

Housing Repairs Handbook



St Albans
City & District Council



Foreword

I am pleased to present this revised Housing Repairs Handbook.

The handbook gives details of our repairs service and includes details of our responsibilities as landlord and yours as the tenant/leaseholder. It sets out the standard of service you can expect from us and gives you a range of helpful information.

This is currently an exciting time for the repairs service. In April 2019 we started a 5 year contract with Morgan Sindall Property Services. As well as repairs they will also be carrying out a number of planned improvements to our housing stock such as kitchen and bathroom replacements and roof replacements.

When you call to report a repair, your call will now be handled directly by staff from Morgan Sindall Property Services. This should help them diagnose the problem and make sure they send a suitably trained engineer to your home.

They also deal directly with emergency repairs reported outside working hours.

Please take some time to read the handbook as it contains useful information as well as important information about what you need to do and be aware of if you are planning any alterations to your home or garden.

We encourage all our tenants and leaseholders to open a [MyStalbans](#) account where you can review your tenancy/leaseholder account and in the future you will be able to log repairs and track the progress of your repair as well as book appointments quickly and easily.

Gareth Heavey Contract Manager

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1 Rechargeable repairs policy

The term tenant is used throughout the policy, but the tenant will be responsible for damage caused by members of their household or visitors to their household as well as their pets or their visitors' pets.

The Tenancy Agreement states that the tenant, those living with the tenant and their visitors must take reasonable care to prevent damage to the property including, decoration, fixtures and fittings, the common parts and the neighbouring properties. Before moving out of the property the tenant should do the following:

- Leave the house in a clean and tidy condition
- Leave the house in reasonable decorative order
- Remove all belongings
- Remove any fixtures and fittings which have been installed without written permission, reinstate originals or similar to originals and put right any damage caused
- Do the repairs they are obliged to do
- Damage caused by accident which arise due to misuse or negligence e.g. fire from an unattended candle or pan
- Apply for compensation for alterations or improvements (where permission was previously approved) in accordance with the Right to Improve.





All tenants are advised when signing their tenancy agreements and at regular intervals via the Housing Times newsletter that they should have adequate household contents insurance in place. The Council are not responsible for loss of or damage to any personal belongings; therefore, tenants should also consider obtaining insurance that covers for accidental damage.

A leaflet providing further information about contents insurance is provided when signing the tenancy agreement. We do promote the Crystal Insurance scheme and provide a booklet at sign up but should also advise residents to shop around for the best deal.

- This policy applies to current, garage and former tenants, along with temporary licence holders
- This policy applies to all rechargeable repairs and services e.g. clearance of rubbish and abandoned goods, making good vandalism or damage
- This policy also applies to repairs that are required in communal and external areas as above where damage has been caused by a tenant or a visitor to the tenant's property.

The Council will ensure that no individual is discriminated against on the grounds of sex or marital status, religious or racial grounds or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or other personal attributes including beliefs or opinions such as political opinions. The Council will ensure the promotion of equal opportunities by publishing information and documentation in different languages and other formats such as large print or Braille when requested.

Definitions of rechargeable works

Rechargeable items include but are not limited to:

Repairs required because of deliberate damage or damage as the result of neglect by tenants, family members or visitors.

Repairs required because of unauthorised or unsatisfactory alterations or improvements to the property and DIY/tenants own contractors. Where a service has been provided by the Council for removal of items the cost of removing unauthorised goods left at the property or in communal areas during the tenancy or on termination of the tenancy.



Emergency Repairs – Where a tenant or leaseholder reports an emergency repair, we will charge the cost of the call out, along with the cost of the repair if we find that this was not an emergency or if it is part of the tenant repairing responsibilities.

Exceptions and exemptions to the above are set out in a later section of this policy.



Identifying rechargeable items

A rechargeable item may be identified in several ways:

- When a repair is reported by a tenant
- Through a repair pre-inspection
- Through a pre-termination visit
- Through a void inspection
- On any visit from a member of Council staff or associated contractors.



Please refer to the section on ‘Exemptions to paying for rechargeable items’ for details of the circumstances in which a repair will not be rechargeable.

Where the tenant fails to carry out repairs that they are obliged to they will be recharged the cost of the remedial work.

Where an identified rechargeable repair has not been completed by the post inspection visit, or it does not meet our standards, we will arrange for the work to be corrected. We will subsequently advise the tenant within 28 days of completion of works that an invoice will be raised.

Deliberate damage or damage as the result of neglect

Tenants are responsible for all damage to their property, excluding wear and tear.

However, in the following circumstances St Albans City and District Council will carry out the repair at the time when it is identified.

- The repair is required for health and safety reasons
- The damage is detrimental to the appearance of the property or the area/neighbourhood, for example, a broken or boarded window
- The damage has been caused to a communal or external area.

The tenant can undertake the remedial work themselves within 28 days of it coming to our attention. A Council officer will inspect and photograph any work carried out to ensure it complies with our current standards. Where it fails to meet these or is not carried out in a timely manner, the Council will recharge for any remedial work required.

Unauthorised alterations/improvements to the property

The tenant must have written permission from the Council before starting any alterations or improvements to the interior or exterior of their home (apart from internal decorating). Before the tenant moves they need to find out if they are expected to leave any alterations or improvements in place or whether they must return the property to its original condition. It will be the tenant's responsibility to check this before they move. If the Council must do any work because of alterations that the tenant has carried out the cost of the work will be recharged in full.



Moving Out

When the tenancy ends and where sufficient notice is given a pre-termination visit will be carried out. The officer inspecting the property will advise the tenants what must be done to avoid being recharged. This includes:

- Handing back all keys to the property on the agreed date
- Leaving the property (and garden if there is one) clear of all goods and belongings, including floor coverings and white goods such as fridges and washing machines. Clearance of items left in communal areas e.g. bin sheds and refuse areas will also be recharged
- Ensuring that the property (including the loft) and garden are clean and clear of rubbish
- Ensuring that the property is in a good state of repair.



The Council will recharge for the cost of clearing the property of any rubbish or belongings left behind. There will also be a recharge for any repairs needed which are identified as the tenant's your responsibility.

If the damage is sufficiently serious in the circumstances to make the applicant unsuitable to be a tenant this may be reflected in any current application for re-housing or if they subsequently reapply for housing in the future. This does not affect the tenant's liability to repay the money owed.

Garages

The garage tenancy agreement states that a garage must only be used for the storage of a motor vehicle. Tenants must obtain written permission from the Council if they wish to store any other items. Any items stored must be adequately insured.



The tenant cannot make any structural or other alterations to the garage.

The cost of any clearance works and any repairs necessary due to misuse or inappropriate storage e.g. hazardous items will be recharged in full.

Calculating the cost of rechargeable repairs

Once it has been established that the repair is the responsibility of the tenant and is rechargeable, the tenant will be advised of the estimated cost in writing. The cost of rechargeable repairs is based on current repair costs plus an additional 3% administration fee.

If the repair does not fall into the “emergency repair” category, the tenant will have the opportunity to complete the repair themselves. On occasion an extension of time may be granted and will be determined on the specifics of the work required. It will be confirmed to the tenant that on completion, the repair must meet the current regulations and British standards. This will be confirmed in writing.

Invoices are raised for recharges and issued to current or former tenants to enable them to make arrangements for payment. Failure to repay any outstanding monies will result in the recovery action, in line with the Income and Former Tenant Arrears Policy.

Payments for rechargeable items

An invoice will be raised for the recharge and sent to the tenant or former tenant. Tenants will be offered a range of payment methods. Recovery action will take place to collect the money owed by our Specialist team, in line with the Income Policy.

Exemptions to paying for rechargeable items

No recharge will be made in the following circumstances:

- If the damage is a result of a malicious act by a third party and a crime number has been provided to the Council within 7 calendar days (an incident number will not be sufficient)
- If the damage is caused because of domestic violence, harassment or hate crime and this has been reported at the time to the Housing Management Team or Community Protection Team. In these circumstances, we would not require a crime number from the police
- Where entry is forced due to concerns about the well-being of the tenant
- Where repeated repairs have been carried out due to the nature of an impairment (physical, mental or developmental) of a member of the household and where appropriate adaptations haven't been made



- Discretion should be used where the tenant is elderly or infirm and has no capacity to perform a repair or pay for one. This is at the discretion of the Housing Management and the Quality Assurance and Customer Services Team
- Reasonable wear and tear will be considered where appropriate and will be reflected in the recharge costs.

What are the effects of recharge repairs debts?

The ability to transfer or exchange to alternative accommodation will be affected by identified recharge repairs and/or outstanding recharge repairs debts. The tenant will not be able to complete on the purchase of their home, under 'Right to Buy', until all housing debts have been cleared.

If the tenant leaves the Council with outstanding debts, including recharge repairs and apply to be housed with us again in the future, any offer of a further tenancy will be withheld until the debt is cleared.

Tips on how you can avoid being recharged

Report repairs and keep the property in a good state of repair.

Know their responsibilities as explained in the Tenant Handbook, the Repairs Handbook and Tenancy Agreement.

Seek written permission from the Council before making any alterations to the property.

Ensure the property is clean and clear when moving out.



2 How to open a MyStalbans online account

User guide steps:

- Go to www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbans
- Click 'Sign up now'
- Enter your first name, last name, and email address. Then click 'Sign up'
- Go to your emails, find the one from 'My SADC' and click on the link to verify your account. The link is the blue underlined text after 'To get started, go to'
- Enter a password that you will remember, then re-enter the same password below. Now click 'Change password'
- Click on 'Profile Settings' and do the following:
 - Type in your telephone number underneath 'Phone number'
 - Select if you are a council tenant or not underneath 'Are you a Council tenant?'. Tenants will be able to see the 'My Tenancy' section on their home page
 - Insert your address by clicking on 'Full postcode', then enter your postcode and click search. Click on the arrow on the right-hand side of the box to show a list of all properties under that postcode and select your own
- Click 'Update'
- Now go to the home page:
 - If you are using a tablet or mobile device, click on the three lines in the top left-hand corner and select home. Or;
 - If you are using a desktop computer, click on the house icon in the top left-hand corner
- Thank you for signing up to your **MyStAlbans** District account. Please explore the site, and use it to benefit your daily Council experience.

3 How to report a repair?

Before you contact us, please:

Check this repairs handbook first to establish if you are responsible. If the repair is the Council's responsibility, please give us as much information as you can, to help us get your problem fixed at the first visit.

Let us know when someone can be at home to let the repair worker in to do the work. A responsible adult (over 18) must be in the home while the repair is being carried out. If for any reason you or a responsible adult will not be able to be at your home when an appointment has been made please inform us as soon as possible. The appointment can then be given to another resident and yours can be rescheduled.



Repairs can be reported:

- Via your **MyStalbans** digital account
- By email on stalbandsrepairs@morgansindall.com or for gas heating issues GasAndHeatingRepairs@stalbands.gov.uk
- By telephoning us on **01727 819256** – Repairs via this method may be reported between 8:45am and 5:15 pm Monday – Thursday, and 8:45am and 4:45pm on Fridays
Press Option 1 for Heating Repair Requests
Press Option 2 for all other Repair issues

Emergencies outside office hours:

Ring **01727 819256** for emergency repairs only. The emergency calls go directly to Morgan Sindall Property Services who will make your home safe. The full repair will be completed during normal working hours. If the repair was not an emergency or the repair is the tenants responsibility the cost of repair will be recharged to you.



Other useful telephone numbers:

Thames Water Utilities Ltd. Please call our 24-hour leakline on **0800 714 614** to report a leak. To report an urgent sewer-related matter call our 24-hour customer service team on **0800 316 9800**.



Affinity Water Emergencies
24-hour line **0345 357 2407**
(local rate).

**Gas emergencies –
National Grid (Gas)
0800 111999
UK Power Network
0800 31 63 105.**

Calls to this service are free of charge from a landline.

Calls to **0800** Freephone numbers may not be free from some mobile phones, so please check with your provider.

4 What happens when I report a repair?

When you report your repair, we will ask you to tell us the following:

- Your name, address and a contact phone number
- As much information about the repair required to help us do the work effectively. I.e. what material the broken fitting is made of and where it is in the property
- If water is leaking into your home from another property, we will



- Whether your home has recently been repaired or refurbished, as the work may be covered by a guarantee. For example, you adaptative kitchen installed by disabled person there is a leak



need to know the address of this property as well

- A period when someone will be at home, we do not currently offer time specific appointments. i.e. a morning or afternoon
- Anything else you think we need to consider about your household. i.e. pets in the property we may need to be aware of

Sometimes a Building Surveyor will need to look at the problem before we can order a repair and we will arrange a convenient time with you.

If you are out when we call, a card asking you to phone to make another appointment will be left. If this is from our contractor, please contact them directly and promptly.

If you cannot keep an appointment, please let us know, otherwise we will cancel your repair.



The Council will charge you if you deliberately provide false information about your repair, e.g.

- how urgent it is
- how it is affecting you
- how it was caused

Repairs and right to buy

If you make a right to buy application for your property we will only carry out emergency works to your home.

This is explained within the information pack you will have been issued when you put in a right to buy application.

You must tell us in writing if you decide not to go ahead with your application then we will complete repairs in the usual way.

5 What priority is my repair?

Priority 1: Emergency

Work to be attended to and made safe within 2 hours and rectified within 24 hours. Emergency Repairs will include the following:

- Severe leaks
- Electrical failure
- Break-ins where insecure etc.
- Fire
- Full water failure (after establishing not common to local area) as we have blocks with pumps
- Hot water only if no source of hot water (i.e. electric shower)
- External door/gate failure (not due to loss of keys and only where there is no alternative route)
- Severe communal hazard where number of persons could be exposed (e.g. open wires)
- Exposed raw sewage (not blocked toilet but overflowing)
- Structural collapse (e.g. of ceiling so can be made safe)
- No Central Heating – 31 October to 1 May only. If you are a vulnerable person, we will try and attend that evening if it is reported before 8pm. Otherwise a heating engineer will attend within 24 hours



- Access for lost keys/locked out – we will only attend for senior citizens or the disabled. Alternatively, you can pay for us to carry out this work. (refer to the rechargeable repairs information)
- No Working Toilet – this will be dealt with within 24 hours where there is no second toilet in the property. Toilets can sometimes be cleared using a bucket of water along with a toilet brush and/or plunger.



Priority 2: At resident's convenience

Work to be completed at the Resident's convenience. The Contact Centre will ask the Resident for their preferred appointment slot and will book this in. This will cover all other non-emergency housing repairs and will normally be completed within 28 days unless there are exceptional circumstances. If you are not offered an appointment at the point of calling you should be called to book an appointment within 48 hours of your request.



6 Appointments and access to your home

Appointments for repairs

We offer appointments during the following times:

Monday to Friday 9 am to 1pm or 1 to 5pm.

We can arrange appointments between 10 am and 2 pm to allow for the school run.

Access to your home

You must allow our staff and contractors access to inspect and do essential work, including repairs, improvements and safety checks required by law. We will give you at least 24 hours' notice, except in an emergency.

In an emergency, we may have to enter your home in your absence if there is a risk of personal injury or serious damage to the property.

Surveyor inspections

Please be aware that our Area Surveyors may be asked to inspect your properties under the following circumstances:

- Potential problems with your roof (causing water to penetrate your home)
- Issues that may affect your health and safety (e.g. bowing ceilings – which may be in danger of collapsing)
- Where you have made a complaint about the quality or scope of work to your home
- Request for a surveyor inspection by a contractor to agree the scope of work required.
- Your concern about possible structural problems i.e. the appearance of large cracks internally or externally to your home.

After the inspection, if repairs are necessary, an order will be raised. The contractor will then within the priority of the job contact you. 19

7 Our standards

Our code of behaviour

Anyone working in your home must:

- introduce themselves and show you identification before entering
- be polite and patient with you and treat you with respect
- explain what they are going to do and discuss how this will affect you or your neighbours
- protect your belongings from damage, dust and paint
- make sure materials and tools do not cause danger to anyone
- let you know about how the work is going
- clear rubbish from your home at the end of each working day
- tell you when they need to turn off electricity, water or gas and make sure they are connected at the end of the day (if it is safe to do so)
- be dressed presentably
- keep appointments.



Workers are not allowed to:

- smoke, swear or play radios in or around your home
- use mobile phones during their work to make or receive personal calls
- be in your home with children under 18 without a responsible adult being present
- receive gifts from you
- leave tools in your home.



They must ask your permission to:

- go into other rooms in your home
 - use your phone
 - use your toilet
 - use your electricity or other facilities
 - take their lunch break in your home.



8 Gas safety

Why do we do it?

St Albans City and District Council has a legal obligation to carry out an **annual gas safety check** to all our properties that have a gas meter.

This is a requirement, even if there are no Council owned gas appliances connected to it.



Under your conditions of tenancy, you must allow our staff and contractors into your home to carry out this check.

What will they do?

The check includes a service of the boiler and any other Council owned gas appliance in your home, such as a gas fire.

What about my gas cooker?

We will check the soundness of the supply to any appliances you have connected to the gas supply and we will also check the operation of the appliance, but we will not service them. If we find a problem, we have a legal obligation to disconnect the appliance.

Does the service cost me anything?

This service is FREE and ensures your safety.

Appointments

- When your service is due, our gas servicing contractor, will write to you asking you to contact them on a freephone number.

Gas is dangerous!

If an appliance is not working properly it can give out carbon monoxide fumes. Carbon monoxide is odourless, tasteless and colourless. If you are exposed to carbon monoxide even for a short period of time, it can cause serious injury or even death by asphyxiation. Faulty appliances can also cause gas explosions.

What if I smell gas?

You need to DO four things:

- i. Turn off the gas supply at the meter**
- ii. Open windows to ventilate the area**
- iii. Call National Grid on 0800 111 999**

Once National Grid have been, call the Council repairs line on 01727 819256 Option 1 or 01727 811155 for out of hours service.

DO NOT

- Smoke**
- Use a mobile phone in the property**
- Operate a light switch, intercom or any electrical appliance.**

9 What must you do?

The following section explains your responsibilities to your home, if you have any questions as to whether it is your responsibility to undertake a repair please don't hesitate to contact us.



You must:

- Let us into your home to carry out repairs, safety checks and any inspections that are needed
- Keep the inside of your home in a clean and reasonable condition
- Decorate the inside of your home to a reasonable standard, including filling minor cracks or holes in walls
- Let us know as soon as you notice a repair is needed and act to prevent it getting worse
- Take care in what you are putting down drains and toilets to ensure that blockages do not occur, if you have caused the blockage you will be recharged for the repair works
- Repair and maintain any fixture, fitting or appliance you have put in
- Act to prevent condensation (see Handy hints!)
- Arrange the repair of any damage caused by you, a member of your family or a visitor to your home, this will be a chargeable repair and you will have to pay for the damage to be repaired
- Look after your garden clear away rubbish from your home and garden using your dustbin or other local services

- You **MUST NOT** store any flammable substances or gas in your property
- You **MUST NOT** put rubbish, prams, bikes or any other items that could cause an obstruction in communal stairwells.

Remember if you do not fulfil your responsibilities then you **WILL** be recharged for the reinstatement of the property when you vacate it.

Damage and charging

If you, or anyone in your home, damages your home, we expect you to arrange for it to be repaired to the same standard as it was before. If we must do it to make sure you and your family are safe, we will charge you for the full cost of the repair plus administration fees.

If damage is caused by a break-in or vandalism, we will carry out work to make your home safe. We will only carry out repairs if you give us a police crime reference number.



Insuring your home

If something happens to your home, we will repair the physical damage to the property, but we cannot replace your belongings. You should arrange your own contents' insurance to cover this. To help, we have a low-cost insurance scheme available for our tenants to join. If you would like more information, please call our Housing Management Section on **01727 819534** or **01727 819301** or ask for a leaflet at the Civic Centre.

The Council accepts no liability for damage to your contents.

Please note that if you fit laminate flooring to your property, this will not be covered by the Council's building insurance, so you must ensure it is covered under your content's insurance.

You will normally have to mention this to your insurer.

Tasks you must do

The following pages explain what repairs you are expected to undertake or arrange to get the work done at your own cost.

A general list follows, along with more specific details on any responsibilities you may have as a tenant in respect to undertaking repairs.



Baths, Basins and Sinks

Your responsibilities

- Try to clear blocked baths, basins, sinks
- Repair any items which are your own

installations. **Advice**

- For water leaks, blockages or tap problems, see the sections Drains and wastes and Pipes and taps
- A blocked waste pipe is not an emergency. You must try to clear any blockages yourself before you call us)
- Do not use the bath or sink if the waste pipe is blocked. We will charge you for the cost of clearing blockages caused by items such as cooking fat, grease, hair

- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself or we will carry out the repair and charge you for the work.

Doors and locks

Your responsibilities

- Replace keys and locks when keys are lost, or you get locked out, or the key is in the other side of the door
- Get extra keys cut and fit any extra locks
- Replace broken or cracked glass unless you provide a police crime reference number
- Resecure loose handles and catches on any doors
- Repair or replace catches, handles, locks or bolts on doors inside
- Adjust doors when you have new carpets fitted
- Fit draught proofing to doors if necessary.



Advice

- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself
- For emergency repairs we may only make the property safe and secure, and then do a full repair at a later date
- If a problem is caused by vandalism or a break-in, you **MUST** report it to the police and get a crime reference number, otherwise this will be a chargeable repair.

Drains and wastes



Your responsibilities

- Keep drains and waste pipes clear and try to clear blocked baths, basins, sinks or toilets
- Keep gully grids clear of leaves, rubbish and so on (except in shared areas)
- Clear blockages or repair leaks from your washing machine or dishwasher.

Advice

- A blocked waste is not an emergency. We expect you to try to clear it yourself (see Handy hints)
- A blocked toilet is only an emergency if you have no other toilet
- Always try and clear the blockage yourself first. If the blockage is caused by items such as nappies, tampons, sanitary towels, cooking fat, baby wipes or dislodged toilet fresheners, we will charge you for the cost of clearing it
- If you install a washing machine, dishwasher or tumble drier, you are responsible for any water supply, waste or vent connections that you have fitted to them, and for clearing any blockages.

Electrics

Your responsibilities

- To know where your consumer unit (fuse board) is in your property

- Reset trip switches and, if necessary, turn off the mains supply (see Handy hints)
- Replace light bulbs, fluorescent tubes and starters
- Replace electrical plugs (not socket outlets) and plug fuses for your own appliances
- Test and clean smoke detectors and replace batteries in battery-operated detectors (see Handy hints).

Advice

- Do not touch bare wires and do not touch sockets or switches with wet hands
- DO NOT install down lighters in your property as you WILL be charged for their removal and reinstatement of the ceiling
- If water is leaking onto electrical fittings or a fitting is dangerous, do not touch any switches connected to it and contact us immediately
- Make sure that you know where the trip switches are in your home and understand how to reset them (see Handy hints)



- If you caused any damage or you call us out when you have not topped up your meter, we will charge you for calling out a repair worker and for the cost of any repair work we do
 - If you have a pre-payment meter, please check there is credit on the meter if there is no electric in your property, before contacting us.

Floors and stairs

Your responsibilities

- Repair or replace any floor covering (vinyl, carpets or laminate)
- Adjust doors when you have had carpets fitted
- Lift and replace floor coverings if we need to access beneath it to undertake repairs. This includes laminate flooring. However, we are not responsible for replacement.

Advice

- We will not accept responsibility for damage to your carpets or other floor coverings
- If we or the contractor tell you that you need to lift your floor covering (including laminate flooring), you should do this before the workers arrive
- If you lay carpets you should use carpet grippers, not glue. This makes it easier for you to lift the carpets for repairs without damaging them
- If you caused the damage, you will have to get it repaired yourself.



Garages (including attached to a property)

Your responsibilities

- Replace keys or locks to garages when the keys are lost or broken. St Albans District Council do not keep spare keys
- Repair any damage caused by you, a member of your family or a visitor to your garage
- Insurance of any contents in the garage – we will not be held liable for loss, damage, theft of items.



Please note that if you rent a garage it **MUST** only be used for a vehicle and **NOT** for storage.

Advice

- If a problem is caused by vandalism or a break-in, you **MUST** report it to the police and get a crime reference number, otherwise we will charge you for the repair
- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself
- If you cannot lock your garage, you are responsible for the security of anything left inside.

Gardens

Your responsibilities

- Remove leaves and rubbish from gullies
- Maintain general garden paths – to include keeping them free of weeds
- Maintain your garden including grass cutting, trees, hedges etc.
- Maintain garden features such as ornamental walls
- Replace keys or locks to shed doors when they are lost or broken
- Replace clothes lines and rotary driers, except in shared areas
- Repair any damage caused by you, a member of your family or a visitor to your home
- Maintain fences and gates unless they are communal fencing and gates. We will only repair and in some instances replace boundary fencing to the rear/side of a property where there is a public space on the other side. We do not maintain front boundary dividers.



Advice

- If a problem is caused by vandalism or a break-in, you should report it to the police and get a crime reference number, otherwise we will charge you for the repair
- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself.

Gutters

Your responsibilities

- Keep gully grids clear of leaves, rubbish and so on (except in shared areas).

Advice

- We need to put up scaffolding for certain types of repairs to gutters
- In bad weather conditions repair workers cannot work at heights, for example, on ladders, scaffolding or on the roof. This is for their own safety.

Heating

Your responsibilities

- Check that your heating controls (room thermostat, timer or programmer) are set correctly
- Get your own heaters repaired and serviced by qualified engineers
- Keep your home properly heated and ventilated to prevent condensation and to prevent pipes from bursting during cold weather
- Bleed radiators if there is an airlock.



Please make sure that if you are going away in the winter months that you leave your heating on low to reduce the risk of pipes freezing during severe weather.

Advice

- If you suspect a gas leak, phone National Grid (Gas) immediately on **0800 111999** – use a phone outside your home. (Using a phone inside could spark an explosion.) Turn off the gas at the mains and open windows
- Do not smoke or switch anything electrical on or off until the problem is fixed
- Make sure that your gas supply has not been disconnected because you have not paid your bill or fed the meter. If this happens, you will have to relight the pilot light (for gas) and reset the controls yourself
- If a radiator is leaking or loose because you have been doing redecoration work, we will charge you for the cost of the repair.

Internal fittings



Responsibilities

Install washing machines, dishwashers or tumble driers including the waste pipes, supply pipes and vents (if not already provided)

- Clear any blockages in your washing machine or dishwasher
- Fit curtain rails, blinds and hooks
- Repair or replace catches and handles on kitchen units and other cupboards
- Repair any damage caused by you, a member of your family or a visitor

- The fitting of Gas Bayonet or Final Electrical Connections for cookers and ovens (this will need undertaking by an approved professional).

Advice

- If you caused any damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself
- If you install a washing machine, dishwasher or tumble drier, you are responsible for any water supply, waste or vent connections that you have fitted to them, and for clearing any blockages.

Pest control

Your responsibilities

- Pests found within the home, such as, mice, cockroaches, ants, feather mites or fleas are your responsibility.

However, we will deal with an infestation of rats or squirrels to your home and wasps' nests within communal areas to blocks of flats.

- To arrange rat treatments within your home or garden please contact SDK on **0344 828325**.

Advice

- Contact Regulatory Services on **01727 814639**
- Avoid accumulating rubbish in areas that can attract pests and keep food in airtight containers
- Do not leave food waste in plastic bags in an outside area, always put food waste in a bin with a lid
- Use remedies that you can buy from a local DIY/hardware stores e.g. flea and ant powders, insect sprays, mouse traps or poison.

Pipes and taps

Your responsibilities

- If a water pipe has burst, turn off your internal water supply at the stop tap and then turn on all taps to allow the rest of the water to flow out
- Fit supply pipework for washing machines and dishwashers (if not already provided).



Advice

- You should know where the stop tap is, so you can turn the water off in an emergency. It is normally under the kitchen sink or in the downstairs toilet. Note: It is a good idea to turn it on and off occasionally to check that it is easy to turn off in an emergency
- If water is leaking onto electrical fittings, do not touch them. Turn off the electricity supply to those fittings by turning off the trip switch for that part of the home on the consumer unit. This is called isolating or breaking the circuit (see Handy hints)
- If there is damage from water leaking, you may be able to claim on your own contents' insurance
- If you caused any damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself. If we need to do it, you will have to pay the full cost of the repair.

Roofs

Your responsibilities

- Look after any TV aerial or satellite dish you put up (see Advice below).

Advice

- We need to put up scaffolding for certain types of roof repairs
- In bad weather conditions, repair workers cannot work at heights, for example, on ladders, scaffolding or on the roof
- If you want to put up a satellite dish, you need to get our permission first
- We will tell you if an aerial or satellite dish needs to be removed to allow work to be done. You must arrange for it to be taken down and put back up. Our workers will not do this for you
- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself.



Toilets

Your responsibilities

- Repair or replace toilet seats and lids, and clean toilet pans
- Try to clear blocked toilets (see Handy hints)
- Repair any damage caused by you, a member of your family or a visitor to your home.

Advice

- A blocked toilet is not an emergency unless you have no other toilet
- You should always try to clear any blockages (see Handy hints).



- If a blockage is caused by items such as nappies, air fresheners, condoms, sanitary towels, tampons and so on, we will charge you for the cost of clearing it
- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself
- If we need to replace a toilet which is part of an existing suite, we will try to find a colour match, but if we can't find a match, we will provide it in white.

When it is the Council's responsibility – what we need to know

- What is the problem, for example, is the toilet blocked; is the overflow running; is the cistern leaking; is the seat broken; has the pan cracked or is it leaking; is the flush handle or chain broken; or is water constantly trickling into the pan?
- What type of cistern is it (high-level or low-level)? If low-level, is it the flush panel, close-coupled or standard?
- What type of handle is it (lever handle, push-down knob or chain)? If it is a push-down knob, is it a dual-flush type?
- What colour is the suite?
- If a toilet is blocked in a flat, are any other flats affected?

Walls and ceilings

Your responsibilities

- Fill minor cracks and holes in walls and ceilings
- Keep air vents clear and use extractor fans (where provided)
- Fit curtain rails, blinds, and hat or coat hooks.

Advice

- Try to keep condensation to a minimum to prevent damp and mould appearing on the walls or ceiling (see Handy hints on page 50)
- If you, a member of your family or a visitor caused damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself. If damage is caused by water leaking, you may be able to make a claim on your own household contents insurance (see page 4).



When it is the Council's responsibility – what we need to know

- What is the problem, for example, is wall plaster loose or crumbling; is ceiling plaster bulging; or is there condensation or mould on the walls?
- Is there any damage caused by water leaking from a pipe or radiator, or through the roof?
- If the problem is outside, what type of wall surface is it (bricks, render, plastic or wooden cladding boards, or hanging tiles)?

- If you are reporting a problem with cladding boards or fascia (outside), what are they made of (wood or plastic)?
- If you are reporting a problem with wall tiles (inside), what shape, size and colour are they?
- If you are reporting a problem with a wall, what is it made of (bricks or concrete blocks)?

Windows

Your responsibilities

- Replace broken or cracked glass
- Clean window vents and extractor fan vents (see Advice below)
- Keep window trickle vents clear and use them
- Repair any damage caused by you, a member of your family or a visitor
- Fit draught proofing to windows if necessary.



Advice

- Look after the metal parts of your windows. Use a soft brush to clear away grit and dust. Then spray them with a silica wax furniture spray to keep them working smoothly. Do not use oil
- Wipe away any condensation puddles that form on cills
- To clean extractor fan vents, use a dry cloth or a vacuum cleaner with the brush or nozzle attachment.

When it is the Council's responsibility – what we need to know

- What is the problem, for example, is the glass cracked or broken; are frames loose or jammed; is the stay or fastener broken?
- What type of frame is it (wooden, plastic or metal)?
- What style of window is it (casement, pivot or sliding sash)?
- What type of glass is it (plain, obscure, or wired)? Is it double glazed?
- If a fastener, what type is it?
- Can you shut the window? Are there any other connected problems?



Tenant responsibility summary

It is important to remember that any improvements that you have made to your home have to be maintained and repaired by you. The following repairs are all items you will have to repair or replace if they become broken.

Tenant responsibility	Notes and exceptions
Bayonet fixings for cookers	This and the fitting of any gas cooker is your responsibility and you must get a GAS SAFE engineer to fit.
Chimney sweeping	We do not carry this out.
Cooker point	Tenant responsible for bayonet fitting and Flexible hose to cooker.
Doors (internal and external)	When damaged by tenant or carpets have been fitted.
Door bell	We do not supply these and will not maintain them.
Door locks changes (lock out)	Tenants are responsible for lock changes if they are locked out. If you have a crime number, we will carry out a lock change free of charge. In our sheltered accommodation the locks are specialist and we will need to obtain this for you.
Drains	SADC are responsible for all draining – Unless blockage has been caused by inappropriate disposals such as nappies, food waste and fat, sanitary products and baby wipes, whereby you will be recharged.
Drives	You will be responsible for this.
External taps	We do not fit external taps, these will be your responsibility.

Tenant responsibility	Notes and exceptions
Fencing (rear)	Unless the garden fencing separates your garden from open spaces and non-residential buildings. (in which case we will install chain-link fencing). We will mark the boundary between Council and private dwellings where the responsibility for the fence is with you. We do not repair/replace fencing to front of properties.
Floor coverings	Includes Vinyl, carpets and laminates. You may have floor covering gifted to you when your kitchen or bathroom is replaced. The ongoing repair to this would be your responsibility.
Fuses	You are expected to change these. If we are called out and a fuse has blown you will be charged for the call out.
Gates	Except at change of tenancy.
Gardens	Except communal gardens, retirement schemes.
Gas fire renewal	We only renew Gas Fires for the elderly.
Glazing	Unless you have been the victim of a crime and have a crime reference number.
Internal door locks	We do not replace or maintain internal door locks.
Kitchen appliances	We do not maintain any kitchen appliances except those in our temporary accommodation.
Light fittings	Tenants are responsible for changing any light blubs or starter motors in lights. If Tenants install their own light fittings and bayonet's they will be responsible for them.

Tenant responsibility	Notes and exceptions
Painting (inside)	Redecoration following a leak will be your responsibility and should be covered by your household insurance in the event of an accident.
Patio	We only maintain the rear path to brick-built outbuildings or the front path to your property.
Pest control	We do not remove bees. We will treat wasps' nests in communal areas only. We will only deal with squirrels and Mice due to damage they can cause. Rats etc should be referred to environmental Health.
Shelving	We do not fit shelving, these will be your responsibility.
Shower	Unless fitted by us.
Tiling	AS a tenant you are responsible for maintaining any tiles surfaces to your property along with the decorations.
Toilet seats	Tenant's responsibility. Please contact SADC for decision if you feel there are exceptional circumstances.
TV aerials and sockets (not communal)	All houses, maisonettes and bungalows.
Washing lines (individual)	We do not supply or fit individual washing lines.
Washing machine fittings	We will only repair up to the end of the washing machine waste pipe. Hoses and connectors to these will be your responsibility.

6 Planned Improvements

In certain cases when you move, the Council can pay you back some of the costs of these improvements if these have made your home more valuable. Please ask at Customer Services Centre for details or telephone **01727 819256** for a leaflet.

To maintain your home, we carry out an ongoing programme of maintenance work.

This is undertaken by the Project Group in Housing Services on **01727 819333**.

The type of work includes

- Cavity wall insulation
- External wall insulation
- Window replacement
- Reroofing
- Door entry system installation
- Kitchen and bathroom modernisation
- Gas servicing
- Boiler replacement
- Lift servicing
- Loft Insulation.



Projects are identified from inspections carried out by housing surveyors and from surveys completed by the Project Group. A Stock Condition Survey has identified work which needs to be carried out over the next 30 years to maintain properties in a good condition.

11 Tenant improvements and alterations

Please note you can apply for any improvements and alterations through your [MyStalbans](#) account.

Your home is likely to contain asbestos. This is safe unless it is disturbed. You will need to make sure you have any areas you plan working in tested for asbestos.

Under the terms of your tenancy agreement you are entitled to alter or improve the property you are living in, subject to approval from the Council. Prior to making any alterations or modifications to your home you **MUST** obtain permission from the Council. In some circumstances you may also need planning or building regulation approval.

The definition of a modification or alteration is: Anything which is an addition or a change to the property or its services, examples include:

- Installing showers
- New kitchens
- New bathrooms
- Removal of internal walls
- Fitting of bayonets for gas cookers
- Cutting into internal or external walls
- Modifications to the fixed electrical wiring installation
- Erection of sheds and garages
- Installations of hard standings or packing pads
- Extensions and porches
- Loft conversions or boarding out of loft spaces.



It is important to note you will be responsible for future maintenance or reinstatement at the end of your tenancy,

If you do not obtain permission prior to altering or modifying you will be charged to restore your home to its original condition, in addition if you apply for retrospective permission there is a charge of £150 to obtain this.

If we terminate your tenancy (except for it being related to a possession order) you may qualify for compensation for the work carried out, less an allowance for depreciation. It is important to note that you must have had written permission from the Council to carry out works and have the relevant receipts.

We will also take off any money you owe from the compensation you get when your tenancy ends.

How do I get permission?

Before consideration can be given for any tenants' improvements, we require the following.

- Drawings/sketches of what is already there and what is being proposed
- Details of any materials being used
- Details of any contractor being used (they must have adequate insurances).

Only once we have this information will we consider giving permission.

As part of considering applications we must consider a few things, including but not exhaustive to:

Does it represent a structural alteration or removal of part of the original structure?

e.g. Removal of structural items will frequently cause long term issues in properties, there is no such thing as a non-load bearing wall or a cosmetic wall.

Will it affect the future maintenance of the building?

e.g. Conservatories restrict access to the roof, walls, soffits and windows above them restricting future maintenance and making it costlier.

Does it compromise Health and Safety?

e.g. The removal of doors or walls to kitchen areas can present a significant health and safety risk to both the occupants and the property.

What is the repairs liability of the proposal for the future?

e.g. Patio Doors may seem simple, but not only does it usually involve removing part of the structure, but ultimately, they will result on costly repairs and replacements for the Council in the future.

Will it affect the future let ability of the property?

e.g. The removal of a wall between the kitchen and a dining room will reduce the future option for the property in its use and letting, the removal of a bath in preference of a shower will also affect the letting of a property in the future.



It is important to remember the properties are Council owned, and we must protect our assets for the future.

The final decision ultimately is with the Asset Management Team who consider the views of the other parts of the Housing Team. If any part of the Housing Team has a reasonable objection, permission is not granted. It is important to note that there is no route for appeal on the decisions.

It is also important to note that if we must send surveyors out to inspect works that have been undertaken (any improvements will have to be checked once complete) there may be a charge payable by the tenant to cover a surveyor's visit.

What happens once I have permission?

Once you have been granted permission to alter or improve your property, you will be advised of any conditions related to the permission.

These will be attached to your permission letter.

It is important that you read these in depth as they include important information regarding health and safety, responsibility for maintenance and the standards we expect.

Once you have finished your alterations please send us any electrical or gas certificates, so we can check them to ensure this work has been completed safely.



12 Handy hints: Condensation

Condensation can cause dampness and mould growth in your home. This looks unpleasant and can increase the risk of respiratory illness. It can also cause wooden window frames to rot. This section explains how condensation forms and how you can keep it to a minimum.

What is condensation?

Condensation starts as moisture in the air, usually produced by cooking, washing, or drying clothes indoors on radiators. When it hits cool surfaces such as walls, mirrors, wall tiles and windows it condenses and forms water droplets. The moist air rises when it is warm and often ends up on ceilings and in upstairs rooms and then it forms mould.

Why is it a problem?

Left untreated, condensation can result in mould growth on walls, ceilings, furniture, furnishings, and clothing in cupboards and drawers. It can also affect wall plaster and cause woodwork to rot.

Reduce condensation in your home by controlling excess moisture

- Close kitchen and bathroom doors to prevent steam going into colder rooms
- When cooking or washing, let the steam escape by opening a window or using an extractor fan if you have one fitted. Leave the window open or the extractor fan on for up to 20 minutes after you have finished cooking or washing



- Open some windows in other rooms for a while each day and open any trickle vents in your window frames. This allows a change of air
- Wipe down surfaces when moisture settles to prevent mould forming
- Do not block air vents and allow air to circulate around furniture and cupboards
- You must not use bottled gas or paraffin heaters – these produce a lot of moisture and they are also a health and safety risk. Note: Your tenancy agreement or lease states that you are not allowed to use these in your flats.



Produce less moisture

- Cover pans when cooking
- Dry clothes outdoors whenever possible or use small ventilated rooms
- Cover fish tanks and remember that house pets and plants produce moisture as well
- If you have a tumble drier or washing machine, ensure that it is vented in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions
- Maintain a low background heat when the weather is cold or wet

Some words of warning:

- Do not block permanent ventilators
- Do not completely block chimneys

- Do not draught proof rooms where there is condensation or mould growth
- Do not draught proof a room where there is a gas cooker or a fuel-burning heater, for example a gas fire
- Do not draught proof windows in the bathroom or kitchen
- Do not put furniture against cold external walls
- Do not hang washing on your radiators this will create excess moisture in the room, which can turn into mould when it hits cold surfaces.



First steps against mould:

- Treat any mould you may already have in your home then do what you can to reduce condensation. This will restrict new mould growth
- Do not disturb mould by brushing or vacuum cleaning. This can increase the risk of respiratory problems
- Wipe off mould growth immediately with water. Do not use washing up liquid
- To kill and remove mould growth, wipe down affected areas with a fungicidal wash. An anti mould kit is available free for our tenants from housing. Always follow the instructions carefully. DO NOT use bleach
- Dry-clean clothes affected by mildew and shampoo carpets
- After treatment, redecorate using a good quality fungicidal paint. to help prevent mould recurring. This paint is not effective if overlaid with ordinary paints or wallpaper.

Handy hints: Fire safety

Communal staircases, corridors and balconies must be kept clear of all combustible material or anything that might block escape routes e.g. household waste, furniture, pushchairs, prams and bicycles and even door mats.

Domestic waste, i.e. rubbish should be removed to the appropriate refuse area immediately and not stored in communal areas.

It is a breach of your tenancy conditions to store items in communal areas within blocks, which pose a fire risk or a potential obstruction. These items will be removed – you may be charged for the removal and legal action could be taken against you.

Preventing fire

- Never smoke in a chair if you think you may doze off, never smoke in bed
- Do not leave a lit cigarette, pipe or candle unattended. Use deep ashtrays so that cigarettes cannot roll out, and don't throw hot ash into a waste paper basket
- Keep matches and lighters well out of the reach of children
- Sit at least three feet away from heaters. Never put a heater near clothes or furnishings
- Check the condition of cables to all electrical equipment regularly. Don't overload electrical sockets



- Before going to bed:
 - Close all the doors as this helps to prevent fire spreading
 - Make sure the cooker and heaters are turned off
 - Switch off and unplug all electrical appliances except those that are meant to stay on, like a video or fridge
 - Empty ashtrays, making sure the contents are cold.
- Prevent a fire starting in the kitchen:
 - Never fill a pan more than one third full of fat or oil
 - Never leave the pan unattended with the heat on
 - Dry food before placing it in the hot oil – wet food will cause the oil to bubble up and possibly spill over the edge of the pan.
- If the pan does catch fire:
 - Don't move it or throw water on to it
 - Turn off the heat if it is safe to do so.

If in any doubt, leave the room, close the door, shout a warning to others and call the fire brigade.

Planning your escape in the event of a fire

- Fire can strike when you least expect it, often during the night. You will only have a short time to get out, so plan your escape route rather than waiting until there is a fire
- Think of another way out in case the normal one is blocked
- Keep the escape routes always clear of obstructions. If the corridors, balconies or staircases outside your home are not kept clear report it to the Council. It is a criminal offence to block these routes or damage any fitting provided to protect the route



- Tell everyone in the house where the door and window keys are kept. Avoid locking yourself in at night with a key, use a thumb turn lock or leave the key in the lock at night
- We will not give permission for security grilles on front doors and windows as they can make it harder to get out of the property if there is a fire.

Escaping from fire

- If your smoke alarm goes off while you are asleep, or you smell smoke, don't investigate
- Shout to wake everyone up and get them out as quickly as possible. Never assume that it is a false alarm
- Dial **999** if you have time
- Check closed doors with the back of the hand. If they are warm do not open them because this means, there is a fire on the other side
- Smoke and fumes can kill. If there is a lot of smoke, get down as near to the floor as possible where the air will be cleaner
- Don't rush, keep calm and get everyone out as quickly as possible. Don't stop to pick up valuables, but you may need a coat if it is safe to get one
- If your escape is blocked by fire it may be safer to stay put until the fire brigade arrives
- Close the door and use towels or sheets to block any gaps to stop the smoke. Go to a window, call for help and wait to be rescued.

Escaping from fires in flats and maisonettes

- If you live in a flat or maisonette, please follow this extra advice:
- Flats and maisonettes are built to give you some protection from fire. Walls, floors and doors will hold back flames and smoke for a time
- If there is a fire elsewhere in the building you're usually safer staying in your flat unless heat or smoke is affecting you
- If there is a fire in your flat, leave the building closing the door to your flat behind you
- If you can safely do so, warn others in the adjoining flats that you have a fire in your home
- If there is a lot of smoke, crawl along the floor where the air will be clearer
- If you live in a building with a lift: **DO NOT USE LIFTS IF THERE IS A FIRE – GO DOWN THE STAIRS INSTEAD**
- If doors are open on the staircase close them as you leave to stop smoke spreading
- Call **999** from any phone as soon as possible when it is safe to do so. Give them the address including the number of your flat and tell them which floor the fire is on
- If you know your postcodes give this as well
- **Do not re-enter the building unless instructed to by the Fire Brigade.**



Smoke detectors

Most of the smoke detectors that we provide are mains-wired with back-up batteries. However, you may have a different battery-operated type of smoke detector. You are responsible for changing the batteries in battery-operated detectors once a year or when you hear it beep at intervals.



- **We recommend you test your smoke detectors operation every month to see if it is working**
- It is also important to keep the vents to smoke detectors free of dust, this can be achieved simply by running your vacuum cleaner over the vents.

Handy hints: Asbestos

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral made up of many small fibres. It is mined from rock and milled into fibres from which a wide range of materials were produced.

Why was asbestos used in buildings?

Asbestos fibres are strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. This led to their widespread use in a wide range of building materials and other products, particularly between 1950 and 1980 but certain types were still used up to 1999.

Why is asbestos potentially a problem?

- Asbestos-containing materials in good condition do not pose a risk to your health
- They can however become a risk should asbestos fibres become airborne
- This may occur if the asbestos-containing material is drilled, sanded, cut or broken up. It can also occur should the material be in a poor or damaged condition and liable to disturbance. If disturbed, the material may release fibres that can be inhaled deep into the lung causing possible damage
- People at most risk are those that work directly with asbestos. These include builders, carpenters, electricians, plumbers and decorators.

What is the likelihood of exposure to asbestos in the home?

- Even if your home contains undisturbed asbestos products you are highly unlikely to be affected by it

- Any repairs or major works undertaken in a tenant's homes our contractors, will include a risk assessment. This will be to assess the potential location of asbestos and likelihood of disturbance during the works
- Measures will be taken to manage the material safely either by avoiding disturbance, encapsulation or removal by specialist contractors and working in a controlled manner. This will further reduce chances of exposure.

Where is asbestos likely to be found?

The list below shows some common areas where asbestos-containing materials may be found. The list of products that may contain asbestos is a lengthy one – this list is not all-inclusive.

Exterior

- Garage or shed roof sheets, tiles or roof felt
- Gutters and down pipes
- Fascia.

Interior

- Partition walls
- Panels beneath windows
- Cupboards around domestic boilers
- Panels behind electrical equipment
- Panels behind fires or heaters
- Panels on or inside fire doors
- Concealed in ducts or pipe casings



- Bath panels
- Floor tiles
- Textures coatings (artex)
- Gaskets and rope seals inside gas appliances
- Cold water storage tanks.

Doing DIY and avoiding asbestos

High, short-term exposure to asbestos fibres can occur during 'Do It Yourself' DIY work.

- Do not carry out any DIY works on asbestos containing materials
- Do not disturb it by banging nails or screwing into it
- Do not drill into it
- Do not drill into it by hand or power tools
- Do not scrape it or use a steam stripper
- Do not attempt to remove asbestos-containing materials.

If you are unsure whether there are any asbestos-containing materials in your home, please call the Council to find out more before you do any DIY work.

If you have damaged asbestos materials in your home, you should seek advice on appropriate action to take. Please telephone the Council's Repairs service and we will arrange for someone to inspect the damage.

Housing Department

St Albans City and District Council
St Peter's Street
St Albans
AL1 3JE

Telephone: **01727 819256** – Eva Radkowska

Email: housing@stalbans.gov.uk

If you need this information in an alternative format, such as Braille or in another language, please call **01727 819494**



www.stalbans.gov.uk