



Annual Report



FREE PRIZE DRAW INSIDE

On the back page of this year's annual report you will find details of a prize draw. Answer the simple questions and tell us what you think of the report and you will be included into a draw with a chance to win a prize of £100.

What's in your report?

This is our second Annual Report, and you may spot a few changes from last year's. We have taken on board comments we received from residents as well as looking at examples from other local authorities.

As before, the purpose of the report is to give tenants an honest appraisal of how well the Council performed against five standards set by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). You may have picked up on the fact that the TSA is to be abolished, but their standards still remain, which are:-

- Resident involvement & customer care.
- Maintaining your home.
- Allocating homes.
- Looking after communal areas and the neighbourhood.
- Value for money.

The government is also keen that councils develop Local Offers. These are as you might expect from their name, locally agreed statements about how the Council might deliver services. We touched on Local Offers in the last edition of 'Streets Ahead', and more details will appear in future editions.



Jenny Hill, Chairman of the RCRA



Members of the Editorial Group are: Tony Ruffell, Julie Osborne, Brenda Paterson, Debbie Bates, Sylvia Walker, Jenny Hill, Teresa Stone, Graham Windsor, Brenda Cobban, John Downing, David Wheeler, Norman Scott.

Who is it from?

Whilst the Council has to publish the Annual Report, the most important thing should be that it is created by tenants for tenants. Our report last year was developed by an editorial panel made up of several tenants, and this year the same approach was taken. This year's panel had a number of new members bringing new ideas, and this, coupled with feedback on last year's report, has resulted in a few changes.

You said: The font size was sometimes too small
Our response: Minimum font size of 12pt

You said: Too much text
Our response: Less text, more photos & graphics

You said: Pages were too cramped
Our response: Articles spaced more generously

This year's Editorial Group made decisions about the:-

- Content
- Layout
- Size
- Colours
- Expenditure

We also took on advice from a former editor of a tabloid newspaper who gave us tips on how to make the report more readable, and we hope you notice the changes and find it easier to read and digest.

One of the criticisms of annual reports generally, (and not necessarily ours), was that the issue of value for money could have been better addressed.

Whilst we were praised for some of the financial information we provided last year, it was felt we could have done better.

This year we have tried to weave issues relating to value for money throughout the various articles in the report – starting with the fact that it has cost in total £1,480 to print this report and a further £798 to send a copy to every tenant.

We do know that some Local Authorities and Housing Associations have chosen to publish very large, expensive, professionally designed and written Annual Reports. Although we do not have details of the exact costs involved our Editorial Group felt that it would be a waste of your money to produce anything like this. So once again we have chosen and written the items in this Report ourselves.

Some Annual Reports were produced using the services of professional photographers, again at great expense, but our Editorial Group think it would be even better if residents sent in their own photographs of local areas for next year's report. We will tell you more in the next edition of Streets Ahead.

Resident Involvement & Customer Care

Involvement

Over the past year we have continued to involve tenants whenever and wherever we can and in a wide range of ways.

This can be:

- At meetings
- By answering written or telephone surveys or questionnaires
- At small focus groups (a bit like the group we set up to produce this Annual Report)
- By helping to select the contractors we use, for example those that are fitting the new kitchens and bathrooms
- By deciding on the standard we should accept for these contracts
- By providing you with information on what we do (we do this via the two editions of Streets Ahead we send you each year)
- At fun days and clean up days

We would like to involve more of you in the decisions we make and would like to take more of your views into account.

Satisfaction & Your Views

In the most recent Tenant Satisfaction Survey 57% of those asked said they were either Very Satisfied or Fairly Satisfied that their views were taken into account compared with 62% last year.

In comparison 59% of Guildford Borough Council Tenants' felt Very Satisfied or Fairly Satisfied that their views are being taken into account by their Landlord this year compared with 68% last year.

Mindful that both Councils have tried to provide more opportunities for their tenants to get involved and influence the way the service is provided, it is disappointing that we have both seen a fall in satisfaction. Obviously we will have to try harder!

Hearing your view is important to us, if you feel we are not providing you with the opportunity to share your view with us please get in touch with Jane Margetts on 01932 425824 or email Jane at jane.margetts@runnymede.gov.uk

Resident Groups



Planting and Fun at Fair Oaks Court, Addlestone

Currently the Runnymede Council Residents' Association (RCRA) which is made up of a group of residents, meet up approximately 10 times a year to help influence the way we run our council housing services. The group can have a direct input in to Housing Committee Meetings and can help shape the policies we work to.

There are also several local residents' groups that meet up – some on a regular basis and others on a more adhoc basis to discuss local issues that interest or affect them.

Over the last year some of our local groups have held planting days, fun days or clean up days with some great results. The photos left and overleaf show some of the action.



Bouncy Castle at Galsworthy/Heriot Road, Chertsey



Litter Picking at Galsworthy & Heriot Road in Chertsey



Bubble Blowing at Englefield Green Fun Day



Runnymede Rhino and the Police join forces in Chertsey

If you would like to be involved in any way please contact Jenny Hill, the RCRA Chairperson. Jenny is a council tenant who lives in Chertsey and she would be delighted to hear from you on 01932 568405 or email Jenny at jennihill@ntlworld.com

Neighbourhood and Community

The area in which you live can have a huge effect on your quality of life.

We have developed a variety of services which we are keen to continuously improve upon to improve the areas in which you live.

Communal Areas

We told you last year that the upkeep of the grassed and shrubbed areas on our housing land was part of the overall contract for the whole council. The contractor carrying out the works is Wyevale, who also maintain the council's parks and open spaces. By being a part of this contract we are able to benefit from economies of scale,

and we believe because of this we get a good 'value for money' deal for the work that is done on our estates.

However, as it is you that live on the estates we want you to decide if the service you are getting from the grounds maintenance contractor is value for money.

We need to know if the grassed area on your estate is receiving the correct number of cuts per year (i.e. the number that we have paid for) and if the shrub and bed maintenance is being done to the standard we have agreed.



We currently have several volunteer Resident Inspectors who help us in this regard. Each time Wyevale visit a site they put a card through the door of our volunteer tenant. The tenant can then ensure the correct number of cards is received from Wyevale in relation to the number of cuts on the contract. Our volunteers also check the quality of the work and if they find a problem with this they let us know.

Wyevale's contract is up for renewal later this year, and this will give us the opportunity to check other contractors to see if we may be able to make savings or improve on the service we receive, or both!

We will be asking the RCRA to help us with this, so if you would like to be involved in this re-tendering exercise to appoint the next grounds maintenance contractor please let us know on 01932 425821 or call Jenny Hill on 01932 568405 or email Jenny at jennihill@ntlworld.com

FACTS & FIGURES

Wyevale Contract – Last year we spent **£33,600** on the grounds maintenance contract.

Tree Works – The total cost of tree works (cutting down or cutting back) carried out during the year was **£20,240**

Weed killing – **£2,858** was spent on weed killing.

Anti-Social Behaviour

In previous Satisfaction Surveys you have told us that the way we deal with anti-social behaviour is very important to you and because of this we have employed dedicated anti-social behaviour officers.

These officers work very closely with other agencies including:-

- **The Police**
- **Social Services**
- **Probation Services**
- **Mediation**
- **Youth Justice**
- **Community Mental Health Team**

We have achieved some outstanding results in the last year.

These include:-

- **Injunctions**
Some with the Power of Arrest
- **Evictions**
- **Demoted Tenancies**
- **Suspended Possession Orders**

We hear lots of complaints of anti-social behaviour and we want to stamp it out, but unless we are told about the problems we cannot start to deal with the perpetrators.

The above successes were achieved as a direct result of the tenacity and effort of neighbours who witnessed the anti-social behaviour. These residents worked closely with us to provide the necessary information we need to take action.

We surveyed all those who had experienced ASB in the last 6 months and although only 5 responded, their replies are below.

	No	Yes
Were you satisfied with the way your complaint dealt with?	0 %	100%
Were you kept informed?	20%	80%
Were you told why your case was closed?	20%	80%
Were you satisfied with outcome?	20%	80%



How do you know this Annual Report is Accurate?

You will find a lot of facts and figures in this report, but how do you know what we've said is true?

As a council, we are audited on a regular basis, both by internal and external auditors. Our Internal Auditors review processes and financial propriety across our own services, including the collection of rent and the allocation of Housing Benefits. They also periodically review contract management in respect of our housing maintenance programme.

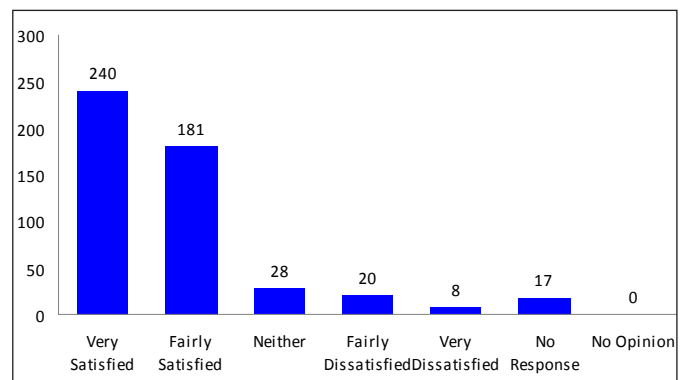
Additionally, they examine corporate issues that affect us, for example compliance with Data Protection legislation and access to computer systems.

The council's External Auditors are KPMG. They provide an annual opinion of the accuracy and reliability of the council's accounts, which includes our own housing finances.

Throughout this report we have compared ourselves with a number of other authorities. Like ourselves, they will have their own auditing processes which will require them to follow very similar processes as we do, so we can be confident their figures are as accurate

we are able to compare our performance against hundreds of other councils and housing associations. Through lack of space it isn't possible to provide details of all the areas benchmarked, but a full report is on the Council's website at www.runnymede.gov.uk

This report was created by a panel of tenants working with council officers. Whilst the TSA has given guidelines for what we should put in it, the message is clear – this is an annual report for tenants, and so it should contain information tenants want. If you have any comments about this report, or would like to help create the next one, then we would like to hear from you. Contact us on 01932 425824, e-mail us on housing@runnymede.gov.uk or drop us a line at the Civic Offices, Station Road, Addlestone, KT15 2AH.



Graph to show the results of the replies received from 494 households when asked :-

'Taking everything into account how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall service provided by your landlord (Runnymede Borough Council)'.



as ours.

Runnymede is also a member of a benchmarking club, run by an independent organisation, Housemark. Through Housemark,

Allocating Homes



The Council is expected to allocate its homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way.

FAIRNESS

With 2,700+ applicants on the housing register, and approximately 200 homes becoming empty each year, it is clear we will never house everyone who applies for our help.

It is important therefore that those we do house are those who need our help the most.

Choosing who to house from so many competing demands is not easy. Does the Council house the disabled man in a wheelchair ahead of the woman with a chronic illness? Does the large household living in overcrowded conditions take priority over the family who have been waiting patiently for a decade or more?

To help make sense of the competing demands, the Council has developed an allocations policy which sets out the 'rules' about how we go about deciding who gets what. The policy can be seen on the website (www.runnymede.gov).

The system operates on a series of priority bands. The greater an applicants need for housing, the higher the band he/she is placed in. Applicants move up within their band the longer they wait. Vacancies are advertised in fortnightly cycles, and applicants are invited to 'bid' – i.e. indicate that they are interested in a vacancy. At the end of the cycle, the applicant who is in the

highest band and who has been waiting the longest, is offered the vacancy.

As we have explained before, the Council has joined forces with Elmbridge and Spelthorne Councils as part of the SEARCH Moves choice based lettings partnership. As these two councils no longer own their own housing stock, we have also included Elmbridge Housing Trust and A2 Dominion in the partnership. All five organisations share the same allocations policy and so allocate their homes in the same way.

Whilst priority for Runnymede vacancies is given to applicants with a Runnymede connection, (and the same applies for Elmbridge and Spelthorne vacancies), approximately 30% of all empty homes are offered up across the whole partnership. This allows anyone to bid for them, irrespective of where they live, thus offering a degree of mobility to those wanting to move areas.



Transparency

Choice Based Lettings, (CBL), ensures all vacancies are advertised, giving applicants a chance to bid for suitable properties. The successful bidder will be the household in the highest priority and who has been waiting the longest.

The results of the bidding process are published, and whilst names and addresses are not provided, applicants are able to see which priority band the successful bidder was in, and how long they had been waiting.



Photograph showing kitchen before and after re-fit

Efficiency

Empty homes serve no purpose. The Council loses rent, and those in housing need have to wait longer before they can move into their new home. The Council's aim is to keep properties empty for as short a period as possible.

It is inevitable that when a tenant moves out the property will be empty for a while. We are obliged by law to test gas and electrical fixtures before a new tenant moves in, and it is usual that some repairs may have to be completed. In some cases, the Council may take the opportunity to undertake rewiring or fit a new kitchen or bathroom whilst the property is empty. It is easier to do this work in an empty home and it saves a lot of disturbance, but it will mean it stays empty for longer.

Table showing allocation times in days with comparisons with last year and others:

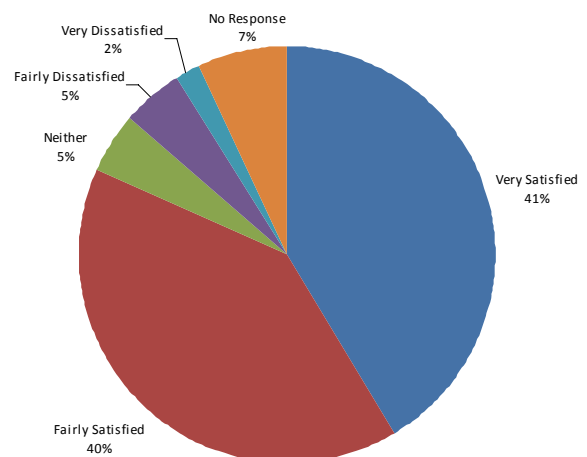
Runnymede B.C. 2009/ 2010	30
Runnymede B.C. 2010/2011	26.7
Paragon Housing Association 2010/2011	41
Average for Housemark Members	27

On average, the Council spends over £1,700 on each empty property before it is re-let.

As you can see in the attached table, last year the Council reduced the average time a home is left empty when a tenant moves out. Already this year further improvements have been made, and the hope is we will reach our target of 21 days by the year end in March 2012.

April 2010 to March 2011 Statistics:-

- 215** – Number of empty homes
- 167** – Offered to applicants on the register
- 43** – Offered to existing tenants
- 64** – New build homes provided by association partners



Pie Chart showing results received from 494 residents asked, 'How satisfied are you with the overall quality of your home?'

Maintaining your home

Tenant surveys regularly flag up repairs to be an important part of the service. As we visit every home nearly three times a year on average, it comes as no surprise tenants see the repairs service as important.

The following are just some of the facts and figures relating to the repairs service:-

- During 2010/11 we carried out 7,550 responsive repairs
- The average cost per job was £113.70
- 215 empty properties were brought back into letting at an average cost of £1,780 per property
- Major works were undertaken to 848 homes, including:-
 - 141 Rewires
 - 146 Kitchen upgrades
 - 35 Bathroom upgrades
 - 38 New Boilers
- 81% of jobs were fixed at the first attempt
- 96% of jobs were attended to within the target time
- 61% of all jobs are attended to within 3 days

In total, including major works and improvements, we spent £2.9m last year, so obtaining value for money is very important. Day to day repairs are priced against a schedule of rates, which is a pre-priced list of jobs. The contractors who offer to do jobs for less are given work ahead of more expensive operatives.

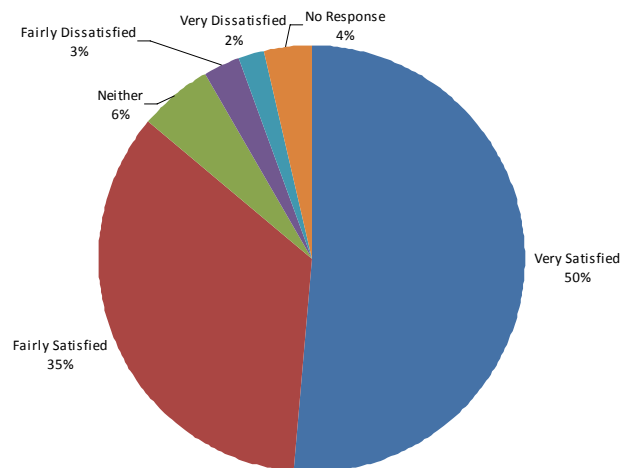
Major programmes of work are tendered, and in many cases, members of the RCRA are invited along to help us interview potential contractors. The successful contractor will be selected on both price and quality of service. The cheapest may not always offer the best value for money.

As we reported last year, we did meet the Decent Homes Standard for all of our homes. The challenge now is to ensure we make sure they continue to meet the standard in future years. The Council has a business plan which runs for 30 years, and over this period we plan to spend £101M on our homes to keep them in good condition.

Table of comparison with other social landlords:

	RBC 2009/10	RBC 2010/11	Housemark Ranking
% of tenants satisfied with condition of home	79%	84%	10th
Average No. of days to complete all repairs	9.7%	6.8%	10th
Repairs completed first time	91%	86%	23rd
% of repairs completed on time	94%	96%	17th
Average cost of a repair	£104	£118	39th
Cost per property for managing the responsive repairs service	£357	£300	17th

Results taken from a sample size of 70



Generally how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your Landlord deals with repairs and maintenance?



Complaints

In the last annual report we advised residents that the RCRA was to monitor the complaints the Council received. The purpose was to help identify any areas of operation which might be improved. Although no names or addresses are revealed, the RCRA gets to see the background of all formal complaints received and the responses the Council makes.

Complaints from residents have resulted in changes. Although not directly affecting tenants, a complaint from a leaseholder last year prompted us to change how we responded when a previously sold flat is due to be sold on. Following the complaint we now copy in the vendor when we write to purchasers.

What recent discussions with tenants' groups have revealed is that tenants do not always complain, even if they may have reason to. Tenants have said they feel there is no point as they do not think it will do any good. The Council is disappointed by these comments, for whilst we know we cannot always meet expectations, we believed that over the years we

had shown tenants that we would at least respond to complaints/enquiries and explain why we did what we did. If a tenant feels they have not received the service they expect, or that our response to an enquiry has not been adequate, then they should let us know.

So how do you complain?

There are changes being proposed in the way the Ombudsman service operates, and this will require the Council to change the way housing complaints are handled.






In the meantime, the advice is first of all complain directly to the person/team you are dealing with to give them a chance to respond. If your complaint is about a leaking tap, you want a plumber to call. You don't want to fill in forms.


If the complaint is more serious then complain to the head of the section. You can write, e-mail, telephone or call to the offices in person. The Council operates a two stage process, which escalates up to more senior officers if the complainant is dissatisfied with our first response.

How to Contact Us

Our Offices are open from 8.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m Monday to Thursday and from 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m on Fridays (our Reception is also open on Saturdays from 9.00 a.m to 5.00p.m if you need to drop off any forms or paperwork).

Telephone Numbers:-

 Main Switchboard	01932 838383	 Housing Needs	01932 425831
 Tenancy Management	01932 425821	 Jenny Hill - RCRA	01932 568405/ 07811 863565
 Housing Maintenance	01932 425851		

 You can also email us on housing@runnymede.gov.uk

 Or write to Civic Offices, Station Road, Addlestone, KT15 2AH

Value for Money – How do we compare with others?

One of the standards Councils are required to report on is value for money. One of the general criticisms of the annual reports Councils produced last year was that not enough emphasis was given to this standard.

This year we provide our own figures for 2010/11, and provide the figures for the previous year so you can see if we have improved or not. We have also used the figures collated by a national benchmarking organisation – Housemark – for 42 other district councils, so you can see how we compare with them.

The final column shows the best performance nationally of all district council members of Housemark – the figure Runnymede should aspire to achieve

	RBC 2009/10	RBC 2010/11	Improved	Housemark Ranking	Best Performance
Overall satisfaction with service	86%	86%	☹️	10th	90%
Satisfaction with the repairs service	86%	86%	☹️	6th	90%
Time taken to relet empty homes	30 days	27 days	😊	30th	19 days
Average weekly cost of management	£14.86	£14.91	😊*	Figures not available	Figures not available
Total arrears as % of debit (inc. former tenants)	1.54%	1.35%	😊	4th	1.2%

* Increase less than inflation

In addition to the performance figures quoted above, the Council's overall costs are relatively low in comparison with others. From the Housemark figures for 2009/10 Runnymede's total overheads as a percentage of turnover placed us third lowest out of the 42 other district Councils we were compared against.



Competition/Feedback

As we indicated on the front page, the purpose of this report is to advise tenants about how the Council has performed over the past year. It is a report for tenants, nobody else, and tenants have helped us prepare this report, just as they did last year.

This year we have taken on board some of the comments we received after the last annual report was sent out, and we hope this year's report is easier to read and provides information tenants want to know. For example, we have increased the font size, broken up the text more and have added more graphics. If there is anything you would like to see in future reports then please take the opportunity to tell us on this tear off slip.

To encourage you to respond, the Council has introduced a simple competition. The answers to the questions can be found within the report. All you have to do is answer the questions, add your comments on the annual report and return this page and we will add your name into a prize draw – with a prize of £100 for the lucky winner.

1. How much did it cost to print this brochure?

2. How much did we spend on tree works?

3. Who are the Council's external auditors?

4. Name 2 of Runnymede's 4 CBL partners?

5. What is the allocation time in days for RBC in 2010/11

6. How many properties did we re-wire in 2010/11

Did you find the information in the report useful? Y N

What else might you like to see in future reports?

Name:

Address:

Tel. No:

e-mail address:

Return to:- Civic Offices, Station Road, Addlestone, Surrey KT15 2AH