support – Allocated a support officer to assist with making claims.

Joint working initiatives have been developed between Housing Income and Housing Options officers to strengthen the focus on income collection before and during new tenancy sign-up. The anticipated impact of this will be to reduce the numbers of new tenants falling into arrears at the start of new tenancies.

Continued to support elderly tenants for a second year by providing £30,000 funding to Age UK Rotherham to help tenants complete applications for Attendance Allowance.



Recruited two new tenancy support officers who started 1 April 2015. The officers provide tenants owing arrears of more than £1,000 intensive support to help them manage their finances and tenancies more effectively.

The Councils Allocation Policy has been reviewed and revised to promote tenant sustainability by placing much greater emphasis on customers paying off or at least reducing housing debts already owed to the Council.

Quality of Service

“Thanks to Gazala Mohamed, she has given not only hope for the future, but a roof over mine and my daughters head. Gazala has led me every step of the way and I can’t thank her enough.”

“Thank you Dolores Tonks-Brown, for being a fantastic individual who cared enough to keep helping me even when it was difficult. Thank you again.”

“I wanted to say how wonderful it was working with Sonya Dyson, Housing Solutions yesterday. She was very caring and kind towards my client. She was very helpful and her manor was second to none.”

Neighbourhood and Community: Caring for Your Neighbourhood, and Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

We have continued to invest in estate services and have exceeded our year-end target for resolving anti-social behaviour cases within a year.

How did we do?

99.31% of all Anti-social behaviour cases have been resolved in the year which compares favourably against the year-end target of 98%, once again putting RMBC in the Housemark Upper Quartile national performance for housing providers

Case Study

Estate Caretaking Services

We have continued to invest in estate caretaking services and funded a 'deep clean' caretaker with one of our contract partners, Mears. This enabled us to undertake intensive estate improvement works in specific areas needing greater attention, such as Wharncliffe and Masbrough.

Works carried out included;

- deep cleaning and sanitising of communal bins stores
- removal of overgrown weeds, self sets and mossy areas
- thorough cleaning including jet washing of stairwells and landing areas
- cutting back and de-cluttering overgrown shrub beds

The deep clean programme proved to be a great success and many residents were very happy with the results. A deep clean programme has been planned for 2016/17 and extended to our other contract partner for caretaking services. We also recognised that it would be beneficial to have annual deep cleans of communal areas in flats such as enclosed entrance areas, staircases, landings and bins stores. The additional work has made a noticeable difference to communal areas. Further investment has included;

- Extra Grass cutting around our estates and within our bungalow complexes as well as tree and shrub maintenance, cleaning pathways and removal of moss
- Additional tree pruning or removal. of trees whilst ensuring that only trees deemed a risk to residents were removed
- Improvement works to our garage blocks and sites, whilst also considering the future of sites where demand is falling.

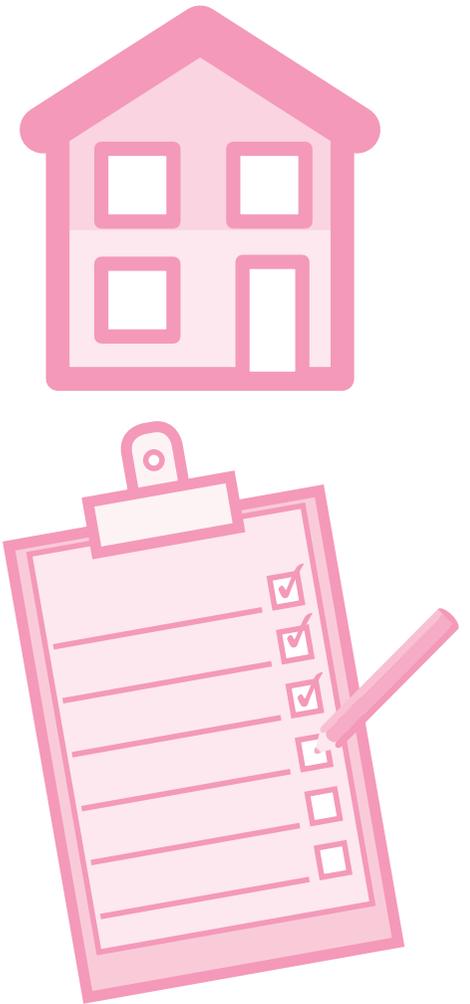
Case Study

Selective Licensing

Selective Licensing came into effect on 1 May 2015. After twelve months, 1,196 applications had been received for properties within the four designated areas (95 % of the original estimate) and a total of 998 licenses were granted.

Headlines:

- Only 10% of houses inspected required no further action as they were fully compliant at the time of inspection.
- 45% of properties inspected had serious Category 1 hazards. The most common deficiencies found were relating to hazards such as excess cold, fire and falling on stairs.
- Following the informal stage of the inspection process, 89% of houses were broadly compliant with housing legislation. The remaining properties were referred for formal enforcement consideration through the issuing of Improvement Notices.
- Tightening of processes, to ensure the use of Selective Licensing powers to resolve neighbourhood issues, had been carried out through the release of anti-social behaviour warning letters to licence holders. 17 licence holders were warned about the behaviour of their tenants.
- 149 cases of 'failing to licence' have been investigated with all but 49 resulting in applications coming forward prior to the landlord being asked to attend a formal interview for the offence. Of these 49 cases, seven cases were approved for prosecution. The first hearing for a landlord failing to license a house, was presented on 16 March 2016 at Rotherham Magistrates' Court. The Landlord faced costs and fines of over £1,000 for failing to licence his property.
- 313 Licence holders and agents have been warned about compliance with licence conditions. All the warnings have resulted in improvements and full compliance.



Providing a Value for Money Service

We know how important it is to get best value from the money we spend so we have been reviewing our ways of working to help us save money whilst still delivering an improved service

How did we do?

£

Total income was

£84,260,022

with £2,865,395 arrears for 2015/16

96.71% of rent was collected during 2015/16. This was down on last year's performance however this partly relates to changes we've made to calculate the figures.

Case Study



Smarter Working

We have reduced the costs for managing non-compliance gas properties where access is denied by a resident. Thanks to a the revised Environment Policy Act Process, the cost has been reduced by over £400 per property.

Case Study



Smarter Working

We have improved how we deliver our minor adaptations service by empowering residents to call up and order minor adaptations direct rather than having to wait for an OT assessment, saving time and money.

Types of Minor Fixing, which can be ordered direct for residents to RMBC's call centre without having to wait for an OT assessment include;

- Grab Rails
- Key Safes
- Wooden Stair Rails
- Bed and Chair Raisers
- Lever Taps



Waiting times have dropped to under 28 days

rather than having to wait up to 8 weeks to be assessed.

This has dramatically improved service levels and customer satisfaction.

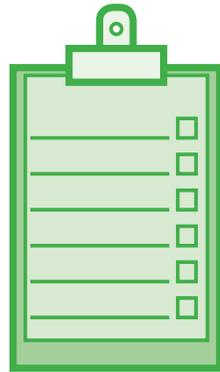
In 2015/16 we fitted over **3,500** minor adaptations.



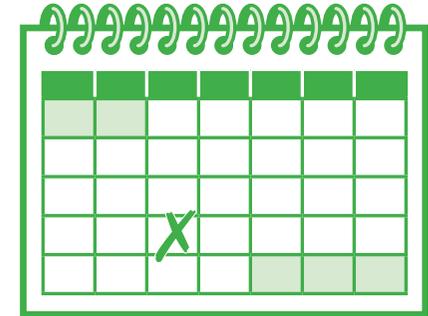
5 Leasehold Management

We have listened to our leaseholders and implemented a number of changes.

Customer involvement has been improved through the introduction of regular customer focus groups and customer surveys.



Annual service charge bills have been changed following customer feedback and now include a statement of account and a breakdown of all repair and maintenance costs.

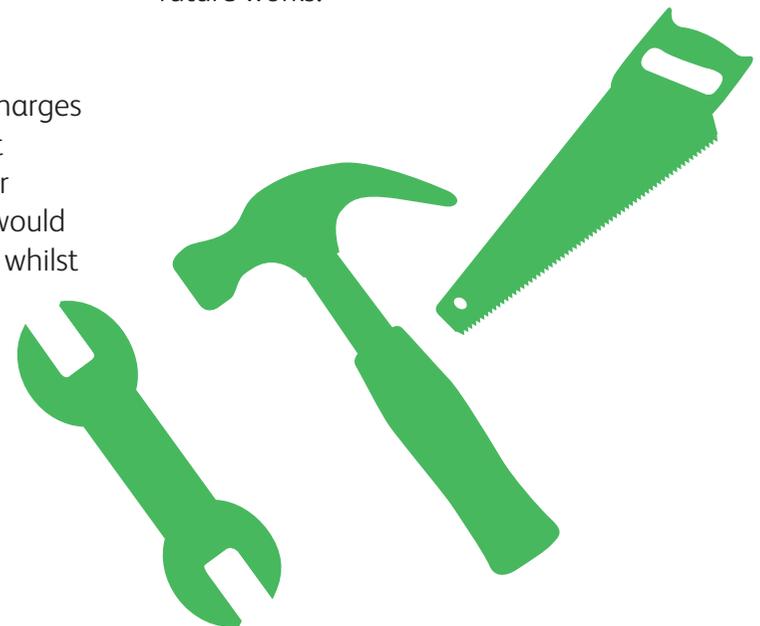


We now routinely publish a schedule of planned major works to provide leaseholders with as much notice as possible of any future works.



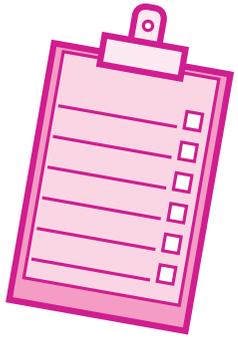
Dedicated quarterly newsletters and an online provision for leaseholders have been introduced to improve communications.

Repayment options for major works charges have been revised taking into account customer feedback to achieve a better balance between helping those who would have difficulty paying larger amounts whilst keeping costs as low as possible.



6 Our plans for improving services in the next months 12 months

We strive for continuous improvement and will continue to make services better for our customers. We will...



Review and implement a new RMBC Rechargeable Repairs Policy.

Continue to work with partners to effectively tackle anti-social behaviour and breaches of the tenancy agreement.



Complete successful implementation of the Housing Income team transformation.



Achieve **100%** gas compliance via the Environment Policy Act.

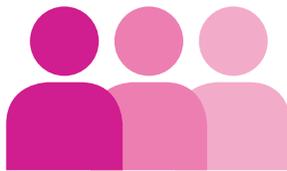


Review our housing assets to ensure that our resources are used in the best way to deliver service objectives and support Housing Growth.

Update the HRA Business Plan to address Capital financing funding gap from 2022 onwards.



Improve void numbers and turnaround times.



Strengthen tenant and resident involvement in strategic policy and planning.

Increase our stock of new homes to meet increased demand and specialist housing needs.

Implement the new Tenancy Agreement, ensuring that processes are in place to manage and effectively enforce all tenancy conditions.

Implement the new model of neighbourhood working.



7 Ways to get involved

Tenant involvement could be one of the best ways of finding out what's happening where you live and it's a great way to meet new people. Ways to get involved include the following:

Area Housing Panels – a key element of tenant involvement, each of the seven Area Housing Panel's receives £28,000 Housing Revenue Account budget to spend on environmental improvements in their area. Please see page 10 for examples of some of the environmental improvements made.

The tenants have an opportunity to influence the projects and spend at their local Area Housing Panel meeting. The Tenant Involvement Structure also includes the Area Housing Panel Chairs which is attended by the Chairpersons of all seven Area Housing Panels.

RotherFed – provides support to a wide range of Tenant and Resident organisations, Community Groups and leads on community projects funded by the Council, Locality and Lottery funding regimes. The Council has established a contract with Rotherfed to provide community and resident involvement support.

Quality Standards Challenge Group (QSCG) – challenging and scrutinising housing services.

Customer Inspection Group (CIS) and Learning from Customers Forum – mystery shopping activities.

The Council directly employs the **Tenant Involvement Coordinator** and requires the Neighbourhood Development Officers to involve and engage with local communities at area level. Neighbourhood Partnerships feed into the broader Area Assemblies where issues can and do consider housing related topics.

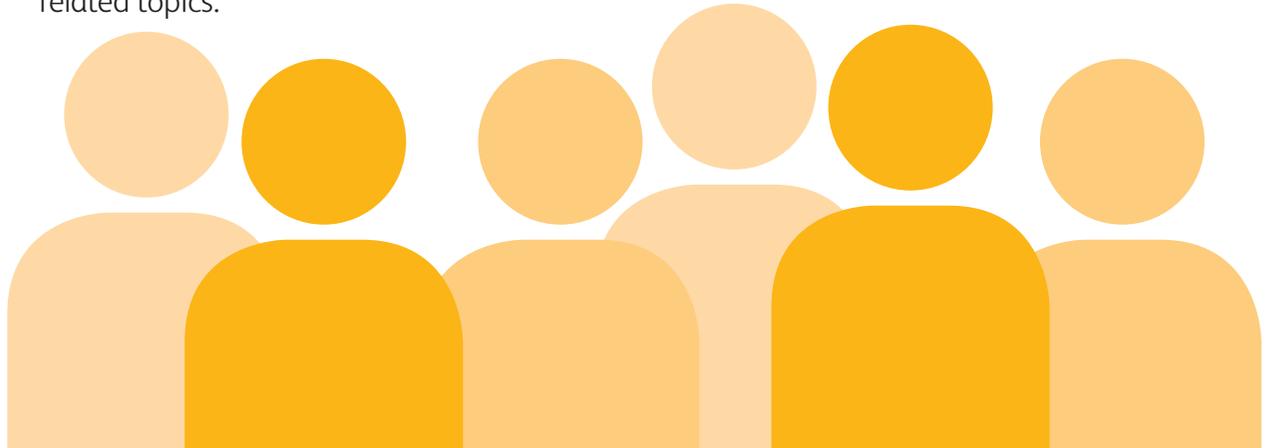
If you would like to get involved or would be interested in setting up a group, then please contact us and we will be happy to help.

Telephone: 01709 822786 or email customerinvolvement@rotherham.gov.uk

Follow us on Twitter



twitter.com/RotherhamTI



8 Contact us

You can contact us in a number of ways:

- **Website:**
www.rotherham.gov.uk/contactus
- **By email:**
councilhomes@rotherham.gov.uk
- **Council Housing (general enquiries):**
01709 336040

Other useful contacts

- **Council Housing Repairs:**
01709 336009
- **Key Choices:**
01709 336005
- **Streetpride:**
01709 336003
- **Council General Enquiries:**
01709 382121
- **Council Tax and Benefits:**
01709 336007

Request a non-urgent repair online:

- www.rotherham.gov.uk/forms
- You can also carry out a number of tasks such as paying your rent, report a non-emergency repair on our website:
www.rotherham.gov.uk/housing

