Tenant's handbook
including your repairs guide
Tenant’s handbook
The complete guide to your council home
About this handbook

This is important. If you do not understand this document then please ask a friend or relative, who speaks English, to contact your local neighbourhood office or housing team on your behalf. We will then arrange for an interpreter to meet with you.

The phone numbers for your Local Housing Team and the Repairs Contact Centre are in the contacts section on page 83. You can also find lots of housing information on our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/housing.

If you would like a copy of this handbook in Braille, in large print or on CD, contact your Local Housing Team (see page 83 for details). Also, if you have a textphone and would like to talk to us using the Type Talk Service, call the Housing textphone number on 0121 303 2551 or our main textphone number on 0121 303 1119.
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Section 1

Your housing service
About our housing service

Welcome to your new home. We hope you find the information in this handbook useful. We aim to:
- provide you with a home that is warm, secure and clean;
- help you settle into your home and become part of your community; and
- provide you with a home and neighbourhood you can be proud of.

About this handbook

This handbook contains information about your tenancy, explains how to report a repair and provides other information on repairs.

This handbook also gives you other useful information to help you in your home.

It does not form part of your tenancy agreement, and is not legally binding.

About our services

Housing officers – Our housing officers can give you a range of support and information. We have developed a set of service standards and common questions which are on our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/housing. You can find the contact details for your Local Housing Team on page 83 of this handbook.

Housing Support Team – This team can provide help to new tenants, making sure that they get all benefits they are entitled to. They provide support to vulnerable tenants. Ask your Local Housing Team for details (see page 83).

Rent Team – We have one central Rent Team. You can contact the team by phone (see page 83) or by visiting one of our neighbourhood offices. They can also visit you at home. There are 10 ways for you to pay your rent – see page 18 for more information. We also have trained debt advisers who can give you advice if you have money problems.

Estate Management – Each of our districts has an Estate Management Team of housing officers who can answer your questions about your tenancy and your neighbourhood. You can join us on our estate assessments and walkabouts in your area. See page 34 for more information.

Concierge and Security Services – Our officers can handle enquiries about your tenancy and home. See page 32 for more information.

Neighbourhood caretakers – Our locally based neighbourhood caretakers provide a wide range of services including minor repairs in homes and common areas (those shared by all tenants). They also improve the safety and security for the place where you live. See page 33 for more information.

Sheltered housing schemes – These schemes help you to live independently in your own home, with housing-related support based on your own needs. For more information, see the Sheltered Housing handbook on our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/shelteredhousing or speak to the Housing Support Team.

Antisocial behaviour – We know that antisocial behaviour affects people and communities, so we have six locally based Antisocial Behaviour Teams who will work with you to sort out problems. Their contact numbers are on page 83.

Ending your tenancy – If you want to end your tenancy contact your local Empty Property Team. See the contact section on page 83 for details of your Local Housing Team who can put you in touch.

Your views

We value your views and want you to help us to improve our service. You can speak to any housing officer to find out how to get involved, and you can give as much or as little time as you want. Please visit www.birmingham.gov.uk/menu-of-involvement for all the ways you can get involved (see page 6).

Our vision

“Our aim is to make council housing a tenure of choice by providing our tenants with homes and neighbourhoods to be proud of, and excellent management and maintenance services.”
Customer care

We aim to provide an efficient and fair service. We have set out our commitments to you in a series of service-standard leaflets. If you would like a copy of any of these leaflets, visit our website www.birmingham.gov.uk/service-standards for details or ask your local housing officer.

Our commitment to you

Our general customer-service standards are to do the following.

- Answer all phone calls within six rings. The person who answers the phone will give their name and the service area they work in.
- When you phone us, deal with the matter immediately. If this is not possible, we will call you back within one working day or at an agreed time. If we transfer your call, we will tell the other member of staff your name and why you are calling.
- Acknowledge your letters or emails within three working days, and reply within 10 working days. If we need to follow with a more detailed reply, we will let you know when to expect it.
- Send any forms or information leaflets you ask for within five working days of you asking.
- Provide clear and relevant advice and information.
- Give everyone equal access to services. We will not discriminate against anyone.

We will do the following.

- Treat you with respect and provide our service in a way that meets your needs.
- Train all our staff in equality issues.
- Make sure that we treat everyone fairly and equally.
- Act quickly and firmly against any kind of discrimination.
- Make sure our offices have access for people in wheelchairs.
- Provide induction loops (for people with hearing aids) and sign language facilities if you need them.
- Use written and spoken language that is clear and easy to understand.
- Provide written documents that are easy to read, and offer them in large print, in Braille or on CD.

- Arrange to translate documents or for an interpreter to explain written documents to you if you do not speak English.
- Collect and monitor information about customer satisfaction and our service users, and use this information to improve our services.
- Assess the effect of our policies and services and make changes if they treat any group unfairly.

If we get it wrong

We try hard to provide a fair and efficient service. However, we know that there may be times when things go wrong. See ‘Your feedback’ on page 8.
Consultation

We believe that every tenant has the right to influence decisions about their home and the area it is in.

**It’s your right to be consulted**

We will always give you the opportunity to comment on any plans that affect you and your home. See page 6 for more information.

**How we will consult you**

We collect your views in different ways.

- Staff visits to your home or walkabouts with tenants to look at an area
- Letters and surveys (paper and online)
- Phone or door-to-door surveys
- Meetings, conferences (including over the phone) and seminars
- Tenants’ forums or discussions with specific groups
- Focus groups
- Open days, exhibitions or roadshows
- Through existing groups such as Constituency Tenant Groups, Housing Liaison Boards, resident associations, Tenant Management Organisations, Sheltered Housing Liaison Boards and Leaseholder Liaison Boards
- ‘Mystery shopping’, where you check our services anonymously and report your findings to us

Whatever type of consultation we use, we will make sure that any information we give you is easy to read and understand.

We will seriously consider what you have to say and tell you how we have used your views to make a difference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common questions</th>
<th>We will contact you about any plans that affect you or your home. You can raise any concerns or complaints with your Local Housing Team. We will also consult you, along with others, about important issues that affect all tenants or groups of tenants.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will I be consulted personally about changes and plans?</td>
<td>We welcome any comments about us, our services, and how we work. If you want to make a general suggestion, contact any member of staff or get a copy of our ‘Your views’ leaflet from your Local Housing Team. This explains the different ways you can give feedback. You could also ask for the ‘Menu of Involvement’, which lists all the different ways you can get involved with your housing service (see page 6). You can also fill in an enquiry form online. Go to <a href="http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/housing">www.birmingham.gov.uk/housing</a> and click on the ‘Contact us’ link. We will take whatever you say seriously.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| How can I make suggestions? | We aim to keep you informed about how we are managing our services and how we have taken your views into account. We also aim to tell you what changes or developments we are planning, and what is happening in communities where we have homes.

We produce newsletters and leaflets on particular topics. We also produce a magazine, Letterbox, four times a year. We sometimes hold local meetings to tell people about certain developments, and to discuss their concerns.

We also put up-to-date information about our housing service on our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/housing.

For each service we have a set of service standards which tell tenants how they can expect to be kept informed. Ask your Local Housing Team for copies of these service standards, or you can download them from our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/service-standards. |
Involving tenants

We aim to:
■ give tenants the opportunity to take part in designing, monitoring and managing services;
■ listen to tenants’ views when we make important decisions about the way services are set up and run; and
■ make sure the tenants who do take part are a fair cross-section of all of our tenants.

We have agreements with tenants about how we will involve them.

Menu of Involvement
Our Menu of Involvement tells you about the many different ways to get involved. Some activities, such as surveys and mystery shopping, take up only a little time. Others, such as belonging to a Housing Liaison Board or Constituency Tenant Group, take up more time.

It is up to you to decide how far you get involved, how you get involved, and what you would like to get involved with.

You can get a copy of our Menu of Involvement from any neighbourhood office and online at www.birmingham.gov.uk/menu-of-involvement.

Constituency Tenant Groups (CTGs)
Each CTG is made up of 12 tenants and leaseholders. There are 10 CTGs in Birmingham, one in each constituency. You will be representing customers’ views to influence and shape future policies and strategies. The emphasis is on us, tenants and organisations we deal with working together.

CTGs look at the long-term direction of services. Any tenant or leaseholder can tell us they are interested in becoming a member of a CTG.

Common questions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>How are tenants’ views represented?</td>
<td>There are many different ways for you to have your say about the way we work and any plans we have for your area. Our Menu of Involvement (see above) explains this in detail. There are also independent tenants’ organisations in local areas. See ‘Tenants’ and residents’ groups’ on page 7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do I find out about getting involved and local associations?</td>
<td>Contact your local tenant participation officer, based in your Local Housing Team (see page 83 for the phone number). We can tell you what is happening in your area and how you can get involved. If there is no tenants’ association for your area, we can give you advice and help to set one up. You can also take a look at the Menu of Involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I give you my ideas without joining an association or board?</td>
<td>Yes, we offer many ways for tenants and leaseholders to get involved. More details are given in the Menu of Involvement. Some of the activities only take up a small amount of your time and don’t involve meetings. No matter what level of commitment you can make, you can have your say and make a difference to your housing service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do I need housing experience or skills to get involved?</td>
<td>No. As a tenant you are our eyes and ears for your community. The most important thing that you can bring is an interest in improving our services. We will try to help you to get the confidence and knowledge to be able to make meaningful decisions about your housing services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m worried about the costs of some of these activities – I can’t afford to pay for travel and childcare. How can I get involved?</td>
<td>If you prefer, you can start by trying some of our resident involvement activities from home, such as surveys. We want you to be able to take part in any way you want so we can support you to take part in resident involvement activities that take place outside the home. We will pay your travelling expenses (bus fare, taxi provided by us or mileage for using your own vehicle) and childcare costs. Your local tenant participation officer can tell you more.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Involving tenants (continued)

**Housing Liaison Boards (HLBs)**
Each neighbourhood area has an HLB which can include tenants, leaseholders, owner-occupiers and local councillors. It meets once a month to monitor the area’s day-to-day services, which means looking at how services are provided and monitoring performance against agreed targets.

Any tenant or leaseholder can stand for election to their local board. Only elected board members can vote at meetings, but any tenant can come to the meetings.

**Tenants’ and residents’ groups**
These are independent groups which can be set up and run by tenants, leaseholders and owner-occupiers who live in a particular area. They meet regularly to discuss local issues, decide what action they should be taking, and organise activities.

**Block champions**
We believe that the quality of the block you live in is very important. We encourage tenants to become ‘block champions’ to monitor and inspect the quality of their block’s cleaning standards and appearance. Every month, block champions and local staff inspect the block and report on the cleaning service. Your local tenant participation officer can give you more information about becoming a block champion.

**Mystery shopping**
We encourage tenants to become mystery shoppers. Mystery shoppers test and monitor the quality of our service, check that we follow procedures correctly, and report back on their experience as a customer. Your local tenant participation officer can give you more information on becoming a mystery shopper.

**Tenant inspectors**
We encourage tenants to volunteer as tenant inspectors. This involves getting out and about to check how we do things such as preparing empty properties ready for new tenants, and suggesting how we can improve the service. Your Local Housing Team can give you more information on becoming a tenant inspector.

**Common questions**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>If I get involved, will I get training or guidance?</strong></td>
<td>We have an annual training plan that we have agreed with tenant-led groups. The training is designed to help tenants gain the knowledge and skills that would help them get involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I don’t speak English very well, what help will I get?</strong></td>
<td>You can ask for interpreters or to receive written information in your preferred language. Please speak to your local tenant participation officer to find out more (the phone numbers are on pages 83 and 84).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I have a disability. What support can you offer so that I can still be involved?</strong></td>
<td>If you want to attend any events or meetings, we will make sure that the venues have access for people in wheelchairs. We also provide hearing loops for people who wear hearing aids, and can provide documents in large print or on CD for people who are blind or partially sighted. You can also take part in resident involvement activities from home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I’m not sure what I want to be involved in. Can I come and see what happens at the meetings without making a commitment?</strong></td>
<td>You are welcome to come to a number of meetings, as an observer, to get a feel of how our customers work with us. To arrange this, speak to your local tenant participation officer (see page 83).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your feedback
If you have any comments on our service, let us know. Your feedback is important to us, as it helps us improve our service. If you have been pleased with a part of our service, let us know so that we will keep doing it. If something has gone wrong, tell us about it straightaway. We will do our best to put it right.

What is a complaint?
You may not be happy with a service because we:

- took too long to do our job or provide a service;
- didn't do what we said we would do;
- gave you the wrong information; or
- treated you unfairly.

A complaint is not:
- a disagreement with a government regulation we must follow; or
- a routine request for a service, such as reporting a repair needed to your home.

How to complain
You can contact any member of staff, but it is best to contact your Local Housing Team. You can do this in person, by phone, by letter or online at www.birmingham.gov.uk/yourviews. You can contact us by textphone on 0121 303 1119. You can get more information from our ‘Your views’ leaflet, which is available from local housing offices (see page 83).

The leaflet, which you can also download from our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/yourviews, explains how to complain. It also includes a feedback form. A member of staff can help you fill the form in. If we can’t sort out the problem straightaway, we will investigate your complaint and pass it on to an investigating officer. They will contact you within 10 working days, with either a full response or to tell you what is happening. They will keep you informed every 10 working days until we have finished our investigation.

If you are not happy with the result of the investigation, you can ask us to review it. We will send you a response within 20 working days, and explain how you can take the matter further through the Local Government Ombudsman, if necessary.

Listening to you
From time to time we carry out surveys to find out how well you think we are doing in different areas of our service. These surveys may be face-to-face, or over the phone or through questionnaires we post to you. We also send you a satisfaction form after every repair.

You can contact us at any time with suggestions on how we can improve our services. It is also useful for us to hear about what we are doing right.

Common questions

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who do I contact if I want to give feedback?</td>
<td>You can speak to any member of staff, but it is best to write to, email or phone your Local Housing Team (see page 83 for details). We record your feedback. When we receive your comments or complaints we share them with the staff, contractors or team concerned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if I am not happy with the response I get?</td>
<td>If you are not satisfied with our response, we have a set of recommended steps for you to follow. You can ask us to send you our leaflet, ‘Your views’, which includes a form you can fill in, or go online at <a href="http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/yourviews">www.birmingham.gov.uk/yourviews</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can I expect you to do?</td>
<td>If, after investigating your complaint, we find that we have done something wrong, we will apologise in writing and do everything we can to put things right. We will take action to make sure the same problem does not happen again to you or any other customer. If your complaint was about one of our policies, we may look at the policy again to see whether we need to change it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who else can I contact?</td>
<td>If you have a serious complaint about our housing service, and you have been through our complaints process but are still not satisfied, you can contact the Local Government Ombudsman. This is an independent organisation which can investigate the matter further. For more information, go online at <a href="http://www.lgo.org.uk/ContactUs">www.lgo.org.uk/ContactUs</a> or phone 0300 061 0614. You may also want to take the matter up with your local councillor.</td>
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Section 2

Your rights and responsibilities
Section 2 Your rights and responsibilities

Introduction

As a tenant, you have many rights, such as the right to stay in your home as long as you want to and the right to buy your home.

This section covers the most important rights you have, and explains why these rights are sometimes different for different groups of tenants. As a new tenant, you have most of the same rights as someone who has lived in their home for a year or more. Tenants who behave in an antisocial way may have fewer rights than others.

You also have a number of responsibilities, as a tenant and neighbour, so that everyone can enjoy living peacefully in their homes.

For full details of your rights and responsibilities, see your Conditions of Tenancy. There is also a copy online at www.birmingham.gov.uk/tenancy-conditions.

Your rights if you have an introductory tenancy

You have an introductory tenancy if you:

■ have never rented a home before; or
■ have only rented from a private landlord.

Everyone who is a new tenant of ours has an introductory tenancy. The only exceptions are tenants who have moved because of a transfer or mutual exchange (see ‘Transferring homes’ on pages 43 and 44, and ‘Mutual exchange’ on page 45).

An introductory tenancy normally lasts for a year, but can be extended by another six months. As long as you do not break the conditions of your tenancy agreement, or the law, in that time, we will give you a secure tenancy.

You have all the same rights as a secure tenant (see page 10), but you cannot:

■ apply to buy your home;
■ exchange homes with another tenant;
■ take in a lodger or sublet part of your home;
■ carry out alterations to your home; or
■ vote for a change to a new landlord.
Your rights if you have a secure tenancy

You have the right to live in your home as long as you want, as long as you keep to the conditions of your tenancy agreement and don’t break the law.

We can go to court to end your tenancy (by getting a ‘possession order’) if, for example:

- you have not paid your rent;
- you, or anyone living with or visiting you (including children), cause a nuisance to another resident;
- you do not live in the property as your only or main home;
- you allow your home to be used for activities that are against the law;
- you, or anyone living with or visiting you, damage your home or the estate you live on;
- you gave us a false statement to get your tenancy;
- we plan to demolish or carry out major work on your home.

Sole tenancies

You are the ‘sole tenant’ if you:

- are the only person who signed the tenancy agreement at the start of the tenancy;
- were a joint tenant but you have a court order giving you the tenancy; or
- were a joint tenant but the person you had a joint tenancy with has died.

Joint tenancies

If more than one person signs the tenancy agreement, this is known as a joint tenancy. Joint tenants have equal rights. We will consider applications for joint tenancies from:

- married couples;
- partners (including same-sex partners);
- civil partners.

If one joint tenant gives us notice to end the tenancy, this ends the tenancy for both tenants. If this happens to you, contact your Local Housing Team so they can investigate your circumstances.

If one joint tenant dies, the other joint tenant takes over the tenancy as a sole tenant. See ‘You may have the right for your tenancy to pass on to a family member after you die (succession)’ on page 12.

How a sole tenancy can become a joint tenancy

A sole tenant can apply to change their sole tenancy to a joint tenancy. Normally, we will only consider a request for a joint tenancy if:

- the tenancy has not been passed on to another person, or passed on when a family member died;
- the rent is paid up to date;
- there is no history of antisocial behaviour;
- the person you want to become a joint tenant with has lived in your home for at least 12 months and is 18 or over; and
- your home is not larger than you need.

We won’t grant you a joint tenancy if it means that your home will be overcrowded.

You have the right to live peacefully in your home

You have the right to live peacefully in your home, without unnecessary interference from us, as long as you keep to the conditions of your tenancy agreement.

You have the right to maintenance work

We will keep the structure of your home, including plumbing, heating and electrical systems, in good repair. For more information about our repairs service, see the ‘Repairs guide’ starting on page 49.

You have the right to repairs

You have the right to have repairs we are responsible for carried out within certain timescales. We call these repairs ‘qualifying’ repairs. For more information on timescales for repairs, see page 78.

You have the right to make improvements to your home

You can make improvements and alterations to your home, as long as you get our written permission and all necessary approvals (for example, building regulations approval or planning permission) beforehand. If you are not sure whether you have the right to make a particular improvement or alteration, ask us first. When you move out, we will ask you to pay the cost of putting right any alterations you have made to the property without our permission.
Your rights if you have a secure tenancy (continued)

You may have the right to compensation for improvements.
If you carry out certain improvements to your home, and then your tenancy ends, you may be entitled to some compensation towards the cost of those improvements. We will explain this when you apply for permission to make the improvement.

You have the right to be consulted.
By law, we must consult you if we are thinking about:
- changing policies or practices that affect how we manage our homes or our repairs service;
- carrying out alterations, improvements or major repairs to your home;
- demolishing your home;
- making changes to your tenancy conditions; or
- transferring your tenancy to another landlord.

We will also consult you generally about matters that affect all tenants.

If you want to have a say on what we do, there are a number of ways for you to get involved (see page 6).

You have the right to information.
You have the right to information from us about:
- the terms of the tenancy agreement;
- our responsibilities;
- equal opportunities;
- principles for setting rents;
- our policies and procedures;
- what personal details we keep about you;
- our performance; and
- how we offer tenancies and deal with transfers.

You have the right to have information about you kept safely.
To do our job as your landlord, we collect and store personal information. We hold this information, from forms, interviews and so on, on computer or on paper in a filing system.

By law you have the right to know what information we hold about you, and we must use that information fairly and properly in ways you understand. You can also have information corrected if it is wrong.

Common questions

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you mean by succession (see page 12)?</td>
<td>Succession is when a tenancy is passed to a family member after the tenant dies. A tenancy can only be passed on by succession once. So if a tenant took over the tenancy after the death of the previous tenant, that tenancy cannot pass on by succession when the current tenant dies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who can take over by succession?</td>
<td>When a tenant dies, the tenancy can pass to their husband, wife or civil partner. If there is no husband, wife or civil partner, a family member who has lived in the home for the previous 12 months may have the right to take over the tenancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What rights do I have to stay in the home if the tenancy cannot pass on again by succession?</td>
<td>We will consider each request individually. We will assess your situation and decide if you can have a tenancy for the property or another one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there any times when I have to leave the home, even though I have the right to take over the tenancy by succession?</td>
<td>If you are the husband, wife, civil partner or live-in partner of the tenant who has died, you can stay in the home. Other relatives who may qualify to take over the tenancy may not be able to stay in the home. However, we will offer them a home that is more suitable, and we will not take any action until six months from the time the tenant died.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your rights if you have a secure tenancy (continued)

You may have the right for your tenancy to pass on to a family member after you die (succession).
In certain circumstances, members of your family may be able to take over your tenancy when you die. This is known as succession. Only the following people can take over your tenancy by succession.
- Any joint tenant, if they were living in your home, as their only or main home, when you died.
- Your husband, wife or civil partner, or a person you live with as if they were your husband, wife or civil partner as long as your home was their only or main home when you died.
- Another member of your family – your parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, step-relative or adopted child – if they lived in your home, as their only or main home, throughout the previous 12 months.

If more than one member of your family is entitled to take over the tenancy, they should agree between themselves who will take it over. If they can't agree we will decide.

You have the right to sign your tenancy over to another person (assign your tenancy).
You can assign your tenancy to another person if:
- your relationship has broken down and a court has ordered for the tenancy to be assigned to your partner; or
- you want to transfer the tenancy to a person who could take it over by succession if you die. (In this case, the assignment will count as a succession and the tenancy cannot pass on again in this way.)

You have the right to exchange your tenancy with that of another tenant.
You have the right to exchange your tenancy with that of another council or housing association tenant. You will need to have written permission from us and the other landlord first.

We will not turn you down without a good legal reason. For more information, see ‘Mutual exchange’ on page 45.

You have the right to sublet part of your home.
You have the right to sublet part of your home, as long as you get our written permission first. You cannot sublet the whole home. We will normally give you permission unless we have a good reason not to. If we don’t give you permission, we will write to you with our reasons.
If you get Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit, this may be affected if you sublet part of your home. Please tell us whenever you sublet or if you stop subletting.

You have the right to take in lodgers.
You have the right to allow anyone to live with you, as long as this does not make your home overcrowded. You are responsible for making sure that people who live with you do not cause a nuisance to neighbours, or do anything else that breaks the conditions of your tenancy agreement.
If you get Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit, taking in lodgers may affect this. Please tell us whenever a lodger moves in and out.

You have the right to buy your home.
See page 42 for information on buying your home.

You have the right to end your tenancy.
If you want to end your tenancy, please give us four weeks’ notice, ending on a Sunday. You must leave the property clean, remove all your belongings, make sure there is no one living in it and return the keys to us. Please return the keys by midday on the Monday after the end of the four weeks’ notice.
If you do end your tenancy, when you change address you will need to tell various organisations. These are listed on page 21.

You have the right to complain.
For more information, see page 8.
Your rights if you have a demoted tenancy

If a secure tenant has behaved antisocially, a court may allow us to change their tenancy to a demoted tenancy. As a demoted tenant, you have similar rights to an introductory tenant. You cannot:
■ apply to buy your home;
■ sublet any part of your home;
■ vote for a change to a new landlord;
■ take in a lodger without our written permission;
■ apply to exchange your home;
■ make a structural change to the property; or
■ transfer to another council property.

There are also different rights relating to succession after your death. A demoted tenancy lasts for 12 months, unless we serve you with notice that the demoted tenancy will last another six months. At the end of the demoted tenancy, you will become a secure tenant again, as long as you haven’t broken the conditions of your tenancy agreement. If you have broken the conditions of your tenancy agreement again, we may end your tenancy.

Your responsibilities as a tenant

You must live in the property as your only or main home.

You are responsible for paying your rent on time. We make it as easy as we can for you to pay on time by offering different ways to pay. For more information, see page 18.

You are responsible for not causing antisocial behaviour. Antisocial behaviour is any behaviour that harasses, annoys or causes a nuisance to other residents. It includes things like name-calling, using the property for illegal purposes or physical abuse. For more information, see page 39.

You are responsible for the behaviour of everyone living with or visiting you.

You are responsible for insuring the contents of your home. We insure the structure of your home, but not your furniture, belongings and decorations, against fire, vandalism, theft or water damage such as burst pipes.

We make it easy for you to insure your belongings under a special household contents insurance scheme we offer our tenants and leaseholders. For more information, see page 21.

You are responsible for keeping your home, garden and garage in good condition. You are responsible for looking after your home, and your garage and garden if you have them. You need to report repairs to us so we can deal with them, and must do any repairs you are responsible for. (See ‘Repairs guide’, starting on page 49.)

You are responsible for the following.
■ Keeping the inside of your home clean and well decorated.
■ Taking action to prevent waste pipes (from sinks, baths or toilets) or drains becoming blocked. (See ‘Blockages’ on page 69.)
■ Repairing and maintaining any fixture, fitting or appliance that you have put in, including washing machines, dishwashers and tumble dryers.
■ Taking action to prevent and control condensation. (See ‘Condensation’ on page 72.)
■ Taking action to prevent pipes from freezing or bursting, by keeping your home warm and by lagging pipes. (See ‘Frozen or burst water pipes’ on page 73.)
■ Making sure that no-one who lives in or visits your home causes any damage.

You are responsible for arranging for damage to be repaired. If you, or anyone living in or visiting your home, causes any damage, you must arrange for it to be repaired.
Your responsibilities as a tenant (continued)

- Make sure you and your family, and any visitors, do not break the conditions of your tenancy agreement.
- Get spare sets of keys to your home in case you lose your keys or lock yourself out.
- Produce ID from time to time to prove you are a tenant, and allow us into your home to carry out tenancy checks.
- You are responsible for carrying out the following repairs, or arranging and paying to get them done.
  - Replacing glass in windows or doors, unless you can give us a crime reference number from the police.
  - Replacing keys, fobs or locks for doors or windows, including those for garages and outbuildings.
  - Clearing blockages in basins, sinks, baths, toilets and drains (see ‘Blockages’ on page 69).
  - Resetting trip switches (see ‘Resetting a trip switch’ on page 70).
  - Replacing light bulbs, fluorescent tubes, starters and fuses in plugs.
  - Putting up TV aerials and satellite dishes (only with our written permission).
  - Maintaining non-essential garden paths or paving (check your tenancy agreement for more details).
  - Replacing clothes lines or posts, including rotary driers.
  - Replacing plugs and chains on baths, basins and sinks, and replacing toilet chains or handles.
  - Replacing handles and latches to doors, cupboards, kitchen units and drawers.
  - Draining the air out of radiators (see ‘Bleeding a radiator’ on page 75).
  - Replacing cylinder jackets around water tanks.
  - Renewing tiles and seals around baths, basins, showers, sinks and kitchen work surfaces.
  - Oiling hinges and locks, and adjusting doors when you have new carpets fitted.
  - Testing and cleaning smoke detectors, and replacing the battery if it has one (this is for your own safety and could save your life. See ‘Your smoke detector’ on page 74).

Your rights and responsibilities

However, for safety reasons, we have to do certain repairs. These are usually repairs involving your gas, electricity or water supply, or the security of your home.

We may charge you for the cost of repairs if you have caused damage and our contractor has to do the work. Our right to do this is set out in your tenancy agreement.

If damage is caused by a break-in or vandalism, our contractor will carry out work to make your home safe. They will only do any further work that is needed if you give us a crime reference number from the police.

You are responsible for getting permission before making improvements to your home. If you want to make improvements to your home, you must get written permission from us first. Contact your Local Housing Team for more details.

You must let us or our contractor into your home, store, garage or shed to carry out repairs and inspections and to service appliances.

We will normally contact you before we visit you at home. All our staff and contractors carry an identity card, which they will show you. If you are still not sure they are genuine, ring the phone number on the card. Staff and contractors won’t mind waiting outside while you do this.

You are responsible for getting rid of waste and rubbish, including large household items. You must get rid of all rubbish quickly and properly, and not allow rubbish or other waste to build up in or around your home. The council’s Environmental Services Team will remove and get rid of bulky items such as old household furniture for a charge.

Your other main responsibilities are to do the following.

- Keep your home properly heated and ventilated.
- Make sure your home does not become overcrowded.
- Tell us if you will be away from home for more than 28 days in a row.
- Give us at least four weeks’ notice, if you intend to end your tenancy.
## Your responsibilities as a tenant (continued)

### Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What type of tenancy do I have?</strong></td>
<td>Most tenants have secure tenancies, although most new tenancies are usually introductory tenancies. (See ‘Your rights if you have a secure tenancy’ starting on page 10 and ‘Your rights if you have an introductory tenancy’ starting on page 9.) A court can make an order for a secure tenancy to be made a demoted tenancy if you, or anyone living in or visiting your home, have been involved in antisocial behaviour. Demoted tenants have fewer rights than secure tenants. (See ‘Your rights if you have a demoted tenancy’ on page 13.) The details of your tenancy are written in your tenancy agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Can I stay in my home for as long as I want?</strong></td>
<td>If you are a secure tenant, you have the right to stay in your home for as long as you want, as long as you do not break the conditions of your tenancy agreement or the law. (See ‘Your rights if you have a secure tenancy’ on page 10.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Can I be made to leave my home?</strong></td>
<td>Yes, but only if your tenancy has come to an end or you have broken the conditions of your tenancy agreement or the law. Only a court can order you to leave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who can live with me in my home?</strong></td>
<td>Any member of your family can live in your home with you. However, you must not let your home become overcrowded. If you are a secure tenant, you can also take in lodgers. (Introductory or demoted tenants need to ask permission.) If anyone moves into your home or moves out, let us know within four weeks. This may affect your entitlement to Housing Benefit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Can I sublet my home?</strong></td>
<td>Yes, if you are a secure tenant. However, you can only sublet part of your home, not all of it, and you must carry on living in it yourself. You must get our permission first before you go ahead. (See ‘You have the right to sublet part of your home’ on page 12.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Can someone become a joint tenant with me?</strong></td>
<td>If, during your tenancy, you get married or enter into a civil partnership, or have shared your home with a partner for at least 12 months, we may allow them to become a joint tenant with you. (See ‘Joint tenancies’ on page 10.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who can take over my tenancy when I die or if I leave the home?</strong></td>
<td>If you have a joint tenancy, it will automatically pass to the other tenant. Otherwise, a member of your family may be able to take over the tenancy. We will consider each case individually. (See ‘You may have the right for your tenancy to pass on to a family member after you die (succession)’ on page 12.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your responsibilities as a tenant (continued)

- Replacing door knockers, bells, security chains, letterplates or numbers.
- Renewing hat or coat hooks, curtain and picture rails, curtain battens and pelmets.
- Repairing any fencing, garage, outbuilding or shed we didn’t provide.
- Keeping air and window vents clear.
- Removing limescale from taps, sinks, baths and toilet pans.
- Repairing or replacing latches, bolts and catches to gates and sheds.
- Filling minor cracks or holes in walls and ceilings.
- Repairing minor damage to plaster surfaces in your home.

For full details of your responsibilities as a tenant, please see the ‘Conditions of Tenancy’ which we gave you when you signed for your keys.
Section 3
Rent
Rent and other charges

It is important that you pay your rent, and any service charges, on time. This money pays for the services you receive. You must pay your weekly rent, for the week ahead, on Monday so it reaches your rent account by Wednesday.

Rent
Your weekly rent covers the cost of providing you with your home and the services you receive, including repairs and maintenance.

Other charges you may pay
The total amount you pay each week may include service charges for the following.
- The upkeep of shared areas for some flats, including the cost of providing a concierge service, caretaking, cleaning and grounds maintenance, shared lighting, servicing lifts and door-entry systems
- The 24-hour emergency alarm system in sheltered housing, and Careline (see page 36)
- A garage you are renting

The service charge you pay depends on the services you receive and how much they cost to provide. These service charges will be shown separately on your rent statement. All tenants and leaseholders in your block will pay service charges.

Rent-payment holidays
Rent-payment holidays are weeks when you do not have to pay rent.

For all tenancies we charge rent over 48 weeks each year. There are four rent-payment holidays each year – two over Christmas and the New Year, and two towards the end of March, just before the Easter break.

We offer the rent-payment holidays to tenants who keep their rent payments up to date.

The rent increase letter we send you each year will include a rent-payment calendar showing the dates of the rent-payment holidays.

Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you set rents?</th>
<th>We set rents in line with government guidelines. Any rent increase is based on the Retail Price Index (RPI), which measures the rate of inflation in the UK, from the previous September. An increase cannot be higher than the RPI, plus 0.5%, plus £2 a week. The formula takes account of the average earnings for the West Midlands, the number of bedrooms of the property, and the valuation of the property (at 1999 prices). If your rent changes, we will let you know at least four weeks before you start paying the new rent.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much do I pay?</td>
<td>When you start your tenancy we will tell you how much rent and service charges you need to pay and we will give you a rent-payment card. This is a swipe card which you use when you pay your rent in person. A full breakdown of the amount you must pay each week is shown on the front of your rent statement, which we send you four times a year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are rent-payment holidays?</td>
<td>We introduced rent-payment holidays in October 2008. They are weeks when tenants do not need to pay rent if their rent payments are up to date on set dates in December and March. We will tell you what these dates are each year. If you are behind with your rent, you won’t be able to take rent-payment holidays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are service charges?</td>
<td>These are usually paid by people living in properties with shared facilities or services. The amount you must pay is based on what the services will cost for the year. The charges are shown separately as part of the overall rent charge, although you pay them with the rent. The amount you must pay will be shown on your rent statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are service charge levels set?</td>
<td>Service charges are set in line with national guidelines.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rent and other charges (continued)

Paying your rent
You can pay your rent every week, every fortnight or every month, as long as you pay for the coming period. You must pay the rent for the week by Wednesday of that week.

By phone – Phone 0121 464 2001 at any time of day or night to pay your rent using our automated service. Choose ‘option 3’, and make sure you have your rent-payment card and your credit card or debit card with you. Or phone your Local Rent Team on 0121 675 2006 (choose ‘option 1’) and give your postcode when asked.

Online – Pay, using your debit card or credit card, through our secure internet payment facility on our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/payrent.

Direct debit – Set up a direct debit to pay your rent each month from your bank account. Call the Direct Debit Team on 0121 303 4775. You can also download a form at www.birmingham.gov.uk/payrent.

Standing order – Set up a standing order to pay your rent from your bank account each week. Phone your Local Rent Team on 0121 675 2006 and give your postcode when asked.

At PayPoint outlets – Pay anywhere that displays the PayPoint logo. You can only pay with cash, and you will need your rent-payment card.

At payzone outlets – Pay anywhere that displays the payzone logo. You can pay with cash or debit card, and you will need your rent-payment card.

At post office – You can send a cheque or postal order to: Birmingham City Council Finance Department (Revenues) PO Box 4092 B4 7AB. Make it payable to BCC Housing and write your name, address and payment reference number on the back.

Housing Benefit – If you are on a low income, you may be able to claim Housing Benefit to pay for all or part of your rent. For more information, phone your Local Rent Team on 0121 675 2006 and give your postcode when asked.

Rent-payment card – You can use this plastic swipe card to pay by most of the methods listed here. It has your payment reference number in the bottom right-hand corner. If you have lost this card and would like another, phone 0121 675 2006 and give your postcode when asked.

Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How and where do I pay?</td>
<td>You can pay in any of the ways shown above. You should always allow at least three working days for the payment to reach us through a bank or post office, and longer if you send it by post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can I set up a direct debit to pay my rent?</td>
<td>You will need to fill in a direct debit form and send it back to us. You can download the form from our website or get one from the Rent Team by phoning 0121 675 2006. When you first set up your direct debit, it can take up to six weeks before the first payment is taken from your account. To avoid getting behind with your rent during that time, carry on making your rent payments until the date of the first direct debit payment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do I keep track of my payments?</td>
<td>You will receive a receipt whenever you pay in person. If you pay through your local bank account, each payment will be shown on your bank statement. Any payment you make by credit card will be shown on your credit-card statement. Your rent statement will show each individual payment made during the last three months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if I lose my rent-payment card?</td>
<td>Phone the Rent Team on 0121 675 2006 to order a replacement card, or you can order one by email from <a href="mailto:rent@birmingham.gov.uk">rent@birmingham.gov.uk</a>. You may have to wait for up to two weeks for a new one. In the meantime, if you have a debit card or credit card, you can pay your rent using the 24-hour phone service on 0121 464 2001. You need your payment reference number, which is shown on your rent statement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rent arrears

Rent arrears is the term we use for unpaid rent you owe us. If you owe us rent, please pay it quickly or contact us about any money problems you have. If you don’t take action, you risk losing your home.

What to do

It is important that you pay your rent on time. If you are having difficulty paying your rent, phone the Rent Team on 0121 675 2006.

If we send you a letter about your rent, you should phone the Rent Team on 0121 675 2006. A member of the team will discuss your arrears with you and give you advice, including how to apply for benefits. He or she can send you an up-to-date rent statement (if you want one) and can also arrange for you to get independent advice on your money problems.

If you can’t pay the full amount you owe, we can enter into an agreement with you so that you can pay it off gradually. This will involve paying an extra amount with your rent over time until the debt is paid off.

You could lose your home

We will take legal action against you if you do not keep to any payment arrangement you have made with us. This may lead to you going to court and losing your home.

We will charge you for the cost of taking you to court, and you will still have to pay us what you owe us.

You and your family could be made to leave your home. Also, you may be considered to have made yourself homeless, which means that we, another council or any housing association, may not rehouse you.

Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What if I have problems paying my rent?</th>
<th>The Rent Team will be able to help you sort out your rent problems and can refer you to the Debt Advice Team. By acting quickly, you are showing you are serious about paying your rent, and legal action may not be needed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the Debt Advice Team?</td>
<td>The Debt Advice Team can help you with any debt problems, not just problems with paying rent, whether you are in work or not. It offers free and confidential advice to tenants on state benefits. The team can help you by making sure you are getting the benefits you are entitled to, filling in benefit application forms, giving you advice on budgeting, preparing a plan for you to pay off your debts, and talking to people who you owe money to. You can phone the Debt Advice Line on 0121 303 2087 for more help and information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will happen if I continue not paying my rent?</td>
<td>If you continue to be behind with your rent, we will start legal action. This could lead to you and your family being made to leave your home, and you will still have to pay any money you owe us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the rent arrears are wrong. What can I do?</td>
<td>If you think something is wrong, contact the Rent Team on 0121 675 2006. We will check your account and our record of your payments, as well as any Housing Benefit you could claim. We may need to adjust your account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am behind with my rent because my Housing Benefit has not been paid. What can I do?</td>
<td>You are responsible for your Housing Benefit claim. Please apply as soon as possible and provide all the information needed to process your claim. If you are having problems, phone the Rent Team on 0121 675 2006, or the Benefit Service on 0121 464 7000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I have paid too much. How do I get it back?</td>
<td>Phone the Rent Team on 0121 675 2006 to see if you can get a refund or reduce your payments until the overpayment is cleared.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How can I get Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit?</strong></td>
<td>You can make a claim over the phone using the E-benefits system. Our staff fill in the forms when you call. If we have all the information we need to fill in the form, we guarantee to deal with your claim within 48 hours. To use E-benefits, phone us on 0121 464 7000. You can also go to a neighbourhood office to fill in an application form although you might need to take some documents there. For more information, phone or visit your local neighbourhood office (phone the Contact Centre on 0121 303 1111 to ask where this is). We will assess your application for both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit at the same time. If we approve your application, our Housing Benefit section will write to you telling you how much you will receive. The benefit will be taken off your rent. We will consider your claim carefully and take account of your circumstances. However, if you think we have assessed your claim incorrectly, you can ask us to review it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What if I have any savings or other income?</strong></td>
<td>If you have savings, investments or other income (for example, a private pension), this may affect the amount of benefit you can receive. However, savings or income under a certain amount will not affect your benefit at all. Savings include spare cash, money in bank or building society accounts, stocks and shares, Premium Bonds or lump-sum redundancy payments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What do I need to do if my circumstances change?</strong></td>
<td>If your circumstances change, you must tell the Department for Work and Pensions and our Housing Benefit section immediately, otherwise you might have to pay a large bill for benefits that you should not have received. If we know about any changes in your circumstances, we have to pass this information to our Housing Benefit section. If you have recently started work or stopped working, you need to contact your local Jobcentre Plus. Staff there will take details from you to see whether you are entitled to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, and will pass the details to the Housing Benefit section.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOME SWEET HOME
Moving in

When you move in, we will give you:
- a copy of your tenancy agreement;
- useful advice leaflets;
- two sets of keys or fobs;
- information on a free fire-safety check (if you would like one);
- a gas-safety certificate for your home;
- an energy-performance certificate; and
- details of how to contact us.

You need to do the following
- Contact the electricity, gas, water and phone companies to let them know whether you want them to provide services to your home.
- Arrange for post to come to your new home.
- Tell your doctor, dentist and other medical professionals you see regularly that your address has changed.
- Arrange for your TV licence to be transferred.
- Phone our Council Tax Office on 0121 303 1113 to tell them you have moved.
- If you claim Income Support, Jobseeker’s Allowance, Pension Credit, Child Tax Credit or Working Tax Credit, tell the Department for Work and Pensions that you have moved. We can help you with any forms.

Home contents insurance
We strongly advise you to take out home contents insurance so you are covered for loss of, or damage to, your personal belongings.

We have an arrangement with an insurance company which offers cheap rates. You can pay your premiums every week, month or year. For more information, contact your local neighbourhood office (phone the Contact Centre on 0121 303 1111 to ask where this is) or visit the website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/neighoffice. You do not have to take this insurance. You could choose your own insurance company.

Need some help?
If you are a first-time tenant or finding it hard to cope, our housing support officers can help you:
- check what other benefits you are entitled to; and
- sort out what furniture you need and where you can get it from.

Moving home – your checklist
Moving home can be stressful as there is so much to do.

To help you, below is a table that lists the organisations you may need to contact to give them your new address. Fill in the phone numbers relevant for you and tick off each one when you’ve let them know about your move.

Who to tell about your new address

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Contact number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The council’s Benefit Service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water company</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Phone company</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gas company</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Electricity company</td>
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<tr>
<td>Royal Mail (to redirect your post)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>DVLA (for your driving licence)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Council Tax Office (for Birmingham City Council)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The council’s Elections Office (to update the electoral register)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your doctor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your dentist</td>
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<tr>
<td>TV Licensing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cable TV company or Sky</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Moving in (continued)

## Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>When do I take over the tenancy?</strong></td>
<td>Your tenancy starts on the date shown in your tenancy agreement. This is when you become the legal tenant. From then on you are responsible for the property and for paying the rent. A member of your Local Housing Team will arrange to visit you soon after you move in to see how you are settling in and to discuss any problems you may have. If you want to discuss anything before that visit, just contact your Local Housing Team. Contact details are on page 83.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What if I cannot move in by the date my tenancy starts?</strong></td>
<td>On the date the tenancy starts you become the legal tenant, which means that you are responsible for the property and for paying the rent. If you cannot move in by this date, you must still pay the rent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Can I get help furnishing my property?</strong></td>
<td>Yes, we can:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ refer you to furniture projects which can supply furniture at a reduced price;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ help you apply for a Community Care Grant if you are on Income Support, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, income-related Employment Support Allowance or Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ help you apply for a budgeting loan;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ help you apply to charities; and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ tell you about the Citisave furniture-loan scheme.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do I need permission to make changes to my property?</strong></td>
<td>You need to get written permission to make certain changes to your home. The sort of changes to the structure that you need permission for include putting up a shed or greenhouse that is more than 6 square feet. Contact your local Estate Management Team for advice. Contact details are on page 83.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Can I put in my own fittings?</strong></td>
<td>You can put in your own fittings as long as you do not damage or remove anything. If you lay carpet, this must be tacked down, not glued. This allows the carpets to be lifted for repairs. If you want to make any other alterations, get our permission first. See ‘Improvements’ on page 37 for more information. The Conditions of Tenancy explains what you need to do if you want to have laminate flooring (see page 42 of the Conditions of Tenancy).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you hold spare keys to my home?</strong></td>
<td>No. We will give you two sets of keys or fobs when you move in. If you want more sets of keys, you will have to get them cut yourself. We can provide keys or fobs for shared entrances if you need extra copies or if you lose them, but you will have to pay for these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do I report repairs?</strong></td>
<td>Before we let a property to a new tenant, we inspect it and carry out gas and electrical safety checks. We will do most repairs to bring it up to standard. Some specialist repairs may have to be done after you move in. If any further repairs are needed, call the Repairs Contact Centre on 0121 216 3330. For more information, see ‘Repairs guide’, which starts on page 49.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Living in your home

Your garden
You are responsible for:
- keeping the garden tidy and free of rubbish;
- trimming shrubs, hedges or trees to make sure they do not become a nuisance; and
- maintaining garden features such as patios or terraces, and any fencing you have put up.

In certain circumstances, we may be able to help you maintain your garden. Contact your Local Housing Team for advice. See page 83 for contact details.

You need our permission to:
- put up a garage, or park a car, motorcycle, caravan or trailer in the garden;
- put up a large shed or greenhouse;
- put up or change a wall or fence; or
- cut down or remove any trees, or plant any trees or shrubs (for example, leylandii) that could damage the property or a neighbouring property.

You must not:
- store any indoor furniture or appliances, or flammable materials or gas, in the garden; or
- have a bonfire.

If you do not look after your garden, we may have to do the work and charge you for it.

Pets
- You can keep pets as long as they are suitable for the type or size of home you live in.
- You must get our written permission to keep more than two dogs.
- If you want to keep a dog, think about how you are going to look after it and train it, and how it might affect your neighbours.
- You must clean up after your animals.
- You must not allow your animals to make too much noise and cause a nuisance (for example, barking continually inside or outside your home).
- We can take action against you if you are not a responsible pet owner. You must make sure that you keep all pets under control.

Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What changes can I make to my garden?</td>
<td>You can carry out any reasonable landscaping and planting, but you need our permission before carrying out certain tasks, as explained above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I keep pets?</td>
<td>You can keep a reasonable number of pets as long as your home is suitable for them, you are a responsible owner who keeps them under control and cleans up after them, and they are not dangerous. We can take action if you do not look after your pets or if they cause a nuisance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do I get rid of rubbish?</td>
<td>The council collects household waste once a week. You must put rubbish in the black bags the council delivers to your home twice a year. In tower blocks, you will usually need to put the bags into shared bins. You can put smaller bags of rubbish down refuse chutes. You should take large items or large amounts of waste to one of our household recycling centres. Otherwise, you can ask for a ‘bulky waste collection’ where the council picks up your items. The first three collections are free, then there is a charge. Phone the Contact Centre on 0121 303 1112 to find out more. Please recycle as much of your waste as possible, using the fortnightly collections of paper, cardboard, glass and cans. The council provides blue and green boxes for this waste. In most areas the council collects garden waste once a fortnight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What changes can I make to my home?</td>
<td>You can make minor changes such as putting up your own shelves or wall cupboards, as long as you do not damage or remove anything or alter the property. You should not make any major alterations without first getting our permission in writing. See ‘Improvements’ on page 37.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Living in a flat or maisonette

Respecting your neighbours
So that all tenants can enjoy their home and local environment, please do not:

- play your television or music equipment at a volume that may upset your neighbours;
- play loud music with your windows open;
- feed pigeons by throwing bread or food scraps in the shared areas or neighbourhood (this attracts rats and other pests);
- let children play in shared areas of the block;
- drop litter or any other items from your balcony or flat window (this can cause serious injury); or
- allow pets to roam and mess the shared areas of your block or neighbourhood.

Health and safety

- **Smoking** – It is against the law to smoke in the shared areas inside your block, including landings, corridors, entrance halls, lifts, lobbies and stairwells. We also ask you not to smoke in your home when anyone from the council visits you. Members of staff and contractors will not smoke in your home.
- **Fire hazards** – Please do not obstruct shared areas, as this could stop people escaping if there is a fire. Also, do not wedge open fire doors or security doors, as these prevent fire from spreading quickly.
- **Bonfires** – Do not light bonfires in any shared area in or around your block.
- **Fire and security equipment** – Do not interfere with safety or security equipment such as equipment for detecting or putting out fires, door-entry systems or CCTV cameras, as this could affect the safety of residents.
- **Electricity, gas and water supplies** – Do not interfere with any equipment or storage facilities in the block that are connected to the power or water supplies.
- **Door-entry systems** – Do not damage or misuse the door-entry system as this could result in the block not being secure, encouraging antisocial behaviour.
- **Fire doors** – Keep fire doors clear of any obstruction and keep them closed at all times. They must never be wedged open. Fire doors have a blue and white notice on them saying they must be kept closed.
- **Landings, stairs and drying areas** – These should be kept clear. Don’t leave anything, such as a pushchair, outside your flat or in a shared area as these can help spread fire.
- **Heaters and cookers** – Do not use or store bottled gas, paraffin, petrol or other flammable substances (those which catch fire easily) in your flat. These can cause an explosion or fire and put lives at risk.
- **Pests** – Do not leave food or rubbish where it can attract pigeons, squirrels, rats or mice, as these pests are a health risk.

Shared areas

When you live in a flat or maisonette, there are areas in the block that you share with your neighbours (such as landings, stairways, lifts and corridors), as well as outside areas like gardens and drying areas. Please respect your block and your neighbours by keeping these areas clean and tidy.

Cleaning shared areas – high-rise blocks
Caretakers clean the shared areas in high-rise blocks of flats. If you live in an area where there is a neighbourhood caretaking scheme, neighbourhood cleaners carry out the cleaning. See ‘Estate services’ on page 32.

Cleaning shared areas – low-rise blocks
A contractor working on our behalf cleans the shared areas in some low-rise blocks. If you live in an area where there is a neighbourhood caretaking scheme, neighbourhood cleaners carry out the cleaning. See ‘Estate services’ on page 32.

In some low-rise blocks, residents can decide to clean shared areas themselves. Please agree this with the Local Housing Team first.

If you have any questions about the arrangements for cleaning your block, contact your Local Housing Team (see the contact details on page 83).

Rubbish

For information on how to recycle and get rid of rubbish, turn to page 23.

Drains

If any drains in the shared areas become blocked, phone the Repairs Contact Centre on 0121 216 3330.
## Common questions

| **Who is responsible for cleaning the shared areas?** | In blocks of flats, cleaning is carried out by caretakers, neighbourhood cleaners or contractors working for us. See ‘Living in a flat or maisonette’ on page 24. In houses converted into flats, the residents who live there are responsible for cleaning the shared areas. |
| **Who is responsible for looking after shared areas or shared gardens?** | When you move in, we will tell you what the arrangements are for your block or neighbourhood. We are responsible for repairing and maintaining the shared areas in the block, including door-entry systems and lifts. If you discover any repair that is needed, contact your Local Housing Team (see page 83). Our Grounds Maintenance Service maintains the shared gardens for your block. See ‘Estate services’ on page 32. |
| **Who is responsible for television aerials and satellite dishes?** | There are shared television aerials in all high-rise blocks. If you have difficulty with your signal in a high-rise block, check with a neighbour to see whether they are also having problems as it may just be your own television. If it is a general problem, contact your Local Housing Team. If you want to put up a satellite dish, you need to get our permission first, and you may also need to get planning permission from the council’s Planning Team. You need to arrange for these dishes to be removed if you move out. |
| **What can be done about noise in flats?** | Noise can be heard easily between floors and walls in blocks of flats, so be considerate and respect each other. See ‘Noise and nuisance’ on page 38. |
Fire safety in flats

Your building is designed to resist fire and stop the spread of smoke. It’s important that you know what to do if there’s a fire in the block and how you can help keep your block safe.

When you move in you should:
- find the nearest floor plan;
- plan the escape route you would take if there was a fire;
- find out what action you should take during a fire;
- immediately report any fire hazards; and
- do your part to prevent fires.

Be prepared
- Don’t panic. It can make you act foolishly and lead you into danger.
- If you plan what you would do in an emergency, it could save your life

Make sure you know the following.

What your smoke alarm sounds like | What to do | How to call the fire service | Your escape route or routes – don’t use the lift
--- | --- | --- | ---

If your flat is on fire – act fast

Don’t ignore your smoke alarm. If a door feels hot, there’s probably a fire on the other side.

You should:
- close the door of the room where the fire is, and all other doors, to prevent the spread of fire and smoke;
- get out, closing the front door behind you, and stay out; and
- call 999 to report the fire.
Fire safety in flats (continued)

What to do if another flat is on fire

During a fire, you can’t use the lifts and the stairs could be overcrowded with other tenants and firefighters. Rather than try to escape, it’s probably safer to stay in your flat as it’s designed to resist fire.

If the fire’s in another flat:
- call 999 to report the fire; and
- close all doors and go to your living room. It’s usually the safest place to be.

If you are trapped and can’t call 999:
- close all doors and go to the balcony or a window;
- attract attention by shouting, waving a cloth, or in any way you can; and
- don’t jump – wait to be rescued.

Smoke
Smoke is the main danger from fire, and you should avoid breathing it if possible.

To help avoid breathing smoke do the following.

Seal the room
Stuff wet towels and sheets in gaps around doors to seal out smoke.

Stay low as smoke rises
It may help to tie a wet cloth over your nose and mouth for easier breathing, but this won’t filter out deadly gases.

Vent any smoke
If there’s no smoke outside, open a window slightly. You might need to close it later, so only break it if necessary.
Fire safety in flats (continued)

If you must leave your flat
Go calmly using the stairs, and hold on to the rail. If you’re stopped by heavy smoke, go to a smoke-free area and wait for the fire service.

You should only leave your flat if:
■ the fire is in your flat;
■ your flat is full of smoke; or
■ the fire service tells you to go.

If you do leave:
■ take your key if you can get it safely;
■ close the door behind you;
■ take a torch, if handy; and
■ do not use the lift.

Stop fires before they start
You can help prevent fires in high-rise blocks.

You should take care with:
■ smoking and cooking (the main causes of fire);
■ electrical appliances; and
■ flammable liquids – check the label.

Report fire hazards, such as:
■ missing or broken fire equipment and fire doors;
■ blocked stairs;
■ electrical problems;
■ rubbish that has built up;
■ faulty exit lights; and
■ nearby flats that are empty but not secure.

You should also do the following.
■ Test your smoke alarms each month by pushing the test button. Contact your Local Housing Team if you don’t have smoke alarms.
■ Keep fire doors closed to slow the spread of fire and smoke.
■ Keep halls and stairs clear of rubbish. They’re your escape route.
Smoke alarms in flats

Smoke alarms give an early warning of smoke so that people have more time to escape.

We have fitted smoke alarms in most council flats. There is a programme to fit the alarms in all flats. These are powered by mains electricity (your home’s electricity supply).

We are responsible for maintaining these alarms. You are responsible for maintaining any battery-powered smoke alarms.

You should not tamper with alarms to find out which type you have as this could be dangerous. Contact your Local Housing Team if you are not sure.

What should I do if my smoke alarm does not work?
If you think you have a mains-powered alarm, contact your Local Housing Team.

All alarms fitted recently by the West Midlands Fire Service have batteries that last 10 years. The batteries are fixed in the alarm and can’t be removed.

If you have one of these new smoke alarms, you will need to have the whole alarm replaced if the batteries aren’t working. Call West Midlands Fire Service on 0800 389 5525 and book your free home fire-safety check. If necessary, your smoke alarm will be replaced.

If you have any questions about our programme of fitting smoke alarms, phone 0121 303 3337.

If you have a battery-powered alarm, change the battery and test it again. You can open the alarm by gently pulling on one side of the lid. You may have to try various points carefully before this works. Make sure that you put in the right kind of new battery and that the battery is fitted properly. Make sure that you have something suitable and safe to stand on.

Remember, it can be dangerous to tamper with a mains-powered alarm. If you are in any doubt at all, contact your Local Housing Team.

What to do if you do not have a smoke alarm
If you live in a flat and you do not have a mains-powered smoke alarm, contact your Local Housing Team. They will arrange for you to have a smoke alarm fitted. In the meantime, call West Midlands Fire Service on 0800 389 5525 and book your free fire-safety check. They will fit a smoke alarm if necessary.

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Does your battery-powered smoke alarm work?

You can test your battery-powered smoke alarm yourself.

- Make sure that you are standing on something suitable and safe.
- Push and hold the test button on the front of the alarm for a few seconds until the alarm sounds.
- You should do this every month.
Smoke alarms in flats (continued)

What you need to do about false alarms
Sometimes smoke alarms go off for no apparent reason. This might be because:

- the alarm bleeps occasionally to warn you it needs a new battery (if so, replace the battery as described above);
- moisture from showers and cooking, cooking fumes and chemicals from hairsprays have set the alarm off; or
- the smoke alarm is faulty. Contact your Local Housing Team immediately, unless you have fitted the alarm or someone has fitted it for you. In this case, you should replace it.

Remember that the alarm may have sensed smoke that you cannot see or smell.

How to look after your smoke alarm
Gently vacuum around the alarm unit with a soft brush attachment on your vacuum cleaner. Doing this once a month will stop dust gathering in the alarm. The metal part of the vacuum cleaner must not touch the smoke alarm.

What else you need to know
Smoke alarms will not prevent fires, but they do give a valuable early warning. Preventing fire is very important in keeping you safe. Be aware of how fires can start (for example, cigarettes, hot cooking oils and fats, and children with matches). Also, make sure you know your escape route in case there is a fire.

Free fire-safety check
Call 0800 389 5525 for a free fire-safety check carried out by firefighters from your local fire station.

The check includes fitting and looking after smoke alarms, as well as other helpful information about staying safe from fire.

For more information about smoke alarms, also known as smoke detectors, see page 74.
Safety and security

By taking a few simple precautions, you can prevent danger and damage to your home.

If you smell gas
- Open doors and windows to get rid of the gas.
- Check to see if the gas has been left on or a pilot light has gone out.
- Go outside and phone National Grid (Gas) on 0800 111999. Using a phone inside, even a mobile phone, could cause an explosion.
- Turn off the gas at the meter.
- Don’t smoke, use naked flames or flick switches.

Preventing fires
- If you have a smoke detector in your home, test it regularly to make sure it works. If it is battery-powered, you need to replace the battery if the alarm starts beeping. (See pages 29 and 74.)
- Make sure all cigarettes are put out properly.
- Don’t dry clothes over heaters.
- Don’t leave the kitchen when using chip pans.

Preventing carbon-monoxide fumes
- Keep rooms well-ventilated and make sure vents are not blocked or closed.
- Buy appliances marked with the British Standard Kite Mark.
- If you buy a gas appliance, you must use an engineer on the Gas Safe Register to connect it and service it regularly.

Gas safety
- By law, and for your own safety, once a year we must carry out a gas-safety check on any appliances we have installed.
- By law, you must allow us into your home to carry out this gas-safety check. If you don’t, we may give you 24 hours’ notice and then use a locksmith to get into your home. We will also charge you for the cost of doing this.
- We will service and repair the appliances at the same time as we do the safety check.

Electrical safety
- Unplug appliances when you are not using them.
- If there is a faulty switch or socket, ‘isolate’ it by putting the trip switch for that circuit to the ‘OFF’ position and unplugging appliances.
- Don’t touch bare wires or wet electrical fittings. (See ‘Repairs guide’ from page 49). Put the trip switch for that circuit to the ‘OFF’ position.
- Don’t use double adaptors. Plug one appliance at a time into a socket. If necessary, use an extension lead.
- Don’t install new electrical fittings (for example, showers) without our permission or advice.
- Report any electrical problems to the Repairs Contact Centre immediately by phoning 0121 216 3330.

Door-entry systems
Door-entry systems control entry into a building. To maintain security:
- make sure that the door locks behind you;
- never leave the entrance door propped open; and
- don’t let people who do not live in the block follow you in, even if they appear genuine.

Security
- If you have a door viewer (spy hole), check to see who is at your door before opening it.
- If you have a chain, keep it on when you open the door.
- If you don’t know the caller, ask to see an identification card and check it carefully.
- If you are not sure the caller is genuine ask them to wait outside while you phone the organisation they claim to be from. If it is someone who says they are calling on our behalf, phone your concierge officer or your Local Housing Team (see page 83). If it is a repair, call the Repairs Contact Centre on 0121 216 3330.
- When you go out in the evening, close the curtains and leave a light on in a main room.
- When you go away, fit a timer to a living-room lamp to make it look as though someone is in.
- Arrange for a friend or relative to keep an eye on your home.
- Let us know if you are going away and leaving your home empty for more than four weeks in a row.
- If you want advice about security, contact the police community support officer for your area. Ask your Local Housing Team for advice (see page 83).
Estate services

Concierge and security services
There are several concierge schemes that cover many high-rise blocks. In these blocks there are CCTV cameras in the shared areas in the block. Concierge and security officers monitor these cameras.

Concierge officers will be able to most questions about where you live. They work from 7am to 7pm. Security officers provide a security service at all other times.

The benefits of living in a block where there is a concierge scheme are that:

- access to the block is controlled;
- activity can be recorded and monitored;
- support is provided in emergency situations;
- concierge or security officers can respond to complaints about noise or antisocial behaviour; and
- you can get housing advice between 7am and 7pm, Monday to Friday.

Caretaking and cleaning services

Caretakers
Some high-rise blocks have a caretaking service. Caretakers clean the shared areas of the block and also carry out health and safety checks.

A caretaker’s duties include:

- cleaning shared areas inside the blocks;
- keeping the area around bin rooms and rubbish chutes clean and tidy, and unblocking chutes;
- picking up litter around the block and removing any bulky rubbish;
- checking that lighting, lifts and safety equipment are in good working order and reporting any repairs that are needed; and
- gritting shared paths around the block when it snows.

Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What happens if I need to contact someone in the evening or at the weekend?</th>
<th>We provide an emergency call-out service for these times. The phone number for this is 0121 216 3330.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do I contact the caretaker for my area during normal working hours?</td>
<td>Look at the information on the noticeboard in the lobby of your block. This will give you contact details for your caretaker and other useful information. You may see your caretaker working in your neighbourhood. They wear a uniform and identification badge at all times so that you can identify them. Your caretaker will be happy for you to approach them with your questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What exactly are the caretakers and cleaners responsible for doing?</td>
<td>We have a set of service-standard leaflets which set out exactly what you can expect from your caretaking and cleaning services. You can get these from your Local Housing Team. They are also on our website at <a href="http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/yourestate">www.birmingham.gov.uk/yourestate</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I live in a low-rise block of flats. How can I find out if I get the cleaning service and who provides it?</td>
<td>If your block does receive a cleaning service, you will hopefully be aware of it. You may see your cleaners working in your neighbourhood. They wear a uniform and identification badge at all times so that you can identify them. The vehicles they use also display their logo and phone numbers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do I contact the concierge or security officer for my area?</td>
<td>Many of you will see your concierge and security officers working from their office within your scheme. They wear a uniform and identification badge at all times so that you can identify them. Your concierge and security officers will be happy for you to approach them with your questions. You can also contact your concierge and security officers using the intercom in your flat. Look at the information on the noticeboard in the lobby of your block. This will give you contact details for your night security supervisors, if you need to contact the service outside normal office hours.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Estate services (continued)

**Neighbourhood caretaking and cleaning**

There are several neighbourhood caretaking schemes in the city, each one made up of neighbourhood caretakers and cleaners.

Neighbourhood caretakers provide a minor-repairs and maintenance service and carry out gardening work to shared housing areas in the neighbourhood. Neighbourhood cleaners provide a cleaning service to high- and low-rise blocks in the neighbourhood.

A neighbourhood caretaker’s duties include:
- inspecting the neighbourhood and reporting issues such as vandalism, repairs, graffiti, antisocial behaviour and parking;
- providing a minor repairs and maintenance service to shared areas;
- carrying out gardening work, such as cutting back shrubs and clearing paths;
- checking blocks to make sure lighting, lifts and safety equipment are working; and
- supervising neighbourhood cleaners.

A neighbourhood cleaner’s duties include:
- cleaning shared areas of high- and low-rise blocks in the neighbourhood;
- picking up litter around the block and removing any bulky items; and
- helping neighbourhood caretakers.

**Cleaning contractors**

In some high- and low-rise blocks, cleaning is carried out by a contractor working on our behalf. Your Local Housing Team (see page 83) will be able to tell you if you live in one of these blocks.

The cleaning contractor cleans shared areas in the block (landings, corridors, stairways and so on) and picks up litter in shared areas outside the block once a week.

The contractor will carry out a ‘deep clean’ of the block once a year.

For more information about caretaking and cleaning services in your area, contact your Local Housing Team (see page 83).

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**Common questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Can I get more involved in monitoring the caretaking and cleaning service?</strong></th>
<th>There are lots of ways for tenants to get involved in how the service is provided. These include taking part in estate walkabouts and assessments, joining local residents’ groups and coming along to local events and open days. We are always looking for tenants to share their views with us. If you want to find out more, visit the website at <a href="http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/getinvolved">www.birmingham.gov.uk/getinvolved</a>.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Which estates have concierge and caretaking services?</strong></td>
<td>Wherever we have high-rise blocks of flats, we provide a caretaking and cleaning service. Neighbourhood caretakers, other caretakers and cleaners are around during normal working hours and carry out a range of duties, looking after the shared areas of the blocks. See ‘Caretaking and cleaning services’ on page 32. Some high-rise blocks also have concierge and security services. Concierge officers are on duty from early morning to early evening. At night, weekends and on bank holidays, there is a security service. See ‘Concierge and security services’ on page 32.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who is responsible for open areas on estates?</strong></td>
<td>We are responsible for maintaining open areas. We employ contractors to look after paths, lawns, flowerbeds, landscaped areas, shrubs and trees. See ‘Grounds maintenance’ on page 34.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who do I contact about pests?</strong></td>
<td>If you find cockroaches or ants in your flat or in any shared area of your block, contact your Local Housing Team (see page 83). If you find mice, rats or other pests, contact our Environmental Services Team. Call the Contact Centre on 0121 303 1111 for advice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you monitor services on the estates?</strong></td>
<td>Yes. We have housing staff responsible for particular estates. They make sure that our concierge officers, caretakers, neighbourhood caretakers, cleaners and any contractors are working to high standards. We encourage tenants to join housing staff on estate walkabouts to spot any areas of concern.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grounds maintenance
A contractor maintains open spaces in neighbourhoods on our behalf. Grounds maintenance services include cutting grass, pruning shrubs, cutting hedges and looking after trees.

Estate assessments and walkabouts
The quality of neighbourhoods is important, so estate assessments and walkabouts, involving residents and council officers, are carried out regularly. They are ways in which you can have a say on the improvements you would like to see in your area. For more information, see ‘Menu of Involvement’ on page 6 or contact your Local Housing Team. See page 83 for contact details.

Empty properties
If there is nobody living in a property, it often means that the tenant has abandoned it. Empty properties are more likely to be vandalised. This has a knock-on effect, as vandalism causes neighbourhoods to get worse and it costs money to put right. The cost of repairing vandalised properties comes from rent payments, which means that we have less money to carry out other repairs.

Why we need to know about empty properties
It is important that we know about empty homes so that we can offer them to others on the Housing Register (waiting list). When our homes have been abandoned, it usually means that no-one is paying rent. This means we have less money to carry out repairs and provide other services. Fraud is sometimes involved, which means that families are not being re-housed from the waiting list and the costs of fraud are being met by tenants and taxpayers.

Also, there is a greater risk of leaking or burst pipes if properties are empty and we do not know about it. This particularly affects tenants in flats who live below empty properties.

The sooner we know a property is empty, the sooner we can take steps to prevent leaks and burst pipes.

If you think that a tenant is no longer living in their home, phone your Local Housing Team and report this. (See page 83 for contact details.) You might suspect someone is not living in a property if, for example:

- you have not seen anybody entering or leaving the property for some time;
- curtains are either always open or always closed;
- mail has built up inside the property;
- the garden is overgrown or neglected; or
- there are signs of vandalism that have not been put right (for example, a side gate being forced open).

What happens next
We will ask you for the address of the property and your own contact details, so that we can discuss your concerns with you and keep you updated.

We will also ask you to tell us why you think the property is empty.

Checking the standard of estate services
We check estate services to make sure they are being provided to the expected standards. You can get a copy of our service-standard leaflets from your neighbourhood office, or you can find them on our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/yourestate.

Customer-satisfaction surveys and feedback
From time to time we will contact you for your views on estate services. We will do this by calling at your home, phoning you or sending a survey in the post. For more information on surveys and how to give feedback, see ‘Consultation’ on page 5.
Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where can I or my visitors park?</td>
<td>You can only park in marked areas, or as allowed legally on the side of the road. You can only park in marked areas, or as allowed legally on the side of the road. See ‘Parking’ above. There are special parking schemes on some estates. You will need to apply to your Local Housing Team for a permit. If you live on any of these estates and do not have a car but have a regular visitor, you can ask your Local Housing Team for a visitor’s permit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can I rent a garage or parking space?</td>
<td>Contact your Local Housing Team. See ‘Renting a garage’ above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I store anything in my garage?</td>
<td>A garage is only for storing a car, van or motorbike, not for general storage. In particular, you must not store any dangerous items (such as petrol, bottled gas or other materials) that could explode or catch fire. Also, you must not use it in connection with a business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do I do if my car is clamped or taken away?</td>
<td>This will only happen if you have parked illegally (for example, on a verge, or blocking a road or driveway) or if you have left a vehicle that is not taxed. If your car is clamped, you can get it released quite quickly by making a payment. Details will be on a ticket that is left on your car. If your car is taken away, there will be a parking sign nearby that will give details of how to get it back.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Support services**

We want to help any tenant who needs support to live independently.

**Help to live more easily in your home**

- **Adaptations**
  You may be able to have certain fittings put in, such as extra handrails, a shower, a bath lift or a stair-lift. Contact your Local Housing Team (see page 83) to find out more. We may arrange for an occupational therapist to visit you to discuss what we can do.

- **Careline**
  This service is for older people and anyone who feels vulnerable, has a disability or a medical need, and who has a telephone service in their home. The service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- **Housing Support Service**
  A team of housing support officers provides housing-related support to vulnerable tenants. Housing support officers aim to improve the quality of life for these tenants, and help them keep their tenancy. They help tenants to:
  - plan their move and settle into their home;
  - get access to funds or support to get furniture;
  - get access to services such as doctors, childcare and schools; and
  - manage their finances.
  They also make sure that vulnerable tenants are getting the benefits they are entitled to, and give advice on security and safety.

We automatically assess all new tenants to see if they could benefit from this service.

- **Other help**
  Our Adults and Communities Team has a rehabilitation and enablement service, which may be able to provide help for you to live in your home more comfortably.

**Special accommodation**

We have three types of accommodation for older or disabled people.

- **Adapted homes**
  These are usually flats which have special features such as ramps, grab rails or walk-in showers.

- **Sheltered housing**
  These schemes are groups of self-contained properties that are connected to a control centre and usually have shared rooms such as lounges.

- **Extra-care sheltered housing**
  These are sheltered schemes with extra facilities such as a laundry and on-site care staff, who can help you use the specially adapted bathrooms. Some may also provide a midday meal.

All tenants in special housing can use the services of professional staff who will make sure they have a support plan, and will contact any family members and support services as agreed in the plan.

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### Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What housing is available to older or disabled people?</td>
<td>We have three types of accommodation – adapted homes, sheltered housing and extra-care sheltered housing. (See ‘Special accommodation’ above.) If you are interested in moving to more suitable accommodation, contact your Local Housing Team (see page 83). They will send you an application form and guidance leaflet. They can help you fill in the form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if I am having difficulty living in my home?</td>
<td>If you think you need some special equipment or changes made to your home, you need to contact the Adults and Communities rehabilitation and enablement service. They will send someone out to assess what changes or help you need. To do this, phone the Contact Centre on 0121 303 1111.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I get help with jobs around the home?</td>
<td>If you are vulnerable, elderly or disabled and have nobody to help you with repairs, gardening or decorating, we may be able to help you or put you in touch with volunteer organisations that can help. For more information, contact your Local Housing Team (see page 83).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will I have to pay?</td>
<td>If you want to have extra services at home, you may have to pay towards the cost of them. However, some, may be covered by a Supporting People grant. If you move to special accommodation, you will pay service charges for the extra services and facilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implements

**Our improvement programme**
We have a programme for carrying out major repairs or improvements in our properties. The programme will make sure we meet the Government’s Decent Homes’ standards for warmth, ventilation and comfort. We will consult you, well ahead of time, about any work we expect to do in your home (for example, double-glazing or a new heating system).

**Improvements you can make**
You may carry out your own improvements, but you must discuss them with us first. You should then write to your Local Housing Team, giving full details of what you plan to do. This includes laying floor tiles or laminate flooring. We will write back to you with an answer within 10 working days.

We have the right to insist that work is done correctly, and to inspect it at certain stages.

**Compensation for improvements**
At the end of your tenancy, you may get compensation for certain improvements you have done. We can give you a list of what kinds of improvements these are. See ‘Your rights’ on page 11.

**Common questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can I carry out improvements myself?</td>
<td>You can carry out alterations or improvements to your home as long as you have our permission. This covers any changes you want to make to the inside of your home, decorating the outside of your home or putting up any structures outside. You need to give us full details of the work and who will carry it out. You may also need planning permission and have to follow relevant building regulations. See ‘Improvements you can make’ above. If you remove fixtures or fittings, or carry out alterations, without permission, we may ask you to put them back or restore them to the original condition. If we have to do this after you have left, we will charge you for the costs involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I be compensated for improvements I have made?</td>
<td>You may get compensation for certain types of improvement. We will agree it and pay it only when you end your tenancy. We can give you a list of improvements that qualify for compensation. See ‘Compensation for improvements’ above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What help is there if I am disabled?</td>
<td>We may be able to make certain adaptations to help you in your home. See ‘Support services’ on page 36.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there any improvements planned for my home or area?</td>
<td>We have a programme of improvements for our properties and surrounding areas. We will deal with the most urgent problems first, and the amount we do will depend on what money or grants we can get. We will only contact you if you are on the programme for that year. See ‘Our improvement programme’ above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can pay compensation only when you leave your home. The amount we pay will be based on the original cost of the improvement and how long it has been there. We will not pay compensation if:
- you did not get our written permission to do the work;
- we have had to evict you because you broke the conditions of your tenancy agreement;
- the compensation to be paid is less than £50; or
- the improvement was made before 1 April 1994.

**Planning permission**
You should ask our Planning Service whether you need planning permission and building regulations approval for the improvement. If so, you are responsible for applying for these. Phone the Contact Centre to find out how to contact our Planning Service on 0121 303 1111.
Noise and nuisance

We expect you to be a good neighbour. Your tenancy agreement says that you, your pets and anyone living in or visiting your home (including children) must not cause a nuisance to your neighbours.

What to do if there is a problem

Talk to your neighbour
When people live close together, they often do not realise that they are disturbing others. If you can, tell them politely, in person or by letter, that they are causing you a problem.

Contact us if you have a problem about noise. See ‘Contacts’ on page 83.

If the problem carries on, contact us. We can give you advice on how to deal with the problem. We will treat all information as confidential. We may need to investigate the problem ourselves.

Use our Mediation Service
It can be difficult to sort things out with a neighbour. We can refer you to a mediator who can discuss the issues with everyone involved, and help them come to a lasting agreement. The service is free, confidential and independent (see ‘Contacts’ on page 83).

Being a good neighbour

- Control the volume of sound from radios, music equipment and TVs. Do not put these systems against shared walls or on the floor.
- Make sure you mow lawns and do housework at reasonable times of the day.
- Keep noise in or near your home right down.
- If you have a dog, do not leave it barking constantly in your home or garden. Also, make sure you clean up any mess it makes.
- Warn neighbours when you are going to do something noisy like drilling, hammering or having a party.
- Make sure your children think about how their playing might affect your neighbours.
- Be quiet when you return home late or leave home early. Don’t slam doors, sound car horns, rev engines or shout.
- You, your pets or anyone living with or visiting you should not cause any nuisance that could interfere with your neighbours’ quiet enjoyment of their homes and neighbourhood.
- Make sure you, and anyone living with or visiting you, do not park vehicles on grass verges, in gardens or in areas reserved for emergency vehicles or refuse-collection vehicles.

Common questions

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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What action can I take against nuisance from a neighbour?</td>
<td>Very often, people do not realise that they are disturbing others. If you can, try to explain the problem to your neighbour. Listen carefully to them and try to come to some arrangement. If the situation does not improve, contact us for advice. We will investigate the situation and let you know if we can help. See ‘What to do if there is a problem’ above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can be done about noise from neighbouring flats or houses, or from outside?</td>
<td>We expect neighbours to be reasonable and respect different lifestyles and daily routines. Noise can easily pass between floors and walls in neighbouring properties. However, many tenants do not realise how much noise is heard elsewhere in the building. Try to speak to the neighbour politely and explain how much they are disturbing you. If noise becomes too much, you should contact us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What about nuisance from dogs?</td>
<td>Under the conditions of your tenancy agreement, you must be considerate to neighbours and keep animals under control. See ‘Pets’ on page 23. If you are having problems with stray dogs, contact the dog warden on 0121 303 9900.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if I cause nuisance to a neighbour?</td>
<td>If you, or anyone living in your home or visiting you (including children), cause any nuisance to neighbours, you may be breaking the conditions of your tenancy agreement. If you do not respond to your neighbours’ complaints, we will get involved. We will try to solve the problem with you, but if the nuisance does not stop, we may take action against you. This can result in you being evicted (made to leave your home).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Antisocial behaviour

We want you to feel safe and secure in your home and your neighbourhood. If you are being affected by antisocial behaviour, get in touch with us. We can help.

Your responsibilities

You are breaking the conditions of your tenancy agreement if anyone in your home (including children and visitors) alarms, upsets, annoys or causes a nuisance to anyone in the area around your home.

Antisocial behaviour is any behaviour which reduces the quality of life of residents in an area. Examples of antisocial behaviour include using or threatening violence, racist behaviour or abuse, hate crime, harassment, prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse, drug dealing, domestic violence, criminal damage and arson. A full list of the types of antisocial behaviour we consider unacceptable is given in your Conditions of Tenancy.

Hate crime, is any criminal offence committed against a person because of their:

- race, colour, ethnic background, nationality or national origin;
- religion;
- sex;
- sexuality;
- disability; or
- age.

What we can do to stop antisocial behaviour

Whenever possible we will take action against antisocial behaviour and hate crime. We consider this a high priority. We will work with other agencies, including the police, to deal with such behaviour.

If we receive a complaint about antisocial behaviour, we will investigate the problem and agree an action plan with you. In certain cases, we may set up ‘acceptable behaviour contracts’.

If antisocial behaviour does not stop, we will take legal action.

Common questions

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What action can I take?</td>
<td>If you are frightened because of offensive or abusive behaviour towards you, please get in touch with the police or your Local Housing Team (see page 83). We will give you advice about what to do. We will need to know all about the problem, so you need to give us full details of events. We will provide a specialist victim support service if your case goes to court.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What action will you take?</td>
<td>If a problem is between neighbours, we may take legal action against the offending tenant. If the problem is with a leaseholder or private owner, we may be able to take action ourselves or give you advice and support on what you can do. You can also get advice from a citizens advice bureau.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if I am worried about a neighbour who is being harassed or abused?</td>
<td>If you think a neighbour is having difficulties and needs help, we may be able to contact them and discuss their needs. We will keep whatever you tell us confidential. See ‘Domestic abuse’ on page 41.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I be rehoused?</td>
<td>Our priority is to deal with the problem. It is important that you tell us about any problems you are having.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you going to tell the perpetrator (the person who behaved antisocially) that I complained about them?</td>
<td>No. We do not tell the perpetrator who has made the complaint about them, but sometimes they can guess who has reported it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 4 Your home

Antisocial behaviour (continued)

In serious cases we and the police may apply to the court for an antisocial behaviour order against a person or several people. If the person (or people) does not follow the antisocial behaviour order, they can go to prison.

In other circumstances we may refer the case to other organisations that can help (for example, mediation services or specialist family-intervention projects).

What we can do to support people who experience antisocial behaviour

We offer support to everyone affected by antisocial behaviour.

We work with other organisations to support victims and witnesses of antisocial behaviour, whether or not they have to give evidence in court. One way we provide this support is through the Witness Support Project. The project can offer someone to talk to in confidence, home visits, contact outside office hours for people who need it, private appointments at the project office, and contact with other organisations for extra support, if this is needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’ve made a complaint about antisocial behaviour. What help can you give me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does the mediation service do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know who the perpetrator is. How can you help?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long does it take for you to respond to my complaint?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do I have to go to court?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been accused of antisocial behaviour. What can I do?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationship break-up

If your relationship breaks down, you must act quickly to protect your rights. Only a court has the power to force you to move out of your home. If you are worried, contact your Local Housing Team (see page 83) to discuss the matter.

Your rights

- Joint tenants have equal rights to stay in the home, and either one may end the tenancy. We can transfer the tenancy to one partner.
- If you are not joint tenants, the person whose name is on the tenancy agreement has the right to ask their partner to leave. However, if the partner wants to stay, a court may have to decide who is going to move.
- If you are the sole tenant and you leave the home, anyone who is still living there can only be made to leave (evicted) with an order from a court.
- If you have children living with you, a court will normally put their interests first to make sure they do not become homeless. The court will usually transfer the tenancy to the parent with the main responsibility for the children.

How to get help

- Contact us. We are happy to discuss your situation with you and give you advice. We will keep the details of any conversation with us confidential.
- You can also go to a specialist advice centre such as a citizens advice bureau.

Domestic abuse

We are committed to helping anyone living in our homes who is a victim of actual, threatened or attempted domestic abuse. We will take court action against anyone living in one of our homes who carries out domestic abuse.

If you are suffering from domestic abuse, contact your Local Housing Team (see page 83). They will put you in touch with someone who can help. You can also ask your Local Housing Team for the leaflet, ‘Help if you are experiencing domestic violence’.

If you want to stay in your own home, we can arrange to make your property more secure.

Common questions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can my partner make me leave the home?</td>
<td>If you are named as one of the tenants, you have the right to stay. If you are married or in a civil partnership, you both have the right to stay. If you can’t agree about who will leave, a court will have to decide. If you are not married and not the tenant, contact your Local Housing Team about what options are open to you. Do not give up your right to stay in the home without first asking for advice. See ‘Your rights’ above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who can end the tenancy?</td>
<td>Any tenant named on the tenancy agreement can end the tenancy. If you are not named and your partner wants to end the tenancy, or if you are a joint tenant and you don’t want the tenancy to end, contact your Local Housing Team. See ‘Your rights’ above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If my partner (who is a joint tenant) has left the home, what do I do?</td>
<td>You can continue to live in the property if you are a joint tenant and the other joint tenant stops living at the property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can I do if I am the victim of domestic abuse?</td>
<td>If you are threatened with, or are the victim of, abuse from a member of your household or an ex-partner, contact your Local Housing Team (or the police if it is an emergency). They have specially trained officers who can help you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Buying your home

If you are thinking of buying your home, you should get as much advice and information as you can, so you can be sure you make the right decision. We can give you advice and guidance.

Right to Buy scheme
You can buy your home if you:
■ have been a council or housing association tenant for at least five years; or
■ had a secure tenancy before 18 January 2005 and, even though you have not been a secure tenant at all times since then, you have been a council or housing association tenant for a total of at least two years; and
■ the property is your only or main home.

The price you pay for your home depends on the market value of the property, but you may get a discount. The amount of discount will depend on how long you have had a tenancy with us and any housing association. You cannot buy sheltered or specialist homes.

You can lose your right to buy
You may not be able to buy your home if you break the conditions of your tenancy agreement (for example, by not paying rent or by causing a nuisance), and this results in you getting a demoted tenancy or us getting a possession order from a court.

The costs involved in buying
Even if you get a mortgage, you will have to pay the following other fees and taxes.
■ Fees for your solicitor, your mortgage provider and your own survey
■ A mortgage guarantee premium (usually for loans above 75% of the price of the property)
■ Land Registry fees
■ Stamp duty, if the property is over a certain value

When you have bought
If you buy a flat, you will be responsible for:
■ the upkeep of the inside of your flat and facilities that are not shared with other residents; and
■ paying us your share of the cost of buildings insurance, the upkeep of the building, shared facilities and areas, and any major repairs to the building.

If you buy a house, you will be responsible for insuring the building and for all repairs and maintenance.

Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who has the right to buy?</th>
<th>Most of our tenants can buy as long as they have been a council tenant or housing association tenant for at least five years. This will include any time spent as an introductory tenant. If you decide to buy, you need to fill in an application form. Once you have applied to buy your home, we will only carry out essential repairs that we have to do by law. Up to three other people can buy the property with you as long as they have lived in the home, as their only or main home, for the past 12 months. For more information, email us at <a href="mailto:HouHouseSales@birmingham.gov.uk">HouHouseSales@birmingham.gov.uk</a>. If you break the conditions of your tenancy agreement, you risk losing your right to buy. See ‘You can lose your right to buy’ above.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much will I have to pay?</td>
<td>A qualified valuer will decide the value of the property on the open market. Any improvements you have carried out will not be included in the valuation. You may get a discount, depending on how long you have been a tenant. Please remember that you will have extra expenses to cover once you own your own home. See ‘When you have bought’ above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I sell my home later?</td>
<td>Yes. Once you become the owner of the property you can sell it on. However, if you sell within five years of buying it from us, you will have to pay back all or part of any discount you have received. Also, if you sell it within five years, you will have to pay back some of the value of the property, based on how much it would sell for on the open market.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transferring homes

Moving to another home in Birmingham
If you want to move to another of our properties, or one that belongs to a housing association in Birmingham, you will need to apply to go on our Housing Register. Ask your Local Housing Team for an application form and a guidance leaflet. They can also give you advice, depending on your reasons for moving. If you are behind with your rent your chances of moving are reduced.

We will assess your level of need for new housing. We use a points system to help us put everyone on the Housing Register in order of priority, based on their need. If we assess you as not needing to move, we will not give you any points.

Birmingham Home Choice
We rent out properties through a choice-based lettings scheme called Birmingham Home Choice. We will assess your need for housing. You then bid for properties you are interested in. The properties are advertised each week on our website at www.birminghamhomechoice.org.uk, in our newsletter and on digital TV. If you are successful in bidding for a property, a housing officer will contact you to invite you to view the property.

For more information on how we offer properties under this system, please pick up a copy of our Allocations Policy Summary.

When will you get a new home?
You will only be considered for a home that is suitable for the size of your family. We cannot say how long it will be before you get the opportunity to move. It will depend on:

- the number of people on the Housing Register;
- the number of homes becoming available in the area you want to move to;
- the number of points you have; and
- how often you bid for properties.

Common questions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is ‘choice-based lettings’?</td>
<td>The government wants all councils to offer people more choice about where they live. With choice-based lettings we show all the available properties to people applying for housing and ask them which ones they are interested in. This will make the lettings process fairer and easier to understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does Birmingham Home Choice work?</td>
<td>Once we have assessed your housing application, we will send you your registration letter. This will tell you your points and what types of property you can bid for. You can then use your points to ‘bid’ for properties you are interested in. Each week, we will draw up a list of everyone who has bid for a property. See ‘What happens after I have made a bid?’ below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is a bid?</td>
<td>You tell us that you are interested in a property by making a bid. No money is involved – you bid with your points. You can bid on the Birmingham Home Choice website, by phone, by text message or through digital TV. You can make up to three bids each ‘bidding’ week, which runs from Thursday to Tuesday. People with the highest number of points will be shortlisted and invited to view the property. See ‘What happens after I have made a bid?’ below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where can I see the properties?</td>
<td>You can see the properties on our website at <a href="http://www.birminghamhomechoice.org.uk">www.birminghamhomechoice.org.uk</a> or in the Birmingham Home Choice property newsletter. You can print the newsletter from any computer or from one of the Birmingham Home Choice access points around the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will all the properties be advertised?</td>
<td>Yes. We advertise all available properties each week from one minute past midnight on Thursday until midnight the following Tuesday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happens after I have made a bid?</td>
<td>If you are shortlisted, we will contact you to give you a date and time to view the property. If you can’t make the appointment, we won’t normally consider you for the property. The people with the most points will be at the top of the list, and they will be invited to view the property. The person with the most points will be offered the property first. If they refuse it, we will offer it to the person with the second highest points, and so on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transferring homes (continued)

There is a huge demand for housing in most areas of Birmingham. Joining the Housing Register does not guarantee that you will be offered a new home. There are many people who want a council or housing association home and only a small number of properties that become available.

Let us know if your circumstances change

If your personal circumstances change while you are on the Housing Register, we will have to assess your level of need again, and this may change the number of points you have.

We will also need your up-to-date contact details, otherwise we won’t be able to contact you.

We run the Wise Move scheme for people over 50 who are living in a home with three or more bedrooms and are considering moving to a one or two-bedroomed property. We offer support to help with the move, and we may be able to cover some costs involved with moving you to a new home.

To find out more, phone 0121 303 6825.

Common questions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can I move within the Birmingham area?</td>
<td>Yes. You can apply for a ‘transfer’ to another of our homes. You need to fill in an application form and be put onto the Housing Register. See ‘Moving to another home in Birmingham’ and ‘When will you get a new home?’ on page 43. If you do not need to move urgently, or if you do not have many housing points, you could think about exchanging with another tenant. See ‘Other ways to move’ on page 45.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I move to another part of the country?</td>
<td>Yes, if you are a secure tenant. Secure tenants have the right to exchange their home with a housing association or a tenant of another council in England or Wales, as long as both tenants have written permission from their landlord. We may refuse your request to exchange if certain conditions are not met. Please contact your Local Housing Team or neighbourhood office for advice. See ‘Other ways to move’ on page 45. The swapandmove service (<a href="http://www.swapandmove.co.uk">www.swapandmove.co.uk</a>) is a useful resource for people who want to move to other parts of the country. (See ‘Swapandmove’ on page 45.) However, tenants living in England and Wales do not have the legal right to exchange their home with tenants living in Scotland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there special homes for older or disabled people?</td>
<td>We offer a range of accommodation for older people. Sheltered housing is self-contained homes for people over 50. Specialist support is available through our extra-care sheltered housing. Please contact your neighbourhood office or Local Housing Team for more information. See ‘Support services’ on page 36 and ‘Other ways to move’ on page 45.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I live in a three-bedroom house that’s too big for me now. What can you do to help?</td>
<td>We run a scheme called Wise Move to help people who are living in a home that is too big for them. See above for more details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I eligible for Wise Move?</td>
<td>To be eligible for Wise Move you need to be over 50, be living in a home with three or four bedrooms, and be thinking about downsizing to something smaller.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I move with Wise Move, what sort of work can I have done on my new home?</td>
<td>We can help to make you feel at home in your new home. This can range from decorating and laying floor covers, to small repairs and adaptations. You can discuss your needs with your Wise Move advisor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can I find out more about Wise Move?</td>
<td>Phone us on 0121 303 6825 or write to us at Wise Move, PO Box 16779, Birmingham, B2 2NX.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other ways to move

Mutual exchange

A mutual exchange is when tenants exchange (swap) homes. You can exchange with another of our tenants, a tenant of another council, or a housing association tenant.

When you exchange, you must accept the other property as it is left. You take responsibility for any alterations or improvements made by the tenant you are exchanging with.

It is illegal to pay anyone to persuade them to exchange tenancies with you. If this happens, all the people involved could be made to leave their homes. If you exchange without asking for permission, you can be forced to move back.

To help you find another tenant to exchange homes with, we have arranged for tenants to have free access to a website called www.swapandmove.co.uk. This gives details of tenants all over the UK who want to exchange tenancies. For more details of this service, visit our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/mutual-exchange or ask your Local Housing Team for a form.

Approval to exchange

Each tenant exchanging must get written permission from their landlord. If you do not get a reply from us within 42 days of submitting your fully completed proposal form and copies of all relevant documents, you should get your own legal advice. Some examples of why we will not give you permission are:

- you have an introductory or demoted tenancy;
- your or the other property is larger than necessary or is not big enough and would be overcrowded;
- either you or the other tenant is breaking the conditions of their tenancy agreement; or
- one of the homes is sheltered housing or has been adapted for a disabled person and the new tenant does not need those adaptations.

If you are exchanging with someone who is a council tenant, you will still be a secure tenant and continue to have the right to buy, if you have that right under your existing tenancy. If you exchange your home with a housing association tenant, you may not keep this right. See 'Buying your home' on page 42.

Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is mutual exchange?</td>
<td>A mutual exchange allows you to swap your home with another tenant. If you are on the housing waiting list and have a low priority housing need, think about doing a mutual exchange, as it improves your chances of moving to another home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I move to another local authority or housing association property anywhere in the UK?</td>
<td>Yes. You can swap with another council, housing association or ALMO (Arms Length Management Organisation) tenant as long as you have a secure or an assured tenancy. You will need written permission from both landlords before the mutual exchange can be agreed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do I need to tell you if I want to swap with someone?</td>
<td>Yes. You need our permission before you can exchange your property. The person you want to swap with will need to get permission from their landlord too. If you swap without permission, you could be evicted and you could both lose your home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I took over my home when my mother died. Can I exchange with another tenant?</td>
<td>Yes. If you took over your tenancy when your mother died, you are known as a successor in your current home. If you exchange you will still be a successor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other ways to move (continued)

Other options

Renting privately
Renting privately is a flexible way to choose where you would like to live. If you are eligible, Local Housing Allowance (a form of Housing Benefit) may help you with your rent. For more information, or for help getting started, phone our Private Tenancy Unit on 0121 303 5070.

Buying your home
If you have the money, you could look at buying a home. You will probably need a mortgage to do this. You can contact any bank or building society for advice and information on mortgages. Properties are usually advertised in estate agents and on the internet.

Affordable housing
Shared-ownership schemes allow you to part-buy a property. You then pay a housing association rent to cover the rest of the property. You can then buy more shares in your home until you own the whole property, and you can sell your share in it.

For more information, contact your local neighbourhood office or Local Housing Team.

Sheltered housing
We have a large number of high-quality self-contained properties available for people aged over 50. If you want to move and would like to know more, contact your local neighbourhood office or Local Housing Team for more information.

Extra-care accommodation
This is for people aged 60 years or over who need help or support. It allows you to live independently with professional support staff on-site.
Moving out

If you want to leave your council home, please remember that you need to do the following.

You could be charged extra rent, or pay our costs for clearing the property, removing rubbish or carrying out repairs, if you do not do these things.

Ending your tenancy
After you have given us notice, a housing officer will visit you at home to explain what you need to do before you leave your property.

Rent
You must pay all of the rent and other charges owing on your property up until the end of your tenancy. If you don't, we can go to court to recover the debts. This may result in you having difficulty getting credit in the future, or housing from another landlord. If you need any help with rent issues, please contact the Rent Team (see page 83).

Repair or damage to your home
You must repair or replace any parts of your home that have been damaged while you have lived there. We will charge you if you do not make these repairs.

Clearing out your property
You may find you have extra rubbish or furniture you need to get rid of before you move. You can get rid of rubbish and bulky items at one of the household recycling centres, or arrange for the council's Environmental Services Team to collect bulky waste (see ‘How do I get rid of rubbish?’ on page 23).

Keys
You must return all keys to the property by midday on the Monday the tenancy ends. This includes front- and back-door keys, window keys, any shed keys, keys for shared gates, keys for the chute room and any fobs. If we have to change the locks because you have not returned your keys we will charge you for this.

Moving-out checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Done</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Give four weeks’ notice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay all rent and charges up to the end of the tenancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make sure any repairs are carried out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave the property clean and tidy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove all furniture and belongings from the property and garden</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return all keys to us when the tenancy ends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common questions

| I want to end my tenancy. What do I need to do?                     | Your tenancy is a legal contract. You can end it by signing a Notice to Quit to give us four weeks’ notice. Please give us the address you are moving to in case we need to contact you after you move. |
| Do I need to remove everything from the property?                   | Please make sure that the property, garden and outbuildings are left clean and tidy, and remove all your furniture, including carpets and laminate flooring. If you do not, we may charge you for the cost of removing any remaining items. If the property is completely cleared, you may get £100. See ‘Leave it clean’ on page 48. |
| Can someone stay in the home after the tenancy ends?                | Please make sure that everyone living in the property leaves when the tenancy ends. This is called ‘vacant possession’. If anyone is still in the property, we will ask them to leave. We may take court action against them if they refuse to leave. |
| What do I do about paying my final rent?                            | You need to pay all rent and charges you owe, including any rent arrears you may have from a previous tenancy. You have to pay rent up to the final day of your tenancy. If you do not return your keys at the agreed time, we may charge you extra rent until you hand them in. |
| I have a lot of rubbish to get rid of. Can you collect it for me?   | Yes. Please arrange to take your rubbish to your local household recycling centre. If you can't do this, or you need to get rid of bulky items such as furniture and washing machines, our Environmental Services Team provides a free bulky-waste collection service. Phone 0121 303 1112 for more details. If you live in a multi-storey block, your caretaker or concierge will give you advice on removing rubbish. |
Moving out (continued)

Leave it clean

Are you moving out of your council home?
Would £100 help with the costs of moving?
To receive £100 for leaving your property clear of rubbish and furniture, you must:

- give four weeks’ notice;
- be available for an officer to visit your home;
- have paid your rent up to date;
- leave no repairs;
- remove all rubbish and furniture; and
- hand in all keys on time.
Who to contact

We have four contract areas:

- **Keepmoat Regeneration Limited** cover the North contract area

- **Wates Living Space** cover West-Central contract area

- **Wates Living Space** cover the East contract area

- **Fortem** (Formerly Willmott-Dixon Partnerships Limited) cover the South contract area

We have one Repairs Contact Centre that is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The contractors will do emergency work 24 hours a day.

How to report a repair

You can report a repair in any of the following ways:

- Phoning the Repairs Contact Centre on 0121 216 3330
- Filling in our online repair form on our website at [www.birmingham.gov.uk/repairs](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/repairs) (please do not use this form for emergency or urgent repairs.)
- By textphone: 0121 678 5343 (for people who are deaf or hard of hearing)

- If the lines are busy, we will answer your call as soon as we can, but you could try later, or if your repair isn’t urgent, report it online at [www.birmingham.gov.uk/repairs](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/repairs)
- If you are calling about a repair you have already reported, please let us know the repair reference number you have been given
- Your phone call may be recorded for quality, training and security purposes.
Reporting a repair

What we need to know

- Which item needs repairing or replacing
- What the problem is (for example, is it loose, leaking or broken)
- What is causing the problem
- Where it is – which room inside or whereabouts outside
- A description of the item – the type, size, shape or colour
- What the item is made of
- How big the problem is – what area or length is affected
- Whether it is causing any other problems or damage
- Whether there are any special circumstances we need to know about

To report a repair online visit: [www.birmingham.gov.uk/repairs](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/repairs) (please do not use this form for emergency or urgent repairs.)

To report a repair by phone follow these three steps:

**Step 1: Before you call**

- Look up the problem in one of the section on pages 54 to 75
- Have paper and pen ready to write down your repair reference number and the date of any appointment

**Step 2: When you call**

Let us know:

- your name, address, postcode and phone number; and
- details of the repair needed.

**Step 3: We will arrange the repair**

- We will put details of your repair onto our computer system
- We will discuss what times are convenient for the repair work to be done
- We will make an appointment for a suitable time on a suitable day your name, address, postcode and phone number; and
- details of the repair needed.
Section 6 Repairs guide

Reporting a repair

When you report a repair

■ The Repairs Contact Centre is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They will ask you a number of questions to find out exactly what the problem is. Please be patient and answer all the questions. This will help them get it right first time.

■ The contractor may need to inspect the problem before the work can be carried out.

■ If you report an emergency repair, you must stay in your home until the contractor arrives, if it is safe to do so.

■ Please do not exaggerate how urgent a problem is to get a quicker response. This prevents the contractor from responding quickly to real emergencies.

■ Our contractors respond to emergency problems 24 hours a day.

■ You must arrange to repair anything you are responsible for, or anything you have damaged. You must pay for any work we do to repair damage you have caused. See ‘Your responsibilities as a tenant’ on page 13.

When work is going to be done in your home

■ If furniture needs to be moved or floor coverings need to be taken up, or if you need to make any other preparations before repair work starts, the contractor will discuss this with you and agree how it will be done.

■ We expect you to make arrangements to allow contractors to get on with their work (for example, by keeping children and pets out of the way).

■ You should check the contractor’s identity card before you let them into your home to carry out a repair or inspection. This is to make sure they are genuine. Phone the Repairs Contact Centre if you are not sure about someone.

■ For safety reasons, in very bad weather, contractors cannot work on ladders, scaffolding or the roof.

Please also see ‘Repairs service standards’ on page 79.

Dangerous materials

If you discover any materials that may be a risk to health (such as damaged asbestos) or any broken electrical equipment which we own and are responsible for maintaining, please call the Repairs Contact Centre. See ‘Asbestos in the home’ on page 52.
Asbestos in the home

About asbestos
Asbestos is a mineral that was used in many parts of the home, including ceiling and floor tiles, roof slates, lagging around boilers and heating pipes, ducting and bath panels, mainly because the material is fireproof and good for insulation.

If your home was built or refurbished between 1945 and 1985, it is very likely that there is asbestos in your home. Almost every home built or refurbished then, including council properties, used this building material. From the mid 1980s, asbestos was used much less often in homes.

Most types of asbestos were banned as a building material in 1999 because of the health risk. Homes built after that date do not contain asbestos.

When asbestos might be a problem
Any asbestos in your home is safe as long as it is not disturbed.

Over time, asbestos materials age or become damaged, and fibres can escape into the air. The danger comes from drilling, cutting, sanding or disturbing materials and then breathing in the dust. When breathed in, these fibres can stay in the lungs for a long time and can cause harm.

The risk is greater for people who have worked with asbestos for many years, for people who washed their dusty work clothes, and for people who smoke.

The risk for people who have not worked with asbestos is low. Asbestos in the home is not dangerous unless it is disturbed. If the asbestos is in good condition and not likely to be damaged, it is safest to leave it where it is.

If we find asbestos in a tenant’s home, we will inspect and monitor the condition of it at appropriate intervals.

Please do not try to remove it. It is against the law for anyone except trained, licensed professionals to try to remove and dispose of asbestos.

How to recognise asbestos
Unless you have a good working knowledge of asbestos, it won’t be easy to recognise asbestos in your home. Asbestos comes in many different shapes and forms. See the diagram on page 53.

Carrying out DIY safely in your home
You may have already carried out DIY in your home, such as scraping off wallpaper or drilling walls to hang cupboards or shelves. Most domestic tasks like these do not stir up asbestos fibres.

If you are planning to do any DIY in your home that involves drilling, cutting or sanding materials that you think could be asbestos, phone us first on 0121 216 3330. We will check that you are not disturbing asbestos.

Under your Conditions of Tenancy you must tell us about your plans to carry out any DIY work or other work which involves alterations to your home, and get our permission before you start the work.

Asbestos and repairs in your home
From time to time, you may need to have repairs done in your home, or your home may be improved.

All of our contractors have been trained in spotting asbestos so they know what to look for. They may call in specialist asbestos contractors who will decide whether to remove the asbestos or seal it.

If the asbestos needs to be removed, it will be removed safely, following all the correct health and safety laws. The asbestos will only be removed if it is disturbed or damaged and is assessed as being a potential risk to health.

Remember
■ Asbestos in your home is safe as long as it’s not disturbed.
■ If you have any questions, phone 0121 216 3330.
Common questions

Should asbestos be removed from my home?  Normally it is better to leave asbestos where it is, as it is quite safe unless it is disturbed. But if you think you have old, broken or flaking asbestos that needs to be removed, phone us on 0121 216 3330.

Parts of my ceiling are flaking. Is this dangerous?  If your ceiling has a textured surface and you can see flaky patches, phone us on 0121 216 3330.

I want to paint my living room. Will it be safe to do this?  Yes, as long as you are not sanding or drilling, it is safe to paint or wallpaper your walls.

Can I use drawing pins to put up posters on walls?  Yes, this is perfectly safe.

How can I tell if there is asbestos in my home?  You can’t tell just by looking for it. That’s why you need to check with us if you are planning to do any DIY that could disturb asbestos.

I had improvement work done to my home last year. Should I be worried about asbestos fibres in my home?  No. All of our contractors are trained in spotting asbestos. If there was any need to work with asbestos, they would have called in specialists to do the work safely and legally.
# Section 6 Repairs guide

## Baths, basins and sinks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your responsibilities</th>
<th>You are responsible for the following.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Repairing any damage caused by you or anyone living in or visiting your home.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Cleaning and removing limescale from baths, sinks, basins and showerheads.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Keeping waste pipes clear to prevent blockages, and removing any blockages that happen. (See ‘Blockages’ on page 69.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Replacing plugs and chains to baths, basins and sinks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Repairing any items you have installed yourself (for example, shower, extra tiles.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Renewing wall tiles and seals around baths, basins, sinks and showers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advice</th>
<th>For water leaks, blockages or tap problems, see ‘Drains and gutters’ on page 57 and ‘Pipes and taps’ on page 63.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ A blocked waste pipe is not an emergency unless you live in a block of flats with a shared soilpipe (the outside pipe that takes waste from the toilet). You are expected to try to clear it before you call us. See ‘Blockages’ on page 69. Do not use the bath or sink if the wastepipe is blocked – wait until it has been cleared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ If you caused the damage or blockage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself or we will charge you for the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ If we need to replace bathroom fittings which are part of a suite, we will try to match the colour, but this is often not possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ We will only maintain showers fitted by us or our contractors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We need to know</th>
<th>■ What the problem is (for example, bathroom fittings loose or broken, wastepipe leaking).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ If a bath panel, whether it is the side or the end panel, what it is made of (plastic or hardboard), and what colour it is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ If a bath or basin, what it is made of (plastic or porcelain), and what colour it is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ If a shower, whether you fitted it yourself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Common areas (shared by all tenants)

### Your responsibilities

- Replacing keys or fobs to common entrance doors (see the advice below).
- Keeping all shared staircases, lifts, corridors, hallways, landings and outside areas tidy, safe and free of obstructions.
- Reporting repairs to us quickly.

### Advice

- Any repairs in common areas should be reported direct to the Repairs Contact Centre.
- If you need extra or replacement keys or fobs to common entrance doors, contact your Local Housing Team. We charge you for these new keys.

### We need to know

- What the problem is (for example, door-entry phone not working, door closer loose or broken, lock broken or jammed, lights not coming on).
- If an entry phone needs repairing, whether the problem is in your flat or at the main entrance, whether the door is closing properly, and whether it is a key or a fob system.
- If lights, whether it is a wall or ceiling light.
- If a bulkhead light, where it is and how high it is.
- If the material used at the edge of the stairs (stair nosing) needs repairing, is it a metal strip, plastic strip, concrete, tiled or non-slip surface?
- The exact location of the repair.
- Your contact details.
Doors and locks

You are responsible for the following.
- Repairing any damage caused by you or anyone living in or visiting your home.
- Replacing keys or locks when your keys are lost or stolen, or when you get locked out.
- Replacing door knockers, bells, security chains, letterplates or door numbers, or providing them if none are fitted.
- Replacing broken or cracked glass in any inside or outside door or window, unless you get a crime reference number from the police. (For safety reasons, we will do the work and charge you for the cost of the repair.)
- Replacing handles and latches on all doors inside your home (internal doors).
- Oiling hinges and locks, and adjusting doors when you have new carpets fitted.

Advice
- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself.
- In an emergency we may make the property safe and secure. You or, in some cases, we, will carry out a full repair at a later date.
- If a problem is caused by vandalism or a break-in, you should report the crime to the police and get a crime reference number (not a log number). If you don’t, we will charge you for the cost of the repair. See ‘You are responsible for arranging for damage to be repaired’ on page 13.
- If a porch that we provided is damaged, we may remove it rather than repairing it.
- You must not remove or replace any doors without our permission.

We need to know
- What the door is made of – wood, plastic or metal.
- What the problem is (for example, lock stiff or not fitting properly into the keep, lock or handle broken, door sticking).
- Whether the property is still secure.
- Which door it is – front, back or side, or a glazed balcony door.
- What type of lock is on the door.
### Drains and gutters

#### Your responsibilities
- Repairing any damage caused by you or anyone living in or visiting your home.
- Keeping wastes and drains clear to prevent them from becoming blocked.
- Trying to clear blocked baths, basins, sinks, toilets and drains. See ‘Blockages’ on page 69.
- Clearing blockages in your own washing machine, dishwasher or tumble dryer.

#### Advice
- A blocked wastepipe or toilet is not an emergency unless you live in a block of flats with a shared soilpipe. You are expected to try to clear it yourself before you call us. See ‘Blockages’ on page 69.
- Do not use the bath, basin, sink or toilet if the wastepipe is blocked.
- We will need to put up scaffolding if the repair is on the third storey or higher.
- In very bad weather, our contractors cannot work on ladders, scaffolding or the roof.

#### We need to know
- What the problem is, (for example, wastepipe blocked or leaking, drain smelling or blocked, gully blocked or grid missing, gutter or downpipe loose or broken).
- If a wastepipe, which it is – bath, basin, sink, shower or toilet.
- Whether more than one fitting is blocked.
- If the drain is blocked, whether it is overflowing.
- If gutter or drainpipe, what it is made of (metal or plastic) where it is, what shape it is (half-round, square or ogee), and how many storeys high the property is.
## Electrics

### Your responsibilities

- Resetting trip switches and, if necessary, turning off the mains supply. See ‘Resetting a trip switch’ on page 70.
- Replacing light bulbs, fluorescent tubes and starters.
- Replacing plug fuses in your own appliances.
- Replacing door bells, or fitting one if we have not fitted one.
- Testing and cleaning your smoke detector, and if it is battery-powered, replacing the battery. See ‘Your smoke detector’ on page 74.

### Advice

- If you caused any damage, we will charge you the cost of the repair.
- Do not touch bare wires and do not touch sockets or switches with wet hands.
- Always switch off electricity at the consumer unit (mains) before touching fittings.
- Make sure that you know where the trip switches are in your home and understand how to reset them. See ‘Resetting a trip switch’ on page 70.
- If water is leaking onto electrical fittings, or a fitting is dangerous, do not use any switches connected to it. Report the repair to the Repairs Contact Centre immediately, and switch off the circuit at the consumer unit.
- Do not remove or disconnect any smoke detector connected to the mains electricity supply.

### We need to know

- What the problem is (for example, no lights or power in part or all of the property, light or light switch not working, socket loose, broken or not working).
- What type of fitting or socket it is.
- Whether other buildings are affected (check with the neighbours. It may be a power cut).
- Whether there are any other related problems.
## Floors and stairs

### Your responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You are responsible for the following.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Repairing any floor covering (vinyl tiles, laminate, carpets) you have fitted yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Repairing any damage caused by you or anyone living in or visiting your home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Advice

| ■ We will not accept responsibility for damage to your carpets or other floor coverings, unless it is caused by our contractors. Our contractors will tell you if they need to lift the floor covering (including laminate flooring) in order to carry out repair work. They will discuss this with you before the job starts. |
| ■ If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself. |

### We need to know

| ■ What the problem is (for example, floorboard or skirting loose or damaged, tread or riser broken, nosing loose, handrail loose or broken, floor covering lifting or damaged). |
| ■ What the floor is made of (floorboards, chipboard, plywood or concrete). |
| ■ What type of floor covering it is (quarry tiles, vinyl tiles or sheeting, non-slip flooring). |
| ■ Whether it is in a common area (one shared by all tenants). |
| ■ How many boards, panels or tiles are affected. |
| ■ If nosing, whether it is on the shared stairs and, if so, whether the nosing (the front edge of the stair) is metal or plastic? |
Section 6 Repairs guide

Gardens and garages

You are responsible for the following.

- Repairing any damage caused by you, or anyone living in or visiting your home.
- Repairing any fencing, shed, garage, outbuilding or other garden features not originally provided by us.
- Replacing clothes lines and posts.
- Maintaining paths, except those leading from the boundary (gate) to your front and back doors.
- Replacing latches, bolts, catches, keys or locks to garage or shed doors, and on gates.

Advice

- If a problem has been caused by vandalism or a break-in, you should report the crime to the police and get a crime reference number (not a log number). If you don’t, we will charge you for the cost of the repair. See ‘You are responsible for arranging for damage to be repaired’ on page 13.
- If your garage is separate from your home, you need to explain how the contractor can find it and get in.
- If the garage cannot be closed or locked, you are responsible for the security of anything inside it.
- If any outbuilding, shed, garage, fence, path or garden wall was originally provided by us, we may remove rather than repair it.

We need to know

- What the problem is (for example, fence loose or broken, gate sticking, path uneven or damaged, garage door jammed, frame damaged, roof damaged).
- If a garage, what type of door it is (up-and-over, side-hung) and whether the car is stuck inside.
- If a garage roof, what type it is (corrugated metal or cement, felt, asphalt or tiles).
- If a gate or post, what type it is (wooden, metal or concrete).
- If a path, what it is made of (slabs, concrete, tarmac, brick paving).
- If a fence, what type it is (wood boarding or panels, chain link) and how much is affected.
### Your responsibilities

- Make sure that your heating controls (room thermostat, timer or programmer) are set correctly. See ‘Adjusting heating controls’ on page 71.
- Draining the air out of radiators. See ‘Bleeding a radiator’ on page 75.
- Replacing cylinder jackets (if the tank has no other insulation).
- Keeping your home properly heated, even when you go on holiday, to prevent frozen or burst water pipes and keeping it ventilated to prevent condensation. See ‘Condensation’ on page 72 and ‘Frozen or burst water pipes’ on page 73.

### Advice

- If you suspect a gas leak, turn the gas off at the mains and open windows. Do not smoke or switch anything electrical on or off until the problem is fixed. Call National Grid (Gas) immediately on 0800 111 999. Use a phone outside your home. Using one inside could spark an explosion.
- Next, phone the Repairs Contact Centre on 0121 216 3330 so a contractor can come out.
- You should make sure that your gas supply does not run out because you have not put money in the meter, or it has been disconnected because you have failed to pay your bill. If this happens, you will have to relight any pilot and reset the controls yourself. See the operating instructions for your boiler.

### We need to know

- What the problem is (for example, smell of gas, central heating not working, radiator leaking or not getting warm, no hot water).
- What type of heating it is (gas or electric) and the make or model of the boiler.
- What type of system it is (wall-mounted boiler, gas fire with back boiler, separate gas or electric fire, convector heater, or solid-fuel heater).
- Whether you have any other form of heating rooms (for example, warm-air heating) or water (for example, an immersion heater).
- If a radiator, whether it is warm at the bottom and cold at the top.
Section 6 Repairs guide

Kitchen fittings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your responsibilities</th>
<th>Advice</th>
<th>We need to know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You are responsible for the following.</td>
<td>If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself.</td>
<td>What the problem is (for example, wall or floor unit loose or damaged, worktop loose or broken, cupboard door or drawer damaged).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Repairing any damage caused by you or anyone living in or visiting your home.</td>
<td>■ If we have to replace kitchen units or parts of a unit, such as a worktop, drawer or door, we will try to match the colour and style, but this is not always possible.</td>
<td>■ What type of unit it is (wall or floor, tall unit or a corner unit, single unit or double unit) and what colour it is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Replacing handles and catches on kitchen units and drawers.</td>
<td>■ If you install a washing machine, dishwasher or tumble dryer, you are responsible for any supply pipes, wastes or vents, and any related electrical connections that you have fitted to them. You should use a qualified person to install them and you should follow the manufacturer’s instructions when using them. You are also responsible for clearing any blockages. You may be charged for damage caused by not installing the item properly.</td>
<td>■ Whether there are any related problems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Pipes and taps

#### Your responsibilities
- Repairing any damage caused by you or anyone living in or visiting your home.
- Reporting a leaking overflow.
- Taking steps to prevent water in pipes and taps from freezing or bursting in cold weather (for example, by lagging any exposed pipes). Also, turning off your water supply at the stoptap if a water pipe bursts, or if you go away. (See ‘Frozen or burst water pipes’ on page 73.)
- Fitting pipework and vents for a washing machine and dishwasher (if they are not already provided).
- Removing limescale from taps.

#### Advice
- You should know where the stoptap is so you can turn the water off in an emergency. It is usually under the kitchen sink or near the front door. You should regularly check that it turns easily.
- If water is leaking onto electrical fittings, do not touch them and turn off the circuit at the consumer unit. (See ‘Resetting a trip switch’ on page 70.) If damage is caused by water leaking, you may be able to make a claim on your own contents insurance. (See ‘Moving in’ on page 21.)

#### We need to know
- What the problem is (for example, no water, pipe leaking or burst, overflow running or broken, tap dripping or faulty).
- If water is leaking into your home whether it is coming from the flat above and if so, the address and whether you have contacted the tenant.
- If a tap, what type it is.
- Whether there are any other related problems.
Your responsibilities

You are responsible for the following.

- Repairing any damage caused by you or anyone living in or visiting your home.
- Putting up television or radio aerials, or satellite dishes, on the outside of the property. You must get our permission before you do this. See the advice below.
- You must arrange for these aerials or satellite dishes to be removed so that we can carry out repairs, when you move out, or when you no longer need them.

Advice

- We will need to put up scaffolding if the repair is above two storeys high.
- In very bad weather, contractors cannot work on ladders, scaffolding or the roof.
- Do not use electrical fittings if the roof is leaking and they are getting wet. Do not use any switches connected to them, and phone the Repairs Contact Centre immediately.
- If you have water coming in through the roof, put a bowl or bucket underneath it and move your belongings to prevent damage.
- If you want to put up a television or radio aerial, or a satellite dish, on the outside of the property, you must write to your Local Housing Team to ask permission. You must wait until you get written permission before you go ahead.

We need to know

- What the problem is (for example, roof leaking, tiles or slates loose or broken, chimney pot or cowl fallen or loose, chimney stack crumbling).
- What type of roof covering it is (slate, tiles, corrugated sheeting, flat felting or asphalt).
- If tiles, what type they are (flat, ridge, interlocking, hip).
- How many storeys high is the property.
- Whether the roof is leaking.
- Whether the chimney is shared with another property and if so, the address of the other property.
Section 6 Repairs guide

Toilets

Your responsibilities

- Repairing any damage caused by you or anyone living in or visiting your home.
- Taking action to prevent your toilet from becoming blocked.
- Replacing flush chains and handles.
- Cleaning and removing limescale from toilet pans.
- Trying to clear toilets when they become blocked. (See ‘Blockages’ on page 69.)

Advice

- A blocked toilet is not an emergency unless you live in a block of flats with a shared soilpipe.
- You should always try to clear any blockages yourself before you call us.
  (See ‘Blockages’ on page 69.)
- If you caused the damage, we will charge you for the repair.
- If we need to replace a toilet which is part of an existing suite, we will try to match the colour, but this is not always possible.

We need to know

- What the is problem (for example, toilet blocked, overflow running, cistern leaking, toilet seat broken, pan cracked or leaking).
- What type of cistern it is (high-level, low-level, close coupled).
- If a low-level cistern, whether it is the flush-panel type or standard.
- What colour the suite is.
## Walls and ceilings

### Your responsibilities
- Repairing any damage caused by you or anyone living in or visiting your home.
- Decorating walls and ceilings inside your home, and treating your walls for mould caused by condensation. (See the advice below.)
- Repairing minor cracks and holes in walls and ceilings, and damage to plaster.
- Putting up television or radio aerials, or satellite dishes, on the outside of the property. (See ‘Roofs and chimneys’ on page 64.) You must arrange to have these removed so that we can carry out repairs, when you move out, or when you no longer need them.
- Keeping air vents clear.
- Putting up and repairing curtain and picture rails, pelmets, hat and coat hooks.

### Advice
- Try to keep condensation to a minimum to prevent damp and mould on the walls or ceiling. For advice on controlling condensation, see ‘Condensation’ on page 72.
- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself. If damage is caused by water leaking, you may be able to make a claim on your own home contents insurance.

### We need to know
- What the problem is (for example, plaster on walls loose or crumbling, ceiling plaster bulging, condensation or mould on walls or ceilings).
- Whether there are any related problems.
- Whether there is any damage caused by water leaking from a pipe or radiator, or through the roof.
- If outside, what type of wall surface it is (pebbledash or smooth render, uPVC boards, timberboards or hanging tiles or slates).
- If tiles, the shape and colour.
- If cladding boards or fascia, whether they are made of wood or plastic (uPVC).
Section 6 Repairs guide

Windows

Your responsibilities

- Repairing any damage caused by you or anyone living in or visiting your home.
- Replacing broken or cracked glass in any door or window, unless you can get a crime reference number from the police. (For safety reasons, we will do the work and charge you for it.)
- Replacing keys to window locks.
- Keeping window trickle vents clear.

Advice

- If a problem has been caused by vandalism or a break-in, you should report the crime to the police and get a crime reference number (not a log number). If you don’t we will charge you for the repair. (See ‘You are responsible for arranging for damage to be repaired’ on page 13.)

We need to know

- What the problem is (for example, glass cracked or broken, frame loose or jammed, stay or fastener broken).
- What type of frame it is (wooden, plastic or metal).
- What style of window it is (casement or pivot).
- What type of glass it is (for example, plain, obscure or wired) and whether it is double glazed.
- Whether there are any related problems.
- If a fastener, what type it is.
Section 7

Handy hints
Blockages

General advice
Blockages are usually caused by waste such as fat, tea leaves, hair and so on building up in the trap. You should clear wastepipes and traps at least once a month.

The trap is under the fitting (bath, basin or sink). The trap always holds some water. This stops air or bad smells coming up the drain. However, waste can build up and become stuck in the trap.

If more than one fitting (bath, basin or sink) is blocked, the blockage may be in the soilpipe or main drain. Phone the Repairs Contact Centre who will need to clear this.

What to do
You need:
■ a bowl;
■ a jug or a cup;
■ a wet rag or a dishcloth;
■ a plunger; and
■ rubber gloves.

To unblock a bath, basin or sink:
■ bail out most of the water;
■ hold the wet rag tightly over the overflow; and
■ put the plunger over the plug hole and pump up and down quickly.

To unblock a toilet
■ If the pan is already full, remove some of the water into a bucket using for example, a jug or a bowl.
■ Push the toilet brush or plunger to the bottom of the pan.
■ Pump it up and down vigorously about 10 times.
■ Flush to see whether the blockage has gone.
■ You may need to repeat this several times before the toilet flushes normally.
If there is no improvement after a couple of attempts, phone the Repairs Contact Centre.

Thoroughly wash your hands and all equipment after you have finished.
Section 7 Handy hints

Resetting a trip switch

This advice only applies to modern consumer units (fuse boxes). If you have an older ‘fuse board’ with fuses and fuse wires, do not touch it. Phone the Repairs Contact Centre immediately.

**General advice**
- Modern electrical circuits are fitted with circuit breakers called trip switches. If there is a fault, the switch trips (flicks off) and the circuit is broken.
- All of the trip switches are in the consumer unit. Some consumer units have buttons rather than switches. The consumer unit may be near your front door or next to the electricity meter (unless the meter is in an outside cupboard.)
- Trip switches and buttons usually flick off because:
  - there are too many fittings or appliances on a circuit and it has been overloaded;
  - the appliance (for example, a kettle, an iron or an immersion heater) is faulty or is not being used properly;
  - the lead to an appliance such as a TV or a hairdryer is loose or badly connected;
  - water has leaked into a circuit; or
  - a light bulb has blown.
- If an appliance is faulty, leave it unplugged and get your own electrician or service engineer to check it.
- Make sure your hands are dry when you touch electrical fittings.
- Never touch the electricity company’s fuse and seals.

**What to do**

**To reset a trip**
- Open the cover on the consumer unit to show the trip switches and buttons.
- Check which switches or buttons have tripped to the ‘OFF’ position and which rooms (circuit) have been affected.
- Put these switches or buttons back to the ‘ON’ position.

**If the trip goes again**

This is probably being caused by a faulty appliance. You need to identify which circuit is being affected and which appliance on that circuit is causing the problem.

**To identify the problem appliance**
- Unplug all appliances on that circuit (including washing machines, dishwashers, tumble dryers and irons) and switch off the immersion heater.
- Switch the ‘tripped’ switch to the ‘ON’ position (if it is a button, press it in).
- Plug in the appliances one at a time.
- Do not use double adaptors when testing appliances. Test one appliance in each socket until the trip goes again.

If the fault is due to a faulty appliance and we send an electrician out, we will charge you for this.
General advice
- A timeclock or digital programmer automatically turns the heating and hot water on and off at the times you set. You can set them to come on once or twice, or to stay on all the time. You have three switches to control when the heating goes on and off.
  - AUTO turns the heating and hot water on or off at the times that you set.
  - ON overrides the timer to have the heating on constantly.
  - OFF overrides the timer and turns the heating off.
- Set the heating to go off during the night and when your home is empty during the day.
- When the weather outside is freezing, keep some background heat on all the time.
- A room thermostat controls the heating to keep the room at a set temperature. Turn the dial so that the arrow or marker is against the temperature you want.
- A comfortable and economic temperature is between 15°C and 20°C.

Timeclock programmer
- Check the clock is showing the correct time and adjust it if necessary.
- Decide when you want the heating and hot water to come on and go off.
- Timeclock programmers will have sets of pins or arrows for setting the heating programme.

Pins:
- Push the pins in opposite the times when you want the heating to be on.
- Pull the pins out opposite the times when you want the heating to be off.

Arrows:
- Slide the ‘on’ arrows (usually red) around to the time you want the heating to come on.
- Slide the ‘off’ arrow (usually blue) around to the time you want the heating to go off.
Check that the programmer is switched to ‘timer’ (or ‘auto’) to activate the times you have set.

Digital programmer
- Check the clock is showing the correct time. If not, put the timer switch to ‘clock’ and adjust the time using the ‘forward’ and ‘reverse’ buttons.
- Set the switch to ‘on’ and ‘off’ in turn, adjusting the times when you want the heating to come on and go off.
- Reset the timer switch to ‘auto’ and double check that the settings on display are as you want.
Condensation

What is condensation?
- It starts as moisture that is produced by cooking, washing or drying clothes indoors or on radiators.
- This moist air condenses (causes water droplets) on cool surfaces such as walls, mirrors, wall tiles and windows, and even fabric, like curtains and clothes.
- When the moist air is warm, it rises and often ends up on ceilings and in upstairs rooms, and then forms mould.

Preventing condensation
Condensation can appear in any home. You can take steps to prevent it.

Control moisture
- Close kitchen and bathroom doors to prevent steam from going into colder rooms.
- Open kitchen and bathroom windows when cooking or washing so that steam can escape, or use an extractor fan if you have one.
- Open some windows in all rooms for a while each day to allow a change of air.
- Do not use bottled-gas heaters as the gas produces a lot of moisture.
- Wipe surfaces where moisture settles to prevent mould from forming.
- Do not block air vents.

Produce less moisture
- Dry clothes outdoors whenever possible, otherwise use well-ventilated rooms.
- Cover pans when cooking.
- Vent any tumble dryer to the outside, or use a condensing tumble dryer.

Keep your house warm
- Keep your central heating on a low background heat.
Frozen or burst water pipes

General advice
- Know where your stoptap is. It is where the water pipe enters your home, usually under the kitchen sink or in the bathroom, or by the front door.
- Know where the gate valves for the hot and cold tanks are. They are usually by the hot-and cold-water tanks.
- Make sure that you can easily turn off all taps and valves.
- Make sure pipes and tanks in your roof space are lagged. Never insulate beneath the water tank in the loft. It needs some heat to come up from below.

What to do
If you are going away for several weeks
- Turn off your water supply at the stoptap, turn your heating off and turn your gas supply off at the mains. However, if you go away during cold weather, it is best to leave your heating on low.

Frozen pipes
- Turn off the pipes at the main stoptap.
- It is best to leave the pipes frozen, but you may try to thaw them using hot-water bottles.
- If the hot-water system is frozen, turn off the water heater.

Burst pipes
- Turn off the water at the main stoptap.
- Turn off any water heaters and put out any coal fire that heats a back boiler.
- Turn all the taps on to drain water from the system. This takes about 15 minutes.
- If electric fittings or wires are getting wet, do not touch them. Turn off the electricity at the consumer unit (fuse box).
- If water leaks through a ceiling and makes it bulge, put a bucket under the bulge and use something such as a screwdriver to make a hole to let the water through. This could prevent the ceiling from falling down.
Your smoke detector

Look after your smoke detector. It could save your life. These are instructions for a battery-powered smoke detector. If you have a smoke alarm connected to the mains, see page 29.

If the alarm goes off:
- take your family to where it is easy to escape in case there is a fire;
- check all rooms for signs of smoke; and
- feel around each door before opening it. If there is any sign of heat, smoke or noise, don’t open the door.

If a fire has broken out:
- do not try to tackle it yourself – smoke and fumes can kill in minutes;
- get everyone out and call the fire service (999); and
- don’t go back for any reason.

If there is no sign of smoke or fire:
- the battery may need replacing; or
- something may have caused it to go off by mistake. (See ‘Emergency action’ opposite.)

Emergency action
A smoke detector may go off by mistake if:
- a heater or clothes dryer is too near the detector;
- someone smokes near the detector;
- an aerosol spray is used near the detector;
- there are too many cooking fumes or steam (for example, from roasting meat or burnt toast); or
- there are strong draughts from doors or windows near the detector.

Test your alarm every month
- Press and hold the test button for a few seconds until the alarm sounds.
- If the alarm does not sound, try cleaning it and test it again.
- If the alarm still does not sound, replace the battery. If it doesn’t work after you have put in a new battery, you need to replace the whole detector.

How to change the battery
- Buy a new 9-volt battery.
- Open the detector by gently taking off the cover.
- Unclip the battery from its connections and battery clips.
- Clip the new battery firmly into place. Make sure it is put in the same way as the one you removed. The + and – signs on the battery must match up with the + and – signs on the detector.
- Close the detector and press the test button to check that it works properly.
Bleeding a radiator

**General advice**
- If the top part of the radiator is cold, air is trapped in the system. You need to let the air out and allow hot water to fill the radiator. This is called ‘bleeding’ the radiator.
- If you have tried to let the air out of the radiator and this has not solved the problem, phone the Repairs Contact Centre.
- If more than one radiator is cold, the whole heating system will need to be checked by a heating engineer. Phone the Repairs Contact Centre.

**What to do**

**You need:**
- a special radiator key (you can buy this from a DIY store);
- a rag or cloth; and
- a bucket.

**How to let air out of the radiator**
- Find the bleed valve. It is the small square nut at one end of the top of the radiator.
- Place the key over the valve and hold the cloth around it to catch any water that comes out.
- Loosen the valve by turning the key slowly to the left (anticlockwise) until you hear a hiss. This is the air coming out.
- Do not unscrew the valve completely because the plug will come out and water will pour out.
- Wait until all the air has come out and a little water comes out. Turn the key back to the right (clockwise) to tighten the valve again.
Our repairs service

Our repairs responsibilities
We will repair and maintain the structure of the property you live in and the outside of the building (including the roof, drains, gutters and pipes).

In blocks of flats or maisonettes, we are responsible for entrance doors, halls, stairways, lifts, rubbish chutes, lighting or other items or areas that are shared by all the tenants and leaseholders.

For tenants, our responsibilities also include any fixtures and fittings we provided in the home, and all pipes, wiring, heating systems, drainage, power and light fittings.

In almost all cases, we will carry out a repair. We will only replace something if it is not practical or is too expensive to repair it. We may remove some items without replacing them.

We have a compensation policy because sometimes things go wrong. In these situations, we need to be able to compensate people who have been affected.

Our contractors
All repairs are carried out by our appointed contractors (sometimes called ‘repairs partners’). They follow our policies and repairs standards when dealing with you and when carrying out their work.

We have specialist contractors who carry out gas servicing and repairs.

We work very closely with our contractors and have a thorough system of checking on the standard of their work.

Gas safety
By law, every year we must carry out a gas safety check in every property which has a gas supply, whether you use it or not.

You must let engineers from our gas contractor into your home and allow them to carry out the safety checks and any servicing. If you don’t, we will take action to get into your home. We will charge you for doing this.

Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What repairs and maintenance are you responsible for?</td>
<td>We are responsible for the outside of the property, the main structure, and for maintaining shared areas of blocks of flats and maisonettes. We also carry out some repairs inside your home. (See ‘Our repairs responsibilities’ above.) All repairs and servicing are carried out by our contractors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if I can’t carry out my responsibilities?</td>
<td>You are responsible for taking care of the inside of your home and for certain repairs. (See ‘Your responsibilities as a tenant’ on page 13.) If you are vulnerable, elderly, disabled or have a long-term illness, and you have nobody to help you with these repairs, we may be able to put you in touch with organisations that can help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do I have to pay for any repairs?</td>
<td>We expect you to arrange repairs for any damage caused by you or anyone living in or visiting your home. However, if it involves your gas, electricity or water supply, or the security of your home, our contractors must carry out the work and you must pay for it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I claim for damage to my property?</td>
<td>If damage is caused as a result of our repairs you must tell us within 28 days of the damage being caused or you finding out about the damage. You can get a compensation form from your Local Housing Team. We strongly advise you to take out home contents insurance to help you pay for any other accidental damage. (See ‘Moving in’ on page 21.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can I check the progress of my claim?</td>
<td>We will give you the number of the person dealing with your claim. However, the customer involvement officer (CIO) for your area will have to oversee your claim at all times and keep you informed about its progress. The phone numbers for the CIOs are 0121 303 6879 (South repairs contract), 0121 464 4903 (Central repairs contract) and 0121 303 1802 (North repairs contract).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can I do if I am not happy with your response to my claim?</td>
<td>If you are not happy with our response, you can make a complaint. (See page 8 for guidance.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Repair response times

When you report a repair, the Repairs Contact Centre will tell you which response category your repair is in – emergency, urgent or non-urgent. The response times are measured from the date you report the problem.

**Emergencies**
If there is danger of injury or damage to the property, our contractor will respond to all real emergencies within two hours.

**Urgent**
If the repair is urgent, our contractors will respond within one, three or seven working days, depending on the type of repair.

Examples of one-day repairs are:
- repairing burst or leaking pipes;
- restoring heating or hot water (in winter);
- restoring water, gas or electricity supplies;
- making the property secure; and
- repairing broken electrical fittings.

Examples of three- or seven-day repairs are:
- restoring any part of an electricity or water supply;
- repairing a faulty door-entry phone; and
- repairing water leaks through the roof.

**Non-urgent**
This is for all other repairs. Our contractors aim to do these within 30 days. Some larger and more complicated repairs may take longer.

**Appointments**
We will offer you an appointment for all repairs except emergencies. You must keep appointments that we have agreed with you.

**Common questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>How long will it take?</strong></th>
<th>We will respond to repairs within the timescales set out above, and will usually offer you an appointment. If a repair worker does not come within the response time, or keep to an appointment agreed with you, phone the Repairs Contact Centre.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What if I can only be in at a certain time?</strong></td>
<td>When you report a repair, let the Repairs Contact Centre know what time of day it is convenient for the work to be done. If you cannot be in, you could arrange for a neighbour, relative or friend to wait in. If this is not possible, phone the Repairs Contact Centre at least 24 hours before the appointment to arrange a new time. You may have to pay our costs for appointments if the contractor comes to do the repair and you are not in. If you are not in when the contractor comes to do a repair, they will leave a card asking you to phone the Repairs Contact Centre to arrange another time for them to call. If you are not in more than once, you will need to report it again. Wherever possible, we will try to make appointments at times to suit you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Repairs service standards

Our contractors **will**:

- introduce themselves and show identification before entering your home
- always wear their uniform
- explain what they will be doing, how the work will affect you and keep you informed of progress
- take care of your belongings and protect them from damage and dust
- make sure materials and tools do not cause a danger to you or your household
- keep mess and noise to a minimum
- make sure electricity, water and gas are connected at the end of each day where it is safe and practical to do so. If we can’t reconnect these services then temporary arrangements should be provided
- clear away any rubbish or building materials from inside and outside the property at the end of each day.

Our contractors **will not**:

- play music while working without your permission
- use your phone, electricity supply or toilet without your permission
- smoke in your home
- use mobile phones for private phone conversations while working
- accept gifts from you.

Common questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What if the work is not done on time?</th>
<th>Your repair will be put in a category that the response time is based on. (See ‘Repair response times’ on page 78.) If the repair is not done within that response time, let the Repairs Contact Centre know and they will follow it up immediately.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What if I am not satisfied with the work?</td>
<td>If the repair was not carried out on time, or you are not satisfied with the work that has been done or the service provided, please let us know. We will try to sort out the matter. Most problems can be sorted out quickly. However, if you want to take the matter further please see ‘Your feedback’ on page 8.</td>
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Sections 10

Contacts
## Section 10 Contacts

### Contacting our housing service

**General council enquiries**  
Phone: 0121 303 1111

**Repairs**  
Phone: 0121 216 3330. Phone lines are available 24 hours a day and calls are free from BT landlines.

**Rent enquiries**  
Phone: 0121 675 2006

Or you can visit our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/housing

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Team</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Edgbaston Housing Team</strong></td>
<td>Covering Bartley Green, Edgbaston, Harborne and Quinton wards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial Behaviour Team</td>
<td>303 9728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Needs Team (including Ladywood and Soho wards)</td>
<td>303 5245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lettings Team</td>
<td>303 6716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estate Management Team</td>
<td>303 9724 or 303 9725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:edgbaston@birmingham.gov.uk">edgbaston@birmingham.gov.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hodge Hill Housing Team</strong></td>
<td>Covering Bordesley Green, Hodge Hill, Shard End and Washwood Heath wards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial Behaviour Team</td>
<td>303 7269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Needs Team (including Nechells ward)</td>
<td>303 1559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lettings Team</td>
<td>303 1561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estate Management Team</td>
<td>303 7250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:hodgehill@birmingham.gov.uk">hodgehill@birmingham.gov.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Erdington Housing Team</strong></td>
<td>Covering Erdington, Kingstanding, Stockland Green and Tyburn wards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial Behaviour Team</td>
<td>303 5485 or 303 5487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Needs Team (including Aston ward)</td>
<td>303 6520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lettings Team</td>
<td>303 7062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estate Management Team</td>
<td>303 7048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:erdington@birmingham.gov.uk">erdington@birmingham.gov.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ladywood Housing Team</strong></td>
<td>Covering Aston, Ladywood, Nechells and Soho wards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial Behaviour Team</td>
<td>303 5660 or 464 5197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lettings Team</td>
<td>303 5606 or 303 0444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estate Management Team</td>
<td>303 5667 or 303 0444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:ladywood@birmingham.gov.uk">ladywood@birmingham.gov.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hall Green and Selly Oak Housing Team</strong></td>
<td>Covering Billesley, Bournville, Brandwood, Hall Green, Kings Heath and Moseley, Selly Oak, Sparkbrook and Springfield wards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial Behaviour Team</td>
<td>464 1199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Needs Team</td>
<td>303 4005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lettings Team</td>
<td>303 7551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estate Management Team</td>
<td>303 8905 or 303 4156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:hallgreen@birmingham.gov.uk">hallgreen@birmingham.gov.uk</a>, <a href="mailto:sellyoak@birmingham.gov.uk">sellyoak@birmingham.gov.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northfield Housing Team</strong></td>
<td>Covering Kings Norton, Longbridge, Northfield and Weoley wards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial Behaviour Team</td>
<td>464 4700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Needs Team</td>
<td>464 5607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lettings Team</td>
<td>464 5606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estate Management Team</td>
<td>464 7297 or 303 5416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:northfield@birmingham.gov.uk">northfield@birmingham.gov.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have any questions or need to talk to your Local Housing Team, please ring the relevant number below for your area. Lines will be open between 8.45am and 5.15pm Monday to Thursday and between 8.45am and 4.15pm on Fridays. **All phone numbers below begin with 0121.**

### Out-of-hours phone numbers

- **Domestic violence:** 0800 0732 606
- **Homeless:** 0121 303 2296
- **Repairs:** 0121 216 3330

If you need the emergency services, call 999.
Section 10 Contacts

Perry Barr Housing Team
Covering Lozells and East Handsworth, Handsworth Wood, Oscott and Perry Barr wards
Antisocial Behaviour Team ...................... 303 6525
Assessing Needs Team .......................... 303 6520
Lettings Team .......................................... 303 7062
Estate Management Team ...................... 303 6525
Email: perrybarr@birmingham.gov.uk

Sutton Coldfield Housing Team
Covering Sutton Four Oaks, Sutton New Hall, Sutton Trinity and Sutton Vesey wards
Antisocial Behaviour Team ..303 5485 or 303 5487
Assessing Needs Team .......................... 303 6520
Lettings Team .......................................... 303 7062
Estate Management Team ..................... 303 1446
Email: suttoncoldfield@birmingham.gov.uk

Yardley Housing Team
Covering Acocks Green, Sheldon, South Yardley, Stechford and Yardley North wards
Antisocial Behaviour Team ...................... 303 0742
Assessing Needs Team .......................... 303 1495
Lettings Team .......................................... 303 0716
Estate Management Team ..................... 303 5054
Email: yardley@birmingham.gov.uk

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