

HousingTimes

Spring 2021

Covid times—keeping us all safe

The Estate Services Team visits blocks weekly to carry out cleaning and safety checks.

They concentrate on disinfecting all 'touch points' such as door handles, intercoms, windowsills and handrails. They also sweep and mop floors and safety check electricals.

The team members wear personal protective equipment like gloves and overalls and all clothes and mops used to clean an individual estate are disposed of safely.

They carry hand sanitiser and mobile hand washing facilities to site and maintain a 2-metre distance from residents wherever they can. That's why they might occasionally ask residents to go back inside briefly while they complete their tasks, or move out of the way to let you pass.

To help them in their work and keep everyone safe, please keep communal areas clear of belongings and rubbish; wash your hands and dispose of face masks safely in your bin; report any fly-tipping you see as soon as you can; and give everyone around you lots space. Thank you!



Bulk Waste correction

In the previous Housing Times we issued some incorrect information on our bulk refuse collection service.

The cost of a bulk collection is £46.00 for up to **three** items not six as we originally printed. If you require removal of more than three items you will require a quote from Veolia on 01727 809019. Those in receipt of qualifying benefits (see website) can have up to **three** items removed for £15, over the three items will require a quote as above.



St Albans
City & District Council

www.stalbans.gov.uk/housing

You could help save a life book a Safe & Well visit



Many people living in Hertfordshire may be at risk of fire in their home, which could be fatal. Circumstances that increase the risk include, but are not limited to:...



**Electrical
Overload**

47%*

of victims
Misused Alcohol



**Excess Clutter
or Hoarding**

67%*

of victims
Lived Alone



**Becoming
Forgetful**

56%*

of victims had
Limited Mobility



**Hidden
Disabilities**

60%*

of victims
Smoked



**Use of Emollient
Creams**

18%*

of victims
Misused Drugs
(both prescription & illegal)



**Unsafe, Damaged
or Old Appliances**

As professionals working in the community, we all need to play our part. If you notice concerns with any of the above or see burns in the home, on someone's clothing or body, then they could be at risk. **THINK FIRE RISK AND ACT TODAY!**

Book a **Safe & Well visit** online at:

www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/fire or call 0300 123 4046

Hertfordshire
Safeguarding Adults Board

*Data taken from the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Fire Death Report 2000-2017

Version 1 Dec 2020

Accommodating rough sleepers over the winter months

The Council has been keen to ensure that COVID-secure accommodation is available locally for people who would otherwise be sleeping rough during the cold winter months.

We work with our partner organisations to ensure beds are provided for every rough sleeper who wants one. Outreach workers, employed by Hightown Housing Association, have been working to make sure rough sleepers are aware of the support available to them.

The accommodation includes COVID-secure pods located with the help of charity Emmaus Hertfordshire. These pods provide beds for four people and are in use until the end of March.

Rough sleepers are also being offered long-term support to change their lifestyle, with the prospect of a permanent home of their own.



This support programme includes courses in life skills at Open Door shelter which, during the day, operates a drop-in centre.

Anyone concerned about a rough sleeper can contact the charity StreetLink (www.streetlink.org.uk). They will inform the Council or other public agencies so help can be offered.

If you would like to offer financial help, which we know some local people do, a donation to one of the charities involved is by far the best thing you can do, rather than giving spare change to those begging.

We're still here to help

If you've got a problem, we're here to provide free, confidential and independent advice, whoever you are. Although we've had to suspend giving face to face help during the pandemic, we're busy providing our full advice service over the phone and online.

Most of us are focused on coping with our daily lives under the restrictions. But we're urging people not to sit on problems and risk them escalating. Lockdown is an opportunity to get to grips with issues that are bothering you and to get in touch with us.

Whatever your problem, we're here to help. We can give you advice on a wide range of issues including:

- debt and money
- benefits
- housing
- reducing energy bills
- work
- relationships
- or some other problem

If you need help, please get in touch.

Call us on **01727 811118** (Monday to Thursday 10am-4pm, Friday 10am-1pm) or call Hertfordshire Adviceline free on **0800 144 8848**. Alternatively, you can visit our website castad.org.uk, to chat to an adviser online or email us. For general information visit the national Citizens Advice website at citizensadvice.org.uk.



Changes to your garden waste collection service

New opt in, paid-for, garden waste service – from July 2021



The Council is introducing charges for all garden waste collections from Monday 5 July 2021..

These changes will apply to you if you live in a house or flat where we currently collect your garden waste.

Most councils in England charge for this service, and, with a large budget gap to fill, sadly we can no longer continue to offer it free of charge.

We know lots of residents value this service, so we want to keep on providing it. But we think it's fairer to offer a paid for service for those who want it, rather than add it onto the Council Tax for everyone to pay whether they use it or not.

A letter explaining the changes is included in your Council Tax pack.

Further information can be found at [t www.stalbans.gov.uk/garden-waste-subscription-service](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/garden-waste-subscription-service).

Exchanging your home with another family

A Mutual Exchange is where you agree to 'swap' your property with another tenant, having first requested permission from your landlord.

Such a swap can be a good way for some people to get the move they want. This is because there are very long waits for transfers to larger accommodation. A family wishing to transfer from a two bedroom to a three bedroom property can wait for many years.

Meanwhile 39 swaps were successfully completed via Homeswapper last year – it can be a good option for some people.

Moves to both smaller and larger properties are popular, as are moves away from the area.

If you are looking to move, as a social housing tenant in S Albans District, you can register for free at

www.homeswapper.co.uk.



The UK's largest community for mutual exchange



HomeSwapper

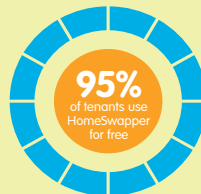
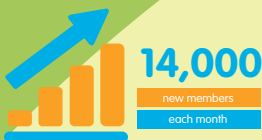
It's free
to join!

Easy to
register!

Find your
new home!

HomeSwapper allows you to:

- See how close a match your home is with a % match
- View who's liked your home
- Avoid timewasters with helpful profile badges
- Message with real-time chat
- See if another swapper is online.



Join today at
www.homeswapper.co.uk

New homes for local people

A brand new Council development, Warner House, was completed in December. It has twenty four one-bedroom and two-bedroom flats for rent to applicants on the housing register aged 55 and over.

Residents started moving in before Christmas.



Another Council development was completed in March. Hawksley Court has eighteen one-bedroom and four two-bedroom flats available for rent to applicants on the housing register. The Council is working on a number of projects to provide new social housing across the District. These include sites in Cottonmill, Batchwood and Harpenden. That's good news for people on the waiting list for homes.



Warner House kitchen.



Hawksley Court interior.



Hawksley Court under construction.



Hawksley Court kitchen.

Council wins top housing award

The Council's team, was delighted to win a major national award for our repairs and maintenance work in January.

St Albans City and District Council was selected ahead of other local authorities and housing associations for the title of Most Improved Asset Management Service 2021.

The prestigious award was won jointly with our maintenance contractor Morgan Sindall Property Services.

One of the main improvements that we have made is the

introduction of a new system that provides instant customer feedback on the repairs service received. We encourage all our tenants to submit feedback as soon as the service is delivered so that we can take immediate action to rectify any issues that may arise. This has proved popular with tenants, and satisfaction levels with the service are high.



Annual rent increase

By now you will have received details of your rent and service charge increase for 2021 – 2022. The new charges came into effect from Monday 5th April 2021.

The rent you pay is “ring fenced” which means it can only be spent on council housing and services to council tenants.

This includes repaying loans we received for buying and improving the housing stock, carrying out repairs and maintenance as well as paying for services such as legal advice, staff training and specialist equipment.

Each year we receive approximately £26 million in rents and service charges from our tenants, either from their own income or via Housing Benefit and Universal Credit.

If you do claim any benefits to help you pay your rent please make sure you inform either the DWP (for Universal Credit) or Housing Benefit.

If you pay by standing order then you will need to contact your bank to adjust it.

Rent statements are issued every quarter in early April, July, October and January. We will be having our two rent free weeks this year in weeks 38 and 39 which are weeks commencing 20th December and 27th December 2021.

Introducing Breathing Space – a new debt relief scheme

In May this year, the Government will launch a new scheme to encourage more people in debt to seek advice to help sort out their finances. The scheme is called ‘Breathing Space’.

Breathing Space is designed to provide protection for people in debt by pausing recovery on certain debts for a period of 60 days. This is to give people an opportunity to get debt advice knowing that recovery action by the people they owe money to has been temporarily halted. People receiving mental health treatment might be able to have a longer pause if their treatment is going to take longer than this.

Access to the breathing space scheme can only be made by seeking advice from a Debt Advice Provider, such as Citizens Advice or an approved mental health professional.

In addition to things like credit card debts, this ‘breathing space’ could apply to money owed on Council rent and council tax arrears, parking tickets or overpaid benefits. While there may be a pause on debt recovery, you will still need to pay your rent, council tax etc during the breathing space period.

Further information is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/breathing-space-to-help-millions-in-debt>.





Herts Careline

Because independence
is important

Free Medical
Alert Card and
Keyfinder Key Fob
with every
community
alarm.

*“Thank you for
your care and attention
when I had to call on you
after an accident at home.*

All power to your wonderful service.”

Community alarm and telecare service



0300 999 2 999

www.care-line.co.uk

Herts Careline –

here for people when they need help

The Herts Careline community alarm service supports residents across the county so they can continue to live independently at home.

The Control Room takes thousands of calls from elderly and vulnerable people every week, providing emergency medical assistance for those in need.

While many people have been isolated or shielding at home, having the Careline service has been a great relief to many customers and their families knowing that someone is there for them 24/7 if they're unwell.

The service has seen around 150-200 new customers join the service every month over the lockdown period.

For more information visit www.care-line.co.uk or call 0300 999 2 999.



Goodbye to Dave

Articles for Housing Times are written by either housing staff or colleagues from other departments and organisations.

Over the last 10 years these have all been collated and transformed into the finished Housing Times by Dave Coasby, a freelance and award winning graphic designer who has previously worked on many prestigious global brands.

Dave was born and lived in St Albans for most of his life, but a few years ago moved with his family to Dorset where he has now decided to hang up his AppleMac and retire from design work.

Over the years not only has he produced all the issues of Housing Times, but has also designed a number of our leaflets and handbooks, giving them a truly professional finish.

We wish him a long and happy retirement and are grateful for all his hard work on behalf of the service.

Your vote matters

Hertfordshire County Council, Police & Crime Commissioner and District Council elections take place on Thursday 6 May 2021. If you've recently moved home, make sure you are registered to vote so that you can have your say.

Registering to vote is easy to do and can be done online at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote. The deadline date for receiving applications to register for the May elections is Monday 19 April 2021.

We're working hard to make sure that polling stations are safe places to vote. You can expect many of the measures you've become used to in shops and banks over recent months, such as hand sanitiser, floor markings and face masks. However, if you have concerns about visiting your polling station as a result of the pandemic, you can still have your say by voting by post. Apply for your postal vote application now by downloading a form from www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter or by emailing elections@stalbands.gov.uk. Alternatively, call the elections team on 01727 819294.

The deadline for the receipt of new postal vote applications is 5.00 pm on Tuesday 20 April 2021.

For further information on registration and voting please visit <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/council-and-elections>.

Polling stations will be safe places to vote in May, but there are other ways to vote.



Want to vote by post? Apply early

The Electoral Commission

YOUR VOTE MATTERS
DON'T LOSE IT



How to contact your Housing Team

MyStAlbans district account

If you sign up for your MyStAlbans District Account you can manage your rent and Council Tax online. It's easy and you can do it at a time to suit you. You can view the balance of your Rent and Council Tax accounts and make payments too.

There are many other services available through 'MyStAlbans'. For example, you can see what payments you have made in the past and download a copy of your Council Tax Bill. You can apply to extend or modify your home, or apply for permission to keep a pet or rent a garage. You can also use it to contact your housing officer to report any issues and concerns.

On MyStAlbans you can sign up to receive your Council Tax Bills electronically, which helps save trees! You can also find out when your bin is due to be emptied, who your local Councillor is and how to contact them, view planning applications in your area, and much more!

Sign up today at www.stalbans.gov.uk (click on the MyStAlbans button).

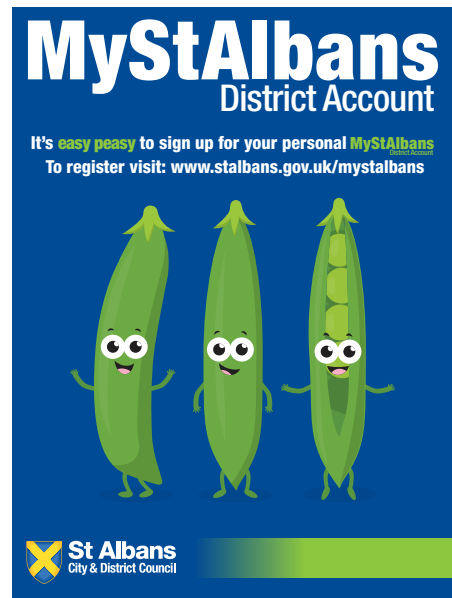
Income and neighbourhood management teams

Income team

housingincome@stalbens.gov.uk 01727 819301

Neighbourhood management team

housingmanagement@stalbens.gov.uk 01727 819354



Useful contacts

Reporting Repairs – daytime
Monday to Thursday 8.45am to 5.15pm
Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm
stalbensrepairs@morgansindall.com
01727 819256

Emergency Repairs – out of hours
01727 811155

Housing Options – including Transfers and Allocations
housing.options@stalbens.gov.uk
01727 819355

Housing Management – Tenancy
housingmanagement@stalbens.gov.uk
01727 819534

Housing Benefits
benefits@stalbens.gov.uk
01727 819220

Housing Support/Temporary Accommodation Team
temp.team@stalbens.gov.uk
01727 819397

Housing Income
housingincome@stalbens.gov.uk
01727 819301

Garages
garages@stalbens.gov.uk
01727 819266

Citizens Advice St Albans District
01727 811118

Leasehold management
housing-leasehold@stalbens.gov.uk
01727 819578

Disability Adaptations/Facilities Grants
dfgapapplications@stalbens.gov.uk
01727 814667 and 01727 819446



St Albans
City & District Council

www.stalbans.gov.uk/housing