



City of  
**Stoke-on-Trent**

Stoke-on-Trent City Council  
**TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2021/22**



## Welcome

### Councillor Carl Edwards, Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment

#### Annual Tenants Report – Foreword from Cllr Edwards (2021/22)

As the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environment I am pleased to be able to present the Annual Report for Tenants and Leaseholders, including a comparison to previous year's performance. This period has been another period of immense challenge including the journey out of Covid restrictions, a deeply affected economy and hugely significant world events however we have continued our determination to work together and deliver the best services we possibly can.

I wanted to start by saying how extremely pleased I am with the progress we are making with our new engagement plans and the Tenant relations team have now successfully engaged with an ever-increasing number of tenants and residents to assist in working together to ensure we have safe and well managed homes with excellent services and support for those who need it the most. We have moved from a period dominated by the restricting effects of the Covid epidemic to a period now influenced by the changed economics which has for instance brought high energy prices and rising inflation and cost of living pressures.

We have therefore continued our work on proactively contacting tenants to get regular feedback on our services and to ensure that we deliver services as effectively as possible and understand and support those who are more vulnerable. For instance, our Income Advice Team have been helping tenants who may be struggling financially and finding it difficult to pay their rent. The team helped to identify more than £1.5m in additional support in the last 12 months, which is over 50 per cent more than the £1m in additional income for tenants in the previous 12 months. The details of how to contact this team are included later in the report.

In terms of our efforts with ensuring we provide safe homes we have for example continued with our fire safety investment programme to install sprinkler systems in our blocks of apartments. During 2021/22 we installed systems to four high-rise blocks at Honeywall House, Southern Court, Penkhull Court and Dibden Court. This has been a rolling programme and now 390 apartments over 12 residential blocks has a sprinkler system installed.

Combined with our determination to improve services and following consultation over the winter period we also launched our new Housing Strategy. I believe our latest housing strategy outlines our ambitious plans to meet the changing needs of our residents over the next five years. We intend to build on our recent successes by having the necessary framework in place to improve our housing offer, provide high quality places to live and attract further investment in the city. This is about ensuring residents have the right choice of housing for every stage of their life, and creating a real step change in the city's housing offer.

During the next 12 months I am determined that we will build on our progress and focus on continuing to engage and involving more tenants/customers in the way we improve and deliver services. If there is one lesson to be learned during this period it is typified by our Stoke-on-Trent vision of working together to create a stronger city we can all be proud of.

This year we have work together with tenants who have volunteered their time to provide feedback and input into the design and content of the report. The group of six tenants and one leaseholder have helped us to ensure that we provide information you want, how that information is communicated and that it is clear. This group has acted as an 'Editorial Panel' and new members are welcome.

## Our homes and neighbourhoods

### Our homes

As at 31st March 2022, we manage 17,454 homes which are made up of the following types of property and average rents:

	social rent	Average rent per week (social)	Affordable rent	Average rent per week(affordable)	Total No of units
<b>Bungalow</b>	<b>3622</b>	<b>£72.19</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>£140.92</b>	<b>3624</b>
1	3310	£71.11			3310
2	301	£83.18			301
3	11	£94.65	1	£135.37	12
4			1	£146.46	1
<b>Flat</b>	<b>2744</b>	<b>£74.89</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>£96.64</b>	<b>2764</b>
Bedsit	51	£62.77			51
1	691	£70.21	20	£96.64	711
2	1990	£76.76			1990
3	12	£85.05			12
<b>House</b>	<b>11010</b>	<b>£85.94</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>£129.97</b>	<b>11066</b>
1	9	£78.72	10	£93.22	19
2	4756	£82.13	8	£111.96	4764
3	6093	£88.62	30	£137.96	6123
4	141	£97.19	8	£163.98	149
5	2	£101.94			2
6	9	£113.24			9
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>17,376</b>		<b>78</b>		<b>17454</b>

The average rent of all residential stock is £81.51 per week. We also have 411 leaseholder properties.

During 2021/22 there were 164 right to buy sales compared to 83 in 2020/21. In addition to rented accommodation, the portfolio includes 1,100 garages and garage plots and 52 commercial units.

## Managing our stock

Affordable housing is in demand and we know that it's important to turn around our properties that become empty quickly and get them let to those in need. At the end of March 2022, there were 2,162 households on the housing register in housing need waiting for a home. This includes our current tenants seeking a transfer. Whilst properties are empty, we are also not getting income from rents. In 2021/22, rent loss from empty properties stood at £1,044,873 compared to £1,236,212 in 2020/21.

In 2021/22, we had 985 properties become vacant and we re-let a total of 987 properties in that year. To get them ready to re-let, Unitas, our repairs and maintenance company, spent an average £3,916 per property, including installing 245 new kitchens and 141 new bathrooms. The average re let time during this year was 29 days for properties with standard repairs, an increase of two days compared to the previous year. Those requiring major works, such as structural repairs and notifiable asbestos removal took an average of 73 days.

## Looking after your financial well-being

### Tenant Support

The Income Advice Team can help tenants with one to one support if they are struggling financially and finding it difficult to pay their rent. The team helped to identify more than £1.5m in additional support in the last 12 months, which is over 50 per cent more than the £1m in additional income for tenants in the previous 12 months.

They can ensure that a tenant is receiving the correct benefits and income. The team can provide personal budgeting support and advise tenants who are affected by welfare reform measures such as the Spare Room subsidy, Universal Credit or the Benefit Cap.

Over the last 12 months the team have supported tenants with applications for Discretionary Housing Payments, Personal Independence Payments (PIP), Housing Benefit, Council tax reduction scheme, Universal Credit, Attendance Allowance, Employment Support Allowance (ESA), the Severn Trent Big difference scheme and grants from charitable organisations.

- 1,563 Income Advice Team referrals in 2021/22 (1,514 2020/21).
- £1,581,493 additional income identified since April for tenants in 2021/22 (£997,721 for 2020/21).

People can check for themselves if they are entitled to other benefits using our budget calculator which can be found at <https://stoke.entitledto.co.uk/home/start>

The Income Advice Team can be contacted at [incomeadviceteam@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:incomeadviceteam@stoke.gov.uk) or telephone 01782 231564.

Where a tenant has a debt issue the team make a referral to CAB who can be contacted on 01782 408625 or email [moneyadvice@snsCab.org.uk](mailto:moneyadvice@snsCab.org.uk)

## Rents and service charges

### Collecting rent and service charges from tenants

Direct debit is the easiest and quickest way to pay your rent. To set up a direct debit call 01782 234234 or go online [www.stoke.gov.uk/rent](http://www.stoke.gov.uk/rent) . You can choose a payment date to suit you and all direct debit payers are automatically entered into a quarterly prize draw and you could win high street vouchers worth £200.

- £1,907,336 current rent arrears as at March 2022 (£1,819,353 in March 2021).
- Arrears are 2.87% of the annual rent debit as at March 2022 (2.79% as at March 2021).
- 94.29% of all tenants have either a clear account or owe less than £500. (94.53% in March 2021)

Every tenant now receives a rent statement each quarter. You will also see press releases and may receive gov.delivery email updates reminding you of your obligations to pay rent and to let you know about the range of support that is available. We also use WhatsApp messaging as a further means of contacting you.

All of this action continues with an overarching approach of fairness where we support tenants to pay their rent and sustain their tenancies and take enforcement action against those tenants who are wilfully going into rent arrears.

### Collecting service charges from Leaseholders

We are looking to improve our services to leaseholders which will include a new online service to make viewing and paying your service charge simple and easy.

It is intended that you will be able to view your new service charge account online by visiting Stoke online, allowing you to have instant access to your account, including making payments. You will continue to receive your estimated service charge and reconciliation statements at the appropriate times in the post, as usual. The new online facility will only show new statements. Any older service charge invoices with outstanding balances should continue to be paid by their current method.

### Formal Action in 2021/22

Since April 2021 there have been 88,713 contacts and attempts at contact made by officers to discuss rent arrears. We use a number of methods of engaging including telephone calls, text messages, letters, e-mails and visits.

- 25 Evictions carried out, all due to rent arrears (0 in 2020/21 due the all legal action suspended due to the Pandemic).
- 108 cases entered to court (20 in 2020/21)
- 1,498 Notices seeking possession (1,017 in 2020/21).

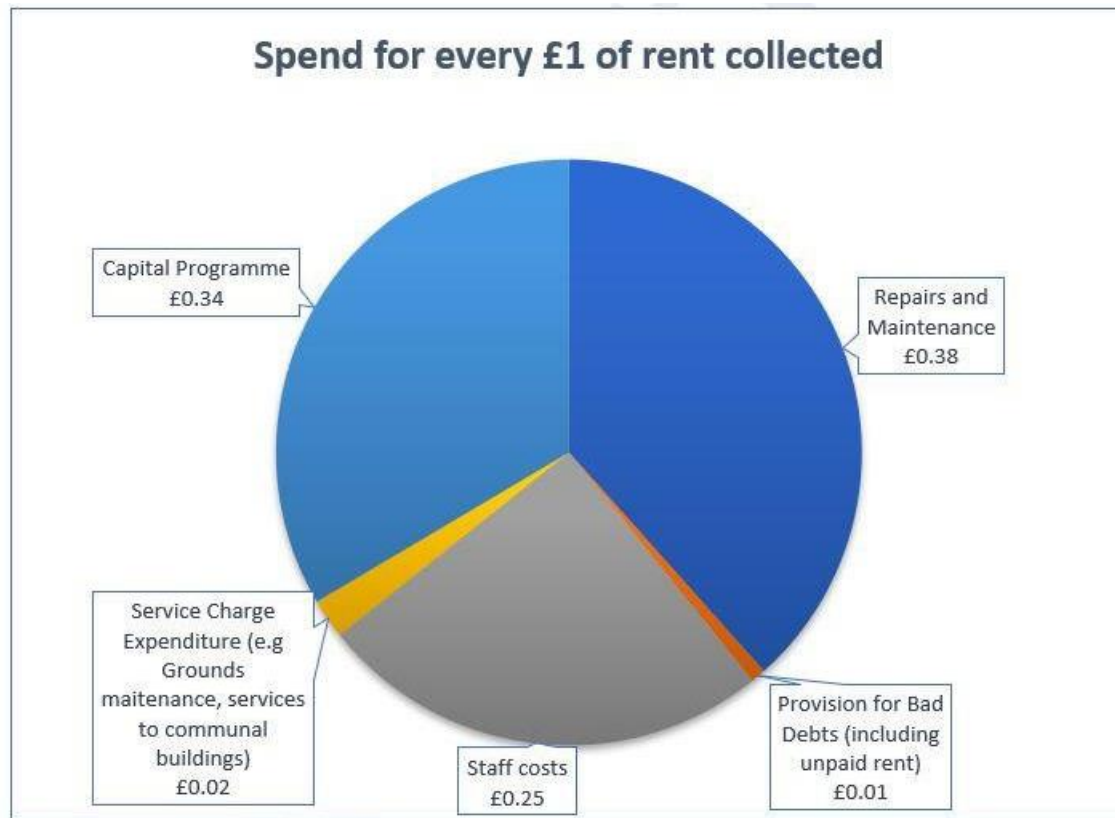
## Income and expenditure

### Rental income

The rental income for 2021/22 is £65.146m.

### How we spend the Housing Income received

Costs relating to 2021-22 - For example £1 would be split down as follows:



## Safe, secure and healthy homes

Unitas, the city council's repair and maintenance company, carries out repairs and maintenance for just under 17,500 homes and approximately 600 public buildings across the city. We maintain and improve our stock through planned investment and efficient maintenance.

Unitas has a strong workforce of more than 450 employees delivering several services across many business areas, striving to provide our customers with the highest standards of service.

## Gas safety and Electrical Safety inspections for tenants

If you are a tenant, by law we have to carry out a gas safety inspection at your home every 12 months. You must let us have access to do the inspection as part of your tenancy agreement. We take our obligations to our tenants very seriously and work hard to make sure we meet all the necessary regulations. If we are refused access to your home or you do not keep your appointments with us, we reserve the right to take legal action to make sure this essential safety work is completed.

As a landlord we have an obligation to maintain the electrical installation in your property, so your property must be safe when a tenancy begins and kept in a safe condition throughout the tenancy.

Unitas carries out electrical inspections to each property every five years in line with current guidance. This is done by completing an electrical installation condition report to identify any hazards and checking the electrics are in a safe, serviceable condition and suitable for continued use

All of our properties have a valid gas safety certificate, and an electrical test certificate that is less than 10 years old. 99.42% of properties also have an electrical test certificate that is less than 5 years old (97.95% in 2020/21)

## Gas Safety Compliance for Leaseholders

We want our blocks to be safe for all residents who live in them. We would therefore like leaseholders who have purchased an apartment in one of our blocks, to provide us with copies of their gas safety check and electrical safety check certificates. This is





required every year for gas and every five years for electrical. For gas safety certificates, this is voluntary if you have been a resident leaseholder since before 2017. If you are a resident leaseholder after 2017 or a non-resident leaseholder that sublets, then this requirement is a legal obligation.

## Decent Homes

Following Unitas' strategic approach to the improvement of council housing stock, the percentage of homes that are non-decent has reduced to 3.23% from 3.34% in 2020/21.

This is a standard set nationally and comprises of four criteria which needs to be met in order for a home to be classed as "Decent":

- It meets the current statutory standard for housing
- It is in a reasonable state of repair – in terms of the roof, chimney, kitchen or heating systems
- It has reasonably modern facilities and services – kitchens have adequate space and layout and be under 20 years old, bathrooms under 30 years old. Adequate noise insulation and space in the common entrance areas.
- It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort – warm and dry, with effective insulation and efficient heating systems

## Creating safe places to live

### Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

The City Council Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Team came together in January 2022, as one team of 13 officers to tackle ASB across the city. Previously the Housing Officers (ASB) worked separately from officers dealing with ASB incidents for other residents. Now each officer has a ward area as their responsibility and links in with the ward councillors every month to understand what is happening in your area.

If you are experiencing any issues, then please visit the website below for advice and where you can report a problem.

[Problems in my neighbourhood | Stoke-on-Trent](#)

[Report Antisocial Behaviour \(stoke.gov.uk\)](#)

### Fire / building safety

As part of our approach to provide advice about fire and building safety, we visit every tenant living in an apartment with communal areas, each year to advise them on safety in the home, keeping fire doors closed and to make everyone aware of what to do in the event of a fire. We have responded to the recommendations made by Dame Judith Hackitt's review into building regulations and fire safety, following the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy and we now have a dedicated team of Estate Officers who carry out inspections of our

apartment blocks with a focus on fire safety. The team have received specialised training in how to reduce any potential fire risks in communal areas. This is closely overseen by two new Senior Estate Officers to ensure we meet our legal obligations regarding fire safety.

- We inspect all our 18 high rise blocks twice each week and our 56 low rise blocks once a week.
- Unitas have inspected and serviced more than 5,000 fire doors and more than 7,000 other fire safety measures, such as compartmentation (fire stopping) smoke doors, automatic-opening vents (AOVs), intumescent seals and collars.

During 2021/22 we continued with our fire safety investment programme to install sprinkler systems in our blocks of apartments. This year we installed systems to four high-rise blocks at Honeywall House, Southern Court, Penkhull Court and Dibden Court. This has been a rolling programme and now 390 apartments over twelve residential blocks has a sprinkler system installed.

We have installed fire stopping works to our six-block of flats, including the fitting of FD30 rated fire doors, fire breaks in the roof areas and compartmentation in the communal areas.



## Repairing, improving and maintaining homes

- £8,600,396 invested in responsive repairs
- 69,567 repairs carried out (including 8,435 out of hours emergency repairs)
- 4.5 days is the average number of days to complete a repair. (2.9 days in 2020/21)
- 95.6% repairs appointments were achieved within the time slot
- 94% of customers are satisfied with their repair, compared to 95% in the previous year.

### Repair appointments

We recognise that most people lead busy lives and want to know when we will carry out a repair, and because of this, we offer an appointment system for repairs. We aim to complete emergency repairs within 24 hours, and we aim to complete all non-emergency repairs within 8 working days.

To improve our performance, Unitas, our repairs and maintenance company, is committed to resolving property repairs quickly and efficiently, therefore we have invested in a new portal that allows our customers to report their repairs online and select an appointment date and time that is convenient for them. The portal is accessible 24/7 and means that customers don't have to call our contact centre. This portal will feed directly into our IT systems allowing Unitas to update their jobs/repairs in 'real-time'. The portal will save time, money, and offer a more efficient service. Visit [Repairs online | MyStoke online account | Stoke-on-Trent](#) to register.

### Improving Your Homes

Our investment programmes each year is based upon the findings of our Asset Management Strategy and results from stock condition surveys and stock options appraisals. Every year we spend around £20m on a number of different improvement programmes. This revenue comes from the housing rent money and it is used to improve the quality and conditions of council-owned houses in the city. The work is carried out by Unitas, the council owned repairs and maintenance company.

The improvement programmes can vary, from a programme of kitchen replacements or central heating and boiler upgrades, to a full estate scheme of works, which includes new roofs, pointing, front and rear doors as well as kitchens, bathrooms, boilers and smoke alarms. It also includes loft insulation, environmental works and landscaping, full central heating, re-modelling apartments to give a more modern layout, energy efficiency measures, refurbishment to shops and garages and bungalow improvements.

The key aim is to ensure that your home stays in a good, safe condition for you to live in. For information about up and coming projects of planned investment to homes in your area, visit Unitas' website [Investing in your home - Unitas](#)





## Proving a great customer service

### Customer Satisfaction

As part of the council's service to tenants and leaseholders, we aim contact all our tenants annually. You told us about how satisfied you were with our service.

We made 2,692 calls and completed 1,761 surveys between April 2021 to March 2022.

How satisfied are you with?

- The quality of your home - 87.82% satisfied
- The area you live in – 88.72 % satisfied
- That your rent provides value for money – 89.63% satisfied
- That service charges provides value for money – 71.07% satisfied
- How general enquiries are handled – 86.51% satisfied
- How complaints are handled – 63.98% satisfied
- With the overall service your landlord provides – 90.07% satisfied
- Do you have access to the internet? – 68% had access to the internet.

### Complaints and Customer Feedback

Our aim is to provide an excellent service to customers at all times, but sometimes, despite our best efforts, occasionally things can go wrong and if they do we want to put it right, as soon as we can, to our customers' satisfaction.

If you do need to tell us something has gone wrong, you can do so by using our online form

[https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20003/your\\_council\\_your\\_city/183/comment\\_on\\_a\\_council\\_service](https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20003/your_council_your_city/183/comment_on_a_council_service) . In the same way, if you think we have done a great job, we would like to know as well so we can pass this onto the people who have delivered the service. All this feedback helps our services to improve as we learn from these compliments and complaints.

### Housing Ombudsman Service

Complaints about the council as your landlord will be considered by the Housing Ombudsman Service as a final stage of the complaints process, although you can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service for advice at any time.

If you are a council tenant or leaseholder, you can complain about a council service using the council's own complaints procedure. This has two stages; stage 1 and if you are not happy with the outcome, a further review at stage 2.

If, after stage 2 of the complaint's procedure, you are not happy with the outcome then you may choose to request a review by a 'designated person'. This would be either a MP, councillor or recognised tenant panel (made up of representatives of the council's Tenants' Voice). Please get in touch with the customer feedback team if you want to contact the tenants' panel on [customer.feedback@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:customer.feedback@stoke.gov.uk). The final stage if you are still not happy with the outcome of this review, would be to contact the Housing Ombudsman.

More information about the council's complaints procedure, the online form and how to contact the Housing Ombudsman can be found here [https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20049/council\\_tenants/184/complain\\_about\\_a\\_housing\\_issue](https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20049/council_tenants/184/complain_about_a_housing_issue)

### Complaints and feedback during 2021/22

#### Stage 2 complaints:

Housing – 25 (3 were either upheld or partially upheld)  
Unitas - 23 (15 were either upheld or partially upheld)

4 complaints went to the Local Government  
Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman, of which 1  
was upheld

There were 161 complaints made about the Housing Service in 2021/22. The main area for complaints were missed appointments. From these, 29% of complaints were either partially upheld or upheld.

The main area for complaints about Unitas appointments was around an outstanding repair. Of the complaints made about Unitas' services, 1,219 progressed to stage 1. We resolved 98% of these complaints, with 725 either being partially upheld or upheld.

### Comments and Compliments

We want to hear from you if you have a comment about a service where you have had a good experience or if you have any suggestions on how it can be improved. This isn't where you are dissatisfied, as this would be dealt with as a complaint.

- 36 comments were received by Housing and Communities Services in 2021/22.
- Housing and Communities Services had 467 compliments
- Unitas had 112 compliments

## Improving tenant communications and developing our digital services

### Contact Centre – in 2021/22

During 2021/22 the Contact Centre handled 317,135 calls (compared to 489,476 calls in 2020/21). Repairs was the most popular service, compared to revenues, in 2020/21. We launched the [Repairs online | MyStoke online account | Stoke-on-Trent](#) which allows customers to report repairs online and select an appointment date and time that is convenient for them. The portal is accessible 24/7 and means that customers don't have to call our contact centre.

### The Housing online portal

The Housing online portal was launched in January 2020 and in 2021/22 there were 1,496 Housing online accounts (In 2020/21 there were 785).

The Housing portal provides tenants with quick and easy access to

- View your rent account
- Download a rent statement
- Make a rent payment
- Set up a Direct Debit
- View payment schedules

Visit [www.stoke.gov.uk/myaccount](http://www.stoke.gov.uk/myaccount) . You can use the MyStoke App or a web browser to access your account.

### E-gov emails and text messaging

You can sign up for email newsletters and alerts [Stoke-on-Trent City Council \(govdelivery.com\)](http://Stoke-on-Trent City Council (govdelivery.com)) and select the subjects you prefer to hear about. These range from general council news, tenants' newsletters, adult learning and events. At the end of March 2020, there were 4,322 people signed up to the tenants' newsletter. The council news bulletin has around 6,181 subscribers.

We have introduced WhatsApp messaging as a further means of contacting tenants. We also contact our leaseholders by text if we have a mobile contact number, to let them know about consultation opportunities on policies that affect them and when service charge bills are ready. It is important to let us have your latest contact details to have full use of this service.

## Our Website

Our website has lots of useful information as well as various on-line forms, making getting in touch more convenient and easier. In 2021/22, we had 306,551 transactions on the website, which was 35.3% of all contacts. The most popular overall service was 'apply for a council house' whereas the previous year it was 'payments'. Other popular views were Housing and Neighbourhoods, Housing Repair, Housing benefits and Housing Payments.

- 84,339 MyStoke accounts (at Feb 22), compared to 63,085 in 2020/21
- 18,737 (2021/22) views on the Housing Services council website pages, representing 2.77% of the total number of views to all council webpages



## Engaging with our Customers – Speaking up and being heard

### Launch of the Housing Customer Engagement Strategy December 2021

The strategy is aimed at shaping the sharing of ideas and information between the city council and its tenants, leaseholders and their neighbours who are served by the council's housing team.

The Housing Customer Engagement Strategy sets out how we will engage with housing services customers in an easy and convenient way and gives customers the opportunity to influence policies and strategies and give them an important voice in how the council runs and manages their homes and the environment in which they live.

The consultation ran for six weeks until September 2021, customer's views were taken on board and the final strategy was published at the end of 2021. [Housing Customer Engagement Strategy 2021 | Stoke-on-Trent](#)

We changed the way our teams are organised in January 2022, to support the delivery of tenant involvement and empowerment by creating a Tenant Relations Team. Looking for new and better ways to involve residents and give them more opportunities to speak up and be listened to is a requirement of the standards set out by the Regulator of Social Housing. We are developing Customer Assurance Panels and scrutiny arrangements, working with individual tenants and leaseholders to get involved in a way that is flexible and suits them. This could be through a menu of options such as surveys, mystery shopping, working groups, and scrutiny arrangements and ensure tenant involvement principles are embedded within Housing Management services in accordance with the Social Housing White Paper and the approved Housing Customer Engagement Strategy.

### Staff training

During January to March, our Tenant Relations Team and Housing Management Team all undertook training in customer services with a focus on customer satisfaction, better ways to communicate with our customer and improving customer service, in readiness to launch the new ways of interacting with our tenants and leaseholders, through proactive calls and engagement.

### Tenant training

To equip our engaged tenants to take part in the proposed engagement activities set out in the Housing Customer Engagement Strategy 2021, the Housing Management team has sought a provider to conduct a tenant training programme over a two-year period. This will cover a range of personal development skills such as working together and respecting differences, how to question and challenge in a constructive way, how to reflect and evaluate, as an example. The programme is designed to cover three themes; Theme 1 - Working Together Equality and Diversity and respecting others; Theme 2 – Scrutiny work – the journey from scrutiny (challenge and questioning skills) and report writing findings, and Theme 3 - Understanding Performance Information and how housing finance works.

It is expected that the training proposal would include a mix of training delivery methods to include both virtual and face to face. Contact us on 01782 235105 or [housing.engagement@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:housing.engagement@stoke.gov.uk) if this is something that would interest you in taking part.

## Contacting you

We have developed a more proactive service based on the welfare calls that the team made during the Pandemic. We will aim to contact all tenants on an annual basis to measure tenant satisfaction and to offer engagement opportunities. We will measure tenant satisfaction through these calls and build in processes to tackle dissatisfaction through service improvements both on individual issues and also through the opportunity to be generally involved in improving services through scrutiny panels.

48.5% of customers were satisfied with the ASB service
96% of customers were satisfied with the Income Advice service
74.4% of customers were satisfied with the new tenant service

We are currently making telephone calls to all tenants and leaseholders to update contact and household details, provide information for example about tenant content insurance, promote fire safety awareness and give the opportunity to feedback on Housing services. The newly created Tenant Relations team will work with tenants and leaseholders on a daily basis. We always ask you at the start of the call if its convenient to talk, as the average call time was 21 minutes. Participation has been positive with only 6% of customers declining to take part.

Since April 2021 to March 2022, we have made 1,761 calls. If you are concerned that the call is not genuine you can call Stoke on Trent City Council directly on 01782 237998.

## Giving your feedback

The customer satisfaction questions as part of the pro-active calls gives us exceptionally good rates of feedback from our customers. We also ask you to tell us how we've done if we provided you a service relating to ASB, Income Advice or if you are a new tenant. On these occasions, we will send you a text with a link to a survey, when the case has been closed, or in the case of new tenants a telephone survey is conducted.

Since April 2021, 84.96% of people responded either that they were fairly satisfied or very satisfied to the questions asked during the pro-active call. This was around for example the quality of their home, that their rent was value for money.

## Customer Scrutiny

During the pro-active calls, we have asked you if you are interested in participating and engaging with the council. We will be organising focus and scrutiny groups where we ask you to work with us to look in more detail at our services, such as repairs and fire safety. If you would like to get involved please get in touch 01782 235105 or [housing.engagement@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:housing.engagement@stoke.gov.uk)

## Consultation opportunities during 2021-22

During 2021/22 there were several opportunities for people to provide views and opinions on a number of new strategies and policies. At the first draft stage, we will let you know when the opportunity to give your views becomes available, either by contacting you directly (if we have your up-to-date information), advertising on social media or sending an information alert via an email.

Consultation closed in January, 2022, for the following:

- **Housing Revenue Account Asset Management Strategy 2022**- sets out our approach to asset management in terms of maintaining and investing in the council's housing stock to a high standard, and meeting legislative requirements.
- **Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2022**– a refreshed plan setting out our ambitions for the next 30 years, underpinned by the regulatory change through the Building Safety Bill, Fire Safety Act and the Social Housing White Paper 2020.
  - **Housing Strategy 2022 - 2027**

The final versions have been presented to Cabinet in April 2022.

## Planned consultation opportunities for 2022-23

During 2022-23 we plan to ask your views on the following:

- **Tower Block options**

The consultation considers the future options for ten council tower blocks in Burslem, Hanley, Stoke and Blurton. The tower blocks are under review because they have deteriorated due to their age and design, and now need major works to bring them up to standard. A considerable number of households live in the tower blocks and we need to now consider what should be done and want to hear residents' views.

Consultation closed at the end of September 2022 and the feedback is being analysed. The consultation findings will be presented over the winter, with a detailed plan proposal on how to proceed, to Cabinet in early 2023. More information can be found here

[https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20003/your\\_council\\_your\\_city/536/tower\\_blocks\\_consultation/2](https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20003/your_council_your_city/536/tower_blocks_consultation/2)

- Older Person's Housing Strategy
- Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- Void Management Policy

We will let you know when these opportunities are available – please look out for any messages from our social media or e-gov emails.

## Our responsibilities as a Local Authority

### Our commitment to tackling climate change

#### Energy efficient improvements to your homes

The council has delivered a range of improvements in order to improve the energy efficiency of your homes. These include

- The energy efficiency refurbishment of 52 bungalows including triple glazing.



- Loft Installation programme (491 properties)
- External Wall Insulations (277 properties)
- Composite front door programme (617)
- Composite rear doors fitted (565)
- 'A' rated gas boiler programme with heating controls and programmers (1,042 systems fitted) The systems that have been installed are A rated boilers which are over 92% energy efficient.
- Electric Boiler programme in High-rise Flats (2 systems fitted)

#### Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund project

The Government has established the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to upgrade social housing currently falling below Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C up to that standard, delivering warm, energy-efficient homes, reducing carbon emissions and fuel bills, tackling fuel poverty, and supporting green jobs. Resources of up to £3.8 billion over 10 years will be made available to local authorities and housing associations that submit successful bids to improve the energy performance of social rented homes, on the pathway to Net Zero by 2050.

The council has submitted a bid for this grant funding to support the installation of external wall insulation (EWI) to a number of Crosswall type houses, selected for this application due to their very poor energy performance. The key benefits of these works are reducing energy consumption, reducing health issues due to poorly heated and damp homes and reducing carbon emissions. The

council will match fund further improvement works to these properties to include other works beyond the EWI measures including, for example, loft insulation. The project will begin in April 2022.

### Unitas Fleet

During 2021/22 Unitas added 14 Hybrid cars to their fleet and are looking to invest in a further 4 more next year. To make them stand out from the rest of our fleet the vehicles have been wrapped by a local company Graphix with a 100% recyclable material.

The current vans have a CO2 rating of 197g/km and the cars have a CO2 rating of 92g/km. Therefore, there is a saving of 105g/km when operating a Hybrid Car, compared to a van, this is due to their ability to part-operate in electric-only mode.



### Partnership Working

The council worked really closely with organisations such as the foodbank, the Hubb Foundation, Brighter Futures, Concrete and community volunteers to set up and deliver the Stoke-on-Trent Together website. [Home - #StokeOnTrentTogether \(vast.org.uk\)](https://vast.org.uk)

Stoke-on-Trent Together is a partnership between Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Voluntary Sector Organisations and Volunteers Across Stoke-on-Trent (VAST) working to support our local communities. Originally established to co-ordinate the response to COVID-19 locally, to ensure that everyone who needed help could receive it, the partnership went from strength to strength and has now evolved into a way of working together to best support and empower communities for the long term.

If you need information or support as an individual, community group or voluntary organisation, or if you want to find out how you can get involved in your local community contact VAST | Tel: 01782 683030 | [info@vast.org.uk](mailto:info@vast.org.uk)

### Local Working

Locally focussed Housing Officers work in partnership with colleagues in Adults and Children's services, police and health.

The Local housing teams are now aligned to the four geographical areas that are currently being used by Adult Social Care. Four Housing Team Managers manage the localities across the city. The north and south geographical areas are also aligned with Staffordshire Police boundaries. The newly formed teams are working closer with colleagues in Adult Care, Children's Services, the police and we are optimistic this will expand to health providers to enable us to deal with complex cases in a shared locality. Within the locality team the Housing Officers deal with tenancy matters, supporting colleagues in other teams and carry out home visits for fire safety tenancy audits and where issues have been identified from the telephone call contact made by the Tenant Relations Team. The aim is to increase and improve tenant satisfaction and engagement.

Local Housing Officers continue to carry out tenancy audit home visits over a four-year programme and as and when required. Fire Safety tenancy audits in low, medium and high-rise blocks of flats with communal areas, will remain as annual home visits by the Locality Housing Officers.

The top three issues picked up were repair issues, where people required support (either direct from the housing officer or by relevant referral to appropriate agencies and poor condition of property, issues relating to garden breaches, ASB issues, tenant Improvement works (either unauthorised or new applications) and rent arrears.

### Community Investment Fund

Communities across Stoke-on-Trent are being given the chance to apply for a share of £1.2m in the latest wave of a hugely successful Community Investment Fund.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council is making grants of up to £50,000 available to help groups with on-going projects, help to get new activities off the ground or help communities to become more resilient against the risks of the coronavirus.

Applications opened in October 2021 until January 2022, and priority will be given to projects that:

- Transform outcomes for children and young people in the city
- Improve education and skill levels for residents of all ages
- Protect and improve mental and physical health and wellbeing
- Work with residents and partners to make our communities safer, cleaner and healthier
- Celebrate and promote Stoke-on-Trent as a destination for business, heritage and culture.

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1,023 New Tenancy visits completed</li><li>• 1,784 Tenancy Audit visits completed</li></ul> |
|---|

## Neighbourhood Environmental Improvement Scheme

Every year, the Tenant Board (Tenants' Voice) members have a small budget to spend on environmental works around the city. Last year this budget was £50,000.

Anyone can apply to the budget - Residents Associations, Councillors, partner agencies or community groups. The project has to be on land which is owned by the council's housing department, and has to be of benefit to more than one resident.

Schemes can be used to address a variety of issues, such as paving, fencing and security, or trip rails to help prevent anti-social behaviour.

If you would like to find out more or suggest a possible scheme, please contact the Housing Team on 01782 235105 or email [housing.engagement@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:housing.engagement@stoke.gov.uk).

This year, the following improvements were made using funds from this budget:



Before

After

Staveley Close / Hyndley Place Garage site - where an existing wall was rebuilt to make safe at a cost of £4,264.17

Southampton Close – where conifers were removed and replaced with fencing at a cost of £9,223.73

Colclough Road, Meir – twelve old trees were removed that were causing issues with roadways and properties and replant 24 elsewhere on the estate, costing £14k

### Environmental improvements

The improved locality focussed estate management service now has two Senior Estate Officers in post who work on a day to day basis with the Estate Officer team out on site. This helps us to provide a more focussed and structured service which also includes more small-scale project work. The 17 Estate Officers work in the local areas across the North and South of the City. They are able to respond quickly to environmental issues and to remove graffiti, discarded drug paraphernalia, litter and fly tipping. One off garden cuts are also carried out for tenants who have vulnerabilities.

### Good quality homes and neighbourhoods

#### Disabled adaptations

Our Housing Assistance and Adaptations Team provide equipment and adaptations to disabled customers living in our council-owned homes. A referral may be made to our team, if an Occupational Therapist assess you to understand what help you need to live safely and more independently in your home. Upon their recommendations, we may install a range of adaptations, for example, a stair lift, ramps, a level-access shower, level threshold doors and property extensions, rise and fall baths, door widening, and through floor lifts.

This year, we have worked with Approach Dementia Support, a charity that supports those affected by dementia, to understand the specific needs and requirements so that we can provide a bathroom specification that is dementia friendly. This includes installing contrasting colours in bathrooms, for example, darker wall tiles and lighter flooring. All level access shower installations delivered by the Housing Assistance and Adaptations Team (HAAT) are all dementia friendly regardless of whether the client has a cognitive impairment.

During 2021/22 there were

- 138 cases completed
- 225 referrals from our Social Care Occupational Therapists Team.
- a total of £1,040,000 invested in providing equipment and adaptations in council homes.



## Independent Living

Sheltered housing, or supported accommodation, is for people usually over the age of 55, who want to live independently in their own apartment or bungalow but also want to have support available to them as and when they need it. The sheltered schemes are designed to be age friendly allowing people to stay in their home safely and independently for as long as possible as they get older, supported through their changing needs.

Some common features within our sheltered housing schemes include:

- help from a scheme manager who is on site Mon-Fri.
- 24-hour emergency help through an alarm system linked to lifeline.
- communal areas, such as gardens, lounges, dining areas and laundry facilities.
- social activities for residents.
- CCTV and door entry system with progressive security within the schemes.
- Intelligent fire detection systems with sprinkler systems throughout.

The council is continuing with its phased programme of investment to modernise the council's sheltered housing offer. During 2021-2022 we continued to relocate residents from schemes that were losing to new accommodation of their choice.

## Current Schemes and Programme

Remodelled Scheme - Wooldridge Court, Smallthorne 27 apartments and 3 bungalows



## New Schemes

QEII Court, Fenton – 57 Apartments Fully let during 2021

Rialto court, Fenton – 65 apartments – Due to Open Autumn 2022



New Scheme - Heathfield site, Chell Heath – 113 apartments, under construction due for completion 2024.



Newhouse Court, Abbey Hulton – due to close Autumn 2022

Union Court, Hanley - due to close Autumn 2022

Lady Bennett Court, Longton - due to close Autumn 2022

For more information contact the Sheltered housing team

Telephone: 01782 235675

Email: [sheltered.housingteam@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:sheltered.housingteam@stoke.gov.uk)

## Providing more affordable housing

In 2021/22, building on the success of our newly completed supported accommodation at QE11 in Fenton, we have successfully completed 135 properties on the former workshop for the Blind in Fenton, which has been empty since 2013.

Rialto Court, an apartment block of 65 homes of supported accommodation for older people will be ready in Autumn 2022, as well as 28 two and three-bedroom family homes at the entrance to the site.

Work is progressing on the second site which previously contained the council's local centre and car park that hosts the weekly Fenton outdoor market. A new public car park will be provided in this area, which will host the traders on market day. Two apartment blocks providing 42 new general needs affordable homes with private parking are also to be built on the site. They have been designed so people on City Road would still be able to see through to the market and the cenotaph in Albert Square. The blocks and road name will all have relevance to the local area's history and are due to be completed in 2022.

Beardmore Court - a total of 24 apartments comprising of 23 one-bedroomed flats and 1 two-bedroomed apartment

Sutherland Court – a total of 18 apartments comprising of 17 one-bedroomed flats and 1 two-bedroomed apartment



Construction has started on affordable housing to be acquired by the council at Biddulph Road (39 units) and Newport Lane, Burslem (a range of houses and apartments). These are expected to be ready 2022/23.

## Movement Incentive Scheme

If you live in a 3 or 4 bedroomed council house and have at least 2 spare bedrooms, we can help you to move to a smaller property including giving you a £1,000 cash payment (deducting any rent arrears) and practical assistance with moving, such as:

- A dedicated officer to support you through the process and settling in period
- Support with disconnection and re-connections of utility supplies
- Redirect mail for a period of three months and help filling out change of address forms
- Assistance with packing of personal belongings and delivery to new property
- Removal and disposal of any unwanted items
- Handyman type service

For more information, please call 01782 233696 or email [homelesssupportteam@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:homelesssupportteam@stoke.gov.uk) Supported Housing

## Mutual exchanges

A mutual exchange is a home swap between two social housing tenants. It can happen for many reasons, such as needing more (or less) space, moving for work or to be closer to family. It's a great option for social housing tenants who can't access or don't want to wait for the normal allocation process. [HomeSwapper](#) is a free service which is available on-line can help you to swap your council with other social tenants.

You will need to be a social housing tenant with a secure or assured tenancy to have the right to a mutual exchange. If you have a starter tenancy or a demotion order you probably won't be allowed to swap. If you're not sure, it's always a good idea to get in touch with your landlord to find out what type of tenancy you have and if you're allowed to swap, before you start looking. It's important to remember that you won't be able to swap with a private housing tenant – both homes need to be social housing properties.

You can swap homes with any other council or housing association tenant that lives anywhere in the UK, so your swap doesn't have to be in the area managed by Stoke-on-Trent City Council. HomeSwapper will help you search for possible swaps, get in touch with other tenants and arrange viewings until you find the perfect new home.

HomeSwapper has over 200,000 homes listed with 1000's more added each week. It's an easy-to-use service, with a free app to download and lots of help and support.

In 2021/22 the council let 101 homes through mutual exchanges, including 12 tenants moving from outside the area.

## Your right to buy your home

If you are a council tenant you may have the right to buy your home at a discount. You will need to hold a secure tenancy and have been a council tenant for at least three years. If you have been a council tenant or tenant of a social landlord before, in another property, we will also take this into account. Your property is valued at the market value based on the date of your application. A discount will be applied depending on the length of your tenancy.

We recommend you take independent legal advice and [read the information on GOV.UK](#) You must also make sure you have the money needed to buy and maintain the property.

## Investing in our team

### Housing Management

#### - Graduate programme

In September 2021 we welcomed a graduate to our Housing Management team as part of the National Graduate Development Programme. They are undertaking projects across our different teams, having already spent time with the Tenant Relations team and now moved on to the Rental Income team. As someone who is new to housing they have been able to provide a fresh take on how we run our services and come up with people-focused ideas that encourage tenant involvement, as well as ensuring our communications are clear and minimise jargon.

#### - Tenancy management

Housing Management have supported the apprenticeship programme with a number of staff completing their Chartered Institute of Housing apprenticeships and have recently recruited a graduate in Housing Management.

A manager in the team is also currently doing a Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship through Staffs University.

Within Housing Management, we now have a permanent apprentice role and in the last 2 years three apprentices have been appointed to permanent roles within the housing management team.

## Awards

In August we were awarded an accreditation under the Housing Quality Network's Accredit MIST (Maximising Income; Sustaining Tenancies) scheme. HQN Accredit: MIST has been designed to recognise and reward those organisations which maximise their own and their customers' income; reflecting the broad range of activities that social landlords deliver beyond rent collection itself, such as supporting new and existing customers to build and maintain successful tenancies, providing money advice and help with benefits, training and skills development and income maximisation work.

The accreditation panel said: "It was great to see a strong bid for accreditation from a large local authority who have a track record of positive performance and a clear and sustained focus on supporting customers at all stages of their tenancy."

"Stoke ticks a lot of boxes in terms of an offer of support to residents including budgeting, benefits advice, help with building skills and knowledge, fuel poverty, furniture, digital inclusion, etc."

"We were particularly impressed with the initiatives to address isolation and exclusion which demonstrated some great joint-working in an area that is easily over-looked."



## Looking Ahead

The Regulator of Social Housing is a government organisation that checks that social housing landlords are working properly. We want to take the next year ahead to prepare for the new requirements to report key tenant satisfaction measures (TSM) that have been proposed by the Regulator of Social Housing. The regulator has consulted with landlords, tenants and other stakeholders to put together the key measures so that it is easier for tenants to interpret and compare the performance of different landlords. The new TSM will create a valuable tool allowing tenants to scrutinise their landlord's performance, giving insights to landlords on where they might look to improve their services, and providing a source of intelligence to the Regulator on whether landlords are meeting the regulatory standards. The Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard will come into effect on 1 April 2023.

To support this work, we want to offer lots of ways to get involved that are flexible and suit you in terms of how much time you have or in the ways you can get involved, as we implement the new Housing Customer Engagement Strategy.

## Key Projects

We are looking for your input and views on services we provide such as fire safety and the repairs service, in the form of scrutiny groups and through feedback surveys.

We are looking for volunteer block inspectors to help us improve the communal areas by working with officers to inspect the block, to engage with other residents to help raise awareness of any issues and to book repairs required to the communal areas.

## Stronger Together through Winter campaign unites services across the city in helping those in most need

A major campaign to support residents across the city through the cost of living crisis and winter months has launched with the support of a number of public services, community and voluntary sector groups.

The Stronger Together through Winter campaign has brought services together to offer targeted support that will:

- Use £2m of government funding through the Household Support Fund to help people with energy and utility costs; provide emergency food and the means for residents to access slow cookers, recipes, affordable food and electrical appliances.
- Provide welcoming spaces in community settings during the colder months.
- Provide a single point of information on a wide range of individual support, financial support, mental health support and wider community activities via <https://sottogether.vast.org.uk/>

The council is administering £2m in household support fund money from the Department for Work and Pensions, and this funding will see:

- £1,310,000 to be used to help charities provide slow cookers, flasks, toasters and other small electrical appliances; supply affordable food; and vouchers for free school meals during the two-week December holidays.
- £555,500 to be distributed mainly to local charities to issue fuel vouchers, support vulnerable households and to help people with additional financial support for water costs.
- £100,000 to be used by charities to provide essential white goods to households in financial hardship; personal care and household cleaning essentials; and discretionary housing and essential transport costs.