Runnymede BOROUGH COUNCIL

TENANTS

Newsletter

February 2022 For Runnymede Borough Council tenants

New affordable homes in heart of Addlestone



Building new affordable homes to support local people has become one of our key aims, with a target of delivering 125 additional Council-owned homes within the next five years.

In St Georges Road, we are building nine modern two-bedroom apartments as part of our plan to do so.

Each home will have a fitted kitchen and will be carpeted, with flooring provided to the kitchen.

When construction is complete, tenants will have access to communal gardens and parking.

The new apartments will be close to Victory Park and a short walk to the town centre, train station and bus stops.

These apartments will be available from late Spring and let to applicants from the Housing Register at affordable rents.

For more information and to bid for one of these new homes, please visit the RBC Living & Homes website or phone us on 01932 838383.

In late 2019 we opened a new build development of four apartments in Egham while in 2018, we completed 12 homes in Englefield Green. The most recent development was five apartments in Addlestone in 2020.

Find out more at **www.rbc-homes.org**

New way to communicate with the Council online

Council tenants will now be able to contact us through our new secure website.

Our Housing Online system will make it much easier for you to view your records, look at documents and report antisocial behaviour or repairs.

You'll also be able to view all payments you have made, and a breakdown of your weekly rent and housing benefit payments.

The aim of the system is to bring everything together to make it easier for you to talk to us about an issue or any other topic as well as making requests for repairs.

To use the Housing Online system, you'll need to create a OneAccount via our main website runnymede.gov.uk

Tenants who would prefer to deal with us over the phone or in person will still be able to do so.

Find out more on back page!

Meet a member of the team...

Hi, I'm Jenni Mitchell and I am looking forward to my new role as Estate Services Team Leader.



Jenni Mitchell - Estate Services Team

I've spent the last 10 years working in social housing, ensuring that facilities are well maintained and meet the needs of residents.

The Council is investing in caretaking services and ensuring shared areas are clean and safe for everyone's benefit.

It's a great time for me to start this role as we will soon be launching regular cleaning of all communal areas, following an assessment of what's needed.

This is a new service and if you live in a block, we will be in touch over the coming months to let you know when the cleaning will begin, what will be included and how to contact us with any enquiries.

We want all our communal areas to be well presented and safe and we hope that residents will be pleased with this extension to our services.

If there's a problem in your neighbourhood, or you have ideas for improvements or would like to get involved in estate walkabouts, please contact me on jenni.mitchell@runnymede.gov.uk or call 01932 838383.



Say hello to the Runnymede and Elmbridge Youth Hub

Are you a Runnymede or Elmbridge resident?
Are you 18-24 years old?

The Youth Hub is a new free service here to support you in your journey to finding work, education, and training.

We can help you with:

- ✔ CV, application form, interview practice, employer engagement and positions.
- ✔ Employment, industry placements, work experience and apprenticeships.
- ✔ Education and training.

Where and when:

Main Centre – Brooklands College
At the Weybridge Campus.
Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays: 9.30am-4pm

St John's Church, Egham
Wednesdays: 10am-4pm

Community Centre, Addlestone
Thursdays: 10am-4pm

Get in touch with us:

youthhub@brooklands.ac.uk
www.brooklands.ac.uk/youthhub

Brooklands College

Elmbridge Borough Council

Runnymede Borough Council

Recharging for damage to homes

During 2021 the Council spent over £69,000 on rubbish and garden clearances from empty properties.

Council staff are creating a new policy on recharging, which is the way we reclaim money from tenants in certain circumstances.

Earlier this year we carried out consultation, including information on the Council's website and, at the moment, we are considering the feedback. At the Housing Committee in March, councillors will be asked whether they want to accept it as an official policy.

The draft policy proposes recharging tenants who neglect or wilfully damage their home, do not maintain their garden or alter their home in a way that damages the property. It sets out that tenants will not be offered a new council home until they have paid or put right any rechargeable repairs they are responsible for. The policy builds on the Tenancy Agreement to outline tenants' responsibilities and costs the Council can recover.

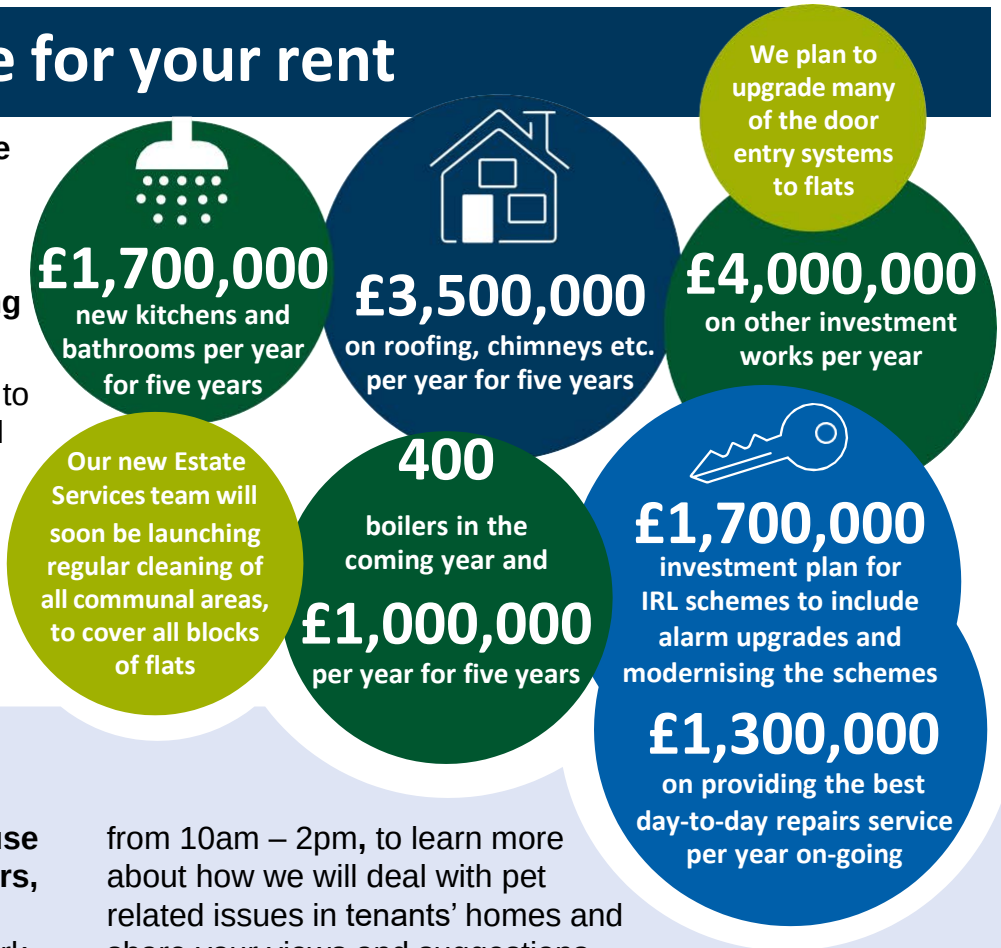
As a landlord, the Council expects tenants to be responsible for their property and actions and we encourage positive behaviour in taking care of their home. To support residents in this, the Council will offer an optional service to carry out chargeable repairs under this policy.

Delivering value for your rent

The greatest proportion of the rent received from tenants is earmarked for investment to ensure a good standard for our properties and for building much-needed new homes.

The Council has a commitment to deliver 125 new homes for local people over the next five years.

We have budgeted for a total of around £50 million investment over the next five years to deliver the following improvements for tenants:



National Pet Day

We love our pets, however irresponsible owners can cause misery to their pet, neighbours, and property.

Join us on 11 April at Victory Park from 10am – 2pm, to learn more about how we will deal with pet related issues in tenants' homes and share your views and suggestions.

Residents' Association relaunch

Runnymede Council Residents' Association (RCRA) is back, and it has a fresh look.

The association has relaunched itself by creating a new Facebook page. This page is more interactive, with regular posts, meetings and discussions on topics that matter to tenants.

RCRA can be a platform for tenants to have a voice, and to work together on projects that enhance the local community and the services you use.

The Facebook group is just for tenants.

Search for us on Facebook or scan the QR Code or email R.C.R.A@outlook.com

Under-occupying and home adaptations

Since 2014, the Council has spent more than £1.5 million on adapting homes for tenants. We're committed to supporting local people to live independently, and support safety, wellbeing, and quality of life.

We are aware that nearly a third of the Council's homes are predominantly under-occupied by older tenants.

There is a rising demand for homes, and to house as many people as possible we need to make the best use of our properties. This includes focussing adaptations on households who will have a long-term use of the property.

We have published a new policy on adaptations which aims to balance both sides of this issue.

The main points in the policy are:

- Before we agree to an adaptation, residents must see an occupational therapist to assess their needs. Once the assessment is complete, we will decide whether this a reasonable adaptation.
- We will usually only carry out adaptations if the home is not under occupied.
- The most we will spend on adaptations for households that are under-occupying will be £1,000.
- Walk-in showers and wet rooms will only be installed on ground floor level, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- We will not install a stair lift if a different property would be a better long-term option.

If you think your home is too big for your needs and you could downsize, email us on tenancy.management@runnymede.gov.uk

Everybody needs good neighbours

Can you believe we are now approaching the second anniversary of living with Covid?



Tim Noble - Community hero

Lockdown has been a challenging time to say the least – however we have seen communities pull together and watched individuals go out of their way to support our vulnerable. We want to say thank you to people who have made this difficult time a little easier.

Tim Noble continues to be a community hero. He went out of his way to support his neighbours in numerous ways, whether that was regularly telephoning them, doing their shopping, or collecting prescriptions.

One neighbour, Mrs Woodison said: "Tim was a life saver during lockdown. He would never see anyone stuck and was always willing to help."

Tim himself said: "I never gave it a second thought. I wouldn't want to see anyone struggle, and I'll do what I can to help those around me."

If you know a neighbour who deserves recognition get in touch.

Meet Inspector Evelyn



Evelyn - Resident Inspector

Keeping the areas around your homes in a tidy state is an important part of our work.

We listen to residents when jobs need doing and are grateful to everyone who makes the effort themselves.

Among them is Evelyn, one of our Resident Inspectors.

Evelyn ensures communal gardens where she lives are neat and tidy and lets us know if maintenance works are up to scratch.

She says: "My local area is important to me. After all, this is my home and I want to make sure it's looked after properly."

If you would like to become a Resident Inspector or would like to nominate a good neighbour for recognition, email listening@runnymede.gov.uk

Improving your homes



Everyone wants to live in a warm, modern and comfortable home, so we're working hard to upgrade the houses we own. It's part of our commitment to the Government's Decent Homes Standard.

During the next five years we aim to install over 400 new boilers per year with 'A' efficiency rating.

We also want to replace more than 200 kitchens and bathrooms per year for five years.

Over the same time frame, we're also planning to gradually install triple glaze windows, using the latest technology to ensure the maximum lifespan. We will aim to replace the windows in 75 properties per year.

Improving existing insulation, replacing roofs where necessary and upgrading door entry systems at our blocks of flats are also on our to do list.

New solar panels and insulation

This winter we contacted 133 Council owned homes to install solar panels and another 172 to upgrade the insulation.

This is part of our commitment to improve the energy efficiency of the homes we own and demonstrates the Council's commitment to reducing the impact we have on the climate.

At the moment, around a quarter of the homes we own - around about 800 properties - have an energy efficiency rating of D – we plan to improve the rating of all those homes by 2030.

We have committed to ensuring the existing homes we own have an EPC C energy efficiency rating as a minimum by 2030, if not before, and the new homes we build have an A energy efficiency rating.

Some of the cost of this work is funded by central government, through Green Homes Grants. We will continue to apply for grants to help us meet our commitments.

Launching more social housing

Thirty four households from the Council's housing register will soon be moving into Corn Merchant House, part of the Council's brand new development of flats and shops in Egham.

Corn Merchant House is part of the town's Magna Square project and the affordable housing flats will be managed by Accent Housing.

The new residents will be part of a fresh community in the town centre near the station.

Magna Square is made up of four residential buildings and a new town square.

Some of the apartments will be available for private sector rent or sale, and one building is for use by Royal Holloway University of London students.

Including affordable social housing has been one of the most important parts of the project, but it will also be home to a supermarket, cinema and other businesses.



Corn Merchant House - Magna Square, Egham

The development has an EPC A rating and is part of the work we are undertaking to regenerate Egham town centre, to support local people, improve the Borough's economy and enhance the environment around us.If you use Instagram, find us on @Magna_Square

Large print newsletter

If you would like to receive this newsletter in large print call the Council on **01932 838383** and ask for the Housing service.

You will need to give us your postal address and we will send a larger version to you.

Better housing for older people



Darley Dene is one of our IRL sites in Addlestone

First class older people's accommodation is one of our priorities and we have committed £1.7 million to upgrade our Independent Retirement Living (IRL) sites.

This summer, our contractors will hold workshops to get residents' input on the design and the changes they would like to see.

We will provide:

- Dementia friendly communal areas with modern, welcoming receptions.
- Café style lounges with links into the wider community.
- Outdoor areas that are engaging, dementia friendly and encourage interaction.
- Modern, digitally enabled technology.
- Provision of modern facilities including mobility scooter storage.

This work has come about following considerable engagement with existing residents of IRL sites, other tenants, applicants for social housing and residents of the borough, Local Councillors and wider stakeholders. This will continue throughout the process.

Have you updated your Universal Credit Journal?

If you are on Universal Credit and your rent is going up in April, you must update your Universal Credit (UC) Journal.

Some tenants did not update their UC Journals when their rents went up last April, which resulted in rent arrears.

If arrears continue to build up, we may have no choice but to start possession proceedings.

Please make sure that you update your journal before April 2022, so you receive the benefits you are entitled to, and so that you have enough money to cover your rent.

If you have had changes in circumstance, remember to report them within two weeks of when they occurred.

Updating your journal is your responsibility, if you need advice, contact Housing and Neighbourhood Services on 01932 838383.

If you are financially at risk, please contact us, we may be able to help you via the Government's Household Support Fund.

Help online:

Budget planning:
www.moneyhelper.org.uk

The Citizens Advice Bureau:
www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Grants and benefits advice:
www.turn2us.org.uk

Find out what support you are entitled to:
www.entitledto.co.uk

Cold weather payments:
www.gov.uk/cold-weather-payment

British gas Energy Saving Trust:
www.britishgas.co.uk/energy/british-gas-energy-trust.html

Supporting financial wellbeing

We understand how tough people's finances can be right now and the impact that it is having on many families' budgets.

We're increasing the work we do to help our tenants because we would like to do more to support you.

To do this in a useful way we're putting in place a plan which is likely to focus on helping to prepare tenants to manage their new home, supporting tenants to grow their income through education and employment, and maximising spare money after essential payments like rent and bills.

Doing this makes life easier if you have unexpected spending to contend with.

We will be asking for your views on this work soon. Keep an eye on our website at

www.runnymede.gov.uk/say

Injunctions to deal with challenging behaviour

While the vast majority of our tenants are good neighbours, we know there are a very small number who can make life very difficult for others.
We take robust action including going to court as a last step where there is serious antisocial behaviour or crime.

Judges expect that we and our tenants will have done everything possible to resolve problems first, before going to court. We also have to balance the needs of the community with the rights of individuals who may be vulnerable or have mental health issues.

Since 2020 we have gathered evidence, attempted to resolve issues ourselves and eventually secured injunctions against three separate tenants.

1. A tenant had been antisocial and made threats. We worked with neighbours to build crucial evidence to present to a judge who granted an injunction. This injunction was broken and the man was convicted of contempt of court and given a suspended sentence.
2. A tenant who had been aggressive to others. The injunction prevented him from going to his house for six months. After this ended, strict rules were put in place about areas he was excluded from due to his behaviour.
3. A tenant had behaved dangerously. The Council was granted an injunction which set out how he should behave in parts of the Borough and excluded him from his home and the Civic Centre.

Injunctions are always the last step in the process, but we are committed to acting when there is a substantial and long-lasting impact on the community.

Working with neighbours and other partner agencies is vital to build a substantial weight of evidence.

Your input helps fix antisocial behaviour

Our tenants give us the best insight into issues around small outbreaks of criminal behaviour in their neighbourhood.

When we picked up on concerns about behaviour around Garfield Road, Addlestone, we listened to people and took action.

We asked people to tell us how they felt about the area, and the amount and type of antisocial behaviour, how often and where it happened.

We held a Joint Action Day with Surrey Police, Fire and Rescue, Crimestoppers, and other partners, (pictured below) to encourage more of a two-way conversation with residents.

Here we spoke to tenants on their concerns about antisocial behaviour, the changes they would like to see, and how they feel these issues should be tackled.

So far, we have targeted our intervention where residents have been reported for allegedly conducting criminal damage and behaviour. Since we have focused our attention on the area, we have noticed a reduction in criminal damage.

We continue to look at other actions like key fob operated internal doors and lift access and CCTV.



Residents play a valuable role in reporting and working with us and other organisations; if you suffer from antisocial behaviour report it to us by calling 01932 838383 or at www.runnymede.gov.uk/community-safety/antisocial-behaviour

Now live: Housing Online!

REGISTER HERE

We're making it easier to manage your tenancy and deal with the Council

Scan the QR or visit our website

Create or log in to your OneAccount to sign up for Housing Online

You can:

- View rent, Housing Benefits, other payments, see refunds and any court costs.
- Report repairs, changes to tenancies and antisocial behaviour.
- Set up a Direct Debit for rent payments.
- View and update your contact details.
- Upload documents or photographs, and much more!

Supporting local people

Runnymede BOROUGH COUNCIL

Check out our new online news pages! See p3

Runnymede BOROUGH COUNCIL

Newsletter

July 2022 For Runnymede Borough Council tenants

Party time for Pets in the Park!

Thank you to all our tenants and your furry companions who joined us at our Pets in the Park event!

We are committed to promoting responsible pet ownership and we took to Victory Park with a Pup Up Café, the RSPCA, Cats Protection, and Company of Animals, to get your opinions on what should be included when granting permission for pets.

By listening to your views, we hope to successfully balance the needs of people wanting pets, neighbours, and the wider community when deciding each request to keep a pet.

Head to our online newsletter to find how we used your feedback to amend our Pet Policy.



Recharges: your views count

We asked for your views on recharging, which is when we reclaim money from tenants in certain circumstances, such as when someone has neglected or damaged their home.

The results of our research showed very strong support for the use of recharges. However, people were concerned recharges should be proportionate, flexible and the individual circumstances of tenants should be taken into consideration.

We are now developing a process to ensure those tenants who may be vulnerable or in difficult circumstances are not unfairly treated or worse off when we have to recover costs and also takes into account if the tenant has an excellent tenancy history.

Go to our website to see the full feedback results, and videos with Maggie Ward, our Head of Housing Services and Business Planning, who wrote the draft Recharge Policy, discussing some of the concerns raised and the suggestions put forward.

▶www.runnymede.gov.uk/tenant-engagement-1/recharge-policy-feedback

Keeping IRL tenants up to date on £1.7m improvements

Runnymede Borough Council is investing £1.7m in our Independent Retirement Living schemes and we're keen to keep residents informed from the early stages of the refurbishment programme.

In May we held four virtual workshops, giving residents a chance to talk to contractors Faithful and Gould which will carry out the work.

Residents were shown early architectural plans for each scheme. Our next step will consist of the mechanical and fire safety works.

We are planning more detailed consultation events to look at colour schemes, materials, and designs in upcoming months.





Off the Housing waiting list and into new homes!

In May we welcomed nine families to our newly-built apartments at St George's Road in Addlestone.

We held a small celebration for them to meet their neighbours, their Area Housing Officer, and councillors. We want to improve the relationship we have with our tenants, and one way to do this is by being more visible to people (see picture left).

We built these homes to support local people, by reducing the numbers on our Housing Register, and to enhance the local environment.

Speaking at the celebration, Cllr Jacqui Gracey, Chair of Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Committee, said: "It was fantastic to hear what a difference these properties are already making to the lives of our tenants. I am proud we are delivering on our commitment to provide both new and improved housing for even more local residents."

The development has been given a Safer By Design Award by Runnymede Beat to recognise the safety factors planned into the building to support security.

You can make changes happen

Audley House

Council staff met with residents of Audley House who brought several issues to our attention. We worked together to discuss solutions and have done the following:

▶As a goodwill gesture, organised a fly tip collection (disposal of bulky waste is tenants' responsibility).

▶Resolved the long-standing car park light issue.

▶The Estate Services Team cleared moss and litter, removed dumped items, swept and cleaned the bin store, and gave a general tidy up to the communal areas.



▶Spoke with neighbouring landlords to encourage garden maintenance and work to address their overgrown shrubs and trees.

▶Started preparatory work to clear back some of the brambles in the rear area.

▶Started work to install fencing and securing the communal garden to stop antisocial behaviour from non-residents.

Stoneylands Court

Residents invited us to see some of the issues they were experiencing in their community.



▶We've put in place a new large 'residents parking' notice at the entrance to stop non-residents from taking up the parking spaces.

▶Increased litter picking in the closed alleyway until a new bin can be put in.

▶Arranged for various items of rubbish to be cleared from the rear communal gardens.

▶Replaced fencing in one of the communal gardens.

▶Installed a new catch for the communal door.

Resident meetings and walkabouts are a great way to suggest and inform us of the improvements you would like to see in your community. Please get in touch if you would like a visit from one of our team on listening@runnymede.gov.uk

Estate area walkabouts

Heathervale Way



Residents joined Council staff and the Runnymede Council Residents' Association (RCRA) for a walkabout to talk about improving the area.

▶We have fixed potholes and are looking at improving signs.

▶We have increased time allocated to the site by our Estates Services Team so it is well maintained and free from rubbish.

▶To improve the look of our temporary accommodation, we fitted curtains in all homes and will provide lockable outdoor storage so residents can keep items safe, and the area tidy.

▶We will also be installing permanent drying areas at each home to reduce condensation indoors and help residents better manage their home.



Garfield Road

We asked residents of Garfield Road what changes they thought would improve their area and would tackle antisocial behaviour.

▶We used tenants' views to inform our next steps which include installing CCTV in blind spots, and we are installing a second fob entry door and fob entry lift to stop non-residents from loitering in the Surrey Towers stairwells.

▶Staff also took part in an evening walkabout to see if lighting needed improving. We will install lighting between the back of the properties to the rear car park to improve safety. We will also be re-laying the pathway behind Hampshire Court, painting the communal hallways in Surrey Towers and relaying the flooring.

▶More suggestions were made which we are considering, for example outside storage for deliveries.

Resident-focused approach to dealing with complaints

We've not been handling complaints as effectively as we would like to, so we are working with tenants to understand how we can do this better.

This means providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring tenants are aware of how to make a complaint.

We will be training our staff to ensure complaints are handled in a resident-focused way.

If you would like to be involved to help us improve our processes even more, email us on listening@runnymede.gov.uk

▶To make a complaint, visit our website at: www.runnymede.gov.uk/say/complaints

▶Find out about The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code at www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Go to: www.runnymede.gov.uk/tenants-news

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

Read more housing news on our website

- ✔ **WATCH staff explain our Recharge Policy.**
- ✔ **MEET Abi Travers, our new Head of Tenancy Services.**
- ✔ **SEE how we're introducing tenant satisfaction measures.**
- ✔ **FIND out how your views influenced our Pets Policy.**
- ✔ **READ consultations we need your views on.**

Scan with your phone

Energy rebate: key information

1. By now many residents will have received their £150 Council Tax energy rebate following the Government's announcement earlier in the year.
2. Payments have been made to everyone who pays their Council Tax by Direct Debit as we already hold their bank account details.
3. We are currently writing to households who do not pay by Direct Debit, to ask them to send their account information so we can make a payment.
4. People who do not provide account details will have the money credited to their Council Tax account, once we have carried out the checks we need to.
5. Even if you do not pay Council Tax because you receive full Council Tax support, you will still be eligible for the rebate.
6. You can find out more via our website: www.runnymede.gov.uk/council-tax/council-tax-150-energy-rebate

Help with your finances - survey feedback

People's finances can be tight, so we're increasing the work we do to help.

We asked tenants experiencing financial hardship what would be most useful to them, so the support we could offer is in areas that matter most.

After listening to people's views, we will provide individual support plans that could include budgeting tools, help accessing benefits, or advice on utility bills.

To see our survey results and next steps, go to www.runnymede.gov.uk/housing/financial-wellbeing-strategy

Grant bid to cut energy bills

We're bidding for Government funding in August to make homes more energy efficient.

If successful, up to 1,000 properties will benefit from improved insulation. This will run alongside the work already taking place to improve homes.

We hope that this will improve the heat retention in your home and reduce your energy bills.

This will also help the Council towards its target to be a net zero borough by 2030.

Work with us to get your home's improvements done

We use the rent money you pay us in several ways, including spending it on home improvements.

This helps improve your quality of life, and keep properties in good order.

We have begun rolling out home improvements, but we can only do this with your co-operation.

In 2021-22, we installed 110 kitchen and 110 bathrooms to the homes we own.

However, 90 properties that were due to have upgraded kitchens and bathrooms couldn't have them installed because the tenants refused.

We understand health issues can mean timing is an issue, but in other cases, tenants did not want to be disturbed, didn't respond, or would not grant access.

This is the plan for works over the next two years:

2022-23: Aiming to install 225 kitchens/bathrooms.

2022-23: Aiming to upgradeheating in 400 homes.

2022-23: Planning 100 electrical wiring updates

Summer 2022: We will begin the replacements of fire doors and flat doors in the communal areas.

Winter 2022: Start roof and window renewals.

Housing Online system update

Housing Online will be launching shortly. Initially you will be able to see your rent payments, rent account balance, repair history, repairs raised, plus details of reports of anti-social behaviour.

We had hoped to have the system working in March 2022 when we sent out our last newsletter.

Unfortunately it is not yet ready to go live. We are working to get it live as soon as possible – please bear with us, we will give you a further update in our next newsletter. In the meantime, you can visit our website www.runnymede.gov.uk/housing to find out about our services and to ask for help.