

# Housing Matters

2017/18  
Review



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The panel would love to hear your feedback once you have read it through Housing Matters. Please complete the survey on the back page or online and send it to us for your chance to win a £50 shopping voucher.



This publication was created by our editorial panel who are made up of tenants; leaseholders and staff. With our thanks to Christine Anderson; Angela Hamilton; Robert Tregaskis; Feona Farrell and Cynthia Price. Front cover: Thank you event for our volunteers and Twin Foxes development.

# Welcome

## It's been a busy year with lots going on.

Our housing transformation programme to reform our services has been going well. The team have come up with some interesting suggestions for us to look at. We will consider them all, decide what will work and how we bring those forward. We are in very interesting times; I look forward to all the changes being finalised, which will help our team moving forward.

Whilst all this is happening, we continue to work hard to deliver a good service to you and to provide extra support to those who need it most. We are keeping up to date with external changes that may impact on our council homes and tenants. We are currently waiting for the Government's Green Paper on Social Housing to see what impact that will have on our plans going forward.

Our council new build programme has continued to provide some desperately needed homes in the town. The new homes at Twin Foxes will soon be ready for our customers to move in to, having been delayed by the extreme weather we suffered earlier in the year. We have started working on the Burwell Road site, where we will be building more new council homes. Plans are moving forward to redevelop Kenilworth Close, including a new state of the art Independent Living Scheme, a community centre, shops and homes.

We will continue to work on ensuring our customers have well maintained, good quality, secure council homes and safe places to live.



We continue to work with residents in the community to improve local areas. We are developing neighbourhood agreements across all areas of our town. We welcome your comments and suggestions to help us develop our plans to improve our services, so please do not hesitate to let us know if you see something that needs addressing.

We also welcome your feedback on this report and its contents. You can complete the survey form on our website [www.stevenage.gov.uk](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk). Alternatively you can fill in the paper form on the back of this report and send it to us.

**Jeannette Thomas**  
**Portfolio Holder for**  
**Housing, Health and Older**  
**People**

# Customer focus

## You said

Our Investment Team need to improve their internal and external communication

## We received 145 compliments – the comments included:

“I was really impressed with the speed and quality of the communication we received following the Grenfell fire”.

- Housing received 882 complaints in 2017/18, which was 70 more than 2016/17.
- Six customers contacted the Housing Ombudsman. The Ombudsman agreed with our decision and resolution in all 6 cases.
- We aim to close 95% of complaints within our target deadlines and we achieved 93%. We are working with the housing service teams to improve this performance.
- Average time taken to respond to your complaints was 8days.

The top categories for complaints were:

Gas Maintenance	19.5%
Damp and mould	12.4%
Tenancy Management	4.2%

## You said

You were disappointed with the service provided by our Gas Contractors, Liberty.

## We did

Liberty changed the management team for our contract. We held a joint clinic with them in March 2018, and included customers who had complained, to agree a new improved way of working.

# 90%

of customers who phoned or visited the Customer Service Centre rated the service as very good or good.

## You said

Our Housing Advice/ Homeless Team were not keeping customers up to date or providing information quickly enough.

## We did

We have trained the team re the recent change in legislation. We have also upgraded our case management systems. This will help our officers to manage their caseloads and respond to you sooner.



Customer Focus

### We did

We have reviewed our communications both internally & externally. Communication is now addressed at all contractor and team meetings

### You said

It was taking us too long to install the required Aids & Adaptations to your homes.

### We did

We introduced new procedures and are responding to you within set timescales. We have procured two additional contractors to assist with outstanding adaptations.

34% of our customers have an Online Customer Account. They can view their rent account balance and recent transaction history. They can also see their repairs, including appointments they have made, along with their personal information.

You can apply for an Online Customer Account on our website [www.stevenage.gov.uk](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk) by clicking on the Customer Account link at the top of the page. We will be developing your online accounts so that you can see and do even more.

### You said

Information for available homes on our Homes4U website was sometimes misleading and didn't include all the relevant information.

### We did

We have improved the information. All homes are inspected before they are advertised and our staff now have cameras so they can take photos.



34%

of our customers have an Online Customer Account.



Resident  
Involvement

# Resident Involvement

In total the  
involved residents  
have given over  
700 hours of their  
time in helping  
to improve our  
services

Volunteer hours vary  
between 2-10 hours per month

Our involved Tenants and leaseholders have been actively engaged helping to shape our housing services.

“I have learnt so much being involved with housing contractors-it has really broadened my knowledge” “It has made a difference to my way of thinking to see what the council deals with every day”

- The HMAB (Housing Management Advisory Board ) met 11 times giving their views on various policies and procedures

- TPAS (Tenant Participatory Advisory Service) published the Customer Scrutiny Panel’s (CSP) newsletter as best practice, promoting the excellent work our CSP team is carrying out with the council.
- CSP followed up on reviews of Former Tenants Arrears, Liberty Gas and Customer Service

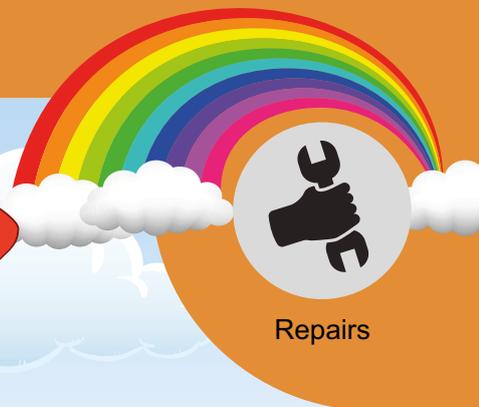
- Working with the caretaking team to ensure the communal areas are kept clean and tidy by carrying out spot checks
  - Resident Inspectors carried out over 200 flat block inspections highlighting various issues
- Members of the resident inspectors group assisted housing staff with the “big knock”, asking customers for their views on housing services. The feedback from this is being used as part of the housing transformation programme
  - As part of satisfaction survey resident inspectors made over 200 calls to residents in order to get feedback on how satisfied the customers were with the repairs service.

- The Disability panel group highlighted an issue with the new drainage system in the town centre which had deep curvature, therefore making it unsafe for some wheel chair users. As a result, the new ones being installed have been modified to make them safer.

The Resident Groups continue to work on resolving local issues and some of the highlights include:

- Campaigning to have curb edges lowered at Hampson park for easy access of push chairs
  - Raising ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) issues; leading to arrest in one case
- Following success for the Bragbury Garden, the group helped to create another small community garden in a nearby Lismore square
- Helped to resolve an ASB issue with a local youth centre by working with the police, councillors and the therefore making the residents feel safe.

# Repairs



The repairs service to your home is provided by our in-house repairs team supported by a range of specialist external contractors.

Our out of hours service carried out 1,254 repairs.

Customer Satisfaction with the repairs service was 94.05%.

83.82% of our repairs were completed right first time.

Stevenage Borough Council operatives made 1,611 repairs to fences in 2017/18

We carried out 20,412 responsive repairs, this represents an average of 2.56 repairs per dwelling.

## How to report repairs:

- Phone – 0800 1123444 or 01438 211011 during office hours or 01438 314963 for out of hours emergency
- Email – [cscrepairs@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:cscrepairs@stevenage.gov.uk) (Please do not use email for emergency repairs)
- On-line at [www.stevenage.gov.uk/report-repair](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/report-repair) (Please do not use for emergency repairs)
- For customers with hearing and speech difficulties only text phone 01438 242555



Caretaking

# Caretaking

## ‘Providing residents with a clean, safe and tidy flat block environment’

The Caretaking team consists of 12 Caretakers and 2 Team Leaders; all are trained to the British Institute of Cleaning Standard (B.I.C.S.)

Responsible for maintaining 543 flat blocks across Stevenage, the team also provides a daily service for the 5 tower blocks and a four day service for 40 flat blocks that have a special feature, such as a bin chute.

The team’s duties consist of cleaning all communal areas, sweeping, dusting, mopping and litter picking.

A dedicated team deals with hazardous issues, such as fire and health & safety risks e.g. drug paraphernalia.

The team as a whole dealt with over 550 incidents in the last financial year.

The service is continually reviewed to ensure standards are maintained and areas for improvement are highlighted.

Caretaking work closely with residents and have a team of Resident Involvement Volunteers who help monitor flat blocks, alongside the team leaders, so that issues can be reported and dealt with quickly.

Recent customer surveys highlighted that 89% of tenants and leaseholders were fairly or very satisfied with the care of the communal areas in flat blocks.

Residents recently provided feedback saying they wanted more information about who is responsible for what in their block. As a result, notice boards are now going up in every flat block. These provide residents with clear information and easy contact details to improve understanding of service levels and accessibility to the council.



220 litres of surface cleaner & 190 litres of disinfectant used last year



Resident Satisfaction  
Target – 80%  
Actual – 89%



“the men today were very good and did a fine job all round”

# Providing homes



Empty Homes

The Providing Homes Team is part of Housing and Investment and incorporates the following functions:

- Lettings
- Housing Advice & Homeless,
- Tenancy Support & Temporary Accommodation
- Central Admin

**2017/18 we had a number of successes:**

Mrs C was faced with eviction for non-payment of her rent. Her benefits had ceased and she had no means to pay - we assisted her to reclaim and prevented the eviction

Mr and Mrs M were assisted in a move from a one bed property to a two bedroom bungalow due to medical needs

Mr B was sleeping on the streets and we assisted him with a tenancy deposit – he is now living in a shared house

187 households were supported to find alternative housing which resolved their homelessness – this is in addition to the support provided to care leavers and council tenants.

In 2017/18 263 households were prevented from becoming homeless.

We helped 56 residents with start-up costs to assist them into private rented accommodation.

619 new applicants were accepted onto the housing register.

We let 356 properties of which 82 were sheltered.



Leasehold

# Leasehold

**Over the past financial year The Home Ownership Team has been busy re-procuring a new Service Charge IT system.**

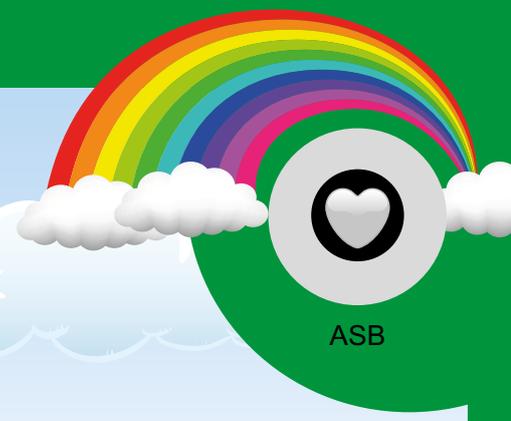
The system will 'bolt on' to our current management system and processes, and allow better manipulation of data meaning we will more easily be able to see the effect of service charge costs before applying them to customer's accounts.

Although the Home Ownership Team specialises in services for Leaseholders, in the future they will set the service charges for residents in Independent Living and General Needs homes, as well as Leaseholders. The benefit to our residents is that costs will be adjusted across all tenures in a more uniform way and information provided will be more transparent – something our current IT system struggles with.

The new IT system is the foundation on which service chargeable areas can be reviewed, such as Estate Services. A project about Estate Services is currently under way to look at how we can better deliver these services. Customers will be consulted on both the on-going Service Charge Review and the Estate Services Review which we hope will make a significant and positive difference to services our customers receive.



# Community Safety



## Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse Service



We work with all Low to Medium risk cases that would otherwise be forgotten. Don't suffer in silence, Put a stop to Domestic Abuse.

## No More Service

59 referrals - 45 males, 14 females

**36**

drug or alcohol referrals

**23**

offender referrals

**35**

had mental health diagnoses

**18**

had physical health diagnoses



2 clients received achievement awards from HACRO (Hertfordshire Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders)

## Anti-social Behaviour Team



We work hard to ensure that Stevenage is a safe place to live. We deal with a number of issues throughout the town and work with partner agencies to prevent ongoing ASB.

## Community Safety Team



Tenancy

# Tenancy

**Tenancy Fraud prevention is still a priority for the council and we are doing all we can to ensure anyone living in our properties is entitled to do so.**

**In 2017/18 we;**

- Investigated 61 cases
- Carried out 65 Right to buy visits
- Successfully prosecuted 1 resident for making a fraudulent housing application
- Had 12 properties returned to the Council
- Prevented fraudulent Right to Buys



In October 2018 Universal Credit will roll out in full for all new applicants in Stevenage or for anyone experiencing a change in circumstances. We have been working closely with other agencies in preparation for this. We helped to arrange a job fair at North Hertfordshire College on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2018 where over 30 employers with current vacancies attended.

The Income team performed extremely well and Collected 98.93% of all rent due for 2017/18. The team has now started to use the Task Manager, which not only allocates rent arrears work to individual income advisors, but also ensures all rent arrears cases are escalated more efficiently. It also allows team leaders to easily identify cases that become overdue for action and to re-al-

locate cases if a colleague is absent. It is hoped the use of task manager will ensure the team become more effective in managing their arrears cases and free them up to spend more time to manage the more complex cases.





Investment

# Investment

## Contracts being procured

### Lifts maintenance and refurbishment

– to all of the Councils homes and corporate buildings.

**Communal heating refurbishment** – to provide modern, energy efficient heating and hot water systems in the Council’s sheltered housing properties.

### Flat block – Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC)

Starting in summer 2018, the Council will be refurbishing the communal areas of its housing flat blocks (up to 5 storeys high). Works to each block will differ depending on the condition. Examples of the types of works that will be carried out include:

- replacing the flat block electrics
- internal and external redecorations including floor finishes
- roof replacements
- window and door replacements
- repairs to pathways and hardstands

All work is subject to survey; tenants and leaseholders will be consulted before works commence.

## Fire Safety

Since the Grenfell tower incident we have carried out 440 Home safety visits; ensuring residents feel safe in their homes and know what to do in an emergency.

- we carried out approximately £5000 of fire stopping works to communal doors in the 7 high rise blocks
- we carried out 439 fire risk assessments across all our flat blocks; making our communal areas as safe as possible.
- we replaced old timber fire doors to better performing and lighter composite fire doors in 3 Sheltered schemes (Highfield, Norman & Grosvenor Courts), 137 doors in total, with more replacements planned.
- we tested emergency lighting monthly on 30 blocks equalling 360 test and inspects.



### Programmed works completed

Heating	31
Electrics	31
Kitchen	62
Bathroom	49
Roofing	420
External Works	469
Loft insulation	25
Windows	649
Doors	696

# Independent Living

Supporting you to keep safe, independent and remain part of your community.

- We maintained our 24 hour emergency response service during the severe winter weather. The team made themselves available for calls across the town from their own homes during the worst weekend.
- We worked in partnership with the Sports and Wellbeing Team to successfully obtain funding from Herts Sports Partnership to fund a chair based exercise programme. We are hosting these in four of our schemes on a weekly basis to improve mobility, flexibility and working to reduce falls.
- We started our journey developing our new database and mobile working solutions, so our team will be able to spend more time supporting residents on the go.



It's a lovely feeling going to bed knowing I have this as reassurance.  
Mrs P

I can't see how you can improve... great service!  
Mrs C

Very nice people, service is bang on, couldn't fault you in any way.  
Mr A

**100%**  
would  
recommend  
our service

**84% strongly  
agreed and  
16% agreed  
that having the  
alarm made  
them feel safe  
and secure**

You don't  
charge too  
much, brilliant  
service, always  
there when I  
need them.  
Mrs G

Supported  
Housing

The Supported Housing Officers support residents in Independent Living accommodation and those on our community support service through regular contact either with visits or calls depending on what the resident has requested.

In an average month last year, the team carried out the following:



**2829  
visits**

**100  
support plan  
reviews**

**15  
assessments  
for independent  
living / flexi-care  
housing**  
(Flexicare is sheltered  
housing where you rent  
your own home with care  
services on site)

## Stevenage Carleine

From 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018 the Supported Housing Officers responded to and attended:

<b>Emergency calls</b>	<b>7016</b>
<b>Calls due to a fall</b>	<b>690</b>
<b>Calls due to physical health</b>	<b>1438</b>
<b>Calls due to mental health</b>	<b>986</b>

# Housing Development

## 2017/18 Achievements

This year the Housing Development team have provided an extra 32 homes for the residents of Stevenage. This includes another 22 homes at the Archer Road development, which was a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bed houses and flats. We also provided 4 additional 2 bedroom homes at Vincent Court.

As well as these new build schemes, the team has also been working hard to make strategic purchases on the open market, and has purchased an additional 6 homes by this route.

The team has also carried on running the buy-back scheme. This allows homeowners to sell their property to the council at a discounted rate, and in return we will look to provide a tenancy in a supported housing scheme. A further 2 properties were bought through this method.





Housing  
Development

## Coming Soon

The former Twin Foxes public house in Rockingham Way, is due to finish in August 2018, with 14 properties being built on this site. These will be a mix of 1 and 2 bed flats.

We're also working in partnership with Hills at the Ferrier Road site, with a further 15 homes being built there which are due in March 2019.

We're also expecting a further 6 homes at the Wedgewood Way site that we're building in partnership with Metropolitan homes.

We're hoping to start work on our Kenilworth Close (Bragbury End) scheme with 238 homes being built on this site. The aspiration is to begin construction in 2019/20, with the aim of getting planning consent and a contractor in 2018/19.



**Stevenage**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Finance

We reduced consultancy fees by carrying out more of the work using our in-house teams and saved £5,000.

We spent more than £16.9m upgrading homes, buying new homes and replacing equipment in 2017/18.

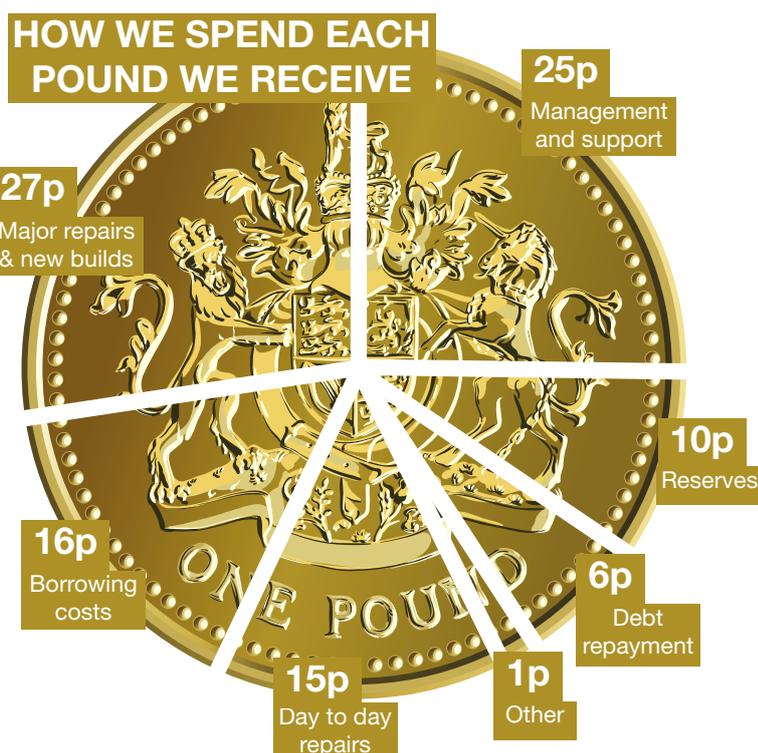
During 2017/18 we saved £379,000.

The finances are split into two parts, the revenue account and the capital account.

The Revenue account deals with the day to day running costs of the housing service that are paid for from the collection of weekly rents and service charges.

This covers services including the repair and maintenance of homes, tenancy management, lettings services, and supported housing services.

The Capital account covers the cost of planned maintenance and building new homes. These costs are covered by grants, cash received from right to buy sales and an annual amount called depreciation, which is set aside from income received in the year.



# The accounts for 2017/18



2017/18 Spend	
Management	10697475.3
Day to day repairs and maintenance	6648866.74
Contribution to major repairs and new build	11735599.13
Payment of Interest on borrowings	7016875.06
Contribution to reserves	4365092.91
Debt repayment	2,500,000
Other costs	446267.84
<b>Total Spend</b>	<b>43410176.98</b>

2017/18 Income	
Rents	39186705.03
Service charges	2888595.18
Other income	687423.4
Non-dwelling rent	360111.89
Investment Interest	287341.29
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>43410176.79</b>

How we pay for works in homes 2017/18	
Money from sale of council properties under Right to Buy scheme	1318173.0108
Contributions from Leaseholders	1340.21
Contribution from rental income	8009915.94
Contribution from reserves	7560298.6852
Other contributions	81445.064
<b>Total</b>	<b>16971172.91</b>

In 17/18 we saved £378,805	
Efficiency savings - delivery re-engineered	252410
Other savings	126395

By looking at better ways to provide the cleaning services at schemes we provided a more efficient service and saved £127,540.



**Please tell us what you think about this magazine  
and be entered in a £50 voucher prize draw!**

**CLOSING DATE 31 DECEMBER 2018. Winner will be notified by 9 January 2019**



# We value your feedback and use it to improve our future publications.

Last year 854 residents viewed Housing Matters, our tenants' annual report. The most read pages were repairs, tenancy and empty homes.

For a chance to win a £50 shopping voucher, please complete the survey form online at [www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing-matters](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing-matters) or fill in the details below and return to the Resident Involvement team, Stevenage Borough Council, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage, Herts SG1 1HN.

Please tick all applicable answers:

**I found Housing Matter 2017/18...**

- |                                       |   |  |                                      |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> interesting  | <input type="checkbox"/> hard work to get through | <input type="checkbox"/> informative             | <input type="checkbox"/> dull        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> easy to read | <input type="checkbox"/> unattractive             | <input type="checkbox"/> difficult to understand | <input type="checkbox"/> a good read |

To help us improve future publications, please write below any other comments on the content or design:

Thank you for your help. Please add your contact details for the prize draw:

Your name:

Your address:

Postcode:

Telephone number/mobile:



## Useful contacts



### Stevenage Borough Council

Customer Service Centre	01438 242666
Resident Involvement Team	01438 242183
Repairs	01438 211011
Out of hours repairs	01438 314963

### Hertfordshire County Council

General Enquiries	0300 1234040
Police Emergency	999
Non-emergency	101