

Housing Repairs Handbook



St Albans
City & District Council

Foreword

Welcome to the new repairs handbook.



Members of the Tenants Forum are working with the Council to make the service that you receive run as smoothly as possible.

You can help by keeping the handbook in a safe place and using it before asking for help.

If you have strong feelings about the service or just want to talk with fellow residents please come and join us.

You can make a difference!

Contact your
Housing Officer



Introduction

This repairs and maintenance handbook tells you about the standard of service you can expect from the Council and gives you a range of helpful information.

It is important that you understand your rights and responsibilities, which you can find on page 21.

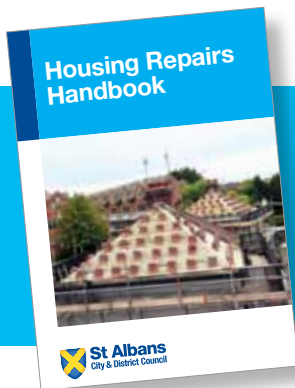
We hope you find this handbook useful. You can find further information about repairs on **www.stalbans.gov.uk/repairs**.

If you need to know more, please call our Contact Centre for Repairs on **01727 819256**.

Tenant involvement

We have produced this handbook in consultation with members of the district wide Asset Management Forum.

To find out more about how to get involved please contact your Housing Officer.



Please keep this Handbook in a safe place where you can easily find it when you need a repair.

Index	page
1. How to report a repair?	5
2. What happens when I report a repair?	7
3. How quickly will my repair be carried out?	9
4. What priority is my repair?	10
5. Appointments and access to your home	13
6. Our standards	16
7. Gas safety	18
8. What must I do?	20
9. Planned improvements	52
10. Tenant improvements and alterations	53
11. Handy hints	56

1. How to report a repair?

Before you contact us, please:

Check this repairs handbook to establish who is responsible and to see what details we need to know. By giving us as much information as you can, you can help us get your problem fixed quickly. The member of staff who talks to you will also have a copy of this book in front of them.

Let us know when someone can be at home to let the repair worker in to do the work. A responsible adult must be in the home while the repair is being carried out. If for any reason you or a responsible adult will not be able to be at your home when an appointment has been made please advise as soon as you can so the appointment can be given to another resident.



Most people choose to report their repair by phone, however there are a number of ways in which you can do this.

Repairs may be reported between 8.45am and 5.15pm Monday – Thursday, and 8.45am and 4.45pm on Fridays.

- By telephoning us on **01727 819256**
- By calling at the Customer Services Centre at the Civic Centre

Alternatively non urgent repairs may also be reported

- In writing
- By email on **h.repairs@stalbans.gov.uk**

Emergencies outside office hours:

Ring **01727 811155** for emergency repairs only. We will only come out to make your home safe and do the full repair during normal working hours. We may charge you the cost of our call out if we find that the repair was not an emergency or if it is part of your repairing responsibilities.

Other useful telephone numbers:

Thames Water Utilities Ltd **0800 587 0036**

Affinity Water 0845 1552062

Veolia Water **0845 782 3333**

Gas emergencies – National Grid (Gas) **0800 111999**

EDF – Electricity **0800 096 9000**

Calls to 0800 Freephone numbers may not be free from some mobile phones, so please check with your provider.



2. What happens when I report a repair?

When you report your repair, we will ask you to tell us the following:

- Your name, address and a contact phone number
- As much as you can to help us get the repair undertaken effectively
- If water is leaking into your home from another property, we will need to know the address of that property as well
- A time when someone will be at home
- Anything else you think we need to take into account about your household
- Whether your home has recently been repaired or refurbished, as the work may be covered by a guarantee
- If the repair relates to an adaptation for a registered disabled person.

After you have reported the repair, we will give you a job number and details of when the work will be carried out or inspected.

Please make sure you get a job number when you report your repair and make a note of the number in case you need to make further enquiries. We will send you a receipt confirming the repair details.

Sometimes a surveyor will need to look at the problem before we can order a repair and we will arrange a convenient time with you.

If you are out when we call, we will leave a card asking you to phone us to make another appointment.

If you cannot keep an appointment, please let us know, otherwise we may cancel your repair.

The Council may charge you if you deliberately provide false information about your repair eg.

- how urgent it is
- how it is affecting you
- how it was caused



Repairs and right to buy

If you make a right to buy application for your property we will only carry out essential works to your home.

This is explained within the information pack you will have been issued when you put in a right to buy application.

If you tell us in writing that you decide not to go ahead with your application we will complete repairs in the usual way.

3. How quickly will my repair be carried out?

There are five different repairs codes and the time taken to undertake the repair will depend on the code which it is given. These are:

- **Code A Emergency** – 24 hour response
- **Code E Urgent** – 3 working days
- **Code F Essential** – 7 working days
- **Code H Routine** – 30 working days
- **Code P Routine** – 60 working days

Occasionally priorities may be adjusted depending on individual situations or circumstances, such as delays due to working conditions and supply of parts and materials.



4. What priority is my repair?

Code A emergency – 24 hour response

You can contact the Council's emergency service outside office hours if the problem creates a very serious health and safety risk.

We should be able to respond to most emergency repairs within 2 hours, depending on the type of emergency.

Out of hours emergency repairs are 'make safe' only. Your full repair will usually be ordered on the next working day, depending on how urgent it is.

When deciding if a repair is an emergency, we may take into account special circumstances in your household, such as sickness, age or disability. Examples of emergency repairs include:

- **Flooding** – burst pipes where you cannot stop the water leak, blocked drains and toilets causing flooding and complete power failure in your home
- **Structural damage** – dangerous structures such as ceilings, walls and chimneys and fire or storm damage to your property. We will make your property safe if this is practical, bearing in mind weather conditions
- **Securing a property following a break in** – boarding up windows or doors and securing your property, provided you have a crime reference number from the Police
- **Access for lost keys/locked out** – We will only attend for senior citizens or the disabled
- **lift breakdowns**

- **No mains drinking water supply** – This will be responded to within 24 hours. A supply of bottled water will be provided for you
- **No electrical power or lighting** – Note we will normally respond within 24 hours. You should have some sort of emergency lighting available, however candles should not be used due to the fire risk
- **No central heating** – 31 October to 1 May only. If you are a vulnerable person we will try and attend that evening if it is reported before 8pm. Otherwise a heating engineer will attend within 24 hours
- **No working toilet** – This will be dealt with within 24 hours where there is no second toilet in the property. Toilets can sometimes be cleared using a bucket of water, with a toilet brush or a plunger.



Code E urgent – 3 working days

This category will include repairs that significantly affect living conditions. Examples of 3 day repairs are:

- **Partial loss of electric power**
- **Blocked bath, basin or sink**
- **Rotten timber flooring or stair treads**
- **Loose or detached banisters or hand rail**
- **Running Taps** – Taps that cannot be turned on or off at all

- **Loss of heating** – (including hot water) between 1 May and 31 October, or partial loss of heating between 1 November and 30 April
- **Partial loss of water supply.**

Code F essential – 7 working days

This category will include repairs that cause inconvenience. Examples are:

- **Leaking roof**
- **Door entry phone not working**
- **Mechanical extractor fans not working.**

Code H routine – 30 working days

This category will include general repairs where work is necessary but routine in nature. Examples are:

- **Blocked guttering**
- **Damaged kitchen units.**

Code P Routine – 60 Working Days

This covers more routine work much of which is programmed. Examples are:

- **External redecoration**
- **Replacement kitchens**
- **Replacement windows.**

5. Appointments and access to your home

Appointments for inspections

If we need to inspect your home, the Contact Centre for Repairs will arrange a convenient time for us to visit. We take account of the urgency of the repair when agreeing an appointment date.

We offer inspection visits for a morning or afternoon during the following times:

Monday to Thursday 9am to 5pm. Friday 9am to 4pm.

Appointments for repairs

We will offer you an appointment for any repairs that cannot be completed in 1 working day.

We offer appointments during the following times:

Monday to Thursday 9am to 12 noon or 1pm to 5pm.

Friday 9am to 12 noon or 1pm to 4pm.

We can arrange appointments between 10am and 2pm to allow for the school run.

Access to your home

You must allow our staff and contractors access to inspect and do essential work including repairs, improvements and safety checks required by law. We will give you at least 24 hours' notice except in an emergency.

In an emergency, we may have to enter your home in your absence if there is a risk of personal injury or serious damage to your or a neighbour's property.

Surveyor Inspections

All Surveyors appointments are offered within a 10am – 12 noon or 2pm – 4pm time period and are usually within 30 days of the reported issue.

It may be possible, exceptionally, for Surveyors to be able to offer appointments before 10am or after 4pm (but only up to 5pm)

This cannot be offered as a normal service but can be requested in exceptional circumstances. Please ask the Repairs Team when reporting your repair.

Please be aware that our surveyors will largely be asked to inspect your properties under the following circumstances:

- Potential problems with your roof (causing water to penetrate your home)
- Issues that may affect your health and safety (e.g. bowing ceilings – which may be in danger of collapsing)
- Where you have made a complaint about the quality or scope of work to your home
- Where you have condensation/mould problems and in spite of taking steps outlined in our guidance leaflet the problem persists
- Severe leaks
- Request for a surveyor inspection by a contractor to agree the scope of work required
- Requests for fencing to separate your home from a road or a public path. Fencing dividing your home from your neighbour is your responsibility so we will not undertake any repairs
- Your concern about possible structural problems i.e. the appearance of large cracks internally or externally to your home.



Normally all other requests for repairs to your home can be dealt with by our Customer Services Team without the need for a surveyor to inspect.

Please note that the Surveyors are unable to approve any requests for new windows, kitchens or bathrooms but are able to inspect if a contractor considers that any items are not repairable following a request for repair. New windows, kitchens and bathrooms are programmed for replacement by the Planned Maintenance Team.

After the inspection, if repairs are necessary, an order will be raised. The contractor will then, wherever possible, contact you within 4 working days to arrange a convenient appointment.

6. Our standards

Our code of behaviour

Anyone working in your home must:

- introduce themselves and show you identification before entering
- be polite and patient with you and treat you with respect
- explain what they are going to do and discuss how this will affect you or your neighbours
- protect your belongings from damage, dust and paint
- make sure materials and tools do not cause danger to anyone
- let you know about how the work is going to be carried out
- clear rubbish from your home at the end of each working day
- tell you when they need to turn off electricity, water or gas and make sure they are re-connected at the end of the day (if it is safe to do so)
- be dressed presentably
- keep appointments.



Workers are not allowed to:

- smoke, swear or play radios in or around your home
- use mobile phones during their work to make or receive personal calls
- be in your home with children under 16 without a responsible adult being present
- receive gifts from you
- leave tools in your home.

They must ask your permission to:

- go into other rooms in your home
- use your phone
- use your toilet
- use your electricity or other facilities
- take their lunch break in your home.



7. Gas safety

Why do we do it?

St Albans City and District Council has a legal obligation to carry out an **annual gas safety check** to all our properties that have a gas meter.

This is a requirement, even if there are no Council owned gas appliances connected to it.

Under your conditions of tenancy, you must allow our staff and contractors into your home to carry out this check.

What will they do?

The check includes a service of the boiler and any other Council owned gas appliance in your home, such as a gas fire.

What about my gas cooker?

We will check the soundness of the supply to any appliances you have connected to the gas supply and we will also check the operation of the appliance, but we will not service them. If we find a problem, we have a legal obligation to disconnect the appliance.

Does the service cost me anything?

This service is FREE and ensures your safety.

Appointments

- When your service is due, our gas servicing contractor will write to you asking you to contact them on a freephone number.

Gas is dangerous!

If an appliance is not working properly it can give out carbon monoxide fumes. Carbon monoxide is odourless, tasteless and colourless. If you are exposed to carbon monoxide even for a short period of time, it can cause serious injury or even death by asphyxiation. Faulty appliances can also cause gas explosions.

What if I smell gas?

You need to DO four things:

- Turn off the gas supply at the meter
- Open windows to ventilate the area
- Call National Grid on 0800 111 999
- Once National Grid have been, call the Council repairs line on 01727 819256 or 01727 811155 for out of hours service.

DO NOT

- Smoke
- Use a mobile phone in the property
- Operate a light switch, intercom or any electrical appliance.

Gas repairs

Report all repairs in the usual way to the repairs hotline, which is **01727 819256**. The call centre is open 8.45am – 5.15pm, Monday to Thursday and 8.45 to 16.45 on Fridays excluding public holidays. At all other times, call the emergency call out number, which is **01727 811155**.

8. What must you do?

The following section explains your responsibilities to your home, if you have any questions as to whether it is your responsibility to undertake a repair please contact us.

You must:

- Let us into your home to carry out repairs, safety checks and any inspections that are needed
- Keep the inside of your home in a clean and reasonable condition
- Decorate the inside of your home to a reasonable standard, including filling minor cracks or holes in walls
- Let us know as soon as you notice a repair is needed and take action to prevent it getting worse
- Take care in what you are putting down drains and toilets to ensure that blockages do not occur
- Repair and maintain any fixture, fitting or appliance you have put in
- Take action to prevent condensation (see **Handy hints**)
- Arrange the repair of any damage caused by you, a member of your family or a visitor to your home
- Look after your garden, clear away rubbish from your home and garden using your dustbin or other local services
- You **MUST NOT** store any flammable substances or gas in your property
- You **MUST NOT** put rubbish, prams, bikes or any other items that could cause an obstruction in communal stairwells.

Remember if you do not fulfil your responsibilities then you may be recharged for the reinstatement of the property when you vacate it.

Damage and charging

If you, or anyone in your home, damage your home, we expect you to arrange for it to be repaired to the same standard as it was before. If we have to do it to make sure you and your family are safe, we will charge you for the full cost of the repair.

If damage is caused by a break-in or vandalism, we will carry out work to make your home safe. We will only do further work if you give us a police crime reference number.

Your rights to repair and improve

You may make most repairs and improvements to your home at your own expense as long as you get written permission from us first. We usually give permission.

Sometimes work affecting your home may also need planning permission and building regulation approval before work starts, so please discuss your plans with us first.

You will have to pay for the work yourself and it must be done to a proper standard. We will need to inspect it when the job is completed so please tell us when it is finished. Please note that we are not responsible for repairs which are necessary due to substandard workmanship or defective materials and you may be recharged for any work necessary to correct these.



Changes you have made

You can carry out changes to your home as long as you get our written permission before you start. This includes work such as adding gas or electrical fittings and laminate flooring.

You will be responsible for any repairs to the changes you make.

Insuring your home

If something happens to your home we will repair the physical damage to the property but we cannot replace your belongings. You should arrange your own insurance to cover this. To help, we have a low cost insurance scheme available for our tenants to join. If you would like more information please call our Housing Management Section on **01727 819301** or ask for a leaflet at the Civic Centre.

Please note that if you fit laminate flooring to your property, this will not be covered by the Council's building insurance, so you must ensure it is covered under your contents insurance. You should tell your insurer.

Tasks you must do

The following pages explain what repairs you are expected to undertake, or arrange to get the work done at your own cost.

A general list follows, along with more specific details on any particular responsibilities you may have as a tenant in respect to undertaking repairs.

Baths, basins and sinks

Your responsibilities

- Try to clear blocked baths, basins, sinks (see **Handy hints**)
- Replace plugs and chains to baths, basins and sinks
- Repair any items you have installed yourself
- Replacement of showers with baths where installed.

Advice

- For water leaks, blockages or tap problems, see the sections Drains and wastes and Pipes and taps
- A blocked waste pipe is not an emergency. You must try to clear any blockages yourself before you call us (see **Handy hints**)
- Do not use the bath or sink if the waste pipe is blocked. We will charge you for the cost of clearing blockages caused by items such as cooking fat, grease, hair
- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself
- If we need to replace bathroom fittings that are part of a suite, we will try to find a colour match, but if we can't, we will provide it in white.

What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, are bathroom fittings loose or broken; is the waste pipe leaking or blocked; or are the wall tiles cracked or broken?
- If you are reporting a problem with a bath panel, is it the side or the end? Is it made of plastic or hardboard? What colour is it?
- If you are reporting a problem with a bath or basin, what is it made of (plastic, metal or ceramic)? What colour is it?
- If your problem is to do with tiles, what shape, size and colour are they?

Doors and locks

Your responsibilities

- Replace keys and locks when keys are lost or broken, or you get locked out
- Get extra keys cut and fit any extra locks
- Replace broken or cracked glass
- Re-secure loose handles and catches on any doors
- Repair or replace catches, handles, locks or bolts on doors inside.
- Adjust doors when you have new carpets fitted
- Fit draught proofing to doors if necessary.

Advice

- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself
- For emergency repairs we may only make the property safe and secure and then do a full repair at a later date
- If a problem is caused by vandalism or a break-in, you should report it to the police and get a crime reference number.
- If you lock yourself out of your property, the council do not have keys and you'll have to arrange for your own locksmith to gain entry and change the lock as necessary.



What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, is the lock stiff or does it not fit properly into the keep; is the lock or handle broken, is the door sticking or not closing properly or is it damaged? Is the property still secure?
- Which door is it (front, back or side, or a sliding patio door)? Is it a shared door? What type of lock or latch has it got?
- What is it made of (wood, plastic or metal)?
- What type of lock is it (mortice, cylinder mortice, cylinder rim night latch (Yale or Union), rim lock, or multi-point)?

Drains and wastes

Your responsibilities

- Keep drains and waste pipes clear and try to clear blocked baths, basins, sinks or toilets
- Keep gully grids clear of leaves, rubbish and so on (except in shared areas)
- Clear blockages or repair leaks from your washing machine or dishwasher.

Advice

- A blocked waste is not an emergency. We expect you to try to clear it yourself (see Handy hints)
- A blocked toilet is not an emergency unless you have no other toilet
- If a blockage is caused by items such as nappies, air fresheners, tampons, sanitary towels, cooking fat or hair we will charge you for the cost of clearing it. Always try to clear it yourself
- If you install a washing machine, dishwasher or tumble drier, you are responsible for any water supply, waste or vent connections that you have fitted to them and for clearing any blockages.



What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, is the waste pipe blocked or leaking; is the drain smelling or blocked; or is the gully blocked or the grid missing?

- If you are reporting a problem with a waste pipe, which is it (bath, basin, sink, shower or toilet)?
- If a waste pipe is blocked, is more than one fitting blocked, or if you live in a block of flats, are any other flats affected?
- If the drain is blocked, is it overflowing?
- If you are reporting a problem with a gully grid, is it round or square?
- What is it made of (metal, plastic or ceramic)?

Electrics

Your responsibilities

- Reset trip switches and, if necessary, turn off the mains supply (see **Handy hints**)
- Replace light bulbs, fluorescent tubes and starters
- Replace electrical plugs (not socket outlets) and plug fuses for your own appliances
- Test and clean smoke detectors, and replace batteries in battery-operated detectors (see **Handy hints**).



Advice

- **Do not touch** bare wires and **do not touch** sockets or switches with wet hands
- **Do not** install down lighters in your property as you may be charged for their removal and reinstatement of the ceiling
- **If water is leaking** onto electrical fittings or a fitting is dangerous, do not touch any switches connected to it and contact us immediately
- Make sure that you know where the trip switches are in your home and understand how to reset them (see Handy hints)
- If you caused any damage or you call us out when you have not fed your meter, we will charge you for calling out a repair worker and for the cost of any repair work we do
- If you have a pre-payment meter, please check to ensure there is credit available if there is no electric in your property.

What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, are there no lights or power in part of, or throughout the property; is a light or light switch not working; or is a socket loose or broken?
- What type of fitting or socket is it?
- Are other homes in your block or nearby buildings affected?
- Is the problem related to any other problems?

Floors and stairs

Your responsibilities

- Repair or replace any floor covering (vinyl, carpets or laminate)
- Adjust doors when you have had carpets fitted
- Lift and replace floor coverings if we need to access beneath it to undertake repairs. This includes laminate flooring. However, we are not responsible for replacement.

Advice

- We will not accept responsibility for damage to your carpets or other floor coverings, unless it is caused by carelessness of people working for us
- If we or the contractor tell you that you need to lift your floor covering (including laminate flooring), you should do this before the workers arrive
- If you lay carpets you should use carpet grippers, not glue. This makes it easier for you to lift the carpets for repairs without damaging them
- If we have to replace floor tiles, we will try to match the colour but this is often not possible
- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself.



What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, is the floorboard or skirting loose or damaged; is the tread or riser broken; is the handrail loose or broken; or is the floor covering lifting or damaged? Is it in a shared area?
- What is the floor made of? For example, floorboards, chipboard or concrete? What type of floor covering is it? For example, stone tiles, plastic tiles or sheeting, or non-slip flooring because you have a disability?
- How many boards, panels or tiles are affected?
- If the problem is with the stair nosing, is it on shared stairs?
- If so, is the nosing metal or plastic?

Garages

Your responsibilities

- Replace keys or locks to garages when the keys are lost or broken
- Repair any damage caused by you, a member of your family or a visitor to your home.

Please note that if you rent a garage it **MUST** only be used for a vehicle and **NOT** for storage.

Advice

- If a problem is caused by vandalism or a break-in, you should report it to the police and get a crime reference number; otherwise we will charge you for the repair
- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself
- If your garage is separate from your home, you need to explain how we can find it and get in
- If you cannot lock your garage, you are responsible for the security of anything left inside.

What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, is the garage door jammed; is the frame damaged; or is the roof damaged?
- If you are reporting a problem with a garage, what type of door is it (up-and-over or side-hung)? Is the car stuck inside?
- If you are reporting a problem with a garage roof, what type is it (tiled, metal or plastic corrugated panels, or flat)?

Gardens

Your responsibilities

- Remove leaves and rubbish from gullies
- Maintain general garden paths
- Maintain your garden including grass cutting, trees, hedges etc.
- Maintain garden features such as ornamental walls
- Replace keys or locks to shed doors when they are lost or broken
- Replace clothes lines and rotary driers, except in shared areas
- Repair any damage caused by you, a member of your family or a visitor to your home
- Maintain fences and gates unless they are communal fencing and gates.



Advice

- If a problem is caused by vandalism or a break-in, you should report it to the police and get a crime reference number; otherwise we will charge you for the repair
- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself.

What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, is the fence loose or broken; is the gate sticking; is a gate catch missing; or is the path uneven or cracked?

- If you are reporting a problem with a fence, what type is it (wooden panels, chain link or rails)? How much is affected (number of panels or rails)?
- If you are reporting a problem with a gate or post, what type is it (wooden, metal or concrete)?
- If you are reporting a problem with a path, what is it made of (slabs, concrete, tarmac or block paving)?

Gutters

Your responsibilities

- Keep gully grids clear of leaves, rubbish and so on (except in shared areas).

Advice

- We need to put up scaffolding for certain types of repairs to gutters
- In bad weather conditions repair workers cannot work at heights, for example, on ladders, scaffolding or on the roof. This is for their own safety.

What we need to now

- What is the problem? For example, is the gutter or downpipe loose; is it leaking or blocked; is a bracket, joint or shoe loose or broken?
- Which gutter or downpipe is it (front, back or side)?
- What is the gutter or downpipe made of (metal, plastic, concrete or other material)?
- What shape is it (half-round, square or ogee)? What colour is it?
- If you are reporting a problem with a gully grid, is it round or square?
- What is it made of (metal, plastic or ceramic)?
- How many storeys high is the building?
- Are there any other connected problems?

Heating

Your responsibilities

- Check that your heating controls (room thermostat, timer or programmer) are set correctly
- Get your own heaters repaired and serviced by qualified engineers
- Keep your home properly heated and ventilated to prevent condensation and to prevent pipes from bursting during cold weather
- Bleed radiators if there is an airlock.

Please make sure that if you are going away in the winter months that you leave your heating on low to reduce the risk of pipes freezing during severe weather.

Advice

- **If you suspect a gas leak, phone National Grid (Gas) immediately on 0800 111999 – use a phone outside your home.** (Using a phone inside could spark an explosion.) Turn off the gas at the mains and open windows
- Do not smoke or switch anything electrical on or off until the problem is fixed
- Make sure that your gas supply has not been disconnected because you have not paid your bill or fed the meter. If this happens, you will have to relight the pilot light (for gas) and reset the controls yourself
- If a radiator is leaking or loose because you have been doing redecoration work, we will charge you for the cost of the repair.

What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, is the central heating not working; is there no hot water; is a radiator leaking or not getting warm?
- What type of system is it (gas or electric)? Is it a wall-mounted boiler, separate gas fire, or storage or convector heater?
- Have you any other form of heating or hot water heating, for example, an electric immersion heater or a warm-air system (gas or electric)?
- If you are reporting a problem with a radiator, is it warm at the bottom and cold at the top?



Internal Fittings

Your responsibilities

- Install washing machines, dishwashers or tumble driers including the waste pipes, supply pipes and vents (if not already provided)
- Clear any blockages in your washing machine or dishwasher
- Fit curtain rails, blinds and hooks
- Repair or replace catches and handles on kitchen units and other cupboards
- Repair any damage caused by you, a member of your family or a visitor
- The fitting of Gas Bayonet or Final Electrical Connections for cookers and ovens (this will need to be undertaken by an approved professional.)



Advice

- If you caused any damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself
- If we have to replace kitchen units or parts of a unit, such as the worktop, drawer or door, we will try to match the colour, but this is often not possible
- If you install a washing machine, dishwasher or tumble drier, you are responsible for any water supply, waste or vent connections that you have fitted to them, and for clearing any blockages.

What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, is a wall or floor unit loose or damaged; is a worktop loose or broken; is a cupboard door or drawer damaged; or are cupboard hinges or catches broken?
- What type of unit is it (wall or floor)? Is it a tall unit or a corner unit? Is it a single or a double unit?
- If you are reporting a problem with wall tiles, what shape, size and colour are they?
- Are there any other connected problems?

Pest control

Your responsibilities

- Pests found within the home, such as, mice, cockroaches, ants or fleas are your responsibility.

However we will deal with an infestation of rats to your home and wasps nests within communal areas to blocks of flats.



Advice

- Contact Environmental Health on **01727 819440**
- Avoid accumulating rubbish in areas that can attract pests and keep food in airtight containers
- Do not leave food waste in plastic bags in an outside area; always put food waste in a bin with a lid
- Use remedies that you can buy from local DIY/hardware stores e.g. flea and ant powders, insect sprays, mouse traps or poison.

Pipes and taps

Your responsibilities

- If a water pipe has burst, turn off your water supply at the stop tap and then turn on all taps to allow the rest of the water to flow out
- Fit supply pipe work for washing machines and dishwashers (if not already provided).

Advice

- You should know where the stop tap is so you can turn the water off in an emergency. It is normally under the kitchen sink or in the downstairs toilet. Note: It is a good idea to turn it on and off occasionally to check that it is easy to turn off in an emergency
- If water is leaking onto electrical fittings, do not touch them. Turn off the electricity supply to those fittings by turning off the trip switch for that part of the home on the consumer unit. This is called isolating or breaking the circuit (see **Handy hints**)
- If there is damage from water leaking, you may be able to claim on your own contents insurance (see **Home contents insurance** on page 22)
- If you caused any damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself. If we need to do it you will have to pay the full cost of the repair.

What we need to know

- What is the problem? for example, is there no water; is a pipe leaking or burst; is the overflow running or broken; or is a tap dripping or faulty?
- If water is leaking into your property, is it coming from the flat above? What is the address? Are there any other connected problems?
- If you are reporting a problem with a tap, what type of tap is it?

Roofs

Your responsibilities

- Look after any TV aerial or satellite dish you put up (see Advice below).

Advice

- We need to put up scaffolding for certain types of roof repairs
- In bad weather conditions, repair workers cannot work at heights, for example, on ladders, scaffolding or on the roof
- If you want to put up a satellite dish, you need to get our permission first. You may also need to apply for planning permission
- We will tell you if an aerial or satellite dish needs to be removed to allow work to be done. You must arrange for it to be taken down and put back up. Our workers will not do this for you
- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself.

What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, is the roof leaking; are tiles or slates loose or broken; has the chimney pot or cowl fallen or is it loose; or is the chimney stack crumbling?
- What type of roof covering is it (slate, tiles, corrugated sheeting, felting or asphalt on a flat roof)?
- If you are reporting a problem with the tiles, what type are they (flat, ridge, interlocking or hip)?
- How many storeys high is the property?
- Is the roof leaking?
- Is the chimney stack shared with another property? What is their address?

Toilets

Your responsibilities

- Repair or replace toilet seats and lids, and clean toilet pans
- Try to clear blocked toilets (see **Handy hints**)
- Repair any damage caused by you, a member of your family or a visitor to your home.

Advice

- A blocked toilet is not an emergency unless you have no other toilet
- You should always try to clear any blockages (see **Handy hints**)
- If a blockage is caused by items such as nappies, air fresheners, condoms, sanitary towels, tampons and so on, we will charge you for the cost of clearing it
- If you caused the damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself
- If we need to replace a toilet which is part of an existing suite, we will try to find a colour match, but if we can't find a match, we will provide it in white.

What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, is the toilet blocked; is the overflow running; is the cistern leaking; is the seat broken; has the pan cracked or is it leaking; is the flush handle or chain broken; or is water constantly trickling into the pan?
- What type of cistern is it (high-level or low-level)? If low-level, is the flush panel close-coupled or standard?
- What type of handle is it (lever handle, push-down knob or chain)? If it is a push-down knob, is it a dual-flush type?
- What colour is the suite?
- If a toilet is blocked in a flat, are any other flats affected?

Walls and ceilings

Your responsibilities

- Fill minor cracks and holes in walls and ceilings
- Keep air vents clear and use extractor fans (where provided)
- Fit curtain rails, blinds, and hat or coat hooks.

Advice

- Try to keep condensation to a minimum to prevent damp and mould appearing on the walls or ceiling (see **Handy hints** on page 62)
- If you, a member of your family or a visitor caused damage, we expect you to get it repaired yourself. If damage is caused by water leaking, you may be able to make a claim on your own home contents insurance (see **Home contents insurance** on page 22).

What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, is wall plaster loose or crumbling; is ceiling plaster bulging; or is there condensation or mould on the walls?
- Is there any damage caused by water leaking from a pipe or radiator, or through the roof?
- If the problem is outside, what type of wall surface is it (bricks, render, plastic or wooden cladding boards, or hanging tiles)?
- If you are reporting a problem with cladding boards or fascia (outside), what are they made of (wood or plastic)?
- If you are reporting a problem with wall tiles (inside), what shape, size and colour are they?
- If you are reporting a problem with a wall, what is it made of (bricks or concrete blocks)?

Windows

Your responsibilities

- Replace broken or cracked glass
- Clean window vents and extractor fan vents (see Advice below)
- Keep window trickle vents clear and use them
- Repair any damage caused by you, a member of your family or a visitor
- Fit draught proofing to windows if necessary.

Advice

- Look after the metal parts of your windows. Use a soft brush to clear away grit and dust then spray them with a silica wax furniture spray to keep them working smoothly. Do not use oil
- Wipe away any condensation puddles that form on cills
- To clean extractor fan vents, use a dry cloth or a vacuum cleaner with the brush or nozzle attachment.

What we need to know

- What is the problem? For example, is the glass cracked or broken; are frames loose or jammed; is the stay or fastener broken?
- What type of frame is it (wooden, plastic or metal)?
- What style of window is it (casement, pivot or sliding sash)?
- What type of glass is it (plain, obscure, or wired)? Is it double glazed?
- If a fastener, what type is it?
- Can you shut the window? Are there any other connected problems?

Repairs responsibility summary

It is important to remember that any improvements that you have made to your home have to be maintained and repaired by you.

Who is responsible?

	Us	You	Notes and exceptions
Bannisters	✓		
Baths	✓		
Bayonet fixings for cookers		✓	
Brickwork	✓		
Carbon monoxide detectors	✓		If supplied by Council
Chimneys	✓		
Chimney sweeping	✓		
Communal (shared) areas of flats	✓		This work may be rechargeable to leaseholders
Cooker point		✓	Tenant responsible for bayonet fitting and flexible hose to cooker
Central heating	✓		
Doors (internal and external)	✓		Except when damaged by tenant use
Door bell	✓		
Door latch	✓		

	Us	You	Notes and exceptions
Door locks external	✓		Tenants are responsible for lock changes if they are locked out
Door numbers	✓		
Drains	✓		Unless blockage has been caused by inappropriate disposals such as nappies, food waste and fat, sanitary products, whereby you will be recharged
Drives		✓	
Electric heating	✓		
Fascia boards and soffits	✓		
Fencing (front)		✓	
Fencing (rear)		✓	Unless the garden fencing separates your garden from public footpaths, open spaces and non residential buildings. (In which case we may install chainlink fencing). We will mark the boundary between Council and private dwellings where the responsibility for the fence is with you
Fire grates and surround	✓		We do not open out fireplaces or install hearths
Floorboards	✓		
Floor coverings		✓	Includes vinyl, carpets and laminates

	Us	You	Notes and exceptions
Fuses		✓	
Fuse main	✓		
Gates		✓	
Garages	✓		
Gardens		✓	Except communal gardens, retirement schemes
Gas fire renewal		✓	
Glazing		✓	
Guttering	✓		
Handrails	✓		Have to be referred to us by Social Services
Hot water cylinder jackets	✓		
Internal door locks		✓	
Immersion heater	✓		
Kitchens	✓		
Kitchen appliances		✓	
Light fittings		✓	Tenants are responsible for changing any light bulbs or starter motors in lights. If Tenants install their own light fittings and bayonet's they will be responsible for them

	Us	You	Notes and exceptions
Loss of keys		✓	In retirement accommodation it is not possible to obtain a new key yourself. We will arrange to have a new key cut, but you will need to pay for this
Outbuildings (permanent)	✓		
Painting (outside)	✓		
Painting (inside)		✓	Redecoration following a leak will be your responsibility and should be covered by your household insurance in the event of an accident
Path to back door and permanent outbuildings	✓		
Path to front door	✓		
Path to garden		✓	
Plastering	✓		
Plumbing repairs and leaks	✓		Rechargeable if due to damage or neglect
Porches	✓		
Taps	✓		Unless fitted by tenant
Roof tiles	✓		

	Us	You	Notes and exceptions
Shelving		✓	
Shower		✓	Unless fitted by us
Sink units	✓		
Skirting boards	✓		
Smoke detectors	✓		If mains operated and installed by Council
Squirrel damage	✓		Making good damage/communal areas
Stairs	✓		
Switches and sockets	✓		Additional sockets may be recharged
Tiling		✓	As a tenant you are responsible for maintaining any tiled surfaces to your property along with the decorations
Toilet pan	✓		
Toilet seats		✓	For elderly and registered disabled
TV aerials and sockets (not communal)		✓	All houses, maisonettes and bungalows
TV aerials and sockets (communal)	✓		Only on blocks of flats with a communal entrance. This is not relevant for houses, bungalows and maisonettes
Washing lines (individual)		✓	

	Us	You	Notes and exceptions
Washing lines (shared)	✓		
Wasps nests	✓		Communal areas/flats only
Water butts		✓	
Worktops	✓		Unless fitted by tenant or unless damage is caused by misuse
Wiring	✓		

9. Planned improvements

In certain cases when you move, the Council can pay you back some of the costs of these improvements if these have made your home more valuable. Please ask at Customer Services Centre for details or telephone **01727 819256** for a leaflet.

In order to maintain your home, we carry out an ongoing programme of maintenance work.

This is undertaken by the Project Group in Housing Services on **01727 819489**.

The type of work includes

- Cavity wall insulation
- External wall insulation
- Window replacement
- Re-roofing
- Door entry system installation
- Kitchen and bathroom modernisation
- Gas servicing
- Boiler replacement
- Lift servicing.

Projects are identified from inspections carried out by housing surveyors and from surveys completed by the Project Group. A Stock Condition Survey has identified work which needs to be carried out over the next 30 years to maintain properties in a good condition.

10. Tenant improvements and alterations

Under the terms of your tenancy agreement you are entitled to alter or improve the property you are living in, subject to approval from the Council. Prior to making any alterations or modifications to your home you must obtain permission from the Council. In some circumstances you may also need planning or building regulation approval.

The definition of a modification or alteration is:

Anything which is an addition or a change to the property or its services, examples include:

- Installing showers
- New kitchens
- New Bathrooms
- Removal of internal walls
- Fitting of bayonets for gas cookers
- Cutting into internal or external walls
- Modifications to the fixed electrical wiring installation
- Erection of sheds and garages
- Installations of hard standings or parking pads
- Extensions and Porches
- Loft conversions or boarding out of loft spaces.

It is important to note you will be responsible for future maintenance or reinstatement at the end of your tenancy,

If you do not obtain permission prior to altering or modifying you may be charged to restore your home to its original condition.

If when your tenancy ends (with the exception of it being related to a possession order) you may qualify for compensation for the work carried out, less an allowance for depreciation. It is important to note that you must have had written permission from the Council to carry out works and have the relevant receipts.

We will also take off any money you owe *eg. rent arrears* from the compensation you get when your tenancy ends.

How do I get permission?

Before consideration can be given for any tenants improvements, we require the following.

- Drawings/sketches of what is already there and what is being proposed
- Details of any materials being used
- Details of any contractor being used (they must have adequate insurances).

Only once we have this information will we consider giving permission.

As part of considering applications we have to consider a number of things, including but not exhaustive to:

Does it represent a structural alteration or removal of part of the original structure?

eg. Removal of structural items can cause long term issues in properties.

Will it affect the future maintenance of the building?

eg. Conservatories restrict access to the roof, walls, soffits and windows above them restricting future maintenance and making it more costly.

Does it compromise health and safety?

eg. The removal of doors or walls to kitchen areas can present a significant health and safety risk to both the occupants and the property.

Will it affect the future 'lettability' of the property?

eg. The removal of a wall between the kitchen and a dining room will reduce the future option for the property in its use and letting. The removal of a bath in preference of a shower will also affect the letting of a property in the future.

The Final decision ultimately is with the Asset Management Team and takes into account the view of the other service areas.

Once work is complete a Surveyor will need to visit to check the work has been carried out to an acceptable standard.

What happens once I have permission?

Once you have been granted permission to alter or improve your property, you will be advised of any conditions related to the permission.

These will be attached to your permission letter.

It is important that you read these in depth as they include important information regarding health and safety, responsibility for maintenance and the standards we expect.



Once you have finished your alterations please send us electrical* or gas safety certificates (gas safe) so we can check them to ensure this work has been completed safely.

**We only accept NICEIC Certificates.*

11. Handy hints:

Clearing a blocked waste

General advice

- Blockages in basins and sinks are usually caused by the build-up of waste in the trap – fat, tea leaves, hair and so on. We advise you to clear waste pipes and traps at least once a month, with hot water or a clearing product. DO NOT use caustic soda as it destroys the plastic fittings.
- The trap always holds some water which stops air or foul smells coming up the drain. However, waste can build up and become stuck in it.
- If more than one fitting (bath, basin or sink) is blocked, the blockage may be in the soil stack or main drain. If so, contact us because we will need to clear the blockage.
- Blockages in toilets are usually caused by unusual objects -- nappies, toys or toilet fresheners.

What to do

You need

- a bowl or bucket
- a jug or cup to use as a scoop
- a wet rag or dishcloth
- a plunger – for the toilet you can use a toilet brush or mop rubber gloves.

To unblock a bath, basin or sink

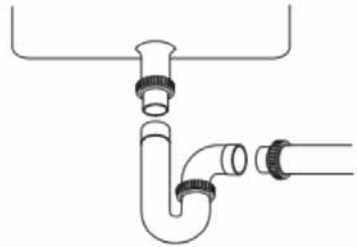
- scoop out most of the water
- hold the rag tightly over the overflow opening place the plunger over the plug hole and pump up and down rapidly.



To unblock a waste trap

- Although the last method can be very effective, the action can just push the blockage along the pipe a little, but may not release it

Frequently the blockage will be in the trap beneath the sink. The quickest way to remove it is to clean out the trap



- Place a washing-up bowl under the trap to catch the water

Remember not to switch on the taps again until it's replaced

Unscrew the two ends of the trap and ease it out

- Clear any debris from it. If this is where the blockage was, you will clearly see it
- Reassemble the trap and check the flow of waste water again.

To unblock a toilet

- If the pan is already full, scoop out some of the water into a bucket
- Push the brush or plunger to the bottom of the pan
- Pump it up and down vigorously about 10 times. This creates a vacuum and 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, you should contact us
- Thoroughly wash your hands and all equipment after you have finished.

Handy hints:

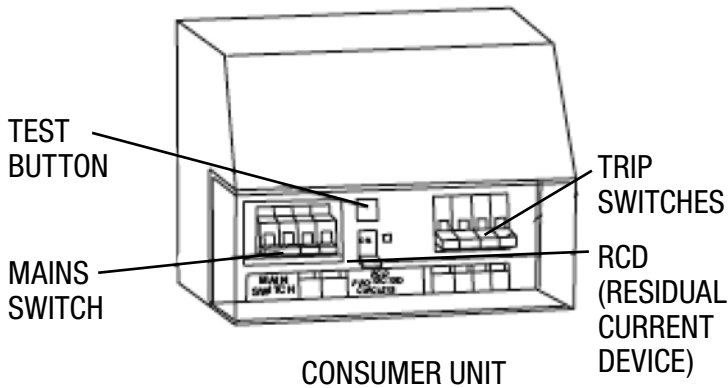
Resetting a trip switch

If your lights or power go off, it means your trip switches are working properly. You can find out what caused the problem and sort it out quite easily.

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
- All of the fuses or trip switches are in the consumer unit. Some consumer units have buttons rather than switches. The consumer unit may be next to the electricity meter (unless the meter is in an outside cupboard)
- A trip switch or button usually operates when:
 - there are too many appliances on a circuit and it is overloaded, an appliance is faulty or has been misused. For example, a kettle has been over-filled or a toaster not cleaned; water has leaked into a circuit or spilt onto a plug
 - a light bulb has blown
 - an immersion heater is faulty
- If an appliance is faulty, leave it unplugged and get a qualified electrician or service engineer to check it
- If a wall or ceiling light is faulty, keep it switched off (put some tape over the switch) and contact us
- **Make sure your hands are dry when you touch electrical fittings**
- **Never touch the electricity company's fuse and seals.**

To reset a trip



- Open the cover on the consumer unit to show the trip switches or buttons
- Check which switches or buttons have tripped to the 'OFF' position and which rooms (circuits) have been affected
- Put these switches or buttons back to the 'ON' position
- If the trip goes again, it is probably being caused by a faulty appliance or light
- You need to identify which circuit is being affected, and which appliance on that circuit is causing the problem
- Check all the rooms and note which set of lights or sockets is not working
- Unplug all appliances on that problem circuit and switch off the immersion heater
- Switch the 'tripped' switch to the 'ON' position (if it is a button, press it in)
- Plug in the appliances or switch on each light one at a time until the trip goes again. Do not use adaptors when testing appliances.

Handy hints:

Condensation

Condensation can cause dampness and mould growth in your home. This looks unpleasant and can increase the risk of respiratory illness. It can also cause wooden window frames to rot. This section explains how condensation forms and how you can keep it to a minimum.

What is condensation?

Condensation starts as moisture in the air, usually produced by cooking, washing, or drying clothes indoors on radiators. When it hits cool surfaces such as walls, mirrors, wall tiles and windows it condenses and forms water droplets. The moist air rises when it is warm and often ends up on ceilings and in upstairs rooms and then it forms mould.

Why is it a problem?

Left untreated, condensation can result in mould growth on walls, ceilings, furniture, furnishings, and clothing in cupboards and drawers. It can also affect wall plaster and cause woodwork to rot.

How to reduce condensation in your home

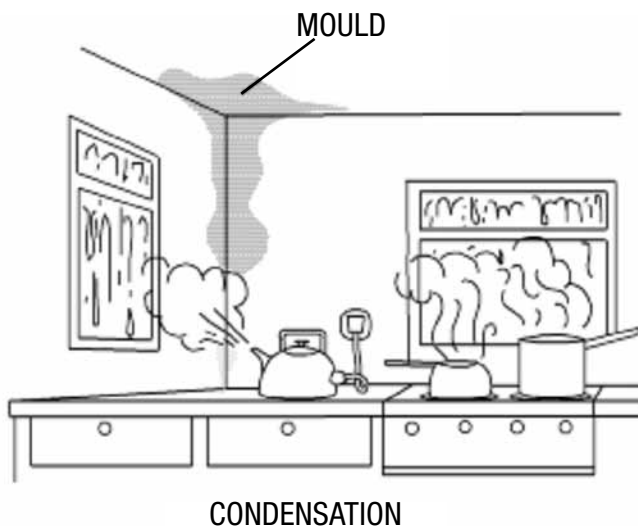
Control excess moisture

- Close kitchen and bathroom doors to prevent steam going into colder rooms
- When cooking or washing, let the steam escape by opening a window or using an extractor fan if you have one fitted. Leave the window open or the extractor fan on for up to 20 minutes after you have finished cooking or washing
- Open some windows in other rooms for a while each day and open any trickle vents in your window frames. This allows a change of air

- Wipe down surfaces when moisture settles to prevent mould forming
- Do not block air vents and allow air to circulate around furniture and cupboards
- You **MUST NOT** use bottled gas or paraffin heaters – these produce a lot of moisture and they are also a health and safety risk. **Note:** Your tenancy agreement or lease states that you are not allowed to use these.

Produce less moisture

- Cover pans when cooking
- Dry clothes outdoors whenever possible or use small ventilated rooms
- Cover fish tanks and remember that house pets and plants produce moisture as well
- If you have a tumble drier or washing machine, ensure that it is vented in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions
- Maintain a low background heat when the weather is cold or wet.



Some words of warning:

- Do not block permanent ventilators
- Do not completely block chimneys
- Do not draught proof rooms where there is condensation or mould growth
- Do not draught proof a room where there is a gas cooker or a fuel-burning heater, for example a gas fire
- Do not draught proof windows in the bathroom or kitchen
- Do not put furniture against cold external walls.

First steps against mould:

- Treat any mould you may already have in your home then do what you can to reduce condensation. This will restrict new mould growth
- Do not disturb mould by brushing or vacuum cleaning. This can increase the risk of respiratory problems
- Wipe off mould growth immediately with water. Do not use washing up liquid
- To kill and remove mould growth, wipe down affected areas with a fungicidal wash. An anti mould kit is available free for our tenants from housing. Always follow the instructions carefully. DO NOT use bleach
- Dry-clean clothes affected by mildew and shampoo carpets
- After treatment, redecorate using a good quality fungicidal paint to help prevent mould recurring. This paint is not effective if overlaid with ordinary paints or wallpaper.

Handy hints:

Fire safety

Communal staircases, corridors and balconies should be kept clear of all combustible material or anything that might block escape routes e.g. household waste, furniture, pushchairs, prams and bicycles.

Domestic waste, i.e. rubbish should be removed to the appropriate refuse area immediately and not stored in communal areas.

It is a breach of your tenancy conditions to store items in communal areas within blocks, which pose a fire risk or a potential obstruction. These items will be removed – you may be charged for the removal and legal action could be taken against you.

Preventing fire

- Never smoke in a chair if you think you may doze off, never smoke in bed
- Do not leave a lit cigarette, pipe or candle unattended. Use deep ashtrays so that cigarettes cannot roll out, and don't throw hot ash into a waste paper basket
- Keep matches and lighters well out of the reach of children
- Sit at least three feet away from heaters. Never put a heater near clothes or furnishings
- Check the condition of cables to all electrical equipment regularly. Don't overload electrical sockets
- Before going to bed:
 - Close all the doors as this helps to prevent fire spreading.
 - Make sure the cooker and heaters are turned off.
 - Switch off and unplug all electrical appliances except those that are meant to stay on, like a video or fridge.
 - Empty ashtrays, making sure the contents are cold.

- Prevent a fire starting in the kitchen:
 - Never fill a pan more than one third full of fat or oil
 - Never leave the pan unattended with the heat on
 - Dry food before placing it in the hot oil – wet food will cause the oil to bubble up and possibly spill over the edge of the pan
- If the pan does catch fire:
 - Don't move it or throw water on to it
 - Turn off the heat if it is safe to do so.

If in any doubt, leave the room, close the door, shout a warning to others and call the fire brigade.

Planning your escape in the event of a fire

- Fire can strike when you least expect it, often during the night. You will only have a short time to get out so plan your escape route rather than waiting until there is a fire
- Think of another way out in case the normal one is blocked
- If you are above the 1st floor do not use balconies or windows as part of an escape route.
- Keep the escape routes clear of obstructions at all times. If the corridors, balconies or staircases outside your home are not kept clear report it to the Council. It is a criminal offence to block these routes or damage any fitting provided to protect the route
- Tell everyone in the house where the door and window keys are kept. Avoid locking yourself in at night with a key, use a thumb turn lock or leave the key in the lock at night
- We will not give permission for security grilles on front doors and windows as they can make it harder to get out of the property if there is a fire.

Escaping from fire

- If your smoke alarm goes off while you are asleep or you smell smoke, don't investigate
- Shout to wake everyone up and get them out as quickly as possible. Never assume that it is a false alarm
- Dial 999 if you have time
- Check closed doors with the back of the hand. If they are warm do not open them because this means there is a fire on the other side
- Smoke and fumes can kill. If there is a lot of smoke, get down as near to the floor as possible where the air will be cleaner
- Don't rush, keep calm and get everyone out as quickly as possible. Don't stop to pick up valuables but you may need a coat if it is safe to get one
- If your escape is blocked by fire go to the room furthest from the fire, close the door and use towels or sheets to block any gaps to stop the smoke. Go to a window, call for help and wait to be rescued.

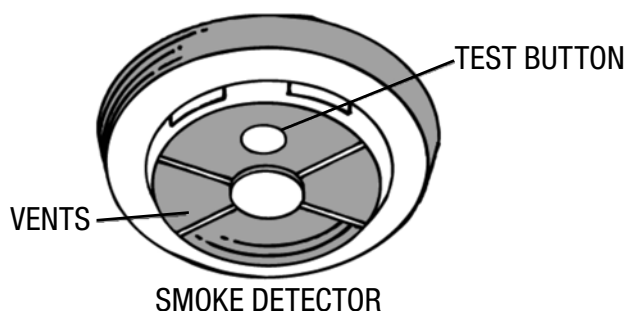
Escaping from fires in flats and maisonettes

- If you live in a flat or maisonette please follow this extra advice:
- Flats and maisonettes are built to give you some protection from fire. Walls, floors and doors will hold back flames and smoke for a time
- If there is a fire elsewhere in the building you're usually safer staying in your flat ***unless heat or smoke is affecting you***
- If there is a fire in your flat, leave the building closing the door to your flat behind you
- If you can safely do so, warn others in the adjoining flats that you have a fire in your home

- If there is a lot of smoke, crawl along the floor where the air will be clearer
- If you live in a building with a lift: ***Do not use lifts if there is a fire, go down the stairs instead***
- If doors are open on the staircase close them as you leave to stop smoke spreading where safe to do so
- Call 999 from any phone as soon as possible when it is safe to do so. Give them the address including the number of your flat, and tell them which floor the fire is on. Do not assume that someone else has
- If you know your postcode give this as well
- ***Do not re-enter the building unless instructed to by the Fire Brigade.***

Smoke detectors

Most of the smoke detectors that we provide are mains-wired with back-up batteries. However, you may have a different battery-operated type of smoke detector. You are responsible for changing the batteries in battery-operated detectors once a year or when you hear it beep at intervals.



- A smoke alarm should be fitted in your home. If not please call **01727 819256**. You should test your alarm each week to ensure that the alarm is working properly. Never remove the batteries unless you are replacing them. Hoovering the smoke alarm six months will help to ensure dust does not affect its ability to work if a fire occurs. A smoke alarm will give you vital time to escape.
- We recommend you test your smoke detectors operation every month to see if it is working
- It is also important to keep the vents to smoke detectors free of dust, this can be achieved simply by running your vacuum cleaner over the vents

Handy hints:

Asbestos

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral made up of many small fibres. It is mined from rock and milled into fibres from which a wide range of materials were produced.

Why was asbestos used in buildings?

Asbestos fibres are strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. This led to their widespread use in a wide range of building materials and other products, particularly between 1950 and 1980 but certain types were still used up to 1999.

Why is asbestos potentially a problem?

- Materials containing asbestos in good condition do not pose a risk to your health
- They can however become a risk should asbestos fibres become airborne
- This may occur if the asbestos-containing material is drilled, sanded, cut or broken up. It can also occur should the material be in a poor or damaged condition and liable to disturbance. If disturbed, the material may release fibres that can be inhaled deep into the lung causing possible damage
- People at most risk are those that work directly with asbestos. These include builders, carpenters, electricians, plumbers and decorators.

What is the likelihood of exposure to asbestos in the home?

- Even if your home contains undisturbed asbestos products you are highly unlikely to be affected by it.
- Any repairs or major works undertaken in a tenant's homes our contractors, will include a risk assessment. This will be to assess the potential location of asbestos and likelihood of disturbance during the works.
- Measures will be taken to manage the material safely either by avoiding disturbance, encapsulation or removal by specialist contractors and working in a controlled manner. This will further reduce chances of exposure.

Where is asbestos likely to be found?

The list below shows some common areas where asbestos-containing materials may be found. The list of products that may contain asbestos is a lengthy one – this list is not all inclusive.

Exterior

- Roof garage and shed sheets, tiles or roof felt
- Gutters and down pipes
- Fascia

Interior

- Partition walls
- Panels beneath windows
- Cupboards around domestic boilers
- Panels behind electrical equipment
- Panels behind fires or heaters

- Panels on or inside fire doors
- Concealed in ducts or pipe casings
- Bath panels
- Floor tiles
- Textured coatings (artex)
- Gaskets and rope seals inside gas appliances
- Cold water storage tanks.

Doing DIY and avoiding asbestos

High, short-term exposure to asbestos fibres can occur during ‘Do it yourself’ DIY work.

- **Do not** carry out any DIY works on asbestos containing materials
- **Do not** disturb it by banging nails or screwing into it
- **Do not** drill into it by hand or power tools
- **Do not** scrape it or use a steam stripper
- **Do not** attempt to remove asbestos-containing materials.

If you are unsure if there are any asbestos-containing materials in your home, please call the Council to find out more before you do any DIY work.

If you have damaged asbestos materials in your home you should seek advice on appropriate action to take. Please telephone the Council’s Repairs Service and we will arrange for someone to inspect the damage.

Handy hints:

Energy saving

Energy saving tips

- Turn your thermostat down. Reducing your room temperature by 1°C could cut your heating bills by up to 10% and typically saves around £50 per year. If you have a programmer, set your heating and hot water to come on only when required rather than all the time
- Is your water too hot? Your cylinder thermostat should be set at 60°C/140°F
- Close your curtains at dusk to stop heat escaping through the windows and check for draughts around windows and doors
- Always turn off the lights when you leave a room
- Don't leave appliances on standby and remember not to leave laptops and mobile phones on charge unnecessarily
- If possible, fill up the washing machine, tumble dryer or dishwasher: one full load uses less energy than two half loads
- Try not to wash clothes on a setting above 40°C. A wash at 60°C uses 30% more energy as 90% of the energy used by a washing machine is used in heating the water
- Only boil as much water as you need (but remember to cover the elements if you're using an electric kettle)
- Use energy saving light bulbs. They last up to 10 times longer than ordinary bulbs, and using one can save you around £45 over the lifetime of the bulb. This saving could be around £70 over its lifetime if you're replacing a high wattage incandescent bulb or one used for more than a few hours a day

- A dripping hot water tap wastes energy and in one week wastes enough hot water to fill half a bath so fix leaking taps and make sure they're fully turned off!
- When washing food or vegetables use a bowl rather than a running tap
- The sun is the most readily available source of heat there is and the cheapest! So make the most of it by opening internal doors of any rooms which get more sun than others and let the warm air travel through your home
- Setting your heating to turn off one hour before you leave the house and turn back home just half an hour before your return will mean that the heat is not wasted on an empty house
- There are a few easy ways to save energy when cooking which can also speed up the amount of time you spend over a hot stove. Always use the correct size pan, If only using a small pan, then use a smaller burner
- If you have an older style large toilet cistern, put a house brick (or even a half) in a plastic bag, and carefully place it inside the cistern (but away from the ball valve and flushing mechanism), this will save a significant amount of water over a 12 month period, saving almost 2 litres per flush
- Use bath water to water plants and gardens

Notes

[illegible]

[illegible]

Housing Department

St Albans City & District Council
St Peter's Street
St Albans
AL1 3JE

Telephone: **01727 819256** – Eva Radkowska

Email: **housing@stalbans.gov.uk**

If you need this information in an alternative format, such as Braille or in another language, please call **01727 819494**



St Albans
City & District Council

www.stalbans.gov.uk