

Housing Times

Annual Summary Autumn 2020

This annual report gives an overview of our achievements for the year ending 31 March 2020

In drafting the content, the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic are very much at the forefront of our minds, and cannot be ignored though they fall mainly outside the period this report covers.

Coronavirus

The pandemic presents substantial challenges for my team, our partners and the people we serve.

We have worked very closely with all our contractors to ensure Covid-secure safe working practices are in place when carrying out repairs and gas servicing. We have reviewed our major works programme to focus more on external works such as roofing and estate improvements, than internal works.

Our Estate Services team has carried out more focused cleaning in the communal areas of our blocks of flats. Additional cleaning has been undertaken in our sheltered and older person schemes and homeless hostels.

2019/20

In 2019/20 redevelopment of our sheltered housing stock continued. A flexicare scheme, Eywood House in Holyrood Crescent, St Albans, was completed providing a mix of one bedroom flats for rent and shared ownership.

Continued overleaf.



Eywood House – see page 18

In addition, Catalyst Housing Association completed Hawking's House delivering 28 units for rent to applicants on our housing register.

During 2019/20 we also purchased 26 units on the open market which included 8 three-bedroom properties. These were allocated to applicants from the Council's housing register.

Our new repairs and planned contract awarded to Morgan Sindall Property Services (MSPS) started in April 2019. It was a busy year with nearly 13,000 repairs carried out.

We are very keen to shape our services with our customers' needs very much at the forefront of our thinking. We want to ensure there are plenty of opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to feed their views back to our team. To support this a new customer satisfaction tool was launched in December 2019 which gives service users the opportunity to swiftly rate repairs services delivered. All feedback is monitored on a daily basis.

MSPS is providing a wide range of community benefits in addition to the repairs service, as part of our contract with them. An example is St Albans Prospex, launched in October 2019, their community traineeship programme. So far nine local trainees have been through the programme, with two progressing into trade apprenticeships with MSPS. MSPS has also engaged with local schools and colleges to provide mentoring support and their staff have been volunteering to support local events.

In September 2019 we welcomed around 100 residents to our Housing Open Day for tenants and leaseholders at the Alban Arena. This is a regular opportunity to ask questions and meet our teams and those of our key partners and contractors, with lots of stalls and family entertainment on offer.

During the year, we carried out improvements to the housing stock including central heating replacements, roofing, window and door replacements. In addition, fire safety improvements were made at Cyril Dumbleton House.

At the time of writing we are progressing completion of two further schemes at Warner House for older people over 55 years of age, and Mereden Court as general needs accommodation. These schemes will provide 42 one and two bedroom flats for applicants on the Council's housing register.

I hope you find this report informative. Do let us know if there are any items or information you would like to see in our next newsletters.

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*Karen Dragovic – Head of Housing
October 2020*

Estate Services 2019/20

The Estate Services Team have been busy keeping our estates safe, clean and tidy. Over the last year they have carried out weekly emergency lighting checks to make sure it will work in the event of a fire.

The team have worked hard cleaning communal landings and stairways and keeping them free of any items and obstructions including shoes, bicycles and pushchairs. This allows for safe access and egress to the blocks in line with our approach to fire safety.



You will often see the team litter picking in the communal grounds, tidying bin areas and clearing fly tips. The team is allocated 30 – 60 minutes weekly to the majority of our blocks and so the clearing of rubbish places a huge demand on them and means they have less time for communal cleaning.

Please dispose of your waste responsibly

A number of our residents leave their waste outside their properties including some large items of furniture, while we do recharge the residents when we know who has dumped the waste, it is not always possible to identify the culprit.



You are responsible for your waste even after it leaves your property and it is important that you dispose of it properly. The Council offers a bulk collection service and they will collect up to six items for £45.60 although if you are on certain benefits this service is free. Please check our website for more details.

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/bulky-items-collections>

You can also dispose of items at one of the household waste centres in the District. They have recently re opened following the lockdown although some are open for reduced hours. Please check www.hertfordshire.gov.uk for the details of your nearest centre and its opening times.

Since mid-February our Estate Services Team have had to adapt to COVID 19. We have reviewed the way we clean blocks placing more emphasis on the disinfecting of “contact points” such as handrails, door entry systems and door handles although we do remind you to wash your hands according to government advice after you have used shared contact points on our estates.



Involving and consulting tenants on the services we provide

There are lots of opportunities for tenants to get involved in shaping the services delivered by the Council and our partners.

In September 2019 we held our annual Open Day at the Alban Arena. Tenants who came along were able to meet staff from our housing teams, and those from Morgan Sindall Property Services, the company that looks after our repairs, and other contractors. Also on hand were other agencies we work with including Mediation Herts and the St Albans District Credit Union.

During the year, the Tenant and Leaseholder Forum met three times. Members asked for a briefing on our new handyman service and Morgan Sindall Property Services came along to talk about that. Initially this service was only available to tenants. But after listening to the Forum's views, it was agreed that the service would be expanded to include leaseholders.



We asked residents to complete a short survey with us, giving their views on the services they receive. We wanted to know how safe people feel in their neighbourhoods, if they know what to do in the event of a fire, and whether they have access to the internet.

The results are summarised below:

87% of respondents felt safe and secure in their neighbourhood

83% said they would know what to do if a fire broke out in their home*

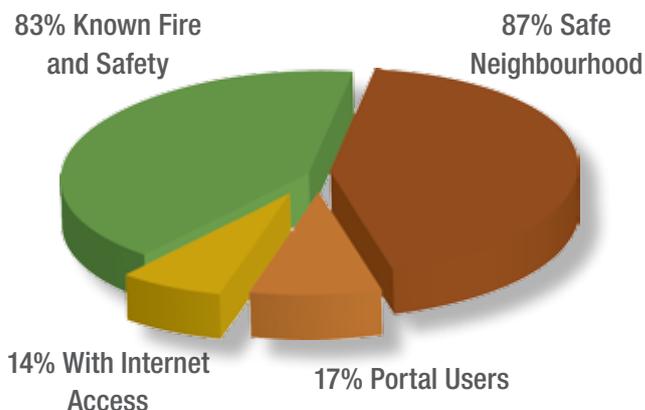
17% said they had a MyStAlbans account and had contacted us via the tenant portal included there.

14% said they had access to the internet.

**Fire Safety guidance leaflets were sent out to residents who were unsure what to do in the event of a fire.*



During the summer months we carried out our fifth year of door knocking surveys. This has been a welcome opportunity for housing staff and local councillors to meet with residents face to face on their doorsteps. This year we spoke with 182 tenants in Harpenden, London Colney, St Albans and Redbourn. We also visited residents in our two sheltered schemes.





Estate Services

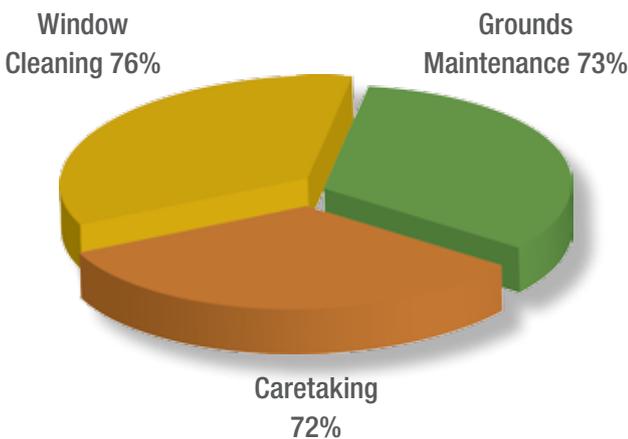
We also asked tenants who live in flats and pay a service charge for the upkeep of communal areas for their views on a range of services:

72% of respondents said that the caretaking services were excellent or satisfactory (60% in 2018/19).

73% said that the grounds maintenance service was excellent or satisfactory (58% in 2018/19).

76% said the communal window cleaning service was excellent or satisfactory (35% in 2018/19).

The increase in satisfaction compared to last year is encouraging. The new window cleaning contract appears to have improved the service for our tenants.



Please contact Andrew Ilott, the Estates Services Team Leader, at andrew.ilott@stalbans.gov.uk, or on **07939 273779**, if you have any concerns about estate services like caretaking and grounds maintenance.

Private sector housing

Established by the Council in 2018, Mosaic Lettings is a council run lettings service. It is designed to help local residents who are facing homelessness to secure a tenancy in the private rented sector, while, at the same time, providing a beneficial service to local landlords.

The service also helps residents who are on the housing register to move into the private rented sector.

The Mosaic Lettings team supports both the landlord and the tenant throughout the tenancy and are always on hand to help-out with tenancy issues. Properties let through the Council are regularly inspected by a Housing Health and Safety Ratings System qualified inspector to ensure that the property meets council property standards.

The benefit to our tenants is that they can secure a new tenancy that is a step up from their current accommodation. Mosaic Lettings has helped tenants who were waiting for a council owned property, but who chose to move into a private rented property because they were able to secure a faster move and potentially get a better suited or otherwise more desirable home. The service also includes tenants' deposit cover, helping tenants to apply for a Credit Union loan if they need one, and advice on how to rent effectively.

If you have registered with the Council as someone who is facing homelessness, or if you are a Council tenant looking to move property, and would like to register with Mosaic Lettings, please contact your Housing Options Advisor, or Mosaic Lettings directly (details below).

Landlords and agents interested in registering with the Council can contact the Mosaic Lettings team at [mosaic.lettings@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:lettings@stalbans.gov.uk) or on **01727 814674**.



Housing advice and homelessness

The Council's Housing Options team helps households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Team members offer a range of housing options to prevent or help relieve someone's current situation.



The main reasons for homelessness remain consistent and are:

- ending of a private sector tenancy
- relationship breakdown/domestic violence
- asked to leave by family/friends.



In 2019/20 the team's caseload included:

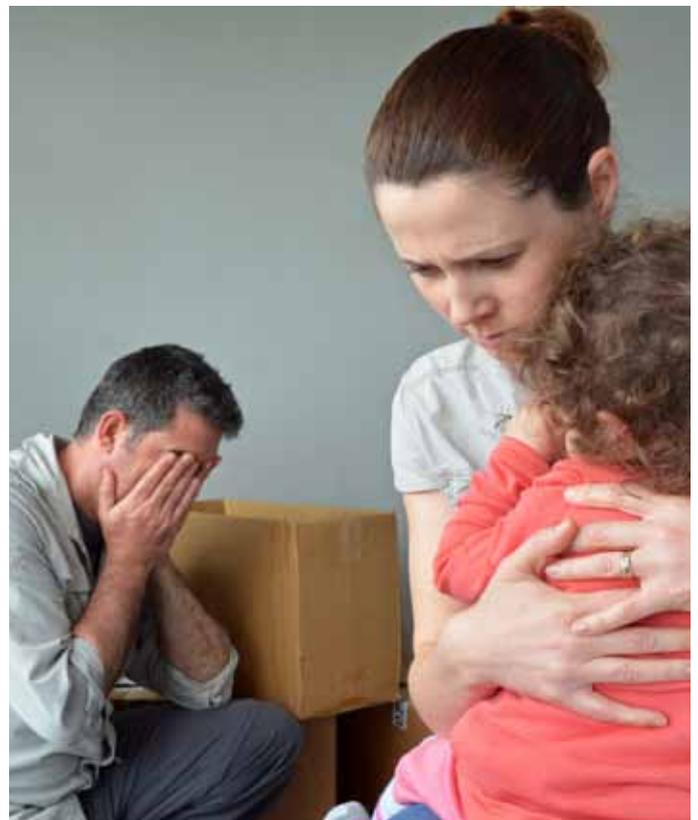
982 households who presented to the Council as homeless. In all cases, the Council has what is known as a 'Prevention' and 'Relief' duty. The Prevention duty requires the Council to take reasonable steps to help the applicant so that accommodation does not cease to be available. We provide support and advice to applicants who are taking some responsibility for securing their own accommodation. Last year 60% of households who approached the Council had their homelessness claim successfully resolved through this prevention duty.

The Relief duty requires the Council to take reasonable steps to help the applicant to secure suitable accommodation for at least six months. 25% of households had their homeless application resolved via the Relief duty.

117 of the households met the criteria for their homeless application to be accepted by the Council. These households are accommodated temporarily awaiting a permanent home.

In 2019 a Specialist Homelessness Advisor was appointed to work with rough sleepers. The Council works in partnership with other agencies to reduce the number of rough sleepers in the District. The number is very low and we aim to reduce this to zero before the cold weather arrives.

If you know someone facing homelessness they can register for housing assistance at www.stalbanshomechoice.co.uk.



Housing Benefit

Over 2019/20, the Housing Benefit team have continued to work closely with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and staff at the local Job Centre to help manage the transition to Universal Credit.

Most tenants of working age will now need to claim Universal Credit rather than Housing Benefit if their circumstances change and they need financial assistance with paying their rent.

Universal Credit is administered by the DWP, not the Council. To help our tenants with this, a member of the Housing Benefit team has been co-located at the Job Centre on Bricket Road in St Albans. This officer will help people claiming Universal Credit for the first time to understand what they need to do to keep on top of their rent and Council Tax payments. We can also signpost claimants to extra help or support, e.g., from Citizens Advice.

94% of the customers we surveyed found this service useful and here are some of the comments we have received.

'It was quick and an excellent service.'

'The fact that the job centre arranged the meeting with the council without me needing to do so was fantastic'

'Everyone at my local job centre in St Albans have been approachable and easy to talk with offering support and advice at a time when things are very stressful.'

For most tenants who are claiming Universal Credit, the payment you receive will include money towards your rent. Therefore, it is important you make arrangements to pay this money to the Council, such as setting up a standing order or a direct debit. If you are claiming Universal Credit and think you might get into difficulties with your finances, please speak to your Housing Income Officer as soon as possible.

Some working age tenants still receive Housing Benefit. At some point in the future it is likely these tenants will be asked to claim Universal Credit instead. However, we don't currently know when this will happen.

Discretionary Housing Payment

If you receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit but the amount you receive doesn't cover your rent in full, you may be entitled to a Discretionary Housing Payment. Please visit

www.stalbans.gov.uk/discretionary-housing-payments or contact the your Housing Income Officer for more details including help to complete the claim form.

Council Tax Support

Council Tax Support helps people on a low income with their Council Tax by reducing the amount they are expected to pay. Some households can receive 100% Council Tax Support. This means they don't have to pay anything towards their Council Tax unless their circumstances change

To apply for Council Tax Support, please visit www.stalbans.gov.uk/benefits.

In April 2019 we introduced a new Council Tax Support scheme for people who are also in receipt of Universal Credit. This new scheme is called a 'banded scheme'. This means the amount of help you receive towards your Council Tax depends on what 'band' your income falls into. The advantage of a banded scheme is that small changes in your income will probably not alter the amount you are expected to pay. You can read more about this scheme at <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/council-tax-support>.

We think a banded scheme makes it easier for residents to understand what they need to pay each month towards their Council Tax. It also reduces the amount of paper we use.



Speaking of paperwork, we are encouraging all tenants to switch to receiving their Council Tax Bills electronically. You can do this at www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbans. Signing up to receive your bill via e-mail rather than in the post helps us to help the environment by reducing the amount of paper we use.

To contact the benefit team, please e-mail benefits@stalbands.gov.uk or telephone **01727 819220**.

If you do not currently receive any financial help and would like to find out what benefits you may be entitled to, please visit www.stalbans.entitledto.co.uk.

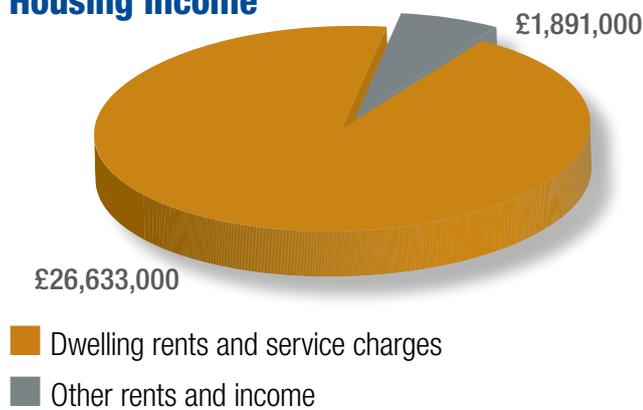
The 2019/20 financial position

In 2019/20 the overall income to the housing service was £28,524,000.

The main source of the income is the rent and service charges received from tenants and leaseholders (in our Housing Revenue Account).

Housing income	How much £	Percentage of total
Dwelling rents and service charges	26,633,000	93%
Other rents and income	1,891,000	7%
Total	28,524,000	100%

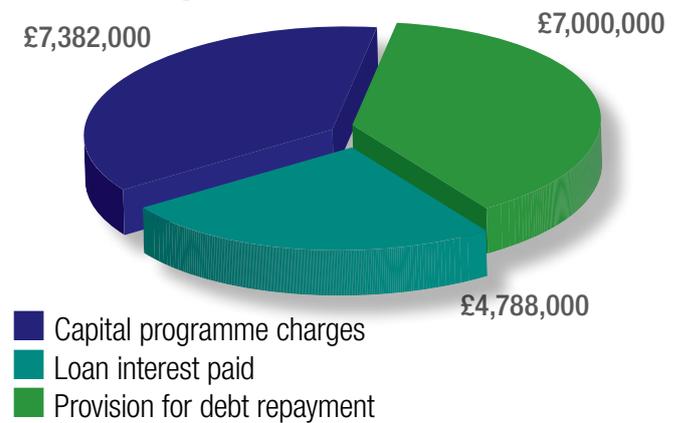
Housing Income



Other charges to the Housing Revenue Account are set out below:

Other Charges to HRA	How Much £
Capital programme charges	7,382,000
Loan interest paid	4,788,000
Provision for debt payment	7,000,000
Total	19,170,000

Other charges to HRA



Including other charges, the total expenditure in 2019/20 was £31,221,000. The balance carried forward into 2020/21 was £9.1m.

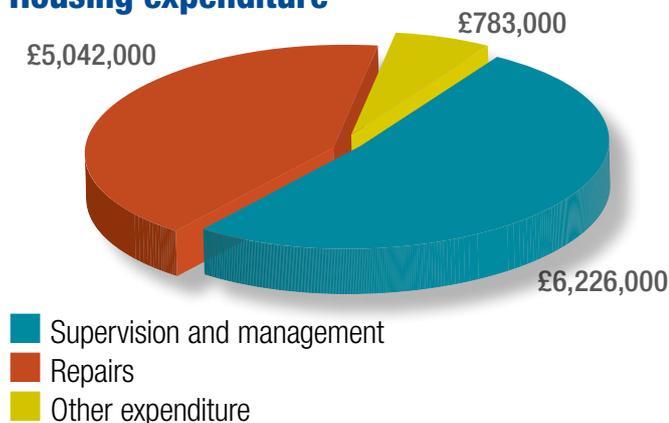
Capital expenditure

During 2019/20 the Council spent £7.3m on improvements to our housing stock. This includes window replacements, roofing, electrical rewires, kitchens and bathrooms and disabled adaptations.

In addition, £9.4m was spent on affordable housing projects expected to complete in 20/21.

Housing expenditure	How much £	Percentage of total
Supervision and management	6,226,000	52%
Repairs	5,042,000	42%
Other Expenditure	783,000	6%
Total	12,051,000	100%

Housing expenditure



Morgan Sindall – Repairs and planned works programme 2019/20

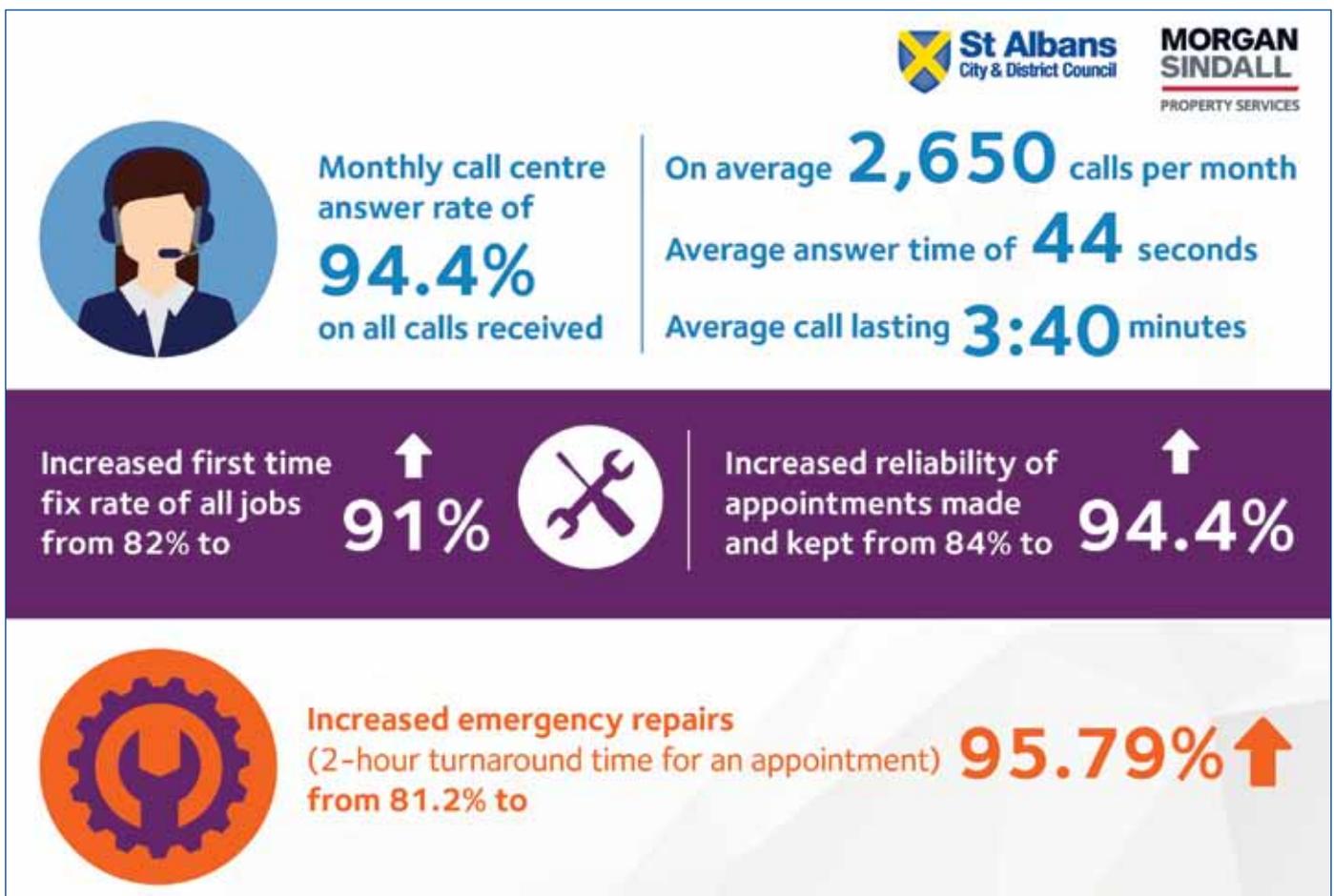
The First 500 days

Morgan Sindall Property Services (MSPS) is the Council's repairs services contractor, looking after 4,800 of our tenants' homes. This includes repairs, maintenance, and improvement works as well as the management of empty properties and Council-owned garages.

The contract started in April 2019, after an intense period of transfer from the previous contractor.

The information below shows some of the key areas which we monitor at least monthly and are used to improve the overall repairs service.

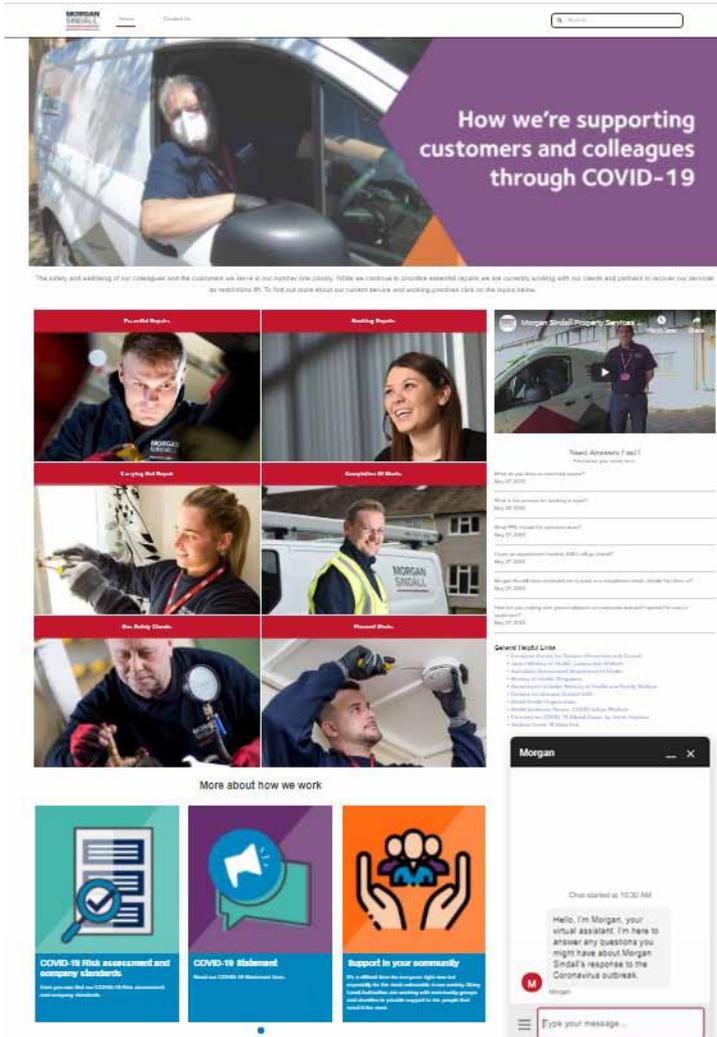
The performance statistics on the contract so far are:



To help support the Council during the pandemic MSPS launched its COVID portal, the portal provides a platform for any COVID-19 repair related queries.

When residents book a repair appointment, a link to the portal is sent out as part of the confirmation booking. Here residents can find out about MSPS working practices, what

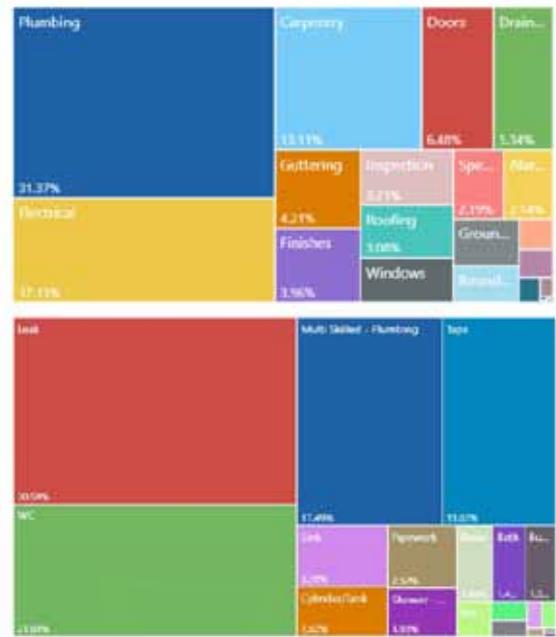
repairs are being carried out at the moment, how best to access the services and what they can expect when the engineers attend their home. The portal also houses 'Morgan', the chatbot. So, if residents can't find the answer to their question, they can ask Morgan, who will provide them with the most appropriate response.



Using data to inform and improve the service

Using data about properties, customers, safety checks and so on allows the company to track trends and develop insights to help develop the service.

For example, the images below show that 48.5% of all repairs fall within two problem types – plumbing and electrical works. The bottom image shows further breakdown to each of these categories and gives more insight into what is driving that repair demand.



ProspeX graduation celebration.

Rant and Rave

In October 2019, MSPS implemented Rant and Rave, their customer engagement tool. This provides helpful customer feedback.

It captures the good news, the bad news and everything in between. Since it launched nearly 800 pieces of feedback have been received with over 1,100 comments, and the overall customer satisfaction score is 4.31 out of 5.



explained knowledge
fixed resolved
quick speed polite
friendly helpful
efficient

MSPS created Prospex, the work to learn programme designed to provide training, structured work experience and employment opportunities to residents in St Albans. In October 2019, the first cohort started their three-week classroom training, covering Health & Safety Construction Skills L1 qualification, Level 1 Certificate in Employability and the industry recognised Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card enabling them access to site. After this, they progressed onto a three-week work placement where they were partnered with an experienced operative, who mentored them through their hands-on learning experience in painting, decorating, plumbing and electrical. It's fantastic to report all nine trainees successfully completed the programme. MSPS were delighted to offer two positions on the apprenticeship programme, one as a multi-trade and the other as a plumbing and heating apprentice.

A new course started in October 2020. For further details please email CSRBox@morgansindall.com.

Mentoring and school engagement programmes

MSPS started its mentoring programme at Job Centre Plus with referrals from the Youth Obligation Team. This programme supported residents with developing their CVs, honing job search techniques, writing cover letters plus completing application forms while offering mock interview practice sessions.

As everyone has different requirements, separate 1-2-1 catch up sessions were offered and tailored to suit individual needs. Resident feedback was very positive – there have been some great success stories with residents who were previously not getting interviews, now being offered them! We are still doing these sessions, online at the moment because of the pandemic.

MSPS is committed to their school engagement programme and during last year, they attended career fairs, STEM events,



Hannah Waddington at St Albans Girls School – Big Interview Day.

inspiring women speed networking gatherings to discuss and raise awareness of all the various roles within the industry. Another area MSPS is passionate about is offering work experience opportunities and has been working with St Albans Girls School and the Property Maintenance Diploma students at Oakland College. Part of the College's course required the students to have contact with industry professionals, this provided them with an insight into MSPS and the works they complete throughout the Borough, at the end of the course two students were offered apprenticeships.

Sponsorship and volunteering

MSPS has supported and volunteered for local charities such as partnering with the London Colney Parish Council at the Community Awards and providing prizes. It also partnered with the Council to sponsor the St Albans Sleepout at the Oakland College, helping raise money for Herts Young Homeless charity. Three members of the MSPS St Albans contract team also took part in the event. The charity helps over 2,000 vulnerable people across the county, each year, who are homeless or at risk of becoming so. Lastly, MSPS also supported the Council's Housing Services Community Day at the Alban Arena, Civic Centre.

MSPS is looking forward to continuing working in partnership with SADC. The relationship has developed and matured over the past 18 months, and by using MSPS data insight proposition it can continually learn and improve on the customer experience while also helping to providing targeted support in the local community.



St Albans Housing Service Day.



London Colney Parish Council Community Awards.



Sleepout Banner.

Management of empty properties

When a tenant moves out of one of our houses or flats the Council carries out renovation work and does all the necessary checks to get it into a fit state to rent to someone new.

We began a new partnership for such repairs and renovations in April 2019 with Morgan Sindall Property Services. There was a big backlog for them to deal with which was already challenging, and the arrival of Covid in March this year, has meant our approach has had to be highly flexible.

Houses and flats become vacant for a number of reasons. It might be that a tenant transfers to another council or housing association property, or the Council buys back a property sold under Right to Buy. Sometimes properties become vacant due to a death or they are abandoned. And on some occasions the vacancy is due to eviction.

Work to get properties ready to relet, and getting the reletting arrangements organised, take place together to make sure that we turn properties around as quickly as possible, usually as soon as we become aware that a property has been, or is about to be, vacated. There are a lot of people in need of homes locally, so this is an important aspect of our work.

If we can, we get surveys and inspections done before the property is vacated. This allows us to establish the condition of the property, which utility provider is in place, and whether there are any other considerations such as sheds or garages, or adaptations and alterations. This information is passed to our contractor, who then works to complete all the necessary repairs as soon as they can – and in many cases before the former tenants leave. This helps us to get most properties ready quickly.

Applicants have 4 days to bid on properties they wish to live in, and once bidding closes, the verification and offer process starts.

We expect all our properties to be prepared for reletting to a high 'relettable' standard, and we benchmark the way we do this against the way other landlords do it to make sure we are offering a good service.



Rant and rave

Morgan Sindall Property Services collect feedback, via text message about their service following each touch point that our customers have with them. Messages are sent out following interactions with the call centre or following a completion of a job, this also includes sub contractors jobs. By giving this feedback directly following an interaction with Morgan Sindall its enables us to improve our service specifically from feedback that you give. Both positive and negative feedback is welcomed and passed directly to our call handlers and operatives. Please continue to respond as together we monitor the results in order to improve the service that we deliver.



Handyperson Service

During 2019 we launched the 'Handyperson Service'. Tenants are able to book DIY jobs – non electrical and plumbing. The service costs £12 for 3.5 hours works and can be used twice a year. Examples of jobs that the Handyman can do are; Putting up curtain poles/blinds, shelves, small decorating jobs etc. To book please email housingcontractadmin@stalbans.gov.uk



St Albans Prospex

Morgan Sindall Property Services our partnering contractor ran a work experience scheme in October 2019. 10 SADC residents signed up and completed the course. Attendees completed 3 weeks in the classroom where health and safety, customer service, basic practical skills, and CSCS qualifications was gained. They then spent 3 weeks working alongside engineers going into residents' houses and gaining 'on the job' experience.

The scheme will run twice yearly and at the end of each course an apprentice place will be offered. The scheme is open to SADC residents and each cohort will undertake 3 weeks classroom work and (when Covid-19 restrictions allow) 3 weeks practical experience. A new course started in October 2020. For further details please email csrbox@morgansindall.com



Tenants' incentive scheme

The Council's Tenants' Incentive Scheme helps to support tenants who no longer need family size homes

The voluntary scheme, which is for people who are transfer applicants wishing to move, helps tenants move to smaller properties more suitable for their needs. It helps release larger properties for families on our register who are living in crowded conditions and need somewhere bigger.

Tenants wish to downsize for a variety of reasons. For example they find their current property is too big and bills too expensive, or they have difficulty with stairs or gardens that need too much looking after.

Tenants looking to downsize are given priority banding when looking for a new home. There are 4 options available. We will:

1. pay a full grant of £1,700 if the tenant makes all their own arrangements; or
2. arrange and pay the cost of removals and will pay the sum of £500 per bedroom given up; or
3. arrange and pay the cost of removals, the cost of redecorating (in magnolia) and the cost of re-carpeting the new home (choice of colours); or
4. arrange and pay for the cost of removals and of redecorating the new home (in magnolia) and remove unwanted furniture from the old home.

Whichever option you choose, you get an additional £250 payment if your property is left in a good state of repair.

In 2019/2020 a total of 19 bedrooms that had been empty were brought back into use through the scheme.

8 families qualified for the additional £250 payment when their property was left in good condition.

- 60% chose Incentive Option 1;
- 13% chose Incentive Option 2;
- 27% chose Incentive Option 3

If you interested, you can make a transfer application by registering at www.stalbanshomechoice.co.uk

Housing allocations

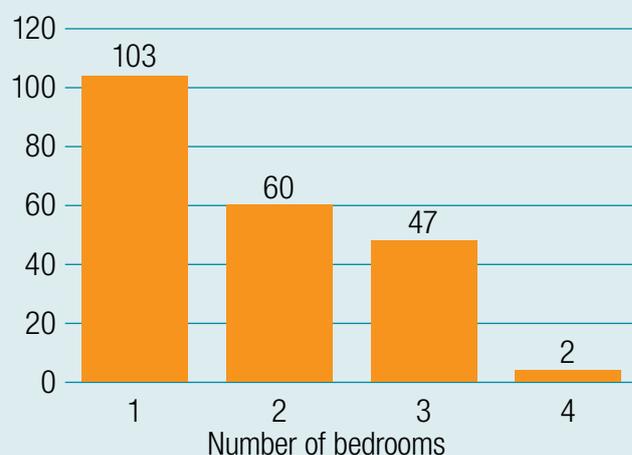
In 2019, the Housing Department moved to a new customer platform called St Albans Home Choice. This gives customers control over their housing application and allows them to upload their documents onto the customer portal.

The Council continues to advertise properties on a weekly basis on www.stalbanshomechoice.co.uk. These properties could be owned by the Council or a Housing Association. Unfortunately there are less properties available than applicants on the housing register. We advise all applicants to place bids on all properties that meet their housing need regardless of type, location or landlord.

Transfer applicants are always likely to find alternative accommodation quicker by looking for a mutual exchange. Council tenants can register for free at www.homeswapper.co.uk. In 2019/2020 the Council oversaw 52 mutual exchanges.

In 2019/2020, 212 Council properties were let to homeless, housing register, and transfer applicants. The breakdown of the size of properties is detailed in the table below. This illustrates the shortage of larger family-sized accommodation and the challenges the Housing department faces meeting the needs of families on the housing register. Note this figure does not include properties owned by Housing Associations.

Number of Council properties allocated 2019/2020



What the Council is doing to improve properties

The Council's Capital Project Team work is all about improving our properties, maintaining their value and keeping the tenants and leaseholders safe. 2019/20 was the first year of our long term partnership with Morgan Sindall Property Services.

Over 1,700 housing surveys were undertaken last year. These help the Capital Project Team plan what works are needed including works to reduce the carbon emissions of homes.

The surveys focus on the current condition of the property. They help the Council plan for replacements of things like kitchens, bathrooms, roofs, windows, wiring, and boilers.

The table below provides a breakdown of some of the planned maintenance and disabled adaptation work carried out in 2019/20. Total capital spend in 2019/20 was £7.3m.

Programme of Works	Number of Properties	Spend
Roof Replacement	51	£548,000
Structural Works	8	£118,000
Window/Door Renewal/Replacement	102	£739,000
Kitchens & Bathrooms	37	£165,000
Fire Risk Assessment Works	1 Scheme	£287,000
Gas boiler and Heating installations	446	£1,822,000
Electrical Rewiring	250	£374,000
Major Disabled Adaptations – Council Properties	67	£461,000
Major Disabled Adaptations – Private Properties	34	£633,000
Garage Refurbishment	3 Blocks	£120,000

The Capital Project Team also makes sure our homes comply with the law on gas safety, electrical safety and legionella testing.



In 2019/20, 6,376 gas services, 950 electrical tests, and 250 rewires were completed.

The Capital Project Team carries out disabled adaptations in Council housing, and processes Disability Grants for private sector housing. Disabled Adaptations provide essential facilities to hundreds of residents every year.

During 2019/20 we received 204 referrals for disabled adaptations with financial support from the Government's Disabled Facilities Grant and the Council's Capital

Investment Programme. We also received 141 applications for minor adaptations such as rails and ramps.

As in previous years, we continue to work closely with a dedicated team of Occupational Therapists from Hertfordshire County Council and the NHS.

The most common adaptations are level access shower facilities, access works for wheelchair users or those with limited mobility, stair-lifts, ramps and grab rails.

Outside the property we can provide mobility scooter stores and dropped kerbs for hard standings.

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

We will need to check that the proposed works are 'necessary and appropriate' to meet the disabled person's needs, and 'reasonable and practicable' depending on the age and condition of the property.

If you wish to request a referral for adaptations, please contact Social Services by calling **0300 123 4042** (for adults) or **01727 891142** (for children and young people).

Further information about adaptations is available on the Council's website at www.stalbans.gov.uk/aids-and-adaptations (dfgapplications@stalbands.gov.uk; **01727 819396**).



Collecting rent and other payments owed by ex-tenants

Sometimes when a tenant moves house or is evicted, rent or other payments are owed that we need to collect to pay for local services.

As well as rent owed for housing, we sometimes need to collect outstanding rent from garage tenancies, as well as court costs and expenses arising from damage or substandard building works undertaken by the former tenant.

Where a tenant has moved on owing money, we often use a tracing agency to locate them so we can collect the outstanding debt. We do this whether they have relocated locally, or have moved abroad.

We also work with third parties who are helping former tenants sort out their affairs such as Citizen's Advice and finance management companies. They can help people get on top of debt problems in a supportive way.



Sometimes tenants ask for non-standard repairs that the Council would not normally agree as part of our service. In some cases, such repairs can be recharged and need to be paid for by the tenant before works are started. In other cases, we may carry out works in an emergency and later recharge the tenant or leaseholder.

Council housing development 2019/20

During the year, Housing Associations completed the development of 95 properties in St Albans District. This includes a flexi care scheme, Eyewood House, Holyrood Crescent on the site of the former Betty Entwistle House. This provides a mix of 1-bedroom flats for rent and shared ownership.

On the site of the former sheltered housing scheme at Linley Court, Catalyst Housing delivered a brand-new building, Hawking's House. The 7x1-bedroom and 21x2-bedroom flats were made available for rent to applicants from the Council's Housing Register.

Following works in 2019/20, completion of 2 Council housing developments is due over the next few months.

Warner House in Cell Barnes Lane is on the site of the former Wavell House. It will deliver 12x1-bed and 12x2-bed flats for applicants on the Council's Housing Register over the age of 55.

Hawksley Court, Tavistock Avenue, is a refurbishment of the Council's sheltered housing scheme, Mereden Court. This project will deliver 14x1-bed and 4x2-bed flats for all applicants on the Council's Housing Register.



Warner House development



Work redeveloping Mereden Court

The Housing Department has identified a range of projects that together will provide a pipeline of new social rented housing – up to 50 new homes in the next three years. These are primarily on former garage sites or where temporary accommodation properties have fallen into disrepair.

We also have agreements with Housing Associations to nominate applicants from the Housing Register to properties on new developments. These include new homes at the site of the former Harperbury Hospital, towards Radlett; land adjacent to Beaumont School, Hatfield Road, St Albans; and the Oaklands College site, Sandpit Lane, St Albans.



Housing Income Team

We now offer more online rent services for our tenants. This includes being able to see a breakdown of your charges, check your rent balance, see your payment history, pay your rent and make an appointment to see your Housing Income Officer. It is easy to register for an online account. For more information please go to www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbans.

Tenants are currently able to make rent payments over the telephone during office hours, using a debit or credit card. You can also call **0161 785 3880** to use our automated payment line 24 hours per day, 7 days per week as well as making online payments via our website.

We offer payment by Direct Debit on the 1st or the 15th of each month and also accept payment by standing order or bank transfer. You will need to have your 8 digit payment reference number in order to be able to pay in this way. This can be found on rent statements sent to you every 3 months.

The number of tenants receiving Universal Credit in St Albans has slowly increased over the year. This has left some tenants struggling to make their rent payments. If this affects you please contact your Housing Income Officer as soon as possible so that we can support and advise you. It is worth having an early conversation with your Housing Income Officer, who can talk through the options and refer you to helpful support services locally. The Housing Income Team can be contacted via our online portal

www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbans or alternatively by calling **01727 819 301**.

In 2019/20 the following formal action was taken:

- 301 Notices of Seeking Possession were served on tenants. These Notices are the first step in taking legal action which could lead to eviction
- 51 tenants were referred to court in connection with rent arrears
- 32 possession orders were obtained
- 4 tenants were evicted

We only take legal action where we have not managed to persuade people to pay rent. The majority of our tenants pay their rent on time. However, a small percentage find themselves in court for non-payment of rent. Our Housing Income Officers will try to work with tenants to avoid the need for court action wherever possible. This includes budgeting and benefit advice, and, where helpful, referral to support services.

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).

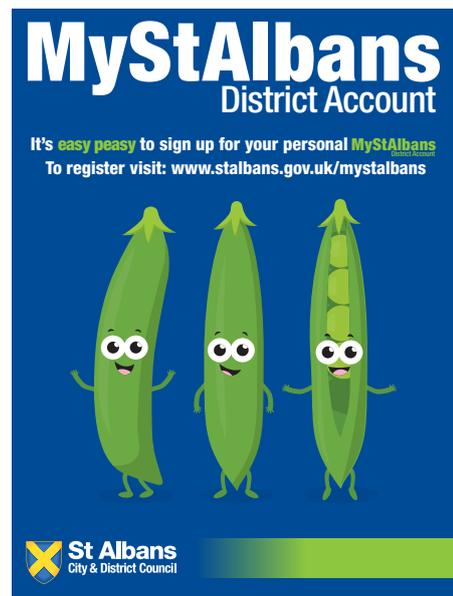
Income and neighbourhood management teams

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
03444 111444

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

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