

Housing Services Tenant Handbook



Welcome

This book gives you important information about your tenancy. If you would like any part of this book translated or produced in a different format, please let us know.

Please keep this handbook with your Tenancy Agreement and put it somewhere handy for easy reference.



The purpose of this handbook is to provide you with information about your tenancy with North Ayrshire Council and about the services we provide for you.

If you have a query or want to find something out, please first check whether it is explained within this handbook. The index at the back will help you find the topic you are looking for.



You can then talk to our staff who will gladly help with any further advice and assistance that you may need.



Our office hours are:

Monday - Thursday **9am - 4.45pm**
Friday **9am - 4.30pm**

The telephone number and address of your Area Housing Office is set out on page 4.

For staff training and development purposes, our offices close at 1.30pm on the second Thursday of every month.



Contacting Us

How to contact us - Area Housing Offices:

Dalry and Beith Housing Office

2 Sharon Street, Dalry
KA24 4AA
01294 836710

Three Towns Housing Office

Saltcoats Town Hall, Countess Street
KA21 5HW
01294 310005

Largs Housing Office

Brooksby Medical and Resource Centre
31 Brisbane Road, Largs
KA30 8LH
01475 687590



Irvine Housing Office

Bridgewater House, Irvine
KA12 8BD
01294 310150

Kilbirnie Housing Office

34-36 Main Street, Kilbirnie
KA25 7BY
01505 685177

Kilwinning Housing Office

32 Howgate, Kilwinning
KA13 6EJ
01294 552261



British Sign Language and Guide dogs

We welcome guide dogs in all our area offices. All our area offices have a reception desk and seating area where a colleague is on hand to offer any help you may need.

Also, some of our staff are trained in British Sign Language.



Contacting Us

Rent payment

24 hour automated payment line:
0845 603 0593

Online rent payment:
www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk

Facebook

A Housing Services Facebook page has been developed as an additional way of sharing information with our customers and to encourage digital engagement. We will use it to tell people what's new in housing and what's happening in North Ayrshire to help people get involved in their community and in local decision making. We aim to expand our social media engagement by developing the use of Twitter in the near future.

Website

www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk

You can contact us by logging on to our website and completing our enquiry form. You can also find out about our Housing Service and other Council services on this site. You can get free access to the internet at all local libraries.



Repairs Contact Centre

01294 310 000

You can call the Contact Centre to report a repair at any time, but outwith office hours we will only respond to emergencies. You can visit your Area Housing Office and use the repairs line in reception.



Your Housing Service

Our aim is to work closely with local people to promote a caring, healthy community with residents living in decent affordable housing.

North Ayrshire Housing Service

The Council currently owns and manages approximately 13,000 rented homes. These are mainly in estates in the towns and villages of North Ayrshire, from Skelmorlie in the north to Springside in the south. The properties are a mixture of houses, flats, bungalows and some sheltered housing.

The day-to-day management of the properties and the provision of services to tenants is handled on a local level through a network of area offices. All matters relating to tenancies are handled through these offices.

Your Area Housing Office

If you have a query about any aspect of your tenancy or just want general advice about your housing situation, you should telephone or visit your Area Housing Office. Addresses and telephone numbers of all area offices are on page 4.

If you want to discuss a particular matter in private you should arrange an appointment to ensure the relevant member of staff is free to meet with you. If you are unable to get to your Area Housing Office, a member of staff can visit you at home during office hours.

Delivering our Service

We aim to provide services that meet the needs of North Ayrshire Council's tenants. We have staff values and service standards which set our customer service commitments. These are set out in a booklet you can get from your Area Housing Office or you can find it on our website

www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk

We regularly publish how well we are doing at meeting these standards in our annual performance report and on the 'North Ayrshire Performs' page on our website.



Scottish Social Housing Charter

The Charter was introduced by the Scottish Government on 1 April 2012. The Charter sets out the key outcomes that the Council should aim to achieve for their tenants, homeless people and service users. The Scottish Housing Charter assesses and reports on the performance of landlords. Copies of the Charter are available in our area offices.

The personal service

Our staff are always happy to discuss any query, problem or worry you may have about your tenancy or related matters.

We will always treat you with respect, take action promptly where necessary and keep you informed of progress. We will also give you as much other help and advice as we can.

We will treat anything you say to us with discretion. All the information you give us is confidential. However, you should be aware that, by law, we have to share certain essential details with some other public organisations. (See Tenants' Rights on page 26.)

Staff and tenant conduct

We are confident that you will, at all times, receive a high standard of customer care from our staff and also from other people contracted to provide services to you. We expect them to treat you with respect. If you are unhappy with the behaviour of a staff member or contractor, then please contact us.

We are also confident that you, members of your household and visitors will behave in a respectful way to our staff and contractors. We take their health and safety seriously. If we receive reports of verbal or physical abuse towards them, we will investigate these immediately and will take whatever action is necessary.



If you have a complaint, let us know. We can then try to put things right. Your comments and complaints can help us correct mistakes and improve our service to you.



We expect them to treat you with respect.

What is a complaint?

We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Council.



What can I complain about?



You can complain about things like:

- Delays in responding to your enquiries and requests
- Our failure to provide you with a service
- Our standard of service
- Employee behaviour/attitude
- Our failure to follow a procedure
- A Council policy

What can't I complain about?

Who can complain?

Anyone can make a complaint to us, including a representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service.

How do I complain?

You can complain in person at any of our public facing offices, by phone, in writing or by completing an online complaint form available on the North Ayrshire Council website.

What if I am still dissatisfied after you have resolved my complaint?

If you are still dissatisfied with our decision, or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can seek a review from an external organisation, for example, The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

There are some things we can't address through our complaints handling procedure. These include:

- A routine first-time request for a service e.g. a first-time request for a housing repair or action on antisocial behaviour
- Requests for compensation from the Council
- Things that are covered by a right of appeal e.g. if you are dissatisfied with the level of priority you have been given when applying for a house, you have the right to appeal against the decision

What is the North Ayrshire Council Complaints Procedure?

We have a two-stage complaints procedure:



Stage One - Frontline Resolution

We will try to resolve your complaint quickly, within five working days if we can. If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can ask us to consider your complaint at Stage Two.

Stage Two - Investigation

We will acknowledge your complaint within three working days and aim to give you a final response letter within 20 working days (unless there is a good reason for needing more time).

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

If you remain dissatisfied after receiving our Stage Two final response letter, you can ask the SPSO to consider it. We will tell you how to do this in the letter.

Compliments and suggestions

We welcome any compliments and suggestions you may have. These can also be raised at any of our public facing offices, by phone, in writing or by completing an online form available on the North Ayrshire Council website.

Customer Involvement

We want to involve customers in shaping housing and related services. Over the past several years, we have made great steps in developing a service that involves and consults with customers in a range of different ways and on a number of topics.

How can I get involved?

Traditionally, tenant involvement has focused on consulting with formal tenants associations. We know that not all tenants want to get involved in this way. As a result, we have developed a route to involvement.

There are three levels of tenant involvement:



1 Involvement in the decision making process

- North Ayrshire Network
- Service Improvement Groups
- Estate based projects

2 Involvement in scrutinising and monitoring the service

- Mystery Shopping
- Inspection Panel
- Estate Inspections

3 Providing views and monitoring the service

- Tenant and Resident Associations (TARAs)
- Register of Tenant Organisations (RTOs)
- Registers of interested tenants/applicants/residents
- Tenant satisfaction survey
- Other satisfaction surveys
- Community celebration forum
- Sheltered housing forum
- Tenant events
- Irvine high flats forum
- Consultation events on specific issues
- Ongoing work with travelling people
- Youth housing forum
- Local housing strategy events

We have a Customer Involvement and Empowerment Strategy which gives detailed information on each method of involvement.

These options will allow us to work with and listen to our tenants so we can improve services and monitor and review our progress.

Wider Involvement

- West Strathclyde Regional Network

How does involvement benefit you? By being involved, you:

- Improve the way we deliver services to all customers
- Improve the way we work together
- Improve how we communicate with you
- Will be more satisfied with what we do
- Increase the power your community has

Consultation

We believe in the right of tenants and customers to influence and participate in making decisions about their homes, surrounding areas, and the services provided to them.

What we will consult on?

- Changes to rent and service charges
- Capital Works Programmes
- Housing Strategies
- Development (including new Council House Building)
- Policies and procedures in relation to housing management and repairs and maintenance which is likely to have a significant effect on tenants
- Housing Service Standards



We will ensure that when we are consulting with tenants and other customers that we:

- Give adequate time to allow for meaningful consultation and discussion
- Provide relevant information at the earliest stage to allow full understanding of any proposals
- Provide advance notice of how and when decisions will be taken which affect the provision, maintenance and management of the housing stock
- Provide information that is clear and in plain language

Feedback

In order to continually improve our services, we recognise that we need to regularly collect and use feedback from customers. We then use the feedback to improve service delivery. It is also important that we feedback to those who have participated, so that they know that their views have been listened to and are being acted on.



Annual Performance Report

Each year we are required to provide an Annual Return Charter (ARC) to the Housing Regulator on our progress in achieving the Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes and standards. The Regulator will publish a report for each landlord on its website. We will also publish an Annual Performance Report to our tenants and other customers in a format that we have agreed with them.

Your Tenancy

Most of our tenants have a Scottish Secure Tenancy. This type of tenancy is the same as other tenants living in council or housing association homes anywhere in Scotland.

Some tenants may have a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy. The main differences in the conditions of tenancy are that the Council can bring the tenancy to an end more easily, as a court will not question the reason for eviction.

In addition, tenants with Short Scottish Secure Tenancies do not have certain statutory rights, for example, to assign your tenancy to another person.

See Tenants' Rights on page 26.

Breach of tenancy

A breach of tenancy is the term used when you fail to keep to the terms of your Tenancy Agreement, for example, not paying your rent or harassing your neighbours.

You and your family can be made to leave your home. We do not want this to happen and will provide you with support and advice to help prevent this. However if you do not correct your breach of tenancy we will take you to court, through the following stages:

- We deliver a legal 'Notice' to you and other members of your household who are over 16. This gives reasons for taking action against you, and a date when we can start taking action to go to court
- If we decide to take court action, the court will write to you giving a date for the hearing
- At the hearing, the court may allow you to put forward your side of the case, and will decide whether you have to leave your home

Can the terms of my tenancy be changed?

We can only vary the terms of the Tenancy Agreement in consultation with you and all other tenants affected.

Can I always stay in my home?

Tenants of Scottish Secure Tenancies have full security of tenure. They have the right to stay in the home for as long as they wish provided they do not breach the terms of the tenancy. In addition, partners or relatives may be eligible to take over the tenancy when the tenant dies. (See Household Changes on page 34.) For Short Scottish Secure Tenancies, tenants have security for the period of the tenancy.

What are my rights?

You have contractual and statutory rights. Your contractual rights are set out in your Tenancy Agreement. (See The Tenancy Agreement on page 24.) Your statutory rights are laid down by Acts of Parliament.

See Tenants' Rights on page 26.

The Tenancy Agreement

The Tenancy Agreement is the legal document that you sign at the beginning of your tenancy. It gives the details of the contract between you and North Ayrshire Council.

This section is only a summary.

By signing it you agree to abide by the Conditions of Tenancy. These are the rights and responsibilities that both you and the Council must observe.

1 Our main responsibilities are to:

- Consult with you on any proposed changes to the tenancy
- Keep your home wind and watertight and in good repair
- Keep all pipes, drains, gutters and installations for heating, water, gas or electricity supply in working order
- Provide you with information about our complaints procedure, and our policies on rent setting, allocations, exchanges and repairs if you ask for this information

2 We have the right to:

- Change your rent or other charges, provided we have carried out consultation and taken tenants views into account. We must tell you the new charge at least four weeks before it is due
- Be let into your home to carry out inspections or repairs, or to service heating systems. We must give you at least 24 hours notice. Failure to allow access could result in a forced entry to your home

3 Your main responsibilities are to:

- Pay the rent and other charges on time
- Keep your garden tidy
- Take care of the property, keep the inside properly decorated and do any repairs you are responsible for. (See page 94 for details)
- Make sure that everyone in your household and your visitors behave responsibly. They must not cause nuisance to neighbours, or harass or threaten other people, including our staff
- Not overcrowd the property
- Let us know in writing at least four weeks before you intend to leave
- Write to us asking permission if you want to carry out any alterations to your home

4 You have the right to:

- Live peacefully in your home without being unnecessarily interrupted by us, your landlord
- Appeal against decisions we make
- Exercise your legal rights as a tenant

What if the Council fails to carry out its duties?

You are welcome to approach any member of staff about a complaint. In most cases problems are resolved quickly and efficiently following an informal discussion. However, if matters are not resolved you should follow our formal complaints procedure. (See page 14.)



Tenants Rights

These are your rights created under Acts of Parliament and Government Regulations. Part 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 includes some changes to tenants rights. The Scottish Government have still to announce the start date for this change in the law, and we will then update our polices in line with this change in legislation. If you want to know more about your rights, please ask at your local housing office.

Joint tenancy

You can ask anyone over the age of 16 to become a joint tenant with you. Joint tenants are jointly and individually responsible. They have equal rights and obligations. Each tenant is responsible for the rent being paid. Either tenant can be held responsible if the Tenancy Agreement is breached.

Sub-letting and taking in lodgers

You can take in lodgers provided you do not overcrowd your home. You can sub-let part or the whole of your home. The Council allows you to do this for up to six months provided you meet certain conditions. You must write to get our permission before you take in a lodger or sub-let. We must reply within a month.

Succession of tenancy (death of tenant)

When a tenant dies, the tenancy can pass to a joint tenant, or a member of the family who was living in the home at the time of the death. (See Household Changes on page 34.)

Security of tenure

A tenant cannot be made to leave their home except by a Court Order. A court has to be satisfied that there are specific grounds for repossession, such as breaking a clause of the Tenancy Agreement, or the tenancy was obtained through false statements.

Assignment (change of tenancy)

You can handover your tenancy to another member of your household provided you ask our permission. The new tenant must have lived in the home, as their only home, for at least six months. (See Household Changes on page 34.)

Consultation about changes that affect you

We must consult you about changes that affect your tenancy or your home. (See Tenant Consultation on page 20.)

Getting repairs done

You are entitled to have certain urgent repairs carried out within set times under the Right to Repair regulations. You will be told if a repair you have reported is classified as one of these 'qualifying' repairs. (See Repairs Service on page 90.)

Exchanging tenancies

You can exchange (swap) homes with another Council tenant or a tenant of a housing association. (See Other Ways to Move on page 116.)

Carrying out improvements to the home

You can carry out improvements to your home provided you have written to us asking permission before you start and we have agreed to them. (See Improvements to Your Home on page 76.)

Access to and control of personal information

We must treat all personal information about tenants as confidential. You can see information relating to you held by us on file or on computer provided you give us reasonable notice. We can make a charge for this. If you are unhappy about anything recorded in your files, you can ask for it to be corrected or erased. If we disagree with your request, you can insist that your views on the matter are added to the records.

Requests for permissions

If it is written in the Tenancy Agreement that you need to get permission from us to do something, you must do this in writing or complete the standard permissions form available at Area Housing Offices. We will reply within the set time given in the Tenancy Agreement. If we do not reply you have the right to go ahead as if permission had been given.

Different management

You and your neighbours may choose to form a tenant management co-operative which could take over managing one or more aspects of the housing service. Your new organisation must be approved by Scottish Ministers. A consultation process would be conducted before such a change could take place.

Moving in



When you sign up

When you take up your tenancy you will attend an interview at your Area Housing Office. You will sign the Tenancy Agreement and we will tell you about:

- The conditions of your tenancy
- The start date for the tenancy
- The service provided by Housing Services
- How to pay your rent
- How to report a repair
- Any improvements we have planned for your home

We will give you:

- A copy of the Tenancy Agreement and a copy of the Tenants Handbook
- Various useful advice leaflets
- Information about benefits and a Housing Benefit application form (if necessary)
- At least two sets of keys (we do not keep spares)
- A home contents insurance form

We will help you with any applications or other forms you need to complete.

We will visit you within six weeks to check you have settled in.

Decoration Packs

Occasionally, assistance with decoration is provided if the décor is in poor condition. In some cases where for example, vandalism has occurred or graffiti is evident, decoration may be carried out by the Council to ensure the property is brought up to a satisfactory standard for the new tenant. Each case is assessed individually. However, in most cases, decoration is the responsibility of the new tenant.

You will be told when you are offered your new home whether a decoration pack will be available to you.

Home contents insurance

We strongly advise you to take out home contents insurance. This would provide cover against damage to your personal belongings, carpets, furniture and other household contents and decorations, for example, if you had a fire or flood. It may also cover certain items stolen in a break-in.

We have identified an insurance policy which you can pay for with your rent. Contact us for more information.

Can I put up my own fittings?

You can put up your own fittings as long as you do not damage or remove anything or alter our property. If you want to do any alterations, you must first ask permission. (See Improvements to Your Home on page 76.)

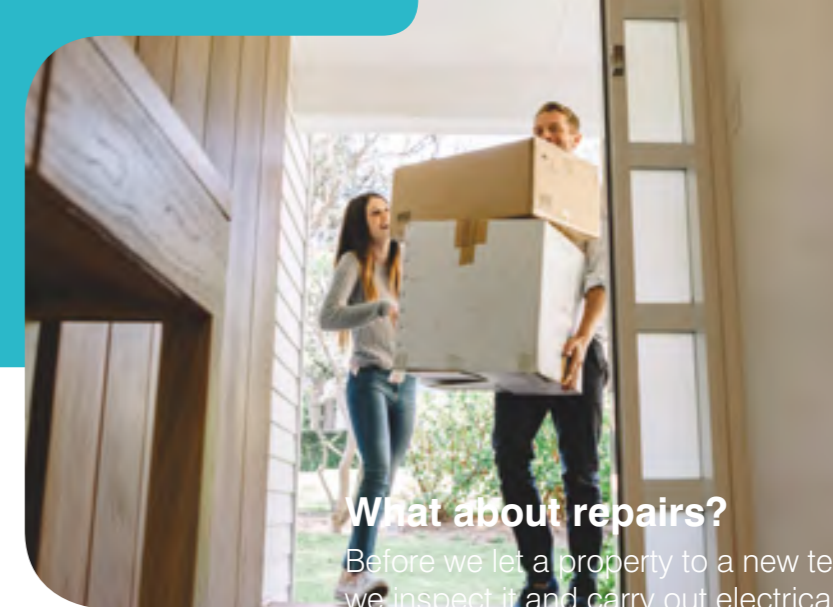
Roof Space Storage

The roof space should not be used as a storage area. Storage within the roof space can cause items to become damaged. If you do choose to use the roof space as a storage area this is done at the Tenants own risk and the Council cannot be held responsible for any damage or loss.



When do I take over the tenancy?

The date on your Tenancy Agreement is when you become the legal tenant. From then on you are responsible for the property and for paying rent. If you qualify for Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax reduction, you must make sure that you fill out the application form for your new home as soon as you know you are moving. You only receive the benefit once you move in, so if you do not move in immediately you will have to pay the full rent and Council Tax until you move in.



What about repairs?

Before we let a property to a new tenant, we inspect it and carry out electrical safety checks. When you move in, you must arrange for an engineer to carry out a gas safety check by calling the Repairs Contact Centre. We will also do some repairs. Some of these may be completed after you move in. If any further repairs are needed, you should call the Repairs Contact Centre. (Refer to page 125.) The engineer will hand you a copy of the inspection certificate.

Does the Council hold spare keys to my home?

No. If you are a new tenant we will change all front and back door locks before you move in and provide you with at least two sets of keys. It is your responsibility to get further sets. We can provide extra keys or fobs for communal entrances but you will have to pay for these. If you exchange tenancies with another tenant, we strongly advise you to get new locks fitted.

Household Changes

Joint tenancies

A joint tenancy is when two or more adults are named in the Tenancy Agreement:

- Each tenant is jointly and individually responsible for the tenancy
- Each tenant is responsible for the full rent being paid and if one tenant breaches the agreement, the other(s) can be held responsible
- Each tenant has equal rights
- Each tenant can apply for Housing Benefit and if one tenant dies, the tenancy automatically transfers to the other(s). Please contact your area housing office for further information



You can ask for someone living with you to become a joint tenant with you. We will not refuse without good reason. If a joint tenant decides to end their tenancy, the other tenant has the right to stay. (See Family Break-up on page 38.)

Handing on your tenancy (assignment)

You may be able to hand on your tenancy. Whoever takes over the tenancy must have been living in the home, as their only home, for at least six months. You must contact us for permission before you do this. (For more information see Tenants Rights on page 26.)

Death of a tenant (succession)

When a tenant dies, any joint tenant will usually take over the tenancy. If there is no joint tenant, a partner (married, in a civil partnership, or not) can take over the tenancy. (See Tenants' Rights on page 26.) This is called a succession.

A joint tenant, married partner or a civil partner must have been living in the home as their only home at the time of the death. A partner who was not married to, or in a civil partnership with, the tenant must have lived with the tenant for one year up to the death.

If there is no joint tenant or partner, another member of the family or a carer living in the home may be able to take over the tenancy but only under certain conditions. See your Tenancy Agreement. The law allows for the tenancy to be handed on a second time on the basis of succession.



You should let us know if anyone moves into your home on a permanent basis

Who can live with me in my home?

Any members of your family may share your home. You can take in lodgers and you can sub-let part or the whole of your home provided this does not cause overcrowding. You need our written permission to take in lodgers or sub-let. (See Tenants' Rights on page 26.) You should let us know if anyone moves into your home on a permanent basis, or moves out. This may affect your entitlement to Housing Benefit or other benefits.

What if my household size changes?

If your family increases and your home becomes too small, you can apply to the North Ayrshire Housing Register for larger accommodation. Alternatively you might try to arrange a mutual exchange with another family. (See Transferring Homes on page 112 and Other Ways to Move on page 116.) If you no longer need a family-sized home, you can also apply for smaller accommodation.

Family Break-Up

If you are going through a family break up, 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 Area Housing Office to discuss the matter.



Your

rights

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- Joint tenants have equal rights to remain in the home but either one may end their tenancy
- If you are not joint tenants, the person named as the tenant has the right to ask their partner to leave. However, if you are married or in a civil partnership, you have the right to stay but you may have to go to court to establish your right. If you are not married or not in a civil partnership, a court will decide whether you can stay. You can contact your local housing office to find out what options are open to you
- If a named tenant leaves the home, a remaining husband, wife or civil partner has the right to stay but an unmarried partner will have to go to court to find out whether he or she can stay

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 give the tenancy to the parent who has the main care and responsibility for the children.

How to get help

No tenant can be made to leave their home, except by a Court Order. The court has to be satisfied that there are good reasons.

- Contact your Area Housing Office. We are happy to discuss your situation with you and give you advice. The details of any conversation you have with us will be confidential
- You can also go to a specialist who can advise you about your particular situation, for example:
 - Citizens Advice Bureau for money problems
 - Relationships Scotland (relationship counselling) for family problems
 - Community Housing Advocacy Project about your housing options
 - A solicitor for your legal rights
 - Women's Aid about domestic abuse. (See Useful Contact Numbers on page 127.)

Do not give up your right to stay in the home without first seeking legal advice. (See 'Your rights' on page 39.)

Any tenant named on the Tenancy Agreement can end the tenancy. For a joint tenancy, both tenants must agree. If you are not named on the Tenancy Agreement and your partner wants to end the tenancy, contact a solicitor. If any joint tenant wants to end his or her interest in a tenancy they must give four weeks' notice to us and also to their joint tenant. The tenancy will then continue in the name of the remaining tenant. (See Tenants Rights on page 26.)

What if my partner or joint tenant has left the home?

If a joint tenant has already left the home, we need to serve a notice on them before we can remove their name from the tenancy. Otherwise, only a court has the power to force a change of tenancy.

What can I do if I am the victim of domestic abuse?

If you are threatened with, or are subjected to, abuse from members of your household or an ex-partner, you may want help and advice. Contact your Area Housing Office, your local Citizens Advice Bureau, the Domestic Abuse Helpline, Women's Aid or Police Scotland. (See Useful Contact Numbers on page 127.)

Buying Your Home

The 'Right to Buy' ended for all Council and housing association tenants in Scotland on 1 August 2016.

Rent Payment

It is important your rent is paid on time. It is the money that pays for the services you receive.

Rent Payment



Phone 01294 324603 (please have your bank details ready,) or complete a direct debit mandate.



Visit www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk and click 'online services' then 'pay for it'.



Call or visit your Local Housing Office or complete a standing order mandate



Call your Local Housing Office and use your credit/debit card. You can also call our 24 hour automated payment line on 0300 456 0639



Pay by Payzone wherever you see the sign. Please take your rent card with you.



Pay by Girobank at any Post Office. Please take your rent card with you.



Pay by PayPoint wherever you see the sign. Please take your rent card with you.



How much and how often do I pay?



Keeping track of my payments

Each time you make a payment at your Area Housing Office, a post office or a Paypoint/Payzone outlet, you will be given a receipt. Always check that the receipt is correct before you leave. If you pay through your bank, the payment will show on your bank statement. Telephone and internet payments will show on your bank statement or credit card statement.

Will my rent go up?

Rent levels are reviewed once a year. There will be a consultation about any proposed increases. If your rent goes up, we will let you know at least four weeks before it must be paid. Rent increases usually come into effect in April.

We send you a statement of the payments you have made once a year (in March). If you want a statement at any other time, you can ask for one from your Area Housing Office.



Pay your rent **first**

Don't risk losing your home

What to do?

Anyone can have money trouble from time to time. If you are having difficulty paying your rent, you must let us know immediately. We will do our best to help you.

If you know you have a rent payment problem, or you have received a letter from us about your rent, you should contact your Area Housing Office immediately. We will show you an up to date statement of your recent rent payments, discuss your arrears with you and give you advice including how to apply for benefits. If you are unable to pay the amount you owe in full we can enter into an agreement with you on how you will pay it off. This will involve paying an extra amount in addition to your rent over a period of time until the debt is paid off.

Arrears is the term we use for money you have failed to pay us. If you owe us rent, act quickly. If you don't, you risk losing your home.

What if I have problem paying my rent?

Contact your Housing Officer immediately. If you have money problems, temporary or permanent, we will do everything we can to help you catch up. If we agree what action you need to take, you may be able to avoid losing your tenancy.

However, if you do not contact us and you continue not to pay your rent, we will take you to court. **Act now**, don't risk losing your home.



Warning stage

If you do not contact us about your arrears or do not keep to a repayment agreement, we will send you a reminder letter. If you do not respond your Housing Officer will visit you at home.



Serious stage

If you do not respond to the visit or fail to contact us or make an agreed payment, we will send you (and anyone over 16 years whom we know is living with you) a notice of proceedings for recovery of possession. This will be given to you by a Housing Officer or sent by recorded delivery (you sign saying you have received it).



Court stage

If you still do not contact us, we will take court action. If you do not try to clear or reduce your arrears the court is likely to allow us to make you leave your home. If we go to court:

- You will have to pay the court costs if the court believes you are in the wrong
- You will still have to pay us what you owe us
- You and your family could be made to leave your home



What will happen if I continue not paying my rent?

Whatever stage you are at in the process, we can come to an agreement.

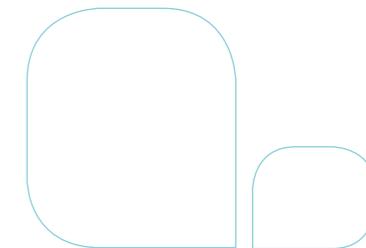
Remember, if you leave your home you will still have to pay us any money you owe us. If we don't know your new address we can use a tracing agency.

Debt Advice staff are based in Kilbirnie Housing Office, and can arrange appointments in any Housing Office or at your home. For free, impartial independent and confidential debt advice contact the Welfare Reform Advice Team on 0300 999 4606.

I think the arrears on my account are wrong. What can I do?

If you think the arrears on your account are wrong, please contact us. We will check the account and give you a statement of your rent account. If the arrears are wrong, we will adjust the account. If they are correct, we will explain to you how the arrears have occurred.

Also see Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction on page 54.



Whatever the situation with your finances, it's good to know where you stand and that you are making the most of what you have. There are lots of reasons why people find it hard to meet their debts including;

- Reduced income
- Bereavement
- Borrowed too much



An officer can help.
They will take account of the circumstances, level of debt (rather than indebtedness), personal circumstances to help people.

Debt Advice staff assist with emergencies such as:

- Gas or electricity being disconnected
- Wages or bank account arrestment
- Court Action being taken against you
- Debt Advice staff can also provide one-to-one advice, assistance and representation with:
 - Advice and where appropriate representation regarding court proceedings
 - Negotiating repayments with creditors
 - Advising on bankruptcy and trust deeds



We can refer you to our Debt Advice or Welfare Rights Officers. You can also contact these services yourself. (See Useful Contact Numbers on page 127.)

Welfare Rights Advice

The benefits system can be complicated and it is hard to know if you are receiving all the benefits that you are entitled to. The Welfare Rights Officers from our Welfare Reform Advice Team assist tenants to get as much help with their finances as possible. They provide advice on a full range of benefits to maximise income, and will be happy to help tenants apply.

As well as income maximisation, the Welfare Rights Officers will;

- Advise clients on their rights and obligations
- Help fill in benefit & court forms
- Assist with mandatory reconsiderations
- Assist with, and represent tenants at benefit appeals
- Deal with complex benefit enquiries
- Complete financial assessments for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)



Appointments can be made in any of our Area Housing Offices or alternatively a home visit can be arranged.

Welfare Reform Support Workers

The Welfare Reform Advice Team have a team of eight support workers who give information on future changes to the benefit system e.g. the introduction of Universal Credit & Personal Independence Payments. The support workers can also make referrals to other agencies and advisors to assist you with the transition, and support you with all aspects of your Universal Credit claim.

If you need support with any of the above issues, please contact the Welfare Reform Advice Team on 0300 999 4606.

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction



Applications and enquiries about Housing Benefit are dealt with by Benefits Service staff.

Housing Benefit

This is for tenants on low incomes or receiving welfare benefits. It is only for help with rent payments. It does not cover garage rent, home contents insurance, water rates or sewerage charges. Anyone can claim who is over 16 years and is a tenant in rented accommodation with limited income and savings.

The amount given depends on:

- Your rent
- The number and ages of people in your family, and any other people living in your household and whether any are employed
- Your income and any savings or investments

Council Tax Reduction

This is for people on low incomes or receiving welfare benefits and who would normally be expected to pay Council Tax. The amount given depends on:

- Your income and any savings or investments
- Your personal circumstances
- The amount of Council Tax set by the Council after any reductions which apply to your home

What can I do if I'm having problems with my Housing Benefit claim?

You are responsible for your Housing Benefit claim. It is important that you contact the Benefits Service as soon as possible and provide all information asked for by them to process your claim. If you are having problems you need to contact the Benefits Service directly.

Your responsibilities:

- It is your responsibility to make sure that your Housing Benefit is paid to us
- You must return any form or request for information. If you don't, your Housing Benefit may be stopped
- You must inform the Benefits Service of any change in your circumstances immediately

How can I get Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction?

You need to contact the Benefits Service directly. You will need to complete an application form. This will include both Housing Benefit and Council Tax reduction. You will be assessed on your income, size of household, whether you are disabled or a pensioner, and any savings you may have. Once your application has been approved, the Benefits Service will write to you telling you how much you will receive. The benefit will be paid directly into your rent account. (See Rent Payment on page 43.) If you feel you have been incorrectly assessed you can ask for your claim to be reconsidered. Contact the Benefits Service. (See Council Contact Numbers on page 125.)

Some households can get reductions on their Council Tax, for example people who live alone, or households with students. These reductions apply even if you are not on benefits.

What if I have any savings or other income?

Savings or income under a certain amount will not affect any benefits. If you have savings, capital or other income. For example private pension, over a certain amount, you will not be eligible at all.



Savings include spare cash, money in banks or building society accounts, unit trusts, stocks and shares, income or capital bonds, premium bonds and lump sum redundancy payments.

Change of circumstances

If your circumstances change, you must inform the Benefits Service, otherwise you might face a large bill if you are overpaid. You should also inform your Area Housing Office.

If we know of any changes in your circumstances we have to pass this information on to the Benefits Service. An example of this is a change in the number of people in your home, or a change in your income.



Your Home Living in Your Home

Your garden

We will carry out maintenance to:

- Paths that lead to your main doors
- Walls or fences which separate our land from lanes and public areas
- Communal areas and open areas we own

You are responsible for:

- Keeping the garden tidy, cultivated and free of rubbish or any unsightly or scrap materials
- Trimming or lopping any shrubs, hedges or trees to make sure they do not become a nuisance
- Maintaining any general garden paths or patios
- Providing and maintaining fencing between gardens and any fences erected by you or a previous tenant



If you are in doubt regarding your responsibility for your garden or fences when you move in, you should contact your Area Housing Office for advice. (See page 125.)

You need our permission to:

- Build a garage, hut, greenhouse, or any other structure in your garden
- Put up or change a wall or fence
- Cut down or remove any bushes, hedges or trees unless you planted them
- Make a driveway or put down paving, monoblocking or decking

Pets

- You may keep one domestic animal. You must get our permission to keep more or to keep any exotic or unusual pets
- You must make sure that your pets cannot escape, for example, don't leave gates open
- Your pets must not annoy your neighbours. This includes fouling, noise or smell from your pet. You must clean up your animal's faeces
- You can be issued with a fixed penalty notice if you allow your dog to foul public areas or roam
- Do not allow your dog to bark continually
- We can stop you having pets if you are not a responsible owner



Access paths and pends

Some houses have special arrangements to allow access through the back of adjoining properties. This is only for when it would be unreasonable to take something through the house, for example household rubbish. The arrangements depend on the type of house and where the access is positioned. Check with us if you are not sure.

How do I get rid of rubbish?

North Ayrshire Council operates a kerbside collection scheme that alternates weekly between recycling (blue bin) and normal refuse (grey bin). If you have larger items to dispose of these can be taken to your local Civic Amenity/Recycling Centre, or alternatively a special uplift can be arranged by contacting the Customer Contact Centre. Please note that a charge is applicable for this service. (See Council Contact Numbers on page 125.)

How do I get rid of garden waste and food waste?

Your brown bin is for garden waste such as grass cuttings, weeds and leaves but also for food waste from the home.

Housing Support

If you are having difficulty with anything in your tenancy, we have a Housing Support team available to provide you with advice and assistance. You can ask your Housing Officer for a referral to this team or contact them directly on 01294 317370 or call into Galt House 31 Bank Street Irvine and ask to speak to the duty officer.

Your Housing Support Officer can help provide information and advice on a variety of issues such as:

- Homelessness
- Housing options
- Understanding and managing your tenancy rights and responsibilities
- Welfare Benefits/Housing Benefits
- Budgeting
- How to manage your rent arrears
- Debt Advice
- Filling in forms
- Independent Living skills
- Accessing GPs and Dentist
- Education, Training and Employment
- Resettlement
- Engaging with other support agencies with an interest in you welfare
- Acting on your behalf

Your Home Living in Flats

If you live in a flat, bedsit or maisonette you need to treat your neighbours with special consideration and respect, and look after common areas.

Respecting your neighbours by:

- Keeping the volume of sound from stereos, radios and televisions at reasonable levels
- Using the refuse collection areas properly and making sure surrounding areas are left tidy
- Not putting cardboard boxes or sharp objects down refuse chutes
- Not allowing anything to be thrown or dropped from balconies, windows, landings or corridors
- Laying sound proof insulation if you fit a laminated floor rather than carpets



Health and safety

- Landings and stairs must be kept clear of obstructions. Don't leave or store anything outside your flat, e.g. prams, bicycles, plants or motorised scooters
- You must not use bottled gas, paraffin heaters or cookers
- Do not leave out food or waste where it can encourage rats, mice and other pests



Common areas

There are caretakers and concierges who are responsible for looking after some blocks of flats and the surrounding areas.

Cleaning is the joint responsibility of the tenants and other residents in flats and maisonettes. This includes staircases, corridors, hallways, landings, windows and bin chute openings. Special arrangements are made for sheltered accommodation. If you are not sure of your responsibilities contact your Area Housing Office. (See Council contact numbers on page 125.)

However, where there is a concierge service, they will do the cleaning. Where there are caretakers, they will regularly check that the cleaning is being done, and if it is not, will remind the residents involved. If residents do not clean an area, we will take appropriate action.

Television aerials

Some blocks of flats have a communal television aerial. If you live in one of these blocks and you are having difficulties with your television, check with a neighbour first to see whether they are also having problem as it may just be your own television. Otherwise report the problem on our Repairs telephone number. (See Council contact numbers on page 125.)



Noise and Nuisance

The Tenancy Agreement states that tenants must not cause nuisance to their neighbours. Nuisance includes persistent noise which causes distress to others, for example, music, dogs, cars, etc.

What to do?

1

Talk to your neighbour

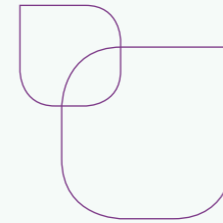
When people live close together, they often do not realise they are disturbing others. You need to explain to them politely that they are causing a problem (only if you feel safe to do so).

2

Talk to us

If the problem persists, contact us. We will need evidence of the problem so you need to keep a diary of events. We will treat all information as confidential.

Many neighbour problems can be sorted out by talking and coming to an agreement. However, it can be difficult to do this without getting into a dispute.



Being a good neighbour

- Control the volume of sound from radios, stereos and TVs. Do not put these systems against shared walls. Place them on a rubber mat or carpet
- Keep the noise you make in or near your home at reasonable levels at all times. Make sure you do housework and decorating at reasonable times of the day
- If you have a dog, do not leave it barking constantly in the home or out in the garden, and clear up any mess it makes
- Warn neighbours when you are going to do something particularly noisy, like drilling, hammering or having a party
- Make sure your children think about how their playing habits might affect neighbours



Noise

What action can I take against nuisance from a neighbour?

Very often people do not realise they are disturbing others. The first step is to try and explain the problem politely to your neighbour if you feel safe to do so. If the situation does not improve, contact us for advice. We will intervene if the situation is not resolved.

What can be done about noise in flats or adjoining houses?

Neighbours are expected to exercise respect and tolerance. Noise can penetrate easily between floors and walls in adjoining properties. However, many tenants do not realise how much noise is heard elsewhere in the building.

Try to approach the neighbour and explain politely to them how much they are disturbing you. The earlier you do this the easier it is to solve the problem. However, if this does not work you should contact the Police and also let us know. We may be able to approach the individual to try and sort out the situation.

What about nuisance from dogs?

The Tenancy Agreement requires tenants to be considerate to neighbours and keep animals under control. If you are troubled by dogs contact the Dog Warden. (See Council Contact Numbers on page 126.)

What if I cause nuisance to a neighbour?

If you, a member of your family, or a visitor, cause any nuisance to neighbours you are in breach of your Tenancy Agreement. If you do not respond to complaints we will take up the matter. We will try to resolve the matter with you, but if the nuisance does not stop, we will take action against you.

Antisocial Behaviour

We want you to feel safe and secure in your home and your community. If you are being affected by antisocial behaviour or harassment, get in touch with us. We have a specialist team who can help.



Tenant responsibilities

Every tenant is responsible for the behaviour of all the members of their household including any visitors. Causing alarm, distress, nuisance or annoyance to neighbours or anyone in the area around your home is a breach of the Tenancy Agreement.

Harassment

Harassment is the deliberate interference with the peace, comfort or safety of any person. Harassing anyone on grounds of race, colour, religious or other belief, gender, age, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, nationality or ethnic origin is a breach of your Tenancy Agreement and it can be a criminal offence. This includes graffiti, damage to property, abuse and threats.

Antisocial behaviour

Antisocial behaviour is actions which harm the quality of life of residents in an area, and causes, or is likely to cause, distress or alarm to anyone not in the same household. It includes threats, drug dealing, excessive noise and vandalism.

What can be done?

We will take action against antisocial behaviour. We consider this a high priority but it can take time to follow the proper process to protect everyone's rights. We work with other services and agencies, including the Police, to deal with such behaviour.

If you have a complaint about a neighbour, any member of their household or a visitor, you should contact your Area Housing Office who will investigate and try to sort out the problem. If this is not possible, they will pass the case to the Council's Antisocial Behaviour Investigation Team. They can take other actions to try to stop the antisocial behaviour but if this is not successful they can apply for an Antisocial Behaviour Order or an Eviction Order.

What action can I take?

If you are frightened because of offensive or abusive behaviour towards you, please get in touch with the Police or your Area Housing Office. We will advise you on what to do. We will need details of the problem, so you should keep a diary of events. You can take private action against the person but you will need to contact a solicitor to do this. You can report suspected drug dealing and other crimes anonymously to Crimestoppers. (See Useful Contact Numbers on page 127.)



What can the Council do?

All of our tenants are responsible for the behaviour of the members of their household, including any visitors. By signing the Tenancy Agreement, they agree to behave in a responsible way in and around their home. If a problem is between neighbouring tenants and involves a breach of the Tenancy Agreement, we can take legal action against the offending tenant. If the problem is with a private household you should contact the Council's Investigation Team for advice on what you can do. You can also get advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau or a solicitor.

What if I am worried about a neighbour?

If you think a neighbour is having difficulties (for example being harassed) and is in need of help, we may be able to approach them and discuss their needs. We will treat whatever you tell us as confidential.

Can I be rehoused?

We will not normally re house you but will try to sort the problem out. However, if there is clear evidence that you or a member of your family are in danger, we may be able to help you transfer to another property.



Garages and Parking

Be considerate to your neighbours when parking. Make sure you do not block other cars. This also applies to your visitors.

Renting a garage site or lock-up

We have a number of lock-ups across the area. We also have garage sites where you can put up your own garage.

If you would like to rent a lock-up or garage site contact your Area Housing Office. We keep a waiting list for lock-up and garage sites. People who are not tenants can also rent lock-ups and garage sites. A rent charge is made for all our garage sites.

Parking

- You must only park in marked areas or on the side of the road. If you want to park your car in your garden, you need our permission, and sometimes planning permission
- You must ask our permission if you want to park a large commercial vehicle, caravan, boat, or mobile home on a regular basis on any road or land owned by the Council. This includes your garden
- Your car may be removed if you park illegally on pavements, footpaths or verges or the car is causing a danger or an obstruction
- You must not use car parking areas, your driveway or any area near your home to carry out repairs to any vehicle except your own

Can I store anything in my lock-up or garage?

Lock-ups and garages are for the sole purpose of storing a car, van or motorbike. However, you are free to put in additional items but you should make sure that they are secure and covered by your contents insurance against damage or theft. You must not store any dangerous items, e.g. petrol, bottled gas or other flammable items.

What happens if a car appears to be abandoned?

If you are worried about a vehicle that has been parked in the same spot for some time and you think that no one in the area owns it or someone has abandoned it, please report this to the Police (See Useful Contact Numbers on page 127,) your Area Housing Office or the Contact Centre (See Council Contact Numbers on pages 125 and 126.)

Improvements to Your Home

Our improvement programme

We have an improvement programme in order to ensure that our homes meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing. You can ask us for details of what we plan for your area.

We will consult with you, well ahead of time, about any work we plan to do in your home. We will also appoint a Customer Liaison Officer who will handle all your queries while the work is carried out.

Improvements you can make

You may carry out improvements to your home. You should discuss your plans with us first and then complete a permissions request form, available from your Area Housing Office, giving us full details of what you plan to do. We will write back to you with an

answer within one month. If we do not reply, you can go ahead as if we had agreed.

We have the right to insist that the work is done in a certain way, 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.

Compensation can only be paid when you leave your home. The amount paid will be based on the original cost of the improvement and how long it has been in use. No compensation will be paid if:

- You did not get our written permission to do the work
- We have had to evict you because you broke the tenancy conditions
- The compensation to be paid is less than £100
- The improvement was done before 1 April 1994. (See Tenants' Rights on page 26)



Planning permission

You should check whether you also need planning permission or a building warrant before starting any work (See Council Contact Numbers on page 126.)

Can I carry out improvements myself?

You can carry out alterations or improvements to your home provided you have our permission. This covers any changes you want to make to the inside of your home, decorating the outside, or putting up any structures outside. You will need to let us have full details of the work and who will carry it out. You may also need planning permission and to comply with building regulations. (See Improvements you can make on page 76.) You do not have to ask for our permission to carry out minor decoration to your home.

If you remove any fixtures or fittings or carry out any alterations without permission we may ask you to put back or restore them to the original condition. We will tell you this when we inspect your home before you leave. If we have to do this after you have left we will charge you for the costs involved.

What happens if I need my home adapted for accessibility reasons?

We may be able to carry out certain adaptations to help you in your home, for example handrails, ramps, bathroom adaptations. (See Support Services on page 84.)



Safety and Security

By taking a few simple precautions, you can prevent damage to your home or distress to your family.

Smell of gas - what to do

- Open doors and windows to get rid of gas
- Check your cooker or fire to see if the gas has been left on unlit or if the pilot light has gone out
- Turn off the gas at the mains
- Do not switch any electrical fitting or appliance on or off (for example lights) or use a telephone or handheld appliance. This could cause an explosion
- Don't smoke or use naked flames
- Call Scotland Gas Networks - 0800 111 999 from outside your home



Preventing fires

- Regularly test your smoke detector and replace the battery when necessary (hard-wired smoke detectors are fitted with a rechargeable battery). If it is faulty, call our Repairs Contact Centre immediately
- Make sure all cigarettes are properly put out
- Don't dry clothes over heaters
- Don't use open chip pans. We suggest you use a deep fat fryer instead



Home Fire Safety visits can be carried out by Scottish Fire & Rescue free of charge. (See Useful Contact Numbers on page 127.)



Security

- If you have a door viewer (spy hole), check to see who is calling before opening the door. If you do not know them and they do not have an appointment, do not open the door
- If you are expecting a caller, always ask to see some form of identification. Check it carefully. If you are unsure, ask the caller to wait outside while you telephone the organisation they claim to represent
- Mark your television etc with your postcode and house number, or keep a note of serial numbers
- When you go out in the evening, draw the curtains and leave a light on in a main room
- Arrange with a neighbour to keep an eye on each others' houses. Inform us if you are going away for a long time. (More than four weeks)

Electrical safety

- Unplug appliances when not in use
- Isolate any faulty switch or socket. Turn off that circuit at the consumer unit (fuse box). Unplug appliances and telephone us on the Repairs Contact Number **01294 310000**
- Don't touch bare wires or switches or sockets that may be wet. Turn off the supply to that circuit at the consumer unit and don't use the fitting again until it is completely dry
- Don't overload sockets. Avoid using double adaptors
- Don't carry out any electrical work at all without our permission and advice
- Report any fault to us immediately

Gas safety and carbon monoxide

- Keep rooms well ventilated and make sure vents in walls or windows are not blocked or closed
- Buy gas appliances marked with the British Standard Kite Mark and use a Gas Safe registered gas installer to connect and service them
- We service and repair appliances we installed
- We also carry out a gas safety check once a year. You must, by law allow us into your home
- If there is a gas fire in a room you must not use this room as a bedroom
- Do not paint any gas appliance
- Do not remove a hearth from beneath a gas fire

Door entry systems

To maintain security:

- Make sure that the door locks behind you
- Never leave the entrance door propped open
- Try not to allow people who do not live in the block to follow you in even if they appear genuine - they should press the button for the flat they are visiting



Don't disturb asbestos material
Some of our properties contain asbestos. Asbestos materials are not dangerous if they are in good condition and left undisturbed.

If you want to carry out DIY, such as drilling boards to fix shelves, removing ducts or bath panels and you are unsure about what type of board or wall it is, you must contact the Customer Contact Centre on 01294 310000 to arrange for a surveyor to visit you. Please ask us for a leaflet if you would like to know more about asbestos in buildings.



Support Services

We want to help any tenants who need support and assistance to maintain an independent lifestyle.

Help to live more easily in your home

- **Adaptations**

You may be able to have certain fittings put in such as extra handrails or conversion of a bathroom. You should contact North Ayrshire Health & Social Care Partnership. An Occupational Therapist will visit you to discuss what can be done.

- **Community Alarm Service**

We have a special alarm service for elderly or disabled tenants which links your telephone to a central call centre. The centre has staff on duty 24 hours a day to provide you with help, reassurance and assistance when you need it. You will pay a small weekly charge for this service.

- **Telecare Services**

Telecare uses a range of sensors, such as fall detectors, flood detectors and bed exit sensors to enable you to live safely and securely at home. The sensors can be linked to the Community Alarm Service that is used to summon help.

- **Other help**

North Ayrshire Health & Social Care Partnership may be able to provide help for you to live in your home more comfortably, for example visits from a Home Carer.

Special accommodation

You may want to move to accommodation specifically reserved for older people (60 or over) or people with disabilities.

- **Amenity or adapted homes**

These are usually individual bungalows or flats which have special features such as ramps or grabrails.

- **Sheltered housing**

We have a number of complexes throughout North Ayrshire. These are groups of self-contained homes which have additional laundry areas and shared common rooms. Each home is connected to our Community Alarm Service.



If you have any particular problems or needs contact North Ayrshire Health & Social Care Partnership or your Area Housing Office. They may be able to help. (See Council Contact Numbers on page 125.)

- **What housing is available to older people or people with disabilities?**

There are two types of accommodation: amenity or adapted homes and sheltered schemes. (See Special accommodation on page 86.) If you are interested in moving to more suitable accommodation you should contact your Area Housing Office. We can help you to complete an application form.

What if I just need some help?

If you are housebound or elderly, we can arrange for a Housing Officer to visit you at home to discuss any tenancy matters with you. If you are elderly or have a disability and have no-one who can help you with your responsibilities for doing certain repairs in your home, or for helping clean common areas, we may be able to do some tasks for you. Also, if you are 75 or over and live in a flat in a multi-storey block, the concierge will clean the landing or close near your home.

Your Estate

Estate Based Projects

This initiative provides an opportunity for tenants and other customers to influence how the environmental improvement budget is spent in their area. Individuals, tenants and residents associations and Council staff can identify environmental projects. Projects can also be identified from estate inspections.



The project is used to fund environmental improvements to communal areas and may include:

- Fencing – to enhance landscaping
- Improved Security Lighting – to improve safety and security
- Landscaping – to enhance appearance of area
- Other environmental improvements

Estate Inspections

Housing Services has a structured approach to inspecting housing estates. Estate caretakers, Housing Officers and Housing Inspectors all inspect the areas regularly as part of their day to day work, but we also recognised the need to bring all the services together to carry out a joint inspection of each estate involving tenant representatives and local Councillors. Inspections take place in areas where there are Tenants and Residents Associations. The purpose of these inspections is to look at the overall appearance of each estate, including open spaces and to highlight problems, suggest actions and identify environmental improvements. These inspections are carried out annually and a programme of inspections features in the Tenancy Matters newsletter.



Repairs Service

If you need a repair?

Telephone our Repairs number **01294 310000** at any time.
The Repairs Contact Centre is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.
Try and give us as much information as possible.

We are responsible for the outside of your property, the main structure and any fittings and appliances we have provided. We are also responsible for maintenance of common areas. You are responsible for taking care of the inside of your property and for certain repairs. (See Repair Responsibilities on page 94.)



Our response times

When you report a repair to us we assess the nature of the problem and the circumstances and then put it into one of the following categories:

- **Emergency - make safe within 4 hours**

For situations where there is real danger to life or limb, major damage to the property, flooding, or the home is insecure.

- **Non-emergency - complete within 7 working days.**

For situations that are causing serious inconvenience or where there is a health or security risk or a risk of damage to the property.

- **Planned - complete within 60 working days.**

For situations that do not cause immediate inconvenience or where there is no danger to people's lives.

Repairs by appointment

In order to provide a repairs service with maximum convenience to our tenants we encourage all repairs, other than emergency, to be made by appointment. Where we cannot arrange a repair by appointment, the repair will be carried out within the timescales set out under 'Our response times'.

Inspections

We will need to inspect some repairs before we can decide what work we need to do. We will arrange an appointment with you.

Working hours and appointments

Our staff work between 8am and 4.30pm (3pm on Fridays). For Emergency repairs they may call at any time. For all other repairs we will usually have agreed a morning (before 12 noon) or afternoon (after 12:30pm) appointment on a date that suits you and staff will call or text you the night before to remind you of your appointment.

Tenants' Right to Repair

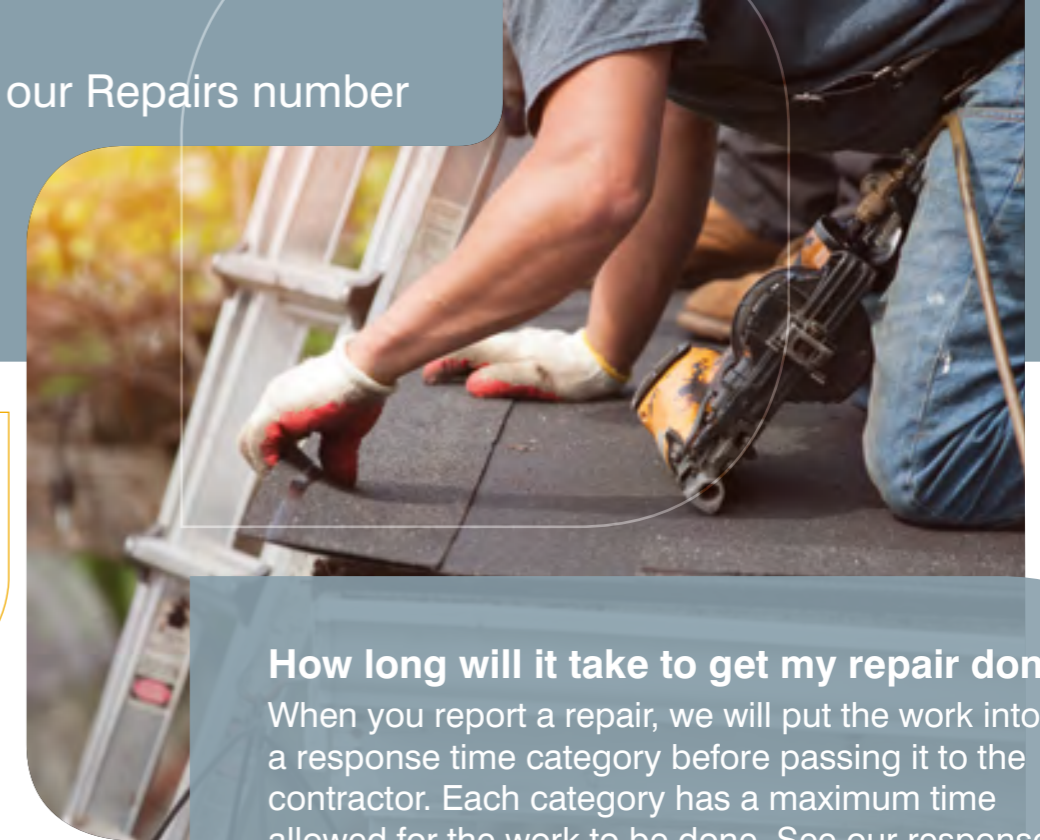
Under the Right to Repair Scheme, we must complete certain repairs within set time limits. These are repairs which, if not carried out on time, could affect your health or safety. They are called qualifying repairs.

What if I am not in when the staff member calls?

If the member of staff calls and you are not in, a card will be left asking you to telephone the Repairs number 01294 310000, to discuss when the contractor should call again. If you do not respond the job may be cancelled. If you fail to keep an agreed appointment your repair will be cancelled and you will have to report it again.

If we do not complete a qualifying repair within the correct time, you have the right to instruct another approved contractor to do the work and bill the Council. You may also be entitled to compensation.

Contact us on our Repairs number
01294 310000



How long will it take to get my repair done?

When you report a repair, we will put the work into a response time category before passing it to the contractor. Each category has a maximum time allowed for the work to be done. See our response times and Working hours and appointments on page 90. If necessary the work will be inspected first. (Also see Tenants' Right to Repair on page 92.)

Repair Responsibilities

Our responsibilities

We repair and maintain the structure of the property you live in. This includes all the outside parts and any fixtures and fittings inside your home that we provide. It also covers pipes, wiring, and fittings for your heating system, drains, power and lighting, any smoke detectors we have installed and servicing any appliances we own.

We are normally responsible for any walls and fences outside your home which separate our land from lanes and public areas, and any steps and paths leading from the property boundary to your entrance doors. We also maintain garages that are part of the building, and any common facilities or open areas.

Joint responsibility for gas safety

By law, we must carry out a gas safety check every year and, under your tenancy agreement, you must let us into your home to carry out these checks.

Failure to allow access could result in a forced entry to your home.



Your Responsibilities

You must keep the inside of your property clean and properly decorated, heat and ventilate the home, and maintain the garden. You also have responsibility for certain repairs and/or maintenance as follows:



- Maintaining fittings that you have installed
- Floor coverings supplied by the Council in bathrooms and kitchens should be maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's guidance
- Fitting and/or maintaining any additional door locks
- Replacing lost keys and changing locks if you are locked out
- Maintaining door bells not installed by the Council
- Bleeding radiators (where appropriate) - if you are in doubt as to how to do this, you should call the Repairs Contact Centre
- Resetting tripped switches, replacing fuses and fluorescent tubes, starters and light bulbs (not communal stair lighting)
- Replacement or repairing small fixtures and fittings such as coat hooks, plugs and chains for sinks
- Regular testing of smoke detectors, replacing batteries where appropriate

- Repairing doors and fixtures inside your home (this includes making adjustments for floor coverings)
- Trying to clear blocked wastepipes or toilets. See Handy Hints: Clearing Blockages on page 104
- Filling minor cracks or holes in wall plaster
- Putting up any television aerials or satellite dishes (you will need our permission for satellite dishes)
- Taking action to prevent pipes freezing. See Handy Hints: Cold Weather on page 110
- Maintaining any fences you or a previous tenant have put up
- Uplift and relay of laminate floors or floor coverings for access required by North Ayrshire Council
- All internal decoration, including tiles
- Repair and/or renewal of toilet seat

What if I can't carry out my responsibilities?

If you are elderly or have a disability and have no-one who can help you we may be able to do some tasks for you. Contact your Area Housing Office for advice. (See Council Contact numbers on page 125.)



Do I have to pay for any repairs?

If you have a repair which is needed because of damage done by you or someone in your home (even a visitor), we expect you to repair it or arrange and pay for it to be done. We will always do emergency work to make your home and family safe but we will charge for this. You will be asked to sign a form agreeing to pay for the work. If your home is damaged by a break-in or vandalism you must report the problem to us immediately and we will carry out the repair if you get a crime incident number from the Police.

What happens if there is damage to my home?

We strongly advise that you take out home contents insurance against loss or damage to your own belongings. We have identified an insurance policy which you can pay for along with your rent. (See Moving In on page 30.) You can get details from your Area Housing Office or our website.

If any of our employees or contractors cause damage to your property which could have been avoided, you may be able to apply for compensation against the party who caused the damage.

As a tenant you should also:

- Report repairs to the Council to allow us as landlords to ensure that property standards are maintained
- Report criminal damage to the Police and get an incident number
- Report any gas leak immediately to National Grid (Transco) on 0800 111 9999
- Clear minor pest infestations e.g. ants, silverfish, cat fleas etc
- Take action to avoid condensation, treat and ventilate your home
- Allow us access to your home to carry out safety checks required by law
- Repair any damage that you, your family or any visitors have caused, other than through fair wear and tear. If we put right the damage you will be responsible for the associated costs

Repair Standards

Your co-operation is needed

You may need to make certain arrangements and prepare for our staff visit.

- Staff cannot be left alone in homes. If you leave your home the staff member will have to leave the property too.
- You should not leave your key hidden somewhere for staff to pick up and let themselves into your home.
- In bad weather conditions staff cannot, for their own safety, work at height, e.g. on ladders or on the roof.
- You are expected to allow staff to get on with their work by keeping children and pets out of their way and away from builders tools, materials, rubbish or skips.
- If furniture or carpets need to be moved before repair work is done, you should get this done before our staff arrive.



What staff should do

Our staff will deal with you in a professional way. You can expect them to:

- Introduce themselves and show you proof of identity before entering your home
- Explain what they are going to do and discuss how this will affect you
- Protect your belongings, furnishings and floor coverings from damage, dust and paint
- Keep your home secure at all times
- Make sure materials and tools do not cause danger to you or your visitors
- Clear up rubbish and leave the area tidy at the end of each working day
- Make sure essential services (water, electricity and so on) are connected at the end of the day and when they have finished the repair
- Be polite to you at all times

Staff may not, without your consent

- Play radios in your home or garden
- Use your telephone or make/take private calls on their mobile telephones
- Use your power supply or other facilities



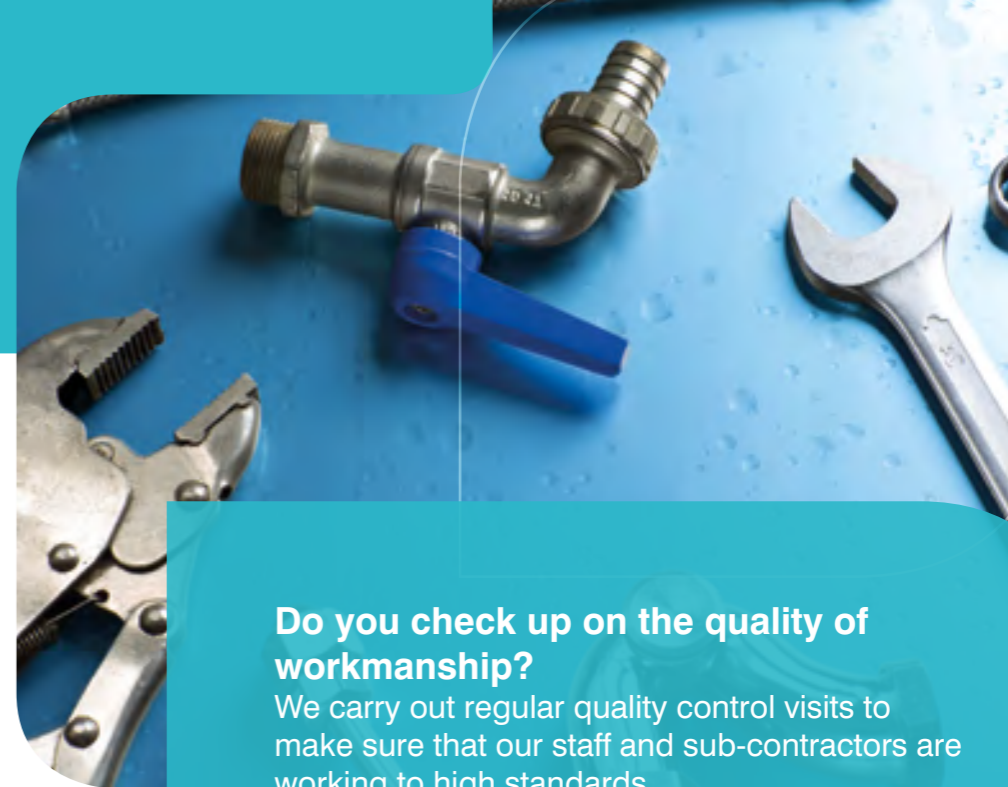
What standard of service can I expect?

We will respond to repair problems in an efficient and helpful way. Most repairs are carried out by our own workforce. For certain types of work we use sub-contractors who have been selected carefully. All staff and sub-contractors must follow certain rules of behaviour when working in or around your home. However, we expect you to make it possible for them to work efficiently. (See Repair Standards on page 100.)



What if I am not satisfied with the service or quality of work?

If you have a complaint, please telephone our Repairs Contact Centre or complete one of our customer complaint forms. We will look into your complaint. If we need to do any work to put the problem right, we will make sure it is carried out to a good standard as soon as possible. If you are still unhappy, you should follow our formal complaints procedure. (See Complaints on page 14.)



Do you check up on the quality of workmanship?

We carry out regular quality control visits to make sure that our staff and sub-contractors are working to high standards.

We also do random checks on what you think of our service. We may telephone you or send you a questionnaire or we may arrange for a Customer Liaison Officer to interview you in your home.

Clearing Blockages

If you need advice on any of the information given in this section, please contact us on 01294 310000.



General advice

- Blockages are usually caused by the build-up of waste: fat, tea leaves, hair, etc in the trap. It is a good idea to clear wastepipes and traps regularly, preferably with a suitable product available from DIY stores
- The trap is under the fitting (bath, basin or sink). It always holds some water in it which stops smells coming up the drain. However, waste can build up and become stuck in it
- If more than one fitting (bath, basin etc) is blocked, the blockage may be in the soil stack or main drain. This will need to be cleared by a plumber. If this is the case, please contact us

To unblock a toilet:

- If the pan is already full, remove some of the water into a bucket using a scoop, e.g. a jug or bowl
- Push the brush or plunger to the bottom of the pan
- Pump it up and down strongly about 10 times. This creates pressure which may shift the blockage
- Flush the toilet to see whether the blockage has gone
- You may need to repeat this process several times before the toilet flushes normally. If there is no improvement after a couple of attempts, please contact us
- When you have finished thoroughly wash your hands and any equipment

To unblock a bath, basin or sink:

- Scoop out most of the water with a jug or cup
- Hold the rag or dishcloth tightly over the overflow opening
- Place the plunger over the plug hole and pump it up and down rapidly. This usually releases the blockage
- After clearing the blockage unscrew the trap and clean it out
- When you have finished, thoroughly wash your hands and any equipment



Bowl



**Rag or
dishcloth**



Plunger

**Rubber
gloves** 



Jug or cup

What to do you need:



Resetting a Trip Switch

If you have an older system with wired fuses, do not touch it. Contact us on **01294 310000**.

General
Advice



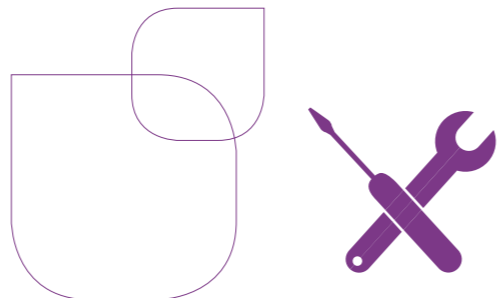
- **Modern electric circuits are fitted with circuit breakers called trip switches. If a fault develops, a switch is tripped and the circuit is broken. The trip switches are at the consumer unit (fuse box). The consumer unit (fuse box) may be next to the electricity meter (unless the meter is in an outside cupboard)**
- **Trip switches usually operate because:**
 - There are too many fittings or appliances on a circuit and it has been overloaded
 - An appliance has been misused or has developed a fault
 - A lead to an appliance such as a TV, hair drier or kettle has come loose or is badly connected
 - Water has leaked into a circuit
 - A light bulb has blown
- **If an appliance has developed a fault, leave it unplugged and get a qualified electrician or service engineer to check it**
- **Make sure your hands are dry when you touch electrical fittings**

To reset a trip switch:

- Open the cover on the consumer unit to show the trip switches
- Check which switches have tripped to the OFF position
- Put these switches back to the ON position

If the trip goes again:

It is probably being caused by a fault in an appliance. You need to identify which circuit is being affected and which appliance on that circuit is causing the problem.



To identify a faulty appliance or socket:

the Repairs Contact Centre on 01294 310000



If you need advice on any of the information given in this section, please contact the Repairs Contact Centre.



Cold Weather

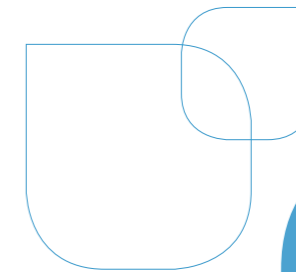
The Council regularly posts up-to-date winter information on our website, Facebook and Twitter.

General advice

- 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 penetrate from below
- If you are going away for some weeks during the winter, leave the heating on all the time on a very low heat
- In very cold weather keep your heating on all the time on a very low heat. You may want to open the loft hatch to allow heat into the loft. This will help prevent pipes from freezing
- Know where your stoptap is. It is where the water pipe enters the house, usually under the kitchen sink or in the bathroom
- Know where the stop valves for the hot and cold water tanks are. They are usually by the hot water and cold water tanks
- Make sure that you can easily turn all taps and valves



What to do



Burst pipes

- Turn off the water at the main stoptap
- Turn off any water heaters
- Turn on all taps to drain water from the system. This may take about 15 minutes
- When the water stops running, turn all taps off
- If electricians are getting wet, do not touch. Turn off electricity at the consumer unit (fuse box)

Frozen pipes

- Turn off the water at the main stoptap
- You are probably 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

If you need advice on any of the information given in this section, please call the Repairs Contact Centre on **01294 310000.**



Moving Home

to move house you need to apply to the North Ayrshire Housing Register



Transferring Homes

How do I apply to move house?

If you want to apply to move house you need to apply to the North Ayrshire Housing Register (NAHR). This is a common housing register for North Ayrshire. The NAHR landlords are North Ayrshire Council, Irvine Housing Association, Cunninghame Housing Association and ANCHO. By filling in one application form you can be considered for housing by all the landlords. Your housing needs will be assessed in line with the North Ayrshire Housing Allocation Policy. The policy is a 'group plus points' policy. You can read about how the 'group plus points' system works in the North Ayrshire Housing Allocation Policy.

To apply for housing you can contact one of our offices and request an Application for Housing pack, or apply online at www.northayshirehr.co.uk

The pack contains an application form, application guide and a summary of the North Ayrshire housing allocation policy. When you submit your application for housing we will assess your level of housing need in line with the policy and write to you to confirm your group and points award.



When will I get a new home?

It will depend on a number of factors. You can read about this in more detail in the Housing Application Guide. For more information on your prospects of being rehoused, ask your local housing office for an housing options interview.

What will happen if a suitable property becomes available?

If a suitable property becomes available we will contact you to let you know and then visit you to check your application details and identify any repairs you need to do before you move out. We will also check if you have outstanding tenancy debt, such as rent arrears or recharges for repairs you are responsible for but we have carried out on your behalf.

How do you calculate the group and points on the North Ayrshire Housing Register?

Each category of need has a level of points that are awarded. Points are given for things like overcrowding and accessible housing needs. The summary of the North Ayrshire Housing Allocation Policy tells you what we award points for.



Accessible Housing

If you (or someone in your household) are having difficulty in your current home because of a health condition or disability, you can apply for an Accessible Housing Assessment. The assessment is carried out by a qualified Occupational Therapist, and focuses on the person's ability to perform essential day to day tasks within their home. If this applies to you, you can request an Application for Accessible Housing form from any local housing office or download a copy from www.northayrshirehr.co.uk

Can I move to another part of the country?

You will need to apply to the council or housing associations in the area you want to move to. They may or may not have a common housing register in operation, you should check this when you apply. Your Area Housing Office may be able to help you find out the details of these organisations. You can also mutual exchange to anywhere in the UK. (See Other Ways to Move on page 116.)



Other Ways to Move

Before going ahead the tenants involved need to apply in writing to their landlord(s) to get approval. Exchanging a tenancy is not quite the same as transferring to another tenancy from the waiting list. You need to be sure that you are happy to exchange. It is very important that you arrange to look over the other property before you make a decision to move.

Can I exchange homes with another tenant?

“ Yes. This is called a ‘mutual exchange’ ”

What is a mutual exchange?

A mutual exchange is when two or more tenants exchange homes.

You can exchange with:

- Another North Ayrshire Council tenant
- A tenant of a housing association
- A tenant of another council

If you exchange, you must accept the other property in the condition in which it is left. You take responsibility for any alterations or improvements made by your exchange partner.

If you exchange without asking for permission you can be forced to move back.

If the previous tenant has left damage which we, by law, have to fix, we will recharge the cost of the work to that tenant. 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

“ We can help you find out who to contact. ”

If you can, travel to the area you want to move to. You can look out for notices in local shop windows or newspapers or you could put up notices yourself. You can also register with agencies and companies on the internet. They may charge you for this service.

How do I apply for a mutual exchange?

You register your property online on the Council's website. This will describe your property and can include photographs. This process will be approved by us. Others who are interested in exchanging will do the same.

You will be given a registration number that allows you to check online, as often as you wish, for properties that are a suitable match. If you are interested in a property you register an interest online. If the tenant in a property you have registered an interest in agrees that they would like to exchange with you, you need to get approval from your landlord.

If you are unable to access this online service, staff at any of the housing offices will be able to assist you.



Approval to exchange

Each of the exchanging tenants must get written approval from their landlord before going ahead with the exchange. Approval will not be given if:

- One or other of the properties is substantially larger than necessary for the incoming family or is not big enough and would create overcrowding
- One of the homes has been adapted for a disabled person and the new tenant does not need these special facilities
- Either tenant is in breach of their tenancy agreement such as being behind with rent payments and a Notice for Recovery of the property has been served on the tenant
- Either landlord has applied for a court order to make their tenant leave their home

All tenancies end on a Sunday,
not on the day you leave.

Moving Out

Ending your tenancy

- **Notice**

You must let us know, in writing, at least 28 days before you leave that you want to end your tenancy and give us a forwarding address.

- **Letting us into your home**

You must allow us to show new tenants around your home and to carry out any minor repairs before you leave.

- **Keys**

You must return keys to us by 12 mid day on the Monday after your tenancy ends. If you don't, you will continue to be charged rent for the rest of the week and will have to pay for any lock change necessary.

- **Outstanding repairs**

You must carry out any work which is your responsibility before you move out. We will inspect your home and discuss these with you before you move out. We will charge you for any work you should have done that we have to do after you have left.

- **Clearing and cleaning the property**

You must remove all your belongings and leave the home and garden clear. We will charge you for any clearance or cleaning we have to do.

Moving out checklist



Before handing in the keys, make sure that:

- You have paid any rent or charges you owe us or alternatively contact the Former Tenants' Arrears Officer on 01294 324028 to make a repayment arrangement
- The property is clean and you have wiped down all worktops, sills, kitchen units and floor tiles
- All your furniture, carpets and belongings have been removed, including from huts and lofts, and no rubbish is left in the house or garden
- You have completed any repairs or redecoration that are your responsibility
- You have contacted the gas, electricity and telephone companies. Keep a note of meter readings to check your final bills
- Let the Council Tax Department know that you are moving
- You have arranged for any gas appliances you are moving, including cookers, to be disconnected
- You have arranged for your post to be redirected



What do I do with anything I don't want?

If you have carpets or blinds that you don't want to take with you and we think that the next tenant might want them, we may agree to you leaving them. If we haven't agreed to you leaving goods, you must remove all your furniture, personal possessions and any rubbish before you leave. We will normally charge you for the removal of any items left in the property. You should telephone the Customer Contact Centre to get them to collect any unwanted items to be picked up before you leave (there is a charge for this service. See Council Contact Numbers on page 126.) Alternatively you can contact Cunninghame Furniture Recycling Company or local charities who may be able to assist with any unwanted items. (See Useful Contact Numbers on page 127.)



What about any work I have done in my home?

If you have removed any of our fixtures or fittings you must put them back, unless we agreed that this was not necessary when you got permission to do the work. If you do not put things back the way they were we will charge you for the cost of doing it ourselves, and also for any fixtures and fittings you have damaged.

When you leave your home, you can claim compensation for certain types of improvements you have carried out provided we agreed to these improvements at the time you did them. (See Compensation for Improvements on page 77.)

Useful Information



Councillors Contact Information

There are 33 elected Councillors who represent 10 multi-member wards. Please check the website for current information.

Councillors hold surgeries where members of the public can talk to them on a variety of issues.

You can find out who your local Councillor is and how to contact them by using the 'About Your Area' section on our website or by visiting your Area Housing Office, Customer Service Centre or local library.

Council Contact Numbers

Area Housing Offices

Dalry and Beith Housing Office

01294 836710

Irvine Housing Office

01294 310150

Kilbirnie Housing Office

01505 685177

Kilwinning Housing Office

01294 552261

Largs Housing Office

01475 687590

Three Towns Housing Office

01294 310005

Repairs Contact Centre

01294 310000.

You can call at any time but outwith office hours (including weekends) we will only respond to emergency repairs.

Customer Service Contact Centre

01294 310000

For the following service enquires:

Roads & Street Lighting Repairs,
Grounds Maintenance, Bereavement/
Cemeteries Enquires, Litter/Recycling
Enquiries, Special Uplifts, Report
flytipping, graffiti, general litter

Antisocial Behaviour Investigation Team

01294 314640

Housing Support Team

01294 317370

Major Works Project Line

01294 310000

Tenant Participation Team

01294 324869

Other Council services

Addiction Centres

01294 476000

Council Tax Enquiries

01294 310000

Dog Warden and Pest control

01294 324339

Hall Lets

0845 230 1325

Homeless - out of hours

0800 019 6500

Household Contents

Insurance Helpline

01294 324611

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme

01294 310000

Money Matters Service

01294 310456

Planning Permission and Building Warrants

01294 324300

Health and Social Care Partnership Office's:

Three Towns

01294 310005

Irvine & Kilwinning

01294 310300

North Coast

01475 687590

Garnock Valley

01505 684551

Trading Standards

01294 310000

All other Council Services (main switchboard) 01294 310000

Useful Contact Numbers

Emergency services

Electricity Power Loss (Scottish Power)

0800 027 0072

Gas Leaks (National Grid - Transco)

0800 111 9999

Police/Fire/Ambulance/Coast Guard

(emergency) - 999

Domestic Abuse Helpline

0808 2000 247

Police

(non-emergency) 101

Crimestoppers

0800 555 111

Home Fire Safety Visits

0800 0731 999

General contacts

Access Ability

01294 470480

Advocacy Service

01294 608663

Age UK

7 Lower Vennel, Bourtreehill

01294 212354

Benefits Agency Kilmarnock

Benefit Delivery Centre

0345 604 3719

Greenock

0345 604 3719

Citizens Advice Bureau (Saltcoats)

01294 467848

Community Housing Advocacy Project (CHAP)

01294 475636

Crosshouse Hospital

01563 521133

Cunningham Furniture Recycling Company

01294 475650

National Debt Line

0808 8084000

NHS 24

111

Family Lives (Formally Parentline)

0808 800 2222

Relationships Scotland

0345 119 2020

Samaritans

116 123

Scottish Ombudsman

0800 377 7330

Scottish Veterans' Residences

0131 556 0091

Tenant Information Service

0141 248 1242

Tenant Paraticipation Advisory Service

0141 552 3633

Victim Support

0345 603 9213

Scottish Water (Water and Sewerage)

0345 601 8855



Index

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A

Adaptations	79, 85
Adapted homes	86, 87
Antisocial behaviour	16, 70, 71, 72
Area housing offices	05, 125
Assignment	28, 35

B

Blockages	97, 104
Breach of tenancy	23
Buying your home	42

C

Carbon monoxide	82
Cold weather, what to do	97, 110
Common areas and facilities	63
Community alarm	85, 86
Compensation	77, 99, 123
Complaints	14
Contact numbers	127
Consultation	20, 23, 28

D

Death of tenant	27, 36
Decoration packs	31
Disabled services for domestic abuse	40, 41, 127
Door entry systems	65, 83

This document is available in other formats such as audio tape, CD, Braille and in large print. It can also be made available in other languages on request.

ਇਹ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਹੋਰ ਫਾਰਮੈਟਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਵੀ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਕਿ ਆਡੀਓ ਟੇਪ, ਡੀ. ਡੀ., ਬ੍ਰੇਲ ਅਤੇ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ। ਇਹ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਵੀ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ।

یہ دستاویز دیگر شکلوں میں بھی دستیاب ہے، جیسے آڈیو ٹیپ، سی ڈی، بڑے حروف کی چھپائی میں۔ درخواست کرنے پر یہ دستاویز دیگر زبانوں میں بھی مہیا کی جا سکتی ہے۔

欲文件有其他形式，如語音磁帶、CD、盲文版本及大字體版本。如有需求，還提供其他語言版本。

Ten dokument jest do uzyskania w różnych formatach: na taśmie dźwiękowej, płycie CD, brajlem i dużym drukiem. Na życzenie, można go także otrzymać w innych wersjach językowych.



North Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siarraidh Àir a Tuath

