

2021 / 22

# ANNUAL HOUSING REPORT



Harrogate  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
<b>About us - facts and figures</b> .....	4
<b>New homes</b> .....	5
<b>Your rent</b> .....	6
<b>Allocations</b> .....	10
<b>Homelessness</b> .....	11
<b>Supported living</b> .....	12
<b>Repairs</b> .....	14
<b>Home Safety</b> .....	15
<b>Anti social behaviour</b> .....	16
<b>Complaints</b> .....	17
<b>Tenant involvement</b> .....	20
<b>Contact us</b> .....	24

**Front cover (left to right):**

New bungalow at Fairfax Avenue,  
Harrogate

Editorial panel members

2021 Garden competition -  
best small garden

2021 Garden competition winners

Rear view of new terraced houses on  
Valley Road, Darley

Front view of new terraced houses on  
Valley Road, Darley

2021 Garden Competition -  
overall winning garden

Kitchen at new terraced house  
on Valley Road

Welcome to this year's annual housing report. Our report covers the period from April 2021 to March 2022.

It's true to say the year had its challenges but I'm sure like me you will have breathed a sigh of relief as the Covid restrictions were gradually lifted and some sense of normality began to return to our daily lives. Lockdowns and sickness inevitably had an impact on staff and - in turn - our services, but I'm immensely grateful to my teams for going the 'extra mile' to ensure disruption was kept to a minimum and your homes remained safe and well maintained.

2021/22 saw us start work in earnest preparing for the launch of North Yorkshire Council - due to 'go live' in April, 2023. The new unitary authority will replace the current two tier structure of county and district councils and will cover the geographical area of 7 existing districts – Richmondshire, Craven, Hambleton, Harrogate, Ryedale, Selby and Scarborough. Whilst Harrogate Borough Council will cease to exist in the spring of 2023 our work will very much continue under the new structure. I'm confident that tenants will see very little change in the way we deliver your services and I'm pleased to confirm that Harrogate Civic Centre will remain the main service delivery point in our area.

Of the 7 district councils affected by this change just three manage large numbers of social homes – Selby, Richmondshire and Harrogate. So teams from the three areas are spending a lot of time making sure we can benefit from the opportunities of working together and to bring some consistency to the way we run our services and maintain our homes. We've also created an opportunity for involved tenants from each area to begin meeting to share ideas and discuss what 'involvement' should look like in the new organisation. Exciting times!

You can find out more about the new North Yorkshire Council by visiting the website below.

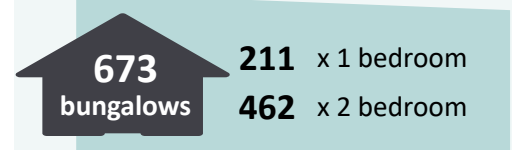
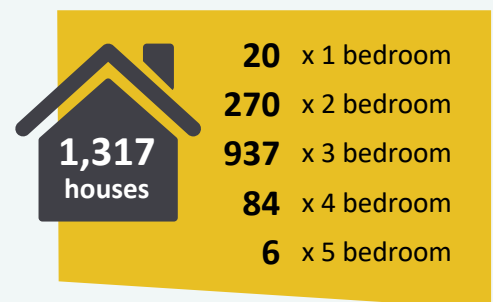
[www.northyorks.gov.uk/new-council-and-devolution-northyorkshire](http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/new-council-and-devolution-northyorkshire).



Madeleine Bell  
Head of Housing and Property

## Housing Service at a glance!

Our **3,791** council properties were home to 6,685 people in March 2022 including 1,362 children.





# About us

## In 2021/22 we...

Had 3,791 council homes, 199 leasehold properties and 43 shared ownership properties

**4,033**

2020/21 **4,025**

2019/20 **4,005**

Built or bought 23 new homes for social rent

**23**

2020/21 **47**

2019/20 **16**

Received £16,542,000 in rent payments

**£16,542,000**

2020/21 **£16,496,000**

2019/20 **£15,759,000**

Charged an average weekly rent of £83.04

**£83.04**

2020/21 **£81.72**

2019/20 **£79.31**

Evicted no tenants

**0**

2020/21 **0**

2019/20 **6**

Spent an average of £25.33 per week on repairs for each home

**£25.33**

2020/21 **£22.21**

2019/20 **£21.81**

Had rent arrears of £151,549 at the end of the year

**£151,549**

2020/21 **£144,446**

2019/20 **£176,564**

Dealt with 40 cases of anti-social behaviour

**40**

2020/21 **88**

2019/20 **52**

Installed 217 new lifeline systems

**217**

2020/21 **224**

2019/20 **260**

Had an average of 28 days between one tenant leaving a home and it being ready for another to move in

**28**

2020/21 **29**

2019/20 **13**

Re-let 268 council homes

**268**

2020/21 **278**

2019/20 **341**

Supported 1,260 households at risk of homelessness

**1,260**

2020/21 **1,446**

2019/20 **1,470**

Had 1,892 households on our waiting list

**1,892**

2020/21 **1,688**

2019/20 **1,827**

Received 111 complaints about our housing service

**111**

2020/21 **66**

2019/20 **89**

Spent £30,505,000 (inc £15k for loan repayment) from the housing revenue account

**£30,505,000**

2020/21 **£15,177,000**

2019/20 **£14,633,000**

## It's all about homes!

During 2020/21 we built **7** new homes for social rent. These were:

- 3 x two bedroom terrace homes at Valley Road, Darley – this site was previously occupied by council garages which were demolished to make way for these much needed new homes.
- 2 x three bedroom semi-detached homes and a one bedroom bungalow at Fairfax Avenue, Harrogate.
- a two bedroom bungalow at Springfield Drive, Boroughbridge.



Valley Road, Darley



Fairfax Avenue, Harrogate



Springfield Drive, Boroughbridge

We also bought back **16** ex-council homes – these were homes which had previously been bought from the council under the 'right to buy' scheme but which the owners had decided to put on the market.

We can't always buy back ex-council homes but it makes sense when we can – we know the houses and have a good idea of what repair and maintenance will be needed and they're often in areas where we're already responsible for maintaining lots of other properties.

With **354** completions, it was another really good year for the construction of 'affordable' homes by private developers and housing associations. Of this total, 233 were for letting and 121 were shared ownership properties. Building affordable homes is often a condition of planning permission being granted for larger residential developments. The council has 'nomination rights' for all of the new rented dwellings so we can allocate them to people on our waiting list.

## What is affordable housing?



'Affordable' housing is a term coined by Government and currently includes:

- **Homes available on social rent** – like the majority of homes managed by the council and some of the homes managed by housing associations in our area.
- **Homes offered on 'affordable' rents** – which the Government has defined as rents which must be no more than 80% of average local market rents.
- **Shared ownership** properties where people can part buy/part rent their home.

## Right to buy

Tenants who are living in a council property and have been a council or housing association tenant for the previous three years, may have a right to buy their home. During the year, 18 of our homes were sold through the right to buy process. Properties were sold in Boroughbridge, Harrogate, Knaresborough, Pateley Bridge and Ripon, as well as in the villages of Darley, Huby, Sicklinghall, Spofforth and Staveley. Fifteen of the properties sold were 3 bedroom houses, two were 2 bedroom houses and there was also one 2 bedroom bungalow.

Over the year we received just over **£16.5 million** in rent payments. The total balance for arrears (unpaid rent) at the end of the year stood at **£151,549**. This is **£7,000** more than the previous year although our figures continue to compare favourably with many other providers of social housing. However, there are still far too many tenants at risk of the council taking legal action against them and, in some cases, of the council asking the Courts for a warrant to them from their home.

**It's an obligation of the tenancy agreement that our tenants pay the rent when it's due. Housing costs are everyone's most important payment and rents must always be paid first.**

Rent becomes due for payment every Monday and all tenants must ensure that the money reaches their account within the week that it is due. This can depend on how or where someone is paying their rent – our team of Housing Officers (Income Management) can explain more.



## **What if I'm struggling to pay my rent?**

If for any reason you are struggling to pay your rent you must contact your Housing Officer (Income Management) on 01423 500600 immediately. Your Housing Officer will be able to give you advice and most problems can be resolved quickly without the need for legal action; a payment plan can be agreed to repay the arrears and ensure full compliance with your Tenancy Agreement.

Help is also available with budgeting and checking you are receiving all benefit payments to which you may be entitled.

Of the arrears figure, just over £53,000 were arrears owed by people who were claiming Universal Credit (UC) at the end of the year. Again, this was an increase on the previous year and it's important tenants speak to us if they're having difficulties. Your Housing Officer (Income Management) has a good knowledge of Universal Credit and can help you to understand all aspects of your UC Journal, including how to report changes in your circumstances, how to report your rent increase and how your payment has been calculated.



## **Don't know who your Housing Officer is?**

Every tenant has a Housing Officer (Income Management) who has responsibility for managing their rent account. This officer will answer any questions you may have about your rent charge, agreeing payments and advising you on benefit matters. You also have a Housing Officer (Estates) who deals with day to day issues affecting your home. If you're not sure who your Housing Officers are ring our Customer Services team on 01423 500600 or search for 'housing team' on the council's website at [www.harrogate.gov.uk](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk) and enter the name of your road or village.

# Your rent

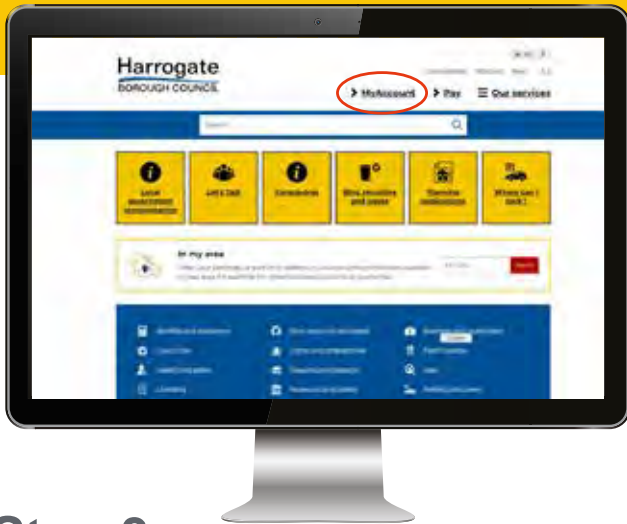
## How to pay your rent

You can manage your rent account on-line, check your balance, see transactions and make a payment. Have your rent account number handy, then just follow these easy instructions:

### Step 1

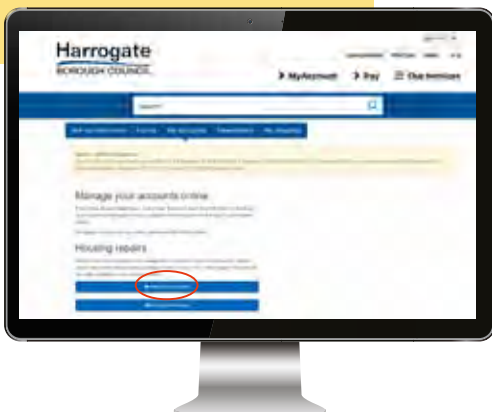
Go to [www.harrogate.gov.uk](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk) and click on **MyAccount** in the top right hand corner. If this is your first time using our online service you will need to register for an account – click on **Create a new account**.

If you already have a My Harrogate customer account, you will need to sign in – click on **Sign in to your account**.



### Step 3

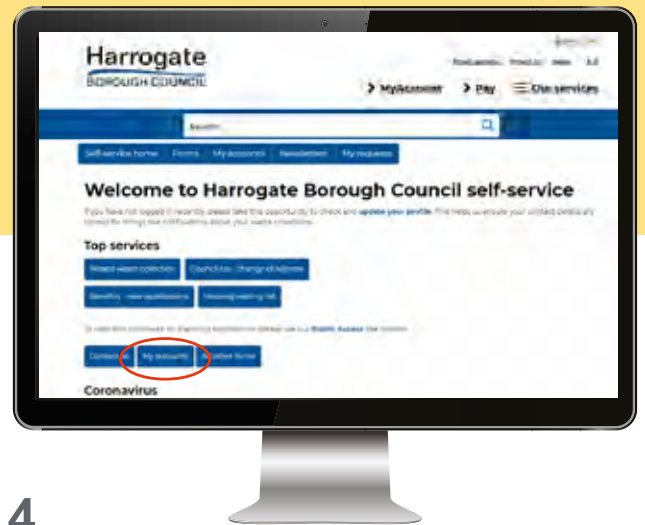
The first time you'll need to add your rent account – click on Add your accounts.



If you need any help setting up your rent account online please ring our Customer Services team on 01423 500600.

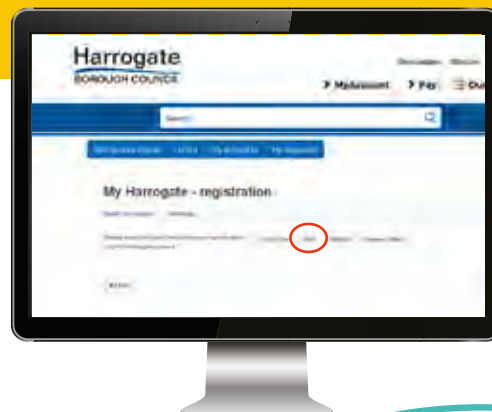
### Step 2

Click on the **My accounts** tab – you can register and view your rent account from here.



### Step 4

Register your rent account by clicking on the tab **Rent** – you'll need to enter your rent reference number. And remember that you can now set up your benefits and council tax online accounts – just click on the relevant tab.



*and you're done!*

*Please remember – you can no longer make any payments in person at our Civic Centre in Harrogate*



## Other ways to pay your rent

### By direct debit

This is a great way to pay your rent and almost a third of our tenants already use this method. You need to complete a paper form and choose whether you wish to pay on 1st or 15th of each month. Upon receipt of the form your payments will be calculated depending upon how many payment dates are left within the year. You should continue to pay your rent on a weekly basis until notified in writing that the direct debit has been set up.

### By phone

Call our 24 hour automated payment line on 01423 500600; please note, credit cards are not accepted and you will need your 10 digit rent reference number.

### By bank standing order/ internet banking

You will need to set this up yourself. Your Housing Officer can provide you with the council's bank details and advise you of the amount you need to pay, or a bank standing order form can be sent to you.

### At PayPoint or Post Office

You can pay at any retailer/Post Office in the UK displaying the PayPoint logo; remember to take your All-Pay payment card with you. If using your payment card, please make sure you use your account number at the bottom left of the card, not the long number across the middle.



If using your payment card, please make sure you use your 10 digit rent reference number at the bottom left of the card.

**Please do not use the long number across the middle.**

## The importance of income

To manage our council housing we need the rent money so that your homes can be properly maintained and you have access to the range of services you need. All your rents are paid into our Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Money in the HRA can only be spent on the council's housing service. This includes ongoing and planned maintenance work to tenants' homes and flats and construction of new homes for social rent. Money from the Housing Revenue Account cannot be used for any other general council activities.

Your rent only pays for the council's housing service – it's not used for anything else.

## In 2021/22 we paid almost **£18,353,000** in to the Housing Revenue Account.

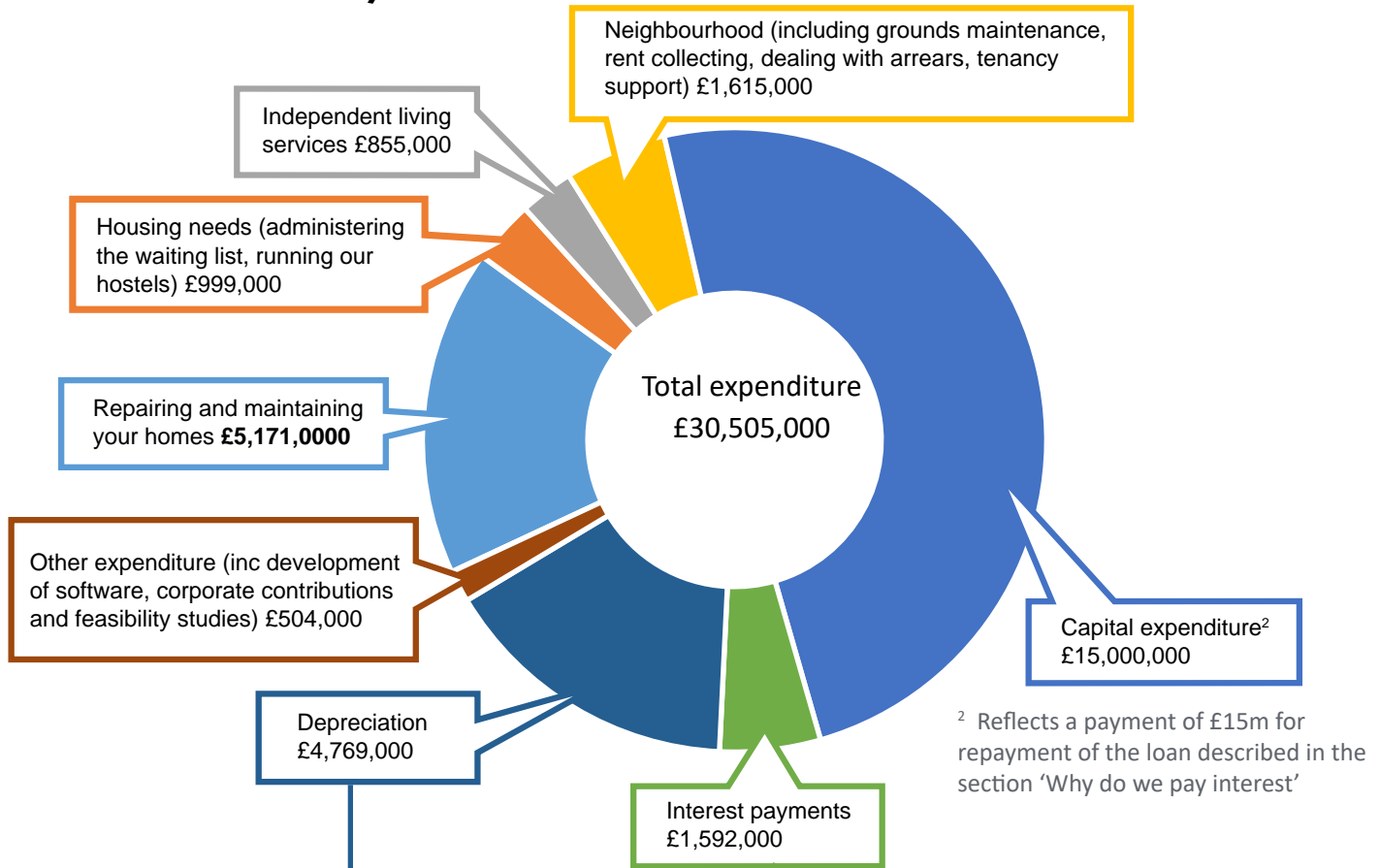
This was made up of:

Rents from all council houses	£16,542,000
Rents from other properties we own	£170,000
Charges for services (like Lifeline)	£811,000
Contributions from the council's general fund	£136,200
Investment income	£26,000
Other <sup>1</sup>	£667,800

<sup>1</sup> Includes money from the Government for feed in tariffs on those properties where we are generating 'surplus' electricity from solar panels etc as well as recharges to the Council's General Fund where our in-house maintenance team have carried out work on properties not within the Housing Revenue Account



## Here's how we spent the money in the Housing Revenue Account in 2021 / 22



### What's depreciation about?

It's tempting to think that houses last forever but that's not really the case. There will come a time when our homes will need to be rebuilt or have very major work done to them.

The accounting code of practice requires the council to apply a depreciation figure to the building element of our homes. That includes the roofs, windows, kitchens etc, but not the land that the homes sit on. This sum is then transferred to what's called the Major Repairs Reserve. The Major Repairs Reserve is still held within the Housing Revenue Account and the money within it is used to fund the planned maintenance programme and other improvements to our homes each year.

### Why do we pay interest?

In 2012, the council had to pay £68m to the Government to 'buy ourselves out' of the old 'Housing Subsidy' system. Up to then we'd had to make big payments to the Government each year and those amounts were increasing making the system unsustainable. So the Government set a one-off amount for each local authority to pay – and we took out a loan. We've previously paid off a big part of the loan but pay interest on the remainder. In 2021/2 we paid off a further £15m of the loan which is reflected in the capital expenditure figure shown.

## Re-letting our homes

With almost 1,900 households on the waiting list for a council house it's important we keep the time between one tenant moving out and another moving in as short as possible.

As soon as a home becomes empty our 'voids' team go in and make any repairs needed. The amount of work involved varies – in most cases our tenants have looked after their home very well and there's not a great deal which needs to be done but in others more work is needed. In 2021/22 we had a particularly high number of properties where the previous tenants had decided not to have a new kitchen or bathroom fitted when they were offered these so there was rather more work to do than usual. As in previous years, in a very few cases tenants had caused significant damage to a home and we had to charge them for the cost of the work we need to do.

Covid restrictions in 2020/21 meant that people couldn't easily move from one house to another and that had an impact on our void figure for the year. The situation with Covid improved significantly during 2021/22 which saw our void figure also improve a little to an average of 28 days between one person leaving their home and a new tenant moving in.

To make sure empty properties were ready for the next tenant we spent, on average, £4,323 per home and lost just 0.87% of our overall rent payment total during the period when homes were empty.

### *Are you a new tenant...*

and need help managing your tenancy? Or are you thinking about moving to a smaller property? Contact Georgina Sullivan-Howe, our Housing Officer (Support) on 01423 500600 ext 58463.

For help and advice on your heating and other energy / utility costs contact the council's Energy Advice Officer, Pat Shulver, on 01423 500600 ext 58171.

For tenants interested in swapping their home with a council or housing association property elsewhere visit: <https://www.homeswapper.co.uk/>

## Allocating homes to new tenants



Over the year, and despite the impact of Covid which meant many people were delayed moving in to their new home, we let **268** properties across the Harrogate district. 45 of these lets were to existing Harrogate Borough Council tenants moving to another Harrogate Borough Council home which was now more suitable for them. At the end of the year there were 1,892 households on the housing waiting list including 278 existing Harrogate Borough Council households who need to move to more suitable accommodation.

## What's an introductory tenancy?

Most of our new tenants are given what's called an introductory tenancy. This is a probationary tenancy for 12 months, but it can be extended to 18 months.

During this time, you'll have fewer rights than a secure tenant and if you break the terms of your tenancy it'll be easier for the council to evict you. After the probationary period, your tenancy will automatically become secure unless the council has taken action to end it.

## Secure tenant

As a secure tenant you have the legal right to stay in your home as long as you keep to the obligations, or responsibilities, set out in your tenancy agreement.

## Tackling homelessness

During the year, the housing options team have continued to provide people with a wide range of information and advice on homelessness prevention and the rights of those who find themselves without a home or at risk of not having one.

During 2021/2, some **1,260** households contacted the council because they were threatened with homelessness or were already homeless. We were successful in preventing homelessness from occurring at all in 50% of cases.

Over the same period the council's Housing Options Private Sector Team secured privately rented accommodation for **76** households struggling to find somewhere to rent – in many cases by using the local authority's Rent In Advance/ Bond Scheme.

During the year we had an average of **54** households living in temporary accommodation at any one time but by the end of the year the average length of stay in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation had fallen to a little over 2 weeks.



Harrogate District Street Aid, a partnership project between the council and a number of local agencies, is raising valuable funds to make a real change in the lives of those with a history of rough sleeping – supporting them to get off, and keep off, the streets. Organisations working with the homeless can apply for grants of up to £500 for individuals where other funding is not available.

The public can donate to Harrogate District Street Aid by using the 'tap points' at Marks and Spencer, Oxford Street, Harrogate or the Victoria Shopping Centre. Each tap with your debit or credit card means a donation of £3 is taken from your account. For more information visit [www.tworidingscf.org.uk/harrogatestreetaid](http://www.tworidingscf.org.uk/harrogatestreetaid)

The Homelessness Reduction Act, 2017, requires that:

- All eligible applicants who are **threatened with homelessness** regardless of priority must be supported for at least 56 days to prevent them from becoming homeless, through help to remain in their existing accommodation or help to secure suitable alternative accommodation.
- All eligible applicants who are **homeless** must be supported for at least 56 days to help secure alternative accommodation. If a priority need (in line with homeless legislation) is identified, interim accommodation must be provided.
- All eligible applicants must receive a mutually agreed tailored, personalised housing plan, which outlines actions to be taken by both the applicant and our team to help them either retain existing or secure alternative suitable accommodation.



Experiencing problems with a social or private tenancy?

Or do you believe you are at risk of homelessness?

### We can help

Call us on  
**01423 500600**  
ext 51605

# Keeping your independence

## Sheltered Housing

The council has six sheltered housing schemes for older people with low level support needs. These are purpose built blocks of flats with access to communal facilities such as a laundry, hairdressing salon, guest room and communal lounges.

Each scheme has a designated Independent Living Officer who acts as scheme manager and all 188 sheltered flats have a built in alarm call system so tenants can pull cords or use their personal pendants to summon help when needed.

### Our sheltered housing schemes are:

- **Carlton Lodge**, Leeds Road, Harrogate
- **Hewitson Court**, Stockwell Road, Knaresborough
- **Collins Court**, High Street, Knaresborough
- **Maple Creek**, Red Lane, Masham
- **Blossomgate Court**, Blossomgate, Ripon
- **Bondgate Court**, Bondgate, Ripon

With the relaxation of Covid restrictions during the year our Independent Living Officers who manage schemes were able to return to site and provide ongoing daily support for their residents 'in person'.

For a general chat about sheltered housing, how it works and what's included, ask to speak to a member of our Independent Living Team on 01423 500600. If you want to apply for a home in one of our sheltered schemes please speak to a member of our Allocations Team also on 01423 500600.



## Harrogate Lifeline Service

Available to anyone living in the Harrogate district – both tenants and owner occupiers – the Lifeline service offers that extra bit of peace of mind and reassurance. A base unit is plugged in to your landline and customers can then press a button or use their personal pendant to summon help in an emergency. A 24 hour call centre answers all calls and the call handler will speak to the customer direct via the unit and arrange for appropriate help. This may involve calling the emergency services, contacting a relative or neighbour or ringing an Independent Living Officer.



We also continue to offer a new 'short-term' Lifeline service – ideal for someone coming out of hospital or maybe someone whose relatives are away for a short time and just need that extra comfort and reassurance over a few weeks.

The Harrogate Lifeline service was installed in a further 217 homes in the Harrogate district during 2021/22. If you're interested in finding out more about this service please call us on 01423 500600 and ask to speak to our Independent Living team.

*Lifeline can give you 24 hour peace of mind, seven days a week*

# Repairs

Our Property Services Team, together with a small number of contractors, tackle all the day to day repairs of our houses as well as annual gas safety checks and our planned works such as new bathrooms, kitchens, heating and windows.

During lockdowns we focused on emergency repairs which meant some 'day to day' repairs were delayed particularly in the earlier part of the year. However, our staff have worked hard to tackle any backlogs with a recent return to more normal response times.

On average we spent £25.33 per week on each home to cover repair costs.



We completed over **9,195** repairs (excluding those in empty properties). Of this total our in house maintenance team completed 7,319 repairs and external contractors have completed 1,876.

The average time taken for non-urgent repairs was 14 days – one day less than the previous year's figure.



Over **97%** of those tenants who returned the survey form which came with their appointment details said they were satisfied with the quality of the work.

*To report a repair  
please call our Customer Services Team  
on 01423 500600  
or visit our website to  
report the issue on line at  
[www.harrogate.gov.uk/  
council-tenants](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk/council-tenants)*



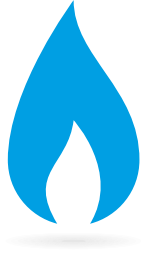
## Are you insured?

Our insurance covers the 'bricks and mortar' of your home but it's the responsibility of a tenant to arrange their own contents insurance. Many of us think we don't have much of value but when we start thinking about the cost of replacing our furniture, white goods, devices like TVs and computers and even clothes it all mounts up. Ask your Housing Officer for further information.



**The out of hours  
number for genuine  
emergencies is  
01423 556300**

## Gas safety tests and servicing



As your landlord we are legally required to carry out a gas safety check in your home every 12 months.

Our contractors, **Sure Maintenance**, do this work for us and will write to you to make an appointment at least ten weeks before the expiry date of your current Gas Safety Certificate.

You must do everything you can to keep the appointment and allow the engineer into your home. Contact Sure Maintenance as soon as possible if you need to change the date and time. Failure to do so may mean we cap your gas supply in order to ensure that you, your property and surrounding homes, are kept safe.

The good news is that on 31st March, 2022, there were no gas servicing certificates outstanding – a result which was very much down to the hard work of the team at Sure Maintenance and to you, our tenants, for providing access when requested.

Blue Flame Associates, our independent gas auditors, may contact you soon after the gas safety check to inspect the work carried out by Sure Maintenance. It's all part of ensuring the work you've received is to standard.

## Is your smoke alarm working?



For YOUR safety and the safety of your family you must check your smoke alarm is working at least once a month. Just press the 'TEST' button for a few seconds until the alarm sounds. If your alarm is faulty please call our Customer Services team immediately on 01423 500600; we will treat your call as an emergency repair and arrange for one of our team to visit as soon as possible.

Sure Maintenance can be contacted on **0800 046 1443** or email **HarrogateBC@suregroup.co.uk**



Every time Sure Maintenance gain access to a home on the first appointment time and date they donate £1 to a local charity selected by one of our tenant panels. Thanks to Sure Maintenance's work and to our tenants keeping appointments, in 2021/22 the Canaan Trust received a cheque for over £2,200!

The Canaan Trust provide a range of support for vulnerable families and the homeless. In Harrogate the organisation has a warehouse distributing essential furniture and other household items to people in need. We make lots of use of this service and they regularly provide furniture and white goods at no cost for some of our newer tenants who are struggling with the costs of setting up a new home.

We believe every tenant has the right to enjoy their home free from anti-social behaviour (ASB).

ASB can take many forms but it's normally things which wider society regards as unacceptable. We're really pleased that in Harrogate most of our housing tenants are very considerate of others in their community but, sadly, we do periodically have to take action against individuals or households where this is not the case.

During the year we dealt with and closed 40 cases of anti-social behaviour:-

- 18 of these related to issues of noise
- 4 were cases relating to drug taking or dealing
- 10 cases were of harassment
- 5 cases were of pets causing nuisance
- 3 cases involved children

In **88%** of cases we were able to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of the person who had complained. Sadly, we currently have 4 cases where we've had to start proceedings to evict the tenant causing ASB.

Please remember if you're being threatened in any way you should first contact the police and let your Housing Officer know. For all types of ASB, your Housing Officer can provide initial advice and also explain what steps the council may decide to take.



We have a dedicated ASB Officer and we take all complaints seriously. We'll investigate and try to resolve the issue but we will need your help with this. In more serious cases, we may ask you to make a statement or keep a written diary of what has happened.

John Ward is the council's Anti-social Behaviour Officer and can be contacted on 01423 500600 ext 58069.



## It's ok to complain!

Whilst we aim to provide you with an excellent service we know there are occasions when we don't get things right first time or you think we could have done things differently. It's really important you tell us if you're not happy with our service so we can learn from any mistakes and try to put things right.

It's always best to put complaints in writing as that helps us to understand exactly what the problem is. However, when you complain we'll make sure we respond to you as quickly as possible. If you have access to the internet, you may find it easiest to complete the complaints form on our website – visit [www.harrogate.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk/complaints).

## What is a complaint?

Our complaints policy defines a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf. It might be about:

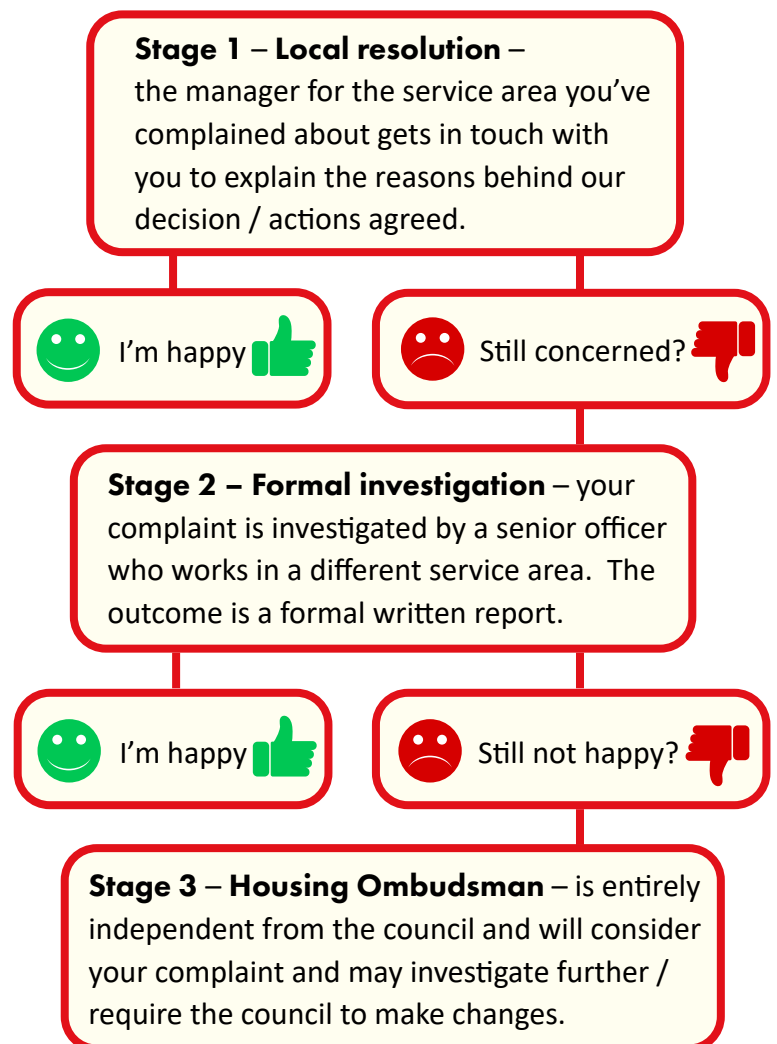
- failure to deliver a service
- a delay in providing a service
- unsatisfactory quality of a service
- the behaviour of a member of our staff; and/or
- the failure of a member of our staff in following council policy.

There are certain subject areas that we would not treat as a complaint, these include:

- a first time request for a service
- a request for information or an explanation of council policy or practice (such as why your rent is set at a certain level)
- a disagreement with a council decision.

We always try to resolve complaints informally if we can – sometimes a chat with a member of staff can overcome concerns or we can sort out a problem immediately.

## Here's how our complaint system works:

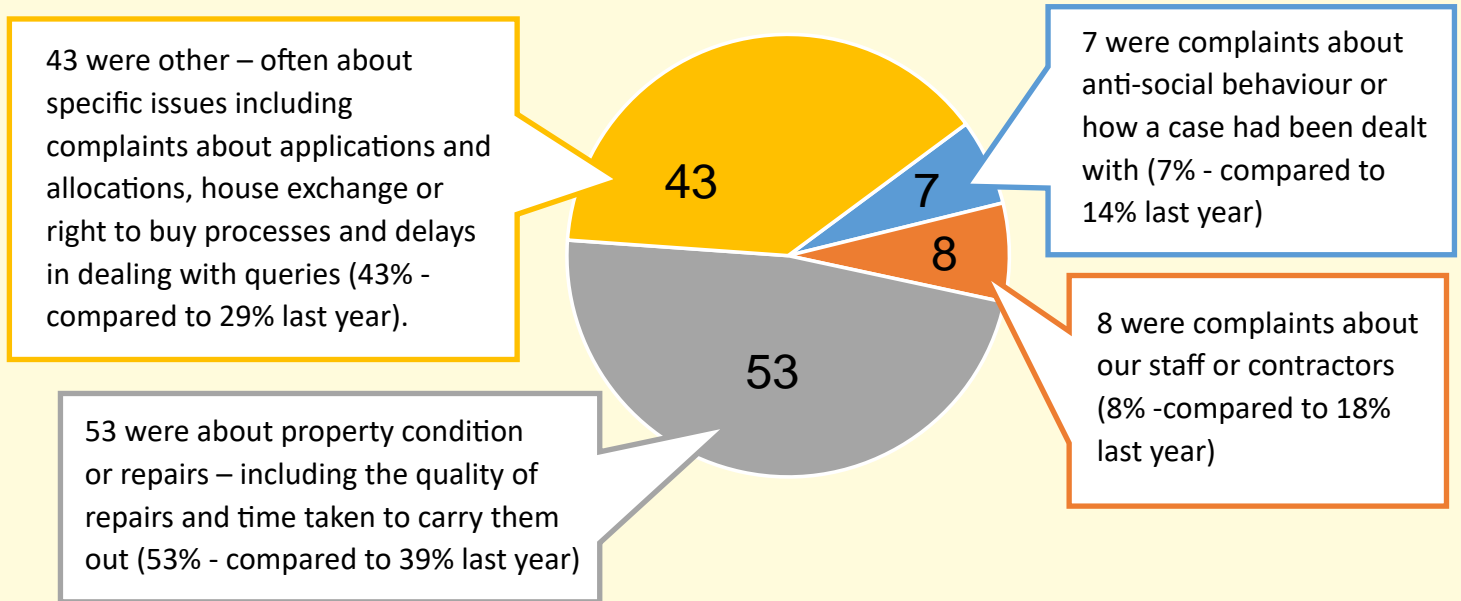


# Complaints

During the year to March 2022, we received 111 complaints about our housing services which was a large increase on the 66 complaints received in 2020/21.

The independent Housing Ombudsman, who investigates complaints about landlords, has also reported a large increase in the numbers of enquiries and complaints received - overall there was a 60% increase in the number of complaints it received in 2021-22, compared to 2020-21 .

The complaints received by Harrogate Borough Council generally fall into four categories:



Figures from the Housing Ombudsman for the period from January to March 2022 show a similar picture for most common causes for complaints it receives about local authority landlords:

- 48% - Property condition or repairs
- 20% - Complaint handling – delays, poor communications
- 11% - Anti-social behaviours (ASB)

Harrogate Borough Council tries to respond to complaints as quickly as possible. Of the 100 service responses made to complaints in 2021-22, 87 were made within the 10 days' target time.

We are usually able to resolve most complaints at the service stage. Some 18 service complaints were escalated to stage one of our complaints procedure.

Of the 12 responses at stage one of the complaints procedure, 9 or 75% were on time.

A total of 3 complaints were escalated to stage two where a senior manager from outside housing investigates and tries to resolve the complaint. Of the 3 stage two responses, 2 were made within the target timescale of 20 days.

Looking at the complaints we've received in more detail it's clear that Covid - with associated staff shortages - has had an impact on our ability to complete property repairs and to respond to some complaints in a timely manner. However, we always want you, our tenants to be provided with excellent services and to learn from complaints which are raised.

Here's a few examples from over the year:

## Complaint 1

A tenant complained that we'd failed to respond to their calls regarding a repair to their heat pump.

### **What we did to make things right:**

We apologised for the delay and reminded all staff of the need to respond swiftly to calls of this type. We organised an inspection of the heat pump system and provided assurance that we'd compensate the tenant if an independent heating engineer found they had incurred extra costs due to the defect.

## Complaint 2

A member of the public rang to complain about anti-social behaviour coming from one of our hostels.

### **What we did to make things right:**

We spoke to people living at the hostel reminding them to be respectful to local residents. Our security officer was told to monitor the situation and we asked the local police to reinstate patrols in the area.

## Complaint 3

A tenant complained about the attitude and conduct of a contractor staff member who had refused to complete a boiler service.

### **What we did to make things right:**

We apologised to the tenant and spoke to the contractor. We explained to the contractor that the tenant had health issues and their staff needed to be aware of this. The contractor organised for a different engineer to do the work and the tenant expressed their satisfaction with both the individual and the job completed.

Tenants who are unhappy with our response can refer their complaint to the independent Housing Ombudsman who can carry out further investigations and recommend changes to the way we do things. In 2021/22 the Ombudsman received no complaints about Harrogate Borough Council. This was also the case in 2020/21. You can find out more about the Ombudsman at [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk) or by calling 0300 111 3000.

## Getting involved!

2020/21 had been the year that tenant involvement went digital with most of our tenant panel meetings going online and many panel members not seeing each other 'in person' for many months.



The relaxation of Covid restrictions in 2021/22 meant that holding meetings at the Civic Centre was possible again and many of the panels decided to opt for a 'hybrid' way of working – with meetings being held alternatively online and in person. It's clear that both online and in person meetings have their own particular advantages – online means that members don't have to travel and can discuss issues from the comfort of their own home whilst in person sometimes allow for a more in depth discussion and, as the Chair of one of our groups says, 'you can see the white of the eyes of the person speaking'!

Tenant involvement took many forms during the year but here's a few of the highlights:

### **Monitoring performance** -

The Housing and Property Services Panel and Neighbourhood Services and Housing Needs Panel – made up of staff and tenant representatives – met each quarter to discuss development of our services and to monitor performance. Representatives from these and other panels also met once a quarter in the 'All Panels' Group' to share information and plan work. Minutes and reports from each meeting are now available to view on the council's website at: [Tenant involvement – Harrogate Borough Council](#)

**The tenants' open forum** was able to start up meetings again towards the end of the year with gatherings held once a quarter in the council chamber and tenants encouraged to raise issues and concerns of wider interest to the community where they live.

**Local housing standards** – a small working group of tenants spent many hours wading through the council's local housing standards, checking the wording and suggesting changes where required. The updated standards – on everything from the service you can expect when you report a repair to the way we let garages – will shortly be published on the council's website at : [Housing local standards – Harrogate Borough Council](#)

**Tenant satisfaction survey** – every tenant and leaseholder received a detailed survey form in the post in early 2022 asking how satisfied they were with the services we provide and seeking suggestions of where improvements could be made. A big 'thank you' to the 1,711 tenants and leaseholders who sent their survey form back – it's really important we know what you think of the services we run. Managers are now looking at the issues the survey raises and discussing where changes and improvements are needed.



## What did you say in the tenant satisfaction survey?

9/10

Almost 9 out of 10 tenants say they are satisfied with the overall quality of the service they receive.



86%

Knowledge of the newsletter is good at 86% but relatively few tenants know about the work of our tenant involvement panels and focus groups – look out for more articles in our newsletter and elsewhere!

88% of our tenants say they are satisfied with the quality of their home with a slightly lower figure – 84% - satisfied with the state of repair of their home.

88%

8/10

More than 8 out of 10 tenants are satisfied with our repairs service.

9/10

More than 9 out of 10 tenants think their rent offers good value for money although slightly less - 8 out of 10 - think their service charges (where these apply) are good value.

87%

87% describe their neighbourhood as a good place to live.

7/10

Satisfaction amongst leaseholders is generally lower - with just under 7 out of 10 satisfied with the overall service.

Of those people who made contact with the council during the previous 12 months, almost three quarters were contacting us about a repair 84% found our staff friendly and approachable and 78% were satisfied with the overall customer experience.

84%

77% of people say they trust the council and almost 9 out of 10 people feel they are treated fairly and with respect.

77%

4/5

Around 4 out of 5 tenants feel they get good information from the council about things which affect them. However, less than 7 out of 10 tenants feel that the council listens to their views and acts upon them so we've got some work to do in that area!



# Tenant involvement

**the NEWS**  
for tenants & leaseholders  
Summer 2021

**This issue**

- P2 Impressions of Fern House
- P3 What I'm keeping from lockdown
- P4 Safety corner
- P6 Enjoy your annual sidal
- P8 Wordsearch competition

**WE NEED YOUR FEEDBACK**  
Look out for details of our survey and/or send us this newsletter and go to [www.harrogate.gov.uk/whatsnew](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk/whatsnew) to have your say!

**Congratulations and thank you!**  
The News' editorial panel sends warmest congratulations to Cllr Trevor Chapman who was elected as Mayor of Harrogate Borough Council in April. We also want to express our sincere thanks to Cllr Stuart Martin, the previous Mayor, and his wife April, for their generous support and help with tenant involvement activities - particularly the garden competition in unusually challenging circumstances!

Harrogate BOROUGH COUNCIL  
If you need help to read this newsletter please contact our Customer Services team on 01423 500600

**the NEWS**  
for tenants & leaseholders  
Autumn 2021

**Keeping warm this winter AND keeping costs down!**  
Summer may still be fresh in our memory but the Shaker, your Energy Advice Officer, is already thinking about winter and is here to help with your queries.

**Pat says:**  
"If you're a pensioner or on a low household income you may qualify for a £140 grant towards your heating costs this year. Just search for 'Warm Home Discount' on the web and there you go in the name of the 'Priority Services Register'."

**This issue**

- P2 Safety corner
- P3 Our editorial panel needs you!
- P4 Help using your computer
- P6 Survey results
- P8 Wordsearch

Harrogate BOROUGH COUNCIL  
If you need help to read this newsletter please contact our Customer Services team on 01423 500600

**the NEWS**  
for tenants & leaseholders  
Winter 2021

**Help us to help the Canaan Trust!**  
This year Sure Maintenance, our gas sitting and maintenance contractor, will be donating £1 to local charity, the Canaan Trust, for every time they can access a home on the first call and not agree with our tenant.

**Climate change from the editorial panel**

**Garden competition**  
This year's garden competition presentation ceremony was held in October in the council chamber at Harrogate Civic Centre. Cllr Mike Chambers, MBE, Cabinet Member for Housing and safer Communities, presented prizes to the winners of the competition.

**OUR WINNERS**

Harrogate BOROUGH COUNCIL  
If you need help to read this newsletter please contact our Customer Services team on 01423 500600

**the NEWS**  
for tenants & leaseholders  
Spring 2022

**This issue**

- P3 Safety Corner
- P4 Energy advice - feeling the pinch?
- P6 The Big Poster competition
- P7 Why I love Boroughbridge
- P8 Puzzle competition

**Focus on Masham!**  
Take a stroll down the Lane in Masham, and past the station, and you'll come to Maple Court, the town's purpose built affordable scheme owned and managed by the Council.

**HBC Homes Online is here**  
We've launched our new online housing 'hub' where you can do everything from reporting a repair to managing your Housing Maintenance application.

Harrogate BOROUGH COUNCIL  
If you need help to read this newsletter please contact our Customer Services team on 01423 500600

**We mailed out quarterly issues of 'Tenants News'** – and were delighted to welcome three new members – Jayne, Pam and Pauline – to the editorial group helping to decide the content of each issue and doing lots and lots of proof reading!

**Involved tenants attended a residents' conference** at the Hilton in Leeds. This was the first time in three years that the event had been held and those attending welcomed the opportunity to meet up with involved tenants from other local authorities and housing associations.

**Organised the 2021 tenants' garden competition** and held a special presentation to winners in the council chamber.

Winners in each category were:

- 1 BEST COMMUNAL GARDEN** - joint winners Hewitson Court, Knaresborough and Maple Creek, Masham
- 2 BEST POTS** - first prize Susan Emiral, Knaresborough, second prize Sandra Bridge, Harrogate
- 3 BEST BACK GARDEN** first prize Charlotte Sutherland, Ripon, second prize Susan Williams, Ripon
- 4 BEST FRONT GARDEN** first prize Diana Spurr, Harrogate, second prize Howard Blackwell, Ripon
- 5 BEST SMALL GARDEN** first prize Danielle and Laila Maloney, Follifoot, second prize Charlotte Castle, Knaresborough

**OVERALL WINNER** - Diana Spurr in Harrogate for her front garden. The judges all agreed that her immaculate garden had a real 'wow' factor with a lovely range of textures and colours.



Cllr Chambers presenting Diana Spurr's prize - the 2021 overall winner





## Interested in **joining a panel** or getting involved in another way?

You'll see from this report that the council supports a number of tenant panels which meet regularly to review how our services are performing and suggest ways in which they can improve. Most panels now meet either in person – normally at the Harrogate Civic Centre – or sometimes online using Microsoft 'Teams'.

Meetings are quarterly with some taking place during the day and others in the evening. Panel members receive expenses driving to a meeting or we can arrange transport.

You can find more information about our panels – and other ways of getting involved in our Involved Tenants' Handbook. Just go to [www.harrogate.gov.uk/tenant-involvement](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk/tenant-involvement) or, if you'd like a paper copy of the Handbook, call our Customer Services on 01423 500600.

To find out more about tenant involvement visit [www.harrogate.gov.uk/tenant-involvement](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk/tenant-involvement) or contact our Tenant Involvement Officer on 01423 500600.



**Already on Facebook?**  
*Please come and join us!*

We now have a dedicated facebook page for Harrogate Borough Council tenants about all things tenant involvement. If you're on facebook it's very easy to find us! Just search for 'HBC tenants' and ask to join. The page is usually monitored Mondays to Fridays and we'd love you to join the conversation!

# Contact us

## Online

You can find out about all our services and manage your rent account online:

**[www.harrogate.gov.uk](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk)**

You can use the website to make payments, or report repairs. Our online services are available 24-hours a day.

## Phone

01423 500600

Phone line opening times:

Monday - Thursday

8.30am to 5pm

Friday - 8.30am to 4.30pm

The out of hours number for genuine emergencies is 01423 556300.

## Report repairs

**Phone** 01423 500600

Phone line opening times:

Monday - Thursday

8.30am to 5pm

Friday - 8.30am to 4.30pm

**Through our website and your customer account at**

**[www.harrogate.gov.uk](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk)**



Search 'HBC Tenants' and ask to join