

Welcome to

Crawley Homes' Annual Report 2020-21



Last year was totally different to anything anyone could have predicted. The Covid-19 pandemic presented many challenges for both Crawley Homes and you, our tenants. As we move towards a new normal I would like to thank everyone for their help, patience and understanding as we tried and tested new ways of working to make sure we could keep everyone as safe as possible.

With safety in mind, the great performance of Liberty Gas in achieving 99.99 per cent compliancy must be mentioned. Completing all but one gas safety check in the necessary timescales, whilst complying with the Covid-19 rules, is excellent.

The new repairs and maintenance contracts with Mears Group and Wates Living Space started at the beginning of the year, although the first lockdown meant Wates didn't practically start until July.

At Bridgefield House we developed and sold the council's first shared ownership homes for over 15 years, giving local people the chance to get on the housing ladder with a home of their own. In addition to these we were able to let another 159 newly built homes across the town.

The development of new homes is a priority for the council but this brings its own challenges, the need

As Cabinet member for Housing, I'm pictured giving a socially distanced welcome to our new contractors, with Jason from Mears and Liam from Wates.

to find suitable sites to build on and the increasing costs of building materials are just a couple.

Close to my heart is the need to reduce our carbon emissions and the need to make homes energy efficient. I'm keeping a close eye on our involvement with the NetZero Collective.

In March this year I wished happy retirement to Karen Dodds, Head of Crawley Homes. She joined Crawley Homes in August 2007 and I had the good fortune to work with her for the last couple of years. We are in the process of recruiting a new Head of Crawley Homes and whoever gets the job will have a tough act to follow.

I'm looking forward to the next year, a new head of service, more new homes, new legislation in the form of the Building Safety Bill and further consultation with the Regulator of Social Housing on the Housing White Paper, as well as all the day to day business.

Councillor Ian Irvine
Cabinet member for Housing

Contact Us

Repairs

Including gas heating and hot water repairs
Telephone: **01293 438111**
Email: **housing.repairs@crawley.gov.uk**

Housing Officers

Contact information for your housing officer can be found at the top of your rent statement.

Any comments

If you have any comments about this Annual Report, let us know.

Email **TenantParticipation@crawley.gov.uk** or call Anne on **01293 438257**.

Produced September 2021



Money

Our money comes from your rent, with some from garage rents, Lifeline charges and recovering costs and recharges. We also spend some of the money we get from right to buy sales on new homes and occasionally we get some grant funding for specific projects such as the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF).

Crawley Homes, the council's landlord service, is a multi-million pound business so it's essential we manage our money well if we are to provide you with an excellent service.

Rent changes

The government's policy statement on rents for social housing sets out the rules for setting rents for local authority landlords and housing associations.

The rent guidance from government changed in April 2020 to allow rents to increase each year by up to Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus one percentage point.

The CPI value used is the figure at September of the previous year and in September 2019, CPI measured 1.7 per cent so after four years of reducing most rents, there was a rent increase of 2.7 per cent in April 2020 for both social and affordable rent properties.

Money for housing only

The rent you pay us goes into a specific bank account called the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). This has rules on what we can use this money for.

We can only use it to pay for housing related items, we can't use it to pay for things like rubbish collection, temporary accommodation or maintaining parks, your council tax pays for these.

Councillors are responsible for the finances of the council and make the final decisions on spending whilst following the rules.

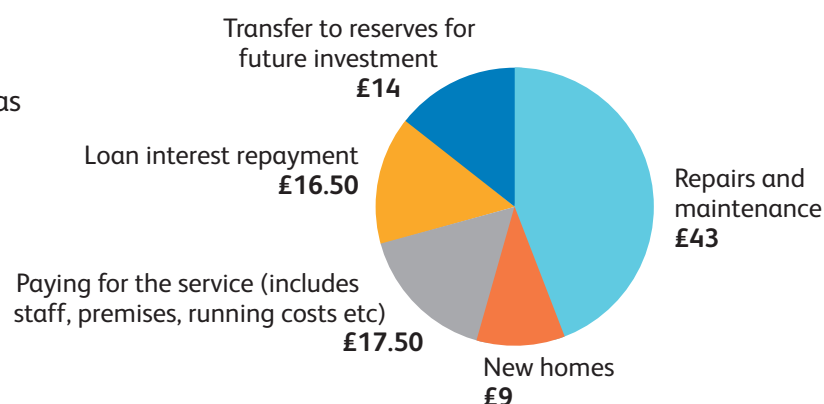
A simple balance sheet

Income		Expenditure	
Rents	£47,940,975	Repairs and maintenance	£10,093,045
Other income	£2,383,508	Planned maintenance	£11,602,350
Right to buy receipts/HIF/reserves	£7,300,396	New developments funded from rents	£4,446,778
		New developments funded from other funds and reserves	£7,300,396
		Sub-total	£33,442,569
		Paying for the service (includes staff, premises, running costs, etc)	£8,880,473
		Loan interest repayment*	£8,308,925
		Transfer to reserves for future investment	£6,992,912
		Sub-total	£24,182,310
Total	£57,624,879	Total	£57,624,879

*The interest on a loan from the Public Works Loan Board taken out in 2012 to cover our share of the national housing debt.

What your rent paid for

In 2020-21 every £100 in rent you paid was spent in the following way:



Crawley Homes

A few numbers to give you an overview of Crawley Homes during 2020-21.



Homes at
31 March 2020



New homes
added



Homes sold under
the Right to Buy



Homes we re-let
during the year

During the last year the Covid-19 pandemic created many challenges for the whole of Crawley Homes.

The Town Hall closed to the public and like many others across the country we worked from home, with our kitchen tables becoming our desks.

Where our services involved work we could not do from home or meant visiting you at home, extra precautions were put in place or we changed the way we did things.

Next year, new year

We are looking forward to a whole range of exciting new opportunities next year, allowing us to continue to improve our service to you.

New Head of Service

Recruitment for a new Head of Crawley Homes will take place during the year, with interviews in September.

New Town Hall

During next year we'll be preparing to move into our new home. We're not going far; the new Town Hall is next door to where we are now.

It's expected to be ready in the spring, but we don't have a moving in date yet.

New computer system

Our existing housing computer system is over 20 years old and showing signs of age. We've been making do and are looking forward to a brand new housing database and management system. For us it will be easier to use with information all in one place, for you it will mean we can be more efficient and there will be the option for you to see your rent account and access other housing services online.

New ways of working

We've already mentioned working from home during the pandemic and the introduction of more digital ways of working. As we move forward we'll blend working from home with working in the office. We'll continue to have virtual meetings as well as face-to-face ones and we'll look for digital ways that could make things quicker and easier for you. You can still contact us by phone or email and this won't affect our service to you.

New apprentices

Next year our maintenance contractors Liberty, Mears and Wates will recruit 12 apprentices, providing them with the first steps on the career ladder.

In addition we will also recruit a Housing Apprentice and an Apprentice Building Surveyor.

Repairs and maintenance

The Covid-19 pandemic created even more challenges than usual for Crawley Repairs Team.

Keeping everyone safe meant social distancing, masks, hand sanitiser and greater cleanliness for any operative visiting your home.

Only emergency repairs and repairs that constituted essential works were carried out in your home during lockdown periods as we followed government guidelines.

As some suppliers and manufacturers closed, when we came out of lockdown, we found shortages in some of our supply chains; fencing supplies and plaster were just a couple of things we had trouble getting.

Staff numbers fluctuated as people became ill or had to self-isolate. Some booked appointments had to be rescheduled at short notice and we can only thank you for your patience if this happened to you.

All in all a difficult year and we are looking forward to 2022.

New contractors

April 2020 saw the start of our new 10-year repairs contracts with Mears Group and Wates Living Space.

Preparations for the start of the new contract were disrupted and as Wates had to integrate their systems and staff with the way we work, their starting date was delayed until 1 July.



**99.99%
Compliance**

Gas safety

At 31 March 2021 only one gas safety check was outstanding, giving us a compliance rate of 99.99 per cent.

Liberty Gas rose to the challenges during the year and with safety in your home a priority, gas safety checks continued. Engineers donned Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to carry out the checks, took extra steps to protect you and rearranged appointments for those who were shielding.

The statistics

These are for all day-to-day repairs including gas and compare our performance last year with the previous one.

The effects of the pandemic shows in our figures. The number of repairs are down and the length of time to complete repairs increased as we followed rules and restrictions. The number of calls went up as you tried to find out what was happening and we completed more repairs on our first visit.

	2019-20	2020-21
Repairs completed, including gas repairs	25,818	24,453
Customer calls to the repair line	50,596	51,031
Percentage of appointments kept	96.9%	94.19%
No access	5.07%	4.78%
Average time to complete a repair	17 days	22 days
Average satisfaction with repairs for the year	88.8%	89.1%
Fixed on the first visit	78.21	86.33%

Planned maintenance

Day to day repairs are just part of what we do. Safety checks, for gas and electrics, fire safety, energy efficiency work, improvements, external decoration and replacement of elements in your home that have reached the end of their life are all part of our planned maintenance work.

In addition to all this we converted two small community rooms in sheltered housing into flats.

Last year



Electrical tests



Properties with new windows



Insulation installed



New boilers



Disabled adaptations

(recommended by Occupational Therapy)

“The plumber who came, was well protected for himself and for us. He was polite, kept us informed of what he was doing and why. He worked quickly and the work was fantastic. Mrs M

“Social distancing observed, nice young man did the repair to my shower switch. Gave me a bit of advice re: switching on and off, and asked if I was managing ok during lockdown. Ms A

“Friendly fella turned up, no messing about, he got on with the job and sorted it quickly and with no fuss. Top lad. Mr W

“Very polite lady, nice clean job, perfect. Please tell her.”

“The engineer arrived in good time. He was smart and wore an ID badge. He discussed Covid guidelines and wore a mask/shoe protectors/gloves. He completed the gas service with a professional manner. He sanitised all surfaces and the end of the work. Very happy with the visit. Ms M

Getting it right

We know repairs are important to you and they are the reason why most of you contact us. So, we make every effort to provide you with an excellent service, but sometimes things don't go quite to plan.

Last year we received 177 complaints about the repairs and maintenance service. This was two thirds of the complaints Crawley Homes received.

Missed appointments, delays and poor communication with both tenants and within the team were the main reasons for complaints.

In many cases if we had just got in touch when we knew there might be a problem, tenants would have been quite happy.

“Miss X says a repair was booked in for the morning and nobody turned up and upon calling the office she was advised that it had been rearranged”.

From these complaints we have learnt it is very important to keep you at the forefront of our minds and ensure we respect the appointment times made and if for any reason we do need to reschedule we let you know in good time.

It's not all doom and gloom though. We get many compliments each week for the service and our operatives and we make sure we tell them too.

Satisfaction with repairs 89.1%

Looking forward

NetZero Collective

We have joined NetZero Collective to help us look at how we can lower energy bills and provide warm, well ventilated homes whilst working towards cutting our carbon emissions to net zero by 2050.

Last year we recruited 10 tenants with homes that represent the different types of construction across the town. We surveyed the properties and collected energy usage data. Using this information we'll develop an individual Decarbonise Action Plan for each one.

Each plan suggests alternatives or additional items that could be fitted to homes. These include photovoltaic (solar) panels, battery storage, air source heat pumps, upgraded radiators and loft insulation.

Designs for the retrofitting will be based on the plan and we anticipate we should start work on the first homes in autumn 2021.

Zero tolerance

Keeping communal areas clear is an essential part of our fire safety policies and we'll be employing a Sterile Areas Officer to educate residents and to manage a zero tolerance approach to items found in communal areas.

Your tenancy

Here to help you

Lockdowns created financial pressures for many of you, some had to claim benefits for the first time in their life. Our Housing Officers were there to help you through the process.

As lockdown three started in January, Milton Mount, our largest block of flats, was evacuated due to a major gas leak. Residents were placed in temporary accommodation across the town and our housing officers were there, along with the Repairs Team and other council officers, to help Southern Gas Networks gain access and to help move everyone back in when the emergency ended.

Thank you

Your compliments go to show how much you appreciate what we do.

I would like to thank you for all your efforts and outcomes relating to my daughter. Thanks to your help she is a different girl. Your sympathetic approach to her situation and current actions do you and Crawley Council credit.

Throughout the pandemic you have been very helpful and helped me deal with my financial issues with kindness.

She was so nice and human and sympathetic, said just pay what you can and gave me the number for Housing Benefit as it may be worth a try. It put my mind at rest as she was so helpful.

Success stories

Our money advisors have also been busy helping some of you to claim all the benefits you are entitled to. Their help has led to some great success stories.

Hard work and determination helped a family to get a huge Housing Benefit overpayment of over £30,000 reduced to less than £500. Helping them to gather all the paperwork for the appeal and sorting out their complicated benefit situation, led to this life-changing result.

A referral to the team as the tenant couldn't afford to heat her home, led to an extra £550 per month for her. Helping to make an appeal against the decision not to award her Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and getting it backdated for a year will make a huge difference and a warm home.

Rents



Average weekly rent for a two bedroom home let at social rent



Average weekly rent for a two bedroom home let at affordable rent



Current tenant arrears as at 31 March 2020

Rent arrears

The amount of money owed by tenants for their rent at the end of March is less than it was a year ago. This is amazing news as many other social housing landlords are saying their arrears have increased significantly.

NB The rents used to calculate these averages do not include any service charges.

Evictions

During the last year no tenants were evicted.

The government brought in legislation and guidance which meant we could not evict tenants except for more serious cases including anti-social behaviour. In June 2021 the council agreed to continue these protections for all Crawley Homes' tenants until 31 May 2022.

Making payments

With the Town Hall closed and only open for appointments outside of lockdowns, many of you had to find alternative ways to pay your rent and you rose to the challenge.

Recurring card payments

We introduced an alternative way to make regular payments for your rent. The payment dates of Direct Debits didn't suit everyone so we can now offer you recurring card payments.

Regular payments from a debit card that can be weekly, fortnightly, monthly or four weekly. You can pay your rent on any day of the month, which works well if you are claiming Universal Credit or are paid four weekly.

No cheques

When the council made the decision to no longer accept cheques we helped tenants find other ways to pay their rent.

New tenants

It's not all about rent for our Housing Officers. By processing mutual exchange applications, they helped 105 tenants move home last year.

They carried out 'socially distanced' viewings with 474 tenants and dealt with many other tenancy enquiries, including messy gardens and estate management.

Empty homes

The Covid-19 pandemic, with its guidance and lockdowns, affected how quickly we could get empty homes ready and re-let.

Returning keys, complying with social distancing, and fewer staff were just a few of the difficulties. In June 2020 it was taking up to 80 days to get them let, but through sheer hard work by March 2021 this was down to 41 days.

Getting it right

The Housing Management Team received 39 formal complaints last year; of these nine were justified and eight were partially justified. We have put things right where we can.

From these we have learnt:

- Good internal communication and working together across the organisation to meet customer needs is vital
- Staff need to follow procedures so you get the agreed service
- Communicating with residents and keeping them informed at all stages of a process is important.

Involving you

Involving residents in our service takes many different forms, from surveys and one-off consultation meetings to our scrutiny panel.

All of this provides us with valuable information about how we are doing.

Thank you

Thanks to Ann, Gloria and Darren for their help in pulling this report together.

TLAP

Face-to-face meetings with our scrutiny panel, the Tenant and Leaseholder Action Panel (TLAP), were put on hold and we explored the use of digital meetings. A tentative start slowly developed but we are looking forward to getting together in the future. Those without a digital device could join these meetings by phone.

Topics covered and discussed by the panel included the Tenants' Annual Report, the council's proposed budget cuts, housing services in lockdown and the Housing White Paper.

Some members of TLAP attended a Mears national customer forum, digital of course, and found it really useful, hearing from other tenants across the country.

Going forward

Digital exclusion

We'll be running a small pilot project in sheltered housing to find out what, if anything, stops older residents from getting online. For many people keeping in touch digitally was one positive thing that came out of the pandemic.

White Paper

Published by the government on 17 November 2020, its full title is The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper.

Its proposals include a charter for social housing tenants setting out what they should expect from their landlord, with emphasis on safety, performance and resident engagement.

This is an exciting opportunity for us to review our resident involvement in the next couple of years and we'll be developing a new strategy next year. If you'd like to help us improve our services to you, please contact Terry on 01293 438434 to register your interest.

Satisfaction survey

Next year we intend to run our Tenants' Satisfaction Survey. Going digital, we propose to do this mostly online with links sent by email; some of you may also receive a paper copy. We'll be sending this to about a third of our tenants, so if you get one please fill it in. If you live in sheltered housing we intend to send you a separate survey.



The Annual Report – what did you think?

We want to collect some feedback on our Annual Report. To do this we will be running a digital MS Teams meeting. This will be on Wednesday 3 November between 12 noon and 1.30pm.

Want to take part? Email tenantparticipation@crowley.gov.uk and we'll send you a link. If you'd like to take part but can't do digital – we can connect you by phone. Call us on **01293 438257** and we can explain how.

New homes in 2020-21

During the year we added 159 brand new homes to our stock, including 31 flats for shared ownership.

● Scott Summers Court

Built on the site of the old doctors' surgery in Woolborough Road, Northgate, this development of nine properties consists of six one-bedroom and three two-bedroom maisonettes and flats.

Named after Marine Scott Summers who died from injuries received on operations in Afghanistan in 2007. A dedication service planned in 2020 will now take place in 2021.



Scott Summers Court

● Ifield Road

The necessary demolition of two houses at the end of Ifield Road in West Green gave us land to build five two-bedroom houses. These were let to tenants in August 2020.



Ifield Road

● Bridgefield House

Just across the road from the Town Hall and opposite the Police Station, this block of 98 flats was built on the former car park of Crawley College. There are 33 one-bedroom, 60 two-bedroom and five three-bedroom flats over eight floors.

Delays meant it wasn't ready for occupation until November 2020. Most of the 67 rented flats were then let over a period of six weeks, to ensure tenants had space to move in.

The remaining 31 flats were marketed for shared ownership.



Bridgefield House

● Forge Wood

Building continues in the town's newest neighbourhood of Forge Wood. During the year we received more homes from Phase 4A, we received the last of our homes in Phase 3B and the first of our homes in Phase 2C. **A total of 11 two-bedroom houses, 12 three-bedroom houses and 24 two-bedroom flats.**

Conversions and purchase

In addition we converted two former community rooms in sheltered housing into flats and brought one property.

Coming in 2021-22

We're looking forward to the next year when we are expecting to receive 31 houses and 51 flats in Forge Wood.

In July we will also be able to let one new four-bedroom house in Northgate, which has been delayed whilst we've dealt with legal issues.



Flats at Forge Wood

If you or someone you know would like help to understand this document please contact the Housing Service Promotion Officer on **01293 438257** or email housing.news@crawley.gov.uk