



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Stoke-on-Trent City Council
**TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER
ANNUAL REPORT
2022/23**



Welcome

Councillor Chris Robinson, Cabinet Member for Housing

Annual Tenants Report – Foreword from Cllr Robinson (2022/23)

As the new Portfolio Holder for Housing I am pleased to be able to present the Annual Report for Tenants and Leaseholders for 2022/23, including a comparison to previous year's performance. Since starting the role in May of this year and through speaking to tenants out on the estates and with the newly formed Tenant Voice group it is clear that the priorities are to improve the repairs service and how we tackle anti-social behaviour, both of which will be subject to tenant scrutiny as we move forward to improve and provide the standard of service you deserve.

I am extremely pleased with the progress we are making with our engagement plans and the Tenant relations team have now successfully engaged with an enormous number of tenants and residents who want to assist us in working together to ensure we have safe and well managed homes with excellent services and support for those who need it the most. I meet with the Tenant Voice and senior managers on a regular basis and I can see the great work that the tenants are doing through the Repairs group, ASB group, Block Inspector & Fire Safety Group, Neighbourhood Environmental Improvement Scheme group, Policy Group and Mystery Shopping. If you want to get involved please get in touch with the tenant relations team.

As a relatively new Cabinet Member for Housing alongside fellow cabinet members we have started at a time when many people are struggling as a result of high energy prices, rising inflation and cost of living pressures. Indeed, we had a Cost of Living Summit back in June 2023 where we worked with partners to focus on three key areas; Food, Money and Energy. We want to support residents to claim any benefits that they are entitled to, promote energy efficiency and support measures and schemes provided by energy companies & government and to explore realistic longer-term initiatives around food poverty. 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 £1.7m in additional support in the last 12 months, which is £4.2m over the last 3 years. This is money that is going straight into people's pockets.

We are on a mission to ensure all our council homes are comfortable, warm and in good condition for our residents. I'm pleased that over the next five years, we're investing more than £117 million into our housing stock as part of our ongoing commitment to raise housing standards in the city. Through the HRA five-year capital investment programme, around 14,500 council-owned properties will benefit from improvement works between now and 2028. The works will range from the installation of new kitchens and bathrooms where required, central heating, insulation and improvements to landscaping, parking areas, external windows and doors and roof repairs.

In terms of our efforts with ensuring we provide safe homes we have been installing carbon monoxide monitors to all our homes and ensuring we comply with the legislation for fire safety. We have also reviewed and updated all of our processes and procedures in relation to Damp and Mould complaints including the development of a stand-alone Damp and Mould plan which aims to find and fix all incidences of damp and mould through adopting a 'zero tolerance' approach. We also have a damp and mould policy which adopts updated guidance on reporting and treating

damp and mould and updated our overall Repairs and Maintenance Policy and Voids Policy. These policies have been designed with residents in mind, to ensure works are delivered efficiently and effectively including the making and keeping of appointments and an improved lettable standard. We completed a review of overall complaint handling across all service areas including Unitas, our repairs and maintenance service provider, incorporating improved monitoring and oversight arrangements so that we are focussed on resolving issues for customers at the earliest opportunity. We have improved arrangements for initial contact and further communication with customers, standardised letter templates and also ensured that all complaints are responded to in writing and delivered ongoing training across the workforce, highlighting the potential health impacts of Damp and Mould on vulnerable customers and across our complaints handling procedures incorporating the need for accurate and timely record-keeping and complying with the Housing Ombudsman handling code and remedies guidance.

In terms of the quality of new housing accommodation for older people I was delighted to visit QE11 and Rialto Court in Fenton within the first few weeks of taking on this role, they really are fantastic buildings for people to live independently but with the knowledge that support is available when required. The next project at Chatterley Court in Chell Heath is coming along well in readiness to open in Summer 2024.

I hope you will see that in the first few months of my new role as part of a new administration we have genuinely focussed on improving the quality of housing services to tenants. This will remain the focus throughout my time as the cabinet member responsible for housing, I am determined that we will continue to build on our progress and achieve this through even closer working and engagement with tenants and leaseholders in the way we improve and deliver services.

Comments from our engaged tenants and leaseholders

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 'Editorial Panel' and new members are welcome.

They felt happy with the draft, content and graphics and commented that a boulder print would be beneficial to people who are visually impaired. The Pie charts make it easier to read and regarding accessibility, the council should do a press release so that our local press and radio can do articles on the publication of the report, including where to access the information.

Our homes

As at 31st March 2023, we manage 17,358 homes which are made up of the following types of property and average rents:

2022-23 Property Type	No. of General Needs (Social Rent)	Average General Needs (Social) Rent per week over 48 weeks	No. of Supported Housing Social Rent	Average Supported (Social) Rent per week over 48 weeks	No. of Affordable Rent	Average (Affordable) Rent per week over 48 weeks
Bungalow	3,614	£72.20	3	£92.86	2	£140.92
1 bed	3,305	£71.14	3	£92.86	1	£135.37
2 bed	298	£83.09			1	£146.46
3 bed	11	£94.59				
Flat	2,653	£74.33	149	£110.30	20	£96.64
Bedsit	52	£62.53				
1 bed	685	£71.30	77	£104.78	20	£96.64
2 bed	1,911	£75.71	72	£116.21		
3 bed	5	£85.21				
House	10,848	£86.00			69	£131.58
1 bed	8	£78.86			10	£93.22
2 bed	4,701	£82.25			8	£111.96
3 bed	5,991	£88.65			42	£136.77
4 bed	137	£97.22			9	£167.39
5 bed	2	£101.94				
6 bed	9	£113.24				
Grand Total	17,115	£81.28	152	£109.96	91	£124.10

We also have 427 leaseholder properties and 47 properties leased to partner agencies.

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 2023, there were 2238 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 2022/23, rent loss from empty properties stood at £950,878.51 compared to £1,044,873 in 2021/22.

In 2022/23, we had 1120 properties become vacant and we re-let a total of 1024 properties in that year. To get them ready to re-let, Unitas, our repairs and maintenance company, spent an average £3,249 per property, including installing 252 new kitchens and 115 new bathrooms. The average re let time during this year was 24 days for properties with standard repairs, a decrease of five days compared to the previous year. Those requiring major works, such as structural repairs and notifiable asbestos removal took an average of 60 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. They can ensure that a tenant is receiving the correct benefits and income. The team helped to identify more than £1.7m in additional income in the last 12 months.

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.

- 2,023 Income Advice Team referrals in 2022/23 (1,563 2021/22).
- £1,703,725 additional income identified since April for tenants in 2022/23 (£1,581,493 for 2021/22).

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.

You can check to see if you are entitled to other benefits using our budget calculator which can be found at www.stoke.entitledto.co.uk

The Income Advice Team can be contacted at incomeadviceteam@stoke.gov.uk or telephone 01782 231564.

We can make referrals to the CAB for debt advice or you can contact the CAB directly on 01782 408625 or email moneyadvice@casns.org.uk.

During 2022, we introduced a Financial Independence Fund. The fund aims to:

Offer creative solutions to Council tenants who are in financial difficulty, facing a financial crisis or in need of short-term assistance to successfully sustain their tenancy and accommodation.

Any award would be part of an overall package of support delivered by the Income Advice Team and the Council's partners to maximise a tenant's income, provide debt advice and budgeting guidance, enabling a tenant to achieve financial independence.

Rents and service charges

Collecting rent and service charges from tenants

- £2,052,087 current rent arrears as at March 2023 (£1,907,336 in March 2022). This is an increase of £139.5k in comparison to 2022 and includes a growing number of Universal Credit claimants having their rent paid in arrears.
- Arrears are 2.98% of the annual rent debit as at March 2023 (2.87% as at March 2022).
- As at March 2023 93.66% of all tenants had either a clear account or owe less than £500 (94.29% as of March 2022)
- As at March 2023 there were 5,350 direct debit rent payers. 39.02% of payments are by direct debit (35.62% as at March 2022).

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. 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.

Our rents team are here to support tenants who are struggling with making rent payments. Please don't delay in speaking to your rents Housing Officer. We can speak to you by telephone, in person, email, text message and do use WhatsApp messaging as a further means of contacting you.

Rent portal

Link to my account registration page: <https://your.stoke.gov.uk/q/register> Link to housing online login

page: https://housingonline.stoke.gov.uk/ords/houlive_selfserv/f?p=13000:101

Link to Youtube video for further support:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1ngUDHaJxQ>

- 39 evictions carried out, due to rent arrears (25 in 2021/22 an eviction ban due to COVID-19 ended in June 2021)
- 157 cases entered to court (108 in 2021/22)
- 1,596 Notices seeking possession (1,498 in 2021/22)

Formal Action

All enforcement action is undertaken with an overarching fairness approach. We support tenants to pay their rent and sustain their tenancies and take enforcement action against those tenants who wilfully go into 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.

Safe, secure and healthy homes

Damp, Mould and Condensation

In 2022/2023 we have amended our processes to ensure that our approach to concerns of Damp and Mould remain appropriate and proportionate. Tenants can now inform us directly of concerns of Damp and Mould in their home without requesting a repair in the usual formats. Using our new, online Damp and Mould reporting tool ([Report Damp, Mould or Condensation in a Council property | Damp and mould \(stoke.gov.uk\)](#)) tenants can report concerns directly to us, receive an instant reference number and upload pictures where necessary.

We are adopting a 'zero tolerance' approach to Damp, Mould and Condensation, you can go online to find our action plan [Damp, Mould and Condensation | Damp, Mould and Condensation | Stoke-on-Trent](#)

We recognise that Damp, Mould and Condensation can have a detrimental impact of people's lives and we have created information for tenants advising them on how to prevent issues from occurring.

How to prevent condensation and damp



Condensation dampness is common in houses which are poorly ventilated and insulated, often getting worse in winter. It causes the growth of black spot mould on walls and other cold surfaces such as tiles and sealants around sinks, baths and windows.

What can you do to reduce moisture in your home?



Wipe condensation from your windows using a dry cloth.



When cooking or bathing, keep the door closed and open a window or use an extractor fan.



Keep lids on sauce pans when cooking.



Dry clothes outside where possible. If not, try to avoid using a radiator and use a well-ventilated room such as the bathroom instead. Shut the door and open a window.



Use all tumble dryers in a well-ventilated room and vent outside.



If possible, buy a disposable de-humidifier.



Ventilating your home

This can also help to let moisture in your home escape.

To ventilate your home:

Open a window for 10-20 minutes a day to let damp air out and fresh air in. This new, dry air also costs less to heat.

If your windows have trickle vents, try to keep them open as it ventilates your home without drastically reducing the heat.

Also, try to keep a gap between furniture and external walls so that the air can flow between them.



Heating

Condensation tends to be more common in colder homes. Therefore, it is important to try to keep rooms at a steady temperature.

Support is available if you're struggling with energy bills through our Income Advice Team.

Please contact them at incomeadviceteam@stoke.gov.uk or call **01782 231564**

Penetrating damp and rising damp

Condensation dampness is different to penetrating damp and rising damp.

Penetrating damp occurs when a fault in a building's structure lets water in from the outside, resulting in a wet patch (without any mould growth).

If there is a problem with a home's damp proof course, you might get rising damp, which creates a 'tide mark' on the walls.

How to report Damp, Mould and Condensation.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council and our repairs company Uritas are committed to keeping your home free from damp, mould and condensation. We take all cases seriously, and want to know if there is an issue in your home.

To report a case to us you can fill out our online form by using the QR code below, or via the following link:

<https://www.stoke.gov.uk/xfp/form/1746>



Alternatively, you can call:
01782 234100.

We will investigate the issue and carry out relevant repairs where something in your property is causing or contributing to the damp, mould or condensation

Unitas, the city council's repair and maintenance company, carries out repairs and maintenance for just under 17,650 homes as at March 2023 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 460 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. We are 100% compliant in Gas Safety.

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.

Decent Homes

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 faculties 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 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 \(stoke.gov.uk\)](https://www.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 16 high rise blocks at least twice each week and 60 low rise blocks once a week.
- Unitas have inspected and serviced more than 5,000 fire doors and installed more than 7,000 other fire safety measures, such as compartmentation (fire stopping) smoke doors, automatic-opening vents (AOVs), intumescent seals and collars.

During 2022/23 we continued with our fire safety investment programme to install sprinkler systems in our blocks of apartments. This year we installed systems to two blocks in Fenton. 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

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 20 Working Days.

- £8,600,396 invested in responsive repairs

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.

MyStoke 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.



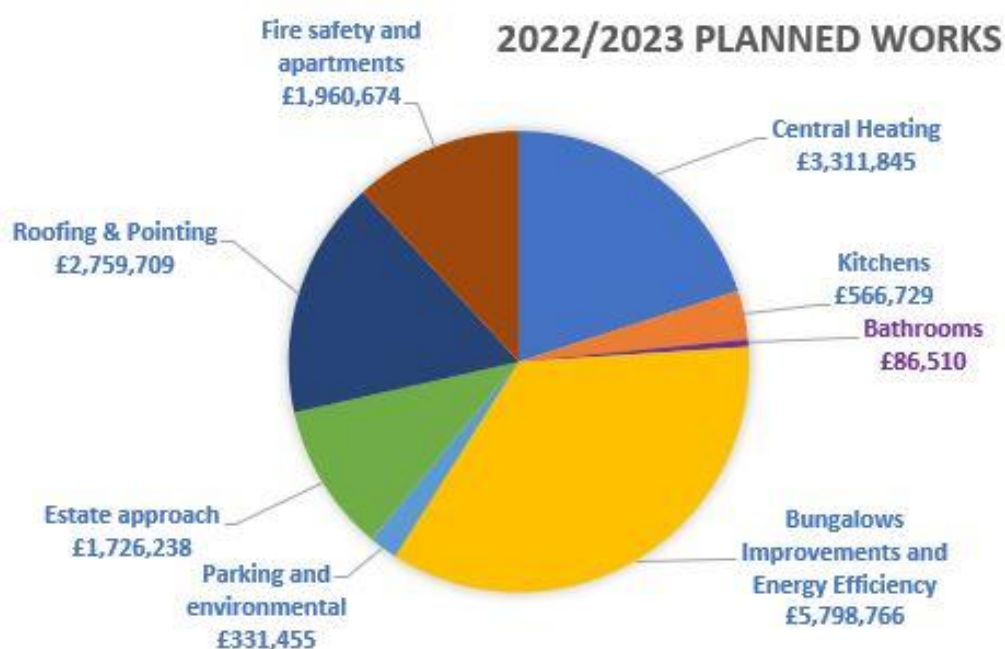
The improvement programmes can vary, from a programme of kitchen replacements or central heating and boiler upgrades, to a full estate scheme of works, which includes new roofs, pointing, front and rear doors as well as kitchens, bathrooms, boilers and smoke alarms. It also includes loft insulation, 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](#).

The 5-year capital investment programme is focussed on decency, damp, disrepair and building safety. Priorities outlined are energy efficiency, tackling the root cause of Damp and Mould and offering wider support for increasing cost of living and high energy prices.



In 2022/2023 we delivered approximately £28.8 million of capital work.



Providing a great customer service

Customer Satisfaction

2022/2023 marked the start of a new regulatory requirement for social housing landlords, introducing the Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard. We must collect and publish our performance to allow scrutiny by tenants. Through our Proactive call service our Tenant Engagement Team ask tenants their views that are used to form the level of satisfaction of tenants and provides opportunities for tenants to

scrutinise our performance and help us to improve services. Where levels of dissatisfaction are identified we will endeavour to investigate and take the appropriate steps to remedy the situation.

As part of the council's service to tenants and leaseholders, we aim to speak to as many tenants as possible to obtain their views, last year we spoke to 4,288 who told us about how satisfied they were with our service and how we operate as a Landlord.

We attempted 11,585 calls and completed 4,288 surveys between April 2022 to March 2023
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We report on 12 Tenant Satisfaction Measures:

1. Overall Satisfaction: 83.25%
2. Satisfaction with Repairs: 60.50%
3. Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair: 64.24%
4. Satisfaction that the home is well maintained: 86.78%
5. Satisfaction that the home is safe: 92.08%
6. Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them: 74.53%
7. Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them: 85.65%
8. Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect: 94.34%
9. Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling complaints: 39.45%
10. Satisfaction that the landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained: 83.33%
11. Satisfaction that the landlord makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods: 77.61%
12. Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB): 53.23%

Our Tenant Engagement Team have worked with Tenants & Leaseholders to investigate into Services and to create plans on how services could be improved. Specific tenant and leaseholder focus groups have been created in regards to;

- Repairs
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Fire Safety
- Block Inspector
- Policy & Procedures / Editorial panel
- Neighbourhood Environmental Improvement Scheme

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](#).

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. 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 and the link to the Ombudsman self-assessment for code of practice can be found here:

https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20049/council_tenants/184/complain_about_a_housing_issue

Complaints and feedback

The main causes of complaints were:

1. Outstanding repairs - 280 (down from 360 in 2021/22)
2. Missed appointments – 185 (down from 264 in 2021/22)
3. Damp related complaints – 176 (up from 96 in 2021/22)

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.

Complaints received:

Stage one:

- 1151 Unitas.
- 250 Council.

Stage two:

- 53 Unitas
- 11 Council

87.5% Responded to within timescale including Unitas (that was 90.0% without Unitas).

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 at the end of March 2023 there were 2,546 Housing online accounts

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 . 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 \(govdelivery.com\)](#) 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.

Calls handed: 305,513

Abandoned %:27%

Average Wait:7 minutes 16 seconds

Top 5 services:

1. Repairs
2. Revenues
3. Payments
4. General Enquiries & Call transfers
5. Housing Solutions

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

DRAFT

Engaging with our Customers – Speaking up and being heard

Housing Customer Engagement Strategy

We launched our Customer Engagement Strategy in 2021. You can find this on our website: [Housing Customer Engagement Strategy 2021 | Stoke-on-Trent](#)

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.

In January 2022, we changed the way our teams are organised 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.

Staff training

Our Tenant Relations Team and Housing Management Team all undertook training in customer services with a focus on customer satisfaction and we will review this training to ensure we look at better ways to communicate with our customer and improving customer service 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 and how to reflect and evaluate.

The training proposal will 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 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

52.33% of customers were satisfied with the ASB service

96.7% of customers were satisfied with the Income Advice service

81.3% of customers were satisfied with the new tenant service

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.

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 and we always ask you at the start of the call if it's convenient to talk

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 Anti-Social Behaviour, Income Advice or if you are a new tenant. On these occasions, we will send you a text with a link to a survey, or in the case of new tenants a telephone survey is conducted.

During 2022-2023, 83.25% 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 or 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. Should you wish to work with us to improve or change our services, such as repairs and fire safety, please contact us. If you would like to get involved please get in touch 01782 235105 or housing.engagement@stoke.gov.uk

Opportunities to give your views

We want to give you opportunity to shape and feedback on the policies and strategies that relate to council tenants and council leaseholders. 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 opportunities in 2022-23

There were several opportunities for people to provide views and opinions on a number of new strategies and policies. As a result of this engagement, the following were approved and adopted by the Council:

- Asset Management Strategy 2022 – 2027
- Housing Strategy 2022-2027

Consultation opportunities in 2023-24

During 2023-24, we plan to ask your views on the following:

- Tower Block Redevelopment Programme

During 2022, the city council began a public consultation exercise to gather views around a range of options on the future of 10 tower blocks located across four sites in Blurton, Burslem, Hanley and Stoke town, which included repair, refurbishment and redevelopment. Feedback provided by residents and leaseholders was considered, and the city council's Cabinet approved to start a redevelopment and investment programme for all 10 tower blocks, to demolish the existing tower blocks over a period of 15 – 20 years, which will enable new, high-quality, modern homes to be built for our residents.

The first phase of work is site 1, in Blurton. The next stage in the programme will be to consult with residents on the design proposals for site 1. Further information may be found on our web page: [Tower Block Redevelopment Programme | Tower Block Redevelopment Programme | Stoke-on-Trent](#)

- Repairs and Maintenance Policy 2023 and Void Management Policy 2023

The Repairs and Maintenance Policy 2023 and the Void Management Policy 2023 have been revised and updated to reflect the latest changes in national legislation. Consultation on these changes took place early in the year, and the final policies were approved by Cabinet in July. The Repairs and Maintenance Policy is designed to ensure that responsive repairs, maintenance and planned improvement works are delivered efficiently and effectively, while the Void Management Policy aims to ensure that a property is properly managed when it becomes vacant.

- Damp and Mould Policy 2023

A new Damp and Mould Policy has been developed to set out how the Council will address and respond to reports of damp and mould in Council properties. This includes any proactive interventions, the approach to diagnosis, actions considered appropriate in different circumstances, effective communication and aftercare.

This policy has now been approved and adopted in October 2023.

[Link to Damp and Mould Policy 2023](#)

- Tenants' Charter and Service Standards

Approved in November 2023, with input from the Tenants' Voice, our Tenants' Charter is founded on a set of core 'Guiding Principles' that underpin the Council's commitment to providing safe, secure, and high-quality housing for all our tenants. These are; responsibility; trust and mutual respect; communication; enabling a tenant voice; a promise to listen and act and to provide a quality home and safe neighbourhood. These principles guide our actions as a service and serve as a framework for our commitment to continued excellence in provision for our tenants.

- Fuel Poverty Strategy 2023

The 2023-2028 Fuel Poverty Strategy sets out the council's commitment to address the root causes of fuel poverty to ensure that everyone can stay

warm and healthy in their homes. Consultation with residents asked for their views as to whether the four objectives put forward were the right ones and gave the opportunity to provide further input into what the Council should look at as a priority to deliver the aims of the strategy. The final version will be presented to Cabinet in December, 2023.

Further reviews are being planned on the following subjects, we will need your feedback to understand what is important to you and help shape how the Council should deliver these services:

- Tenancy and Estate Management Policy
- Building Safety Engagement Strategy
- Domestic Abuse Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Supporting Vulnerable Tenants 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. If any of these areas are of interest to you, please get in touch on 01782 235105 or housing.engagement@stoke.gov.uk.

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 bungalows including triple glazing.

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



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.

Unitas Fleet

During 2021/22 Unitas added 14 Hybrid cars to their fleet and are looking to invest in more. 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

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.

- 1,027 New Tenancy visits completed
- 2,647 Tenancy Audit visits completed

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.

Neighbourhood Environmental Improvement Scheme

Every year, we 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.

Using this budget, the following improvements have been made:



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 a Senior Estate Officer in post who works 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 (HAAT) provide equipment and adaptations to customers living in our council-owned homes. If an Occupational Therapist assesses you and finds that you need adaptations to your home to live safely and more

independently they will send a referral to HAAT who will they design the adaptation works such as; ramping, level access shower, door widening, stairlifts, rise and fall baths, hoisting and through floor lifts and extensions.

The HAAT 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 2022/2023 there were

- 116 homes adapted
- 219 referrals from our Social Care Occupational Therapist Service (SCOTS).
- a total of £1,200,000 invested in providing adaptations to 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. In Autumn 2022 Rialto Court in Fenton was opened and is now fully let. In Summer 2024 we will opened a brand new sheltered housing scheme called Chatterley Court in the Chell Heath area of the city.

Current Schemes and Programme

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



New Schemes

Rialto court, Fenton – 65 apartments – Fully Let



Chatterley Court, Chell Heath – 113 apartments, under construction due for completion 2024.





For more information contact the Sheltered housing team

Telephone: 01782 235675

Email: sheltered.housingteam@stoke.gov.uk

Providing more affordable housing

In 2022/23, building on the success of previous years. We have undertaken a number of projects, designed to increase the offer of accommodation we offer.

Rialto Court based in Jesse Austin Avenue, off City Road, in Fenton is the latest sheltered housing scheme to be developed by Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The £11 million scheme has been built on the former Rialto Pottery site – which operated from 1920 to 1926 – and has been decorated in an art-deco style in homage to the company's popular Rialto Ware, some of which is on display in the complex's reception area. It boasts 65 one and two-bed apartments and communal facilities including a laundry room, kitchen, dining area, residents lounge, community gardens and a scooter storage area.

Construction of a new Sheltered Accommodation site, called Chatterley Court, is underway with an estimated completion time of summer 2024. Once complete, the complex will offer independent living solutions for people aged over 55. It will boast communal areas, dining areas, gardens and additional support features including call alarm systems, walk-in showers, easy access bathrooms and the infrastructure for specialist equipment.

Although the apartments will not be available to let until next year, Stoke-on-Trent City Council is now taking enquiries and is eager to hear from anyone wishing to express an interest in the scheme.

Please contact the Sheltered Housing Team on 01782 235675 or email Sheltered.HousingTeam@stoke.gov.uk.

Work is now completed on a second site in Fenton, previously containing the Council's local centre and car park. Two apartment blocks providing 42 general needs affordable homes with private parking. 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.



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 2023/24.

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 homelessupportteam@stoke.gov.uk

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 home 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 2022/2023 the council let 87 homes through mutual exchanges, including 10 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, the Rental Income team and currently completing time with localities. 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. We have been successful in securing another graduate who will start in September 2023 and we are looking forward to working with them in the future.

- 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 another graduate in Housing Management due to start in September.

A manager in the team is also currently doing a Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship through Staffordshire University, they are in the final year of this qualification. We are undertaking procurement for another 8 new apprenticeships within the Housing Management Team, with an estimated start date of January 2024.

Within Housing Management, we now have a permanent apprentice role and in the last 3 years three apprentices have been appointed to permanent roles within the housing management team.

Awards

Last year we were awarded an accreditation under the Housing Quality Network's Accredited MIST (Maximising Income; Sustaining Tenancies) scheme. HQN Accredited: 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."

Our rental income service was the first landlord to be awarded the Housing Quality Network's new Managing Income: Sustaining Tenancies (MIST) accreditation. In February, HQN completed an 18-month reassessment, finding that:

- As an interim assessment, we find Stoke-on-Trent City Council continues to make good progress against HQN's accreditation standards, with a particularly strong offer of support during the cost-of-living crisis.
- Once again, morale and motivation amongst officers appear to be high. Leadership and direction are clear and the council's values and goals are reflected in customer-facing practice.
- As we have reported in previous assessments, we consider that Stoke-on-Trent City Council's ethos and practical approach has helped to mitigate the impact of potentially damaging external factors, including welfare reform and the Covid-19 pandemic. This gives us a high degree of confidence regarding Stoke-on-Trent City Council's support for residents and sustained performance during the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

We have recently added the HQN network to our existing membership, this also gives us access to a number of free groups/hubs and regularly attend best practice groups and seminars with HQN, HouseMark and Chartered Institute of Housing to support to improve the service we provide.

Looking Ahead

The Regulator of Social Housing is a government organisation that checks that social housing landlords are working properly. We have started to collect data for the new requirements to report key tenant satisfaction measures (TSM) for 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 Anti Social Behaviour 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.

We have also met with the newly appointed Tenant Voice to discuss progress from involved tenant groups, findings and discuss the way forward.

Support through the cost of living crisis

Stoke-on-Trent City Council with the help of a wide range of local partners across the voluntary sector, are distributing support worth £5.3 million on behalf of the Department of Work and Pensions, to support the most vulnerable households across the Stoke-on-Trent area with food, utilities, and other essentials.

The money is our share of the government's Household Support Fund which will run from 1 April 2023 until the 31 March 2024. The fund is available to support both adults (without dependent children) and families with children and will be made available to vulnerable households who need additional financial support.

All details of what support available can be found at <https://sottogether.vast.org.uk> or by telephoning 01782 683030.

Community Lounges

A community lounge provides a place for you to gain local advice and support available to you and your family, including:

- Budgeting skills
- Employment & Training
- Volunteering
- Community Activities
- Mental health & wellbeing support
- Fuel poverty
- Housing
- Benefit Support
- Finding transport
- Carer support
- Independent living

To find a Community Lounge near you visit <https://communities-together.co.uk>.

Welcoming Spaces have been set up to provide a place of connection where people can meet up, socialise and access support relating to the cost of living. Services available at each Welcoming Space will vary but may include:

- Access to support about money, welfare and mental wellbeing community activities
- access to computers, free Wi-Fi and charging points
- heated space

Details of your nearest Welcoming Space can be found at <https://sottogether.vast.org.uk/cost-of-living-welcoming-spaces>

Children and Families

Support will be provided to families where children fall into one of the following categories:

- They receive free school meals
- They have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in place
- Attend a funded two-year-old place or be eligible to attend a funded two-year-old place
- Are eligible to receive EYPP (Early Years Pupil Premium) as part of a funded 3 or 4 year old place.

Food vouchers will be available for these families of £30 during the Easter and Christmas breaks, and £75 during the summer holidays. Further information can be found at www.stoke.gov.uk/foodvouchers

At a Cost of Living Summit leading figures from across communities in Stoke-on-Trent met to agree how to address the cost of living crisis in the city. Around 60 delegates explored and developed partnership-based plans and initiatives to support residents with the cost of living focused around three main issues:

- Money
- Food
- Energy

Councillor Jane Ashworth said: “We are prioritising cost of living and know by addressing this it can be a springboard to longer term wealth building in communities in Stoke-on-Trent. We have ambitions to make Stoke-on-Trent a greener, safer, healthier and genuinely more prosperous city. That means not only changing the narrative, but transforming the actual way that our local economy works for local people.

“Going forward we will be working with partners from across the voluntary sector to coordinate a response to cost of living pressures, harnessing specialist knowledge and expertise and promoting a partnership approach that ensures people and business know what support they can access and how to do so.”

The city council is responsible for allocating the city’s Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to deliver projects which support local businesses, improve local spaces and assist residents with employment and skills. Through this funding the

Staffordshire North & Stoke-on-Trent Citizens Advice Bureaux have been awarded £175,000 to deliver a pilot scheme over two years.

The large-scale benefit and tax credit take up campaign will target those who may not be accessing benefits and tax credits they are entitled to. This will address cost-of-living related hardship by increasing people's incomes, and ensuring take up of cost-of-living support in the targeted areas across the city. A team of trained advisors will work across the city, targeting, initially, those wards with the highest number of claimants and potential claimants.

DRAFT