Check out our new online news pages! See p2

Runnymede BOROUGH COUNCIL

Newsletter

February 2023 For Council housing tenants

Improvements to repairs and maintenance coming soon



Runnymede Council have signed a new contract with our partner MCP.

They will carry out day-to-day repairs and maintenance in tenants homes, and works in empty Council owned properties from April.

The Council understands the importance of delivering a good repairs service to our tenants so we are investing in excess of £13 million on the contract over the next 10 years.

Tenants will be able to easily report many repairs online, including mobile devices, schedule their own appointments at a convenient time and track the repairs.

As a Council, we are committed to delivering an excellent repairs service. To ensure we are meeting expectations, we will be asking tenants for their feedback on the works we carry out. Rather than a letter, tenants will receive a short and quick satisfaction survey via text message.

We will be hosting a meet and greet on 15 May, from 10am to midday at Chertsey Hall, where tenants can speak to their new contractor.

▶ MCP is recruiting! For more information on the roles available, please visit www.mcp.community or email your CV to recruitment@mcp.community

MCP is an equal opportunities employer and encourages people from all backgrounds to apply.

Hundreds of new kitchens and bathrooms installed!

Since May 2022 we've replaced around 180 kitchens, 180 bathrooms, 200 boilers and rewired 15 homes. Feedback from tenants who have had work carried out has been very positive, with around 99 per cent satisfaction rate.

Next year, as well as replacing kitchens, bath rooms, boilers and rewiring works, we are starting roof, external door, window, and replacement fire doors. This will take three to five years to complete and we will be replacing around 800 roofs, 1,500 doors, 4,000 windows and 700 fire doors.

Unfortunately we have not been able to complete upgrades in as many homes as intended. If tenants decline the works, this causes delays, results in the housing stock deteriorating and increases costs for everyone.

If you are worried about the disruption such work might cause, please talk to us about the support we can offer and options available.

When it is time for your home to get a new kitchen, bathroom, or boiler, we will contact you by letter, email or phone. By allowing our surveyors into your home, we can carry out the upgrades to as many properties as possible.

Help with rising cost of living

We are aware of the impact the rising cost of living is having on people's living standards.

Details of the support available from Runnymede Borough Council is on our website at www.runnymede.gov.uk/cost-living

Examples of support include:

▶British Gas Trust Fund. Everyone can make an application for the grant regardless of their gas supplier. www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk/who-can-apply

▶Turn2us. A benefits calculator that ensures users are receiving benefits they are entitled to. www.benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk

▶ Help is available if you have difficulty paying your Council Tax. Search our website for Council Tax Support.

▶ If you have difficulties with your utility bills, we have advice from British Gas on funds they have available.

▶ There's also advice about where to go for help if you are feeling the pressure over day to day living costs.

As well as help offered for all residents of the Borough via the website, additional support is available for Council tenants.

If you are struggling with your rent payments, please speak to your Area Housing Manager at 01932 838383 or email tenancy.management@runnymede.gov.uk



Please ask our permission

As a tenant of the Council, you'll need to ask permission before doing a number of things involving your home. This is in line with your Tenancy Agreement, which is your legal contract with the Council. Written permission is needed to:

- install CCTV (including video doorbells),
- store a mobility scooter, or
- own a pet.

We would also like to remind you that your tenancy agreement includes requesting permission to:

- Use your home to run a business.
- Take in a lodger.
- Transfer your tenancy.
- Exchange your home.
- Carry out improvements, alterations, or adaptations to your home.
- Remove, alter, replace, or plant any hedge, fence or tree in your garden.
- Erect a shed or any structure in your garden.
- Dig a pond.
- Install laminate flooring.
- Park any motor home, caravan, business vehicle or boat at the property or on Council land such as residential car parks.

Permission for the above is a requirement for all tenants. To request permission, please contact your Area Housing Manager, or visit our website www.runnymede.gov.uk/council-home/i-need-permission

If you are not sure that you have the necessary written permission please contact your Area Housing Manager on 01932 838383 or email tenancy.management @runnymede.gov.uk.

Thanks for sharing your views in our satisfaction survey

Many thanks everyone who responded to our first digital satisfaction survey that asked: Runnymede Council tenants – what do you think? We are thrilled that around 35% of all tenants took the time to answer.

We know that all social landlords have seen their satisfaction rates fall (on average) in recent years, and that online surveys tend to lead to lower scores. However the results gave us plenty to think about.

Full results here: www.runnymede.gov.uk/tenant-engagement-1/tenant-satisfaction-survey

In response to the feedback from tenants, we are committed to keeping you informed of the improvements planned. We will also carry out further surveys to see how you think we are doing.

The improvements action plan for the next 12 months includes:

▶ bring in new repairs contractor - see our front page article.

▶ Create a dedicated customer contact centre for repairs.

▶ Offer easier online repairs reporting, scheduling and tracking.

▶ Review our anti-social behaviour policy and procedure, including creating a customer guide.

▶ Create an online tenant portal for transactions and real time information.

▶ Investment in IT to track requests through to completion

▶ Review of the estate caretaking service.

We are committed to improving our services and to keeping you informed on how we're doing. Visit: www.runnymede.gov.uk/housing.

Regenerating Parkside homes

You might have heard that we're considering some major works in the Parkside and Braeside area of New Haw.

If we get permission, and can put the finances in place we want to redevelop the 'temporary' homes that were built in the 1950s, and replace with new, energy efficient, modern homes.

Initial feasibility work is underway, and if the project proceeds and permission is granted, more detailed work will take place to create detailed plans for the area.

This work will take into account resident views and feedback, and regular updates on progress will be available to residents directly and on our website. You can sign up to receive these here: www.runnymede.gov.uk/housing/stay-informed-parkside-regeneration

There are still many questions we can't answer, as until we have explored the options and costs further, we will not know what can actually be achieved.

We've already written to and held meetings for every household directly affected, but there is more information which you can read on our website at www.runnymede.gov.uk/parkside-regeneration



The overall aim of the plan is to deliver better housing, while also investing is wider improvements for the community.

We would like to:

▶Replace some of the current properties with new homes.

▶Develop a new retirement living scheme and a community building.

▶ Improve energy efficiency so our housing meets our target of at least C rated by 2030, with all new build properties having an EPC A rating.

Why it's needed:

▶To deliver new and better quality homes for local families.

▶To increase options for tenants who are under-occupying their current home, and enable those needing to move to stay within their community.

▶The 'prefabricated' houses built after the war were intended to have a life of approximately 30 years.

Picture shows one of the oldest homes in Parkside, which is currently not in use.

Checking in on our performance

The way the Council manages its homes and relations with tenants is monitored by the national Regulator of Social Housing.

In October 2019 the regulator served us a notice saying we were not compliant with one of its regulatory standards, the Home Standard.

The good news is all the issues identified have now been addressed. As a result of the actions we have taken, the Regulator of Social Housing contacted us in January 2023 to inform us that we are now compliant with the Home Standard – and therefore as a result their notice will now be withdrawn.

In their most recent letter, the Regulator has said to us: "I wanted to record my sincere thanks to the Council….for the positive and constructive engagement we have had throughout the period of our engagement and for their transparency and openness."

100 **One hundred per cent of our properties now have an electrical safety certificate in place.**

76 **76 per cent of our properties as of January 2023 have now reached the government's Decent Homes Standard.**

100 **One hundred per cent of our homes have current gas safety certificates.**

Working to cut your fuel bills

We've applied for over £1.2m grant funding to insulate homes, as part of a £4m programme.

If we're successful, 255 tenants will benefit from more energy efficient homes. This is part of our commitment to reduce emissions from our housing stock, meet the Council's Net Zero target, and support residents to reduce their energy bills.

The work is due to start in August. We've selected properties with the lowest energy performance certificate, meaning they produce more carbon dioxide which is damaging to the environment. Affected tenants will be contacted directly.

Get involved in improving your area

We're making it easier for residents to influence improvements in their community, with a budget for upgrades suggested by tenants.

This could be a community garden, pathways, parking improvements, and more.

We are currently working on a programme of regular estate inspections, which tenants are invited to take part in. We're consulting tenants on a new Estate Improvements Budget Policy.

Find out more and share your views at www.runnymede.gov.uk/tenant-engagement-1/draft-estate-improvement-policy

Watch out for mould or damp during the winter season

Condensation and stale air can build up in your home if you don't allow enough fresh air to move around. Here are a few tips on avoiding damp and mould in your home:

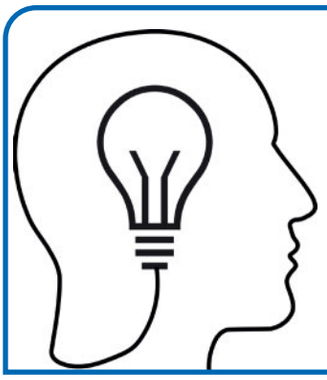
▶ Keep your home heated as best as you can given the price of energy.

▶ Ventilate by opening windows to allow natural air flow.

▶ Wipe away condensation around windows and sills as soon as you see it.

▶Air dry your clothes outside and avoid hanging them on radiators. If you don't have an outside space, put them in the bathroom with the door closed and bathroom fan on or leave the window open.

▶If you think your kitchen or bathroom fan is broken, or you have problems sticking to these steps, report it to the Council.



What would you like to read about in the next newsletter?

If you would like us to explain an aspect of the Council's work contact us on listening@runnymede.gov.uk

Check out our new online news pages! See p3

Runnymede BOROUGH COUNCIL

Newsletter

June 2023 Information for Runnymede Borough Council tenants

Improving repairs service

Since April, repairs to Runnymede Borough Council housing properties have been carried out by our new partner, MCP Property Services.

MCP Property Services has taken over from BCE Mills Bros and is carrying out day-to-day repairs and maintenance in homes, and empty Council-owned properties.

Bringing in MCP also means you can report repairs online, schedule an appointment and track the repairs.

As part of our on-going commitment to delivering an excellent repairs service, we would encourage tenants to provide feedback via the satisfaction text sent after each repair.

Since MCP has started, we have been hosting meet and greet events throughout the Borough so tenants can speak to staff and ask questions about the repairs service. The most recent events were at Chertsey Hall and Independent Retirement Living schemes, where these photos were taken.

Your experience matters and we want to hear your views on MCP and the repairs process delivered by the Council.



All your info now in one place

Housing Online is a new and secure way tenants can communicate with the Council. The system will be an easier way for you to view documents, rent account and payments, and report issues such as anti-social behaviour and repairs.

Housing Online is available through the Council's OneAccount. If you have not yet created your own OneAccount, you can do so on the Runnymede website: www.runnymede.gov.uk

Housing Online is especially useful when it comes to repairs. You can:

- identify your repairs using picture guides,
- request non-urgent repairs and book an appointment that suits you,
- track your repair through to completion, and
- receive updates on existing repairs by text.

If you would prefer to not communicate with the Council online, you can call us on 01932 838383 or speak to us at the Civic Centre.

OneAccount









Spring clean in School Lane

After listening to residents, we planned a Community Spring Clean Day in Egham. Ahead of the event, residents had the opportunity to tell us what they felt should be included on the day.

We provided skips and our staff helped clear garden waste, we litter picked, and we spoke to local people about what issues and concerns they felt needed addressing to help improve the area.

We also re-painted the parking spaces, had a kerb lowered to improve access for disabled residents and overgrown hedges were cleared. A fenced off area was cleared and communal rotary lines installed, as people had asked for.

If you feel your area would benefit from an estate walk about with our staff, get in touch by emailing us on listening@runnymede.gov.uk

Help improve how our website works

We want to improve our website and would like your help.

We have recognised fewer tenants are using our webpages whereas phone calls to the Council have increased. This results in longer waiting times for your questions to be answered.

We recognise that some information may be difficult to find on our housing pages, by not being in the place where you might expect information to be, or the content is not sufficient your purpose.

If you can help, email our team with your contact details at listening@runnymede.gov.uk

Handbook thanks

A big thank you to everyone who helped create the new repairs handbook.

You helped identify what is most important to understand about the repairs service, ensure we do not use ‘council’ terminology, and avoided overloading people with too much information.

With the help of the 17 people involved, we now have a hand-book that that is comprehensive and easy to follow.

To view or download the handbook please visit www.runnymede.gov.uk/housing or let us know if you need a paper copy.

Reporting anti-social behaviour

Ensuring you feel safe in your home is important to us.

We want to improve how we handle reports of anti-social behaviour (ASB), so we asked you for assistance in shaping what we do. This included reviewing how issues are reported to us and how we keep people updated once a report has been made.

The 22 people involved also contributed to ideas for a ASB guide, which can be used as a reference point after a complaint is made. This will include who to report certain issues to, and what to expect from us when the report is made.



Celebrating our new monarch

In celebration of the King's Coronation, we held a photo competition for our tenants. The winning photo is of Mrs Elizabeth Thatcher celebrating with Age Concern, and the photo was taken by her daughter Patricia Hosier. Congratulations!

New kitchens, bathrooms, fire doors and roofs coming soon

Since April this year, we have installed over 80 kitchens and bathrooms in your homes.

This year we will carry out surveys at flats and maisonettes to install new fire doors. The work will be carried out over three years by NEO Property Solutions.

We have started installing new doors and windows to properties. This is a five year programme, with the aim of completing 250 homes a year. Both flats and houses will receive this, with priority to high-rise buildings.

We are currently tendering for a new roof contractor, to begin work in September this year.

If your home is to receive improvements, you will receive a letter explaining what's happening before any work is carried out.

Cost of living payments help

The Council has a Household Support Fund for residents struggling with the increased cost of living. Help is available for food, essentials and utility bills.

See runnymede.gov.uk/benefits-support/household-support-fund or contact us if you need help to claim.

Benefits claimants, including people on Universal Credit, Pension Credit and Tax Credit, received £900 in instalments direct from the Department for Work and Pensions. There will also be a separate £150 payment for people with disabilities, and £300 for pensioners.

DWP has also announced that households on low income will receive cost of living payments during Autumn this year, and Spring 2024.

If you are struggling with your rent, please speak to your Area Housing Manager by emailing tenancy.management@runnymede.gov.uk or call 01932 838383.

Could benefits advice help?

You can now book an appointment with our benefits team on our website: www.runnymede.gov.uk/benefitappointment.

By booking in advance, we can ensure the right person is available to help with your enquiry.

Appointments can be booked for discretionary housing payments, new claims, household support fund, and you can also use our scanner to submit supporting evidence.

Our online news pages have loads of extra information about what the Council is doing.

Read more housing news on our website

- ✔ Garfield Road Get Together
- ✔ Feedback on balcony safety policy
- ✔ Building safety information
- ✔ Our new repairs handbook.

Visit www.runnymede.gov.uk/tenants-news or scan with your phone

Explaining our Parkside goals

In the last Newsletter, we explained how we were exploring options for regenerating the Parkside area of New Haw.

The project is in the early stages and a lot of work is required to establish what will be possible and how much the project would cost.

We will meet with locals to discuss the plans, consider views, and incorporate ideas where possible. In this newsletter, we are sharing some of the goals that are being considered.

Find out more: www.runnymede.gov.uk/parkside-regeneration

Mix of housing

We're planning for houses, flats and a new independent retirement living scheme. A greater mix would allow people to remain in the area throughout their lives and help to reduce under and over occupation.

Owned and rented

It is likely Council rented, affordable home ownership, open market sale and possibly open market rented homes will be available. This would bring greater choice and make the project affordable.

More homes

We intend to increase the number of homes. Most existing houses have three bedrooms and large gardens. Extra homes means more people can be housed and will make the project more affordable.

Local facility

We want the community spirit to remain and to build on it with an exciting new facility.

Energy efficient

Highly insulated homes using new technology will emit less carbon and will be cheaper to run.

Pylons removed

Removing pylons would make the area look better and may make it easier to build homes.

We all have an important role in protecting homes from fire

New Fire Safety Regulations have been introduced by the Government. For social landlords including the Council, this means improved fire protections for high rise buildings.

Our obligations now include checking fire-fighting equipment, fire doors and providing fire safety instructions to all residents. It is our responsibility to ensure that your building is safe, however you have a part to play too. This includes:

- Not to do anything that creates a significant risk to your building's structural safety.
- Not to do anything that creates a significant risk of causing or spreading fire in your building.
- Not to damage or remove any of your building's fire safety measures, such as smoke detectors, fire alarms, fire doors, and fire extinguishers (if present).

If you notice an issue concerning any of these report it to firesafety@runnymede.gov.uk

We are working towards best practice in fire safety, which is why Runnymede Borough Council is now a member of the Fire Protection Association, the UK's leading fire safety organisation.

For more information, visit www.runnymede.gov.uk/tenants-news/fire-safety-residential-buildings

Tell us what you think!

Last year you told us what you think of the services we provide.

We then made an improvement action plan based on survey responses.

The Regulator of Social Housing has now introduced Tenant Satisfaction Measures and we have decided to offer all tenants the opportunity to complete another survey.

We will write to you later this year and explain how you can take part.