



BERRY BROOK
HOMES

Annual Report to residents

76%

of our residents
are happy with the
service we provide



Berry Brook Homes is a private local housing company providing affordable, subsidised housing to rent in Wokingham Borough.

e hello@berrybrookhomes.co.uk

T 0118 908 8479

A Wholly Owned Company of



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Welcome to Berry Brook Homes' annual report to residents 2022

This report gives our residents a snapshot of our performance between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022. It also gives updates on future plans for the organisation, the results of our bi-annual residents survey, plus sections on property exchange and how we have made changes to our service following feedback from residents. We hope you enjoy reading the report.

If you would like more information about Berry Brook Homes' performance please feel free to contact us at hello@berrybrookhomes.co.uk or visit our website www.berrybrookhomes.co.uk

Message from the Chair



As the newly appointed Chair of the Board for Berry Brook Homes, I am pleased to say that this annual report provides a great insight into the organisation, its operations, its residents and its aspirations. As you will see, there are areas where we excel such as gas safety compliance and complaints resolution, but there are also areas where we need to improve such as resident engagement. Whilst no organisation can consistently be 100% in its offering, it certainly acts as a target for customer satisfaction. At the heart of what we want to deliver as a landlord is good quality, affordable housing for local people that they can be proud to call home. Whilst the annual report talks about the strides we have made to overcome the unprecedented challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic, these are by no means over. Instead, in the face of ever more uncertainty caused by the current cost of living crisis, rising utility bills and economic uncertainty, we remain deeply committed to supporting our residents through difficult times.

As a year in review, it is pleasing to see the results from our residents' survey which, on the whole, demonstrate an increase in positive experience but also identifies clear areas for improvement. We know there is still more to do, and we remain committed to continuing to work together with our residents, putting you at the heart of our decision-making.

As we begin to look forward to 2023 I want to assure you that our residents remain our top priority. I look forward to leading the Board on our continuing journey of improvement and to delivering our plan to perfect our services, helping people in housing need and nurturing communities where people can realise their potential.

Prue Bray

Chair of the Board, Berry Brook Homes

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Meet the Team

Any of the **Berry Brook Homes** team can be contacted at hello@berrybrookhomes.co.uk



Monni Ryatt
MANAGING DIRECTOR



Karen Howick
HEAD OF OPERATIONS



Amy Griffiths
SERVICE & COMPLIANCE
OFFICER



Tracy Garner
SERVICE IMPROVEMENT
OFFICER



Michele Johnson
WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL'S
DEDICATED HOUSING OFFICER FOR
BERRY BROOK HOMES RESIDENTS

Michele can be contacted at
berrybrookhomes@wokingham.gov.uk
or on **07562 169 337**



Delivering what matters most in a difficult year

When looking back on 2021/22, the continuing effects of the pandemic are at the front of everyone's minds. Most of us have spent more time at home than ever before, and having a secure, safe place to call home has never been so important. We are pleased to report that our agent, **Wokingham Borough Council** (WBC), worked hard to maintain services for our residents throughout the lockdowns despite the restrictions, including repairs, new lettings, tenancy and financial help and advice, and supporting our residents at a time when they needed it most.

Support for those in financial hardship

People face hard choices with money throughout their lives. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of our residents have experienced job insecurity through unemployment, furlough, reduction in hours, shielding or self-isolation, and problems with benefit payments, resulting in real financial hardship through no fault of their own. More recently, rises in the cost of food, fuel and energy have made things worse. Our agent, WBC, has continued to provide money and debt advice, and link our customers to the right help when they needed it, making sure that nobody would lose their home because of these unprecedented circumstances.

We know that even now in post pandemic times many of our residents are still being impacted by Covid 19, as well as the rises in the cost of living. Help is available, so if you need any help or advice with money problems or are struggling to pay your rent or other bills, contact your housing officer, Michele Johnson either by phone on **07562 169337** or by email at **berrybrookhomes@wokingham.gov.uk**

Peach Place



Appointment of a Service Improvement Officer

Berry Brook Homes is committed to the continuous improvement of our services, so in January 2021 we appointed a Service Improvement Officer whose job it is to make sure we deliver and maintain excellent services, using residents' feedback to shape improvements. She will also regularly review our policies and procedures to make sure we are up to date and using best practice. You will hear from our Service Improvement Officer from time to time as she works to identify opportunities to improve the way we deliver across a range of services - you might be invited to take part in a survey for instance, or to join a resident panel to review a new or updated policy. Keep reading for more information on how you can help us to improve by becoming an involved resident.



Tracy Garner
SERVICE
IMPROVEMENT
OFFICER

Greys Court, Peach Place





100%

of grounds maintenance targets met



100%

of contracted cleans completed, with additional COVID cleans carried out at all our supported living schemes to keep our residents safe.



100%

of emergency lighting tested, completed and compliant



100%

of monthly required Legionella testing completed and compliant



100%

of fire alarm testing completed and compliant



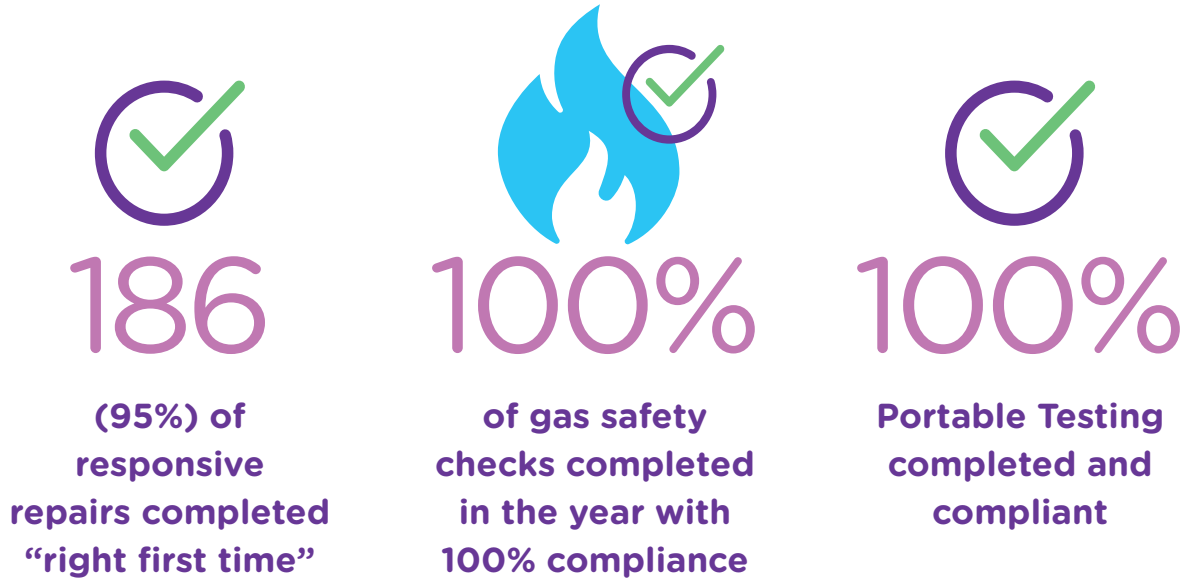
100%

of fire extinguisher services completed and compliant

21

Fire Risk Assessment actions were identified in the year. 2 were classed as “moderate” risk which means that measures should be taken to reduce the risk within a defined time period, usually within six months, and 5 as “tolerable” which means they did not constitute a health and safety risk to residents; All actions were addressed.

Annual report results reported in line with Key Performance Indicator targets as set by the [Berry Brook Homes Board](#) as per desired performance expectations.



4 anti-social behaviour incidents reported, all resolved successfully



2 official complaints received, both dealt with within published timescales

OUR SISTER ORGANISATIONS



A LOCAL HOUSING COMPANY

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Wokingham Borough Council
as Management Agent



“You said, we did”

Over the past year, some of our residents have told us they feel their current fixed term tenancy does not give them the security they would like in their home, that they do not feel settled knowing they will have to renew their tenancy in a few years’ time with the possibility of having to find another home if their tenancy is not renewed. We think everyone should feel secure and

settled in their home without having to worry about whether their

tenancy will come to an end every five years, so we have listened to what residents have said and have taken the decision to transition those residents currently on fixed term tenancies to assured periodic (also known as “lifetime”) tenancies. This change will not only give those who are keeping to the terms of their tenancy agreement a greater sense of security, it will also support families to put down roots, find schools and work, make local connections and invest in their communities.

However, before going ahead with this change, we wanted to make sure our residents were happy with it, so we sent out a survey. We’re delighted that so many of our residents took the opportunity to give us feedback, with 55% having their say. **The outcome was resoundingly positive with 100% of those who responded saying they support the change.**

What residents say about our plans to replace fixed tenancies with **assured tenancies**:

“Just wanted to say thank you on behalf of our family, it’s very kind of you to change our tenancy to a lifetime tenancy, it gives us the security we all need in this difficult time.”

“It will give me peace of mind. I do not have to worry about being asked to move or being told my tenancy has elapsed.”

“Wonderful idea.”

“Absolutely fantastic that you are listening to tenants, well done.”

“I would love that as it will feel more like my home.”

“I think this is a great idea and puts my mind at ease greatly.”

“I think this is a brilliant idea, especially for when we have children that have grown up in a Berry Brook Home as we have made friends with neighbours and would love the opportunity of a house for life ... Thank you for the opportunity!”



Property Exchange

Did you know you may be able to swap your home with a tenant of another housing association or local authority? Even though our tenants do not have the formal right to exchange, Berry Brook Homes will happily consider property exchanges on a case by case basis.

A property exchange is similar to a mutual exchange (the term used when social housing tenants swap their homes), but there are some differences. Once an incoming tenant has completed a property exchange into a Berry Brook Homes property, they may not have the same rights as they did under their previous tenancy. For example, they will not have an automatic right to another property exchange at a later date, and they will not be able to buy their home.

However, our plan to transition all our tenancies from fixed term to assured (see page 7 for more details) will also apply to incoming tenants who have taken a property exchange, and this should make it easier for our tenants to find a swap.

Berry Brook Homes is not registered on any of the mutual exchange websites so you will need to look for someone to swap with through other channels such as social media, or advertising your property locally such as in shop windows or newspapers. **But you must not offer money to encourage someone to swap with you.**

If you would like to know more about swapping your home, please contact us at hello@berrybrookhomes.co.uk

What happens next?

We are currently going through the legal work involved in transferring everyone over to lifetime tenancies, which may take a few months. We will keep residents informed of progress, but hope to be ready to start signing lifetime tenancies in early 2023. If you have recently signed a new fixed term tenancy, or if your current tenancy is due for renewal before we are ready to introduce lifetime tenancies, we will still transition you to an assured tenancy as soon as we can.

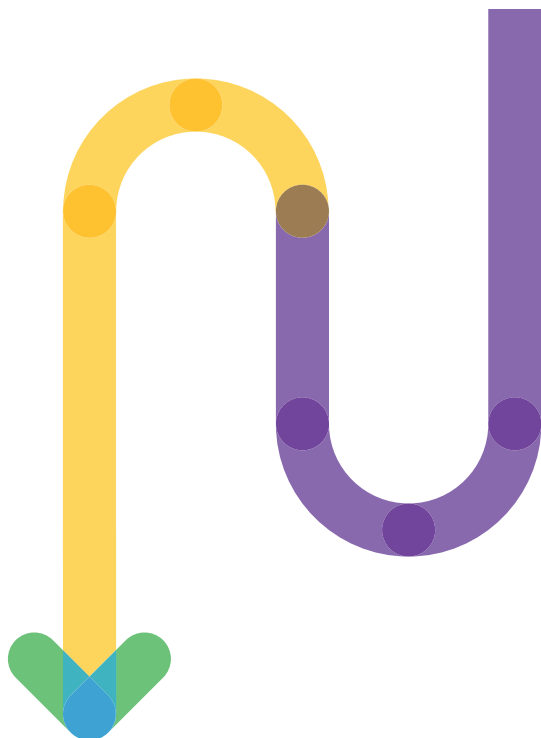
Thinking about making alterations or improvements to your home?

The property you rent from us is your home and we are usually happy for you to make alterations or improvements, but **you do need to ask our permission before doing anything major** such as putting in patio doors, making any alterations that involve electrical or gas works, or replacing the kitchen or bathroom. **You don't need permission to re-decorate or put up pictures or shelves.**

If you would like more information on the type of work we will allow or if there's something you want to do to your home and want to apply for permission, please email us at hello@berrybrookhomes.co.uk

Grovelands Park, Winnersh





Resident engagement

Our residents have always been at the heart of our organisation, playing a key role in helping us to build on the things that we do well, and develop the areas where we can do better.

We believe that by involving you in decisions that affect your homes and neighbourhoods, we can make sure we are delivering services that meet your needs.

There is a range of opportunities for residents to give feedback, scrutinise our performance, challenge our decisions, and share ideas to help influence and improve services for everyone. We regularly ask residents for feedback through surveys, for example following a repair or after raising a complaint or anti-social behaviour case, and in April this year we sent out our two-yearly resident survey asking all our residents to give us feedback on how we are performing as a landlord. After all, who knows the service better than our customers?

For more information on becoming an involved resident, contact us directly at hello@berrybrookhomes.co.uk

Many tenant involvement activities are run by our agent, Wokingham Borough Council, and Berry Brook Homes tenants are invited to take part. For more information, visit Wokingham Borough Council's Tenant Involvement page: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/housing-and-tenants/tenant-involvement/> or call the Residents Resource Centre on **0118 978 2494** or email tenant.involvement@wokingham.gov.uk

Resident satisfaction survey 2022 results

We are delighted with the response to this year's resident survey, with 55% of our residents having their say.

Things we are doing well

82% of residents are happy with the quality of their home.

76% are happy with the service provided by Berry Brook Homes.

83% are happy that Berry Brook Homes provides a home that is safe and secure.

61% agree Berry Brook Homes gives them the opportunity to make their views known.

82% agree that Berry Brook Homes is good at keeping you informed about things that might affect you as a resident.

Areas where we have improved

Our last resident survey in 2019 showed that repairs and maintenance was an area where we could improve with just 40% of residents saying they were happy with the service, so we are pleased to say that despite the occasional restrictions on the repairs service due to the pandemic, 61% of tenants who had a repair during 2021/22 are now either fairly happy or very happy with the way Berry Brook Homes deals with repairs.

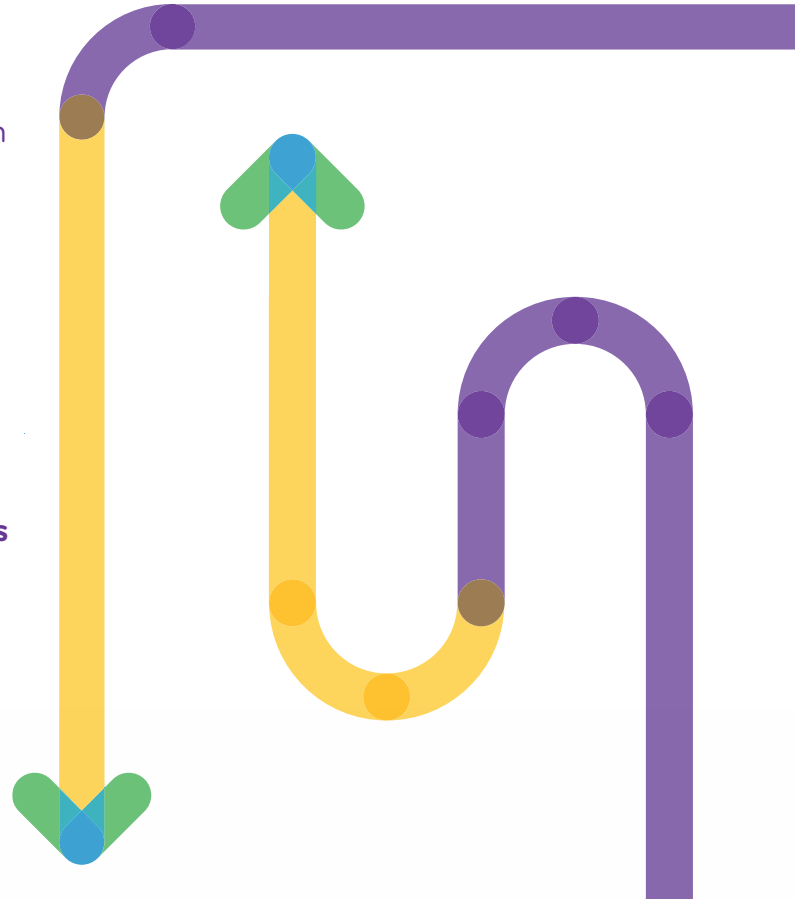
Another area where we have improved is satisfaction with Berry Brook Homes as a landlord. We have been working hard to improve our residents' experience over the last two years, and we are very happy to report that 76% of our residents are happy with the service we provide, compared with 60% in 2019. Whilst we feel this is a great achievement, we know there is always room for improvement and we want to strive for even more satisfaction amongst our residents so we will continue to look for ways to make our services even better, involving all our residents along the way.

Things we could be doing better

Just 54% of residents who took part in our survey agree that Berry Brook Homes listens to residents' views and acts on them. We have been working hard over the past year to devise ways of getting feedback from residents that we can use to make improvements to our service and reassure residents that we are listening.

One outcome of listening to our residents is the programme of **improvement works currently taking place at our Phoenix Avenue development following feedback from residents** about historical defects and repeated repairs issues. We are confident that the programme will put these problems right once and for all, and residents of Phoenix Avenue can enjoy their homes without repeatedly having to report repairs.

Another area where we have acted on what our residents say is the phasing out of fixed term tenancies, replacing them with assured ("lifetime") tenancies. **You can read more about this on page 10.**



Phoenix Avenue

The Social Housing White Paper

Although Berry Brook Homes is a private landlord, we endeavour to treat our residents as if they are social housing tenants as far as we can.



In November 2020, the Government published their Social Housing White Paper, which is designed to give social housing residents a greater voice, empowering tenants and strengthening consumer regulation. The White Paper covers seven key themes of greatest direct importance to the everyday lives of residents, all linked by one common thread – that the safety, wellbeing and opinions of residents is paramount.

Key themes of the Social Housing White Paper:

- To be safe in your home
- To know how your landlord is performing
- To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly
- To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator for tenants
- To have your voice heard by your landlord
- To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in
- To be supported to take your first steps to ownership

Berry Brook Homes is committed to being accountable and transparent, and to giving our residents a strong voice. Our performance continues to improve year on year, but we know that it is important to continue to improve our residents' experience. Building good-quality affordable homes, providing value for money services and supporting our residents is at the heart of everything we do. We look forward to working with our customers to further improve our services. If you would like to comment on any of the themes covered in the White Paper, or indeed on any aspect of our services, please email us at hello@berrybrookhomes.co.uk

New complaints handling process

In July 2020 the Housing Ombudsman published its Complaint Handling Code.

Although the Code applies to social housing landlords, in line with our aim to treat our residents the same as if they were social housing tenants, **Berry Brook Homes has adopted the new Code**. The new Code encourages landlords to use the feedback provided by complaints in a constructive way and provides a structure to help landlords handle complaints effectively, learning from them in order to prevent future complaints.

We are proud to say that we had just two formal complaints in 2021/22, both of which were dealt with quickly and fairly, settled satisfactorily, and in line with the new Code. Our procedure for dealing with complaints has three stages, each allowing complainants to take the matter further if they are unhappy with the outcome. Complainants also now have the right to involve the Ombudsman at any stage of the complaints process.

The Housing Ombudsman expects landlords to carry out regular self-assessment of their complaints process and to take appropriate action to ensure their complaint handling is in line with the Code. Landlords are expected to report the outcome of their self-assessment to their Board members and to make the assessment available to the public. If you would like to read our self-assessment, please go to www.berrybrookhomes.co.uk and click on the About Us tab.

Anson Crescent, Shinfield



Reporting disrepair

Did you know that tenants can complain if their social landlord refuses to do repairs, does them badly or takes too long to carry out the work?

You may have heard or seen on TV and in the media stories of people living in poor conditions because their landlord has not carried out repairs when they should have; this is classed as “disrepair”. Berry Brook Homes has a good track record for dealing with repairs, but if you feel at all unhappy about how a repair has been done or if you have any ongoing repair issues that you are having trouble getting resolved, please contact us directly either by email at hello@berrybrookhomes.co.uk or by phone on **0118 980 8479**.

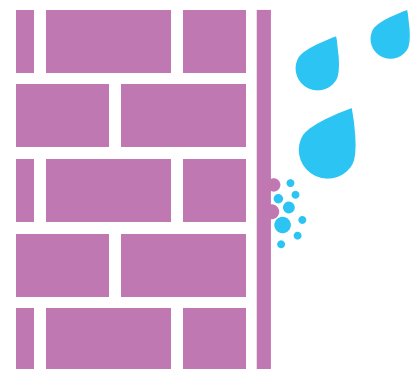
Both Berry Brook Homes and the tenant are responsible for looking after and maintaining the property. To see who is responsible for what, and what you can expect of us when reporting a repair, please refer to your tenant guide.

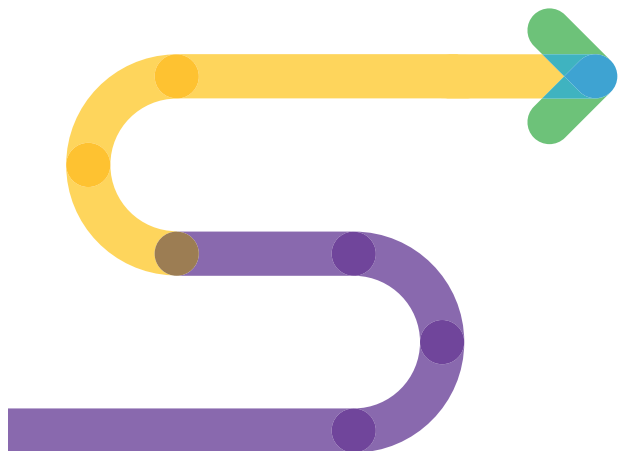
The Tenant Guide can be viewed on our website here: www.berrybrookhomes.co.uk/about-us/

Damp and mould

Another topic that has been highlighted in the media recently is the problem of damp and mould in homes, and in response to this the Housing Ombudsman has published new guidance for landlords. Berry Brook Homes properties are built to a high standard and to the most up to date regulations. However, we know that damp and mould can and does occur for all sorts of reasons, and in the great majority of cases the problem can be dealt with quickly and effectively. If you are concerned about damp and mould in your home, please report it immediately in the same way you would report any other repair. The sooner you report it, the sooner it can be resolved.

If you would like to read more about the new guidance, please visit the Housing Ombudsman’s website at www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk





A reminder on how to report repairs

Email housingrepairs@wokingham.gov.uk
(monitored 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday)



WBC Facebook page
(monitored 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday)

For **non-heating repairs**, contact the repairs helpdesk on:

0800 515 287

(monitored 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday)

For **heating-related repairs**, call the heating repairs helpdesk on:

0800 389 8789

(monitored 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday)

For the **emergency repairs helpdesk** please call:

0800 515 287

(Outside office hours, weekends and bank holidays)



Compliments from our residents

“I really love living here I feel safe and looked after well. Thank you for all your support on keeping the place clean and looking nice on the streets and in the communal area.”

“Our new housing officer Michele is very proactive and seems to be getting things done and get the ball rolling!”

“Thank you Michele you are awesome, you are always a pleasure to chat with, keep up with the great work.”



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