



Housing NEWS

Sunderland
City Council

Summer 2022



Welcome

This is your first quarterly Housing Newsletter, every edition will be packed with useful information about your home, how to get the most out of our services and how to engage with Sunderland City Council as your landlord.

So, first things first, who are we...?

Sunderland City Council became a registered provider of social housing in October 2019, and we were very proud to let our first home in October 2020.

We are keen to be a supportive and engaging landlord who offers our customers affordable homes, which are safe, secure, attractive and contribute positively to the community where they are located.

We're always here to help and listen to what we could do better for you, as our tenants.

We currently own more than 70 properties and aim to increase this to around 400 by April 2025. Our homes are a mixture of existing empty properties which we transform into new homes, and a range of new build houses, some of which are built specifically to support vulnerable residents to live independently.

Meet the team

Michelle Green and Phil Auton are our Housing Operations Managers. They lead the management of the council's housing stock, making sure that they are high quality houses.



L to R Michelle Green, Andrew Routledge, Phil Auton

Michelle has more than 20 years' experience in social housing and for the past seven years she has been a manager in property maintenance.

Michelle's expertise is focussed on delivering an excellent front line housing management service to tenants.

Phil has more than 12 years' experience of working within the housing sector. He has a vast amount of experience leading operational tenancy management functions such as anti-social behaviour, rent arrears, tenancy sustainment and customer engagement.

Andrew Routledge is our Housing Management Officer with over ten years' experience. He specialises in estate management and income collection. Andrew is customer focussed and is keen to support all our tenants.

Michelle, Phil and Andrew are here to help and support you. They will work closely with you, making sure your voice is heard by taking on board your thoughts and feedback to shape what we offer and what support we provide. Please get in touch if you have any queries, comments or concerns about your home or anything related to it.



Cost of living crisis

If you've been affected by the recent increase in household energy bills, and by the increase in cost of living, then there is help available.

Support and advice about debt, welfare benefits, utilities, housing matters, financial safeguarding and more can be found at www.sunderland.gov.uk/managingyourmoney or by calling the council's Strategic Advice Service on 0191 520 5551

Here are some top tips to help keep your energy usage as low as possible and to help reduce your energy costs:

- Don't overfill your kettle, only heat the amount of water you need in your kettle, this could save you £11 per year

- Close curtains at dusk and tuck them behind the radiators to stop heat leaking out through the windows
- Avoid leaving TVs, computers, and other electrical devices on standby. Switching these items off at the wall socket could save you £55 per year
- Reduce your thermostat by 1 or 2°C if you are still comfortable at this temperature
- Run your washing machine with full loads only, use an eco-setting and reduce your washes by one wash per week for a year. This could save you £28 per year

More information and advice is available at www.sunderland.gov.uk/reducing-energy-costs

Paying your rent

We want to make sure that paying your rent is as easy as possible, so we have provided various options by which you can pay:

- Online using a debit or credit card
- By phone 0191 520 5588 to make a debit or credit card payment 24 hours a day. Please note, it may take three working days for a debit or credit card payment to reach your Council Tax account
- Using online banking you can make your payment to Sunderland City Council, quoting your council tax reference number using the bank details below:
Bank: NatWest
Sort Code: 55-61-11
Bank Account: 46623590
- In person - using the barcode on your bill, pay by cash or debit card at any Post Office branch or at any PayPoint
- By post - cheques to be payable to 'Sunderland City Council'. Send your cheque to: City Hall, Plater Way, Sunderland SR1 3AA. Please write your name, address and council tax reference number on the back of the cheque. We do not accept cheques dated in the future

If you receive Universal Credit and your rent has increased, then you need to let the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) know this so you can receive the correct payment. You can do this online if you have an online Universal Credit claim account - simply log into your account, click on the home tab and report a change.

If you have any problems contacting the DWP and letting them know about the rent changes, or if you are having any problems paying your rent, please call us for support on 0191 520 5551 and ask for the Strategic Advice Service.

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**WE WANT
YOUR FEEDBACK**

Complaints

We want to provide the best services possible and encourage you to get in touch if you feel that the housing services you have received from us are not of the high standard expected. Please contact us by:

Email:

sunderlandhousing@ Sunderland.gov.uk

Phone: 0191 561 2715

Address: Sunderland City Council, Housing Management Service, City Hall, Plater Way, Sunderland SR1 3AA

Or via your local Councillor or Member of Parliament

The Housing Ombudsman operates to oversee complaints about housing providers. You can contact them directly at any time for advice, support, or guidance:

Online form: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint

Phone: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Address: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ



Gas servicing

We want to make sure your home is a safe and comfortable place for you to live.

Once a year we will carry out a gas service on your property. This annual inspection of your gas appliances will be carried out by a qualified gas fitter who is registered by Gas Safe, the regulatory body

in the industry, and it will normally take around an hour to complete. We will contact you before the visit to make sure the appointment is convenient for you.

If you need to rearrange an appointment, please contact our customer service team by calling 0191 520 5551.



Focus on... Anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) affects households in many different ways.

If you are suffering from ASB, or have witnessed any in your local area, please report it:

Online: www.sunderland.gov.uk/report-it

Email:

sunderlandhousing@ Sunderland.gov.uk

Phone: 0191 561 275



Summer safety

Summer is nearly here and many of us will be enjoying time outside. Follow our fire safety guidance to ensure you can enjoy your garden and outdoor space safely:

Fire pits

- Check the weather, don't use fire pits in windy conditions
- Build fire pits in the open without being close to buildings, trees, branches, waste, and any other flammable materials
- Set the fire pit on stone, brick, gravel or on slabs
- Only use seasoned hardwood kindling or logs bought for the purpose
- Allow the fire pit to burn for at least 30 minutes to let smoke from lighting disperse before using it
- Keep a supply of water to hand in case you need to damp down fire
- Children should always be supervised around a fire pit

- Use protective gloves when handling anything on the pit
- Ensure the fire pit has been fully extinguished when finished.

Chimineas

- Avoid placing chiminea on decking, near trees or structures
- Ensure the chiminea has a fire guard, if it doesn't you can make one out of wire mesh
- Ensure chimineas have been properly put out when finished
- Don't use chemicals such as petrol, always use seasoned kindling to create a small fire then add seasoned wood slowly
- Chimineas are only designed for small fires, if flames start to come out of the top or guard of chiminea, it should be extinguished immediately
- Children should always be supervised around a chiminea
- Always use a professional approved manufactured chiminea

Log burners

- Children should always be supervised around a log burner
- Ensure log burners are not placed on decking, near trees, structures and not near any other flammable materials
- Only use seasoned woods, and use kindling to create a small fire
- Keep a supply of water to hand in case you need to damp down fire
- Log burners can particularly be harmful due to the toxic smoke, especially if you have any underlying medical conditions such as COPD or asthma

Please remember that it is illegal to burn most types of waste in the garden. Garden incinerators and other methods of burning green waste can cause a significant nuisance to neighbours and are generally discouraged. Find out more about outdoor fires, smoke and air quality at www.sunderland.gov.uk/pollution



Council housing plans for the city

Our five-year housing plan paves the way for a radical new approach to housing in the city. The plan got underway in 2020 and aims to make sure...

- Our residents have access to the homes they need as they grow old
- Vulnerable residents are able to live in properties that support them to live independently for longer, in which they are enabled to live a happy, fulfilled life
- We tackle empty homes, so often a blight on their community, breathing new life into bricks and mortar and creating attractive new homes for our residents

£59m

of investment will deliver our vision by 2025

40 years

since the last council house was built in Sunderland

362

empty properties will be brought back into use as family homes over the next five years



20 years

since we last rented a property

117

new build bungalows will be delivered across the city

95

new homes - providing supported accommodation - will be built, converted or refurbished



Improving lives

The work we are doing as part of the plan is already transforming lives, ensuring our residents - including some of the city's most vulnerable people - are supported to realise their potential in homes that enable them to live independently for longer.

Robert Cooper, 73, relocated to one of five new bungalows in Elmwood Avenue, Southwick, after a long-term condition made life in his two-storey home difficult to manage.

"I have pulmonary fibrosis, and it was becoming a real strain

getting up and down the stairs in my old house," explains Rob, who lives alone. "I lived in Wear View for a long time, but I had downsized and moved to Houghton a few years ago.

My family live in Redhouse, so they wanted me to look for something closer to them. I put my name down for a new house and I was delighted when the council got in touch to offer me a brand-new bungalow.

"I was speechless when I came and saw this place. It's absolutely perfect. It would hard to find one thing to complain about. The

team at the council who helped me with this were absolutely brilliant. They made sure I knew where everything was when I moved in and helped me feel really settled."

Our work is transforming lives and is empowering our tenants to live independently for longer in a house they can call a home.

To find out more about what we have achieved so far towards our housing plan visit: www.sunderland.gov.uk/housing-annual-review



Upcoming developments

We are currently building 16 new houses in Old Mill Road, Southwick.

The development is a mix of 3-bedroom houses for general needs applicants, and 2-bedroom bungalows for over 55s.

It is anticipated that the houses will be built and available for tenants from August to December this year, and details of how to apply to rent these properties will be available soon.

Have your say

We'd love to hear from you, our tenants, and find out what you think (good and bad!) about our housing services and what we offer.

We'd also like to know what you think about the neighbourhood where you live, how you'd like us to consult with you in the future, and find out if you'd like to become more involved with what we do.

There is also the opportunity for two tenants to join our Housing Service Monitoring Group. This consultation group reviews and gives their thoughts on policies and the services that we provide.

If you are interested in joining the group and helping to shape how we do things, or would simply like to know more it please get in touch with Phil Auton, Housing Operations Manager, by emailing: phil.auton@sunderland.gov.uk

We carry out customer care visits annually. These involve staff visiting you in your home to get your thoughts and views on your home, our homes, and our services. If we haven't been to see you yet, we'll be in touch soon to arrange a visit.



Naming our newsletter

We are really excited to be bringing you our first newsletter and would like your thoughts on what to call it. Email us to let us know which one of the following is your favourite:

1. Housing News
2. Your Housing
3. Up Your Street
4. Tenants Voice

Send your choice to Sunderlandhousing@ Sunderland.gov.uk by 30 September.

We'd also like to know what you'd like to see and read about in future editions of our housing newsletter, so please get in touch and let us know!

Get in touch

If you would like to speak to us, or have any queries, comments, or concerns about your home, please get in touch.

Email: sunderlandhousing@ Sunderland.gov.uk

Phone: 0191 561 2715

Post: Sunderland City Council, Housing Management Service, City Hall, Plater Way, Sunderland SR1 3AA