



Housing NEWS

Sunderland
City Council

Winter 2022



Welcome

In this second issue of Housing News you'll find an update on the work we are doing to tackle homelessness in Sunderland, how to apply for a property, information about gas safety in your home and support that's available to you during this current cost of living crisis.

If there's anything that you'd like to know more about and would like to be featured in future editions of Housing News, please get in touch and let us know.

Helping rough sleepers and the homeless in Sunderland

We've been working in partnership with Oasis Community Housing on a project to support people who are homeless or rough sleeping in Sunderland. Having a safe and stable place to call home is so important to breaking the cycle of homelessness. Six people have benefitted from the scheme so far, which has offered supported housing to those most in need.

Together with Oasis Community Housing, we carried out outreach programmes to identify people in the city who are, or at risk of sleeping rough. Once we knew



who these people were, we worked with them to assess their needs to determine if they were suitable for the scheme which will provide them with supported accommodation for up to three years, as well as other types of help.

Once they've received this three-year temporary support, we're aiming to help these people even further by identifying suitable properties that meet their needs, and that they can live in long-term.

One lady has already benefitted massively from the scheme. Through the scheme, she was identified as homeless and was

provided accommodation. She has been one of our tenants for over 20 months now and has completely turned her life around.

She also volunteers in the community with organisations including the Salvation Army.

Phil Auton from Sunderland City Council said, "Working in partnership with Oasis has shown that a multi-agency approach can benefit those in housing crisis, the outcomes we have gained for our tenants has improved both the short- and long-term housing aspirations."

Gas safety

We are fully committed to ensuring your safety in your home, and that all gas appliances are maintained and in a safe condition. By law, we need to check all gas appliances in your home once every 12 months to make sure they are safe.

We will send you a letter to let you know when your gas safety check appointment will be, please let us know if it's not suitable for you by calling 0191 561 2715 or 0191 520 5555.

What is a gas safety check

A qualified and registered Gas Safe engineer will visit your home to carry out the free safety check. It's important that you allow us access to carry out this safety check. All engineers will carry a Gas Safe Register ID card which you can check before letting them into your home.

Faulty gas appliances, fittings or flues which are not properly checked could cause gas leaks which in turn could lead to a fire, explosion, or carbon monoxide



poisoning. The engineer will check these things are in good working order and safe to use and will make a record of the checks carried out, a copy of which will be given to you.

How long will it take?

The appointment will last around 30 to 60 minutes.

Your help

To make sure there is no delay in the gas safety check being carried out in your home, we need you to:

- Let the engineer in when they visit for your safety check appointment
- Make sure a responsible adult is present for the duration of the appointment

- Have a clean and tidy home for the engineer to work in, with clear access to gas installations
- Have credit on both your gas and electric meters if you have prepayment meters.

Smell Gas?

If you have any issues between your annual gas services, please don't hesitate to contact us so we can arrange the support you need.

If you smell gas inside your home, please leave the property and call the National Gas Emergency Service number on 0800 111 999 and they will advise you what to do next. All calls are recorded and may be monitored.



Carbon Monoxide Alarms

You are responsible to regularly test the carbon monoxide alarms in your home.

This is to ensure they remain in working order and to replace batteries if they are needed.

If you have any concerns about the alarms please contact our Repairs and Maintenance team on 0191 561 2715 or email: building@sunderland.gov.uk



Cost of living support

The current cost of living crisis is having an impact on everyone. To support you, and all residents in Sunderland, we have developed a cost of living support hub where you can find out what help and support is available to you. Please scan the QR code below using your phone's camera, or visit the hub at www.sunderland.gov.uk/cost-of-living where you'll find information about:

- Help from the government with cost of living payments (including automatic payments to benefit/pension claimants) and the Energy Bills Support Scheme which will give most households a £400 discount on their energy bills
- Additional financial support from government to low income and vulnerable households that may be struggling with energy costs or other cost of

living pressures. The Household Support Fund page will include details of the support available as it develops. This will include an application-based process via the council and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) providers. In addition, automatic support awards will be made to free school meals pupils (on grounds of means tested benefit entitlements), pensioners receiving Council Tax Support or Adult Social Care Services, as well as some disabled households known to the council

- Warm Spaces that are housed in community venues such as libraries and community centres. The Warm Spaces in Sunderland will offer a range of support services as well as helping people struggling with their energy bills and the cost of living crisis to keep warm.

There is also information available about where to get further help and advice including:

- Support for food if you are in financial crisis (this will mainly be via foodbanks but also via our Local Welfare Provision Scheme for specific vulnerable groups)
- Help with utility bills, or if you have a shortfall in your rent
- How to apply for support including free school meals, Healthy Start vouchers and general help around money.





Applying for a property

If you're looking to apply for a council home you can register alone, jointly with a partner or with another adult who wishes to live with you, including family members.

If you're already one of our tenants and you'd like to move to an alternative home, you can request to transfer homes by contacting the Housing Operations Team direct on 0191 520 5551 or Email: sunderlandhousing@ Sunderland.gov.uk

Copies of the Housing Application Form can be requested by phoning the customer services network on 0191 520 5551 or by scanning the QR code on the right.

When you apply for a home, we will ask you for information about:

- You and those who you wish to share a home with
- Your housing history
- Your housing needs
- Any support needs you have
- Your financial circumstances
- Your preferred areas of the city to live

Once we've received all the necessary information from you and it's been verified, we'll register the application within 10 working days.



**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



Christmas recycling

Lots of things can be recycled in your blue recycling bin over the Christmas period, including cardboard boxes, food and drink packaging, tins, cans, and bottles.

Top tips for recycling:

- Don't forget to wash and squash any food or drink containers. We can't recycle anything that has food or grease left on it
- Flatten and/or rip up any large cardboard boxes and pop them in your blue bin. Please make

sure cardboard is dry as we can't recycle it if it's wet

- Don't put glittery and shiny cards, or any wrapping paper in your blue bin as we can't recycle them
- Don't put batteries, items containing batteries, or electrical items in your blue OR green bin. Batteries can cause fires if damaged during collection and processing. Instead place batteries in battery tubes at local shops and venues. Alternatively,

both batteries and electricals can be taken to the Household Waste and Recycling Centre

- If you have any extra recycling that won't fit in your blue bin, book a free appointment and take it to the Household Waste and Recycling Centre

For more information about waste and recycling, including what you can and can't put in your blue recycling bin, please visit: www.sunderland.gov.uk/householdwaste



Christmas and New Year bin collections

There are **no changes to bin collections** over the festive period, so please put your bins out for collection on your normal scheduled days.

Our refuse teams will be operating as normal on Tuesday 27 December, which is an official bank holiday.



Be scam aware

Please be careful and vigilant as scammers are preying on people with scam phone calls, texts, emails and even via social media.

Scammers will always use times of uncertainty, such as now during the cost of living crisis, to try and trick people into handing over

their personal or bank details by pretending to be from trusted organisations.

Council staff will always carry and provide identification when visiting your home, and any outgoing calls will go through a series of security checks.

We need you to be our tenant reps!

Do you have a passion to improve neighbourhoods and communities in Sunderland?

If you do, we've an exciting opportunity for you to join our Housing Service Monitoring group and to influence what, and how we deliver our services.

As a tenant representative you will be involved in the decision-making process by attending scheduled meetings, being consulted on specific areas of our work, and carrying out scrutiny exercises.

You'll be paid £800 a year for the role, which will require you to work a few hours each month. There are two vacant tenant positions available which are open to all tenants of Sunderland City Council. To apply for the position, you must:

- hold a Sunderland City Council tenancy
- have a clear rent account, without any unspent convictions, court orders or any other breach of tenancy
- be a good listener, influencer and a communicator who is passionate about improving neighbourhoods and communities in the city

We are looking for two people who have:

- good communication skills
- the ability to be objective and can analyse, interpret, and question information

- the ability to weigh up issues, make balanced judgements and decisions based on evidence
- a passion to improve neighbourhoods and communities
- if you have a knowledge or experience of the housing sector that'd be a bonus (but not essential)

The key responsibilities of the role are to:

- take an independent view of how well housing services are delivering their work
- help with the annual review of customers
- help to look at and analyse customer feedback and complaints

The roles are for three years. Once members have served for three years, they may be re-selected but may be considered alongside other suitable applicants through the selection and interview process.

To support the role, the two tenants appointed will be provided with any equipment, training, and development that are needed for the role.

To find out more about the roles, or how to complete the informal application, please contact Phil Auton on 0191 520 5551 or Email: phil.auton@sunderland.gov.uk or sunderlandcouncilhousing@ Sunderland.co.uk



Damp, condensation and mould

Damp

Damp occurs when a fault in the basic structure of the building lets in water from the outside.

The usual signs are mould, a musty smell and wet patches on the walls or ceilings after rain. If you think your home may have damp, please contact our Building Services Team on 0191 561 2715 or email building@sunderland.gov.uk who will arrange for a Technical Inspector to call at your home, look at the problem and arrange any necessary repair work.

Condensation and mould

What is condensation?

Even though you cannot see it, the air in your home contains water vapour. When warm air comes in contact with cold surfaces, such as window panes, outside walls, mirrors or tiles, it turns into droplets of water called condensation.

What causes condensation?

Condensation is a greater problem during winter when the weather gets colder. This is because we tend to keep windows and doors closed to keep the heat inside, so the moisture cannot escape. The main causes are:

- too much moisture in your home
- not enough ventilation in the rooms of your home
- temperature in your home being too low

Condensation can cause a black mould, which has a musty smell, to form in your home. This usually happens on cold, outside surfaces and walls and in areas where the air does not flow well.

The mould usually forms on decorative surfaces such as wallpaper, tiles, windowsills and wall plaster, but it can also form on furniture, cushions, curtains and on clothing stored in wardrobes and drawers.

Black mould is not a sign of rising damp as it can only grow in pure water associated with condensation.

Useful tips to reduce condensation

Reduce the amount of moisture you produce:

- don't boil kettles or pans longer than you need to
- make sure you put lids on pans
- open windows or use extractor fan (if fitted) when cooking

- wipe away any condensation from windows and other surfaces
- avoid drying clothes on radiators
- close the bathroom door when you're in the shower or bath

Improve the ventilation in your home:

- don't overfill cupboards and wardrobes
- don't block air vents or airbricks in your property
- open internal doors occasionally to allow air to circulate
- keep trickle vents in windows open

Keep your home well heated

- in cold weather provide a low background heat during the day
- don't use bottled gas or paraffin heaters

If you are experiencing issues with damp and mould in your home, please contact us immediately. Call: 0191 520 5551 or Email: sunderlandhousing@ Sunderland.gov.uk

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 520 5551

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