

# HousingTimes

Incorporating St Albans and District Council Housing Services Annual Report

Summer 2019

## Housing Services

# OPEN DAY

**Saturday 21st September 2019**

St Albans City and District Council invites you to come to the Housing Services Open Day

At the Alban Arena, St Albans between 11.30am and 2.30pm



Credit Union  
Repairs contractors  
Community Neighbourhood Officers

**FOR CHILDREN**  
FUN, GAMES  
FACE PAINTING  
FREE POPCORN  
CANDY FLOSS

John O'Conner – ground maintenance



Mediation service

Snacks and refreshments



In partnership with

**MORGAN SINDALL**  
PROPERTY SERVICES



**St Albans**  
City & District Council

[www.stalbans.gov.uk/housing](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/housing)

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# Housing Support – Sheltered Housing and Temporary Accommodation

The Housing Support team is a small team of staff who work to provide housing and support for homeless applicants as well as support to tenants in sheltered housing

The tenants in our two remaining sheltered housing blocks can have a daily visit from a Housing Support Officer to check on their welfare and also to deal with any problems that arise in the block.

All tenants in these blocks also have access to a 24 hour alarm system and can summon help if there is an emergency e.g. if they have a fall or are feeling unwell.

The team also work with people who have applied to the Council as homeless and are having their homeless application investigated.

The Homeless reduction Act was introduced in April 2018, this has led to an increase in the number of households the Council is placing in temporary accommodation.

We have several types of temporary accommodation, these can be self-contained houses or flats in and around our general needs housing stock, we also have a few self-contained mobile homes in areas such as Batchwood (Woollam Crescent) and Sopwell (Norman Close).

The Council has some hostels where facilities may be shared, these include two large converted houses in Grosvenor Road and part of the Ridgeview complex in London Colney.

In some circumstances we must place individuals or families into Bed and Breakfast style accommodation. We try to avoid using B&B accommodation as it is usually outside the district and residents have little or no access to cooking or food storage facilities.

The housing support team has a number of new staff who are bringing fresh ideas to the team.

New procurement rules mean that we are getting better value for money on things like bed and breakfast accommodation, white goods and furniture.

The team is also focusing on building stronger relationships with housing associations and support agencies such as food banks. The team hopes that any additional support they can give will help people when they eventually move into permanent housing.



## Housing Contracts Support Team

These officers manage the administration of the repairs contract as well as other smaller contracts, they are also responsible for some aspects of housing service delivery.

The Garage Officer is responsible for managing over 2,000 garages across 100 sites within the district.

The priority for management of garages has been carrying out health and safety inspections on garage sites, making sure they are numbered consistently. He is also working towards clear signage on all sites.

Going forward we are looking to develop more housing on under-used garage sites and assess whether any garages could be re-designated as storage facilities and let to tenants for storage.

You can now apply for a garage online via your [MyStAlbans](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbands) account ([www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbands](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbands)).



Other members of the team, and the contract manager Gareth Heavey, work on managing invoices from all our suppliers and making sure they are paid on time.

The largest invoices we receive are from Morgan Sindall Property Services for council housing repairs

and we scrutinise every item on these invoices to make sure we are paying the correct amount and that repairs have been completed to a satisfactory standard.

The team leader is Rebecca Robinson who also works closely with Morgan Sindall Property Services on investigating and responding to complaints about the repairs service. These can range from a complaint about a missed appointment to concerns about the quality of a repair.

The Housing Contracts Team won the Team of the Year award recently in the Council's annual staff awards in recognition of their helpfulness and customer focused approach to their work.

## Crystal Home Contents Insurance for St Albans Tenants

We would like to remind all our tenants that although you rent your home from us, the contents of your home and garden are your responsibility.

Therefore, we can offer our tenants a special home contents insurance scheme underwritten by Royal and Sun Alliance Insurance plc, that brings peace of mind knowing that your furniture, belongings and decorations are insured against fire, theft, vandalism, burst pipes and against those events that as a tenant you may be affected by and financially liable for, such as damage to your landlord's fixtures and fittings.

The Crystal Insurance Scheme has many benefits such as:

- Flexible pay as you go payment options. You can pay fortnightly or monthly by cash using a swipe card at your local Payzone, or monthly by direct debit. Annual payments are also available using a credit / debit card
- No excess. You don't pay the first part of a claim
- There are no administration or cancellation fees
- No minimum-security requirements. You don't need special door and window locks
- No fuss, quick and easy to apply.

There are optional extensions available for an additional premium:

- Extended accidental damage
- Personal effects cover (cover for items away from the home)
- Wheelchair scooters
- Hearing aids
- Structure of garden huts, garages and greenhouses.

For more information visit [www.crystal-insurance.co.uk](http://www.crystal-insurance.co.uk) or call Crystal Insurance now on **0345 450 7286**.

Limits and exclusions apply, a full policy wording is available on request.

The Crystal Insurance Scheme is a product name arranged and administered by Thistle Tenant Risks a trading style of Thistle Insurance Services Limited. Thistle Insurance Services Limited is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority FRN 310419. Lloyd's Broker. Registered in England under No. 00338645. Registered office: Rossington's Business Park, West Carr Road, Retford, Nottinghamshire DN22 7SW.

# Fly-Tipping – a blight!

Over the last year we have seen an increase in fly-tipping across Council housing sites. Such inconsiderate behaviour is a horrible blight on neighbourhoods and a significant drain on the Council's resources which could be better used elsewhere.

We commonly find sofas, mattresses and kitchen appliances dumped in and around bin areas, car parks and other communal areas. Bin stores are for general household waste and (where available) recycling! Lots and lots of people contact us about this problem, angry and frustrated by the behaviour of other people.

You are responsible for your waste even after it leaves your property. It is important that you dispose of it properly. The Council offers a bulk collection service and we will collect up to six items for £45. For people on certain benefits this service is free. So there is really no excuse. Please check our website for more details.

You can also dispose of items at one of the household waste centres in the District. Please check [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk) for the details of your nearest centre and its opening times.

If you use a 'man-in-a-van' service to take items for you, consider the following:

- S** Suspect all waste carriers.
- C** Check with the environment agency on **03708 506506** that the person taking your rubbish away is licenced.
- R** Refuse any unexpected offers to have your waste taken away.
- A** Ask how your waste will be disposed of.
- P** Paperwork – You need to ensure that you get a receipt and a waste transfer note.



If you don't dispose of your waste correctly you could face an on the spot fine of £400 or fines of up to £50,000. You could also receive a criminal conviction and a prison sentence.

If you see someone in the process of fly-tipping call the police on **999** and give as much as detail as possible such as the car registration number. If you discover a fly tip then contact the Council's Waste Management Services Team ([wastemanagementservices@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:wastemanagementservices@stalbans.gov.uk), **01727 809019**) in the first instance.



# Housing Repairs Service

Repairs to tenants' homes which are the Council's responsibility are provided through a formal contract with a specialist repairs contractor. In 2014 a 5 year contract was awarded to Roalco and in late 2017 we began the process of procuring a new contract ready to start in April 2019.

A complex 3 stage tender process started. We had initial submissions from 18 contractors which we shortlisted down to 7 and then carried out a further tender exercise and brought this down to 3.

In 2018, between October and December we interviewed the final 3 contractors and asked for further tender submissions, the contract was finally awarded to Morgan Sindall Property Services in December 2018.

We began working with Morgan Sindall to mobilise the contract in January 2019 and they started working for the Council on Monday 1st April 2019.

The contract is different from previous repairs contracts in several ways.

1. The contract is a 'price per property' model. This means that we pay the contractor a fixed fee for every council property and this price includes the majority of common repairs e.g. water leaks.

Any repairs not covered by the price per property are classed as exclusions and Morgan Sindall need to obtain our permission and agreement to pay before they carry out repairs.



2. Tenants now report repairs directly to Morgan Sindall rather than calling the Council who passes the repair onto a contractor. This means that the tenant should be given an appointment when they first report a repair. Morgan Sindall staff are trained to ask the right questions about the repair so the most suitable tradesman can attend with the correct equipment.





3. Out of hours emergencies are now directly reported to Morgan Sindall rather than the previous arrangement of calling a call centre, being passed to an on call member of staff who then passed the emergency to the contractor. This means that emergency repairs are dealt with more promptly.
4. The contract also includes some planned works, for example kitchen and bathroom replacements, window and roofing replacements, fire safety works. The contract also includes complete property surveys to be carried out in order to inform our future capital works. In total 750 surveys are planned for 2019/20.



### How is it working?

Contract mobilisation started in January 2019 and we had a 10-week period to get everything ready to go on the 1st April.

This included Morgan Sindall transferring staff from the previous contractor as well as employing new staff who all needed training and induction.

They also had to buy several vans and set up an office in St Albans.

Their IT systems had to be loaded with addresses of all our properties including their repair history. We have also passed on details of any planned improvement works e.g. re-roofing or window replacement.

The contract is still quite new and there have been a few teething problems, particularly with IT systems and information sharing.

We have been working with Morgan Sindall to support their staff as they settle into their new role and we have space in their local office so we can work with them when necessary.

Morgan Sindall also employ a Resident Liaison Officer (Lisa McCormack) who can support tenants having extensive works carried out and also provide assistance if repairs are held up or don't go as planned.

As part of the new contract Morgan Sindall have made a 'social value offer'. This includes a handyman service and a commitment to provide IT training for tenants as well as apprenticeship and local employment opportunities.

We regularly monitor their social value offer to make sure they are keeping to their promises and identify ways we can develop this further.

# Annual Report



# The 2018/19 Financial Position

In 2018/19 the overall income to the housing service was £28,318,000.

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	26,274,000	93%
Other rents and income	2,044,000	7%
Total	28,318,000	100%

Housing Expenditure	How Much £	Percentage of Total
Supervision and management	5,798,000	54%
Repairs	4,481,000	41%
Other Expenditure	525,000	5%
Total	10,804,000	100%

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

Other Charges to HRA	How Much £
Capital programme charges	7,445,000
Loan interest paid	4,961,000
Provision for debt payment	8,000,000
Other	(33,000)
Total	20,373,000

Including other charges, the total expenditure in 2018/19 was £31,177,000. The balance carried forward into 2019/20 was £4.4m.

## Capital Expenditure

During 2018/19 the Council spent £4.3m on improvements to our housing stock. This includes window replacements, roofing, electrical rewires, kitchens and bathrooms and disabled adaptations. In addition, £9.3m was spent on affordable housing. This included new council housing developments at Batchwood and Sandridge mentioned elsewhere in this report.

# Housing Income

We are offering lots of additional online services to tenants.

You can now 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 online. It is easy to register for an online account. For more information see: [www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbans](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/mystalbans).

As well as the online option, tenants can also currently make rent payments over the telephone during office hours, using a debit or credit card. Or you can call **0161 785 3880** to use our automated payment line 24 hours per day.

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 eight digit payment reference number 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 us as we can talk through the options and refer you to helpful support services locally. The Housing Income Team can be contacted via your **'MyStAlbans'** online account (see link above) or alternatively by calling **01727 819301**.

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.

In 2018-2019 the following formal action was taken:

- **397** Notices of Seeking Possession were served on tenants. These Notices are the first step in taking legal action which could lead to eviction
- **60** tenants were referred to court in connection with rent arrears
- **50** possession orders were obtained
- **6** tenants were evicted.

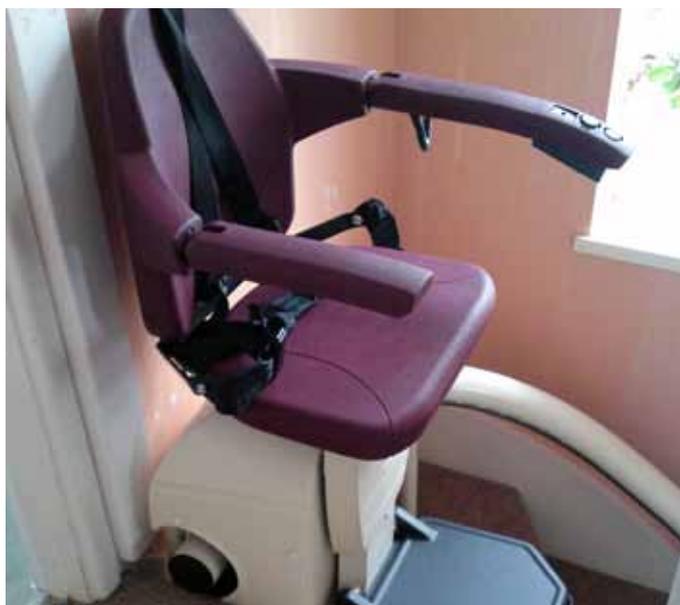
# Housing Capital Improvement Programme 2018/19

The Council's Capital Project team works to improve our properties and maintain their value. Our new repairs contractor, Morgan Sindall Property Services will be carrying out surveys to most of our housing stock over the next two years.

Together we will develop a new five year programme of works. The surveys focus on the current condition of the property to determine their replacement dates of things like kitchens and bathrooms, roofs, windows, wiring, boilers and heating installations.

The table below provides a detailed breakdown of the planned maintenance and disabled adaptation work carried out last year.

Project	Number of Properties	Expenditure
Re-roofing	118	£571,000
Window replacement	231	£815,000
Electrical rewiring	83	£148,000
Gas boiler and heating installations	85	£281,341
External redecorations	16	£6,200
Major disabled adaptations to council properties	74	£794,000
Minor disabled adaptations to council properties	148	Included in the above
Disabled adaptations to private properties	62	£588,000



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 2018 to 2019 we received 248 referrals for disabled adaptations which were successfully carried out with financial support from the Government's Disabled Facilities Grant. We also received 194 applications for minor adaptations such as rails and ramps. We are currently working on 179 active applications. We have also introduced discretionary funding for different types of adaptation works so that we are able to respond better to the specific needs of residents across the District.

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 on: **0300 123 4042** for adults or **01727 891142** for children or young persons.

If you would like more information regarding adaptations, please contact the Adaptations Team on **01727 866100** Extension: **6172** or email us at [dfgapplications@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:dfgapplications@stalbans.gov.uk).

## Private Sector Housing Team

The Private Sector Housing Team works with home owners, landlords and tenants to improve housing conditions in the private sector.

There are standards expected for all housing to ensure homes are safe to live in. For example, they should be warm, energy efficient, have adequate fire safety measures, and not cause harm or illness to the occupiers. The Housing Act 2004 gives powers to the Council to enforce housing conditions.

Over the past year the team has dealt with over 200 complaints in the District.

A frequent complaint is damp and mould. If you are experiencing such problems you may find the information below or in the Council's damp and mould leaflet helpful. You can find this on our website.

The team also works to bring empty homes back into use. Homes that are empty for some time can attract anti-social

behaviour and vermin. They are also a wasted resource in an area where there is a very high demand for housing.

There are currently over fifty properties locally that have been empty for more than 2 years. We are working hard to bring them back into occupation.

The Private Sector Housing Team is also responsible for licensing and inspecting all Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). Over the past year the team has conducted over 100 inspections of HMOs.

If you wish to report a property that you believe is empty or is an HMO you can contact the team at [privatesectorhousing@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:privatesectorhousing@stalbans.gov.uk).

## Dealing with Condensation and Mould

-  Don't block permanent ventilators or chimneys
-  Don't draught proof windows in the bathroom or kitchen or in rooms where there is condensation or mould growth, or where there is a gas cooker or a fuel-burning heater like a gas fire
-  Don't put furniture against cold external walls
-  Don't disturb mould by brushing or vacuum cleaning
-  Do treat mould already in your home and reduce condensation to restrict new mould growth
-  Do wipe off mould growth immediately with clean water
-  Do wipe down affected areas with a fungicidal wash. An Anti Mould Kit is available free to Council tenants. Always follow the instructions carefully. Do not use bleach
-  Do dry-clean clothes affected by mildew and shampoo carpets
-  Do redecorate after treatment using a good quality fungicidal paint to help prevent mould recurring. This paint is not effective if overlaid with ordinary paints or wallpaper.

# Tenant Consultation

We want to involve as many tenants as possible in the way we shape the delivery of services, so we try to provide a wide range of opportunities for people to have their say.

Tenant and Leaseholder Forums are held in the Council Offices every 3 months and the Housing Consultative Committee meets 3 times a year in June, November and February. All our tenants and leaseholders are very welcome to attend these meetings.

Over the past four years we have also been seeking the views of tenants through telephone surveys over the winter, and face to face door knocking surveys during the summer months. It has been a pleasure for the Housing Team, some of whom are usually entirely office based, to get out and about and meet residents.



We usually conduct the visits with local ward councillors. We ask residents to complete a short survey giving their views on the services they receive and what they think of the area that they live in.

This year we spoke with a total of 246 residents. The results of the survey are summarised below:

- 86% of residents felt safe and secure in the area they live in
- 70% had no problems in contacting the Housing Department
- 59% said they would be interested in using online services
- 93% of all the residents we spoke to said they would know what to do if a fire broke out in their home.

Of our residents who live in flats and pay services charges for caretaking services, window cleaning and the upkeep of communal grounds:

- 60% felt the caretaking service was excellent or satisfactory
- 58% said the grounds maintenance service was excellent or satisfactory
- Only 35% of residents were satisfied with the communal window cleaning service.

Although we had some excellent individual feedback, we clearly still have some work to do to improve overall customer satisfaction.

The Housing and Estates Services Teams will continue working hard towards this. If you have any queries regarding the caretaking or grounds maintenance service, please contact the Estate Services Team Leader directly on **07939 273779**.

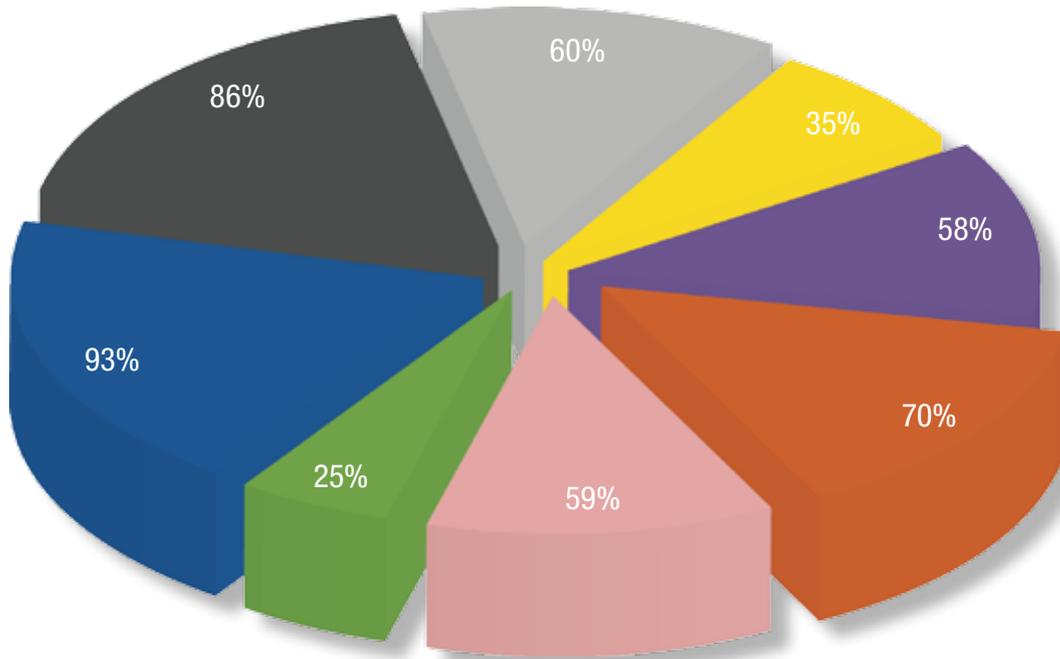
We are currently in the process of procuring a new window cleaning service to help improve matters.

As part of the survey, we asked residents if there were any other issues that they would like to bring to our attention. The most common concern people shared with us was lack of parking due to multiple car households.

We have consulted residents on a number of occasions about parking enforcement on their estates. The majority of people tell us that they do not want formal enforcement action or Controlled Parking Zones. However, we have consulted with residents in Thirlestane and plans are on track to implement a Residents Only Parking Scheme there later this year.

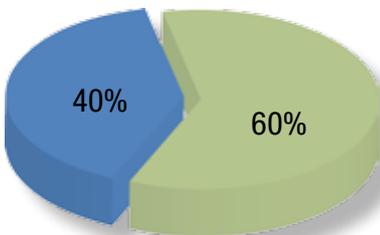
Other issues people wanted to tell us about were street lights not working and potholes in roads. These concerns have been reported to Herts County Council which manages these services. Some residents in Wheathampstead raised concerns about reduced bus services and we have passed these comments on to Arriva, the local bus company.

## Housing Services positive responses

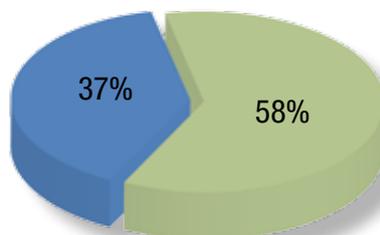


- Caretaking Services
- Windows Cleaning
- Grounds Maintenance
- Contacting Housing Department
- Use Online Services
- Direct Debit Dates
- Fire Safety
- Safety and Security

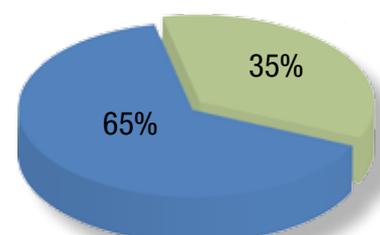
### Caretaking Services for Flats



### Grounds Maintenance Services



### Communal Window Cleaning Services



Scored 3 and above

Scored 2 or below



# The Homeless Reduction Act

In April 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act came into force across England. This dramatically changed the way that Local Authorities responded to homelessness.

With the introduction of the Prevention and Relief Duties, the focus has shifted to working alongside the applicant to resolve their housing issues. In St Albans, the Council has focused on trying to help people into the private rented sector. We have seen a lot of success both in finding alternative private rented accommodation and in helping to prevent evictions.

The changes have been significant and have required the Council to extend the Housing Options Team to meet the new demands including employing a new Private Sector Housing Officer, and a Principle Homelessness Advisor. The case load has increased noticeably. In the year 2016/2017

we had a total of 185 homeless applications. In the year 2018/2019, the number was 634.

While the changes are significant, the Council has been able to respond quickly and effectively. Over the last year the team has prevented or relieved homelessness in 46% of cases. Many of these applicants would otherwise have been considered intentionally homeless or not in priority need according to the criteria we work to which would mean we would not be able to help them. However, with the help of the Housing Options Team these applicants have been helped to remain in their home or to find alternative safe accommodation.

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## Tenant and Leaseholder Forum

The Forum involves tenants, leaseholders and residents' associations and officers from our Housing, Estate Services and Parks and Green Spaces teams. It meets four times a year to consider, advise and consult on matters relating to the management and maintenance of the Council's housing stock.



We alternate between morning and afternoon meetings to ensure as many residents as possible can attend. We can also arrange evening meetings if residents would prefer.

During the year, we consulted the Forum on the introduction of the [MyStAlbans](#) District online account and our new tenants' portal. We also involved the Forum in making amendments to the Council's Rent Arrears Policy. Officers gave presentations on the Council's Nuisance and Anti-Social Behaviour policies, and on our letting standards for empty properties, including some interesting 'before and after' photographs.

**Our next meeting is on Tuesday 17th September starting at 2.30pm at the Council Offices. Tea and coffee and light refreshments are available from 2.00pm.**

We are always looking to recruit new members to the Tenant and Leaseholder Forum. If you'd like to come along to a meeting, please contact Sue Carroll, Neighbourhood Management Team Leader ([susan.carroll@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:susan.carroll@stalbans.gov.uk), telephone **01727 819534**).

# Council Housing Development

The first new Council housing developments in a generation were completed in 2018-19. In total, 48 brand new homes were built for households on the Housing Register.

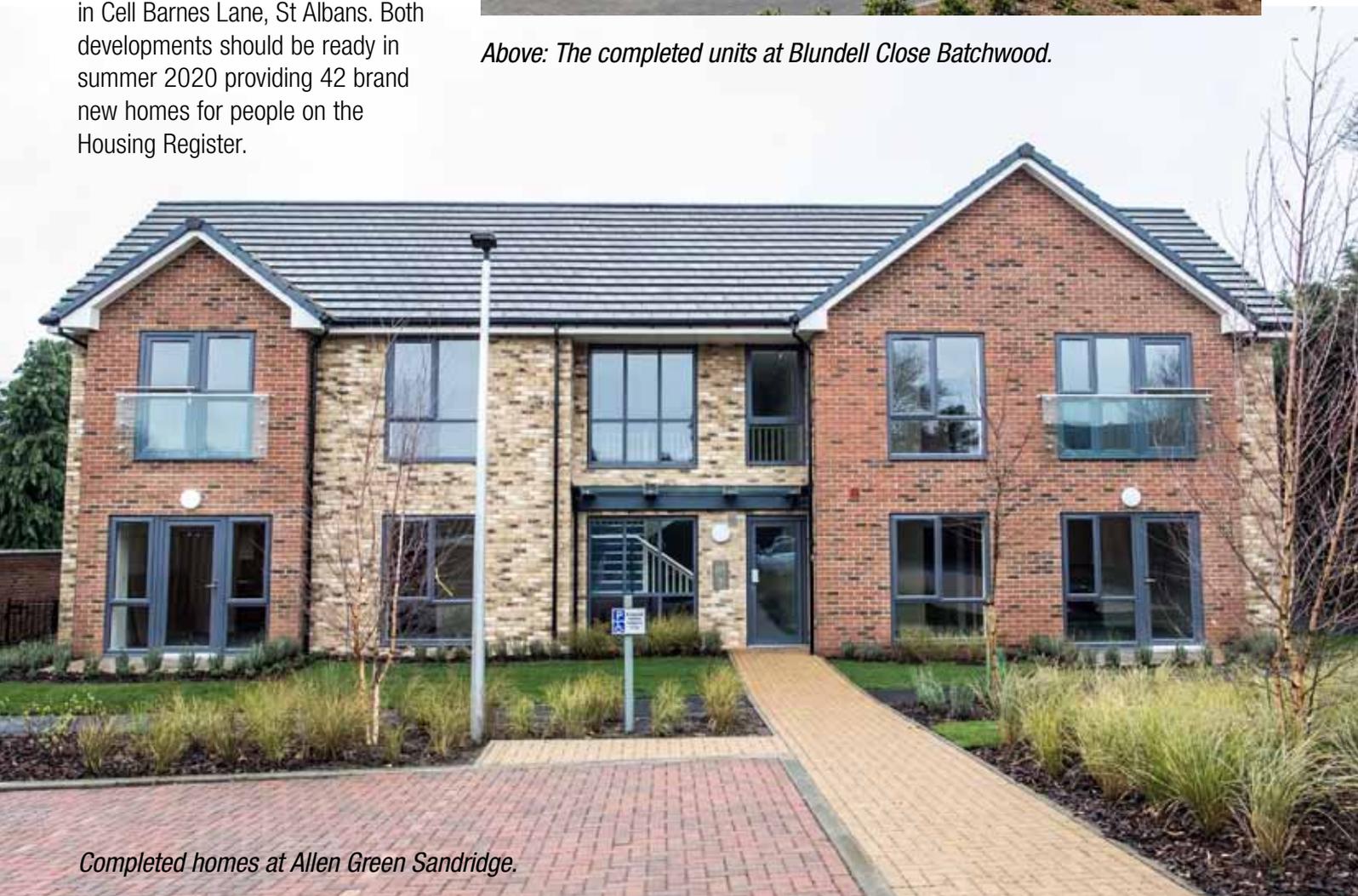
The first housing development, across three former dilapidated former garage sites in the Batchwood area of St Albans, was finished in June. A mix of 1, 2, and 3 bedroomed homes have been built, including some bungalows.

The second development, across 2 former garage sites in Sandridge, were finished during the winter. This includes a mix of 1, 2, and 3 bedroom flats and houses.

The Council continues to build more homes for social rent. We are redeveloping the former sheltered housing complexes at Mereden Court in Tavistock Avenue, and Wavell House in Cell Barnes Lane, St Albans. Both developments should be ready in summer 2020 providing 42 brand new homes for people on the Housing Register.



*Above: The completed units at Blundell Close Batchwood.*

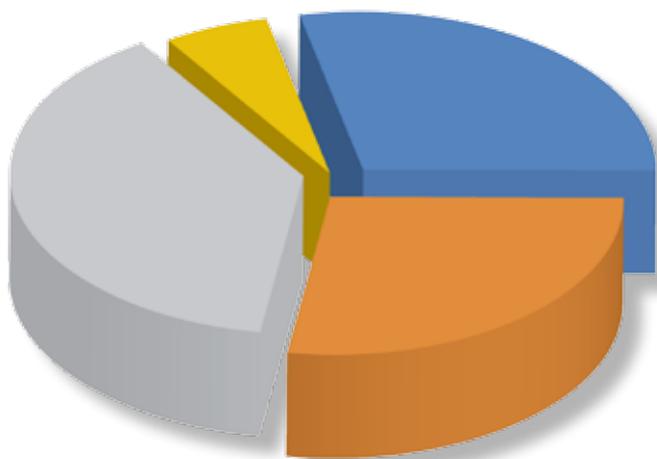


*Completed homes at Allen Green Sandridge.*

# Housing Options

A large number of applicants are waiting to transfer to more suitable properties locally. At the end of March 2019, 373 households were registered for a transfer.

## Transfer Applicants 2018/19

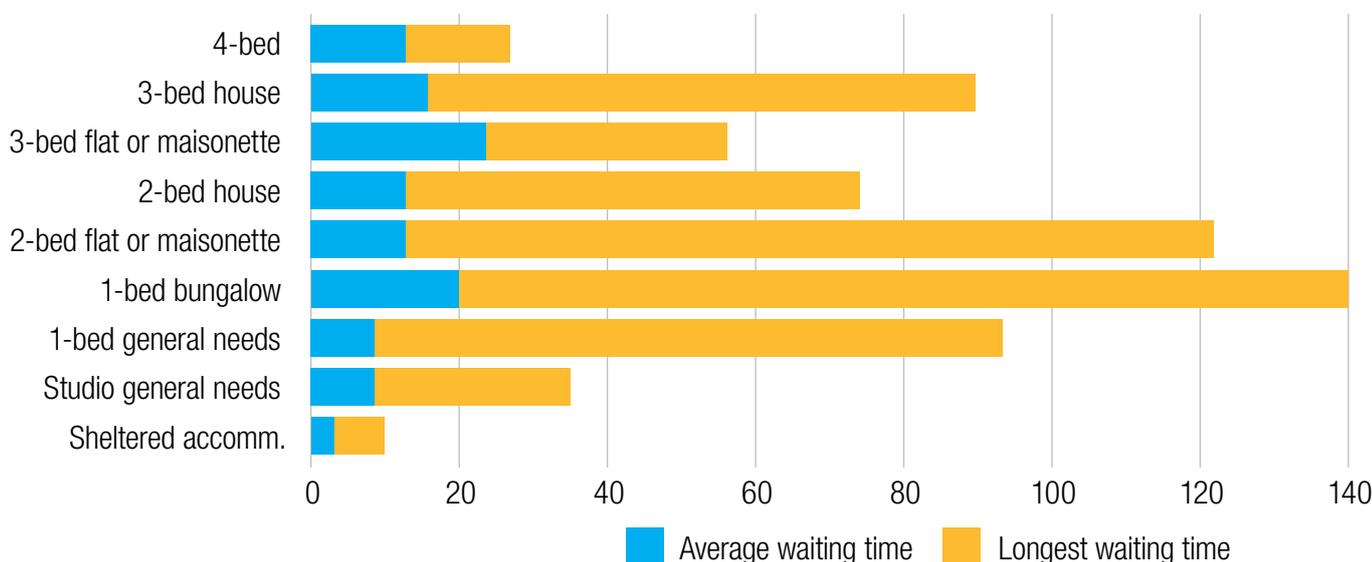


■ 1 bedroom = 106    ■ 2 bedroom = 103  
■ 3 bedroom = 143    ■ 4+ bedroom = 21

Unfortunately, due to the limited number of social housing properties available, applicants can wait for a considerable time before they are offered a property. Only 266 properties were allocated in 2018-19. The breakdown of the size of properties and the waiting times people in priority need are experiencing, are provided in the tables below.

Type of property	Number let
Sheltered accommodation	7
Studio accommodation	4
1 bedroom bungalow	18
1 bedroom general needs	81
2 bedroom flat/maisonette	91
2 bedroom house	20
3 bedroom flat/maisonette	3
3 bedroom house	41
4 bedroom house	1

## Average and longest waiting time (months)



\*Note the waiting times includes applications from homeless households and those with a Band A priority.

HomeSwapper continues to offer all social housing tenants the opportunity to advertise their home and undertake a mutual exchange. In many instances moving home via a mutual exchange is both quicker and less problematic than moving through the Housing Register.

There were 43 successful mutual exchanges in the St Albans District in 2018-19.

If you would like to transfer from your current accommodation, you can register for free at [www.homeswapper.co.uk](http://www.homeswapper.co.uk).

# Tenants' Incentive Scheme

The Tenants' Incentive Scheme helps to support tenants to move to smaller properties that are more suitable for their needs. This is a voluntary scheme for people who are transfer applicants and who wish to move.

Tenants wish to downsize for a variety of reasons including their current property being too big, difficulty with stairs, too-large gardens and bills being expensive.

Incentives are available to all tenants who are in homes that are too large for them and their families and who want to move to smaller properties. Applicants are given priority banding to enable them to move.

There are 4 options available. We will:

- pay a full grant of £1,700 if the tenant makes all their own arrangements, or
- arrange and pay the cost of removals and will pay the sum of £500 per bedroom given up, or
- 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

- 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 2018/19:

- A total of 17 bedrooms that had been empty were brought back into use
- 8 families qualified for the additional £250 payment when their property was left in good condition
- 70% chose Incentive Option 1
- 20% chose Incentive Option 2
- 10% chose Incentive Option 3.

If you interested, you can apply at: [www.stalbanshomechoice.co.uk](http://www.stalbanshomechoice.co.uk)



# Housing Benefit

Over the past 12 months, the Benefits Team has been through some major changes. The introduction of Universal Credit has completely changed the way we work, and how we help tenants and residents in the District.

Despite these changes, the team has performed well. From April 2018 – March 2019 a claim for Housing Benefit took an average of 13 days from when it was received to when it was processed. This is compared with 22 days the previous year. It remains a priority to make sure that the right benefit is paid at the right time for our customers.

Since the introduction of Universal Credit, the Benefits Team has been working in partnership with the Job Centre and Citizens Advice to help people manage the change. Citizens Advice can help customers make a claim for Universal Credit. They can also offer advice on how to manage their money until the first payment is paid. A member of staff from the Council's Benefits Team is based at the Job Centre to help people too. Between April 2018 – March 2019, the Benefits Team helped 780 Universal Credit customers with new claims, budgeting, Council Tax and advice on how this new benefit works.

For most people, Universal Credit includes a payment for rent and it is a tenant's responsibility to make payments to their landlord, including the Council. Sometimes Universal Credit does not cover all of a tenant's rent. These tenants may be eligible to claim a Discretionary Housing Payment. Tenants receiving Universal Credit may also be entitled to help with their Council Tax. The Benefits Team explains all of these options during a Universal Credit appointment.

**Do you currently receive help with your rent from Housing Benefit or Universal Credit? If the amount you are entitled to does not cover your rent in full, you may be entitled to a Discretionary Housing Payment. Please contact the Benefit Office or visit [www.stalbans.gov.uk](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk) for more details.**

## Council Tax Support

Council Tax Support helps people on low incomes to pay their Council Tax by reducing the amount they have to pay.

For the majority of people, Council Tax Support has not changed since it started in April 2013. However, for people who receive Universal Credit there is a new way of working out how much Council Tax Support a customer is entitled to, using something called 'income bands.

Universal Credit changes each month depending on the amount of income that a person receives. By using 'income bands' we try and keep monthly Council Tax payments the same from month to month, so people have more certainty about what money they will have. It is also designed to ensure that those with the lowest incomes do not have to pay Council Tax.

Details on the Council Tax Support scheme can be found on our website. We think this new scheme is easier for customers to understand and will enable the Council to make savings in administration costs.

To contact the Benefits Team email: [benefits@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:benefits@stalbans.gov.uk); 01727 819220.



# Safety Inspections

We do various testing in our council housing on a regular basis.

Electrical testing takes place every five years and gas safety testing is needed every year. We need our tenants' help to get this work done.

The electrical testing will show whether the electrical circuits or equipment are overloaded and highlight potential dangers like electric shocks waiting to happen and defective electrical work. We check that sockets and light fittings and smoke detectors are safe to use. If we spot dangers we get them put right. Such tests help keep tenants safe in their homes. We only use registered NICEIC or NAPIT approved electricians as we know they meet the high standards for knowledge and training that is required.



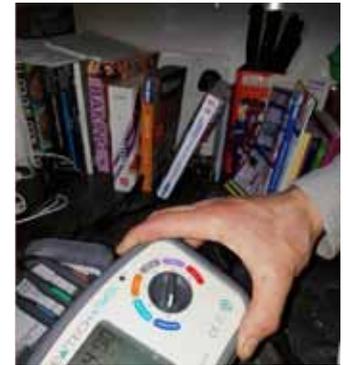
Below are some pictures from our work showing examples of dangers that we found in local homes.

Residents who wish to install any additional electrical wiring should always contact us first to get permission.

Gas safety regulations mean that we have a duty to get the gas appliances and flues of every council home checked by a Gas Safe registered engineer every year. The destruction caused by a faulty appliance is not only to the property it is in. It can affect surrounding properties too. So the checks are essential.

It is so important that, where we can't get access to a property, we will apply for an access injunction as a last resort, at a cost of over £500. This cost is recharged to the tenant. The good news is that for the last two years applications for injunctions have not been necessary as everyone has provided access to their homes.

Thank you to everyone who understands the legal duty we are under and gives us access to their homes to do the work the first time we ask. This helps enormously and avoids the need for multiple reminders and expensive court action. It also means we have more money to spend on other important things.



# Your Housing Team

Area	Housing Income Team Manager Lina Clifford <a href="mailto:lina.clifford@stalbans.gov.uk">lina.clifford@stalbans.gov.uk</a>	Neighbourhood Management Team Manager Sue Carroll <a href="mailto:susan.carroll@stalbans.gov.uk">susan.carroll@stalbans.gov.uk</a>
Batford, Harpenden, Pimlico, Redbourn, Sandridge, Southdown	Jenetta Barker <a href="mailto:jenetta.barker@stalbans.gov.uk">jenetta.barker@stalbans.gov.uk</a> 01727 819498	Macie McCormack <a href="mailto:macie.mccormack@stalbans.gov.uk">macie.mccormack@stalbans.gov.uk</a> 01727 819387
Batchwood, Newgate Close, New Greens, Thirlestane, Tudor Road, Valley Road area, Wheathamstead	Julia Thacker <a href="mailto:julia.thacker@stalbans.gov.uk">julia.thacker@stalbans.gov.uk</a> 01727 819383	Rosie Coke <a href="mailto:rosie.coke@stalbans.gov.uk">rosie.coke@stalbans.gov.uk</a> 01727 819525
Bricket Wood, Chiswell Green, City Centre area, Hatfield Road, Park Street, Sopwell, Telford Court,	Samantha Sandiford <a href="mailto:samantha.sandiford@stalbans.gov.uk">samantha.sandiford@stalbans.gov.uk</a> 01727 819404	Jackie Beaney <a href="mailto:jackie.beaney@stalbans.gov.uk">jackie.beaney@stalbans.gov.uk</a> 01727 819554
Camp area, Colney Heath, Dellfield, London Colney, Marshalswick, Smallford	Errol Curniffe <a href="mailto:errol.curniffe@stalbans.gov.uk">errol.curniffe@stalbans.gov.uk</a> 01727 296124	Ella Malyon <a href="mailto:ella.malyon@stalbans.gov.uk">ella.malyon@stalbans.gov.uk</a> 01727 296131

## Useful Contacts

**Reporting Repairs** – daytime  
Monday to Thursday 8.45am to 5.15pm  
Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm  
[stalbansrepairs@morgansindall.com](mailto:stalbansrepairs@morgansindall.com)  
01727 819256

**Emergency Repairs** – out of hours  
01727 811155

**Housing Options** – including Transfers and Allocations  
[housing.options@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:housing.options@stalbans.gov.uk)  
01727 819355

**Housing Management** – Tenancy  
[housingmanagement@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:housingmanagement@stalbans.gov.uk)  
01727 819534

**Housing Benefits**  
[benefits@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:benefits@stalbans.gov.uk)  
01727 819220

**Housing Support/Temporary Accommodation Team**  
[temp.team@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:temp.team@stalbans.gov.uk)  
01727 819397

**Housing Income**  
[housingincome@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:housingincome@stalbans.gov.uk)  
01727 819301

**Garages**  
[garages@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:garages@stalbans.gov.uk)  
01727 819266

**Citizens Advice**  
03444 111444

**Leasehold management**  
[housing-leasehold@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:housing-leasehold@stalbans.gov.uk)  
01727 819578

**Disability Adaptations/Facilities Grants**  
[dfgapplications@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:dfgapplications@stalbans.gov.uk)  
01727 814667 and 01727 819446