

HOUSING TIMES

ANNUAL SUMMARY
WINTER 2023-24



stalbans.gov.uk/housing



St Albans
City & District Council



New Housing Developments

During the financial year 2022-23, 51 new properties were completed across four sites in the District.

These are at Oaklands Grange, St Albans; Harper Lane, Radlett; Smug Oak Lane, Bricket Wood; and Rolt Close, Harpenden. These properties were all delivered through our Housing Association partners who are key in providing additional social housing across the District.

The Council is looking to build a mix of two, three, and four bedroom properties at Norman Close and Woollam Crescent in St Albans. These new developments will result in 26 additional homes for social rent for households on the Council's Housing Register.

We are also working to identify future sites for housing development across the District.

51
New
Properties



Telford Court, St Albans

In July 2022 District Councillors approved the decommissioning and closure of Telford Court, a tower block and associated buildings in St Albans, not far from the City station.

This has come about following changes to the law which led the Council to review its housing stock. Officers from the Council held a series of meetings with residents giving them the opportunity to ask any questions about the moving process.

To date the Council has supported many of the tenants to move out of Telford Court to new homes across the District. A number of residents will move to Jubilee Square, in Victoria Street when the new housing on the site of the former police station and NHS services is completed.

Decisions have yet to be made on the future of the Telford Court site, other than that it will be redeveloped for new housing. However, there is no timetable for any works to start as we look to resettle all the remaining residents in their new homes.

Save on Energy

St Albans Home Energy Support Service

By improving home energy efficiency and using energy more mindfully we can save money on our bills, stay warm and reduce our impact on the environment.

How we power and heat our homes has a direct impact on our air quality and the climate. **St Albans Home Energy Support Service** has been set up to help all residents to have their energy bill or energy efficiency queries answered.

This service, which is available to all St Albans District households regardless of income, is provided in partnership with *Better Housing, Better Health*.

Through this service you can get

Information on grants and funds you may be eligible for

Checks to make sure you are receiving all the support from your energy supplier that you are entitled to

Referral to other organisations or contractors who may be able to help you

Detailed advice on how to save energy at home

Debt advice

Advice on switching suppliers

The service can be contacted on **0800 107 0044** (weekdays 9am-5pm) or by email bhbh@nef.org.uk

More details can be found at www.bhbh.org.uk



St Albans Home Energy Support Service



In partnership with Better Housing Better Health.

Free impartial home energy efficiency advice



Our experts will help you understand what you can do to save energy at home no matter what type of property you live in. This might involve small steps such as adjusting your thermostats and timers as well as other refurbishments such as insulation, heating systems and renewable technology.

Financial support



We will seek out any energy efficiency grants, funding or benefits you may be eligible for. We will also refer you to other organisations who can support you if you are having trouble paying your bills.

Finding your extra help

We're here to help and know that home energy might not be the only cause for concern. If someone in the home is struggling with their mental health, debt or has further needs - we're part of a network and will direct you to other charities and local services.



Energy bill advice and switching



We can look at your bills and make sure you are on the best tariff and receiving the support you are entitled to from your energy supplier.





Supported Housing Services

The Accommodation Support team is responsible for managing and supporting residents in temporary accommodation and those in our retirement housing schemes, Cyril Dumpleton House and Gertrude Peake Place.

Temporary Accommodation For Homeless Families

The team deals primarily with households in temporary accommodation. Most have applied to be housed in the District and are waiting for a decision on their homelessness application. They offer guidance and support to residents and work towards a successful outcome when the time comes to move on.

With an increasing demand for temporary accommodation, the Council is working to reduce the need for families to be placed in hotel accommodation, which is used as a last resort when no other accommodation is available so that people are not living out of suitcases.

The Council has acquired several properties which will be used for temporary accommodation. These are currently having safety work and checks done before the first residents move in.

A redeveloped scheme in London Colney provided 10 flats for temporary accommodation. This is good news for people affected by homelessness locally.



Sheltered Accommodation

The works at Cyril Dumpleton House have been completed and the communal lounge has had a makeover. We are also working with residents at Gertrude Peake Place to see what improvements are needed there too.

Tenancy Sustainment Service

Our Tenancy Sustainment Service offers tenants support to help you successfully manage your tenancy.

Support includes basic debt and welfare advice, joint working with specialist agencies, and signposting to other relevant services and charities. Early intervention following tenancy sign ups is a critical part of our service as we aim to deal with any barriers at the start. We receive referrals from Housing and Income Officers, and other Council teams.

We have received 186 referrals so far. The types of case work we do often involves intensive assistance for rent arrears and complex needs and involves early intervention, and advice and assistance.

Between October 2022 and July 2023, we assisted tenants with collecting over £68,700 through Universal Credit and Housing Benefit applications and appeals, Discretionary Housing Payments, Council Tax support, and grants towards furniture, white goods, flooring, food and utilities. We help to prevent evictions, maximise tenants' income, and provided basic budgeting advice, and we support tenants along with other members of their households.

We have good working relationships with various services and charities in and around the District. We are also administering the Household Support Fund offering help with paying utilities' bills and the purchase of white goods like fridges. We receive referrals for grants from various professionals and partner organisations.

Our goal for this quarter is to apply for lump sums from charities. We hope to use new funds received to support individuals and families experiencing hardship who may not be eligible for welfare benefits, for example.



We advised on **966** homeless referrals

Homeless Approaches In St Albans District

In 2022/23 St Albans City & District Council received 996 homelessness referrals. This involved people who were threatened with homelessness within 56 days of their contact with us, or those who were already homeless.

The causes and consequences of homelessness are complex. **184 applicants** were asked to leave by their family either because of a relationship break down or because of overcrowding.

We supported **133** households comprising people who were fleeing from their current accommodation due to experiencing domestic abuse. The most prevalent type of domestic abuse occurs in romantic or marital relationships. But the definition of domestic abuse also covers abuse between family members, such as adolescent to parent violence and abuse, and elder abuse.

We provided 87 households

who had received a Section 21 notice to leave their assured shorthold tenancies - with advice and assistance to navigate their rights as a tenant. This helped them to stay in their home legally or to find somewhere else to live.

There was an increase in referrals through the duty to refer mechanism during the year.

50 occasions this year the Council was notified by the Probation Service and other agencies working in prisons of a person who might be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

46 individuals notified the Council of their 'homeless' due to a relationship ending and being asked to leave their home.

44 people had been 'sofa surfing' and been asked to leave by different friends or family that they have been living with.

The 2022/23 Financial Position

All housing income collected is ring fenced and can only be spent on the housing service. It covers things like housing repairs and maintenance, staffing to run the service and other housing related costs.

The Council also pays around £13 million to the Government each year for loan repayments and to service the historic debt from building houses and flats in the last 80 years.

In 2022/23 the overall income to the housing service was £30,116,000.

The main source of the income is the rent and service charges received from tenants and leaseholders.

New housing and improvement to homes (capital expenditure)

During 2022/23 the Council spent £9m on improvements to Council-owned homes. This includes boiler upgrades, window replacements, roofing, electrical rewires, kitchens and bathrooms and disabled adaptations.

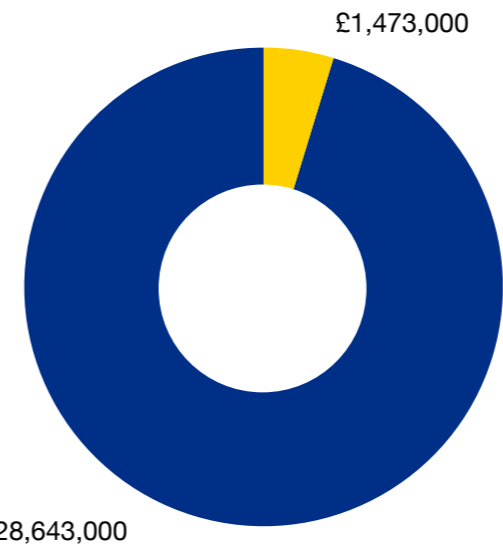
A further £1.2m was spent on affordable housing projects in the District, with two of these due to complete in 2023/24, adding an additional 14 units to our housing stock.



Reducing carbon emissions and energy bills

Housing Income

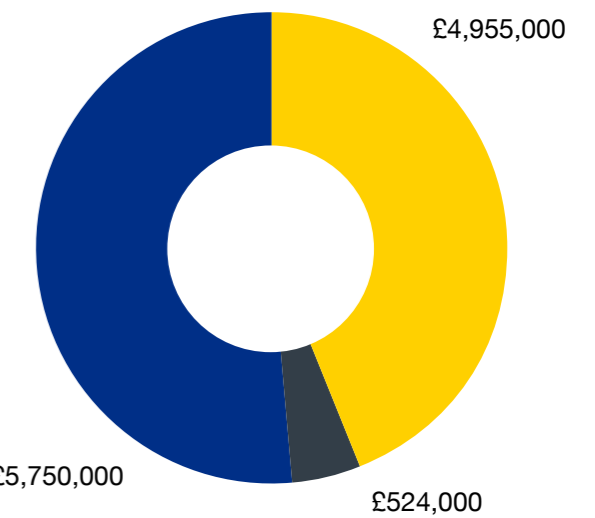
Housing Income	How much £	Percentage of Total
Rents from Dwellings and Service Charges	28,643,000	95%
Other Rents and Income	1,473,000	5%
Total	30,116,000	100%



- Rents from Dwellings and Service Charges
- Other Rents and Income

Housing Expenditure

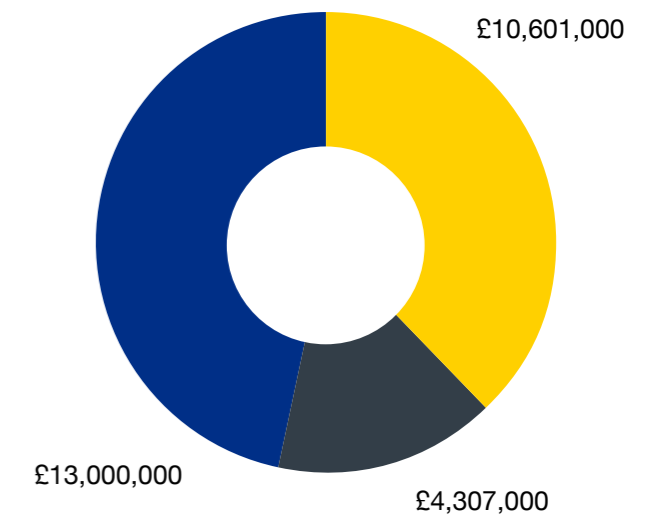
Housing Expenditure	How much £	Percentage of Total
Supervision and Management	5,750,000	51%
Repairs	4,955,000	44%
Other Expenditure	524,000	5%
Total	11,229,000	100%



- Supervision and Management
- Repairs
- Other Expenditure

Other Charges to the Housing Revenue Account

Other charges to HRA	How much £
Capital Programme Charges	10,601,000
Loan Interest Paid	4,307,000
Provision for Debt Payment	13,000,000
Total	27,908,000



- Provision of Debt Payment
- Capital Programme Charges
- Loan Interest Paid

Allocations and Lettings

In 2022 there were 254 Council properties and 101 Housing Association properties allocated to applicants on the Housing Register.

Of the total 355 allocations, 227 were to housing and homeless applicants and 128 were to transfer applicants.

The breakdown of the size of these properties are:

Bedsits	5	Band A	17
1 Bedroom	145	Band B	164
2 Bedroom	132	Band C	38
3 Bedroom	70	Band D	125
4 Bedroom	3	Band E	11

This table provides breakdown of the priority bands of applicants allocated housing. Property bands are explained below.

As of March 2022, the breakdown of the 551 households on the Housing Register was as below:

Bedroom need	Homeseeker/ Homeless	Transfer	Total
1 Bedroom	108	78	186
2 Bedroom	58	57	115
3 Bedroom	61	141	202
4+ Bedroom	10	38	48

355
properties
allocated
2022/23

Their priority banding by bedroom need is below:

Bedroom need	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Total
1 Bedroom	11	63	13	49	50	186
2 Bedroom	6	31	8	70	0	115
3 Bedroom	1	23	27	151	0	202
4+ Bedroom	2	11	17	18	0	48

Disabled Adaptations

Disabled adaptations can provide a wide range of solutions to mobility problems which prevent independent living. The work we carry out assists our residents to continue living in their homes with independence and dignity.

Our service provides adaptations across the district for council and housing association tenants as well as private tenants and owner-occupiers.

The most common adaptations we provide are level access shower facilities; access works for wheelchair users or those with limited mobility; installing stair-lifts, ramps and grab rails. Outside the property we can provide mobility scooter stores and additional handrails.

In 2022-23 we spent £645,000 on adaptations to council housing and £660,000 on private properties using the Disabled Facility Grant scheme.

As in previous years, we work with a dedicated team of Occupational Therapists from Hertfordshire County Council and the NHS. We also work closely with other council services, such as Housing Options, and our local contractors who deliver and install the adaptations.

If you think you may need an adaptation to your home, you will need a referral to an Occupational Therapist who will carry out an assessment of your functional needs and make the appropriate recommendations to us.

There may be a wait for an assessment so it is best to arrange this as soon as you think you need help. Once you have been assessed and adaptations have been recommended, we will need to check that the proposed works are practically possible as well as 'necessary and appropriate' to meet your needs. This will depend on the age and condition of the property.



You can arrange this by calling Social Services on **0300 123 4042** (for adults) or **01727 891142** (for children or young people).

If you would like more information regarding adaptations, please see:

www.stalbans.gov.uk/aids-and-adaptations

You can contact the Adaptations Team at

dfgapplications@stalbands.gov.uk

01727 819396.



White Ribbon Ambassador

The Council is accredited through White Ribbon which is an organisation that works to end male violence against women.

As White Ribbon Ambassadors, we have developed a multi-agency steering group with our partners. Action taken so far includes our licensing team ensuring that local taxi drivers now accept card payments to avoid people having to withdraw cash late at night, and we have worked with St Albans Football Club on matchday to promote the White Ribbon promise.

White Ribbon is a global campaign that encourages people, and especially men and boys, to individually and collectively take action and change the behaviour and culture that leads to abuse and violence. To wear a white ribbon is to promise to never commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women.

Most recently we have worked with Morgan Sindall Property Services to implement their Phoenix Programme. The programme offers support to women to rebuild confidence and develop skills to gain sustainable employment.

According to the Office for National Statistics, in the year ending March 2020, 1.6 million women experienced domestic abuse, with many experiencing economic abuse, where access is denied to economic resources such as education and employment.

Without a job, survivors are often unable to obtain safe and affordable housing or funds to provide for themselves or their children. The Phoenix programme supports female victims with digital skills, CV preparation, mentoring, skills for work, work experience, interview preparation and managing finances. Morgan Sindall Property Services will also provide guaranteed interviews for roles within their business and with supply chain providers.

For more information about the programme, see: www.morgansindallpropertyservices.com/?s=phoenix+programme
Help and advice for anyone experiencing domestic abuse or wanting advice is available by calling the **Herts Domestic Abuse Helpline** on **08 088 088 08**

Estate Days

With Covid restrictions finally over our team had the pleasure of meeting many local residents at Estate Days held during the Spring and Summer of 2022 and 2023.

Between May and October we visited Aldwick Court, Redbourn, Hill Dyke, New Greens, London Colney, Colney Heath and Park Street. We were joined by partners from Morgan Sindall Property Services, whose team provided a skip and caged truck to remove fly tipping and unwanted large household items. They were also able to book in repair works. During last year's Estate Days **we removed 32 tons of rubbish.**

Our partners and councillors regularly join us on Estate Days to speak to local residents in person. CCS energy, the police, Communities First, and St Albans Older Peoples Trust come along when they can.

We will be arranging more estate events during the summer of 2024, keep an eye out for publicity flyers.



Housing Income

The Council now offers more online rent services for our tenants.

You can now see a breakdown of your charges, check your rent balance, see your payment history, pay your rent and make an appointment to see your Housing Income Officer online. It is easy to register for an online account. For more information please see: www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbans

The number of tenants receiving Universal Credit in St Albans increased over the year and this left some tenants struggling to make their rent payments. If this affects you please contact your Housing Income Officer as soon as possible so that we can support and advise you.

It is worth having an early conversation with your Housing Income Officer, who can talk through the options and refer you to helpful support services locally. The Housing Income Team can be contacted through the online portal www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbans or by emailing housingincome@stalbands.gov.uk

The majority of tenants pay their rent on time. However, a small percentage find themselves in court for non-payment of rent.

In 2022-2023 the following formal action was taken:

278 'Notices of Seeking Possession' served on tenants
These Notices are the first step in taking legal action which could lead to eviction.

16 tenants were referred to court
in connection with rent arrears.

8 Possession orders obtained.

1 Tenant evicted.

Our Housing Income Officers will try to work with tenants to avoid the need for court action wherever possible. This includes offering budgeting and benefit advice, and, where helpful, referral to support services.

Housing Complaints

When our tenants are dissatisfied with a service they have received or believe a decision has been made which is wrong or unfair they can make a formal complaint through the Council's complaints procedure.

These are managed outside of the Housing department and formal complaints are investigated and reviewed by a senior officer. The Council has a two-stage complaint process, and if a complainant is not satisfied with the response they receive they have the option of escalating the matter to the Housing Ombudsman. The process is outlined below.

Stage 1

The initial complaint is investigated by the manager responsible for the service area. In 2022/23 there were 60 **Stage 1** complaints. The complaint reasons are shown in the table below.

Stage 1 Complaints (2022/23)

Complaints about a repairs service	30
Complaints about a tenancy management service matter e.g., rent accounts and neighbour nuisance	14
Complaints about a housing option service matter - from our tenants this was generally in response to decisions about transfer applications and banding	9
Complaints about capital projects and leasehold matters e.g. roof and window replacements	7
Total	60

Following the response at **Stage 1**, 13 complaints were then escalated to **Stage 2**. These complaints are investigated and reviewed by a more senior service manager. Following this **Stage 2** review, 6 were then escalated to the Housing Ombudsman. The Ombudsman Service reviews whether a decision has been made in accordance with the service policies and whether the Council has acted fairly and reasonably and in a timely manner.

If the finding is against the Council, a decision of maladministration will be made, and an award of compensation and a change to a decision may follow. A review by the Housing Ombudsman can take many months and some of the complaints referred in 2022-2023 await assessment.

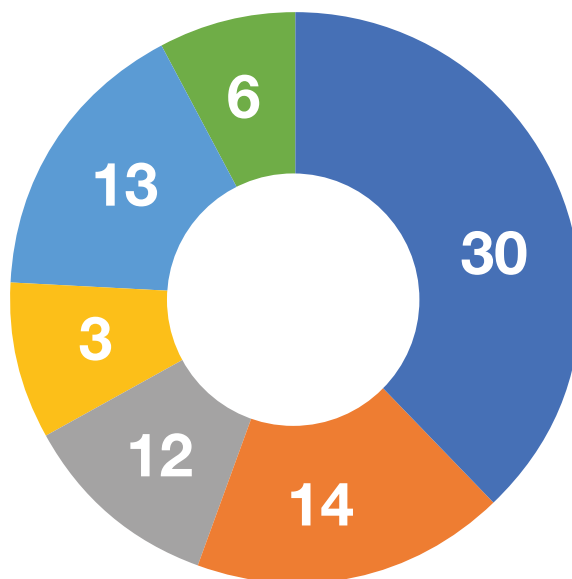
How did we do in the last year?

Below are some complaints statistics showing what concerns you most as residents demonstrated by the number of complaints in each of the Housing areas of work. More of the complaints, understandably, were about repairs which also reflects the need for maintenance of the Council's stock. Complaints for Housing Management are received often about antisocial behaviour and although we take whatever action we are able this is not a quick process.

On a positive note, the last year has seen a marked decrease in complaints escalating to **stage 2** of the complaints process from around 48% to 21.67%.

Stage 1 Complaints

Repairs	Housing Management	Housing Options	Capital Projects/Leasehold
30	14	12	3
Stage 2 Complaints		Escalation Rate	
13		21.67%	
Housing Ombudsman/Local Government & Social Care Referral			6



- Repairs
- Housing Management
- Housing Options
- Capital Projects/Leasehold
- Stage 2 Complaints
- Housing Ombudsman/Local Government & Social Care Referral