

HOUSING SERVICES

Head of Housing – Karen Dragovic

Our ref: 2016JT\Bulklets\Coronavirus

Please ask for: Housing Contract Admin

Telephone:

E-mail: housingcontractadmin@stalbans.gov.uk

Date: 10 June 2020

To All Residents

Dear Resident(s)

Re: Housing Services and the Coronavirus Pandemic – Service Update

Following my recent letter I am writing to let you know how we are dealing with our repairs and planned maintenance service in the current Coronavirus pandemic.

You may be aware that the Government is keen to start reopening businesses and services. We are currently considering how we can re-open our services while maintaining the health and well-being of our tenants, staff and contractors.

At present most of our staff are working from home, carrying out emergency visits and inspections as required while maintaining social distancing and safe systems of working.

Our contractors have furloughed several staff and are carrying out emergency works and works to empty properties so they can be re-let to people in urgent housing need.

Housing Repairs to Occupied Properties

Our contractors have been dealing with emergencies only over the last few weeks and we would like to thank you for your understanding and co-operation with this approach.

Discussions continue regarding a phased return to repairs work so that social distancing and safe systems of work can be met. This will allow routine repairs to begin to return to normal over the coming months and based upon government advice. Over the coming months you will see our maintenance contractors start to become more active around the District, carrying out works safely both for themselves and our residents.

Works to Communal Areas – Internal and External

Our contractors have been carrying out emergency and health and safety works only to communal areas – the communal hallways and external grounds.

Our caretakers have been working on our estates and have been prioritising health and safety checks, cleaning shared contact surfaces and clearing away higher than usual incidences of fly-tipping.



Empty Properties

Contractors have been working to on empty properties to make them ready for letting while using safe systems of work and maintaining social distancing.

While we have had to suspend our bidding and transfer systems, we have carried out some lettings to homeless households and those fleeing violence.

Gas Servicing

Despite the lockdown our legal duties in respect of gas safety have continued and we have to make sure that the annual gas safety check has been carried out.

At the onset of the government guidance on lockdown, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), Gas Safe and the HM Government deemed all gas related repairs, maintenance and annual boiler servicing to be classed as 'essential works'.

The Council will resume quarterly inspection of fire alarm systems and the testing of domestic water samples in homes of multiple occupancy, sheltered housing schemes and commercial and communal buildings within the next month.

Our contractors have worked with our tenants to maintain a safe system of working and social distancing while the safety checks have been carried out.

Housing improvements and development (capital works)

As capital works are generally non-emergency works we have suspended them for the time being. We are working to refine our capital programme and review what works can be safely carried out while services are gradually re-opened. Scaffolding that has already been erected will be left in place, in accordance with the government's current guidance on safe working practises, until works can resume.

Aids and Adaptations for Disabled Tenants

All adaptations works in occupied properties have been postponed except for emergency repairs or external works. If you need to report emergency repairs to adaptations which are less than 12 months old, please contact the Adaptations Team. For adaptations that are more than 12 months old, please report any emergency repairs as normal to Morgan Sindall. Emergency repairs to equipment such as stairlifts, ceiling track hoists, specialist baths and door entry systems should be reported directly to the installer. This type of equipment should be covered by a warranty if it was installed as part of an adaptations application.

You can contact the Adaptations Team by emailing dfgapplications@stalbans.gov.uk or calling 01727 819396.

Next Steps

In recent months the number of repairs requested has understandably dropped while we have been carrying out emergency repairs only. We know there are likely to be repairs that tenants have not reported as they have not been urgent. It would now be very helpful to understand what repairs works are outstanding so we can plan for the future. Please report such repairs to our call centre by emailing stalbanstrepairs@morgansindall.com or calling 01727 819256.

We will not be making appointments for non-emergency repairs until we know the extent of the outstanding works and the resources our contractors will need to deal with them.

Our priority for the future is to continue to maintain a safe system of working for our tenants as well as staff and contractors. Therefore, it could be some time before all outstanding repairs can be dealt with. Your patience in helping us deal with this is much appreciated.

I do hope you have found this information to be useful. If you have any questions or concerns please contact us using your MyStAlbans account or by emailing housingcontractadmin@stalbens.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely



Karen Dragovic
Head of Housing