

HousingTimes

Summer 2018

Protecting our staff

Sadly, physical and verbal threats and attacks against housing staff are not unknown. We have a responsibility to protect our staff from incidents of violence, threatening behaviour and verbal abuse.

We take behaviour like this very seriously, and prosecute, or repossess Council properties, wherever possible. Our staff can now use devices to monitor and record incidents where they feel their safety is threatened. Evidence, including audio recordings, obtained through these devices, may be used in criminal and civil proceedings and/or to take injunctions and possession action against alleged offenders.

We will only use these devices where staff, or others, feel threatened. We will take any steps necessary to safeguard client confidentiality, and where we take legal action on behalf of a tenant, leaseholder or contractor, we will only do so with their permission.

For information, email housingmanagement@stalbans.gov.uk.



Data protection – how do the new rules affect you?

Like many others, you may have been inundated with information about the new data regulations. For those not in the know, here is a brief guide on what we do with your data.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 give you more say over what an organisation can do with your personal information. This includes details like your name, address, date of birth, email, financial and medical information and even your opinions and views.

As far as the Council is concerned, we ask you to share certain personal information with us when you become a tenant, or when you ask for other Council services.

Our privacy notice tells you what we will do with the information you provide, who we will share it with, and when we will delete it.

Under these new rules, you also have additional rights in respect of your personal information. When we hold personal information for housing services, you have the right to:

- Access a copy of your personal information
- Ask us to correct an error
- Ask us to restrict what we do with your personal information

More information is available on the Council's website, or from our GDPR team at gdpr@stalbans.gov.uk or phone 01727 866100.

MyStAlbans

District Account

Register for a **MyStAlbans District Account** and get customised information relevant to you, your home and your neighbourhood

You can also pay your Council Tax (and see your bill and balance), tell us about waste and recycling issues, and report things like litter, really easily. And as a housing tenant, you can get a number of your housing services through the MyStAlbans District Account. Coming soon, you will be able to view your rent balance, and see recent transactions associated with your rent. You will also be able to book appointments to see your Housing Officer.

It's easy to sign up. Just go to www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbans

If you're new to computers or need a bit of help, Computer Friendly is offering short courses to get you started online. See www.computerfriendlystalbands.org.uk (or ask a friend to download their brochure), email courses@cfsta.org or call 020 3239 1559.



Don't get bitten by loan sharks

It is a criminal offence to lend money for profit without a consumer credit licence from the Financial Conduct Authority. Such companies and individuals are commonly known as 'loan sharks'.

You can check to see if a lender is authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority at www.fca.org.uk/register

Loan Sharks often lend money alongside another legal, or illegal, business. It's as well to know a bit about how they operate, so you don't get caught out. Some of the warning signs that a lender is acting illegally include:

- Giving you no paperwork or agreement
- Refusing to give you information about the loan
- Keeping items until the debt is paid, such as your mobile phone, or bank card
- Taking things from you if you don't pay on time
- Adding more interest or charges, so the debt never goes down
- Using intimidation or violence if you don't pay

Not all loan sharks act like this. Some may appear to be legitimate businesses, like a doorstep lender, and you may be given a payment book or even an agreement to sign. But what they are doing is illegal.

Over 310,000 households in the United Kingdom use these illegal money lenders every year. Anyone can fall in the trap of borrowing money from loan sharks. Some may go to these lenders because of things like a poor credit history or because they don't think they can get a loan from a mainstream credit provider or bank.



Some people think they are borrowing from a friend or colleague, or they need money quickly, perhaps to pay an unexpected bill like a car repair.

Everyone has urgent financial needs from time to time.

Planning ahead means you can prepare for them. Going to a Credit Union is a good place to start. You can search online for details of the St Albans District Credit Union which is located in Hatfield Road.

What can I do about a loan shark debt?

If you have borrowed money from a loan shark the most important things to remember are:

- You have not done anything illegal and you won't get in trouble with the police. While it's illegal to lend money without a licence, it's not illegal to borrow money from a loan shark
- You don't have to pay the money back. If the money was lent illegally, the loan shark has no legal right to collect it, and they can't take you to court to get it back
- Don't stop paying a loan shark if you are worried about your safety. Get advice from a specialist before you make a decision.

If you are worried about a loan shark, confidential help is available from specialist illegal money lending teams who investigate and prosecute illegal lenders.

People who borrow cash from illegal lenders may be struggling with repayments, and scared of threats and violence. When dealing with a member of the public, the Police are often in a position to gain the information they need to start investigating a loan shark.

Where can I get help?

Getting advice on loan sharks depends on where you live in the UK. Here are some options:

- 24 hour hotline **0300 555 2222** – all calls are confidential
- www.stoploansharks.uk
- Twitter [#stoploansharks](https://twitter.com/stoploansharks)
- www.facebook.com/stoploansharksproject
- Text **07860022116**

For free, confidential, debt advice, see:

Citizen's Advice – www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Stepchange – www.stepchange.org

National debtline – www.nationaldebtline.org

Parking in front of Council Garages

The Council has over 2,000 garages across the District. Sadly, there are lots of instances of car owners parking in front of garages, causing considerable inconvenience for garage tenants.

Residents should only use allocated parking spaces, or use on street parking. If you'd like to apply for a Council garage, the subsidised rate for Council tenants is £10.92 per week. Just register for a new MyStAlbans District Account, and you'll see full details there. To register for MyStAlbans go to

www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbans

Our Garage Management Officer does regular inspections of all garages sites and may take action against repeat offenders. At some of our sites, Traffic Regulation Orders are in place and cars parked there without a valid permit could be liable for a parking ticket and a £70 fine.

One such site is Telford Court in Alma Road, St Albans. Two further St Albans sites currently being considered for Traffic Regulation Orders are Thirlestane in Lemsford Road, and St Pauls Place on Hatfield Road.

If you see a car blocking a garage, or causing an obstruction, please contact the Garages team on **01727 819266**.

Alternatively, you can send photos of obstructive parking, and fly tips or vandalism at garage sites to garages@stalbands.gov.uk. Thank you for your help.

The photos show some recent examples of obstructive parking.



Help when you need it most

Local food banks offer lots of support to people who are going into temporary housing and need additional help when they first come to the Council.

As a result of relationships built with local food banks, we distribute vouchers for food banks, and we now have a food bank collection box at the Council offices where Council staff regularly donate goods. The Vineyard Church, has also been supplying us with emergency food packages in case we come across people who need additional support.

In exceptional circumstances the Council can provide

personal care packages for things like toothpaste, toothbrushes and other essentials. But sometimes people need a bit of extra help.

There are six foodbank locations in the District, providing this service.

For further information contact temp.team@stalbands.gov.uk or call **01727 819397**.

New action on homelessness

When it comes to homelessness, the Council's job is to assess whether a household that comes to us is eligible, according to certain criteria, to be housed long-term by us.

But now, due to a change in the law, our role has changed significantly.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force in England in April this year. This new law means Local Authorities have more duties and responsibilities than before when it comes to working with people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. In response to the legal changes, the Council has launched various new initiatives to make it easier for people who are homeless to get the help they need.

Our newly launched online self-referral tool is for people who are either threatened with homelessness, or who are currently homeless. This will help the Homeless Team to create a bespoke personal housing plan with individuals. The link is available at <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/housing/homelessness>

If members of the public want to refer instances of rough sleeping, the way to do this is to contact Street Link

www.streetlink.org.uk or encourage the rough sleeper to attend the drop in service at Open Door Night Shelter 8 Bricket Road, St Albans AL1 3JX, telephone **01717 859113**, between 2pm and 3:30 pm.

We are also launching a new Private Sector Housing Scheme to try and help more people get private rented accommodation, rather than wait for an offer of scarce social housing.

The Council's team is hopeful that the extra powers and resources we now have will mean there will be fewer people sleeping rough, and we can help more people find homes.



What is Legionella, and does it affect you?

The name comes from the first recorded outbreak in Philadelphia during a convention of the American Legion in July, 1976.

A mystery illness affected over 200 people and caused the death of 34. Legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia caused by the inhalation of small droplets of contaminated water containing the Legionella bacterium.

All man-made hot and cold water systems are likely to provide an environment where Legionella can grow if water in the system is left dormant for long periods.

What are your landlord's responsibilities?

Your landlord has a legal duty to assess and control the risk of exposure to Legionella bacteria.

The Council carries out regular risk assessments and has preventive methods in place. Sheltered housing schemes, commercial buildings and multiple occupancy properties are tested every 3 months to ensure that residents are safe.

What are the risks?

The risk from hot and cold water systems in most homes is low owing to regular water usage and turnover.

Showers create and disperse water droplets which may be inhaled causing a risk of exposure to Legionella. If used regularly (as in the majority of homes) the risks are greatly reduced.

What can you do to keep yourself safe?

You should clean and disinfect showerheads regularly.

Instantaneous electric showers pose less of a risk as they are generally cold water-fed and heat only small volumes of water during operation.

For most domestic hot and cold water systems, temperature is the most reliable way of ensuring the risk of exposure to Legionella bacteria is minimised. Keep the hot water hot, and the cold water cold. And keep the water moving through the tanks and pipes.

Please always inform us if the hot water is not heating properly or there are any other problems with system or plumbing, so that appropriate action can be taken.

First new Council homes in a generation

The Council has developed 25 affordable homes for rent on 3 former garage sites in the Batchwood area. This is much needed affordable housing, and is the first large scale development by the Council for almost 30 years.

The mix of 25 one, two, and three bedroom homes will all be rented to families on the Council's Housing Register.

Since 2013, 27 other homes for rent and shared ownership, have been built on former Council garage sites, this time by Housing Associations.

The work does not stop when the Batchwood development is complete! We are currently working to develop 23 homes on 2 former garage sites in Sandridge. This development is scheduled for completion in November 2018.



Work continues on new local housing



Work is progressing well in Holyrood Crescent to redevelop the former Betty Entwistle House.

The new scheme will be known as Eywood House and is being built in partnership with Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association. It will provide 40 one-bedroom homes for rent and shared ownership. The flats have been carefully designed for residents over the age of 40 who have a care need.

If you are interested in being considered for one of the new flats, due to be ready in Spring 2019, please register at www.hertschoicetohomes.org.uk.

Information about the shared ownership flats is available at www.bphaoptions.org.uk.

Work is also well underway in Sandridge to provide new housing for families, as well as single people and couples from the Council's housing list.

Work is now taking place on the roofs of the properties at the former garage sites in Langley Grove, and St Leonard's Crescent.

A total of 23 houses and flats are due for completion this winter. The new homes will be let and managed by the Council.

Two and three bedroomed houses, and one and two bed flats, will be available to applicants registered at www.hertschoicetohomes.org.uk

For further information regarding these and other developments contact rebecca.hillman@stalbands.gov.uk or call **01727 819586**.



Royal Wedding fever hits Gertrude Peake Place!

Staff from one of the Council's contractors, the Bell Group, kindly redecorated 5 benches in the communal garden at Gertrude Peake Place in Redbourn, in May.

The smart, newly painted benches really enhance the gardens, which have won gardening awards due to the hard work of the residents there.

At an event in May to present the benches, Bell Group staff brought cakes and treats to help the residents celebrate the Royal wedding in style! The sun was out and much fun was had by all.

Thanks to everyone involved!



Pawfect solution

Do you have a pet? Have you got permission?

Did you know that it is condition of your tenancy agreement that you request permission to keep a pet?

The aim of the policy is to promote responsible pet ownership and to encourage owners to act in a responsible manner.

If you decide that you wish to keep a pet please seek prior permission from your Housing Officer. Permission will not be unreasonably withheld or withdrawn.

Details of the pet policy is available on the Council's website: <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/housing/counciltenants/Council-tenancies/agreement/>

Microchipping for Dogs – as from 6th April 2016

It became law that all dogs over eight weeks old must be microchipped and it is also a requirement of your Tenancy Agreement. Dog owners must register their pet's microchip details on one of the authorised databases. These databases are run by private companies and not by the government or the Council.

Owners who do not get their dogs chipped and registered face a fine of up to £500 if caught.

It costs about £10 to £15 to get your dog microchipped by a vet or veterinary nurse and some Animal Charities will carry out the procedure free of charge.

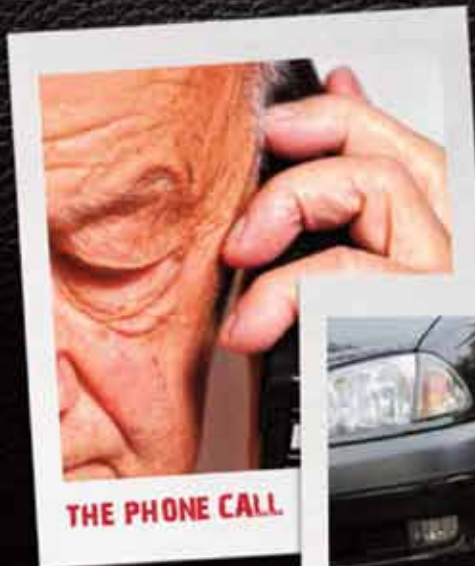
Here are just a few of our residents' lovely pets.



IT'S A SCAM

Fraudsters want your PIN and bank card

- ① A fraudster telephones you claiming to be from your bank or the police. They tell you that your bank card details have been used fraudulently.



THE PHONE CALL

- ② They suggest that you hang up and ring the bank/police back to ensure the call is genuine. **Don't be fooled** – they stay on the line. They then tell you to read out or key in your PIN.



THE PIN NUMBER



THE COURIER

- ③ They send a taxi/courier to you to collect your bank card. With this and your PIN, they spend your money.

JUST REMEMBER:
Your bank or the police will never ask for your PIN or bank card – **don't give them to anybody!**

If you've been a victim of this crime call the police on **101**.



HERTFORDSHIRE
CONSTABULARY

**Police and Crime
Commissioner**
for Hertfordshire

Disabled adaptations

The Council provides disabled adaptations to properties across the District to help people stay living safely at homes. We also help people move to more suitable accommodation, where necessary.

If you think you may need your home to be adapted because of a disability, you will usually need to be referred by a Hertfordshire County Council Occupational Therapist. These professionals will carry out an assessment of your needs and make recommendations to us for any works. We'll make sure proposed works are necessary and appropriate to meet the disabled person's needs. We'll also check that they are reasonable and practicable depending on the age and condition of the property.

There are detailed criteria for who can apply (for details see the web link below).

There is financial help available for eligible people for various types of works. This includes things like

level access showers,

ramps, door widening, stair lifts, and door entry systems.

Where a home cannot be adapted, the Council may be able to offer financial help towards the cost of moving to a more suitable property.

The maximum amount of financial assistance provided is £30,000. There are special rules for owner occupiers, and some grants are means tested.

To request a referral for adaptations, please contact Hertfordshire County Council's Social Services team on: **0300 123 4042** (adults) or **01727 891142** (children and young people).

For full details see www.stalbans.gov.uk/adaptations. To contact the Council's Adaptations Team email dfgapplications@stalbands.gov.uk, or call **01727 866100**.



Getting Housing Benefit and thinking of going on holiday?

The Government has recently changed the rules on whether you can continue to receive housing benefit if you are away from your property for any reason.

You can normally continue to receive help with your rent if you are temporarily away from your home. However, you must intend to return to the property. And your absence must be unlikely to exceed certain time periods, depending on where you're going and why.

If you are going to be out of the country on holiday, you cannot be away from your property for more than 4 weeks. If you are going abroad for more than 4 weeks, your Housing Benefit will stop immediately. This is a change to the previous rules.

So, if you are planning an extended holiday, please think carefully about whether it will affect the help you get with your rent. You will also need to let us know if anyone in your household goes abroad for more than 4 weeks. This is because it can affect the amount of housing benefit you are entitled to.

In exceptional circumstances you can be abroad for up to 26 weeks and still receive help with your rent. If you need to go abroad for a lengthy period, please contact the Benefit Office at benefits@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819220 to discuss whether your benefit will be affected.

If you are going to remain in the United Kingdom, your

Housing Benefit will normally be unaffected as long as your absence is unlikely to exceed 13 weeks. In certain circumstances, you can be absent for up to 52 weeks - for example, if you are in hospital or receiving care somewhere other than in your home. Again, if you know that you are going to be away from your property for a long time, please contact the Benefit Office beforehand to advise them of this.

Your tenancy agreement states that you must advise the Council if you are going to be away from your home for more than 3 months. This is important as otherwise we may assume you have moved out. We may also receive reports from the public that the property has been abandoned.

Finally, if you are claiming other benefits such as Income Support, Pension Credit, Job Seekers Allowance, Child Tax Credit / Working Tax Credit, Employment Support Allowance or Universal Credit beware! They may have different rules on whether you can continue to claim these benefits if you are abroad. So, if you are going abroad, even for a short period, it's really important to find out beforehand whether your other benefits may be affected. If you fail to tell the appropriate authorities, you may have to repay any benefits you have been paid. And action, including in court, could be taken against you.





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Call:

St Albans - 01727 817297
Harpenden - 01582 469564
Hemel - 01442 215755
Hertford - 01992 504485
Tring - 01442 822838
Barnet - 0208 4408342

Your Housing Team

Area	Housing Income Team Manager Lina Clifford lina.clifford@stalbans.gov.uk	Neighbourhood Management Team Manager Sue Carroll susan.carroll@stalbans.gov.uk
Batford, Harpenden, Pimlico, Redbourn, Sandridge, Southdown	Jenetta Barker jenetta.barker@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819498	Macie McCormack macie.mccormack@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819387
Batchwood, Newgate Close, New Greens, Thirlestane, Tudor Road, Valley Road area, Wheathamstead	Julia Thacker julia.thacker@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819383	Rosie Alphonse rosie.alphonse@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819497
Bricket Wood, Chiswell Green, City Centre area, Hatfield Road, Park Street, Sopwell, Telford Court,	Samantha Sandiford samantha.sandiford@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819404	Jackie Beaney jackie.beaney@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819554
Camp area, Colney Heath, Dellfield, London Colney, Marshalswick, Smallford	Errol Curniffe errol.curniffe@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 296124	Claire Tobutt claire.tobutt@stalbans.gov.uk 01727 819415

Useful contacts

Reporting Repairs – daytime
Monday to Thursday 8.45am to 5.15pm
Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm
h.repairs@stalbans.gov.uk
01727 819256

Emergency Repairs – out of hours
01727 811155

Housing Options – including Transfers & Allocations
housing.options@stalbans.gov.uk
01727 819355

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

Housing Benefits
benefits@stalbans.gov.uk
01727 819220

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

Housing Income
housingincome@stalbans.gov.uk
01727 819301

Garages
garages@stalbans.gov.uk
01727 819266

Citizens Advice
03444 111444

Leasehold management
leaseholders@stalbans.gov.uk
01727 819578

Disability Adaptations/Facilities Grants
dfgapplications@stalbans.gov.uk
01727 814667 & 01727 819446



St Albans
City & District Council

www.stalbans.gov.uk/housing