

Housing Matters

2018/19
Review




Stevenage
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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Welcome

We have been celebrating 100 years of Council Housing.

We have gifted flowers and chocolates to our amazing residents who are due to turn 100 years old. We also asked the children from both Peartree Primary School and Featherstone Primary School to create designs for 'how will houses look in 100 years' time?' There were some very imaginative designs, making it very difficult to select the winners. The victorious pictures were laminated and placed in a time capsule; along with other items which have been buried – with the children's help – at our proposed housing site in Shephall Way. Addison House, a block of nine flats will be erected at this site to commemorate the Addison Act of 100 years ago. This act stated councils should build houses 'Fit for Heroes,' after World War I.

Our 'Housing All Under One Roof' programme, which was introduced to reform our services, has now reached the last tier of staffing and we hope to have this finished before the end of the financial year. We find ourselves in very interesting times and I look forward to all the changes being finalised, with our well-structured and motivated team continuing to bring these plans into reality.

Whilst all of this is happening, we continue to work hard to deliver a good service to you – our residents – and to provide extra support to those who need it most.

Our council home new build programme has continued to provide the desperately needed homes in the town. The homes at Twin Foxes are now complete and have families living in them. We expect to have finished the work in Burwell Road, where there will be

15 new council homes, ready for new tenants to move in before Christmas. Plans are moving

forward with our Kenilworth Close development, including a new state-of-the-art Independent Living scheme, community centre, shops, and homes.

Work is ongoing in the community, collaborating with residents to improve local areas and develop and establish neighbourhood agreements across all areas of the town.

We welcome your feedback and suggestions to help us develop our plans to improve services. Please do not hesitate to speak up if you see something which needs addressing.

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

We would welcome your feedback on this report and its contents. You can complete the survey form on our website at: www.stevenage.gov.uk

Alternatively you can fill in the paper form on the back of the report and return this to us.

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



Customer focus

We received 81 compliments – the comments included:

“Thank you so much for your kind help. You have been so kind and helpful in this difficult time and got back to me so promptly. It makes such a difference to liaise with people like you.”

“Just want to thank you so much to Housing Options for all your hard work. The accommodation is lovely and I’ve woken up with no anxiety for the first time in weeks.”

“I would like to take this opportunity and convey my sincere thanks to the Independent Living Team. Their commitment and dedication to Stevenage Borough Council is commendable. I would also like to thank the Lettings Team. Please pass on my sincerest thanks; they were all so very kind to me.”

88.5%

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

“A sincere thank you to my tenancy advisor for her kind and helpful ways when assisting with my garden improvements planning. Also a sincere thank you to the planning officer that visited yesterday.”

You said

We need better control of communal repairs, with more inspections and greater customer dialogue.

You said

You wanted investment to improve information sharing with other teams and to improve communication with you, our tenants.

We did

We have increased inspections. We now conduct 10 site visits per month in our blocks. The repairs manager conducts four site visits per month and 10% of block repairs are now inspected.

We did

The delivery team now has weekly meetings to discuss current and future works, sharing information so they are better informed when communicating with customers.

You said

It was taking too long sometimes for medical forms to be returned by our Independent Assessor.

We did

Medical forms are now being sent electronically, which has made the process much faster and also provides an audit trail when we need to chase one.

- Housing received 752 complaints in 2018/19, which were 130 less than 2017/18.
- Six customers contacted the Housing Ombudsman. The Ombudsman agreed with our decision and resolution to all six cases.
- We aim to close 95% of complaints within our target deadlines and we achieved 90%. We are working with the housing service teams to improve this performance.
- Average time taken to respond to your complaints was 8.74 days

The top categories for complaints were:

Gas maintenance	19.1%
Damp and mould	8.7%
External works	4.5%

35%

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 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

It's frustrating having to take two days off work, one for a boiler breakdown and one for an annual gas safety check.

We did

Our Gas Engineers now have new hand held computers. This means when they are repairing a heating system/hot water they can see when the next service is due. If it is imminent, the engineer can carry out the service whilst he is there.

You said

We need better communications between teams when a property has been advertised but is not ready for letting/not going to be let.

We did

Lettings and repairs now have a closer working relationship through weekly void meetings. The two teams are also now situated closer together. Real time updates are now available through new software.

Customer Focus



Community
Development

Resident involvement

Volunteer hours vary
between 2-10 hours per month

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

The HMAB (Housing Management Board) regularly meet to give their views on various policies and procedures. They also consider the performance and improvement of the housing service. More details can be found on:

<http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/110971/110974>

The Council continues to work with TPAS (Tenant Participatory Advisory Service) to develop ways in which we engage visitors in our work.

Do you live in a flat block?

Resident inspectors work with the caretaking team to ensure the communal areas in flat blocks are kept clean and tidy by carrying out spot checks and highlighting various issues.

Would you like to get involved where you live? We are looking to broaden this role to include a wider remit and would love to hear your suggestions.

If so contact the Neighbourhood Warden Team by email:

neighbourhood.warden@stevenage.gov.uk

or phone Sue on: 07702 916859

For other ideas about getting involved contact:

community.development@stevenage.gov.uk

or call Communities and Neighbourhoods on: 01438 242389

Repairing your homes

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



Repairs

Customer satisfaction after repair work was completed was 96.13%

997 out of hours' calls were taken in the year

94.51%.of repairs were completed right first time

Stevenage Borough Council operatives completed over 1000 fencing repairs in 2018/19

Approximately 21,991 repairs were carried out

How to report repairs:

- On-line at www.stevenage.gov.uk/report-repair (Please do not use for emergency repairs)
- Email – cscrepairs@stevenage.gov.uk (Please do not use email for emergency repairs)
- Phone – 0800 1123444 or 01438 211011 during office hours or 01438 314963 for out of hours emergency
- 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 two team leaders, all of which are trained to the British Institute of Cleaning Standard (BICS).

They maintain 543 blocks across the Stevenage Borough, including a seven day service for the five tower blocks and a four day service for 40 blocks that have special features, such as a bin chute.

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

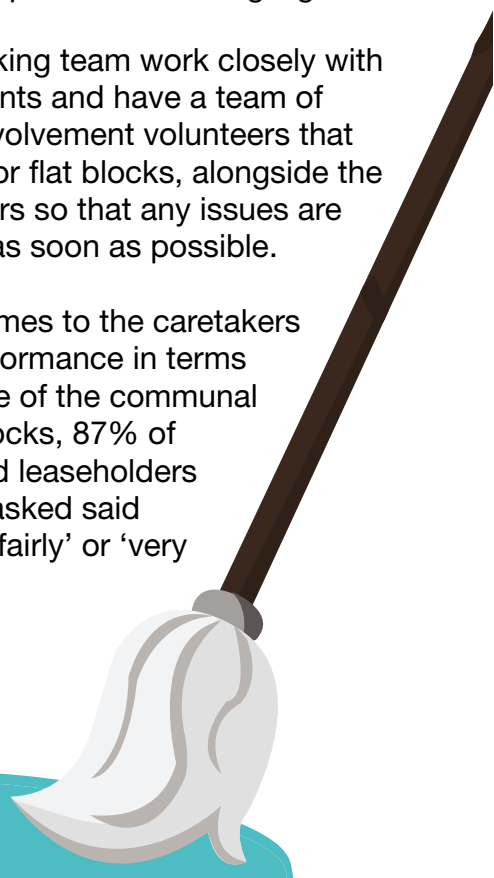
They have a dedicated team to deal with issues such as fire hazards and health & safety hazards (e.g. needles).

To date (April 19-July 19) they have dealt with over 300 incidents.

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

The caretaking team work closely with their residents and have a team of resident involvement volunteers that help monitor flat blocks, alongside the team leaders so that any issues are dealt with as soon as possible.

When it comes to the caretakers overall performance in terms of their care of the communal areas in blocks, 87% of tenants and leaseholders who were asked said they were 'fairly' or 'very satisfied.'



“Being clear on who is responsible for what, within our flat block” – caretaking is always trying to be proactive and listen to residents. Notice boards are now going up in every flat block to provide everyone with the correct information and telephone numbers of departments for residents to contact.”

Providing homes



In November 2019 Executive agreed to adopt the 2019-2024 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which details how SBC will achieve its 4 priorities which are;

1. Prevention and Relief of Homelessness
2. Provision of Temporary Accommodation
3. Housing Development
4. Support of Homeless Households

This strategy has now been published.

Temporary Accommodation and Tenancy Support

Since the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act in April 2018 there has been a significant increase in the numbers of applicants approaching the service and longer length of stay in emergency and temporary accommodation which has caused an increase in the need to Bed & Breakfast Accommodation. In 2018/19 we booked in the region of 39 clients in to Bed & Breakfast Accommodation, in 2019/20 to date we have booked in 178 clients. In order to mitigate the cost to Stevenage Borough Council we have an action plan in place for short term, medium term and long term actions which includes a program of converting a small number of hard to let general needs accommodation into temporary and emergency accommodation use and some properties as part of the open market acquisition program are being used for temporary and emergency accommodation use. A total of 21 properties have been introduced due to these conversions and additions.

The Housing Supply Team, via the Next Step Lets Service assisted 97 households with funds to help them to secure tenancies in the private rented sector and avoid homelessness. The service offers ongoing support to both tenants and landlords throughout the tenancy to make sure everything runs smoothly. 24 new landlords this year joined the scheme to benefit from the support and financial incentives offered.

170 applicants were placed in emergency and temporary accommodation in 2018-19. This is where the applicant has become homeless and enquires are made into their eligibility during the relief period.



Providing
Homes

Providing homes

Housing Register


Stevenage Borough Council, currently have 1,982 people on the waiting list to be housed within the borough

Included within the list are 487 customers who, fall within Band F. Customers within Band F are accepted on to the register, are able to remain on the register, but they fail to match the criteria to bid.

So far for this year, there have been 831 active bids made for properties that have become available within Stevenage. Bids for housing are made using Locata, the online housing system. Customers accepted onto the register and have the ability to place bids are given a unique reference number. That number allows them to bid on properties which they qualify for, based on the information we have received for them and their household.

On average we receive 118 Housing Applications per month to join the housing register. When we are in receipt of the application, we have 28 days to undertake the necessary checks and to write to the applicant with the outcome. The Central Admin Team, based within the Housing and investment section, have worked extremely hard to ensure that we meet the 28 day target set and on a recent review, the team are on average taking 17 days to process each application. The team have been looking at better, leaner ways of working in order to ensure a swift reply is given to customers applying to join the register.

In 2018/19 a total of 379 lettings took place (in addition to the 39 Bed & Breakfast placements), of these 379 there were 226 general needs lettings, 90 Independent Living and 63 temporary or emergency lettings

A large green silhouette of a house with a white outline, serving as a background for the text.

**We achieved
399 preventions in
18/19 this is where we
prevented households
becoming homeless by
either helping them to
remain in their current
accommodation or helped
them find alternative
accommodation prior to
them becoming homeless.
This includes 97 new
PRS tenancies.**

Providing homes



Housing Options

As detailed in April 2018 the way that the Housing Options service works to support clients with housing issues changed dramatically with the introduction of the new legislation. The act requires us to work more intensively with clients who are threatened with homelessness and those who have already lost their homes.

During the year 2018-19 the Housing Option Service dealt with 1373 households requesting assistance. The issues experienced by the largest number of these clients were:

- the loss of private rented sector accommodation,
- exclusion by family and friends and
- relationship breakdown

Not every request for assistance is directly related to a threat of homelessness, in which case the team offer advice to assist clients to resolve issues.

The common issues addressed with clients include benefit and affordability issues, non-payment of rent, multiple debts, landlord disputes, neighbour issues, issues with repairs and property condition. Mediation between tenant and the landlord, or within families, can often resolve issues to prevent the loss of a client's home

During the year the team were able to assist 399 clients either by preventing the loss of their current home or helping them to secure a new property, the housing Options team work very closely with the

Tenancy supply Team who help source properties for clients who are at threat of homelessness

Case Study:

A young man with a partner and baby approached the Housing Options Team because his family could no longer offer them a home. An advisor helped them to join the Housing Registration for social housing, but also explained that many applicants face an indefinite wait before they may be offered a council or housing association home and we always encourage applicants to explore the alternatives that are available. Options such as the private rented sector or affordable home ownership with the Help to Buy scheme. The advisor helped the family review their finances and work out how much rent they could afford each month. They didn't have any savings so the Housing Supply Team assisted the family with an interest free loan to cover the tenancy deposit on a property they had just taken on from a new landlord. The family were delighted to move into their own home in the private rented sector and to know that the team will continue to support them.

Managing Your Homes Independent Living

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

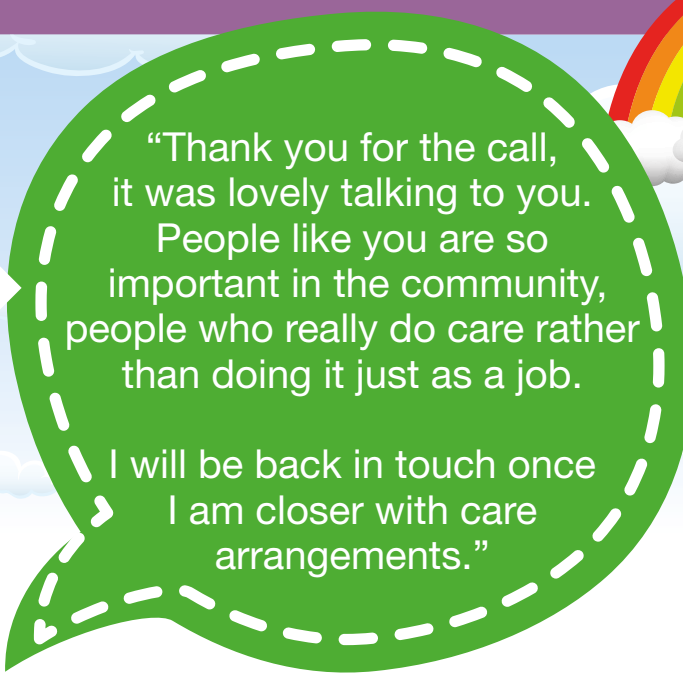
- We maintained our 24 hour emergency response service during the severe winter weather. The team made themselves available, from their own homes.
- We worked in partnership with the Council's Sports and Wellbeing Team to successfully obtain funding from Herts Sports Partnership to fund a chair based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



A Careline customer phoned in to say how wonderful the team were when they attended in the early hours of the morning. The customer had been taken ill and the team attended. The customer was very grateful for all the support and empathy they had received.



99%
would
recommend
our service



“Thank you for the call,
it was lovely talking to you.
People like you are so
important in the community,
people who really do care rather
than doing it just as a job.

I will be back in touch once
I am closer with care
arrangements.”



The Supported Housing Officers help residents in independent living accommodation and those using 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:

**26,272
visits**

**100
support plan
reviews**



Stevenage Careline

From 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019 the Supported Housing Officers responded to and attended:

8,244	Emergency calls
754	Calls due to a fall
1,386	Calls due to physical health
986	Calls due to mental health



Tenancy

Managing Your Homes

Tenancy

Tenancy fraud prevention continues to be a priority for the council and we are doing all we can to ensure anyone living in our properties is entitled to reside there.

In 2018/19 we:

- Received 145 fraud investigation referrals
- Carried out 112 Right to Buy visits
- Successfully prosecuted one resident
- Recovered nine properties
- Removed two people from the Housing Register

Tenancy management ensures that our tenants are keeping to the terms of the tenancy agreement.

In 2018/2019 we:

- Carried out 805 audits on properties. An audit is carried out to ensure that we have the correct people living in our properties, that the property is of a good standard and to offer help and support to our tenants if needed. This is an opportunity for the tenant to raise any problems that they may have in relation to their tenancy.
- Carried out 249 flat block inspections. These inspections are to make sure that the residents are complying with fire safety regulations. That their communal areas such as lifts, stairs, landings and walkways are kept clear. That the external and internal condition of the property is clean, safe and secure.
- Carried out visits to our new tenants four weeks after they have moved in, to ensure that have settled in and to offer any support they may require as new tenants.
- Assigned new tenancies to those who wished to complete a mutual exchange of properties. 89 mutual exchanges were completed in 2018/19.
- If a tenant requires additional support to what we can offer, we can make referrals or 'signpost' them to other agencies – for example, adult or children services, mental health team and so on.
- Dealt with low level anti-social behaviour.

The audits and other home visits highlight any hoarding problems among some of our tenants. Hoarding is recognised as a mental health condition. The tenancy team has been working with these tenants with due sensitivity and assurances to try and overcome this challenge. At first, most of these tenants refuse to let us enter their homes as they are afraid we would take these belongings away from them. Yet, with perseverance and persistence, we gain access to the properties and achieve positive outcomes. One tenant was relieved and asked their tenancy advisor "not to give up on them". Our aim is to help our tenants to keep their tenancies.

Managing Your Homes Leasehold



Managing Homes

We have 1408 leasehold properties. Eight tenants bought their flat in 18/19 under the Right to Buy scheme and became leaseholders.

Service charge collection – by becoming more streamlined meant that we exceeded our target for service charge collection. We collected 98.52 % of the charges in 18/19. Successful collection of service charges enables us to provide effective services to our leaseholders.

Easier to pay – providing additional direct debit payment dates and with an online facility on our website to check leasehold service charge account balances and make payments.

Above and beyond leasehold customer expectations – during challenging times we have assisted our residents above and beyond the day job, sometimes late into the evening. We did this to ensure that they were reassured and safe. Challenges included a fire in a flat block, although it was contained we worked with residents late in the evening to reassure them. Another challenge was a large bee's nest, which was safely removed 'live' and we worked with residents to successfully keep them safe.

Paperless – we have been making strides to become paperless. Paperless direct debits are now possible, this means a customer can set up a direct debit over the phone.

Leases have been scanned and are available to the team, making us more responsive to enquiries.

Improvements – we continue to tackle fly tipping at flat blocks, by holding culprits more accountable and we have noted a direct improvement by the use of photo evidence with our correspondence.

Accessibility – we have improved our staffing and our accessibility for customers by being available for evening surgeries and calls.

Next Step Lets – we continue to promote this service to Landlords.

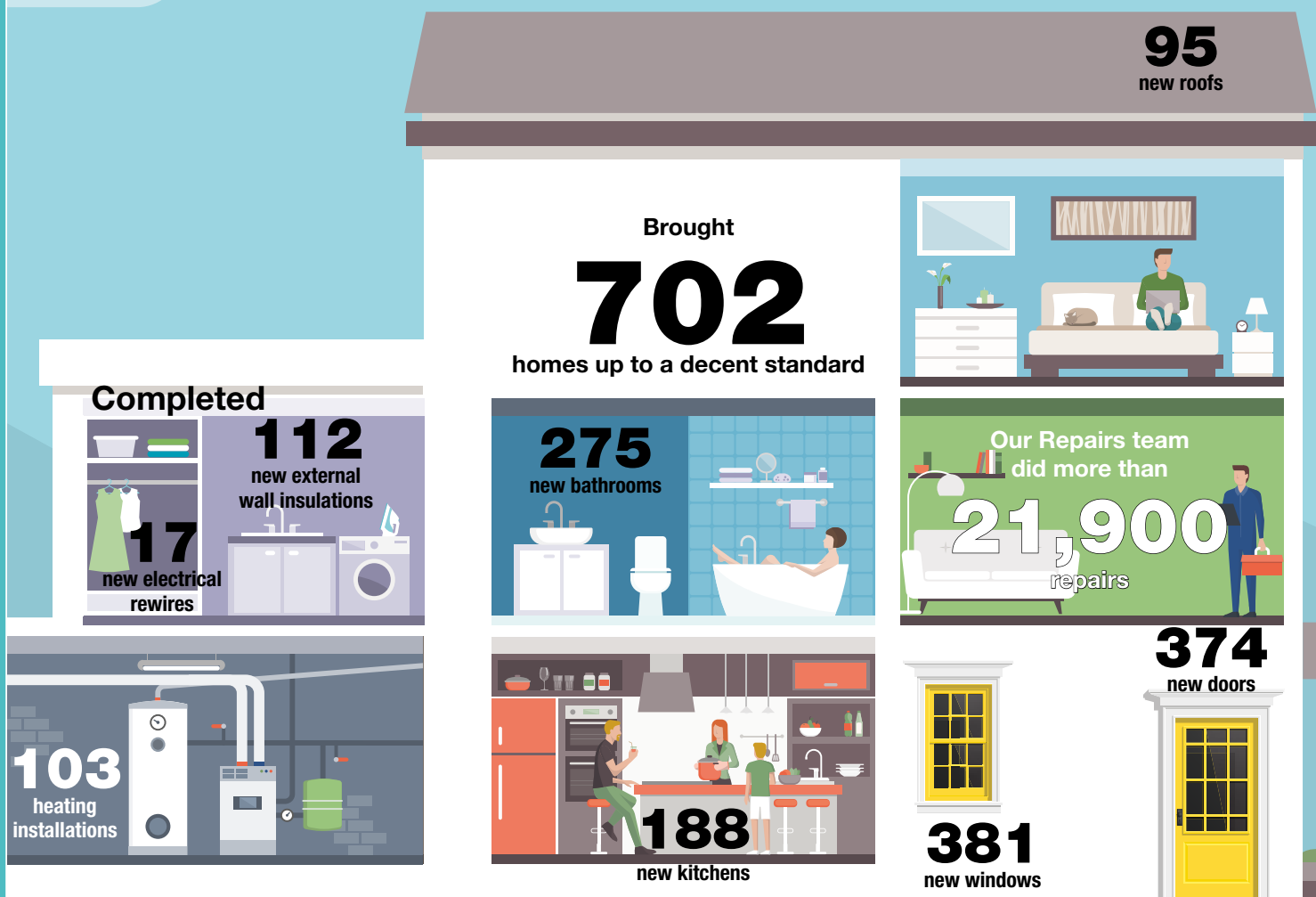
The Next Step Lets service is run by the Housing Supply Team within Providing Homes and they work with leaseholders who let their properties. These landlord leaseholders benefit from the tenant finding service and the financial incentives available. The co-ordinators offer support throughout the tenancy. This begins with matching the right prospective tenants from clients who have contacted our Housing Options Team and organising viewings. The co-ordinators also complete inventories along with all the move in documentation through to exit inspections. If either the landlord or the tenant has a query, the team are there to offer advice and support throughout the tenancy. This avoids problems and in fact the average length of tenancy for properties managed by the team is 6½ years!



Investment

Investing in Your Homes and Properties

Through the major works contracts that we had in place for 18/19 we completed the following:



Keeping You Safe



"I think this group has been the most helpful; it has made me a stronger person. Lots of lovely people and the forum staff are so reassuringly helpful and friendly."

"Saved mine and my son's life with your support. You pointed us in the right direction."

"Extremely satisfied and amazed with the help available."

"Disappointed I didn't do it sooner, I will recommend you to friends and family in the future."

"They are the best support, they are good always. Thank you loads you are all amazing."

If you would like to access any of these services please visit
<http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/housing-matters/193109/>

Or alternatively call us on
01438 242666

Community Safety Team

New Housing Development

2018/19 Achievements

The Housing Development Team have delivered 20 new build homes for the residents of Stevenage this year, with a further 22 homes purchased on the open market for the Council's housing supply. Our development of Twin Foxes pub has delivered 14 one and two bedroom flats for social and affordable rent as well as six homes at the Wedgewood Way development.

We have also gained planning permission for three of our development sites across the town. Schemes at Shephall Way and the former annex of

Symonds Green community centre will bring forward 38 apartments for the Council to let. The scheme at North Road is for a further 21 units for private sale with the money gained from these sales used to help fund the other schemes.

We have made significant progress on our flagship regeneration scheme at Kenilworth Close this year having secured planning permission for the scheme which consists of 236 homes and are working towards a start on site in 2020.



Coming This Year

The scheme at Ferrier road has been completed, with Burwell Court and Ditchmore Lane to be completed in 2020. The developments at Burwell Court and Ferrier Road will deliver 29 homes for the Council to let. To help fund these and future developments, the Ditchmore Lane scheme will deliver 10 homes for private sale.

In the coming year we also expect work to commence on the sites at Shephall Way, Symonds Green and North Road with Shephall Way expected to complete in autumn 2020 and North Road and Symonds Green expected to complete in early 2021.

At Kenilworth Close, building is expected to be carried out in two stages, meaning that we expect to see the completion of 176 homes in 2022 and a further 60 homes two years later.



Finance

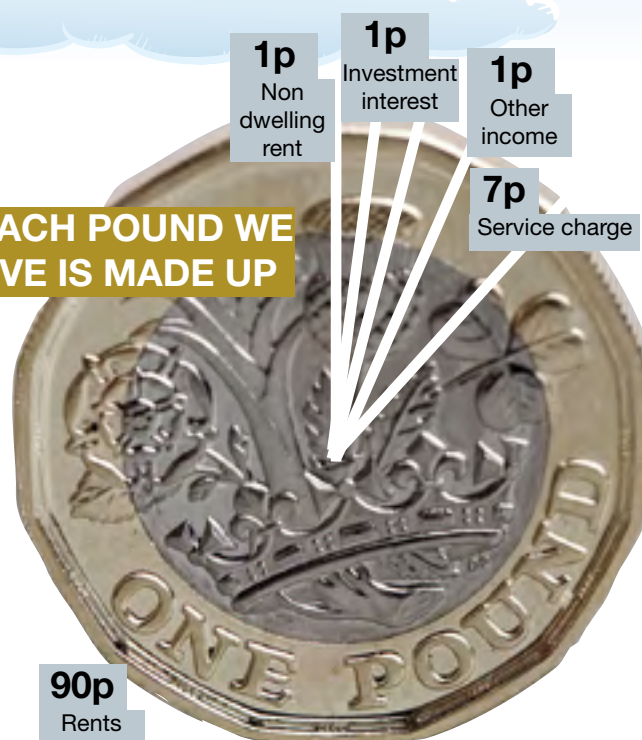
In 2018/19 we spent more than £46.2m upgrading homes, buying new homes and replacing equipment.
During 2018/19 we saved £225,959.

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.

HOW EACH POUND WE RECEIVE IS MADE UP



HOW WE SPEND EACH POUND WE RECEIVE



The accounts for 2018/19



2018/19 Spend		£
Management		10,865,886
Day to day repairs and maintenance		6,,822,614
Contribution to major repairs and new build		19,549,805
Payment of Interest on borrowings		6,920,398
Debt repayment		1,241,000
Other costs		864,829
Total Spend		46,264,532

2018/19 Income		£
Rents		38,782,288
Service charges		3,516,708
Other income		496,914
Non-dwelling rent		251,351
Investment Interest		404,665
Use of Reserves		2,812,606
Total Income		46,264,532

How we pay for works in homes 2018/19		£
Money from sale of council properties under Right to Buy scheme		1,964,183
New Loans		1,810,558
Contribution from rental income		6,770,206
Contribution from reserves		11,124,186
Other contributions		696,816
Total		22,365,948

In 18/19 we saved £225,959		£
Savings on ground maintenance works		10,000
Increased income from charges		68,900
Savings from existing budget reviews		66,397
Other savings		80,662
Total savings		225,959



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

CLOSING DATE 31 JANUARY 2020. Winner will be notified by 7 February 2020.



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

Last year a significant number of residents viewed Housing Matters online, 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 or fill in the details below and return to the community development team, Stevenage Borough Council, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage, Herts SG1 1HN.

Please tick all applicable answers:

I found Housing Matters 2018/19...

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| <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
Community development team	01438 242389
Repairs	01438 211011
Out of hours repairs	01438 314963



Hertfordshire County Council

General Enquiries	0300 1234040
Police Emergency	999
Non-emergency	101