

Housing Matters

Newsletter January 2025



Introduction

Councillor Jackie Hollywell, Portfolio Holder – Housing

Welcome to the first edition of Housing Matters, our revamped council housing newsletter. From previous engagement you've said that you'd like us to keep you informed as to how we're doing and what's happening in the world of housing here in Stevenage.

In November, last year the council underwent its first Housing inspection by the Housing Ombudsman. It was awarded a C2 grading which has given us a good understanding as to where we are meeting requirements and where we are underperforming. Alongside this, an action plan has been established detailing the changes and improvements we need to make to help shape our services.

I hope you enjoy the first issue of this digital magazine and I'm looking forward to seeing the service develop. I really urge you to get involved in consultations, sharing your feedback and helping us to shape it into one that you're all happy with.

Happy reading!

Accountable to you

You've told us you'd like more transparency about how we're doing as your landlord. We are listening and we're taking action.

That's why we are now publishing regular updates on how we are doing along with some helpful information in our quarterly newsletter, Housing Matters.

To help us understand what is important to you we will be asking some tenants what information you would like to see included, and which format suites best. Every three months, we will then provide details of how we're measuring up against things that matter to you.

We will be open and upfront about the information, and we will explain what it means, and if we need to, how we are looking to improve areas that need some attention.

We are keen to make sure that we are being transparent and engaging, and to do this we are increasing the opportunities for everyone to be actively involved in our services.

Take a look at the information and advice that is available on our website at www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing

Paying your rent - It's easier by Direct Debit

If you don't currently pay your rent by Direct Debit, there are many benefits to changing. It's free, safe, secure and allows you to pay rent and other charges on a choice of dates. Paying your rent by Direct Debit means your payment is covered by the [Direct Debit](#) Guarantee, so you can be sure that your rent and any other monies you owe are paid on time.

Other benefits include:

- Not having to remember to pay every month
- No queuing at banks or post offices
- Choice of payment dates available on the 1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd of each month.

You can find more information on paying your rent by [Direct Debit](#) on our website or call us on 01438 242666. The easiest way to set a Direct Debit for your rent is through [Housing Online](#), just log in and select the 'My Account' tab.

Extra support this winter

We know this time of year can be financially difficult and many people struggle with paying energy and food costs, so we want to make sure you are getting the best advice, whether it's getting the benefits you're entitled to or support with budgeting.

As your landlord we work in partnership with a number of organisations, who can provide and help make your income go that little bit further.

Don't struggle on your own, please remember to get in touch with HertsHelp. There are fully trained, friendly advisors on hand to offer confidential assistance and they can put you in touch with helpful services and support locally, call 0300 123 4044, email info@hertshelp.net or [visit the HertsHelp website](#) or go to our website for [help to manage the cost of living](#).

Are you insured?

We do not provide any cover or insurance for your possessions, and so advise all residents to consider what home contents insurance you should get. No matter how careful you are, there's always a risk that your belongings could get broken, damaged or stolen, so home contents insurance can help give you peace of mind should the worst happen.

We've teamed up with Thistle Tenant Risks, providers of tenants contents insurance policies. Their crystal insurance scheme can offer you insurance for the contents of your home. Full details are available from our [website](#).



Preventing damp and mould in your home

During this time of year when the weather is much colder, we're more likely to see increases in condensation, damp and mould in our homes.

We know it can be difficult to keep homes both warm and well ventilated, but there are some simple things everyone can do to prevent condensation turning into damp and mould, such as:

- Adequately heating your home. It can often be more cost effective to maintain a constant temperature rather than using short bursts of heating
- Always use the extractor fan in the kitchen when cooking and in the bathroom when showering and bathing
- Wiping any excess condensation from windows and open them for a short time to let some air in
- Not drying washing on radiators – use an airer and dehumidifier or put washing in the bathroom with the extractor on, window open and door closed.

More information is available [on our website](#) and if you've tried following this advice and are still experiencing issues with condensation, damp and mould, please [report damp or condensation](#) at MyStevenage, by email at dampandmould@stevenage.gov.uk alternatively you can use our Housing Online Account [Housingonline Account](#).

We take all reports of damp, condensation and mould seriously and we have a specialist team of surveyors and contractors experienced in dealing with these issues who will work with you to help solve the problems.

You said

We did

As your landlord, we're committed to ensuring you have the best possible experience with us.

We regularly make positive changes to the way that we deliver our services based on the feedback from surveys, customer contact, social media and conversations with colleagues.

However, you share your feedback, it helps us continually improve our services, homes and support, and these are few examples of where you have given feedback and we have changed the way we do things:

We need a clear approach to repairs, which covers roles and responsibilities and clear timescales

Adopted a new Repairs Policy developed in partnership with tenants. 80% of those consulted said it was better

Residents in our high rise blocks, want us to invest in reducing ASB, improve the safety of the blocks and to update decorations.

Completed the initial consultation with residents on the proposals, put in place the funding needed and have a plan to start work by the end of the year

It can be difficult and confusing making a complaint online

Invested in a new complaint handling system, to make reporting and monitoring of complaints for residents easier.

Improve the information that you provide to tenants, and provide evidence that our voice has been heard

Our first Annual Residents Report has been published, and we are rolling out our new quarterly newsletter, making better use of our social media accounts. These are all explaining, advising and informing our residents of the influence that residents have had.

How are we doing as your landlord?

In April 2023, the Regulator of Social Housing introduced a new requirement for all social landlords, like us, to annually report on a set of information highlighting how well we're doing at providing quality homes and services. These are called Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

One of the ways we measure our performance is by asking tenants for your feedback on 12 areas of our service covering the condition of your home, our repairs service, building safety, complaints, customer engagement, and neighbourhood management. Over the course of the year, we've spoken to 1,000 customers to get honest feedback on their experience with us.

We also gather and publish information on other areas and how we are performing in some key areas. As part of our commitment to be open and transparent with customers, we will publish details of these every three months. Those below are for the first half of 2024/25 and further details are available in the [Tenant Satisfaction Measures](#) part of our website.

Homes that meet the Decent Homes Standard

95.7%

Percentage of non-emergency repairs completed in target

95.2%

Percentage of emergency repairs completed within target timescales

96%

Gas safety checks carried out

100%

Fire safety checks carried out

100%

Asbestos safety checks carried out

100%

Water safety checks carried out

100%

Lift safety checks carried out

100%

Number of cases per 1,000 homes – stage 1

45.1

Complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code timescales – stage 1

100%

Complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code timescales – stage 2

83%

Number of ASB cases that involve hate incidents per 1,000 homes

0.1

Number of ASB complaints per 1,000 homes

4.6

Number of complaints per 1,000 homes – stage 2

4.5

