

Tenants Handbook



NORTH AYRSHIRE
COUNCIL

Housing Services

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

If you have a query or want to find something out please first check whether it is explained within this book. The contents list or index will help you find the topic you are looking for. You can then talk to our staff who will gladly help with any further advice and assistance that you may need.


Please keep the book with your Tenancy Agreement and put it somewhere handy for easy reference.

■ **Our office hours are:**

Monday - Thursday 9.00am - 4.45pm, Friday 9.00am - 4.30pm.

For staff training and development purposes our offices will close at 1.30pm on every 2nd Thursday of the month.

■ **The phone number and address of your Area Housing Office** are set out on page 1.

If you see this symbol  in parts of this book, it means that you can get a more detailed leaflet on the topic from your Area Housing Office.

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Contacting Us

How to contact us

■ Area Housing Offices

- Ardrossan Housing Office, 9-11 Glasgow Street, Ardrossan, KA22 8EP 01294 605258
- Dalry and Beith Housing Office, 2 Townend Street, Dalry, KA24 4AA 01294 835355
- Dreghorn Housing Office, Main Street, Dreghorn, KA11 4AQ 01294 221860
- Irvine Housing Office, Bridgegate House, Irvine, KA12 8BD 01294 324870
- Kilbirnie Housing Office, 34-36 Main Street, Kilbirnie, KA25 7BY 01505 685177
- Kilwinning Housing Office, Howgate, Kilwinning, KA13 6EJ 01294 552261
- Largs Housing Office, Brooksby Medical and Resource Centre,
31 Brisbane Road, Largs KA30 8LH 01475 687590
- Saltcoats Housing Office, 27 Vernon Street, Saltcoats, KA21 5HE 01294 602611
- Stevenston Housing Office, 1 Main Street, Stevenston, KA20 3AA 01294 605281

(Guide dogs and British Sign Language. We welcome guide dogs in all our area offices. All our area offices have a reception desk and seating area where a colleague is on hand to offer any help you may need. Also, some of our staff are trained in British Sign Language.)

■ Repairs Contact Centre (freephone) 0800 0196 444

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

■ Rent payment

- 24 hour automated payment line 0845 603 0593
- on-line rent payment www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk

Typetalk. The RNID telephone relay service is used in all our offices, so we can share a two-way conversation with you. If you use a textphone you can make a call by dialing 18001 followed by the telephone number of the office you wish to contact.

■ **Website** www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk

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

■ **Leaflets you can ask us to send you**

Antisocial Behaviour

A guide to Tenant Participation

A guide to welfare rights and advice

About your smoke detector

Alterations to your home

Asbestos in Housing

Changes of tenancy and name changes

Household Contents Insurance Application Form

Information for people who have debt problems

Your right to know

(a guide to freedom of information law in Scotland)

Listening & Learning

Looking after your estate

Mutual exchanges

Paying Rent

Repairs

Rent Arrears

North Ayrshire Mediation Service

Service Standards

Succeeding to a tenancy

Tenancy Support

Taking in lodgers or subletting your home

Your Housing Service

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

North Ayrshire Housing Services

The Council currently owns and manages approximately 13,200 rented homes. These are mainly in estates in the towns and villages of North Ayrshire from Skelmorlie in the north to Springside in the south. The properties are a mixture of houses, flats, bungalows and some sheltered housing.

The day-to-day management of the properties and the provision of services to tenants is handled on a local level through 9 area offices. All matters relating to tenancies are handled through these offices including the payment of rent.

Your Area Housing Office

If you have a query about any aspect of your tenancy or just want general advice about your housing situation, you should telephone or visit your Area Housing Office. Addresses and telephone numbers of all area offices are given in **Contacting Us** on page 1.

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

Repairs

Repairs enquiries are handled by a central control centre. You need to call on the freephone number. You can call from your own phone, a public phone or a repairs freephone in your Area Housing Office. See **Contacting Us** on page 1 and **Repairs Service** on page 49.

Tenant Participation

We have a Tenant Participation Team who encourage and support the various ways that tenants can become involved in decision-making. They provide advice, training and general support to individual tenants and representatives. They also co-ordinate any consultation exercises. They can help with producing leaflets and newsletters promoting activities and can also attend tenant group meetings to give advice and guidance, if this is needed.

Tenancy Support

We have a team of Tenancy Support Officers who can provide housing-related support to people who are at risk of losing their tenancies because they are having difficulties managing their home or their finances. The team can work with these tenants in a number of ways to help them achieve more independence. The service is free and confidential and open to anyone who is having difficulties coping with their responsibilities as a tenant.

Equalities

The Council has clear policies and procedures which promote equalities and respect for the needs of everyone in our community.

These policies cover resident involvement, the provision of housing and services, and the recruitment, employment and training of staff.

The Council will take action against any form of discrimination or harassment, for example on such grounds as disability, gender, age, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, or sexual orientation.

Customer Care Code

We aim to provide services that meet the needs of North Ayrshire Council's tenants. We have developed service standards which set out our customer service commitments. These are set out in a leaflet you can get from your Area Housing Office or you can find it on our website www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk.

We regularly publish how well we are doing at meeting these standards in our newsletters.

We promise:

- to respond promptly to all communications
- to communicate in clear, jargon-free English
- to provide you with clear and relevant advice and information in response to any enquiries
- our staff will be polite and helpful, will be tidily dressed and will always show identification when meeting you in person or will give you their name if speaking to you on the phone
- to treat you with respect. We can discuss matters in a private interview room and we can arrange to have an interpreter present to assist
- to ensure that our staff are properly trained
- to have safe, clean, tidy and well-lit offices and to provide interview facilities that are accessible to all disabled customers and customers with pushchairs
- to help you fill out a form we ask you to complete.

Some of our standards are:

- to respond to all letters or e-mails within 10 working days
- to send forms or information you request within 3 working days
- to deal with telephone calls immediately, and answer the phone within 6 rings
- to not transfer telephone calls unnecessarily but when it is necessary explain to you who you will talk to and tell the other member of staff your name and why you are calling
- to give an appointment card to customers who visit our offices to make an appointment
- to leave a calling card when a home visit is made and you are not at home
- to offer you an appointment when you visit our offices and we cannot see you within 15 minutes.

The personal service

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

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

We will treat anything you say to us with discretion. All the information you give us is confidential. However, you should be aware that, by law, we have to share certain essential details with some other public organisations. See **Tenants' Rights** on page 17.

Listening and learning

We want to listen to and learn from our customers comments and suggestions and to respond positively to complaints. If you would like to make a comment or suggestion we have a customer comments form you can complete. We can give you a copy or send it to you, or you can complete it on our website.

**Customer
Care Code**

Satisfaction surveys

We carry out surveys from time to time to find out how well our customers think we are doing in various key areas of our service. These surveys may be telephone interviews, or posted questionnaires. Sometimes they will be face-to-face interviews conducted by staff, appointed researchers or Customer Liaison Officers.

Staff and tenant conduct

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

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

Tenant Consultation

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

Your right to be consulted

We will advise you of any plans that affect you and your home. We will also consult you on other important issues, including:

- alterations, major repairs and improvements to existing homes
- changes in tenancy conditions
- changes in rent or service charges
- changes to policies that affect how we manage our homes or our repairs service
- how we set standards of service and measure how well we are keeping to the standards
- how we plan to include tenants in our decision-making process
- any proposals to transfer or sell your home to another landlord.

If other residents in your neighbourhood are affected by our plans, we will consult with them too.

How we will consult you

We collect your views in different ways:

- staff visiting your home or carrying out walkabouts with tenants to look at an area
- letters and postal surveys
- surveys on the phone or at your door
- meetings, conferences and seminars
- focus group discussions
- open days, exhibitions or roadshows.

Whatever way we consult you, we will make sure that any information we give you is easy to read and understand, and that you have enough details to help you form an opinion.

We will ask you for your comments and give you enough time to consider the matter properly. We will look seriously at what you say and will let you know the final outcome.

How can I make suggestions?

We welcome any constructive criticism or suggestion about our operations, services, organisation or way of working. We will take your comments seriously. You can make your suggestion directly to a member of staff or you can fill out one of our customer comments forms. Contact your Area Housing Office for the form or complete the form on our website www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk.



Will I be consulted about changes and plans?

You will be told personally of any plans that directly affect you or your home. You can raise any concerns or complaints directly with us. You will also be consulted, along with other tenants and residents, about other important issues affecting your local area. This will be done through forms of consultation appropriate to the nature of the issue. See **How we will consult you** on page 7. Whatever form of consultation we use, we will make sure we explain our plans to you clearly. We will ask for your comments and look into what you say before a final decision is made.

How are tenants kept informed?

We aim to keep you informed about how we are managing our services. We produce leaflets on particular topics, and we sometimes hold local meetings or seminars to tell people about certain developments, and to discuss their concerns.

We produce a newsletter called **Tenancy Matters** four times a year. This keeps you informed about what we are doing and highlights issues and developments that may concern our tenants. The editorial team is made up of tenants and staff. We welcome any contributions to the magazine.

Tenant Consultation

Tenant Participation

We are committed to working in partnership with our tenants and other members of our communities. As a tenant you can make a positive difference and make things happen.

How you can get involved

Tenants and Residents Associations. These are independent groups which tenants and residents set up and run. They meet regularly to discuss issues and decide what action they should take. Representatives from the associations meet regularly with our staff to put forward their views and concerns.

Service Review Groups. These are small groups of tenants and staff who meet regularly to review specific aspects of our service such as repairs, rents, estate management or services to the elderly. They will also look at ways that the services can be improved.

Focus Groups. These are small groups that are formed to review and discuss specific issues. These usually concern a new development or a proposed change to how we provide a service.

Tenants Conference. We hold two conferences each year. A wide range of topics are covered and they give tenants an excellent opportunity to share views.

The Tenant Participation Team

We have a Tenant Participation Team who encourage and support the various ways that tenants can become involved in decision-making. They provide advice, training and general support to individual tenants and representatives. They also co-ordinate any consultation exercises. They can help with producing leaflets and newsletters promoting activities and can also come to tenant group meetings to give advice and guidance, if this is needed.

Want to know more? To find out how you can contribute, please contact our Tenant Participation Team. See **Council Contact Numbers** on page 71.

What is Tenant Participation?

This is a two-way process involving tenants and housing staff sharing information and ideas, and tenants influencing decisions and taking part in what is happening. We are actively working to build ways for our tenants in all areas of North Ayrshire to have their opinions represented on a permanent basis. If you want to know more, contact the Tenant Participation Team.

Why should I get involved?

It will give you an opportunity to make a difference. For example you may feel strongly about some aspect of our services you think should be improved or changed or you may want to create a better sense of community in the area where you live. There are different ways in which you can influence the decisions made for your area. See **How you can get involved** on page 9. We also hold a register of people who are willing to participate on an occasional basis in discussions or other activities. How you get involved depends on what you would like to do and how much time you have available. It could be a couple of hours a month or more. It is entirely up to you. If you want to find out more, contact the Tenant Participation Team.

Is there a Tenant Participation strategy?

Yes. We have a strategy which has been agreed with tenants, Council staff and Councillors. This document is reviewed and updated every 3 years. It shows our commitment to giving opportunities for tenants to be involved in decisions about our service. You can get a copy of the Tenant Participation strategy from our website www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk or by contacting the Tenant Participation Team. See **Council Contact Numbers** on page 71.

Tenant Participation

Complaints

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

What is a complaint?

We would expect you to complain if we have:

- failed to fulfil our responsibilities, carry out a policy, or provide a service
- failed to achieve good standards of service
- failed to take into account relevant information you have given us when coming to a decision
- acted towards you in an unfair way.

In general terms **a complaint is not:**

- a disagreement with a government regulation which we are applying
- a routine request for a service such as reporting a repair to your home for the first time.

Making a complaint - first steps

Most problems are sorted out immediately. You can approach any member of staff but it is best to phone or visit your Area Housing Office. If we need to look into certain details we will do our best to do this quickly.

Formal complaint

If you have contacted us but you are unhappy with our response, we have a procedure (a set of clear steps) you need to follow.

You should complete our customer comments form. You can get this from your Area Housing Office or we can send you one. You can also complete and submit it from our website. The form will be passed to the manager responsible for the service you are complaining about. He or she will write to acknowledge your complaint within 3 working days and will write with a full response within 20 working days.

If you are still not happy there are further steps you can take. These are set out in the leaflet attached to the customer comments form.

If you have been through our complaints procedure and still feel things have not been sorted out you can approach the **Scottish Public Services Ombudsman**. See page 12.

Who do I contact if I want to make a complaint?

Write to us or speak to us on the phone. You can talk to any member of staff but it's best to contact your Area Housing Office as the first step. We will look into the problem or explain the situation. In most cases, once the facts are known, the problem can be sorted out. You can write to us or speak to us directly on the phone.



What if I am not happy with the response I get?

If you are not satisfied with our response we have a set of recommended steps you should follow. To make a formal complaint see **Formal complaint** on page 11.

What remedies can I expect?

If, following an investigation, we find that we are in the wrong, we will apologise in writing and will do everything we can to put things right. We will also take action to make sure the same problem does not happen again to you or any other tenant.

What is the Ombudsman Service?

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is an independent organisation. If you have a serious complaint against the Council and have been through our formal complaints process but are still not satisfied, the Ombudsman may investigate the matter further. To contact the Ombudsman write to SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh, EH3 0BR, telephone 0800 377 7330 or log on to their website www.spsso.org.uk.



Complaints

Your Tenancy

About your tenancy

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

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

In addition, tenants with Short Scottish Secure Tenancies do not have certain statutory rights: to buy their home, to exchange with another tenant, to sub-let the home, or on death, for a member of their family to take over the tenancy. See **Tenants' Rights** on page 17.

Breach of tenancy

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

You and your family can be made to leave your home. We do not want this to happen and will provide you with support and advice to help prevent this.

However if you do not correct your breach of tenancy we will take you to court.

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

What type of tenancy do I have?

Most North Ayrshire Council tenants have Scottish Secure Tenancies. However, certain tenants have Short Scottish Secure Tenancies because of their particular circumstances. The details of your tenancy are written in your Tenancy Agreement. This sets out the tenancy conditions. See **The Tenancy Agreement** on page 15. Whichever type of tenancy you have the conditions are quite similar although short tenancies have certain restrictions. See **About your tenancy** on page 13.

Can the terms of my tenancy be changed?

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

Can I always stay in my home?

Tenants of Scottish Secure Tenancies have full security of tenure. They have the right to stay in the home for as long as they wish provided they do not breach the terms of the tenancy. In addition, partners or relatives may be eligible to take over the tenancy when the tenant dies. See **Household Changes** on page 21. For Short Scottish Secure Tenancies, tenants have security for the period of the tenancy.

What are my rights?

You have contractual and statutory rights. Your contractual rights are set out in your Tenancy Agreement. See **The Tenancy Agreement** on page 15. Your statutory rights are laid down by Acts of Parliament. See **Tenants' Rights** on page 17.

Your Tenancy

The Tenancy Agreement

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

Our main responsibilities are to:

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

We have the right to:

- change your rent or other charges provided we have carried out consultation and taken tenants views into account. We must tell you the new charge at least 4 weeks before it is due
- be let into your home to carry out inspections or repairs, or to service appliances. We must give you at least 24 hours notice.

Your main responsibilities are to:

- pay the rent and other charges on time
- keep your garden tidy
- take care of the property, keep the inside properly decorated and do any repairs you are responsible for. See page 51 for details
- make sure that everyone in your household and your visitors behave responsibly. They must not cause nuisance to neighbours, or harass or threaten other people, including our staff
- not overcrowd the property
- let us know in writing at least 4 weeks before you intend to leave
- write to us asking permission if you want to carry out any alterations to your home.

You have the right to:

- live peacefully in your home without being unnecessarily interrupted by us, your landlord
- appeal against decisions we make
- exercise your legal rights as a tenant.

What is the Tenancy Agreement?

This is the legal contract between you and the Council. By signing it you agree to abide by the Conditions of Tenancy. These are the rights and responsibilities that both you and the Council must observe. The conditions are set out in your Tenancy Agreement.

Can we be joint tenants?

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

What if I break the Tenancy Agreement?

We will discuss with you how you can correct the situation. If the problem is not resolved, we may have to take court action. See **Your Tenancy** on page 13.

What if the Council fails to carry out its duties?

You are welcome to approach any member of staff about a complaint. In most cases problems are resolved quickly and efficiently following an informal discussion. However, if matters are not resolved you should follow our formal complaints procedure. See **Complaints** on page 11.

Can I be made to leave my home?

Yes, but only if your tenancy has come to an end or if you break your Tenancy Agreement by, for example, not paying your rent. Only a court can order you to leave. We will always follow a clear procedure if we have to take formal action. See **Breach of Tenancy** on page 13.

The Tenancy Agreement

Tenants' Rights

These are your rights created under Acts of Parliament and Government Regulations. If you want to know more about your rights, please ask at your Area Housing Office for more detailed leaflets.

Joint tenancy

You can ask to hold a joint tenancy with another member of your household provided he or she is over 16 years old.

Succession of tenancy (death of tenant)

When a tenant dies, the tenancy can pass to a joint tenant, or a member of the family who was living in the home at the time of the death. See **Household Changes** on page 21.

Sub-letting and taking in lodgers

You can take in lodgers provided you do not overcrowd your home.

You can sub-let part or the whole of your home. The Council allows you to do this for up to 6 months provided you meet certain conditions.

You must write to get our permission before you take in a lodger or sub-let. We must reply within a month.

Security of tenure

No tenant can be made to leave their home except by a Court Order. A court has to be satisfied that there are specific grounds for repossession, such as breaking a clause of the Tenancy Agreement, or the tenancy was obtained through false statements.

Assignment (change of tenancy)

You can pass your tenancy to another member of your household provided you ask our permission. The new tenant must have lived in the home, as their only home, for at least 6 months. See **Household Changes** on page 21.

Getting repairs done

You are entitled to have certain urgent repairs carried out within set times under the Right to Repair regulations. You will be told if a repair you have reported is classified as one of these 'qualifying' repairs. See **Repairs Service** on page 49.

Consultation about changes that affect you

We must consult you about changes that affect your tenancy or your home. See **Tenant Consultation** on page 7.

Exchanging tenancies

You can exchange (swap) homes with another council tenant or a tenant of a housing association. See **Other Ways to Move** on page 63.

Carrying out improvements to the home

You can carry out improvements to your home provided you have written to us asking permission before you start. See **Improvements to Your Home** on page 41.

Requests for permissions

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

Access to and control of personal information

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

Different management

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

Buying your home

You can buy your home from us provided you are a tenant with a Scottish Secure Tenancy. See **Buying Your Home** on page 25.

Moving In

When you sign up

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

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

We will give you:

- a copy of the Tenancy Agreement and a copy of the Tenants Handbook
- various useful advice leaflets, for example about safety
- information about benefits and a Housing Benefit application form (if necessary)
- at least two sets of keys (we do not keep spares)
- a home contents insurance form.

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

Decoration vouchers

With some properties we help the new tenant by giving them decoration vouchers. These can be exchanged for decoration materials at certain local stores. The vouchers are only a contribution. They will not cover the full cost of decorating.

You will be told when you are offered your new home whether you will be getting any vouchers.

Home contents insurance

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

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

When do I take over the tenancy?

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

Can I put up my own fittings?

You can put up your own fittings as long as you do not damage or remove anything or alter our property. If you want to do any alterations, you must first ask permission. See **Improvements to Your Home** on page 41.

Does the Council hold spare keys to my home?

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

What about repairs?

Before we let a property to a new tenant, we inspect it and carry out electrical safety checks. We will also do some repairs. Some of these may be completed after you move in. If any further repairs are needed, you should call the Repairs freephone number. Shortly after you move in an engineer will come and do a safety check on the gas appliances in your home. The engineer will hand you a copy of the inspection certificate.

Moving In

Household Changes

Joint tenancies

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

Each tenant is jointly and individually responsible for the tenancy. Each tenant is responsible for the full rent being paid and if one tenant breaches the agreement, the other(s) can be held responsible.

Each tenant has equal rights. Each tenant can apply for Housing Benefit and if one tenant dies, the tenancy automatically transfers to the other.

You can ask for someone living with you to become a joint tenant with you. We will not refuse without good reason.

If a joint tenant decides to end their tenancy, the other tenant has the right to stay. See **Family Break-up** on page 23.

Handing on your tenancy (assignment)

You can hand on your tenancy. Whoever takes over the tenancy must have been living in the home, as their only home, for at least 6 months. You must contact us for permission before you do this.

Death of a tenant (succession)

When a tenant dies, any joint tenant will usually take over the tenancy. If there is no joint tenant, a partner (married or not, in a civil partnership or not) can take over the tenancy. See **Tenants' Rights** on page 17. This is called a succession.

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

If there is no joint tenant or partner, another member of the family or a carer living in the home may be able to take over the tenancy but only under certain conditions. See your Tenancy Agreement.

The law allows for the tenancy to be handed on a second time on the basis of succession.

Who can live with me in my home?

Any members of your family may share your home. You can take in lodgers and you can sub-let part or the whole of your home provided this does not cause overcrowding. You need our written permission to take in lodgers or sub-let. See **Tenants' Rights** on page 17. You should let us know if anyone moves into your home on a permanent basis, or moves out. This may affect your entitlement to Housing Benefit or other benefits.

What if my household size changes?

If your family increases and your home becomes too small, you can apply to transfer to larger accommodation. Alternatively you might try to arrange a mutual exchange with another family. See **Transferring Homes** on page 61 and **Other Ways to Move** on page 63. If you no longer need a family-sized home, we may be able to find you a smaller home to move to.

Who can take over my tenancy when I die?

If you have a joint tenancy, it will usually pass to the surviving tenant if you die. Otherwise your husband, wife, partner or a member of your family may be able to take over the tenancy. See **Death of a tenant** on page 21.

Can someone become a joint tenant with me?

During your tenancy, if you get married or enter into a civil partnership, or want to share a home with someone living as a partner, or with a friend, we may allow him or her to become a joint tenant. They must be over 16 years old and we will investigate their previous housing circumstances before agreeing. See **Joint tenancies** on page 21. You need to fill in an application form which you can get from your Area Housing Office.

Household Changes

Family Break-up

Act quickly to protect your rights. Only a court has the power to force you to move out of your home. If you are worried contact your Area Housing Office to discuss the matter.

Your rights

- Joint tenants have equal rights to remain in the home but either one may end their tenancy.
- If you are not joint tenants, the person named as the tenant has the right to ask their partner to leave. However, if you are married or in a civil partnership, you have the right to stay but you may have to go to court. If you are not married or not in a civil partnership, a court will decide whether you can stay.
- If a named tenant leaves the home, a remaining husband, wife or civil partner has the right to stay but an unmarried partner will have to go to court to find out whether he or she can stay.
- If you have children living with you, a court will normally put their interests first to make sure they do not become homeless. The court will usually give the tenancy to the parent who has the main care and responsibility for the children.

How to get help

- Contact us. We are happy to discuss your situation with you and give you advice. The details of any conversation you have with us will be confidential.
- You can also go to a specialist who can advise you about your particular situation. For example:
 - Citizens Advice Bureau for money problems
 - Relationships Scotland (relationship counselling) for family problems
 - Community Housing Advocacy Project about your housing options
 - a solicitor for your legal rights
 - Women's Aid about domestic abuse. See **Useful Contact Numbers** on page 70.

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

Can my partner make me leave the home?

If you are named as one of the tenants you have the right to stay. If you are married or in a civil partnership, you both have the right to stay. If you can't agree about who will leave only a court can decide as part of 'family proceedings'. If you are unmarried or not in a civil partnership and not the tenant, contact your Area Housing Office about what options are open to you. Do not give up your right to stay in the home without first seeking legal advice. See **Your rights** on page 23.

Any tenant named on the Tenancy Agreement can end the tenancy. For a joint tenancy, both tenants must agree. If you are not named on the Tenancy Agreement and your partner wants to end the tenancy, contact a solicitor. If any one joint tenant wants to end his or her interest in a tenancy they must give 4 weeks notice to us and also to their joint tenant. The tenancy will then continue in the name of the remaining tenant. See **Your rights** on page 23.

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

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

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

If you are threatened with, or are subjected to, abuse from members of your household or an ex-partner, you may want help and advice. Contact your Area Housing Office or your local Citizens Advice Bureau. You can also contact the Domestic Abuse Helpline. See **Useful Contact Numbers** on page 69.

Family Break-up

Buying Your Home

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

Right to Buy

You can buy your home if:

- you are the tenant of the property
- your house is not being repossessed because you have breached your Tenancy Agreement
- you or any joint purchaser has no arrears of rent or other charges, Council Tax, or water and sewerage charges
- you have spent a certain number of years as a tenant of a council or any other landlord that has the right to buy. (See **How long have you lived in your home?** opposite.)

When you have bought

If it is a house you will have to pay for buildings insurance and for all repairs and maintenance.

If it is a flat, you may have to pay service charges to the Council for upkeep of the building, shared facilities and the buildings insurance. You will also have to pay a share of any major repairs to the building.

How long have you lived in your home?

If you were a tenant with the Council before **30th September 2002**, and you still live in the same home, you must have spent at least 2 continuous years as a tenant of North Ayrshire Council or any other Right to Buy Landlord. The level of discount you get remains the same.

However, if you became a North Ayrshire Council tenant on or after **30th September 2002**, or have transferred or exchanged homes from another home since that date, you must have spent 5 continuous years as a tenant of the Council or any other Right to Buy Landlord. You will also get a lower level of discount.

Sometimes an area can become classified as a 'pressurised' area. This means that there are too few homes for the amount of people needing homes in the area. If your tenancy started after 30th September 2002 and you live in an area that becomes a 'pressurised' area your Right to Buy could be frozen for up to five years.

Who has the right to buy?

Most tenants of the Council can buy provided they have been a tenant for a certain number of years. Anyone who is a joint tenant can buy with you. You may not be able to buy if your home has been specifically designed for an elderly or disabled occupant or is near special facilities.

How much will I have to pay?

The property will be valued at open market value. Any improvements you have carried out will not be included in the valuation. You may get a discount depending on the length of time you have been a tenant. If you buy a flat the Council may still maintain the structure of the building and the communal areas, but you may have to pay towards the cost of this through service and repair charges. See **When you have bought** on page 25.

What will the initial costs be?

You will need to advise a solicitor to act on your behalf so there will be legal costs. You will also need to pay fees to the Land Registry for the Local Authority Search. These are included in the legal fees you pay to our solicitor. You will also have to pay for a survey to be carried out and there will be certain fees to be paid to your mortgage provider.

Can I sell my house later?

If you have exercised your right to buy you become the owner of the property and can sell it on. However, if you do so within 3 years of buying you will have to pay back all or part of the discount you have received.

Buying Your Home

Rent Payment

It is important your rent is paid on time. It is the money that pays for the services you receive. Payment must reach us by the date given on your rent card. See **Contacting Us** on page 1 for Area Housing Office addresses.

How to pay

- **By Direct Debit.** You can choose to pay your rent on the 1st or 15th of the month. If you would like more information on this method, please contact our Direct Debit hotline on 01294 324603.
 - **By Interactive Voice Response.** Call our 24-hour automated payment number 0845 603 0593.
 - **By internet payments.** Go to the 'Online Service' option on our website www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk
 - **By telephone.** Call your Area Housing Office and use your credit/debit card.
 - **At your Area Housing Office** or the Municipal Bank in Cunninghame House, Irvine, during office hours. You can pay with cash, by cheque (made out to North Ayrshire Council) or by credit/debit card.
 - **By Banker's standing order.** You can arrange to pay your rent once a week or once a month. If you would like further information on this payment method, please contact your Area Housing Office.
 - **By Girobank** at any Post Office. You can pay with cash or by cheque (made out to The Post Office Ltd). You will be given a receipt. You should take your plastic payment card with you and allow 3 days for your payment to get to us.
 - **By Post to your Area Housing Office.** Please allow 3 days for the payment to reach us. Send a cheque or postal order (made out to North Ayrshire Council). Do not send cash! Also send your rent card so we can mark it up. We will then send it back to you with a receipt.
 - **By Paypoint or Payzone.** You can pay with cash or by cheque (if accepted by the outlet). You will be given a receipt. You should take your plastic payment card with you and allow 3 days for your payment to get to us.
 - **By deduction from your wages.** You can only do this if your employer agrees to this.
- Cheques:** You must write your name, address and rent reference number on the back of the cheque.

How much and how often do I pay?

You receive a rent card every March. This shows what you must pay every two weeks. However, if you receive Housing Benefit the amount you pay, if any, will be given in your Housing Benefit letter. Your rent is based on the type and size of property you live in and for certain properties it includes service charges. Your Council Tax is a separate payment from your rent. You have a separate payment card but you can pay it in similar ways to your rent. Your Council Tax payment includes water and sewerage charges.

Will my rent go up?

Rent levels are reviewed once a year. There will be a consultation about any proposed increases. If your rent goes up, we will let you know at least 4 weeks before it must be paid. Rent increases usually come into effect in April.

Keeping track of my payments

Each time you make a payment at your Area Housing Office or at a post office, it will be marked up on your rent card or they will give you a receipt. Always check that the entry is correct before you leave. If you pay through your bank, the payment will show on your bank statement. Phone and internet payments will show on your bank statement or credit card statement. We send you a statement of the payments you have made once every six months (in March and September). If you want a statement at any other time, you can ask for one from your Area Housing Office.

Rent Payment

Rent Arrears

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

What to do

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

If you know you have a rent payment problem, or you have received a letter from us about your rent, you should contact your Area Housing Office immediately. We will show you an up-to-date statement of your recent rent payments, discuss your arrears with you and give you advice including how to apply for benefits.

If you are unable to pay the amount you owe in full we can enter into an agreement with you on how you will pay it off gradually. This will involve paying an extra amount in addition to your rent over a period of time until the debt is paid off.

We can refer you to our debt advice or welfare rights officers.

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

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

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

- you will have to pay the court costs if the court believes you to be in the wrong (about £300)
- you will still have to pay us what you owe us
- you and your family could be made to leave your home.

What can I do if my Housing Benefit has not been paid?

You are responsible for your Housing Benefit claim. It is important that you apply as soon as possible and that you give all the information the Housing Benefit Office needs to process it. If you are having problems you need to contact the Housing Benefit Office at Cunninghame House, Irvine.

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

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

What if I have problems paying my rent?

Contact your housing officer immediately. If you have money problems, temporary or permanent, we will do everything we can to help you catch up. If we agree what action you need to take, you may be able to avoid risking losing your tenancy. However, if you do not contact us and you continue not to pay your rent, we will not hesitate to take you to court. **ACT NOW**, don't risk losing your home.



What will happen if I continue not paying my rent?

If you continue to be in arrears we will send you a written warning. Unless you make a serious attempt to repay your debt, we will apply to court to repossess your home (make you and your family leave). Whatever stage you are at in the process we can come to an agreement. Remember, if you leave your home you will still have to pay us any money you owe us. If we don't know your new address we can use a tracing agency.

Rent Arrears

Housing and Council Tax Benefit

Applications and enquiries about Housing Benefit are dealt with by specialist Housing Benefit staff at Cunninghame House in Irvine.

Housing Benefit

This is for tenants on low incomes or receiving welfare benefits. It is only for help with rent payments. It does not cover garage rent, home contents insurance, water rates or sewerage charges.

Anyone can claim who is over 16 years and is a tenant in rented accommodation with limited income and savings.

The amount given depends on:

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

Council Tax Benefit

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

The amount given depends on:

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

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

Your responsibilities

- It is your responsibility to make sure that your Housing Benefit is paid to us.
- You must complete any renewal form immediately. If you don't your Housing Benefit may be stopped.
- You must inform the Housing Benefit Office of any changes in your circumstances.

How can I get Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit?

You need to contact the Housing Benefit Office. You will need to complete an application form. This will include both Housing Benefit and Council Tax. You will be assessed on your income, size of household, whether you are disabled or a pensioner, and any savings you may have. Once your application has been approved, the Housing Benefit Office will write to you telling you how much you will receive. The benefit will be paid directly into your rent account. See **Rent Payment** on page 27. If you feel you have been incorrectly assessed you can ask for your claim to be reconsidered. Contact the Housing Benefit Office. See **Council Contact Numbers** on page 72.

What if I have any savings or other income?

Savings or income under a certain amount will not affect any benefits. If you have savings, capital or other income, eg private pension, over a certain amount you will not be eligible at all. Savings include spare cash, money in banks or building society accounts, unit trusts, stocks and shares, income or capital bonds, premium bonds and lump sum redundancy payments.

Change of circumstances

If your circumstances change, you must inform the Housing Benefit Office immediately otherwise you might face a large bill for backdated repayment. You should also inform your Area Housing Office. If we know of any changes in your circumstances we have to pass this information on to the Housing Benefit Office, for example changes in the number of people in your home, or a change in your income.

Housing and Council Tax Benefit

Living in Your Home

Your garden

We will carry out maintenance to:

- paths that lead to your main doors
- walls or fences which separate our land from lanes and public areas
- communal areas and open areas we own.

You are responsible for:

- keeping the garden tidy, cultivated and free of rubbish or any unsightly or scrap materials
- trimming or lopping any shrubs, hedges or trees to make sure they do not become a nuisance
- maintaining any general garden paths or patios
- providing and maintaining fencing between gardens unless it was originally provided by us.

You need our permission to:

- build a garage in your garden
- put up or change a wall or fence
- cut down or remove any bushes, hedges or trees unless you planted them
- put up a hut if it is exceptionally large or you want to put it closer than 5m to the house or you want to put it in a shared garden.

Pets

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

Access paths and pends

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

What changes can I make to my garden?

You may carry out any reasonable landscaping and planting you wish. You must contact us before removing or cutting down hedges, trees, etc. You need our permission before carrying out certain major tasks including building a garage or making a driveway. See **Your garden** on page 33 and **Garages and Parking** on page 37.

How do I get rid of garden waste?

During the growing season there is a garden refuse service. It is collected every week from your brown wheelie bin at the kerbside.

What if I need help?

If you are having difficulty dealing with your domestic responsibilities, managing your finances or with your responsibilities as a tenant, please contact us. We have a Tenancy Support Team who can help in various ways.

Can I keep pets?

You can keep one domestic pet but you need to ask permission to keep more. You must also get our permission to have any exotic or unusual pets. See **Pets** on page 33.

How do I get rid of rubbish?

North Ayrshire Council operates a kerbside collection scheme that alternates weekly between recycling (blue bin) and normal refuse (grey bin). Glass bottles and jars are collected monthly (black box). From April to November we also run a 'brown bin' kerbside collection for organic garden waste, such as grass clippings, hedge trimmings and leaves. If you have larger items to dispose of these can be taken to your local Civic Amenity/Recycling Centre, or alternatively a special uplift can be arranged by contacting the Cleansing Office. See **Council Contact Numbers** on page 72.

Living in Your Home

Living in Flats

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

Respecting your neighbours

- Keep the volume of sound from stereos, radios and televisions at reasonable levels.
- Use the refuse collection areas properly and make sure surrounding areas are left tidy.
- Do not put cardboard boxes or sharp objects down refuse chutes.
- Do not allow anything to be thrown or dropped from balconies, windows, landings or corridors.
- If you fit a laminated floor rather than carpets you must be sure to lay sound-proof insulation.

Health and safety

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

Common areas

There are caretakers and concierges who are responsible for looking after some blocks of flats and the surrounding areas. In particular, they are responsible for security and arranging repairs.

Cleaning is the joint responsibility of the tenants and other residents in flats and maisonettes (but not in sheltered schemes). This includes staircases, corridors, hallways, landings, windows and bin chute openings.

Where there is a concierge, they will do the cleaning. Where there are caretakers, they will check each week that the cleaning is being done, and if it is not, will remind the residents involved.

If residents do not clean an area, we will take appropriate action.

Door entry systems

Door entry systems should be used properly. See **Safety and Security** on page 47.

Who is responsible for cleaning the common areas?

Cleaning landings, stairs and hallways is usually the joint responsibility of the residents who use these areas. However, special arrangements are made for sheltered accommodation. See **Your Housing Service** on page 3.

Who is responsible for maintenance of common areas?

We are usually responsible for maintenance of common areas. This includes maintaining fences and paths, and also servicing entry phones and lifts. Any repairs or misuse should be reported to the Repairs freephone number. See **Contacting Us** on page 1. You will be told when you move in what tasks you are responsible for.

Who is responsible for television aerials?

Some blocks of flats have a communal television aerial. If you live in one of these blocks and you are having difficulties with your television first check with a neighbour to see whether they are also having problems. It may just be your own television. Otherwise report the problem on our Repairs freephone number. See **Contacting Us** on page 1.

What can be done about noise in flats?

Noise can penetrate easily between floors and walls in blocks of flats. Neighbours in flats are expected to show particular consideration and respect for each other. See **Respecting your neighbours** on page 35 and **Noise and Nuisance** on page 43.

Garages and Parking

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

This also applies to your visitors.

Renting a garage site or lock-up

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

If you would like to rent a lock-up or garage site just contact your Area Housing Office. We keep a waiting list for lock-up and garage sites.

People who are not tenants can also rent lock-ups and garage sites.

A rent charge is made for all our garage sites and lock-ups. If you are a tenant this is added to your rent.

Parking

- You must only park in designated parking areas. No area can be reserved by a particular household.
- You must ask our permission if you want to park a large commercial vehicle, caravan, boat, or mobile home on a regular basis on any road or land owned by the Council.
- Your car may be removed if you park illegally on pavements, footpaths or verges or the car is causing a danger or an obstruction.
- You must not use car parking areas, your driveway or any area near your home to carry out repairs to any vehicle except your own.
- If you want to park a car, boat, caravan or a commercial vehicle in your garden you need to ask our permission and you will have to make a proper driveway. You will also need to contact the Council's Planning Department to get planning permission.

Where can I park my car?

You must only park in marked areas or on the side of the road. If you want to park your car in your garden you need our permission and sometimes planning permission. See **Parking** on page 37.

How can I rent a garage site or lock-up?

We have quite a number of lock-ups and garage sites to rent. If you would like to rent one you need to contact your Area Housing Office. See **Renting a garage site or lock-up** on page 37. When you take on a garage site or lock-up you sign a separate Tenancy Agreement. Your rent for a garage site or lock-up will be added to your rent and you will pay it as one amount.

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

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

What happens if a car appears to be abandoned?

If you are worried about a vehicle that has been parked in the same spot for some time and you think that no one in the area owns it or someone has abandoned it, please report this to the Police (see **Useful Contact Numbers** on page 69), your Area Housing Office or the Cleansing Office (see **Council Contact Numbers** on pages 71 and 72).

Garages and Parking

Support Services For The Elderly and Disabled

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

Help to live more easily in your home

- **Adaptations** - you may be able to have certain fittings put in such as extra handrails or conversion of a bathroom. You should contact Social Services. An Occupational Therapist will visit you to discuss what can be done.
- **Community Alarm Service** - we have a special alarm service for elderly or disabled tenants which links your telephone to a Central Call Centre. The Centre has staff on duty 24 hours a day to provide you with help, reassurance and assistance when you need it. You will pay a small weekly charge for this service.
- **Other help** - Social Services may be able to provide help for you to live in your home more comfortably, for example visits from a Home Carer or Meals on Wheels.

Special accommodation

You may want to move to accommodation specifically reserved for older people or people with disabilities.

- **Amenity or adapted homes.** These are usually individual bungalows or flats which have special features such as ramps or grabrails.
- **Sheltered housing.** We have a number of sheltered housing schemes throughout North Ayrshire. These are groups of self-contained homes which have additional laundry areas and shared common rooms. Each home is connected to our Community Alarm Service.

If you have any particular problems or needs contact Social Services or your Housing Office. They may be able to help. See **Council Contact Numbers** on page 72. You can also contact the Disabled Persons Housing Service for advice. See **Useful Contact Numbers** on page 70.

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

There are two types of accommodation: amenity or adapted homes and sheltered schemes. See **Special accommodation** on page 39. If you are interested in moving to more suitable accommodation you should contact your Area Housing Office. We can help you to complete an application form.

What if I just need some help?

You may be able to have adaptations made to your existing home or to have specialist carers visit you. See **Adaptations** and **other help** on page 39. If you are housebound or elderly, we can arrange for a housing officer to visit you at home to discuss any tenancy matters with you. If you are elderly or disabled and have no-one who can help you with your responsibilities for doing certain repairs in your home or for helping clean common areas, we may be able to do some tasks for you. Also, if you are 75 or over and live in a flat in a multi-storey block, the Caretaker will clean the landing or close near your home.

What if I just want to feel I can call someone for assistance?

You can apply to have your present home linked to the Community Alarm Service. Through this service you can make contact with a trained member of staff when you are worried, or are in an emergency situation. By pulling a cord or pressing a button in your home, you can activate the alarm and have a two way conversation with the staff at the Control Centre. If you are not living in a sheltered scheme but would like to get connected to the alarm service you should contact your Area Housing Office or Social Services.

Support Services

Improvements to Your Home

Our improvement programme

We have on-going plans to carry out major repairs or improvements to our properties. Over the coming years we are concentrating on making all our homes meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015. This includes renewing kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems, windows, doors and electric wiring. You can ask us for details of what we plan for your area.

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

Improvements you can make

You may carry out improvements to your home. You should discuss your plans with us first and then write to us giving full details of what you plan to do. We will write back to you with an answer within one month. If we do not reply, you can go ahead as if we had agreed.

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

Compensation for improvements

At the end of your tenancy, you may get compensation for certain improvements you have done. We can give you a list of what kinds of improvements these are.

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

- you did not get our written permission to do the work
- we have had to evict you because you broke the tenancy conditions
- the compensation to be paid is less than £100
- the improvement was done before 1st April 1994. See **Tenants' Rights** on page 17.

Planning permission

You should check with the Council's Planning Department whether you also need to apply for official planning permission and building regulations approval.

Can I carry out improvements myself?

You can carry out alterations or improvements to your home provided you have our permission. This covers any changes you want to make to the inside of your home, decorating the outside, or putting up any structures outside. You will need to let us have full details of the work and who will carry it out. You may also need official planning permission and to comply with building regulations. See **Improvements you can make** on page 41. If you remove any fixtures or fittings or carry out any alterations without permission we may ask you to put back or restore them to the original condition. We will tell you this when we inspect your home before you leave. If we have to do this after you have left we will charge you for the costs involved.

Can I be compensated for improvements I have made?

You may get compensation for certain types of improvement. It will only be paid at the end of your tenancy. We can provide you with a list of improvements that qualify for compensation. See **Compensation for improvements** on page 41.

What help is there if I become disabled?

We may be able to carry out certain adaptations to help you in your home, for example handrails, ramps, bathroom adaptations. See **Support Services** on page 39.

Do North Ayrshire carry out improvements?

All our properties are included in a rolling programme of general maintenance to the outside of the property. We are also committed to upgrading your home to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. See **Our improvement programme** on page 41. Tenants can also request improvements to their area through our annual estate-based projects scheme.

Improvements to Your Home

Noise and Nuisance

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

What to do

Talk to your neighbour. When people live close together, they often do not realise they are disturbing others. You need to explain to them politely that they are causing a problem.

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

Many neighbour problems can be sorted out by talking and coming to an agreement. It can be difficult to do this without getting into a dispute. You may wish to contact a Mediation Service (or we can refer you to one). These are independent and impartial people who can discuss the issues with you both and help you come to an agreement. We have a leaflet that explains what they do.

Being a good neighbour

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

Noise. A Noise Helpline deals with excessive or persistent noise. See **Council Contact Numbers** on page 72 for details.

What action can I take against nuisance from a neighbour?

Very often people do not realise they are disturbing others. The first step is to try and explain the problem politely to your neighbour. See **What to do** on page 43. If the situation does not improve, contact us for advice. We will intervene if the situation is not resolved.

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

Neighbours are expected to exercise respect and tolerance. Noise can penetrate easily between floors and walls in adjoining properties. However, many tenants do not realise how much noise is heard elsewhere in the building. Try to approach the neighbour and explain politely to them how much they are disturbing you. If noise becomes too much you might consider using the community mediation service. The earlier you do this the easier it is to solve the problem. However, if this does not work you should contact the Police and also let us know, or Ayrshire's Environmental Health 24 hour Noise Helpline. See **Council Contact Numbers** on page 72. We may be able to approach the individual to try and sort out the situation.

What about nuisance from dogs?

The Tenancy Agreement requires tenants to be considerate to neighbours and keep animals under control. If you are troubled by dogs contact the Dog Warden. See **Council Contact Numbers** on page 72.

What if I cause nuisance to a neighbour?

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

Noise and Nuisance

Antisocial Behaviour

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

Tenants' responsibilities

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

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

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

What can be done

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

If we receive a complaint about a neighbour, any member of their household or a visitor, your Area Housing Office will investigate and take action to try and sort out the problem. If this is not possible, they will pass the case to the Council's Antisocial Behaviour Investigation Team. They can take action such as applying for an Antisocial Behaviour Order or an Eviction Order.

Community Wardens

Community Wardens have an important role to play in deterring crime and antisocial behaviour within neighbourhoods. The Council's Wardens operate in designated areas throughout North Ayrshire.

What action can I take?

If you are frightened because of offensive or abusive behaviour towards you, please get in touch with the Police or your Area Housing Office. We will advise you on what to do. We will need details of the problem, so you should keep a diary of events. You can take private action against the person but you will need to contact a solicitor to do this.



What can the Council do?

All our tenants are responsible for the behaviour of the members of their household, including any visitors. By signing the Tenancy Agreement, they agree to behave in a responsible way in and around their home. If a problem is between neighbouring tenants and involves a breach of the Tenancy Agreement, we can take legal action against the offending tenant. If the problem is with a private household you should contact the Council's Investigation Team for advice on what you can do. You can also get advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau or a solicitor. They may suggest you contact a mediation service. See North Ayrshire Mediation Service in **Useful Contact Numbers** on page 70.

Can I be rehoused?

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

What if I am worried about a neighbour?

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



Antisocial Behaviour

Safety and Security

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

Smell of gas - what to do

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

Preventing fires

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

Security

- If you have a door viewer (spy hole), check to see who is calling before opening the door. If you do not know them and they do not have an appointment, do not open the door.
- If you are expecting a caller, always ask to see some form of identification. Check it carefully. If you are unsure, ask the caller to wait outside while you telephone the organisation they claim to represent.
- Mark your TV etc with your postcode and house number, or keep a note of serial numbers.
- When you go out in the evening, draw the curtains and leave a light on in a main room.
- Arrange with a neighbour to keep an eye on each others' houses. Inform us if you are going away for a long time - more than 4 weeks.
- If you want to set up a 'no cold calling' zone in your area, you should contact the Councils Trading Standards Section. See **Other Council Services** on page 72.

Electrical safety

- **Unplug** appliances when not in use.
- **Isolate** any faulty switch or socket. Turn off that circuit at the consumer unit (fuse box). Unplug appliances and phone us.
- **Don't** touch bare wires or wet fittings. Turn off the supply to that circuit at the consumer unit and don't use the fitting again until it is repaired or completely dry.
- **Don't** overload sockets. Avoid using double adaptors. Use one appliance at a time.
- **Don't** carry out any electrical work at all without our permission and advice.
- **Report** any fault to us immediately.

Door entry systems

To maintain security:

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

Safety and Security

Gas safety and carbon monoxide

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

Don't disturb asbestos material

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

If you want to carry out DIY, such as drilling boards to fix shelves, removing ducts or bath panels and you are unsure about what type of board or wall it is, you must contact the Repairs Contact Centre to arrange for a surveyor to visit you.

Please ask us for a leaflet if you would like to know more about asbestos in buildings.

Repairs Service

Telephone 0800 0196 444 and give us as much information as possible about your repair.

Our response times

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

- **Emergency - make safe within 24 hours.**

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

- **Urgent - repair completed within 7 days.**

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

- **Routine - repair completed within 28 days.**

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

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

Working hours and appointments

Our operatives work between 8.00 am and 4.30 pm (3.30 pm on Fridays). For Emergency or Urgent repairs they may call at any time. For routine repairs we will usually have agreed a morning (up to 12.00 pm) or afternoon (after 12.30 pm) appointment on a particular date.

Tenants' Right to Repair

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

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

Contact us on our Repairs freephone number 0800 0196 444.

What repairs are carried out by the Council?

We are responsible for the outside of your property, the main structure and any fittings and appliances we have provided. We are also responsible for maintenance of common areas. You are responsible for taking care of the inside of your property and for certain repairs. See **Repair Responsibilities** on page 51.

Who do I contact about repairs?

Telephone our Repairs freephone number 0800 0196 444 at any time. The Repairs Contact Centre is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.



How long will it take to get my repair done?

When you report a repair, we will put the work into a response time category before passing it to the contractor. Each category has a maximum time allowed for the work to be done. See **Our response times** and **Working hours and appointments** on page 49. If necessary the work will be inspected first. Also see **Tenants' Right to Repair** on page 49.

What if I am not in when the operative calls?

If the operative calls and you are not in, a card will be left asking you to phone the Repairs freephone number 0800 0196 444, to discuss when the contractor should call again. If you do not respond the job may be cancelled. If you fail to keep an agreed appointment your repair will be cancelled and you will have to report it again.



Repairs Service

Repair Responsibilities

Our responsibilities

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

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

Joint responsibility for gas safety

By law, we must carry out a gas safety check every year. You must let us into your home to carry out these checks. If you don't we may have to take action to gain access.

Your responsibilities

You must keep the inside of your property clean and properly decorated, heat and ventilate the home, and maintain the garden. You must also do certain repairs:

- replacing lost keys and changing locks if you are locked out
- replacing bulbs and fluorescent starters
- repairing doors and fixtures inside your home (this includes making adjustments for new carpets)
- trying to clear blocked wastepipes or toilets. See **Handy Hints: Clearing Blockages** on page 55
- filling minor cracks or holes in wall plaster
- putting up any TV aerials or satellite dishes (you will need our permission for satellite dishes)
- replacing the battery in your smoke detector (if it is battery-operated)
- taking action to prevent pipes freezing. See **Handy Hints: Cold Weather** on page 59
- maintaining any fences you or a previous tenant have put up.

What if I can't carry out my responsibilities?

If you are elderly or disabled and have no-one who can help you we may be able to do some tasks for you.

Do I have to pay for any repairs?

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

What happens if there is damage to my home?

You are responsible for your own belongings, carpets, fittings and so on, and for decorating inside your home. We strongly advise you to take out home contents insurance against loss or damage to your own belongings. We have identified an insurance policy which you can pay for along with your rent. See **Moving In** on page 19. You can get details from your Area Housing Office or our website.

If any of our employees or contractors cause damage to your property which could have been avoided, we will carry out the repairs and pay you compensation for any losses.

Repair Responsibilities

Repair Standards

Your co-operation is needed

You may need to make certain arrangements and prepare for our operative's visit.

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

What our operatives should do

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

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

Operatives may not, without your consent:

- play radios in your home or garden
- use your phone or make/take private calls on their mobile phones
- use your power supply or other facilities.

What standard of service can I expect?

We will respond to repair problems in an efficient and helpful way. Most repairs are carried out by our own work force. For certain types of work we use sub-contractors who have been selected carefully. Our operatives and sub-contractors must follow certain rules of behaviour when working in or around your home. See **What our operatives should do** on page 53. However, we expect you to make it possible for them to work efficiently. See **Your co-operation is needed** on page 53.

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

If you have a complaint, please phone our Repairs Call Centre or complete one of our customer comments forms. We will look into your complaint. If we need to do any work to put the problem right, we will make sure it is carried out to a good standard as soon as possible. If you are still unhappy, you should follow our formal complaints procedure. See **Complaints** on page 11.

Do you check up on the quality of workmanship?

We carry out regular quality control visits to make sure that our operatives and sub-contractors are working to high standards. We also do random checks on what you think of our service. We may phone you or send you a questionnaire or we may arrange for a Customer Liaison Officer to interview you in your home.

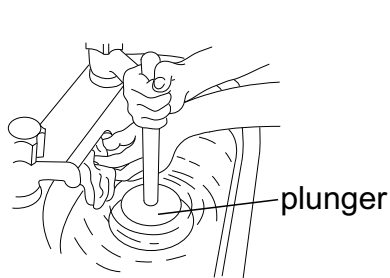
Who will carry out the repair?

Most repairs are carried out by our own repair operatives. We also use specialist contractors. All operatives must carry identification. Always check this and contact us if you are in any doubt.

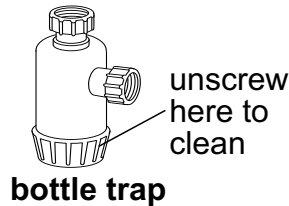
Repair Standards

Clearing Blockages

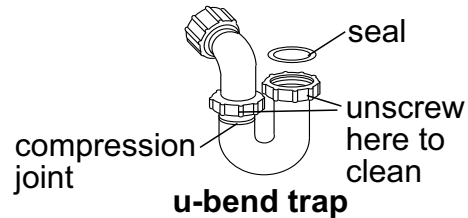
If you need advice on any of the information given in this section, please contact us on 0800 0196 444.



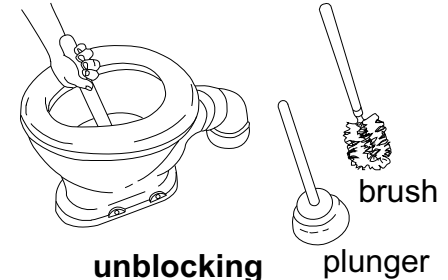
unblocking a basin or sink



bottle trap



u-bend trap



unblocking a toilet

**brush
plunger**

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General advice

- Blockages are usually caused by the build-up of waste: fat, tea leaves, hair, etc in the trap. It is a good idea to clear wastepipes and traps regularly, preferably with a suitable product available from DIY stores.
- The trap is under the fitting (bath, basin or sink). It always holds some water in it which stops smells coming up the drain. However, waste can build up and become stuck in it.
- If more than one fitting (bath, basin etc) is blocked, the blockage may be in the soil stack or main drain. This will need to be cleared by a plumber. If this is the case, phone the Repairs Contact Centre on 0800 0196 444.

What to do

You need:

- bowl
- jug or cup
- rag or dishcloth
- plunger
- rubber gloves.

To unblock a bath, basin or sink:

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

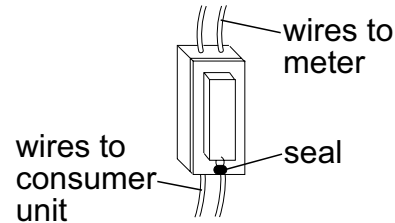
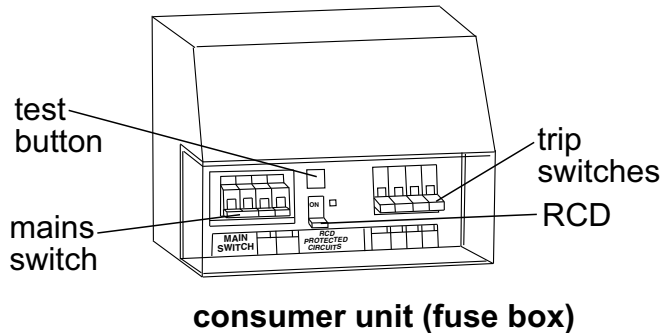
To unblock a toilet:

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

Handy Hints:
Clearing Blockages

Resetting a Trip Switch

If you have an older system with wired fuses, do not touch it. Contact us on 0800 0196 444.



**electricity company fuse
(Do not tamper with this.)**

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General advice

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

What to do

To reset a trip switch:

- open the cover on the consumer unit to show the trip switches
- check which switches have tripped to the OFF position
- put these switches back to the ON position.

If the trip goes again:

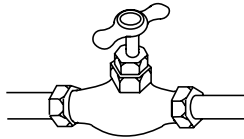
It is probably being caused by a fault in an appliance. You need to identify which circuit is being affected and which appliance on that circuit is causing the problem.

To identify a faulty appliance or socket:

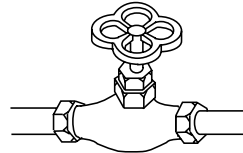
- check all the rooms in the house and note which set of lights or sockets is not working
- unplug all appliances on that problem circuit and switch off the immersion heater
- switch the 'tripped' switch to the ON position
- plug in the appliances one at a time until the trip goes again. (Do not use double adaptors when doing this)
- when you have found the 'problem' appliance, unplug it
- reset the 'tripped switch' to the ON position
- plug the appliance into a different socket
 - if the trip goes again the problem is with the appliance - you need to get it repaired
 - if the trip doesn't go off - the problem is with the first socket - don't use it and phone the Repairs Contact Centre on 0800 0196 444.

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

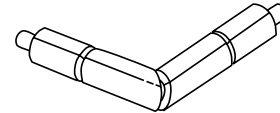
Cold Weather



stoptap



gate valve



pipe lagging

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General advice

- Make sure pipes and tanks in your roof space are lagged. Never insulate beneath the water tank in the loft. It needs some heat to penetrate from below.
- If you are going away for some weeks during the winter, leave the heating on all the time on a very low heat.
- In very cold weather keep your heating on all the time on a very low heat. You may want to open the loft hatch to allow heat into the loft. This will help prevent pipes from freezing.
- Know where your stoptap is. It is where the water pipe enters the house, usually under the kitchen sink or in the bathroom.
- Know where the gatevalves for the hot and cold water tanks are. They are usually by the hot water and cold water tanks.
- Make sure that you can easily turn all taps and valves.

What to do

Frozen pipes

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

Burst pipes

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

If you need advice on any of the information given in this section, please call the Repairs Contact Centre on 0800 0196 444.

Transferring Homes

How do I apply to move house?

If you want to apply to move house you need to apply to the North Ayrshire Housing Register (NAHR). This is a common housing register for North Ayrshire. The NAHR landlords are North Ayrshire Council, Irvine Housing Association, Cunninghame Housing Association and ANCHO. By filling in one application form you can be considered for housing by all the landlords.

Your housing needs will be assessed in line with the North Ayrshire Housing Allocation Policy. The policy is a 'group plus points' policy. You can read about how the 'group plus points' system works in the North Ayrshire Housing Allocation Policy.

To apply for housing you should contact one of our offices and request an Application for Housing pack. This pack contains an application form, application guide and a summary of the North Ayrshire housing allocation policy. When you submit your application for housing we will assess your level of housing need in line with the policy and write to you to confirm your group and points award.

What will happen if a suitable property becomes available?

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

When will I get a new home?

It will depend on a number of factors. You can read about this in more detail in the Housing Application Guide.

Moving Home and Your Right To Buy

Before you decide to transfer to another home, you should check whether this will affect your right to buy your home. See **How long have you lived in your home?** on page 25.

Can I move within the North Ayrshire area?

Yes. You can apply for a transfer to another house owned by any of the NAHR landlords. See **How do I apply to move house?** on page 61. You can also be nominated to other social landlords in North Ayrshire who are not taking part in NAHR if you choose them on your application form. You should check the application guide to see where these landlords have their houses before you select them.

How long will I have to wait for a transfer?

This depends on your level of housing need and the type of property and area you wish to move to. Please read the Housing Application Guide for more information.

How do you calculate the group and points on the NAHR?

Each category of need has a level of points that are awarded. Points are given for things like overcrowding and medical conditions. The summary of the North Ayrshire housing allocation policy tells you what we award points for.

Can I move to another part of the country?

You will need to apply to the council or housing associations in the area you want to move to. They may or may not have a common housing register in operation, you should check this when you apply. Your Area Housing Office may be able to help you find out the details of these organisations. You can also mutual exchange to anywhere in the UK. See **Other Ways to Move** on page 63.

Transferring Homes

Other Ways to Move

What is a mutual exchange?

A mutual exchange is when two or more tenants exchange homes. You can exchange with:

- another North Ayrshire Council tenant
- a tenant of a housing association
- a tenant of another council.

You must first fill out an exchange form to get our permission to exchange. If we do not reply to you within one month you can go ahead with the exchange as if we had agreed.

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

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

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

Approval to exchange

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

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

HomeSwapper is a matching service for council and housing association tenants who want to exchange homes either within their area or somewhere else in the UK. It is an on-line service. You need to register on their website www.homeswapper.co.uk. You can get free access at all local libraries.

Can I exchange homes with another tenant?

Yes. This is called a 'mutual exchange'. Before going ahead the tenants involved need to apply in writing to their landlord(s) to get approval. See **Approval to exchange** on page 63. Exchanging a tenancy is not quite the same as transferring to another tenancy from the waiting list. You need to be sure that you are happy to exchange. It is very important that you arrange to look over the other property before you make a decision to move. See **What is a mutual exchange?** on page 63.

How do I find someone to exchange with?

You are responsible for finding someone to exchange with. We keep a list of tenants interested in exchanging in the area. You can ask to be put on this list. Exchanges are often found by word of mouth or from notices in shop windows.

Can I move to another part of the country?

Yes. You can apply to go on the HomeSwapper scheme. See **HomeSwapper** on page 63. Many local councils and housing associations also have exchange lists. We can help you find out who to contact.

If I exchange will I keep my Right to Buy?

If you exchange with another North Ayrshire Council tenant you will usually keep this right but some of the terms will change, in particular the amount of time you have been a tenant and the amount of discount you will get. See **Buying Your Home** on page 25. If you exchange with a tenant of a housing association in Scotland, you may not be able to buy your new home.

Other Ways to Move

Moving Out

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

Ending your tenancy

- **Notice.** You must let us know, in writing, at least 28 days before you leave that you want to end your tenancy and give us a forwarding address.
- **Letting us into your home.** You must allow us to show new tenants around your home and to carry out any minor repairs before you leave.
- **Keys.** You must return keys to us by 10am on the Monday after your tenancy ends. If you don't, you will continue to be charged rent and will have to pay for any lock change necessary.
- **Outstanding repairs.** You must carry out any work which is your responsibility before you move out. We will inspect your home and discuss these with you before you move out. We will charge you for any work you should have done that we have to do after you have left.
- **Clearing and cleaning the property.** You must remove all your belongings and leave the home and garden clear. We will charge you for any clearance or cleaning we have to do.

Moving out checklist

Before handing in the keys, make sure that:

- ✓ you have paid any rent or charges you owe us
- ✓ the property is clean and you have wiped down all worktops, sills, kitchen units and floor tiles
- ✓ all your furniture, carpets and belongings have been removed, including from huts and lofts, and no rubbish is left in the house or garden
- ✓ you have done any repairs or redecoration that are your responsibility
- ✓ you have contacted the gas, electricity and telephone companies. Keep a note of meter readings to check your final bills
- ✓ let the Council Tax Department know that you are moving
- ✓ you have arranged for any gas appliances you are moving, including cookers, to be disconnected
- ✓ you have arranged for your post to be redirected.

What must I do if I want to leave?

You must let us know, in writing, at least 4 weeks before the date you want to end your tenancy. If you do not let us know, we may charge you rent for the full 28 day period.

Keys must be returned to your Area Housing Office reception by 10am on the Monday. See **Ending your tenancy** on page 65.

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

If you have carpets or blinds that you don't want to take with you and we think that the next tenant might want them, we may agree to you leaving them. Otherwise, you must remove all your furniture, personal possessions and any rubbish before you leave. We will normally charge you for the removal of any items left in the property. You should contact the Cleansing Office for your area to get them to collect any unwanted items before you leave. See **Council Contact Numbers** on page 71.

What about any work I have done in my home?

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

When you leave your home, you can claim compensation for certain types of improvements you have carried out provided we agreed to these improvements at the time you did them. See **Compensation for Improvements** on page 41.

Moving Out

Councillors Contact Information

Ward	Party	Councillor	Telephone
1 - Irvine West	SNP	Brown, Matthew	01294 274315
	Lab	Clarkson, Ian	01294 275207
	Con	McPhee, Pat	07920 700664
	Lab	O'Neill, David	01294 273544
2 - Irvine East	Lab	Barr, Tom	01294 272108
	SLD	Kirkwood, Ruby	07920 595940
	Lab	Moffat, John	01294 211529
	SNP	Sturgeon, Joan	07920 700743
3 - Kilwinning	SLD	Chamberlain, Andrew	07920 586533
	SNP	Ferguson, John	07920 586544
	Lab	McDougall, Margaret	01294 272894
	Lab	Oldfather, Ryan	07920 700723
4 - Saltcoats & Stevenston	SNP	Gibson, William	07920 586565
	Ind.	McNicol, Ronnie	07920 596492
	Lab	Munn, David	01294 467779
	Lab	Munro, Alan	01294 604727

5 - Ardrossan & Arran	Ind.	Currie, Margaret	01770 860525
	SNP	Gurney, Anthony	07814 790083
	Ind.	Hunter, John	07920 590755
	Lab	McNamara, Peter	01294 468904
6 - Dalry & West Kilbride	Con	Barr, Robert	07920 586511
	Ind.	McLardy, Elizabeth	01294 822636
	Lab	Reid JP, John	07775 691094
7 - Kilbirnie & Beith	Lab	Bell, John	01505 684101
	Ind.	Highgate, Jean	01505 503783
	SNP	Dickson, Anthea	07833 402088
8 - North Coast & Cumraes	Lab	Gallagher, Alex	07920 586555
	SNP	Hill, Alan	01475 568615
	Con	Marshall, Elizabeth	01475 673162
	SNP	Rae, Robert	01475 673780

Useful Contact Numbers

Emergency services:

Electricity Power Loss (Scottish Power)	0845 2727999
Repairs	0800 0196444
Gas Leaks (Scotland Gas Networks Plc)	0800 111999
Police/Fire/Ambulance - emergency.....	999
Domestic Abuse Helpline.....	0800 0271234

Police - (non-emergency):

Irvine.....	01294 404400
Kilbirnie.....	01505 404400
Kilwinning	01294 552520
Largs.....	01475 531365
Saltcoats.....	01294 404500

General contacts:

Access Ability.....	01294 470480
Advocacy Service.....	01294 472362
Age Concern - drop-in centre, 7 Lower Kennel, Bourtreehill.....	01294 212354
Ayrshire Central Hospital (general enquiries).....	01294 274191
Benefits Agency - Kilmarnock Benefit Delivery Centre	0845 608 8632
- Greenock.....	01475 881500
Citizens Advice Bureau - Irvine	01294 278051
- Kilbirnie	01505 682830
- Largs	01475 673586
- Saltcoats	01294 467848

General contacts (continued):

Community Housing Advocacy Project (CHAP)	01294 313137
Disabled Persons Housing Service	01294 219730
Household Insurance Helpline.....	01294 324629
National Debt Line	0808 8084000
North Ayrshire Mediation Service	0800 2321781
NHS 24	0845 4242424
(confidential health advice and help when your GP surgery is closed during the night, at weekends and on public holidays)	
NHS Helpline	0800 224488
(provides up-to-date information on diseases, conditions, NHS service support groups and organisations, health promotions and disease prevention)	
Ombudsman (Scottish Public Services Ombudsman).....	0800 3777330
Parentline	0808 8002222
Relationships Scotland	0845 1192020
Samaritans	0845 7909090
Tenant Information Service.....	0141 2481242
Tenant Participation Advisory Service	0141 5523633
Victim Support	0845 6039213
Water and Sewerage (Scottish Water)	0845 6008855
Welfare Rights Unit.....	01294 317700
Women's Aid.....	01294 602424

Council Contact Numbers

Area Housing Offices

Ardrossan Housing Office.....	01294 605258
Dalry and Beith Housing Office	01294 835355
Dreghorn Housing Office	01294 221860
Irvine Housing Office	01294 324870
Kilbirnie Housing Office	01505 685177
Kilwinning Housing Office.....	01294 552261
Largs Housing Office	01475 687590
Saltcoats Housing Office	01294 602611
Stevenston Housing Office.....	01294 605281

Repairs(freephone) 0800 0196 444

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

Major Works Project Line 01294 225025

Tenancy Support Team 01294 601723

Tenant Participation Team 01294 471501

Other Council services

Addiction Centre: Saltcoats..... 01294 461731

Irvine..... 01294 275631

Antisocial Behaviour Investigation Team..... 01294 314692

Other Council services (continued):

Cleansing Office (hotline for general enquiries, special uplifts, litter, and recycling)	0845 6030594
Community Wardens	01294 314690
Council Tax Enquiries	0845 6030592
Dog Warden and Pest control	01294 324339
Hall Lets.....	0845 2301325
Homeless - out of hours	0800 0196500
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Enquiries	0845 6030595
Noise Helpline (services provided by Environmental Health department for the whole of Ayrshire during normal office hours and 6pm to 4am on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday)	0800 7310410
Social Services: Ardrossan	01294 468213
Dreghorn	01294 218407
Irvine.....	01294 324800
Kilbirnie.....	01505 684551
Kilwinning	01294 559820
Largs	01475 687592
Saltcoats.....	01294 605261
Street Lighting and Roads (24 hours every day of the year).....	0845 6030594
Trading Standards (No Cold Calling Scheme)	01294 324900
All other Council services	0845 6030590

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This handbook was developed with tenants and staff working together
and the final text was approved by tenant representatives.

Housing Services Cunninghame House, Irvine KA12 8EE
Telephone: 01294 324 600 Fax: 01294 324 624
website: www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk



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

此小冊子是向你解釋租契的重要內容。如果你希望其中任何部分翻譯或製作成不同格式，如大字體版或錄音磁帶，請知會我們。

Cantonese

Ta książka zawiera ważne informacje na temat Twojego najmu. Jeżeli chcesz sobie otrzymać jakąkolwiek część tej książki w innym języku lub formie, jak duży druk lub nagranie audio na taśmie, skontaktuj się z nami.

Polish

ਇਹ ਕਿਤਾਬ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਕਿਰਾਇਦਾਰੀ ਬਾਰੇ ਜ਼ਰੂਰੀ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਦਿੰਦੀ ਹੈ। ਜਿਹ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਕਿਤਾਬ ਦਾ ਕੋਈ ਵੀ ਭਾਗ ਅਨੁਵਾਦ ਕਰਨਾ ਜਾਂ ਕਿੱਸੇ ਦੂਜੇ ਫਾਰਮੈਟ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਕਿ ਵੱਡੇ ਅਖਰ ਜਾਂ ਆਡਿਓ ਟੈਪ, ਵਿੱਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸ਼ਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

Punjabi

یہ کتاب آپ کی کرایہ داری کے بارے میں معلومات مہیا کرتی ہے۔ اگر آپ چاہتے ہیں کہ اس کتاب کے کسی حصے کا ترجمہ کیا جائے یا کسی مختلف صورت میں شائع کیا جائے، جیسے کہ بڑے حروف یا آڈیو ٹیپ، تو براہ مہربانی ہمیں آگاہ کریں۔

Urdu