



The Housing Service Tenant Handbook



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Approved
By
Involved
Tenants



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1. Welcome

The Housing Service would like to welcome you. We are pleased to give you a copy of the new Tenants Handbook, which could not be produced without the help of you, our valued tenants.

This handbook forms part of your Tenancy Agreement and is an important document that provides information on various matters that relate to your tenancy.

It provides information on a wide range of issues such as paying your rent, repairs and maintenance, neighbour relations, tenant involvement, and who you need to call if you want to request a service.

These and other useful phone numbers are listed in the back of the booklet. Please keep this handbook in a safe place in your home, as you may need to refer to it for information at some point during your tenancy.

As a tenant of Wokingham Borough Council we hope that you will play a role in making your neighbourhood a desirable place to live for you and your neighbours. If you have any questions or requests of the service, or are unsure of anything in this handbook, please do not hesitate to contact us. Contact details can be found in the Housing Service Contacts section in this handbook.

2. Moving In

2.1 When does your tenancy start?

You become the legal tenant of your home on the date shown on our Tenancy Agreement. From that date you are responsible for your home and for paying rent and other charges, even if you do not move in immediately.

2.2 Repairs

Before you can move in, we inspect your home and carry out gas and electrical safety checks. We also do essential repairs. We should finish these jobs before you move in, although we may have to do some small jobs afterwards. If this is the case, we shall let you know before you move in.

More information on Repairs can be found in the Repairs section of this handbook (section 7).

2.3 Keys

Please remember – we do not keep spare keys for you. It is your responsibility to have cut and pay for any extra sets of keys you require.

2.4 Home Contents Insurance

You are responsible for insuring the contents of your home and all your personal possessions. If you do not have insurance, you could find yourself in real difficulty if your possessions are damaged by fire, water or flooding, or if they are stolen.

We strongly advise you to have a home contents insurance policy. The Housing Service operates a Tenants' Home Contents insurance scheme. This scheme is geared towards your needs at affordable weekly premiums.

To find out more about home contents insurance, or to obtain an application form, please contact 0118 974 6000 or email housing@wokingham.gov.uk

2.5 Moving Out

If you decide to end your tenancy with the Housing Service you must give us four weeks notice in writing, returning all keys to the Housing Service by 12 noon on the day your tenancy ends. Your tenancy must end on a Monday and any rent arrears cleared.

You must take all your belongings and rubbish with you and the property must be left in a good decorative state.

3. Your Tenancy

3.1 Tenancy Agreement

The conditions of your tenancy are set out in detail in your tenancy agreement, which is a legal contract between you and the Housing Service. It is an important legal document, so please read it carefully and make sure you fully understand what your obligations and responsibilities are. Make sure that you keep it in a safe place for future reference.

The tenant is the person who signs the tenancy agreement. As the tenant, you are responsible for paying the rent and other charges and for keeping to the terms of the Tenancy Agreement.

If more than one person signs your Tenancy Agreement, you are joint tenants. This means you are both responsible for keeping to the terms of the Tenancy Agreement.

The Housing Service wants you to be happy in your home and keeping to the tenancy conditions will help prevent or solve many potential disputes or problems.

3.2 Grounds for Possession

The different tenancy types are detailed in your Tenancy Agreement. The Housing Service reserves the right to seek possession of your home from a court if any of the Grounds set out in legislation are breached. The Grounds on which the Housing Service can do this are detailed below:

Ground 1: The tenant has not paid the rent which is due. If a tenant can prove that they are in arrears because of late housing benefit payments or the rent was wrongfully increased (for example not notifying a tenant of a rent increase) then the service cannot seek possession of the property. Alternatively, if you have not kept to the terms and conditions of the Tenancy Agreement then the Housing Service is entitled to seek possession if a court believes there are sufficient grounds for an eviction.

Ground 2: If a tenant or any member of a household has been causing a nuisance or annoyance to your neighbours or anyone visiting the neighbourhood. However, the Housing Service has to show it is reasonable for a court to consider possession of the property; this constitutes continuous complaints made against a tenant. The service can also apply for possession if the property is being used for illegal purposes such as drug dealing. In addition, if you were living in the property with your partner and your partner left because of your violence or threats of violence and it is unlikely your partner will be coming back, the service may be able to obtain a possession order against you.

Ground 3: You or someone living with you has allowed the property to fall into a bad state of disrepair due to neglect or if it is the fault of someone living with you and you have not taken steps to get them out of the property then your tenancy could be at risk.

Ground 4: If the service has provided furniture in the property and you have not taken care of the furniture.

Ground 5: A tenant (whether a sole tenant or joint tenants) have obtained a tenancy and property by providing false information and the service would not have otherwise given you a tenancy.

Ground 6: A Mutual Exchange is undertaken with another Social Housing or Housing Association tenant and money was paid to obtain the exchanged property.

Ground 7: If the property forms part of a building which is used mainly for other purposes other than housing and any tenant or anyone living in a property are using the property other than to live in and makes it no longer suitable to live in the property.

Ground 8: The service moved you into a property because required works (maintenance) were being carried out on your previous property and it was made clear you would have to move back into the previous property after the works were completed. However, if the works have not been completed or we advised you would be able to move into the new property permanently the service cannot seek possession.

Ground 9: If you deliberately overcrowd the property (you allow more people to live in the home than the number it was intended for). This does not include statutory overcrowding such as having another child. The service will try to find a more suitable property if the overcrowding is of a statutory nature.

Ground 10: The service needs to carry out substantial maintenance works to the property or land around the property which would cause a health and safety risk to the tenants or the service intends to demolish the property. If this is the case the service will find suitable alternative accommodation for you. If you do not leave the property voluntarily or return to the property once maintenance works have been completed we may seek possession.

Ground 12: Your property forms part of a building, or is connected to a building which is used for other purposes and you are employed by your landlord and your property was let to you as part of your employment (e.g. school caretaker). The service can get possession if the employment has come to an end and we need the property for some other person who will be employed.

Ground 13: If the property has been adapted to suit the needs of someone with a disability (and a disabled person no longer lives there), the service may need the property for someone with those needs. If this is the case, the service will find suitable alternative accommodation. If a tenant does not vacate a property for someone who has disabled needs, this may give the Housing Service grounds for seeking possession. This also applies to Joint Tenants.

Grounds 14 and 15 do not apply to tenants of the Housing Service.

Ground 16: In cases of succession (where a tenant passes away and another person living in the property is granted the tenancy) if a tenant passes away and the property is too big for one person and can be used to house a family in housing need, the service may seek possession. If this is the case we will find suitable, alternative accommodation for that person.



4. Housing options

The Housing Service aims to provide you with suitable accommodation. However, changes in your household circumstances may mean you have to review your housing needs. Therefore, it is important that you are aware of the housing options available to you.

4.1 Housing transfers

The Housing Service will do its best to help you if you need to move to another home. Our priority is to make the best use of our homes and to offer you a home that will best suit your needs. As a tenant of Wokingham Borough Council, you are entitled to apply for a housing transfer if:

- There is overcrowding in your current home.
- You are under occupying your current home.
- Your home is unsuitable due to your medical circumstances.

4.1.1 Can the Council refuse a transfer?

Yes. The Council can refuse a transfer offer in the following cases:

- **Rent Arrears:** A clear rent account is required before a transfer can be considered, except in some circumstances. Please call your Rent Officer for more information.
- **Non-compliance with Tenancy Agreement:** Compliance with the Council's Tenancy Conditions must be satisfactory and the dwelling must be returned to the Housing Service in a satisfactory condition.
- **Anti-Social Behaviour:** Tenants or members of the household who engage in anti-social behaviour will not be considered for transfers and may in fact be evicted from their home.
- **Non-disclosure of information:** A transfer may be refused where the tenant fails to disclose any information which is requested or provides false or misleading information either on the application form or at any subsequent interview.

4.2 Mutual Exchanges

The law states you have the right to exchange your home with another secure council tenant (or a Housing Association tenant) as long as both landlords give their permission. An exchange can often be a quicker way of moving than applying for a transfer.

Further information on Mutual Exchanges can be obtained by contacting the Housing Service or by visiting www.homeswapper.co.uk. Homeswapper is an online Mutual Exchange service that is used by the Housing Service.

Introductory Tenants do not have the right to Mutual Exchange.

4.3 Right to Buy your home

The Right to Buy scheme enables tenants to buy their home at a discounted price. The discount entitlement is dependent on the years spent as a Secure or Flexible Tenant, but this may be capped.

Introductory Tenants do not have the Right to Buy.

If you would like to discuss the Right to Buy, please ring 0118 974 6000 or email housing@wokingham.gov.uk

4.4 Subletting your home

Subletting means giving a tenancy to someone else and charging them rent or renting out part of your home to a person who is not named on the Tenancy Agreement or a joint tenant on the Tenancy Agreement.

If you are a Secure Tenant or a Flexible Tenant and want to sublet part of your home you can only do this if you have a spare bedroom and you must get written permission from The Housing Service.

If you are an Introductory Tenant you cannot sublet part of your home.

You must not sublet your entire home. If you do we will take legal action against you to repossess your home as you will be breaking your Tenancy Agreement and committing a criminal offence.

If you do sublet your entire home we will recover any profits from the unlawful subletting and you could lose any rights to future tenancies.

4.5 Tenancy Fraud and attempts at Tenancy Fraud

You and anyone who lives in your home must not commit fraud or attempt to commit fraud in respect of your tenancy. This includes:

- Fraudulently obtaining a tenancy e.g. through misrepresentation of identity or circumstances, making a false statement or withholding information.
- Non-occupation by the tenant as their principal home.
- Unlawful subletting (e.g. subletting the whole property to a single household, single or multiple sublets within one property).
- Wrongly claimed succession.
- Unauthorised assignments (where a tenant attempts to assign their tenancy to another person, through a Mutual Exchange for example, without the permission of the Housing Service).
- Key selling' (where the tenant leaves the property and passes on the keys in return for a one-off lump sum payment or favour).
- Not notifying the landlord when the tenant moves out or passes away.

If you carry out anything listed above, we may take legal action against you. This could result in us evicting you from your home.

The Housing Service takes fraud very seriously. It is not a victimless crime. It can prevent people in genuine need of a home from accessing Council housing and the more money that is lost as a result of housing fraud means there is less to spend on housing services.

If you suspect anyone of any fraudulent activities, you should notify the Housing Service immediately. You can report fraudulent activities anonymously and with peace of mind by completing the Council's online form by visiting <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/benefits/benefits-and-fraud-prevention/report-benefit-fraud/>

The Council also operates a dedicated benefit fraud hotline. Benefit fraud is a serious crime. Nationally, it is estimated that about 10% of benefit paid has been claimed fraudulently. You can help us reduce this by reporting fraud.

4.6 Running a business from your home

You may run a business from your home but must seek written permission from the Housing Service before you do this.

An example of a business we would allow is running your own one-person, desk-based business. Examples of businesses we would not allow include repairing and maintaining cars and selling cars or businesses involving machinery or other sources of noise, pollution or nuisance.

5. Your rent

You rent must be paid every Monday in advance. A specialised rent team works in Wokingham Borough Council that will support you from the time you sign your tenancy agreement. They will ensure that you have options to pay your rent and meet your tenancy obligations.

5.1 Rent charges

We set rents in line with government guidelines and any increase or decrease in rent will be in accordance with these government guidelines.

If your rent changes, we will let you know at least four weeks before you start paying the new rent.

5.2 How much do I pay?

When you start your tenancy we will tell you how much rent and service charges (if applicable) you need to pay and will advise you of your rent account number and discuss how you wish to pay. You will be asked to make a payment to ensure that your rent account is paid in advance, this will be two weeks rent and will be required at sign up. If you are entitled to partial Housing Benefit you will be required to pay 2 half weeks rent and a change of address form completed. If in receipt of Housing Benefit already or benefits which entitle you to full Housing Benefit a complete form will be required at sign up.

Your rent may include a service charge; this will be for a service that is delivered in your neighbourhood.

Paying your rent is important and is a priority bill to pay, so please consider how you will pay it and set up regular payments. The options have been included in section 5.4 and will be discussed at the sign up. If you are paid monthly you can pay your rent once a month, but it must to be paid in advance. If for whatever reason your payment pattern changes you must let the rent team know, for example if your employment status changes, or there are changes to your benefits.

5.3 Rent arrears

If a payment is missed and we are unaware of the reason we will start the arrears procedure. You may get phone calls, letters, texts, emails or be visited at your home.

The rent team will be looking for the missed payments, arrears, to be cleared as soon as possible; you can discuss making an agreement with the team at any point of the arrears process. If the agreement fails further action will be taken.

The Council or other Registered Social Landlords generally have no obligation to re-house those evicted for non-payment of rent (not even if children are involved).

You may be seen as intentionally homeless. For independent financial advice please contact your local Citizens Advice.

5.4 Methods of payment

Direct Debit	Please contact your Rents Officer to arrange a Direct Debit to be set up.
Pay Online – Pay for Services	www.wokingham.gov.uk
Telephone Banking	We offer a 24 hour phone payment service – 0845 303 9485.
Payment Machine	Located in the foyer of Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End. Available during Council working hours.
Online Banking	Bank: National Westminster Bank Account Name: Wokingham Borough Council Sort Code: 60-24-21 Account Number: 68437730 Quoting Reference: Your Rent Account Number (that starts with three zeros)
Standing Order	Please contact your Rents Officer to arrange a Standing Order to be set up or contact your bank quoting the above sort code, account number and your rent account number.

6. Neighbourhood Relations

6.1 Anti-Social Behaviour

We define Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) as when someone acts in a way which causes or is likely to cause harassment, nuisance, alarm or distress to one or more persons. This can include:

- Noise Nuisance
- Pet Nuisance
- Drug use or drug dealing
- Hate crime
- Domestic violence and abuse
- Arson
- Neighbour disputes
- Harassment/Intimidation
- Threatening behaviour
- Criminal behaviour
- Causing harm to any person
- Alcohol related offences

If an Anti-Social Behaviour complaint is made the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer or Neighbourhood Officer will book an appointment to discuss with the complainant their concerns and complete a risk assessment. This appointment should take place within five working days of the initial contact. We will listen and acknowledge the issues.

The risk assessment will enable the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer to assess the extent to which a complainant/victim/witness is at risk of experiencing harm. This is to ensure they can tailor their actions and support appropriately and liaise with other agencies (if required) quickly and effectively.

If you are the victim of Anti-Social Behaviour the Housing Service will work with you to write an action plan and will tell you clearly what we can and cannot do to help.

You may be asked to keep a log to help us understand the severity/frequency of Anti-Social Behaviour you have reported.

6.1.1 What we can do to help

We can only help if you tell us there is a problem. If you report an issue to us, we can pursue the following options:

6.1.2 Remedies:

- Mediation/informal warnings.
- Contacting local enforcement departments (e.g. Police or Environmental Health).
- Working in partnership with Social/Youth Services to provide additional resources.
- Support vulnerable victims.
- Support vulnerable perpetrators/victims (e.g. where behaviour may be due to mental health problems).
- Physical improvements (e.g. better lighting in communal areas etc.).
- Acceptable Behaviour Agreements (a voluntary, written agreement between a person involved in anti-social behaviour and one or more partner agencies).
- Partial/Full Closure Order (working in conjunction with Thames Valley Police).
- Injunction to prevent nuisance and annoyance.
- Possession Orders.

If you feel more could be done to resolve an ASB case the complainant can make a request for a Community Trigger. The purpose of the Community Trigger is to give victims and communities the right to request a review of their case and bring agencies together to take a joined up approach in solving the issues.

6.1.3 Your responsibilities

We expect our Tenants to be considerate towards your neighbours, respect your neighbourhood and make sure your guests do the same. You must comply with the conditions of your tenancy at all times.

6.1.4 Support for victims and witnesses

The first and most important support we offer is to reassure you that, except in some very serious circumstances, the information you give us will be kept in the strictest confidence.

Our support services range from helping you to make a report or helping you give evidence in court. In very rare and serious cases, we will help you find a new home. The amount of support you need will vary depending on your circumstances and the types of ASB you have reported.

We will keep you informed of the progress of your case.

6.1.5 Reporting ASB

If you wish to report ASB you can contact the ASB Officer or email our dedicated ASB email address at asbhousing@wokingham.gov.uk

6.2 Pets

You are permitted to keep domestic pets as long as they do not become a nuisance to your neighbours.

Tenants who wish to keep domestic pets may do so. If your home is a flat, bedsit or maisonette you will need written consent by your Neighbourhood Officer. Unfortunately, if you live in a maisonette, communal flats or a bedsit and wish to keep a dog as a pet, the Housing Service will, in most cases, refuse consent unless you live on the ground floor and have a garden.

Permission will not normally be granted to keep animals such as goats, sheep, horses or cattle in any property.

If you have a pet such as a dog, you are responsible for making sure that your garden fencing will stop it from escaping.

6.2.1 Dangerous Dogs

Tenants of Wokingham Borough Council are not permitted to keep dogs defined as dangerous or one that is banned under law that is current at the time. It is also against the law to sell, abandon, give away or breed a banned dog.

From April 2016 it is a legal requirement for all dogs to be microchipped and all contact details up to date.

If you have any dog that is dangerous to others, you will have broken your Tenancy Agreement, and that will put your tenancy at risk.

6.2.2 Dogs Barking

Excessive dog barking causes nuisance and may be considered Anti-Social Behaviour. Your neighbours can make a complaint under noise nuisance. An Order can be issued by the Court to make you control the situation. Before doing this you must inform the dog owner of your intention by completing a form. To obtain a copy of this form please speak to your Neighbourhood Officer.

6.3 Gardens

You are responsible for keeping your garden tidy. Please:

- Keep your grass short.
- Look after your hedges and shrubs and ensure they don't hang over footpaths or other public rights of way.
- Don't let your hedges or trees grow too tall, so that they block your neighbours natural light, or cause a nuisance to them.
- Don't dump or store rubbish in your garden, as this is a health risk.

6.3.1 If you find it difficult to look after your garden

If, because of disability or age, you cannot look after your garden, please ask your relatives or friends to help if possible. If you cannot do this, please contact the Housing Service for advice and how we may be able to help.

6.3.2 Fencing

Any Council owned property that has a fence or gate that is next to a public footpath, road or public space (that requires repairing) will be repaired by the Council or replaced if we think repairing the fence panels will take more than two hours.

For dividing fences between back gardens, once ownership has been established (i.e. the fence panels belong to the Council and are on Council owned property), we will replace the front two panels, closest to the property, with new fence panels (if they cannot be repaired) and the rest of the fencing panels with a chain-link fence. If the dividing fence belongs to a leaseholder or to a private owner, they will be responsible for repairing or replacing the fence.

We will also repair, or if required replace, front gates in gardens.

6.3.3 Trees

You are responsible for looking after and maintaining any trees in your garden.

If a tree in your garden becomes diseased, dangerous or overgrown, you must tell your Neighbourhood Officer. You must not chop down a tree without the written permission of the Council.

Please note – some trees are protected by Tree Preservation Orders and others are protected because they are in a conservation area. It may be a criminal offence to cut off parts of a tree, or chop down trees without prior permission.

6.3.4 Communal gardens

The Housing Service is responsible for looking after communal gardens. We will cut the grass regularly.

6.4 Parking

Any vehicles you own must be a reasonable size for a parking space. A reasonable size would be up to a Transit sized vehicle. Any vehicle over this size must be, by law, registered with the Vehicle and Operators Service Agency (VOSA) as to where the vehicle is parked and when not in use.

Any vehicle kept by you must comply with legislation and must have a valid MOT certificate (if applicable), be insured and be legally taxed (vehicle licence) unless a valid Statutory Off Road Notice is in place. All vehicles must be registered with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

Please be aware that any vehicle that has a SORN cannot be parked in public parking areas, including communal car parks. Any vehicle that has a SORN and is parked in a public parking area is liable for action to be taken by the DVLA. Such actions could include the vehicle being wheel clamped or even towed away.

Contact your Neighbourhood Officer if you have any concerns regarding parking.

6.4.1 Caravans, motorhomes, boats and trailers

You must get permission from the Housing Service to park caravans, motorhomes, trailers, or similar vehicles, on car parks owned by Wokingham Borough Council.

6.4.2 Large Goods Vehicles (LGVs) and Passenger Carrying Vehicles (PCVs)

You are not permitted to park any LGVs or PCVs on your property or on the Housing Service's land.

6.4.3 Parking on footpaths and grass verges

The Housing Service does not allow parking on footpaths or grass verges belonging to the Council, as it looks unsightly and can cause damage.

6.4.5 Parking in your garden

No parking is allowed in your garden or on the land around your home unless you have a standing parking space, such as a driveway or paved area and a dropped kerb and pavement crossing.

If you would like to build a parking space, you must have written permission from the Housing Service. You may also need planning permission and building regulation approval to install a dropped kerb and pavement crossing.

6.4.4 Garages

The Housing Service has a number of garages for rent. Garages can be used to store private motor vehicles in (as well as belongings etc). We give our tenants priority when renting out garages, but anyone else can also rent a garage if one is available.

If you decide to rent a garage, please note:

- The Housing Service accepts no responsibility for any loss or damage caused to any goods stored or left in the garage unless by our negligence.
- You cannot sub-let or transfer the garage to another person.
- You must not leave a motor vehicle on the access way or in any way obstruct the access to other garages.
- You must not undertake any construction work or repairs to the garage yourself, and you must permit the Housing Service, or our contractors, to enter the garage and examine its condition and undertake any repair the Housing Service considers necessary.

6.5. Waste disposal

You are responsible for disposing of your domestic waste on a regular basis. Waste collections in the Borough are weekly.

To find out the day of your waste collection you can visit www.wokingham.gov.uk or call the Customer Call Centre on 0118 974 6000.

Blue bin bags and recycling boxes must be left out by 6.30am on your collection day:

- Tie up your blue bin bags and leave them at the edge of your property on top of recycling boxes to deter animals.
- Blue bags can be tied in dustbins but not wheeled bins, left at the edge of your property.
- As near to the kerb as possible without causing obstruction.

Your refuse is considered your property and is your responsibility until it is collected. A build-up of rubbish can also result in further problems such as mice and rat infestations.

6.6 Garden Waste

Garden waste can be disposed of in brown bins and brown sacks but should only contain:

- Garden clippings
- Grass cuttings
- Leaves
- Weeds

Brown bins and brown sacks must be left out by 6.30am on your collection day and be:

- Left on the edge of your property
- As near to kerb as possible without causing obstruction

6.7 Pest control

You are responsible for the disposal of vermin in your property or garden and should contact an appropriate pest control company to deal with the matter.

You can avoid getting pest problems in your garden by not leaving out food in your back garden or overfilling your bin.

6.8 Illegal dumping and littering

Those responsible for disposing of their refuse incorrectly, such as dumping and littering, will be prosecuted and will be liable for any costs.



7. Repairs and Maintenance

In order to maintain your property in good condition, repairs and maintenance will sometimes be necessary. As the tenant, you share responsibility for these repairs and maintenance with the Housing Service.

7.1 Responsibilities of the Housing Service

We will keep your home in good condition by repairing and maintaining the items below:

- The structure and exterior of the dwelling. This includes chimneys, external decoration, external doors, windows, drains, fences fronting the public highway, garages, gutters, outside pipes, roofs, steps, walls and floors (but not floor coverings).
- Kitchen sink units and bathroom basins, toilets, baths, and showers fitted by us.
- Electrical wiring, gas, water and soil pipes.
- Space and water heating fitted by us.

In flats and maisonettes we will repair and maintain in good condition the following items:

- The common entrances, halls and stairways (including decoration).
- The lifts and passageways.
- The communal lighting, fire safety equipment and other communal amenities.
- Doors, glass and windows in communal areas.

In order to help deliver a more efficient service, repairs will be prioritised according to the nature of the work involved. Repairs that are required as a result of damage or breakdowns that put tenants' health and safety or the property at risk will be dealt with faster than those that can safely wait.

We will charge you for the cost of any work that is not due to fair wear and tear, or that is caused by acts of carelessness, neglect or vandalism by yourself or anyone living with you or visiting you.

The Housing Service will NOT be responsible for the repair of any of the items detailed below where:

- Damage has been caused by the tenant or anyone living with or visiting the tenant.
- Unapproved alterations have been carried out by the tenant.
- Where the tenant has neglected to properly maintain the dwelling.

If the Housing Service undertakes repairs resulting from such damage, the cost of repairs will be charged to you as the tenant.

A list of repairs that are carried out by us, the Housing Service and what you as a tenant are responsible for can be seen in the following chart:

INSIDE YOUR HOME	Us	You	INSIDE YOUR HOME	Us	You
Heating			Doors & Windows		
Night storage heaters installed by us	✓		Glass in internal doors		✓
Gas/electric fire installed by us	✓		Internal doors		✓
Gas/electric fire installed by you (providing you got our written permission to install it)		✓	Internal door handles, catches, locks & bolts		✓
The cost of removing air from gas pipes after the gas supply stops because the meter has run out of credit		✓	External doors, window handles, catches, locks & bolts	✓	
Bleeding radiators		✓	Raising, or lowering doors for new floor coverings		✓
			Lock change/lost key		✓
			Door numbers/knockers/letter boxes		✓
Plumbing			Window frames	✓	
All chains and plugs on sinks		✓	Broken glass (unless caused by vandalism and the police have been involved)		✓
Taps fitted by us	✓		Communal doors	✓	
Taps fitted by you		✓	Glass in communal areas	✓	
Blocked sinks, basins and toilet		✓	Windows in communal areas	✓	
Floors			Kitchen		
Floor tiles (fitted by us)	✓		Kitchen units installed by you		✓
Floor tiles (fitted by you)		✓	Kitchens units installed by us	✓	
Vinyl flooring and fitted carpets		✓	Electric point for cooker	✓	
Floor boards and joists	✓		Cooker (except if we provided the cooker in Sheltered Housing)		✓
			Pipe work to washing machine, dishwasher etc.	✓	

A list of repairs that are carried out by us, the Housing Service and what you as a tenant are responsible for can be seen in the following chart:

INSIDE YOUR HOME	Us	You	INSIDE YOUR HOME	Us	You
Bathroom			Electrical		
Damaged bath, basin, toilet or cistern		✓	Electrical wiring, sockets and light fittings	✓	
Tiling (to splash back areas and around bath/shower enclosure fitted by us)	✓		Wired-in smoke alarms	✓	
Toilet seat repair or renewal		✓	Battery operated smoke alarms (fitted by you)		✓
Towel rails and clothes dryers installed by you		✓			
Towel rails and clothes dryers installed by us	✓		Battery operated smoke alarms (fitted by us)	✓	
Toilet roll holders		✓	Carbon Monoxide detectors (fitted by you)		✓
Shaver sockets installed by you		✓	Carbon Monoxide detectors (fitted by us)	✓	
Shaver sockets installed by us	✓		Fuse Box	✓	
Mirrors		✓	Replacement fuses		✓
Pipe work to sink, basins and baths	✓		Electric meter and supply of electricity		✓
Gas			Extractor fans owned by us (excluding filters)	✓	
Gas pipe work	✓		General		
Radiators, valves, time clocks and thermostats	✓		Decoration inside communal areas	✓	
Gas boiler	✓		Structural cracks in the plaster	✓	
Supply of gas and gas meter		✓	Hairline cracks in the plaster		✓
			Coat hooks		✓
			Curtain rails		✓
			Mould caused by condensation		✓
			Staircase and hand rails	✓	

A list of repairs that are carried out by us, the Housing Service and what you as a tenant are responsible for can be seen in the following chart:

OUTSIDE YOUR HOME	Us	You	OUTSIDE YOUR HOME	Us	You
Communal Areas			General		
All communal areas including balconies, storage cupboards, drying areas and refuse stores	✓		Cleaning drains and gullies in gardens		✓
Communal TV aerials	✓		Brickwork (structural)	✓	
Roof			Main drains	✓	
Roof, soffit and fascia's	✓		Foundations	✓	
Chimney	✓		Gutters and down pipes	✓	
Gardens and Boundaries			External painting	✓	
Paths – from highway to front door	✓		Individual television aerials		✓
Paths – all others		✓	Pests – wasps, ants, mice and rats		✓
Patios installed by you or previous tenant		✓	Pests – squirrels and bats	✓	
Fencing and gates next to a road, footpath or public space	✓		Vegetation within the properties boundaries		✓
Fencing and gates between you and your neighbour if both fences are council owned (please note, we will only replace fences with chain-link fences)	✓				
Sheds and garages (erected by us)	✓				
Sheds and greenhouses (erected by you or previous tenant)		✓			
Individual drying facilities		✓			
Hard-standing built by you or previous tenant		✓			
Brick built sheds not attached to the property		✓			
Brick built sheds attached to the property	✓				

7.2 How do I make a repair request?

When making a repair request the Housing Service will investigate your report and advise who is responsible for the repair. Where the Council is responsible, you will usually be given an indication of when it will be carried out. This is how you can make a repair request:

Where to report your repair	Times available	Contact number
Repairs Helpdesk (non-heating)	8.30am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday	0800 515 287
Heating Repairs Helpdesk	8.30am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday	0800 389 8789
Emergency Repairs Helpdesk	Outside of the hours above, including all weekends and bank holidays	0800 515 287

You can also report a repair by emailing the repairs team at housingrepairs@wokingham.gov.uk or by posting a message on our dedicated Facebook page (search Tenant Services Wokingham Borough Council.)

Please note the repairs email address and the Facebook page are monitored during office hours (8:30am – 5:00pm) Monday to Friday, excluding Bank Holidays. Any emergency repairs request made after 5:00pm should be made by calling the emergency repairs helpdesk. If you send an email, or a message to our Facebook page after 5:00pm it may not be responded to until the following day.

7.2.1 Employee identification

All of our employees and contractors must carry official identification and show it to you before they enter your home. Please ensure you check the identification of anyone you do not know who calls at your home.

If you have any concerns about a visitor's identity do not let them into your property and alert the Housing Service if you have any concerns during office hours, or the emergency repairs helpdesk number if out of office hours, as shown in the table in section 7.2 of this handbook.

7.2.3 Tenant's Responsibilities

You must report any repairs, faults, damage or theft of our fixtures immediately to the Repairs and Maintenance Team.

You must take good care of your home, its fixtures and fittings and keep it in a good state of repair. You must keep it in a clean, sanitary and in a habitable condition and comply with any direction given by the Housing Service from time to time regarding any repairs to the premises for which you are responsible.

We will charge for repair or replacement if damage to your home (including its fixtures and fittings) has been caused deliberately or by your own neglect or carelessness, or by any actions of anyone who lives with you or who visits your home, including children. Failure to pay will be a breach of your tenancy agreement.

The Housing Service may recover the debt through a County Court if you do not pay.

7.2.4 How long will it take for repairs to be carried out?

The Housing Service aims to complete repairs and improvements quickly, efficiently and to agreed targets, which can be seen in the table below:

Priority 1 Emergency (3 hours)	There is an immediate and serious risk to people or property (make safe and secure only)
Priority 2 Urgent (2 Working Days)	A serious risk to people and/or property is likely to develop if action is not taken quickly
Priority 3 Routine (15 working days)	There is a lower risk to people and/or property
Priority 4 Non-urgent/Planned (40 working days)	Items must be pre-ordered or made to measure
The length of time it takes for us to do your repair will depend on the type of problem. We will respond fastest to damage or breakdowns where there is a risk to health & safety or the property.	
The Repairs Help Desk operator will inform you of the priority given to your repair.	

Certain repairs fall under the Right to Repair Scheme, a scheme that enables tenants to carry out repairs themselves if we do not complete them by the required timescale and are then compensated by the Housing Service for the works carried out, as long as the works do not exceed £250. To find out if a repair falls under the Right to Repair Scheme contact the repairs team.

7.3 Improvements and alterations

You have the right to carry out improvements to your home (as long as you are a Secure or Flexible Fixed Term Tenant), including external painting. You must obtain our written consent before any work starts. We will refuse consent only if there is a good reason for doing so. We may give consent that includes reasonable conditions. For structural alterations, you must obtain building regulations and/or planning approval from the relevant Council department.

You must keep all improvements and alterations in a good state of repair. It is your responsibility to carry out and pay for these repairs unless we have agreed, in writing, to do this.

In some cases, if you move out after you have made improvements we may pay you compensation, provided you obtained our written consent before you did any works. Not all improvements are covered.

7.3.1 Obtaining the Council's help to carry out improvements on medical grounds

We are committed to helping improve the quality of life for tenants with disabilities and health or mobility problems. Funding for aids and adaptations may be available through the Disabled Facilities Grant.

To apply for aids and adaptations, you will first need to contact Wokingham Borough Council's Community Care Contact Team on 0118 974 6000 to explain your problem and request an assessment by a Care Practitioner.

We carry out minor and major adaptations but will only undertake aids and adaptations work to your home on referral from a Care Practitioner (Occupational Therapist or Social Worker).

Examples of minor adaptations include grab rails and lever taps and we aim to complete minor adaptations within six weeks of a referral from a Care Practitioner. Examples of major adaptations include installation of a stair lift or shower and we aim to complete major adaptations in twelve months of a referral from a Care Practitioner.

7.4 Safety in your home

7.4.1 Electrical safety

You should know how to turn off the mains electric supply in an emergency. The switch is usually in the same place as the fuse box. The advice that follows may be helpful:

- Find out where your mains switch is before an emergency arises.
- Do not overload plug sockets.
- When not using electrical appliances switch them off and pull out the plug. This will also save energy.
- Do not run wiring under the carpet – the wire's protective covering may be damaged and you won't be able to see it.

7.4.2 Fire safety

By following simple guidelines you can reduce the chance of a fire starting in your home and help keep everyone and your home safe.

- Fit smoke alarms in your home.
 - Test your smoke alarm every month.
 - Do not leave pans of hot oil unattended.
 - Do not use paraffin or oil heaters.
 - Keep all escape routes (such as passageways, corridors and hallways) clear.
- If a fire starts, you should follow the advice given by the Fire & Rescue Service:
- Alert everyone in the property if you are not alone.
 - Shut all doors; only open doors you need to on your way out and don't look for valuables.
 - Get everyone out.
 - Crawl on the floor if there's smoke; the air is cleaner near the floor, so if there is smoke put your nose as low as possible.
 - Call the Fire & Rescue Service on 999.
 - Don't go back into your property.
 - Wait near the building.
 - When the Fire & Rescue Service arrives, give them as much information as possible about the fire and the building.

7.4.3 Water supply and stopcock

It is important that you know the location of your stopcock in the event of a water leak. Please find the location of the water stopcock in your home. If you need to stop the water flow to the property the stopcock should be turned clockwise to ensure it is closed. If you are unsure of where the stopcock is located contact the repairs team.

7.4.4 Open fire places

The Housing Service, in some circumstances, does allow open fireplaces and log burners, but you must apply for permission and have written approval from the Housing Service before any works take place. If approval has been given from the Housing Service, the resident must supply the Housing Service with an annual certificate to detail that the open fire place has been serviced / chimney has been swept.

However, we generally advise you not to have an open fireplace as the risk to the building and the safety of the occupants is greatly increased. Risks can range from inadequate ventilation, deterioration of the flue, incorrect fuel being used, inadequate enclosures and the chimney not being cleaned or adequately maintained. These failures impact and increase the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and fire within your home.

7.4.5 Gas safety and servicing

It is important that you know how to turn off your mains gas supply in an emergency. The shut off valve is found on top of your gas meter.

The Housing Service would like to remind tenants about the importance of having your regular gas service visit.

This service is a legal requirement and must be carried out. If you do not allow access to carry out this service, it is a breach of your Tenancy Agreement. This takes up a lot of time and resources that could be better used serving you. Failing to allow access to have your service done puts both you and your neighbours at risk, so please help us to help you.

If you suspect there is a gas leak:

- Put out cigarettes and naked flames.
- Do not use electrical switches or lights.
- Open all doors and windows.
- Turn off the gas supply at the meter.
- Immediately report the leak to the National Grid, the gas supply company on 0800 111999.

7.4.6 Heating advice

Our Repairs Service receives a lot of calls about heating and condensation. You should keep your home adequately heated and ventilated to ensure that you do not cause condensation. Here are a few pointers to help reduce the risk of condensation and keep your home heated more efficiently:

- Ventilate – even in damp weather, properties need to ‘breathe’. Do not block ventilators and when cooking or bathing, open a window to allow excess moisture to escape.
- Keep your heating at a consistent temperature – it is better to keep your heating on a lower setting and allow the thermostat to control the heating. We would recommend that you set the thermostat between 18 and 21 degrees centigrade. The thermostat will then control the boiler which will need to work less as the property will be maintaining a constant temperature. A sudden change in temperature (such as when the heating has been switched off all day and is then turned on in the evening) means that the boiler has to work for longer periods and can also make condensation problems worse.
- Heavy curtains at the windows can help reduce heat loss. However, these need to be pulled back completely during the day; otherwise this can trap damp air around the windows causing mould.
- Don't dry clothes on radiators; if you need to dry clothes inside put them on a drying rack in the bathroom. Open a window and close the bathroom door.

8. Get involved and make a difference

The Housing Service is committed to creating vibrant communities, sustainable neighbourhoods and a sense of pride for all living there.

Getting involved with the Housing Service will enable you to have an input in how the service is planned, delivered and monitored. You can help improve the quality of life for you and others in your home, neighbourhood and the local community whilst gaining knowledge and experience along the way.

The Involvement and Improvement Team is responsible for encouraging tenant and leaseholder involvement across the borough. The team works very closely with the Involved Tenants, tenants and leaseholders of the borough to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have an input into how the service is provided.

The Housing Service provides a number of involvement opportunities to suit your individual needs. If you can spare a few minutes or even a few hours each month then one of these opportunities could be for you.

Contact the Involvement and Improvement Team for more details (contact details can be found in the Housing Service Contacts section of this handbook).

8.1.1 Surveys

From time to time, the Housing Service will carry out satisfaction surveys to identify your views with a specific area of the service. Your response and views are used to improve and raise our standards.

8.1.2 Facebook and Twitter

The Housing Service has opened a Facebook social networking service, a different way in which you can contact and connect with us. Look us up and like us on Facebook to receive regular updates on what is happening within the Housing Service. Search for 'Tenant Services Wokingham Borough Council' from your Facebook page and 'Tenant Services WBC' from your Twitter account to find us.

8.1.3 Phone, email and letters

All feedback that the Housing Service receives from tenants and leaseholders is invaluable. You can contact us, email us or write to us with any views, comments, complaints or feedback you may have. For all contact details please see the Housing Service Contacts page at the back of this handbook.

8.2 Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Meetings

8.2.1 Focus Groups

The Housing Service organises focus groups and will invite tenants and leaseholders along to review specific areas of the service.

8.2.2 The Tenant Involvement Annual Review

All tenants and leaseholders are invited to attend the Tenant Involvement Annual Review. This is an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of the past year and look forward to priorities for the forthcoming year.

8.2.3 Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel

This panel consists of Involved Tenants, staff and Councillors who meet once a month to ensure continuous improvement in the Housing Service and to advise and scrutinise strategic plans and issues, budgetary issues, policy and procedures.

8.2.4 Communications Group

This group meets regularly (dependent on deadlines) to prepare and produce Housing Matters and to proofread all general publications and letters (not individual letters to tenants or leaseholders). The group ensures that documents are in Plain English and tenant and leaseholder friendly. They also monitor the Housing Service sections of the website.

As part of the Communications Group, there is also the Reading Panel. This is a group of tenants and leaseholders who look at our draft documents from time to time to check that they are informative, easy to read and understand, attractive and appealing.

8.2.5 Neighbourhood and Communities Group

This group meets monthly and monitors and reviews the standards of the Housing Service about our Neighbourhoods and Communities e.g. Anti-Social Behaviour and Neighbourhood Management. They also work in partnership with us to organise community events.

8.2.6 Repairs and Maintenance Group

This group meets monthly to monitor the day to day repairs and maintenance service, the Decent Homes programme across the borough as well as monitoring other contracts such as grounds maintenance, gas servicing and voids (letting empty homes).

8.2.7 Attend a Group as an observer

If you are unsure whether signing up to one of the Involvement Groups is for you, you are welcome to come along to one of the meetings as an observer. This will give you the chance to see first-hand how the groups operate and how they help shape the service.

Contact the Involvement and Improvement Team for more details (contact details can be found in the Housing Service Contacts section of this handbook).

8.3 Getting involved in your local neighbourhood and community

The Involvement and Improvement Team organises various events throughout the year in which all of our tenants and leaseholders can get involved. These events allow our tenants and leaseholders to help the Housing Service improve the standard of your neighbourhood. Some of the events that are held throughout the year are listed below:

8.3.1 Housing/Rent/Benefit Surgeries

Housing Officers and Rent Officers hold Housing, Rent and Benefit Surgeries each month giving tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to speak to your Housing or Rent Officer and raise any issues that affect you and the area in which you live.

8.3.2 Walkabouts

You are invited to join the Housing Service, Involved Tenants, other Wokingham Borough Council services, Thames Valley Police and other agencies on the Walkabout around your local area. Walkabouts give you the opportunity to have your input and raise issues that affect you and the area in which you live.

8.3.3 Community Fun Days

Community Fun Days are open to all tenants, leaseholders and local residents and take place across the borough. They offer a range of free and fun activities for the whole family. WBC and other agencies also attend to promote the work and support that they provide.

8.3.4 Local and borough wide events

The Housing Service holds local and borough wide events throughout the year which all tenants and leaseholders are invited to attend. The Involvement and Improvement Team also link in with other Wokingham Borough Council services and partner organisations that organise events throughout the year, which you will be invited to.

All of the Housing Services events are listed in the quarterly Housing Matters magazine that is sent to every tenant and leaseholder.

8.3.5 Making sure you are not out of pocket

Any Involved Tenant or leaseholder on the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel or a Involvement Group is able to claim for out of pocket expenses for example, car mileage and fares for public transport. These claims are at the discretion of the Involvement and Improvement Team. Receipts will be required for all expense claims except mileage.

Transport is also organised on request for anybody who requires this to attend any events, meetings etc.

8.4 Community Facilities

8.4.1 Residents Resource Centre

The Resident Resource Centre is located at 10 Targett Court, Winnersh, Berkshire, RG41 5HP.

The Residents Resource Centre provides:

- Advice, support and guidance on any housing or community related matter.
- A direct link to the Involved Tenants and Leaseholders and the Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Team.
- A venue for tenants' and leaseholder meetings.
- Computer access for Involved Tenants and the wider community.
- Rent and Housing Surgeries.
- Venue for training.
- Venue for Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement activities and events.

Any residents of the borough can pop in to report any housing and community issues. The Residents Resource Centre is open Monday to Friday, 10.00 am until 4.00 pm subject to diary commitments.

8.4.2 Community Houses/Flats

The Housing Service provides 2 community houses at:

- 17 Billing Avenue, Finchampstead, Berkshire, RG41 4JE.
- 36 Frensham Green, Shinfield, Berkshire, RG2 8EH.

Each house or flat is managed by a member of the Wokingham Borough Council Community Development Team. These facilities provide:

- A direct link to the Community Development Team.
- A variety of community activities and learning opportunities for adults and young people.
- Rent and Housing Surgeries.
- PCs and Laptops with free internet access.

9. Feedback

We value all kinds of feedback and positively encourage you to let us know what you think about the services we deliver, so that we can recognise the things that we do well and try to put right the things we don't do so well and improve our services.

9.1 What is a comment?

Comments are usually suggestions about how the Housing Service can make our services better. We continually look to improve our services and we are open to all reasonable suggestions.

9.2 What is a compliment?

A compliment is usually when a tenant, leaseholder or service user is happy with the service we have provided, or when we have gone that extra mile. It is good to receive positive feedback as it shows us what we are doing well and what we need to continue to do.

9.3 What is a complaint?

A complaint is when you tell us you are not satisfied with the quality of the service or if we have failed to do something. Complaints can be received from individuals or from groups of tenants, leaseholders or other service users.

9.4 Your feedback is a great way to help us improve our service to you

You can make a comment, compliment or complaint in the following ways:

- Visit the reception desk at Shute End and give details to a member of staff
- Fill in the online form which can be found at: <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/housing-and-tenants/tenant-services/contact-tenant-services/>
- Write to: Customer Care Officer, The Housing Service, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1WN.
- Send us an email to housing@wokingham.gov.uk or housing.complaints@wokingham.gov.uk
- Telephone – 0118 974 3768

10. Housing Service Contacts

Address	The Housing Service Wokingham Borough Council PO BOX 154 Shute End Wokingham Berkshire RG40 1WN
General Enquiries	(0118) 974 6000
Fax	(0118) 974 6770
Email	housing@wokingham.gov.uk

Repairs & Maintenance	
Repairs Helpdesk (non-heating)	Freephone 0800 515 287
Heating Repairs Helpdesk	Freephone 0800 389 8789
Emergency Repairs Helpdesk (after 5pm)	Freephone 0800 515 287
Email	housingrepairs@wokingham.gov.uk

Neighbourhood & Communities	
Reporting Anti-Social Behaviour Email	0118 974 3766 asbhousing@wokingham.gov.uk
Neighbourhood Officers	0118 974 3745 (you will be directed to your specific Neighbourhood Officer)
Voids (Empty Properties) Officer	0118 974 6644
Estate Services	0118 974 3776
Tenancy Sustainment	0118 974 3745 (your details will be passed to the appropriate Tenancy Sustainment Officer)
Email	tso@wokingham.gov.uk

Money Matters	
Rent Team	(0118) 974 6629
Housing Benefit Email	(0118) 974 6000 benefits@wokingham.gov.uk
Council Tax Email	(0118) 974 6000 ctax@wokingham.gov.uk

10. Housing Service Contacts

Housing Allocations & Homelessness	
General Enquiries	0118 974 6760
Allocations	0118 974 6869/6757
Homelessness	0118 974 6754/6756/6752
Medical/Shared Ownership	0118 974 6986
Email	housing.needs@wokingham.gov.uk

Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Team	
Address	The Residents Resource Centre 10 Targett Court Winnersh Berkshire RG41 5HP
Telephone	(0118) 974 2494
Email	tenant.involvement@wokingham.gov.uk
Tenant Involvement Manager	(0118) 974 3767
Tenant Involvement Officer	(0118) 974 3759
Customer Care Officer	(0118) 974 3768
Email	housingcomplaints@wokingham.gov.uk

Sheltered Housing Team	
Housing Manager Specialist Housing	(0118) 974 3773
Sheltered Schemes	
Dickens Court	(0118) 974 9577
Glebe Court	(0118) 974 4434
Harman Court	(0118) 978 4434
Meachen Court	(0118) 977 6404
Palmer Court	(0118) 978 2773
Polehampton Court	(0118) 934 2761
Sale Garden Cottages	(0118) 978 8740
Spring Gardens	(0118) 988 3077
Treacher Court	(0118) 934 5776

10. Housing Service Contacts

Community Houses and Flats	
Finchampstead	Community House 17 Billing Avenue Finchampstead Berkshire RG40 4JE
Shinfield	Community Flat 36 Frensham Green Shinfield Berkshire RG2 1PT

Other Useful Numbers	
Dog Warden	01635 503 671
Emergency out of hours number	0800 212111
Sports & Leisure	0118 974 3728
Email	sports@wokingham.gov.uk
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)	0300 790 6801/2
Wokingham Citizens Advice Bureau	0300 3301189 (new callers) 0118 978 7258 (existing clients)
Thames Valley Police	101 (non-emergency calls) 999 (emergency calls)
Thames Valley Crimestoppers (report a crime anonymously)	0800 555 111
National Grid (for emergency gas leaks)	0800 111 999
Job Centre Plus	0800 055 6688
TV Licensing	0300 790 6144
Housing Ombudsman	0300 111 3000
Homeswapper (Website for Mutual Exchanges)	www.homeswapper.co.uk
Reporting Fraud	0800 454 240 or visit http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/benefits/benefits-and-fraud-prevention/benefit-fraud/



WOKINGHAM
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