

Housing Services

Annual Statement
October 2011



St Albans
City & District Council

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Karen Dragovic

Head of Housing St Albans City and District Council

Welcome to our second Annual Statement which sets out our achievements during 2010-2011 and explains how well we are making progress with implementing the Local Offers set out in last years Annual Statement.

I hope you find the information helpful and informative.

We have reviewed the format this year and would appreciate your comments on this document, in particular how we could improve it further.

There are some key challenges facing the Council with the implementation of 'self financing' in April 2012. This changes the way council housing is financed so please look for the article on this in the next edition of the Housing Times newsletter.

I hope you will take time to look at the various opportunities over the coming year to have a real say on how we can improve our local offers and services for you.



Robert Hornett

Chair St Albans Tenants Forum

Welcome to the 2011 Annual Statement from the Housing Service. We have seen a year of major changes both nationally and locally for tenants. More than ever tenant participation and involvement will be placed at the heart of landlords' services. Members of the Tenants Forum see the changes promoted in the Localism Bill as a fantastic endorsement for tenants and housing landlords to work even closer for a better service.

As the Council's Tenants Forum we feel tenant involvement already plays a strong role in several areas of the housing service. Tenants and leaseholders work together with housing officers on a range of projects to improve their services. Active tenants and leaseholders currently work jointly with officers in the interviewing and selection process for contractors on repairs, gas servicing of the Council's housing stock as well as contractors for planned maintenance for example kitchens and bathrooms.

Members of the Forum played a major part in consulting with other Council tenants and developing the local offers we made in last years report. There has been mixed success in implementing these offers as you will see over the following pages. We are committed to developing a range off ways in which tenants are consulted to help increase overall satisfaction with the housing service.

Finally, I hope you find the annual statement interesting and have learnt a little more about the many aspects of delivering a housing service but more importantly I hope this report will spark your interest in getting involved with the service.

Introduction

This Annual Statement is sent to all tenants and its purpose is to give an update on the progress we have made over the last year.

Many tenants may recall that in October 2010 we produced an Annual Statement giving details of 'Local Offers' in respect of our main service areas with details of how we proposed to deliver services over the coming year and what improvements were planned for housing services.

A copy of the Annual Statement was also sent to the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) for them to consider how our service was run and whether there were any concerns which would require them to step in and carry out a formal inspection of the Housing Service.

The Statement was signed off by the TSA and no concerns were raised.

This year's Annual Statement is sent to tenants only and we hope it will give more information about the service, how it is organised and how services are delivered.

We continue with our plans for 'co regulation' which is regulation of the service by tenants, councillors and officers working together

to look at how the housing department is organised and our performance. They will raise any concerns or suggest improvements.

We also compare our service with similar housing providers and regularly attend meetings with other landlords, both locally and nationally, to compare performance and share good practice.

We welcome your views on this statement. There is a tear out section at the back for you to send back to us and tell us what you think. You can also tell us what you would like to see included in future Annual Statements or in Housing Times.

Over the last year staff in the Housing Service have carried out a number of surveys and focus group meetings with tenants.

In developing this Annual Statement we have consulted with tenant representatives on the content and layout.

The report is divided into sections according to each of the Local Offers and we have included some background information which we hope you may find interesting.

Housing Department staff
Photo courtesy of Pete Stevens.



Customer Service and Complaints

‘Your landlord has a duty to treat all tenants with fairness and respect and provide all tenants with choices, information and communication which is appropriate to their diverse needs.

Your landlord should have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible and ensures complaints are resolved promptly, fairly and politely’

Complaints from tenants or their representatives are dealt with using the Council-wide complaint management system.

There are also proposals that in order to refer a complaint to the Housing Ombudsman tenants should refer their complaint to a tenant panel, local Councillor or Member of Parliament, this is called the ‘Democratic Filter’.

The Localism Bill is expected to become law in November 2011. Once this is confirmed in law then we will give tenants more detailed information in a future edition of Housing Times.

The tables that follow give information on the type of complaints we have dealt with over the last year. The second table gives a breakdown of complaints by quarter and also by stage with details about how many were upheld or partially upheld.



Housing Officer Kath Young helps a tenant with a complaint.

Any housing service complaint is dealt with in the first instance by Karen Dragovic Head of Housing.

If the person making the complaint is not satisfied with the response then the complaint is escalated to stage 2 where it is further investigated and reviewed by a different Head of Service independent from the department.

If this does not resolve the complaint then the complainant may refer the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman.

There are some changes proposed in the Localism Bill about the way complaints about Council Housing are dealt with. There are proposals that they should be passed to the Housing Ombudsman who currently deals with complaints about Housing Associations and other Social Landlords.

Type of Complaint – October 2010 – September 2011	Number received
Service Failure	8
Staff Behaviour/Attitude	16
Lack of response to communication	6
Outcome of application/decision	3
Housing Policy and procedures	1
Other	7

Housing Services – Complaints by Quarter October 2010 – September 2011						
	Stage 1		Stage 2		Ombudsman	
October 2010 – December 2010	Received	12	Received	1	Received	0
	Upheld	0	Upheld	0	Upheld	0
	Partially Upheld	2	Partially Upheld	1	Partially Upheld	0
January 2011 – March 2011	Received	10	Received	4	Received	0
	Upheld	0	Upheld	0	Upheld	0
	Partially Upheld	1	Partially Upheld	1	Partially Upheld	0
April 2011 – June 2011	Received	11	Received	5	Received	0
	Upheld	1	Upheld	0	Upheld	0
	Partially Upheld	2	Partially Upheld	1	Partially Upheld	0
July 2011 – September 2011	Received	8	Received	3	Received	1
	Upheld	0	Upheld	0	Upheld	0
	Partially Upheld	3	Partially Upheld	1	Partially Upheld	0

In the last Annual Statement we gave details of how we manage and monitor customer services within the Housing Service.

We monitor all correspondence that we receive and have a target of 10 days for sending a response.

Over the last year, Housing Options and Housing Management teams received 4941 letters and responded to 91% within 10 days, the average response time was 3 working days.

Between October 2010 and September 2011 over 13,200 visits were made to the Customer Services Reception by housing applicants, tenants and leaseholders, an average of 52 each day.

Some require detailed information specific to their tenancy or application and others may just want to pick up a leaflet or drop off a form.

Of these 13,200 visitors, 1484 asked to see a duty officer to discuss their individual situation. Our target is that no one should wait more than 15 minutes to see a duty officer when they attend reception without an appointment.

Equality and Diversity

St Albans District Council is committed to ensuring that all tenants are able to use Council services and obtain information about services.

Equality means making sure our services work for everyone regardless of age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion or belief and transgender.

We are currently changing our computer software system and as part of this will be collecting information on our tenants, leaseholders and applicants which will include information on disability and language requirements. You can opt out of having this information recorded if you wish.

We continue to use Language Line for interpretation and we also translate documents on request. In the last year we have translated documents into Braille, large print and a range of languages so all our customers have access to the information they require.

We are currently reviewing our housing policies and procedures and as part of this we will be carrying out 'equality impact assessments'. This means we will check we are taking into account the needs of everyone when producing our policies.



Housing Options Officer Cilla Tait giving advice.

Last year we gave details of our service commitments in respect of customer services – details of these are below

From April 2011 we will...		How we're doing – October 2011
Have a published feedback policy (complaints and compliments) available to all tenants and leaseholders.		Revised corporate Customer Feedback policy issued by customer services.
Address complaints in accordance with published timescales.		Software in place to ensure compliance.
Make information available to you in a language other than English or in large print, Braille or audio tape if you need it.		Information in other languages or formats provided on request.
Implement a system in order to gather monitoring information of tenants who agree to provide such information to help us understand your needs and serve you better. This will include language requirements and any disabilities.		In progress and associated with housing computer system upgrade. Information to be transferred from Housing Benefits where possible.
Show an identity card issued by the Council before entering your home.		All staff aware of this requirement. Telephone surveys to be carried out to confirm it is being actioned.
Extend the use of monitoring systems to ensure we respond to letters within 10 working days.		Currently in place in Housing Management and Housing Strategy to extend to Asset Management by April 2012.
Have a named Management Officer responsible for each street and estate.		List of areas detailed under the tenancy standard. Street patch list available on request.
Ensure we have a minimum of 2 Duty Management Officers available each day to deal with telephone calls and visitors to reception who do not have appointments.		2 Duty officers available on a daily basis. Cover provided on 8 half day sessions due to staff training or meetings.
Carry out spot checks to monitor whether tenants have to wait more than 15 minutes in reception for a face to face interview with a duty officer.		Random checks carried out by Customer Services Team.
Arrange a home visit with a Management Officer within 10 days of the request being received.		Staff aware of this requirement. As there is no central record of requests available we rely upon tenants to advise where this is not achieved.
Investigate methods of ensuring that e mails are answered within published response times.		Workload monitoring system installed September 2011 - this will provide partial monitoring.
Greet telephone callers in a polite and courteous manner giving our name when we answer the phone.		All staff aware of this requirement. Telephone surveys to be carried out to confirm it is being actioned.
Investigate the possibility of extending Wi Fi internet access to Council managed blocks of flats.		IT Department have raised concerns about cost and security - this offer is currently under review.

KEY: ■ Achieved ■ Underway ■ Delayed or Postponed

Tenant Forum Interview with Karen Dragovic – Head of Housing



Why did you decide on a career in housing?

I was originally interested in planning and completed a planning qualification. Whilst studying I visited several inner city areas and became interested in housing. I had the option to specialize in a Housing Diploma and my interest grew from there.

I had and still have a strong belief in social housing and the right for people to have a decent home as I feel it is so important to everyday life. I also wanted to help improve the quality of life for people who have not had the same opportunities in life that I have been given.

How did you become Head of Housing?

Through hard work, study, flexibility, a sense of strong conviction in social housing and interestingly, a sense of humour.

What do you find rewarding about your work?

Seeing the completion of new affordable housing in the District, meeting tenants who have moved into these properties at the opening events and seeing what a difference it has made. Any decision whatever it is, that makes a difference and helps someone is rewarding.

I also enjoy meeting and consulting with tenant groups and working with them on issues such as the current work we are doing on the Housing Finance Review.

What are your priorities for the housing service?

To continue to develop good quality affordable housing, maintaining the housing stock in good repair and delivering a flexible housing service that really engages with tenants and empowers people to have a say.

What do you do when you are not at work?

Along with my husband I belong to the Military Vehicle Trust and own a Saladin-armoured car with a turret and gun (disarmed of course) and a trailer which we have converted into a caravan. We have a Leyland Daff Drops which pulls the trailer and carries the Saladin. We spend most of our weekends going to country steam shows during the summer and display our vehicles for the public. We collect money for Help For Heroes and help with the annual poppy appeal. Along with some of our friends who have vehicles, we have organised rides for local disabled children.

I also collect teddy bears and have quite a large collection.

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment

Your landlord has a duty to consult with you on the desirability and scope of Local Offers and in relation to the services it provides.

This includes how performance will be monitored and scrutinised by tenants, what should happen if Local Offers are not met and what arrangements there are for reviewing Local Offers.

Your landlord also has a duty to provide opportunities to scrutinise the effectiveness of policies in relation to tenant involvement and consult at least once every 3 years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of management services

Over the last year there has sometimes been a struggle to ensure we are involving a wide range of tenants in service development and decision making.

Where tenants have been involved in specific consultation e.g. changes to housing finance, we have been successful in consultation and feedback. We have also involved tenants in tender evaluation and selection interviews of contractors with some success.

We have a small group of tenants with whom we meet to discuss range of issues and then share their ideas on how to develop services and priorities but we would like to involve even more tenants.

Over the next year we aim to work with tenants to develop tenant scrutiny skills so they are able to look at our performance, give clear guidance on what their expectations are, then challenge us when we don't live up to their expectations.

Under the Localism Bill there will also be changes to the way we deal with complaints called the 'Democratic Filter'. At present if a tenant is not satisfied with the way their complaint is handled they can refer their complaint to the Ombudsman.

Proposals within the Localism Bill are that in order to refer a complaint to the Ombudsman, the complaint has to be supported by an MP, Councillor or Tenant's Panel. We will therefore seek to develop a tenants panel meeting regularly to scrutinise (examine closely) our services and review complaints.

One way in which we hope to involve tenants more is to pay them for their time, perhaps a payment for attending some meetings or getting involved in interviews. There is some difference of opinion amongst our tenants as to whether this is right and also what is an appropriate level of payment.

Our priority over the coming months is to talk to tenants one to one, either on their doorstep or by telephone to obtain their views.

We are also hoping that tenants will approach us when they would like us to organise a meeting or walkabout on their estate in order for us to look at local issues, and what we and tenants can do to resolve them. We have a number of forums which meet regularly and new members are also welcome to attend either regularly or just for a one off meeting. These are:

- Tenants Forum.
- Grounds Maintenance Forum.
- Estate Services Forum (new).
- Editorial Forum (newsletters and publications).
- Repairs Forum.

These meet at least quarterly. Sometimes more frequently, details can be found in the Housing Times newsletter.

We will organise meetings at times which are most convenient for our tenants. Some people work in the day and so are not available for daytime meetings, others work in the evenings so cannot attend evening meetings. We will, where appropriate, alternate meetings between daytime and evening to ensure we are available to as many people as possible.



'Cheeky Dog' entertaining children and below twins enjoying the face painting at a recent Tenants Drop-in.

A new initiative, which we will pilot in 2012, is our 'Council on the corner meetings'. These will be meetings where housing staff and Ward Councillors will run joint surgeries in a local area and be available for tenants and leaseholders to meet. Details of these will be published as soon as they are organised.

Next year we will be carrying out a Tenants Satisfaction Survey to obtain your views on a wide range of housing services. This will be carried out by a professional research company, and surveys will be sent to at least 10% of tenants. If you receive a survey please do take the time to complete and return it. The last survey was carried out in 2008 and 772 tenants responded.

In order to encourage a good response we donated 25p for each completed form to the Mayor's Charity raising over £190. We also held a prize draw and gave out several High Street vouchers.

Last year we gave details of our service commitments in respect of tenant involvement and empowerment – details of these are below along with an update on progress so far

From April 2011 we will...		How we're doing – October 2011
Ensure all tenants have information available on the range of options for involvement.		Information under review and to be incorporated into updated tenant handbook.
Investigate ways of extending tenant involvement to ensure coverage of under represented groups (younger tenants, families with children and ethnic minorities).		Doorstep survey to commence in Autumn 2011. Increase in family attendance at recent open day.
Provide support (training and expenses) to tenants who want to increase their involvement in the service.		In place.
Explore other ways to increase involvement e.g. social networking sites and via newsletters.		Support given to Local Newsletters. Facebook page set up for leaseholders and to be established for Tenant Forum.
Promote the work of the Tenants Forum and publish a summary of work in each newsletter.		Article included in summer 2011 newsletter.
Hold quarterly meetings of the Asset Management Forum involving tenants contractors and staff.		Quarterly meetings of the Repairs Forum held
Develop an annual work programme for the mystery shoppers to cover all sections of service delivery.		Workload problems for Mystery Shoppers.
Hold quarterly meetings of the Grounds Maintenance Forum.		Meetings held and dates published in newsletter.
Randomly select 30% of empty properties for quality checking by the mystery shopping group before they are re let.		Ongoing problems with access and timing.
Investigate the possibility of including a tenant representative on selection panels for housing staff vacancies.		Underway – process delayed due to Corporate organisational development.
Attend meetings of resident associations when invited and given 10 working days notice.		In place.
Carry out 50 estate walkabouts (25 in spring/summer and 25 in the autumn) and 25 doorstep/telephone surveys.		Spring programme completed. Autumn programme underway.
Publish the schedule of walkabouts by 31st March each year.		Spring walkabout schedule published in newsletter and on website.
Provide notes of meetings and issues raised at walkabouts to those tenants who attend and those tenants who request them.		System in place to provide this information.

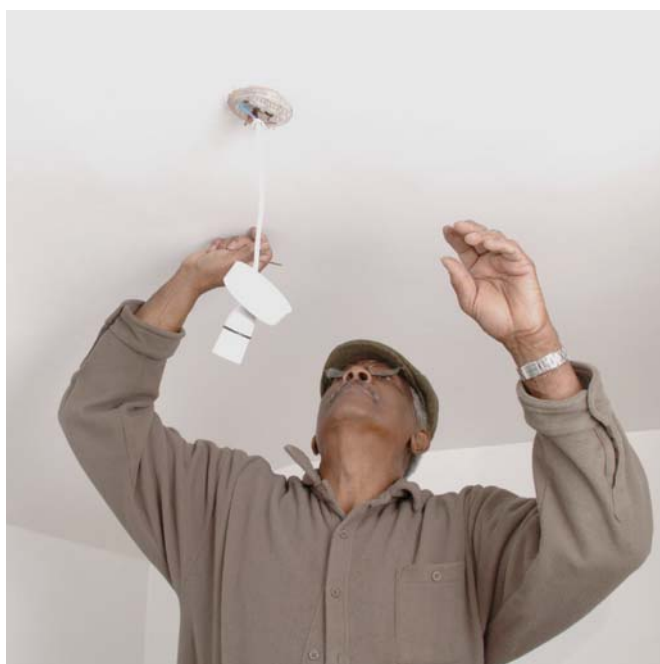
KEY: ■ Achieved ■ Underway ■ Delayed or Postponed

The Home Standard

Your landlord has a duty to ensure that tenants' homes meet the Decent Homes Standard by 31st December 2010 and continue to maintain homes after that date.

Your landlord also has a responsibility to provide a cost effective repairs and maintenance service to individual homes and communal areas, meeting the statutory requirements for the health and safety of occupants.

The service should respond to the needs of tenants and offer choices with the objective of completing repairs and improvements right first time.



Electrical equipment is checked and replaced when necessary.

The Asset Management Service is the largest area of expenditure and probably the most important to tenants in terms of overall satisfaction with landlord services.

The Team has 20 staff based in the Council offices. There are 12 surveyors who manage day to day repairs and large scale capital projects such as re roofing or replacement windows. The remainder of the team is administrative and support officers who take repair calls from tenants, deal with contractors and book appointments for surveyors. In recent years the focus of the team has shifted toward involving tenants and leaseholders in identifying priorities for service delivery and the selection of contractors.

The work of the section falls into four broad areas

- Responsive repairs – day to day repairs requested by tenants e.g. water leaks, broken doors, heating breakdown and works to vacant properties.
- Capital works – extensive work identified through the stock condition survey e.g. roof replacement, rewiring or kitchen and bathroom works.
- Planned maintenance – work to prevent deterioration of property e.g. external painting and repointing.
- Other ad hoc works to meet legal requirements or our obligations to tenants e.g. gas safety checks, and disabled adaptations.

Current Service Priorities

Digital Aerial Upgrade

In 2005 the Government confirmed it's commitment to switching TV broadcasting from analogue to digital. Back in 2001, in response to planning restrictions on the erection of satellite dishes the Council had commenced a programme to replace communal aerial supplies on blocks of flats to satellite systems and a large number of aerials have been replaced with satellite to limit the number of satellite dishes on blocks of flats.



Terry Harris (Electrical Surveyor) advises a tenant on the digital switchover at an Open Day held at the Council Offices.



The Watret team (Pauline Cunningham, Ken Watret and Darren Dudey) with Dave Bennett Gas Services Surveyor.

The analogue broadcasting system which serves the St Albans area will be switched off in 2012 and while provision of TV aerials is not a landlord's legal obligation we are committed to upgrading communal TV aerials across the district before the service is switched off.

Unfortunately there are a number of properties (bungalows, maisonettes and houses) which are still connected to the analogue system and these will not be upgraded. The affected tenants have been notified this year of the impending digital switchover and whether the Council will be upgrading their communal system to digital. In some instances the Council has 'gifted' aerials to residents living in properties connected to communal aerial that we are unable to upgrade, where the tenant is currently in receipt of a free television license from the government.

Safety in the Home

The Housing Service has a legal duty to carry out a number of checks to make sure a property is safe both when a tenant moves in and in the course of their tenancy. We also carry out a number of additional services for tenants which are in excess of our legal requirements.

Safety checks

Before a property is let to a new tenant we carry out a gas and electrical safety checks and give a copy of the safety certificate to the new tenant. This is a legal requirement.

In addition an annual landlord's gas safety check (LGSR) has to be carried out and in order to do this we need the tenant to give our specialist contractor access to their home to carry out the test. It is a condition of the tenancy that access is given in order that we can carry out these tests

Because the implications of gas safety are so important we have started using injunctions to gain access to properties where tenants will not let us in to carry out gas safety checks. These give us permanent access to the property so we can carry out the annual checks promptly.

The contractors who carry out the gas safety checks are also required to test the hard wired smoke detector, the carbon monoxide detector and the water temperature to ensure compliance with Water Hygiene Regulations (Approved Code of Practice 18).

In Retirement Housing a schedule of tasks is carried out to ensure compliance with the Water Hygiene Regulations. This is because the flats are fed from a communal hot water source and we need to take into account the age and health status of many of the residents.

Asbestos is a major area of concern for all property owners, but particularly Councils, as a large number of council houses and flats were built between the 1940's and early 1980's before the dangers of asbestos were known and when it was used extensively in the construction industry.

Asbestos is safe when it is in good condition and undisturbed but when repairs or major works are arranged we have a duty of care to inform contractors where asbestos is present, to prevent them from disturbing it. This is why we also ask tenants to seek our permission before carrying out improvement work themselves as we will then be able to advise them if any asbestos is located in the area where they propose working.

The Council is currently carrying out asbestos surveys on vacant properties, and prior to any major works. We are in the process of installing bespoke Asbestos software to enable better transfer of information between the Council, Contractors and residents.

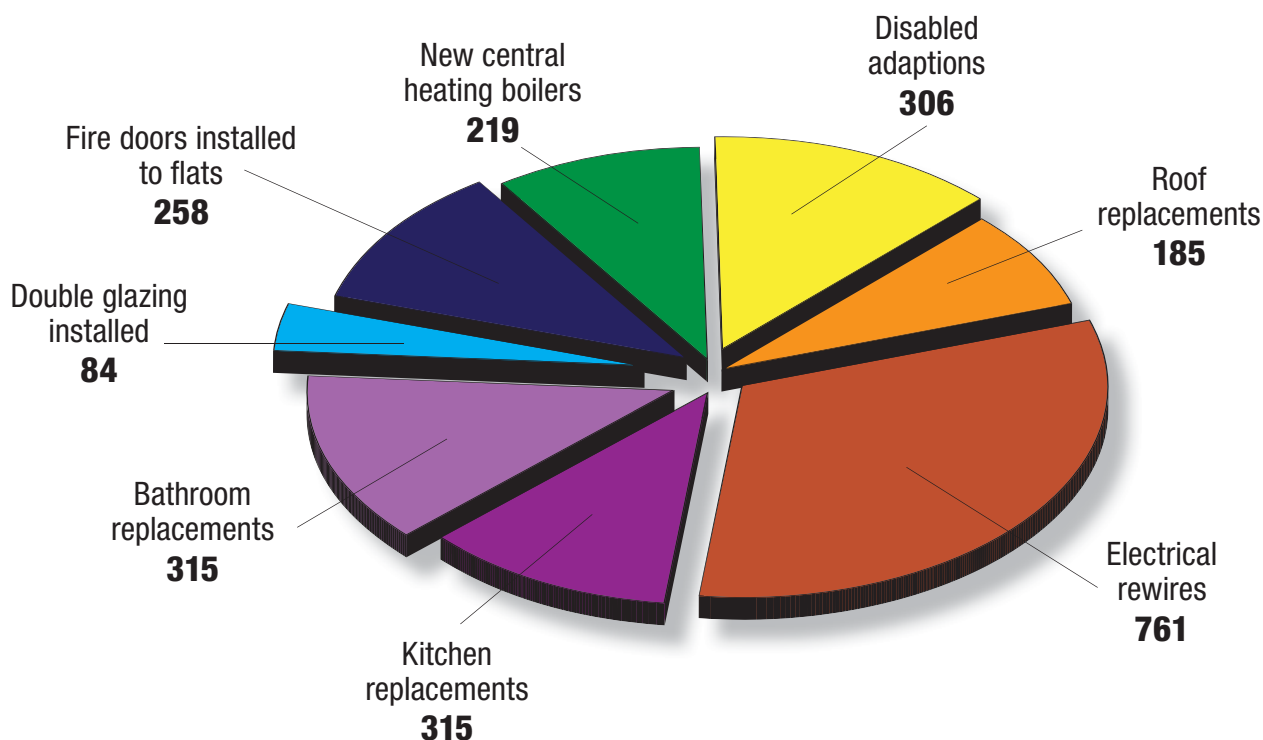
What have we done in 2010-11?

Achievements for the Repairs Service in 2010-11 include:

- Ordering and managing 29,755 repairs.
- Carrying out 1,404 pre inspections of requested repairs.
- Carrying out 4,371 post inspections of completed repairs.
- Arranging repairs and safety checks to 331 vacant properties in preparation for letting to new tenants.

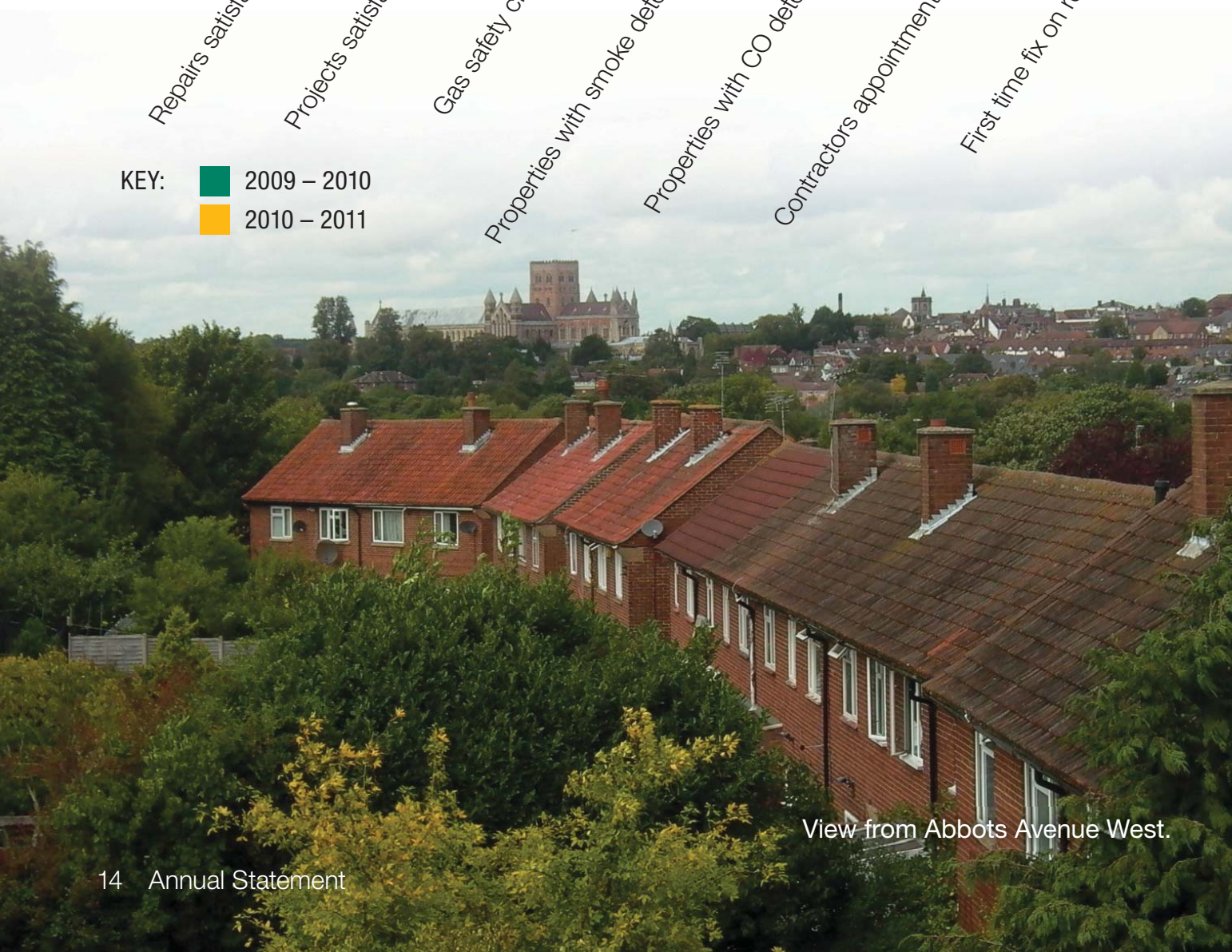
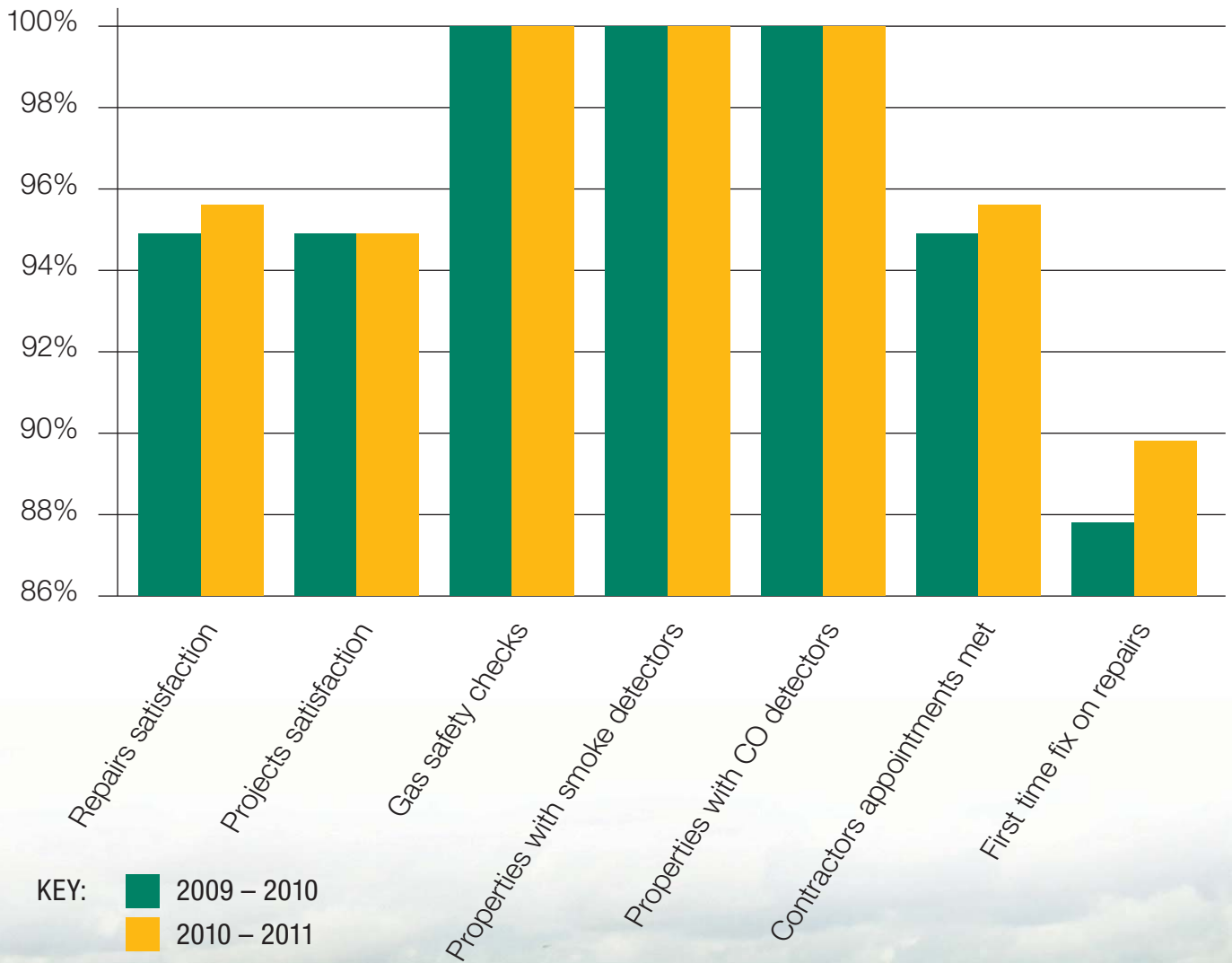
During 2010-2011 the Council spent £6.5 million on capital improvements to its housing stock – the chart below shows how this money was distributed across a range of improvements.

Capital Improvements to Properties



How have we performed?

Asset Management Performance



View from Abbots Avenue West.

Last year we gave our service commitments in respect of Asset Management, details of these are below along with details of progress so far.

From April 2011 we will...		How we're doing – October 2011
Ensure all properties meet the Decent Homes Standard by December 31st 2010.		All properties which we have been able to obtain access to now meet the decent homes standard.
Complete 90% of repairs within a single visit.		94% emergency repairs completed at the first visit.
Complete 90% of all repairs within published timescales.		98% achieved.
Decorate the exterior and interior communal parts of your property every 5 years.		Year 1 of 5 year programme completed. Programme published on website and available on request.
Consult with tenants to review and establish clear guidance on tenant and the landlords repair responsibilities.		Consultation carried out in repair forum.
Strive to ensure that all properties have annual gas safety checks in accordance with our legal obligations.		99.5% achieved at September 2011. Injunctions piloted on 'no access' cases.
Monitor tenant satisfaction in relation to gas repairs, responsive repairs and capital works and aim for a minimum of 90% satisfaction rising to 92% by 2012-13.		Satisfaction for the 12 months up to September 2011 was 94%.
Seek to increase choice when carrying out kitchen or bathroom modernisation.		Increased choices now available. Consultation carried out on proposed revisions to scope of work.
Ensure tenants are involved in interview and selection of contractors for all contracts in excess of 12 months.		Tenants participate in contractor interview and selection panels.
Publish the approved 3 year capital programme on an annual basis in the Housing Times newsletter.		Published in Housing Times newsletter and on the website.
Send postal confirmation when a repair is ordered which includes details of the appointment and job number and an opportunity for the tenant to give feedback on the repair.		Postal confirmation and survey sent out for all individual repairs.
Strive to ensure that all properties are prepared for the digital switchover at the Crystal Palace Transmitter in 2012.		Currently on target for all flats with communal aerials to be upgraded before the switchover take place.

KEY: ■ Achieved ■ Underway ■ Delayed or Postponed

The Tenancy Standard

This standard relates to the lettings and allocations services we provide as well as how we manage rent setting and collection processes and what action we have taken in ensuring your rights and responsibilities with your tenancy.

Lettings and Allocations (Housing Options)

Your landlord has a duty to allocate homes in a fair and transparent way taking into account the needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants. All lettings should make best use of available housing and resources, be in accordance with the purpose of the housing and promote sustainable communities.

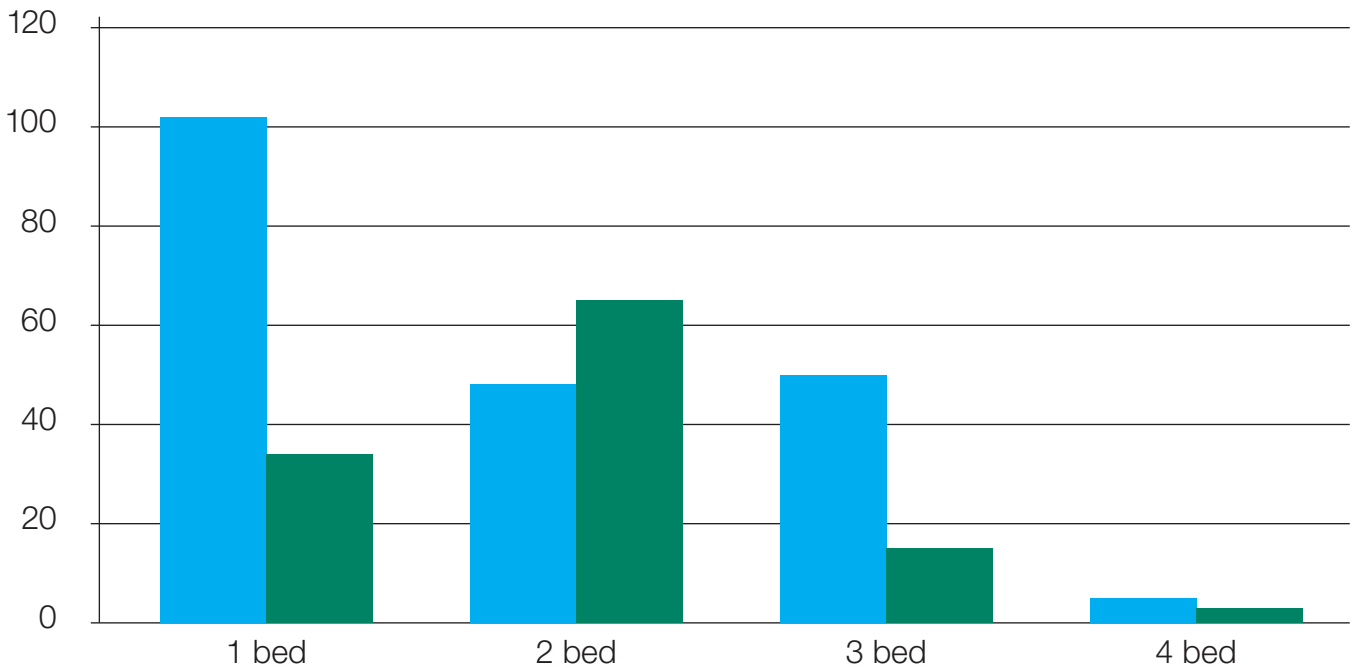
Housing Options

Last year 317 Council and Housing Association properties were allocated to applicants on our housing waiting list. The table below shows how these are broken down between Housing Association and Council properties. In addition we have shown how these are distributed by number of bedrooms.



Mountbatten Close, St Albans.

Properties let between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2011



KEY: ■ Council ■ Housing Association

Below is a snapshot of the list (as of 23rd September 2011) which shows how many applicants there are in each band requiring a particular size of accommodation (Please note that these numbers will vary depending on whether applicants join or leave the list).

Applicants by Band for 1 bedroom accommodation		
	Transfer applicants*	Homeseeker applicants**
Band A	1	0
Band B	37	6
Band C	12	23
Band D	27	338
Band E	119	712
Total Waiting	186	1079
Applicants by Band for 2 bedroom accommodation		
	Transfer applicants	Homeseeker applicants
Band A	0	0
Band B	10	19
Band C	8	102
Band D	33	138
Band E	118	305
Total Waiting	169	564
Applicants by Band for 3 bedroom accommodation		
	Transfer applicants	Homeseeker applicants
Band A	0	0
Band B	4	6
Band C	10	18
Band D	103	45
Band E	24	83
Total Waiting	137	152
Applicants by Band for 4 bedroom accommodation		
	Transfer applicants	Homeseeker applicants
Band A	0	0
Band B	1	1
Band C	6	2
Band D	15	13
Band E	1	1
Total Waiting	23	17

*Applicants will be registered as a transfer applicant if they hold a tenancy with St Albans Council or a Registered Social Landlord within St Albans City and District

**Applicants are registered as a 'Homeseeker' if they are an applicant on the Housing Register or are tenants of Registered Social Landlords outside the St Albans area.

Priority Banding

All housing applicants are given a priority banding when they apply for housing. This banding may change if their circumstances change. Below is an overview of the information we use to apply bidding to applicants.

Priority Banding	
Band A	applicants have a local connection and an urgent need to move.
Band B	applicants have a local connection and a priority need to move or may be homeless.
Band C	applicants have a local connection and a high need to move.
Band D	applicants do not necessarily have a local connection but have a recognised housing need. Some homeless applicants who do not qualify for Band B will also be in this category.
Band E	applicants do not necessarily have a local connection and have no recognised housing needs.

The choice based lettings system has been running for over 2 years and is a great improvement on the previous system used to allocate properties. It has helped reduce the time properties are empty between one tenant moving out and another moving in, and reduced the number of times an individual property is offered and refused by applicants.

As part of Herts Choice Homes we hold ‘user group’ meetings on a quarterly basis. This is opportunity for users of the choice based lettings system to give feedback about areas for improvement, such as the website or feedback. If you think that this is something you would be interested in attending please contact Victoria Brett on 01727 819585.



Discussing housing options.

A Day in the Life of the Lettings Officer

Victoria Brett has worked in the Housing Service for 5 years. Initially appointed as the Lettings Officer to deal with transfer requests and allocation of empty properties. Her responsibilities have expanded over recent years.

Prior to joining the Council Victoria worked for London Borough of Barnet through their Graduate Training Programme where she obtained her MA.

In 2009 Victoria managed the change from a housing allocation system to the choice based lettings system. Recently Victoria has also taken over responsibility for managing temporary accommodation for homeless families whose homeless application is being considered or those who are waiting to move to permanent housing.

Victoria is now the 'Housing Options Co Ordinator - Choice Based Lettings and Temporary Accommodation' but to save space we will temporarily use her original title!

I am responsible for the maintenance of the Housing Register, the advertising and shortlisting of vacant properties and for the allocation and management of temporary accommodation.

On arrival at the office I check to see if we have been given notice on any properties by tenants and also to see if any vacant properties have had repairs and safety checks completed and have been passed back ready for letting. If I have any concerns I speak to colleagues in the Asset Management Team to discuss progress.

Once a week, staff from my team, meet to discuss progress on all empty council properties in the district.

We have different deadlines throughout a bidding cycle. On any one day I could be preparing properties for advertising and loading them onto the Locata Choice Based Lettings System or I could be monitoring bidding, placing bids on behalf of tenants who are unable to bid for themselves, or working on the newly received shortlists. At the end of a bidding cycle my priority is to co-ordinate the verification of successful applicants. Once this has been done we work as quickly as we can to arrange accompanied viewings with them.

In the course of the day my team receives many calls from tenants and applicants wanting to know details of their banding or the outcome of their bidding. I also receive a number of letters from tenants, applicants, Councillors and MP's about housing applications and banding.

Throughout the day new requests for temporary accommodation are received by the Housing Options Team. Due to high occupancy rates we have to look at what availability we have to accommodate these families. I meet with the team who visit those in temporary accommodation and discuss any issues or concerns that have arisen and need to be dealt with.

I may also have meetings with staff either individually or as a team to discuss matters arising from their visits and suggestions for improvements.

My day usually ends around 6:30pm when I have a final check on the progress of bidding on the Locata System and catch up on my phone calls when the office is usually quieter!



Victoria Brett explains bidding to a tenant.

Last year we gave details of our service commitments in respect of the Housing Options Service details of these are below along with an update on progress so far

From April 2011 we will...		How we're doing October 2011
Verify your application, confirm your banding and send you details of how to bid within 21 days of receiving all the information we require.		All applications have been confirmed within 21 days.
Advise you in writing of the outcome of any referral to medical panel within 14 days of the panel meeting.		Telephone or written confirmation given within 14 days.
Aim to re let properties within 21 days of them becoming empty.		Average 24 days for all vacant properties (except sheltered housing) at September 2011.
Support housing associations in the development of 57 new homes across the district.		During 2010/11 we worked with housing associations to develop 111 new affordable homes.
Contact you by telephone if you make a successful bid for a property (an up to date telephone number must be provided) and arrange an accompanied viewing within 48 hours of our call.		Successful bidders advised within 24 hours of bids closing and initial accompanied viewings carried out with 48 hours (delays where applicants unable to attend).
Provide you with information on what you can expect from your new property with the offer of a new tenancy.		Issued to all prospective tenants when viewing a vacant property.
Provide you with information on how we expect you to leave your current property with the offer of a new tenancy.		In place and sent to transfer cases.
Host an annual Housing Options Day where staff will be available to offer housing advice and respond to queries.		Held in September 2011.

KEY: ■ Achieved ■ Underway ■ Delayed or Postponed

Development of New Affordable Housing

Last year, despite the slowdown in building market, a total of 111 new affordable dwellings were completed in the District. New homes were provided on the Oaklands College Campus in St Albans city centre, in Wheathampstead and the Highfield area of St Albans.

Staff have also continued working on the sheltered housing redevelopment programme which will see the completion of Rosewood Court, a sheltered housing scheme in Park Street, on the site of the former Eric Steele House. 34 residents are scheduled to move into their new homes in January 2012.

Laelia House in Dellfield is undergoing refurbishment work to provide 18 flats (12 x 1 bedroom and 6 x 2 bedrooms). It will be known as Fielding Place and will be ready for occupation in November 2011.

The Housing 21 housing association held a consultation day over the summer where

local residents could look at and comment on plans for the redevelopment of Leacroft in Harpenden. This development will provide a flexicare scheme for older people. A planning application has now been submitted.

Early October saw presentations from four housing associations to former residents of Caroline Sharpe House, councillors and staff. This is the first stage in selecting a partner to redevelop the site. Caroline Sharpe House is to be redeveloped as a flexicare scheme for older people.

Plans are in place for other sheltered schemes: The Grange in Colney Heath is now empty and the Council is discussing the redevelopment options for the site with the chosen Housing Association. Victor Smith Court in Bricket Wood will be vacated by residents early next year and expressions of interest to redevelop this site will then be sought.



The Mayor meets contractors at Rosewood Court (formerly Eric Steele House).

Rents and Security of Tenure

Your landlord has a duty to ensure rent levels are set in accordance with the formula established by the Government in 2001. Rent levels are based upon property value, number of bedrooms and local earnings.

Your landlord has a duty to publish clear and accessible policies which outline their approach to tenancy management and develop services which support tenants and prevent unnecessary evictions.

The Housing Management Service employs eight Housing Officers who between them manage around 5000 tenancies. There is also a Senior Housing Officer who is responsible for managing all the retirement housing schemes.

Housing Officers are responsible for making sure rent is collected every week and those tenants who for a variety of reasons do not pay their rent are contacted promptly and arrangements made to pay any outstanding rent.

Housing Officers will seek an agreement with the tenant about rent payment. If the agreement is not kept then further action is taken, initially by serving a Notice of Seeking Possession and then referral to Court for a Possession Order.

If the tenant still misses payments and all avenues to resolve the arrears have been explored then the case is referred back to the Court for a Bailiff to 'Execute a Warrant' and the tenant is evicted.

Tenants who are evicted for rent arrears are considered to be intentionally homeless and will not be entitled to be rehoused by either the Council or a Housing Association.

Details of legal Action for rent arrears are shown below

Legal Action for Rent Arrears 2010-2011	
Number of Notices of Seeking Possession Served	452
Number of court orders obtained	53
Number of evictions carried out	5

At the end of the financial year £389,436 was owed to the Council by tenants. This sum represents 1.8% of all rent due.

The rents for all tenants are set annually and any changes come into force in the first week of April. The rent increase is based on a formula set by the Government in 2001. The rent is based upon a number of factors relating to the property including value, the number of bedrooms and average local earnings, any changes are based upon the inflation rate in the previous September.

Each year a number of tenants contact the Council and report that the rent they pay differs from their neighbours even though they live in the same type of property.

This usually occurs because the previous rents were based upon a points system depending upon a range of improvements carried out in the 1960's and 70's.

When the properties were valued in 2000/01 a sample were valued and then the value, combined with the existing rent points was used to determine the new rent for the property.

Details of average rents are given below

Property Size	Average Weekly Rent
1 bedroom	£73.78
2 bedrooms	£90.37
3 Bedrooms	£105.05
4 Bedrooms	£116.31

In addition to rents we also charge for any services over and above the actual rental of the property. These cover additional costs of any services provided to properties or estates. Service charges cover costs such as caretaking, grounds maintenance, heating and water.

People on Housing Benefit will find that some of these charges are paid through Housing Benefit but others are not. There are complex regulations about what charges Housing Benefit can be paid for but in general if a service is provided in common areas for the whole block e.g. caretaking, it will be covered by Housing Benefit. Where a service is provided to an individual's property (e.g. heating) then the tenants are responsible for paying the charge.

In last year's Annual Statement we said we would be giving tenants an explanation about how their individual charges are calculated. This will be sent to all tenants when the new charges are set in early 2012.

As well as dealing with rent accounts Housing Officers also deal with a range of tenancy issues. These include:

- Signing up a new tenant and ensuring they move into their new home.
- Dealing with breaches of the tenancy agreement such as overgrown gardens or neglected properties.
- Dealing with serious nuisance or anti-social behaviour.
- Arranging mutual exchanges.
- Tenant participation – meeting tenants and encouraging them to get involved and share their ideas about their local area or estate.

The Housing Officers each manage a patch of around 600 properties usually in a particular geographical area and manage all tenancies according to the terms of the tenancy agreement. They are guided in this by a number of policies and procedures which are summarised in the tenant handbook.

Contact details for the Housing Officer in your area can be found in the 'useful contacts' section at the back of this report.

Housing Area	Housing Officer
All Retirement Housing	Mrs Louise Wallis* (Thurs-Fri) (Mon-Weds) Appointment pending
Redbourn, Dellfield, Southdown, Tudor Road	Mrs Jenetta Barker
Batchwood, Valley Road, Hatfield Road, New Greens	Mrs Kath Young (Mon – Weds) (Thurs – Fri) Appointment pending
Batford, Harpenden Town Centre, Thirlestane, Chiswell Green	Miss Claire Coleman
London Colney, Smallford, Colney Heath	Miss Judith Tucker
Park Street, St Albans City Centre, Telford Court, Pimlico, Bricket Wood	Mrs Denise Higgins
Wheathampstead, Sandridge, New Camp (former Allotment sites)	Miss Samantha Sandiford
Camp Area, Marshalswick	Mrs Kellie Kelley
Sopwell North, Sopwell South, Sopwell Centre, Newgate Close	Miss Kate Hewgill

*Senior Housing Officer

The Tenancy Strategy

One of the requirements of the Localism Bill currently going through Parliament is that local Councils should work with other social landlords in their area and develop a Tenancy Strategy.

This strategy will address a number of issues including rent levels and tenancy length.

It is proposed that landlords will be able to grant tenancies for defined periods instead of the current tenancy for life which a Secure Tenancy gives.

This proposal will only apply to new tenants in social housing **NOT** existing tenants.

All landlords are or will shortly be consulting with their tenants to seek their views on this proposal.

In St Albans we will be consulting with our tenants on:

- a) The proposed length of a tenancy – 2, 5 or 10 years.
- b) The circumstances under which we would not renew a tenancy. This could be a variety of reasons e.g. income has increased enabling the tenant to buy or rent privately, children have left home, anti-social behaviour, adaptations which are no longer required.

The Tenancy Strategy has to be in place within 1 year of the Localism Bill becoming law, probably in the autumn of 2012.

Housing staff will be carrying out telephone or door to door consultation so please do take the time to share your views. It may not affect you but it may affect your friends or family so your opinion is of great value to us.



Linda Middleton explains housing options.

Last year we gave details of our service commitments in respect of rents and tenure, details of these are below along with an update on progress so far

From April 2011 we will...		How we're doing – October 2011
Give you at least 28 days notice of any increase in rent.		Done – rent increases are calculated annually and agreed at the Council meeting in February. All tenants are notified during the last week in February for implementation during the first complete week in April.
Give a written explanation of how heating and water charges are calculated.		This will be available when the rent changes for 2012 are issued.
Send you a quarterly rent statement.		Statements are sent out in January, April, July and October with details of the previous quarters rent and benefit payments.
Inform you when your case is to be referred to the Housing Review Panel and when you have the right to appeal a decision made by the Panel.		Information sent out with decision letter following Housing Review Panel.
Assist you in completing a Housing Benefit form or refer you to the Housing Benefit Visiting Officer to ensure you are claiming the full amount of Housing Benefit you are entitled to.		Housing Officers complete a benefit application when a new tenancy commences or on request by the tenant.
Refer you to the CAB Money Advice Service when Notice of Seeking Possession is Served (rent arrears).		This is done unless the tenant declines to be referred.
Refer you to the Tenancy Support Service before referring your case to court for possession action (rent arrears).		This is done unless the tenant declines to be referred.
Refer all former tenant arrears over £100 to a debt collection agency for tracing and collection.		Done – except where the tenant has an agreement to pay and is sticking to that agreement.
Give you a housing handbook at the start of your tenancy and send a revised handbook to all tenants.		Given to all new tenants. Currently being revised.
Give you full information about your rights and responsibilities as a tenant when we sign you up with a new tenancy agreement.		Completed at the start of a tenancy. Reminders provided if there are any alleged breaches of the tenancy.
Visit you within 42 days of your new tenancy starting to check you have moved into the property, whether you have any problems paying rent and if there are any outstanding repairs.		As at September 2011 96.3% completed (Target 85%).
Advise you in writing if there are any concerns about the conduct of your tenancy by you or members of your household.		Completed. We may also visit you.
Advise you within 42 days of receiving all relevant information whether or not we will approve your request for a mutual exchange.		100% completed within 42 days at September 2011.
Advise you of a decision made by the Housing Review Panel within 10 days of the panel meeting.		Letters sent out by Housing Officers in accordance with timescales.

KEY: ■ Achieved ■ Underway ■ Delayed or Postponed

The Neighbourhood and Community Standard

Your landlord has a duty to keep the neighbourhood and communal areas clean and safe and take action to tackle and prevent anti social behaviour. They will work in partnership with tenants, other providers and public bodies where it is effective to do so.

Local Area Co-operation

Your landlord will take into account their presence and impact within the areas where they own properties and will identify and publish the roles they are able to play and co-operate with other agencies in achieving their objectives.

In the last Annual Statement we told you about the organisations we work with to provide homes and support individuals and communities. Over the course of the last year we have continued to work with them and also find other ways to enhance and improve our services.

We continue to work with the police, local health services and the Hertfordshire Mediation Service to address all types of nuisance and anti-social behaviour, to enable our tenants and leaseholders to enjoy their homes in peace and security.

We work with occupational therapists to ensure tenants with health problems or disabilities can have adaptations made to their homes or quickly find alternative housing to help them maintain their independence.



There are 3 aspects of the service covered by this standard, they are local area co-operation – how we work with other organisations. Management of neighbourhoods, (in particular estate services) and management of nuisance and anti-social behaviour.

Before taking legal action to recover rent arrears and ultimately evict a tenant, we work with Hightown Praetorian & Churches, Origin and Aldwyck housing associations to obtain additional support for tenants who may be dealing with personal difficulties. Funding is provided to the Citizens Advice Bureau a Money Adviser who holds a weekly surgery to advise and support people with money problems, debt and to help them claim all the benefits they are entitled to.

Following a review of procedures for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, the Council decided that all concerns or referrals should be filtered through the Community Protection Team rather than individual officers taking action.

This new approach ensures we are capturing, recording and dealing with safeguarding concerns in a consistent manner.

We also work with your District, County and Parish Councillors when you bring issues or concerns to their attention and ask them to help or support you in working with the Council.

This is a summary of the individuals and organisations we work with across the Housing Service and across the District. All staff and their managers are aware of the help available will be able to provide advice, information and contact details either on request or where they identify that you or your community may need extra help, support or advice.

Left: CAB Advice stand open day 2011.

Neighbourhood Management

Your landlord will consult with tenants in developing a published policy for maintaining and improving neighbourhoods associated with their homes.

Over the last year we have been reviewing the way we manage neighbourhoods, and how we work with tenants and their representatives to manage and maintain services.

We liaise with other Council departments to achieve this and also employ our own caretaking team to provide cleaning to a number of estates and blocks of flats.

In recent years we have conducted regular walkabouts on estates with the intention that housing officers, councillors and local residents walk around a defined area and check what is going on and what needs to be done. Although these were initially successful, their popularity has declined over the last 2 years. We no longer publish a programme of walkabouts but we will carry them out where tenants request them.

In order to maintain contact with tenants in their own community we will begin a programme of house calls or telephone surveys over the autumn of 2011 and onwards to talk to tenants about what is happening in their community and what is important to them.

If this is successful we will develop an annual programme to make sure we cover all areas of the district where we provide and manage housing.

There have been some changes to the caretaking service implemented in April 2011; details of these were given in the spring/summer newsletter. The most significant change is that instead of an individual caretaker visiting a block for a short period each week, a team of 2-4 caretakers visit blocks less frequently but for a longer period so that a more thorough cleaning service is provided. Service charges for caretaking were adjusted in April to reflect these changes, and were either increased or reduced as a result.

In the last Annual Statement we made a number of service commitments in respect of services we provide to neighbourhoods and estates. A summary of progress so far is provided at the end of this section.

Managing and Preventing Anti-Social Behaviour

Your landlord will publish a policy on how they work with partners to tackle and prevent anti-social behaviour and will demonstrate strong leadership, commitment and accountability in preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour.

Your landlord should ensure all tenants can easily report anti-social behaviour, tenants are kept up to date with progress on a case and that support is available for victims and witnesses.

Management of nuisance and anti-social behaviour is dealt with initially by housing officers and dealt with as a breach of the terms of the tenancy agreement.

More complex or long term cases of anti-social behaviour can be referred to the Council's Community Protection Team who are based outside the Housing Service in the Policy and Partnerships team.

In the last year housing officers and the Community Protection team dealt with 232 incidents where the terms of a tenancy have been breached as a result of nuisance or anti-social behaviour.

Of those referred to the Community Protection team, 100% were responded to within 24 hours.

Of these cases, 66% were resolved completely and the cases were closed. Of the remainder, action is either ongoing or could not progress due to lack of evidence. The Community Protection Team interview victims and witnesses in person to explain procedures and provide reassurance. This has had a significant reduction on the number of cases where no action could be taken due to lack of information or evidence.

The Community Protection team uses a range of methods to investigate and resolve problems caused by nuisance and anti-social behaviour. They also play an important part in preventing anti-social behaviour occurring. This can range from working closely with the Housing Options Team to review applicants and ensure people with a history of anti-social or criminal behaviour are not housed by the Council or where they are housed; appropriate organisations can monitor behaviour and activities and intervene if things start to go wrong.

The Community Protection team also have regular meetings with Police and probation service colleagues to discuss problem areas or individuals and work alongside the Police, Probation and Social Services to make sure that anti-social behaviour is kept to a minimum and where it does arise, it is dealt with swiftly and appropriately.



May Blackwood, Housing Services Officer.

There are a number of legal remedies available where people are in breach of their tenancy by causing nuisance and anti-social behaviour. This could be by using injunctions or taking possession action and evictions. Our own legal services team within the Council deal with nuisance cases. More complex cases are dealt with by external solicitors. Some staff have had training in taking statements and taking their own cases to court, this year the Community Protection Team have obtained 2 ASBI's (Anti-Social Behaviour Injunctions) without legal assistance and over the next year we are going to train more staff in taking their own cases and representing the Council in Court.

An important and often overlooked part of managing anti-social behaviour is prevention. We work to do this in a variety of ways:

- Use of CCTV on estates and within some properties where there is persistent crime or anti-social behaviour.
- Diversion activities for young people to steer them away from anti-social behaviour. This year we have funded two Fire Service LIFE projects to give young people life skills and diversion activities.
- Assisted funding of alcohol awareness projects for all year 9 school pupils across the district.
- Provision of Smartwater property marking kits free to 350 residents at particular risk of burglary.

Over the next year we will train more staff in obtaining statements and legal evidence so they can present cases in Court without the use of solicitors.

We will also do more to increase the response to surveys of people who have reported anti-social behaviour and had their case managed by the Community Protection Team.

Additionally, we will work to prevent nuisance and anti-social behaviour and support victims of crime by carrying out risk assessments and develop clear action plans when a case is initially referred to us.

Last year we gave details of our service commitments in respect of managing and supporting communities, details of these are below along with an update on progress so far

From April 2011 we will...		How we're doing – October 2011
Review Fire Safety Assessments to estates in accordance with legal requirements.		Completed by Estate Services Officer.
Work with the Environmental Services team to increase recycling on estates to achieve the Councils 60%+ recycling rate.		Work underway by Asset Management Team to identify sites and apply for planning permission as necessary.
Carry out 50 estate walkabouts and 25 doorstep surveys.		Estate walkabouts completed. Programmed for Autumn 2011 on request. Doorstep survey schedule in place.
Publish details of Caretaker responsibilities for all tenants who receive the service.		Information published in summer 2011 newsletter.
Work with tenants to develop methods of improving feedback on estate services.		Format to be developed through Tenant Forum.
Remove graffiti within 5 working days of notification and racist/obscene graffiti within 24 hours.		Cleared within 48 hours of reporting to Estate Services or repairs team.
Work with the Animal Warden and enforce the tenancy agreement to ensure animals do not cause a nuisance on estates.		Referrals to Animal Warden and joint visits carried out across the district. Tenancy enforcement action in some cases.
Carry out annual steam cleaning of bin sheds, chutes and hoppers.		Completed summer 2011.
Continue to seek ways of working with partner agencies to improve and develop services to tenants.		Continue to work with mediation service, support service and Citizens Advice Bureau.
Enable tenants to report anti-social behaviour in the way they are most comfortable with: by telephone, in writing, by e mail or in person.		All staff aware of the need to take reports in a range of formats.
Identify nuisance 'hotspots' and work with local residents and the Police to develop a local action and support plan.		Ongoing work by Community Protection team and Police.
Respond to urgent cases (involving violence, hate crimes, domestic violence and drug dealing) within 24 hours.		100% had initial contact within 24 hours.
Provide additional support for vulnerable witnesses e.g. regular face to face contact, faster response times and CCTV coverage.		Achieved via Community Protection team. Investigating use of risk assessments.
Issue a questionnaire seeking your feedback on the service provided by the Community Protection team and seek 80% satisfaction on the way cases have been handled.		Feedback positive but need to improve response rate. We are considering telephone surveys.
Hold regular meetings with the Police to share information on hate crimes and anti-social behaviour.		Anti-social behaviour meetings held all cases discussed, also discussed at JAG (Joint Agency Group).

KEY: ■ Achieved ■ Underway ■ Delayed or Postponed

Value for Money

Your landlord shall have a comprehensive approach to managing resources to provide cost effective, efficient, quality services and homes to meet tenants' needs and potential needs.

We continue to experience severe pressure on housing budgets and the changes to our financial situation arising from the new self financing regime will add to these pressures.

Over the last year as part of a Council-wide organisational development process we have been reviewing our staffing levels and the way we provide services in order to identify more efficient ways of working and reduce overall costs.

This means that while some posts are no longer required, other people have had new duties added to their jobs.

We have also reviewed administrative support across the service to ensure it is sufficient, responsibilities are clearer and specialist staff are able to focus on their specialisms rather than administrative duties.

Some of the proposed changes to staffing levels and staff responsibilities are currently under consultation with staff and the union. We will give further details of the outcomes in the next Housing Times.

In the last Annual Statement we said that we would work to ensure all charges to leaseholders (generally owners of flats bought under the Right to Buy scheme), would be made promptly and that we would ensure leaseholders are charged appropriately for all the services they receive from the Housing Department. This is because the majority of income to the Housing Service comes from housing rents and it was seen as unfair that leaseholders were benefitting from some housing services without contributing towards them.

In April 2011 responsibility for collecting leasehold charges e.g. for services, repairs and maintenance, was transferred from the Councils Finance Department to the Housing Service. The Leasehold Officer has the latest information on whether or not leaseholders are paying their charges and can take prompt action to recover any debts.

In addition to this, a new leasehold management charge is to be applied to all Council leaseholders from April 2012. This charge will cover the costs of services and staff time which cannot be recovered from direct service charges. We feel it is fair that leaseholders should contribute to Housing Services in order that costs do not all fall solely on our tenants.



Housing Accountants Helen Bristow and Darren Lynch review budgets.

The Current Financial Position

In 2010-2011 the overall income to the Housing Service was £23,788,000.

We do not receive any money from Council Tax to pay for services to tenants. Apart from a small grant from the Government, the rent and charges from tenants and leaseholders are the main source of income.

Housing Service Income 2010-2011		
Where the money comes from	How much?	Percentage of overall income
Tenants rents	£22,051,000	92.70%
Other rental income (garages, shops etc)	£1,164,000	4.89%
Service charges from tenants	£236,000	0.99%
Herts County Council 'Supporting People'	£201,000	0.84%
Other income	£136,000	0.58%
Total	£23,788,000	100%

Because our income is so dependent upon the rent we receive from tenants, a large amount of staff time and resources are spent on recovering rent arrears from current tenants and collecting unpaid rent from former tenants.

Housing Service Expenditure 2010 - 2011		
Where the money is spent	How much?	Percentage of overall expenditure
Management services	£5,180,000	22.25%
Day to day repairs and planned maintenance	£3,341,000	14.35%
Contribution to major repairs	£3,885,000	16.69%
Government subsidy	£9,978,000	42.86%
Other costs	£895,000	3.85%
Total	£23,279,000	100%

Changes to Housing Finance from April 2012

During 2010-2011 we consulted with tenants and leaseholders on the Governments proposals confirmed in February 2011, to implement self financing from April 2012. This is a new system of financing Council Housing. It means that the Council will keep all of its rental income. Approximately £9.9 million of this income was paid to the Government in 2010-2011. In return we will have to make a one off payment to the Government of approximately £186.5 million. The final amount we will have to pay will be confirmed in November 2011.

The current system where 75% of the proceeds from the sale of council housing is paid to the

Government will continue. The Council will continue to retain 25%.

The Council has been consulting and discussing with tenant representatives a strategy for managing council housing under self financing arrangements. This was approved by the Council in June 2011.

It is likely that the large debt the Housing Service will need to take on will have a significant effect upon the way we manage and maintain your homes and estates in the future. Further details on self financing will follow in the next edition of Housing Times.

Last year we gave details of our service commitments in respect of ensuring value for money, details of these are below along with an update on progress so far

From April 2011 we will...		How we're doing – October 2011
Continue to consult tenants on the Government's proposals in respect of the Review of Council Housing Finance.		Consultation process lead by Head of Housing.
Seek tenants views on expenditure and what they think are priorities for expenditure and any possible reductions in services.		Carried out at Finance Consultative Group.
Ensure all charges to leaseholders are recovered in a timely manner so that the cost of repairs and services does not fall on tenants.		Invoices issued in 2011-12 are £119,023 for service charges and £26,921 for repairs charges.
Achieve value for money in long term contracts by ensuring a 60/40 quality/cost ratio.		Lead by Asset Manager in consultation with tenants and councillors.
Continue to publish details of all invoices paid over £500 on the Council website.		Information provided by Council's Finance Department.
Investigate ways of streamlining and simplifying the key services we provide.		Service review underway as a corporate project.
Review all job vacancies as they arise.		Vacancies reviewed. All job descriptions rewritten in 2011.
Make efficiency savings across budgets.		Efficiency savings identified as part of corporate organisational development review.
Commence work on developing a long term partnering contract for all major capital works.		Working with Stevenage Homes to investigate joint contracts across Hertfordshire.
Ensure we make best use of housing land by bringing forward at least one low demand garage site for redevelopment as affordable housing.		Planning application in progress at Hilldyke for 3 garage sites. Planning permission approved for 4 dwellings at Whitehedge Drive garage site.
Recharge more tenants for damage or neglect to their home and improve collection rates.		Increase in recharges – further resources to be directed toward this in 2012.
Develop a 'zero based budgeting' approach so that we are able to calculate the real costs of services which can be compared with those of other landlords.		Training held for senior strategic staff and trialled on some budgets in the budget setting process 2011-2012.

Useful Contacts for Council Tenants

Customer Services and Complaints Monitoring

Head of Housing	Karen Dragovic	01727 819400	karen.dragovic@stalbans.gov.uk
PA to Head of Housing	Maureen Watts	01727 819494	maureen.watts@stalbans.gov.uk

Asset Management Team

Asset Manager	Stephen Jeremy	01727 819280	stephen.jeremy@stalbans.gov.uk
Repairs Team Leader	Colin Chudleigh	01727 819484	colin.chudleigh@stalbans.gov.uk
Capital Project Team Leader	Bryan Padley	01727 819489	bryan.padley@stalbans.gov.uk
Building Surveyor (Gas)	Dave Bennett	01727 819490	dave.bennett@stalbans.gov.uk
Building Surveyor (Electricity)	Terry Harris	01727 819374	terry.harris@stalbans.gov.uk
Housing Services Team Leader	Sacha Richardson (job share)	01727 819373	sacha.richardson@stalbans.gov.uk
Housing Services Team Leader	Jen Allen (job share)	01727 819373	jen.allen@stalbans.gov.uk
Housing Repairs		01727 819256	h.repairs@stalbans.gov.uk

Housing Management Services

Tenant Participation Officer	Jenny Owen	01727 819387	jenny.owen@stalbands.gov.uk
Tenant Services Manager	Joanne Turner	01727 819386	joanne.turner@stalbands.gov.uk
Principal Community Protection Officer	Neil Kieran	01727 819416	neil.kieran@stalbands.gov.uk
Area Team Leader	Chris Banks	01727 819389	chris.banks@stalbands.gov.uk
Estate Services Officer	Jeff Minty	01727 819599	jeff.minty@stalbands.gov.uk
Leasehold Officer	Colin Fernandes	01727 819578	colin.fernandes@stalbands.gov.uk leasehold@stalbands.gov.uk
Housing Officer	Kellie Kelley	01727 819414	kellie.kelley@stalbands.gov.uk
Housing Officer	Claire Coleman	01727 819415	claire.coleman@stalbands.gov.uk
Housing Officer	Jenetta Barker	01727 819498	jenetta.barker@stalbands.gov.uk
Housing Officer	Samantha Sandiford	01727 819404	samantha.sandiford@stalbands.gov.uk
Area Team Leader	Susan Coster	01727 819348	susan.coster@stalbands.gov.uk
Senior Housing Officer	Louise Wallis	01727 819463	louise.wallis@stalbands.gov.uk
Housing Officer	Kate Hewgill	01727 819383	kate.hewgill@stalbands.gov.uk
Housing Officer	Kath Young	01727 819499	kath.young@stalbands.gov.uk
Housing Officer	Judith Tucker	01727 819417	judith.tucker@stalbands.gov.uk
Housing Officer	Denise Higgins	01727 819421	denise.higgins@stalbands.gov.uk

Housing Options Allocations and Development

Housing Options Officer (Choice Based lettings and Temporary Accommodation)	Victoria Brett	01727 819585	victoria.brett@stalbans.gov.uk
Housing Options Assistant	Matthew Barnes	01727 819480	matthew.barnes@stalbans.gov.uk

Other Key Contacts

Customer Contact Centre	01727 866100	contactus@stalbans.gov.uk
Housing Out-of-Hours Service	01727 819493	housingmanagement@stalbans.gov.uk
Fraud Investigation	01727 819236 819238 or 819269	CAFT@stalbans.gov.uk
Refuse Collection	01727 819285	wastemanagementservices@stalbans.gov.uk
Recycling	01727 819285	wastemanagementservices@stalbans.gov.uk
Housing Benefit	01727 819456	benefits@stalbans.gov.uk
Council Tax	01727 819204/205	counciltax@stalbans.gov.uk

How to contact us

Housing Services Team

St Albans District Council
Civic Centre, St Peters Street
St Albans, Herts AL1 3JE

Main Switchboard: **01727 866100**
Fax: **01727 819377**
Text: **01727 819570**

Web: www.stalbans.gov.uk

E-mail: contactus@stalbans.gov.uk

Out-of-Hours Emergency Housing Repairs
01727 811155

Council Office Opening Hours:

8:45am – 5:15pm Monday – Thursday

8:45am – 4:45pm Friday

If you would like to receive this Annual Statement in an alternative format, such as Braille, or in another language, please call Maureen Watts on **01727 819494**.



St Albans
City & District Council