



# Your handbook

FOR TENANTS OF WOMEN'S PIONEER HOUSING



## Opening hours

9.30am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday

## Head office

227 Wood Lane, White City  
London W12 0EX

## Email

info@womenspioneer.co.uk

## Website

www.womenspioneer.co.uk

## Phones

main switchboard: ☎ 020 8749 7112

repairs hotline: ☎ 020 8743 4422

fax: 📠 020 8749 9843

## Emergencies

### Out-of-hours repairs

For repairs emergencies when our office is closed, please see the listings in your latest copy of *Pioneer Press* for the contractor best able to attend to the problem. Or call our repairs hotline and listen to the recorded message listing our emergency out-of-hours contractors.

### Fire, flood, leaking gas

Please read **section 8** of this handbook so you know what to do if there is an emergency. One might be triggered by an accident in your home or for reasons beyond your control.

If you can smell gas or suspect a gas leak, call the National Grid ☎ 0800 111 999

### Power cut

If a power cut has affected the whole house, call UK Power Network  
☎ 0800 056 6341 or 📠 0333 32 32 105

Welcome to  
your new home.  
Our staff are  
here to make  
your experience  
of being our  
tenant enjoyable.



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# Section 1

## Who we are

Our history

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## Section 1

### Who we are

#### Our history

Women's Pioneer Housing was set up in 1920 by women suffragists whose goal was equal rights for women at work, at home, in society and in politics. We were the first housing association in Britain just for women, with our early tenants from the first generation to live independently.

#### Our service

We are a charity so do not make a profit from our service. We also charge lower rents than you would pay if you rented privately. Most of our rental income goes towards the cost of managing and repairing our homes. We also use our rental income to repay loans we take out to pay for the cost of refurbishing your homes and building new ones.

Unlike your local council, our service is strictly housing. At most of our properties, we are not responsible for collecting the rubbish, recycling, sweeping the streets or any other services beyond our property boundaries. These are services most of you get from your local council, paid for by your council tax.

#### Who we house

We mainly house single women or, in our larger homes, women raising a family – some on their own. What all of you have in common is that you have a modest or low income so cannot afford to buy a home or rent privately.

New tenants come to us through many different routes, including:

- the local council's housing list or its 'choice-based lettings' scheme
- our own waiting list for single women
- our waiting list for sheltered housing (open to women aged 60 or over who apply to us directly)
- the waiting list for a hostel for single women aged over 21
- specialist agencies such as Look Ahead and Solace Women's Aid.

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## Our homes

We manage over 1,100 rented and leasehold homes in central, south and west London. Most of our properties are single person studio or one-bedroom flats. We have a small number of two and three bedroom homes for families.

We have five sheltered housing schemes for older women in Kensington and Chelsea. Some of our sheltered flats are purpose-built for wheelchair users and four other flats have been adapted to take a wheelchair.

## Who we answer to

Our work is overseen by a board of volunteers with expertise in housing and employment law, finance, housing management and development, and other useful skills. The board, which includes tenant members, approves our policies and makes sure we have proper systems in place to run our business.

We are registered with a government agency called the Homes and Communities Agency, which monitors our finances and business practices.

# Section 2 Moving in

Your door keys

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Gas supply

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Electricity and water

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Heating and hot water

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Telephone and internet

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Satellite dishes

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Television

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Parking

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Council tax

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Home insurance

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## Section 2

# Moving in

After you sign your tenancy agreement and get the keys to your new home there will still be a few things you need to do.

### Your door keys

You will have been given two sets of keys, usually one for your flat door and the other for the main front door. We may have also given you keys for window locks or a shed. It is your responsibility to look after your keys and get any spares cut. If you need more, the ones used for some of our locks have to be cut through our authorised supplier. Ask your housing officer for details.

### Gas supply

We will have told you if your home has a gas supply and will have given you a copy of the gas safety certificate.

If you want to install a gas cooker, you must make sure a qualified engineer does the work. Please also tell us because we need to know which of our tenants have gas-fuelled appliances for safety reasons. See also page 51.

If you have a gas-fired boiler, we will arrange for it to be serviced annually. You must let our contractor into your flat so they can do the work.

You will need to get the gas supply put in your name. If you wish, you can ask your gas supplier to fit a pre-payment meter.

### Electricity and water

As with a gas supply, you will need to contact Thames Water to have the water supply put in your name and you will also have to get the electricity supply put in your name. You can choose any supplier for the electricity so do some research before deciding who to go with.

### Heating and hot water

We provide the heating and/or hot water in some flats. If this is the case for your flat, the cost is added to the service charge which you pay along with your rent.

### Telephone and internet

There is most likely a telephone socket in your flat. If you want to use it for a landline or the internet you will need to contact a phone company/internet service provider and make your own arrangements for the phone and/or internet service.

### Satellite dishes

We will not let you have a satellite dish put up on our property.

### Television

There is a television socket in your flat that gives you a choice of lots of channels. If you want to get cable installed, you need to first ask us for advice and permission.

### Parking

There may be a parking area where you live solely for the use of Women's Pioneer residents. The housing officer will tell you about any arrangements that apply, including parking permits.

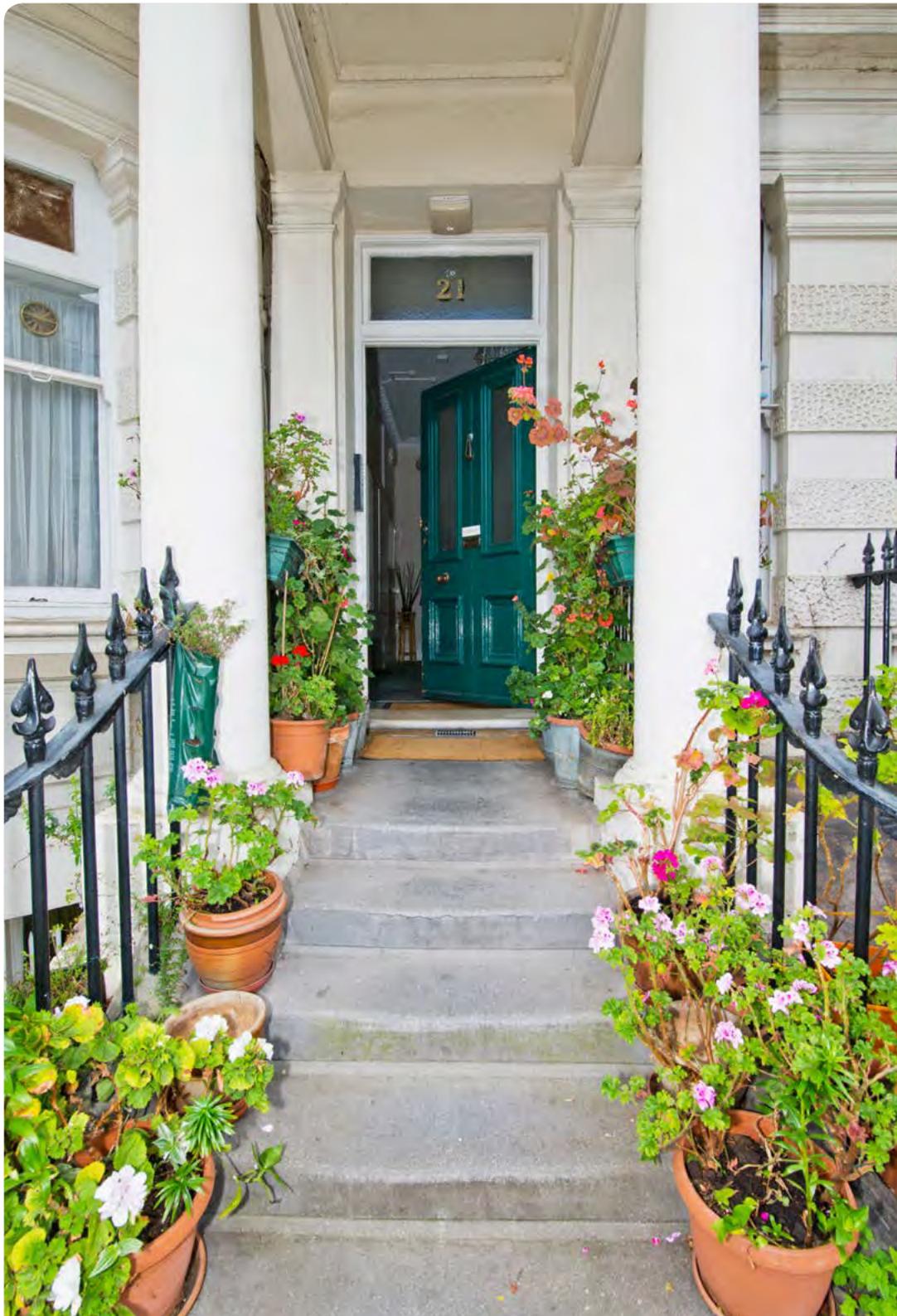
### Council tax

As soon as you move in you must let the local council know so they can set up an account for you. They will write to you to tell you how much you have to pay. If you claim housing benefit, you may have to pay a small contribution yourself.

### Home insurance

We strongly recommend that you take out a home contents insurance policy. Only in the very rarest cases will our insurance cover the cost of putting right any damage to or loss of your possessions.

You should make sure your insurance will cover any damage to your decorations, wall and floor coverings as well as your furniture and personal possessions.



## Section 3

# How to contact us

During office hours

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Your first point of contact

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Reporting a repair

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## Section 3

# How to contact us

### During office hours

Our office is open from 9.30am to 5.30pm from Monday to Friday. We close at weekends, on bank holidays, at Easter and over the Christmas to New Year period. We have arrangements in place if you need an emergency repair when our office is closed. See page 35.

### Head office

227 Wood Lane, White City  
London W12 0EX

### Email

[info@womenspioneer.co.uk](mailto:info@womenspioneer.co.uk)

### Website

[www.womenspioneer.co.uk](http://www.womenspioneer.co.uk)

### Phones

main switchboard: ☎ 020 8749 7112

repairs hotline: ☎ 020 8743 4422

fax: 📠 020 8749 9843

### Your first point of contact

Your first point of contact will normally be your housing officer. Your housing officer is not always in the office as they are often out visiting tenants or attending meetings.

Each officer has a 'duty day' when you can be sure that they will be in to take your call or see you in person. On other days it is best to make an appointment if you want to see your officer in person.

### Reporting a repair

During office hours you can call the repairs hotline to report a repair or check what is happening with a repair problem you have already told us about (see number listed left, under phones). For more on repairs, see [section 9](#) on page 39.



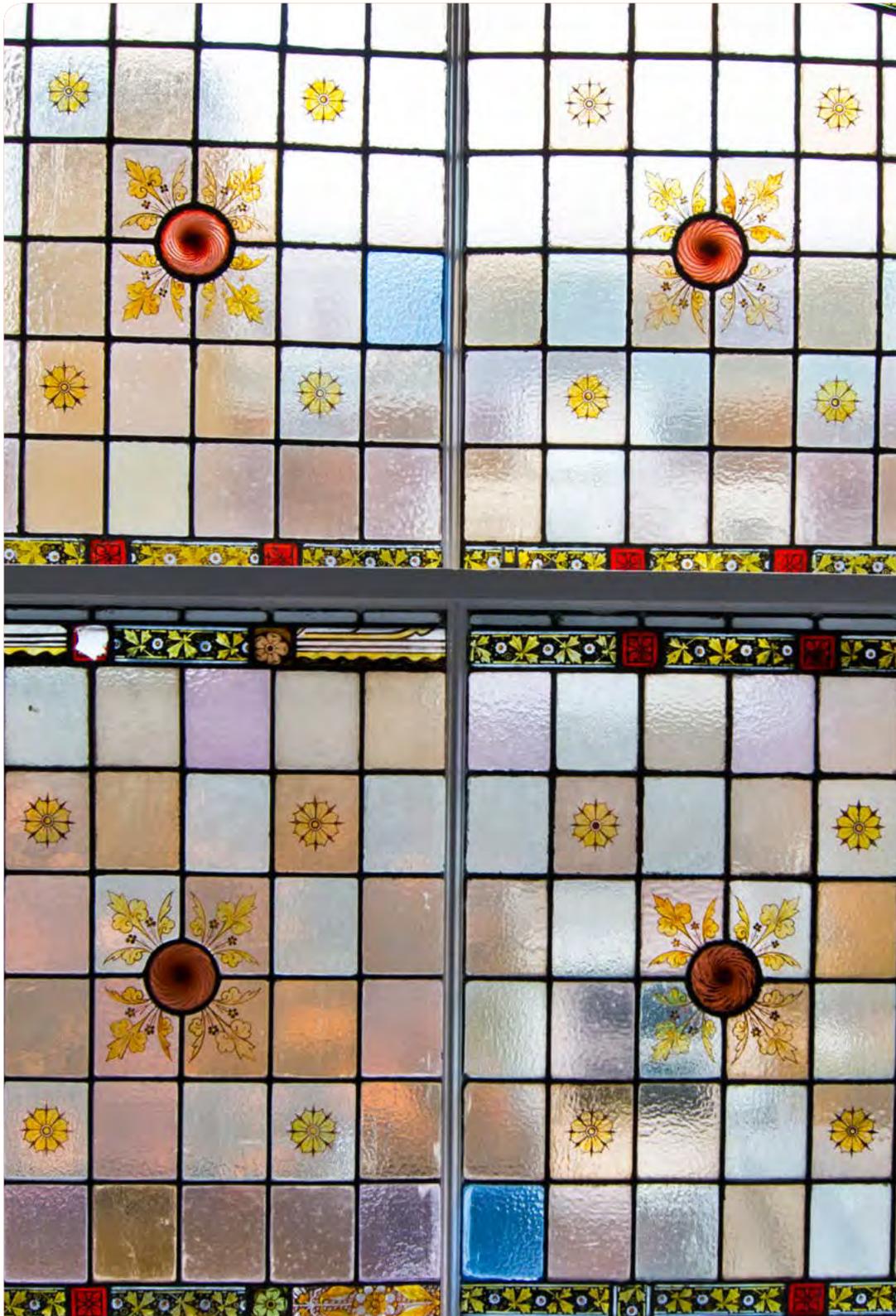
## Section 4 Our duties as your landlord

Your tenancy

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Our services

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## Section 4

# Our duties as your landlord

### Your tenancy

We want your experience of being our tenant to be positive and enjoyable. As your landlord we are responsible for providing you with particular services carried out to a certain standard.

Your tenancy agreement sets out in detail what you can expect from us, as does our website. There you will find a whole range of information on our services, policies and procedures.

### Our services

Some of you have different types of tenancy so there is no one-size tenancy agreement. Overall, however, you all get very much the same services.

In summary, you can expect us to:

- keep the building you live in, in a good state of repair (full details are in the agreement)
- decorate the outside of the building, usually once every eight years
- notify you, using a standard formal process, of any changes to your rent and/or service charges
- let you know how we consult with you on changes to services or your tenancy agreement.



## Section 5 Your rights as our tenant

Your tenancy agreement

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Equality and diversity

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Keeping your details private

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## Section 5

# Your rights as our tenant

### Your tenancy agreement

As with our duties to you, your rights are set out in your tenancy agreement. Some of you have slightly different rights, depending on the type of tenancy agreement you signed.

The main difference is the length of your tenancy. For example, some of you have a tenancy that runs for 12 months and others have one lasting five years.

If there is anything in your tenancy agreement that you do not understand, your housing officer will be happy to help explain it.

### Equality and diversity

We monitor some details about the people we house each year, just as we do for everyone who applies to us for work. For example, we ask how they describe their ethnic group and whether they have a disability.

We do not have 'quotas' so this does not affect whether we will offer someone a tenancy or a job. What it does do is check that we are giving fair access to our homes and jobs. If we find we are not, we can do something to put it right.

### Keeping your details private

If we contact another person or organisation for information about you, as we have to do from time to time, we will only ask for the details we need as your landlord and as an employer and business.

We will store this information securely and make sure only authorised people can read or use it.



## Section 6 Your duties as our tenant

Summary of your duties

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Starter tenancies

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## Section 6

# Your duties as our tenant

### Summary of your duties

These are explained in your tenancy agreement and include:

- The home you rent from us must be your only or main home.
- You must pay the rent and service charges we have set.
- You may not run a business from your home unless we say you can. We would not normally refuse to let you do this unless you proposed doing something that would disturb or inconvenience your neighbours. We also cannot permit anything that would breach planning laws.
- You may not use your home for an illegal or immoral purpose.
- You may not cause nuisance or harassment in or anywhere near the building your flat is in
- You must make good any damage that you cause.

The tenancy agreement you signed is a legally-binding document so you should read it and make sure you understand it in full. Do ask us if there is anything in it that you find confusing or unclear.

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**If you break any part of the tenancy agreement, we may take legal action to end your tenancy.**

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### Starter tenancies

If you have signed a 12-month starter tenancy agreement, we will only give you a fixed-term tenancy at the end of the first year if you have kept to all the terms of your tenancy in a satisfactory manner.



## Section 7 Paying the rent

When to pay

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Different ways to pay

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Rent arrears

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Help on a low income

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Refunds

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# Section 7

## Paying your rent

### When to pay

Your rent and service charge should be paid monthly and in advance so that it reaches your rent account by the first day of the month. You can pay your rent using a variety of means.

### Different ways to pay

#### Direct debit

A direct debit is an instruction from you to your bank or building society. It authorises us to collect your rent and service charge payments from your account.

Once you have agreed the dates and amounts, the money is taken from your account automatically. If we want to change an amount or the date we collect it, we will tell you first.

Direct debit is the simplest and most convenient way for you to pay your rent and service charges.

#### Standing order

Your bank automatically sends us your rent money from your account each month. Let us know if you want to pay this way and we will send you a form. Fill the form in and send it back to us and we'll send it to your bank.

#### Phone

You can pay your rent using a credit or debit card by calling our head office on ☎ 020 8749 7112.

#### Allpay

Allpay offers lots of ways to pay your rent.

**Swipe card** With this plastic card you can pay your rent at any Post Office or shop displaying the PayPoint sign, using cash or a debit card.

**Allpay app** This is an app for your mobile phone that you can download from the Apple app store or Windows phone store and Google Play. You use the app to pay your bills from an Apple, Windows or Android smartphone.

**Internet** Go to [www.allpay.net](http://www.allpay.net) and follow the link to 'make a payment'.

**Automated phone payments** This lets you pay using an automated phone system 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To use it you will need a valid Allpay payment card and a debit or credit card. You can then call ☎ 0844 557 8321 to make a payment.

**Text payments** This is a secure text message bill payment option, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All you need is a UK-registered mobile phone, a valid Allpay payment card and a current debit or credit card.

### Rent arrears

If you fall behind with your rent, please contact your housing officer to agree the best way to pay back the money you owe. Small arrears can quickly turn into a very large debt so it is sensible to tackle the problem before it gets out of hand. If you don't pay your rent you may lose your home.

### Help on a low income

If you are on a low income or struggling to pay a lot of debts, your housing officer may be able to tell you where you can get useful help and advice.

If you are retired or your income is low, you may be able to claim housing benefit to pay part or all of your rent. Your housing officer can tell you what you might be able to claim and can help you fill in the forms.

### Refunds

If your rent account is in arrears and you are due a refund from us, or compensation for any matter, we will credit the money to your rent account.



## Section 8 Emergencies

Nearest escape route

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In case of fire

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Flood risk from a water leak

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If you suspect a gas leak

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Urgently needed repairs

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# Section 8

## Emergencies

Please read this so you know what to do if there is an emergency. One might be triggered by an accident in your home or for reasons beyond your control.

### Nearest escape route

When you first moved in we will have advised you to look for the closest escape route. There are signs in parts of the building you share indicating escape routes. For most of you, this will be the main staircase and front door.

### In case of fire

#### Fire in your flat

If a fire breaks out in your home:

- Alert any other people in your flat.
- Leave the room where the fire is at once and shut the door to stop smoke and fire spreading.
- Don't tackle the fire yourself unless it is safe to do so.
- Calmly leave the flat and, when everyone is out, close the front door to stop smoke and fire spreading to the rest of the building.

- Leave your building using the nearest emergency exit. For most of you this is going down the main staircase and out through the main entrance.  
**Do not use the lift.**
- Do not stay in your flat. In the past, some of you were told to stay in your flat. This advice is out of date.
- Do not use a balcony unless it is a part of the official escape route from your flat.
- Set off the fire alarm on the staircase or landing by using the red 'break glass' point to alert your neighbours so they too evacuate the building.
- Call the fire brigade (see box below).

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Call the fire brigade on 999. This is free from any telephone. Give the operator your address, including your flat number, and tell them which floor the fire is on. Make yourself known to the fire brigade as soon as you can after they arrive.  
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#### Fire in the building

If you hear the fire alarm in your building:

- Tell any other people in your flat.
- Leave your flat at once, closing all the doors behind you.
- Leave the building using the nearest available exit. **Do not use the lift.**
- Set off the alarm in the common parts if it hasn't already been activated.
- As soon as you are outside the building, call the fire brigade on 999 (see instructions below left).

#### Flood risk from a water leak

All of these can help to minimise damage to your home and belongings:

- If an appliance is leaking, shut off the water supply to the appliance.
- If water is near electrical outlets, like switches, sockets or lights, turn off your electricity at the fuse box.
- If it is safe to keep the electricity on, turn on all the extractor fans and, if you have one, a dehumidifier. This will start to dry out wet areas.
- If water is leaking from the ceiling, put a bucket under the leak. If the ceiling is bowed, there may be a lot of water pooled in it. If it is safe to do so, make a small hole at the bottom of the bulge to let the water drain out. This can usually be done with the point of a knife or scissors.
- Use towels or mops to soak up as much water as you can.
- Move your belongings to a dry area.
- Put blocks under your furniture to raise it off a wet floor.

Please get in touch with us as soon as you can so that we can arrange any repairs needed. Also contact your insurers to tell them that you may be making a claim.

## If you suspect a gas leak

If you think you can smell gas, call the National Grid at once ☎0800 111 999. They will come out at night or day.

- Do not turn on any lights.
- Do not touch any electrical switches or sockets.
- Do not light any matches.
- Do not smoke.
- If there is a gas meter in your flat, turn your gas supply off at once. The lever is next to the gas meter – pull the lever up so that it sticks out at a right angle to the pipe.
- Open all windows and doors so that gas does not build up in your home.

Any gas appliances that you get installed in your flat must be fitted by a registered plumber. It is illegal and extremely dangerous for anyone who is not properly qualified to install gas-fuelled appliances.

An appropriately qualified engineer will be able to show you this logo on demand:



## Urgently needed repairs

If something goes badly wrong with a fixture or fitting in your flat or the building and it needs repairing as a matter of emergency, see page 41 for what to do.

Do not call any of our contractors for help if the problem could wait until our office reopens or you are likely to be sent a bill for our contractor's fee plus the cost of our admin time.

A repair that we consider to be a genuine emergency is one that poses a health hazard or creates a risk of injury to people in the building or passers by, or where substantial damage is likely to be done to our property or to your possessions.

# Section 9 Repairs and decor

General rules

How to report a repair

When our office is closed

Getting into your flat to do work

Contractor ID

Charging for repairs

Speed of repairs

Repairs we expect you to do

Your feedback on repairs

Decorating your flat

Improving and altering your flat

# Section 9

## Repairs and decorating

### General rules

This section covers how to ask us for repairs and how they will be carried out. It explains which repairs we do and those we expect you to organise.

Some types of repair are done every eight years or so. We call these cyclical repairs and explain how that works in **section 11**, on page 55.

In **section 10** we set out everything we do to protect you and your neighbours and what we expect you to do to keep risk to a minimum.

Keeping your homes in good repair is one of the most important tasks we do. Most of our buildings are very old, dating back to the 1890s. Keeping them properly maintained is expensive and can often only be done using specialist skills and materials.

We have a limited income and building repairs are always rising in cost so we have to budget carefully. We do get asked sometimes to repair something that isn't vital to your safety or that of your neighbours. Our priority has to be safety, keeping the building functioning properly and making sure all the equipment is running as it should.

If you cannot find what you are looking for in this section, you may find more information at [www.womenspioneer.co.uk](http://www.womenspioneer.co.uk)

### How to report a repair

#### Before you call us

Please check first that the work needed is our responsibility and not your own. This saves both us and you time. If you are not sure, call us and we will tell you.

#### Who to call

During office hours you can report any repairs that are our responsibility direct to the repairs desk.

**Repairs hotline** ☎ 020 8743 4422

You can also come to our head office to report a repair in person, at 227 Wood Lane, White City, London W12.

#### Gather your facts first

Before you call, make sure you have to hand all the information we're likely to ask you for. We will want:

- your name and address
  - a phone number we can call you on during the day
  - as much detail about the problem as you can give
  - when and how our contractor can get into your flat to do the repair.
- For example, if you aren't going to be home, could you leave a key with a neighbour, your estate services officer or scheme manager?

When you call we will enter details of the problem you are reporting on our system. We will also be able to see at once if there are any unfinished repairs for your flat.

The more information you give us the quicker we can get the problem sorted and choose the most suitable contractor.

### When our office is closed

If you need a repair done when our office is closed and it is a **genuine emergency**, get a pen and paper ready, call our repairs hotline and listen to the recorded message.

**You should only call the contractor if the problem is a genuine emergency.** By that we mean a health hazard, a risk of injury to people in the building or passers-by or that substantial damage might be done to our property or to yours.

The automated message will list all the repairs contractors who deal with our out-of-hours emergencies, the type of repairs they handle and how to call them.

You can find a list of our emergency contractors in *Pioneer Press* as well but we do change them from time to time. If you have not kept your last copy or want to check that you have the most up-to-date list call the repairs hotline.

## How soon will your emergency be dealt with?

If you have a genuine emergency, our contractor will arrange to come to you as soon as possible. This will normally be within four hours of your call.

The emergency contractor will not normally do a full repair. They will do whatever is needed to make your home safe and secure until a full repair can be done, during normal working hours.

If you call a contractor out of hours, please let us know once our office reopens.

Do not call an emergency contractor if your repair could reasonably wait until our office reopens. If you do, we will charge you what it has cost us – the contractor's fee – plus the extra admin we have had to undertake.

## Getting into your flat to do work

From time to time we will need to get into your flat to carry out repairs or do vital safety checks or works (see also gas safety on page 51).

Sometimes this will be work we have planned ahead or it might be repairs that have to be done at short notice or in an emergency. We have a legal right to get into your flat to do these works.

If you are not at home and we have an emergency, or we have been trying without success to contact you for some time, we may have to force entry. To avoid this, it would be helpful if you could let us know where we can find a spare key - maybe one left with a friend, neighbour or your estate services officer.

If you are going away for more than a month make sure you let us know before you go and tell us where we can get a key to your flat if we need to get in. If we don't know that you have gone away you may come back to find a large bill for any costs we have run up trying to get access to your flat.

## Contractor ID

Do not let anyone into your home unless they first show you proper ID, even if they claim to be a contractor. If you are at all suspicious, check with us or your estate services officer or, if you live in sheltered housing, call your scheme manager.

## Charging for repairs

We do sometimes charge for repairs. For example, if you call out one of our emergency contractors for a repair when you could reasonably have waited until our office was open again or if we have to repair any damage caused by you, someone in your household or a friend.

Another example of why we might charge is if we send out a contractor who finds that the repair was caused by your carelessness or misuse.

A typical case might be your using a faulty electrical appliance which has made the fuses trip, cutting out the power. If we then send out an electrician because you didn't tell us this was the likely cause we would charge you for the electrician's costs. We would add a 15% charge to cover our admin costs.

A less common reason might be your asking us to do a repair that isn't our responsibility. If there are very good reasons why you shouldn't organise the repair yourself, we might do it for you but would ask you to pay up front before we order the works.

## Speed of repairs

Every job is given a priority rating according to how urgently the problem needs to be resolved. This also means we, and our contractor, can give you a better idea of when they will turn up.

Priority categories for repairs	
P1	To be made safe or completed within 24 hours
P2	To be completed within three working days
P3	To be completed within seven working days
P4	To be completed within 28 working days

When you call us to report any repair we will tell you what priority we are giving it and, if you wish, our reasons.

*continued over/...*

To apply our ratings for the urgency of a repair consistently our staff follow written guidelines. The factors we take into account include, but are not limited to, loss of services or an amenity, the weather, the risk of damage (to your belongings or our building), and whether the people affected are frail or disabled.

### Timescales for emergencies

If we rate a job an emergency, we aim to get our contractor out within 24 hours but most respond much more quickly. Depending on the type of problem, they might only be able to make the situation safe on the first visit, or prevent any damage getting worse.

They will let us know as soon as they can if more work is needed and, if so, what. We will try to get this done as quickly as possible, and will give you a timescale.

If you have reported an emergency we will need you to stay at home so you can let our contractors in. We may also be able to advise you on ways to prevent further damage, to your belongings or our building, for example shutting off the water supply.

### Timescales for non-emergency repairs

Repair problems that are not an emergency but which stop you being able to use important amenities like the toilet, bath, hot water, or (in winter) your heating are classified P2, to be repaired within three working days.

If replacement parts need to be ordered, we may extend the three-day target.

We aim to get problems like faulty communal TV aerials or door entry systems repaired in seven working days or fewer.

Works we aim to get done within 28 working days are routine jobs where there is no urgency or where you are not going to be available to let our contractor in any earlier.

These timescales are for repairs you report to us. They do not apply to more major repairs, which take longer so we can get the best possible price. We may need to appoint a surveyor to specify the work needed, will probably get prices from more than one contractor and may have to put up scaffolding.

### Repairs we expect you to do

Some repairs are your responsibility. They are minor works and are listed in your tenancy agreement and on our website.

The most common are:

- changing lightbulbs (unless you are over 75 or the bulb is in a very awkward location)
- replacing tap washers
- clearing blocked sinks and toilets
- replacing lost or stolen keys
- re-glazing broken windows and
- fixing broken toilet seats.

Most of these are easily sorted and you can get advice on how to do them yourself on the internet. If you don't feel up to the job or think the work will be quite complex we may be able to recommend a suitable contractor to do it for you.

### Pest control

You are also responsible for keeping your flat free of pests, like mice or cockroaches. That means blocking any holes with wire wool, setting (and emptying) traps, and making sure you never leave food or scraps around or let rubbish build up. If a problem has spread to shared areas or is affecting a lot of flats in the building we will arrange to have the building surveyed and will do our best to treat the problem.

### Shared parts of the building

Another responsibility you all have is keeping all your belongings inside your flat. We cannot let you keep anything in the parts of the building you share with other tenants because of fire regulations.

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**Any object you put in a shared part of the building can become a safety hazard if a fire breaks out. Any item left in or stored in shared parts of the building, including cupboards, may be removed without warning.**  
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## Your feedback on repairs

Anytime we send out a contractor to do a repair in your home we also send you a repairs monitoring survey.

It's a simple form asking for yes/no answers to our questions with a space for your own comments. These are usually sent out along with a self-addressed envelope so it costs you nothing to send it back. We're also looking into ways to let you give feedback through our website.

All your feedback is used, whether positive or negative. We use it to assess the work of our contractors and our own role in the process so it helps us identify what worked, what didn't and whether our contractors are working to the high standard we expect of them.

## Decorating your flat

Right from our earliest days, we gave our tenants the right to decorate their flats to their own tastes. This rule remains unchanged, but comes with conditions.

We expect you to keep everything in your flat in a reasonable state. You are responsible for all the decor, including painted surfaces, wallpaper, curtains, blinds, carpets, rugs and other flooring.

**We strongly advise you to take out household contents insurance that includes cover for any accidental damage to your interior decor, floor finishes and furniture. If, for example, water leaking from another flat causes damage in your flat, redecorating your flat is your responsibility.**

We will only repair damage to your interior decor if we or one of our contractors caused the damage while doing a repair.

## Improving and altering your home

Your tenancy does not give you any right to have your flat improved and currently we only improve flats that fall empty.

However, we are happy for you to change some things in your flat and will give advice on what you can and cannot change.

You can also find information on improving your home on our website or can ask us to send you our factsheet.

Examples of changes that do not need our consent include:

- redecorating the interior
- fitting shelves
- fitting blinds or curtains
- replacing the taps (but not installing a mixer tap for an over-bath shower).

**To do any other types of work you will first need our written permission.**

Before we will approve anything you will need to write to us giving full details of the work you propose. For some works we'll need every aspect of the work clearly specified and scale drawings. You will need our consent before you start the work, including any preparations.

We will not normally give consent to any work that would involve altering the structure of our building, so taking out a wall, for example, would not be allowed.

This list includes the sort of work we might approve, if we are happy with all the details you have given us.

- replacing the kitchen (cupboards and other fixtures)
- replacing your bathroom (bath, toilet, sink etc)
- replacing a bath with a shower cubicle
- installing an over-bath shower
- altering the electrical wiring
- changing the type of heating
- removing a door or doors
- replacing doors.

**Any work you propose must be carried out by a suitably qualified person.**

If you want to change anything involving the electrics or heating, the contractor you employ must be NICEIC or Gas Safe registered, as appropriate, and we will want to see the completion certificates.

Some of our buildings are listed by the local council so your planned alterations may need listed buildings planning consent. If you live in a listed building contact the council's planning department for advice on whether or not the works you propose will need planning consent.

**We regret that we cannot help pay for any improvements you choose to do.**



## Section 10 Health and safety

Yearly home safety checks

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Fire safety checks

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Fire safety in your home

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Gas safety

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Electrical safety

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Water supply safety

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Asbestos

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# Section 10

## Health and safety

This section outlines what we do to make your home and building as safe as we can, and includes advice on safety at home.

### Yearly safety checks

A couple of times each year we will contact you to arrange for a contractor to call by to:

- check fire safety equipment in your home
- test any portable electrical appliances we have provided (PAT testing)
- inspect and test the gas supply and any gas-fired appliances.

These checks are to keep you and your neighbours safe. We will give you advance notice of the dates of the visits. These will be during the working day and you have to let our contractors into your flat.

### Fire safety checks

In every single building we own we do a fire risk assessment (FRA) covering all the shared parts.

We have to do this by law (the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005) to identify any risks or hazards that might compromise your safety or that of anyone else living in or visiting the building were a fire to break out.

FRAs are updated after any major repair works or after planned maintenance, which is usually done every eight years.

We also regularly inspect our buildings to make sure there is nothing that might block any of the escape routes (corridors and stairways), and to check that fire doors are not propped open and fire exit doors are kept clear and easy to open.

If a fire breaks out, in your flat or any other part of the building, you must get out of the building at once using the nearest available escape route.

To give an early warning of any fire we have, over the last few years, been installing fire alarm and detection systems in the shared parts of our buildings. Your home also has a smoke alarm. These systems are regularly tested and serviced to meet the relevant British Standards.

### Fire safety in your home

Most fires in the home start by accident. You can cut the risk of a fire starting in your flat with some simple precautions:

- Test your smoke alarm weekly by pressing the test button. Call us if you aren't sure where the button is.
- Contact us at once if the smoke alarm bleeps to indicate a low battery.
- Do not leave naked flames, candles etc unattended for any length of time.
- Do not leave tea towels or any other materials that can burn near your cooker.
- Do not use a chip pan.
- Make sure any fire doors in your flat can be easily closed, and keep them closed as much as you can.
- Switch off electrical appliances if you're not going to use them again soon, particularly at night.
- Never overload sockets with extension leads.

## Gas safety

### Gas safety checks

Once a year we check the gas supply and all gas appliances we have had fitted in every flat where gas is used.

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**Faulty gas-fired appliances can kill. They might explode or they might leak carbon monoxide, a poisonous gas with no smell. For this reason, we have a legal duty to make sure any gas pipework and appliances in your home are inspected and tested by qualified gas engineers once every year.**

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Your help is vital when we are trying to arrange for our contractors to visit. The sooner our contractors can get in to do the inspection, the safer it is for you and your neighbours.

If the gas safety inspection date we give you is not convenient, please let us know so we can arrange a time when you can let our contractors in.

*continued over/...*

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If our contractor makes more than one attempt to get into your flat to do the work and your gas safety certificate is close to expiring we will take you to court as this is a breach of your tenancy and highly dangerous. You will be billed for both our legal costs and the cost of our contractor's wasted time.  
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The checks are done by Gas Safe-registered engineers, carrying a registration card, under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998. If they find a problem, they will tell you. If it is serious, they will have to disconnect the appliance.

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To improve your safety, we have been installing carbon monoxide detectors in flats where gas appliances are used.  
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### Your own gas-fired appliances

If you have had any gas-fired appliances fitted, like a cooker, it is your responsibility to make sure it is safe and serviced regularly. Please make sure we also know about your appliances for our safety records.

Our gas engineer will give your appliances a basic check but it will not be as stringent as those given to equipment we have provided. If anything you have had installed is found to be unsafe, the engineer will disconnect it.

### Portable gas heaters

We have a blanket ban on all portable gas or paraffin-fuelled heaters, including those that use a Calor Gas cannister. They are extremely dangerous and have been the cause of serious house fires and deaths.

### Electrical safety

We regularly test and inspect the electrical wiring in your flats and in shared areas. This is usually done at about the same time as we do the planned maintenance and decorating (which we call cyclical works) to the outside and shared parts of your building, usually every eight years.

As with the gas safety checks, you have to let our contractor into your flat to do the checks. Refusing to do so is a breach of your tenancy agreement.

We are upgrading electrical safety in every flat when we do our cyclical works. Our contractors are replacing the old-style fuse box with a new consumer unit with RCD protection.

This significantly lowers the risk of electric shocks but the system is very sensitive so the 'trip' switch will drop if you plug in a faulty electrical appliance. It may even happen if a light bulb blows.

All electrical works done for us are undertaken by suitably qualified and NICEIC registered contractors.

### Power cut to your flat only

If a faulty appliance or other fault causes the 'trip' switch in your fuse box to drop, it is easy to restore the power. Call our repairs hotline on ☎ 020 8743 4422 for advice if it happens during office hours.

Out of office hours, there is detailed advice on our website, if you are able to get on the internet. Or you can try resetting the switches on your fusebox yourself. The box has a row of switches and all should be 'up'. Flick any that are down back up. To isolate the problem, you could plug in all your items of electrical equipment one by one to see if one item is tripping the system.

### Your own electric appliances

You are responsible for repairing your own electrical appliances, like an electric cooker, and you must only use professionally qualified contractors for servicing and repairs.

### Water supply safety

Legionella bacteria cause Legionnaire's Disease. This is an often fatal form of pneumonia. The bacteria exist in all water supplies so we all need to try to avoid creating the sort of conditions that let the bacteria thrive and multiply.

Some of our buildings have shared water systems, providing hot water and heating to all the flats. To reduce the risk of legionella in these buildings we keep:

- hot water stored at 60-65°C
- cold water storage tanks below 20°C
- all the tanks clean.

Even if your water comes straight from the mains, legionella can build up in limescale, sludge or rust so we strongly recommend you do the following:

- Clean limescale from any shower heads every three months. Just soak the shower head in vinegar for 20 minutes or so. Leave it for longer if the build up is heavy.
- Let the water run for a few minutes if you haven't used a tap or shower for a while, before using it again, to make sure you're getting fresh water.
- If you have your own boiler and can vary the hot water temperature make sure it is no lower than 60°C so the heat can kill off any legionella.

## Asbestos

Asbestos, once hailed as a 'wonder' material, began being used extensively in buildings in the 1950s and it was decades before the dangers were recognised.

It is a natural, fibrous material and the biggest danger comes from loose fibres. If it is present in your flat and in good condition and sealed with paint, it should be safe if left undisturbed.

**The biggest risk comes from accidentally damaging or trying to remove something in your flat made of or with asbestos. That is a job for professionals.**

## Identifying asbestos

Asbestos was widely used for insulation and fire protection. But for a long time a huge range of materials were made with it, including floor tiles, boxing to cover pipework, toilet seats and textured wall and ceiling coatings.

To avoid accidental exposure to it:

- Do not drill, cut, sand or scrape anything in your flat that you think might contain asbestos.
- When removing wallpaper, soak it first and if possible use a steam stripper.
- Don't drill or try to remove textured coatings (Artex) from ceilings.
- Wash any area of flaking paint with sugar soap before repainting.
- Do not scrape up plastic floor tiles.

If you suspect that anything in your home that might be made with asbestos has been damaged, then contact us immediately.

# Section 11 Building maintenance

Pre-planned ('cyclical')  
maintenance

Major building works

# Section 11

## Building maintenance

### Pre-planned (or cyclical) maintenance

We have an ongoing rota for maintaining and decorating all of our buildings on, typically, an eight-year cycle.

Because our buildings are mostly very old, these works tend to be quite extensive.

They generally include:

- repairing or replacing the roof
- repairing chimneys
- repointing and repairing brickwork
- mending any damage to windows
- repairing rainwater and other external pipes
- decorating the outside of the building
- decorating all the common parts inside the building
- replacing carpets in these shared areas
- testing and inspecting the electrical wiring and supplies
- fire safety works
- installing, upgrading or checking internal emergency lighting
- other repairs we find needed.

Doing all these repairs under one contract helps to make the work less disruptive to those of you living in the building and means we can make full use of the scaffolding while it is up.

We use consultant surveyors to draw up a contract specifying all the work needed and invite three contractors to give us an itemised cost for doing the work.

The contract is awarded on factors including cost, quality, previous track record and customer service standards.

We do our best to arrange for works to be done during the summer months and they generally take 16-18 weeks.

The works are managed and inspected by our surveyors who make sure the work being done meets the specification, is of good quality and offers value for money.

### Major repairs

Occasionally we have to do major repairs outside the cyclical maintenance contract. These typically include damp proofing works, repairs to roofs or replacing a lift.

Again, these works will usually be inspected, specified and managed by our consultant surveyors. They also take longer to complete than smaller repairs but at the start we will tell you how long they should take.



## Section 12 Estate services

Services to your building

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What is a service charge

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Estate services officers

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Consulting you on changes  
to your service charges

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# Section 12

## Estate services

### Services to your building

Some of the services we provide for you and other tenants and leaseholders in your building are paid for by the service charge part of your rent. Some of these services may be unique to your building.

Occasionally we decide we need to change a service or do something differently, including matters affecting service charges. We will usually consult you first. Later in this section we tell you when and how we would do that.

### What is a service charge?

The service charge is an 'add on' to your rent which covers your share of the cost of services to your building.

Services vary from building to building but typically include some of the following:

- cleaning the shared parts
- cleaning shared windows
- repairs to electrics and lighting in all the shared parts of the building
- maintaining grounds and gardens that you share
- minor repairs to shared parts where the problem doesn't affect the building's structure
- insuring contents in shared parts, including flooring and decorating
- electronic door entry or warden call systems
- pest control, as and when needed
- television aerials
- estate services officers or scheme managers
- fire safety equipment

- lifts
- repairs to shared laundry equipment
- hire of Paladin bins
- legionella testing of communal water supplies
- Community Alarm Service
- electricity for services in shared parts of the building and grounds
- gas used to power services in shared parts of the building and grounds
- water supplied to shared parts of the building and grounds
- CCTV
- TV licence for TVs in shared areas
- renting a phone line for internet access on a shared computer.

### Setting the charge

Instead of charging you a fixed sum for all the combined services to your building, we vary the charge every year so that it better reflects the actual cost.

We don't know in advance what some services will cost because we cannot predict, for example, how much electricity will be used, if equipment will break down or a pest infestation will break out.

We estimate as best we can what we expect to spend over the next 12 months. The main benefit to you of a variable service charge is that, at the end of each year, we match actual costs against our estimates. If our estimate was too high we pay you back the following year.

If actual costs exceeded our estimates we have to charge you a little extra the following year to make up the shortfall. We never hold onto any surplus and you only pay for what you get.

### Queries about a service charge

See *Questioning your service charges* on page 85 in [section 18](#).

*continued over/...*

## Estate services officers

Most of our properties are served by an estate services officer (ESO)\* who provides a flexible, roving caretaking service.

ESOs are our local eyes and ears and respond very promptly to any problems in or queries about your building.

Your ESO is responsible for:

- making sure services like cleaning and gardening are done well and checking that our contract terms are met
- identifying and reporting to us any repairs needed to shared parts
- weekly health and safety inspections
- doing small repairs to shared parts and, on occasion, in tenants' flats.

Your ESO should be your first port of call if you have a query about services to your building or small repairs.

Matters they can help with include, but are not limited to, changing light bulbs in shared areas or for older tenants, unblocking sinks and toilets, easing and adjusting door frames and windows, and bleeding central heating radiators.

*\* At the time of printing this service is not available in Camden, Harrow or Hillingdon*

Any help you get from an ESO does not override your own repair responsibilities, as set out in your tenancy agreement.

ESOs regularly inspect properties for potential safety or security hazards to residents or visitors. Some of these are inspections that we have to do by law so they give very good value for money.

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**Your ESO is happy to be a keyholder if you are not able to be at home to let in any of our contractors for planned or emergency works, due to your own work, health or holiday commitments.**

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Please visit the website for an up-to-date list of ESOs and the properties they cover. If your building has an ESO, this information is also on your noticeboard.

## Consulting on changes to your service charge

We will consult you if we plan to add to, withdraw or alter an existing service. We are legally obliged to do this if a service is going to cost you more than £100 over the year for a rolling contract or more than £250 for a one-off service. Many of our services are vital to your safety and security and/or have to be done to meet our legal obligations.

# Section 13 Getting help or support

Tell us if you need help

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Problems holding  
down your tenancy

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Home aids and adaptations  
for your mobility

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Moving to sheltered housing

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Nursing or medical care

---

Domestic abuse

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Help with a mental  
health problem

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Safeguarding

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# Section 13

## Getting help or support

### Tell us if you need help

If you find you need extra help to cope, we will try to put you in touch with a suitable agency. This might be social services, your GP, another health authority service or a local voluntary agency. If you would benefit from moving to another home, we might also be able to help.

### Problems holding down your tenancy

If you think extra support would help you to hold onto your tenancy, please get in touch with your housing officer to talk through what you need. They may be able to advise you directly, or they may refer you to our housing inclusion manager who will look at your needs in more depth and give extra targeted help, mainly through telling you about and making referrals to suitable organisations.

### Home aids and adaptations for your mobility

If your health or a disability is making it harder for you to cope in your home we may also be able to help.

Altering parts of your flat or installing special equipment can make it easier to do normal activities. For example, we can fit rails to make it easier to move around indoors. Or, with guidance from an occupational health therapist, we could make major changes, like fitting a stair lift.

Grants for this sort of work can be given by organisations like your local health authority or the council. We can help you find which might pay for the work you need and can help you apply for a grant.

### Moving to sheltered housing

We have 179 flats in five sheltered housing schemes in Kensington & Chelsea. They are for women aged 60 or older who may find it reassuring living among other women of a similar age.

We keep an open waiting list for these flats or can help you apply for a similar place with another housing association or the council.

In sheltered housing, you have your own self-contained flat but can call the scheme manager for advice during working hours.

All flats are connected to the Community Alarm Service (CAS) so you can call someone in an emergency simply by pulling on a cord.

Most flats in sheltered housing are designed for people with limited mobility. A very small number are built specially for people who use a wheelchair.

Sheltered schemes have some shared facilities, like a lounge, where if you want to you can meet other residents or take part in activities.

### Nursing or medical care

If you have to go into hospital or a hospice for an extended period please let us know so we can keep an eye on your home. If you are likely to be away for more than four months you will need to get our written consent. It is highly unlikely that we would refuse it.

### Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse affects women at all levels of society. The NHS says it is abuse if your partner or another family member:

- threatens you
- shoves or pushes you
- makes you fear for your safety
- puts you down or tries to undermine your self-esteem
- controls you, for example stopping you seeing your friends and family
- is jealous and possessive, suspecting your friendships and conversations
- frightens you.

We will offer sensitive, non-judgmental and confidential guidance on personal safety, legal advice, rehousing and liaison with specialist agencies and the police.

If you are more comfortable discussing any issues with a female member of staff, we will arrange this for you.

Specialist and professional organisations that help include the National Domestic Violence helpline run by Women's Aid and Refuge. Find out more at [www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk) or call ☎ 0808 2000 247.

No one can see that you have called this number from checking your mobile phone or a landline.

**If you are in immediate danger, call 999.**

### Help with a mental health problem

If you are having trouble coping, we may be able to refer you to someone from health and/or social services to help you maintain your tenancy.

If you have to go into hospital or specialist care for an extended time please let us know so we can keep an eye on your home. We will also need to make sure we can get into your flat in an emergency.

If you are likely to be away for more than four months, you will need to get our written consent. It is highly unlikely that we would refuse it. Your tenancy will be safe as long as you arrange for your rent to be paid while you are away.

### Safeguarding

Safeguarding covers all the things we do to keep vulnerable adults safe from significant harm. We prefer to prevent anything bad happening in the first place but if abuse of some sort is going on then we will do all we can to stop it.

If you have a concern about the safety or wellbeing of any of our residents please raise it with your housing officer or any of our staff, even if all you have is a suspicion or gut feeling.

We will investigate and consider whether we need to bring in help from the council. It has a duty by law to investigate any case where safeguarding may be appropriate.

If you prefer, you could bypass us completely and instead report your concerns to your local council.

**We cannot promise we will not share the information with anyone else, especially if failing to do so might put someone else at risk. But we do promise that you will be told before we inform anyone else and we will only discuss the matter with someone who needs to know, to help make sure it does not happen again.**

## Section 14 Getting on with your neighbours

Basic courtesy

Problems with a neighbour

Noise nuisance

Neighbour harassment

Keeping a pet

# Section 14

## Getting on with your neighbours

### Basic courtesy

It is a condition of your tenancy that you should be polite and considerate towards your neighbours. Breaking this agreement can lead to you losing your home.

### Problems with a neighbour

We are often forced to live closer to other people than we would like in London so should be tolerant of different lifestyles, values and beliefs.

If a neighbour's behaviour is genuinely causing you distress, speaking to them directly is often the best way to come to an agreement you can both live with.

Very often we do not realise that something we are doing (we think quietly or inoffensively) is upsetting someone close by. A polite but direct approach from you is more likely to get a happy result than our 'official' intervention.

If you have talked to your neighbour and it hasn't worked your housing officer will do what s/he can to help.

### Mediation

If necessary, and where we can, we will bring in an outside agency to help solve a problem, for example a mediation service.

The mediator will not judge whether someone is right or wrong but aims to get both parties to consider why and how a problem arose and agree what could be done to improve a situation.

Please ask your housing officer if you think mediation might help your situation.

### Noise nuisance

Noise is the most common reason for the complaints we get. It isn't possible to stop all noise carrying through to other flats but there is a lot you can do to keep your own noise levels down.

As our tenant, you have agreed not to play music or any other sound system loudly. This includes TV and radio. You also agreed to cover your floors with carpets.

On occasion you may need to do something noisy, like repairs or housework. Please bear in mind that your neighbours might work shifts or might be unwell and trying to sleep during the day.

If you are suffering from a neighbour's noisy behaviour, you should keep a record of when and where it happened and the effect it had on you. You can get diary sheets from your housing officer.

If a polite request to stop doesn't work and we end up taking legal action, your notes may prove vital to a court case.

If a neighbour plays extremely loud music, you could try your council's environmental health service. Most councils have noise patrols and their officers have some powers to act where we cannot.

### Neighbour harassment

We will take the very strongest line with any tenant who verbally or physically harasses or abuses anyone else. The same applies to any tenant who lets anyone from their household or a visitor harass or abuse another person.

Attacking or threatening anyone because of their race, skin colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation (lesbian, gay and transgender), disability, appearance or marital status is a clear breach of your tenancy agreement.

### Keeping a pet

You may keep a pet without our permission if it is a cat or a small animal. However, you will need our permission if you wish to keep a dog as a pet.

We will only let you keep a dog if you have direct access to your own private garden. We will not let you keep a dog if it is noisy or aggressive or you are unable to keep it under control.

The same rules apply to looking after someone else's dog for them.

We do make exceptions for guide dogs and for hearing dogs.



## Section 15

# Moving, letting or buying your home

Moving home: the choices

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Finding another council or housing association home

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Moving to another Women's Pioneer home

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Swapping home with another tenant

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Sharing or letting your flat

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Moving to a retirement flat by the seaside or in the country

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Buying a home of your own

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Right to buy

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# Section 15

## Moving, letting or buying your home

### Moving home: the choices

If you want to move home there are a number of choices open to you. Your likelihood of getting a new home depends very much on what size home you want and whether you are prepared to move to another landlord or new area.

This is because London has a chronic shortage of affordable rented housing and most of our own properties are either studio or one-bedroom flats.

### Finding another council or housing association home

Empty properties are advertised, usually once every two weeks, on your local council's websites. To bid for some properties you will need to be ranked in the right 'band' or have a certain number of 'points'. The council's website will tell you how this works.

### Moving to another Women's Pioneer home

If you want to transfer to another of our homes you will need to have been our tenant for at least two years unless you want to move to a flat of the same size.

**You will not get a transfer if your rent account is in arrears or you owe us money for another reason.**

To apply for a transfer you will first need to fill out an application form. If you would like us to consider medical factors, you will also need to fill in a separate form that we will send to a GP to be assessed.

We can only transfer a small number of tenants in any one year because the number of homes that fall empty is small and we have to let at least 50% of these to people put forward by the local council.

**For full details of our policy on getting a home transfer, please go to our website or contact your housing officer.**

### Swapping home with another tenant

You have the right to swap your home with another Women's Pioneer tenant or another council or housing association tenant, through a scheme called mutual exchange.

The main organisation helping tenants get a mutual exchange is called Homeswapper. You can find out more about their service at [www.homeswapper.co.uk](http://www.homeswapper.co.uk)

Before you go to Homeswapper, there are some rules. For example, you will need written permission from us and the other landlord before you can exchange. Both you and the other tenant will need to have up-to-date rent accounts. And you can usually only swap one of our homes with another female tenant.

### Sharing or letting your flat

If you let anyone else move into your flat you must let us know first. We will need to know their name, age and gender. See below for more on sharing your flat.

### Sharing your flat with a partner

You may let your partner move in with you so long as your flat will not be overcrowded. Your tenancy agreement states the maximum number of people

allowed to live in your flat. Your partner must obey all the rules that apply to you and will not have a legal right to stay there if you move out.

### Taking in a lodger

If your tenancy began anytime after 1989 you will need our permission to take in a lodger. No one can take in a lodger if it means more people will live there than the maximum number stated on your tenancy agreement. A lodger can only stay if you say they can and must not break any of the rules that apply to you. They have no legal right to be in your flat, no rent book and cannot stop you going into the space they occupy.

### Letting your flat

**Under no circumstances can you move out and let your flat to anyone else.**

This is fraud and it is a serious criminal offence. Offenders can be fined up to £50,000, be sent to prison for up to two years and any profits made from this fraud will be seized. We will also apply to the courts to take the flat back even if you later move back into the flat.

## Moving to a retirement flat by the seaside or in the country

Seaside & Country Homes is a retirement home scheme now run by the mayor of London. Look on the Greater London Authority's website to see if you are eligible: [www.london.gov.uk](http://www.london.gov.uk)

## Buying a home of your own

If you would like to buy a home, there are a number of options you could consider. One could be shared ownership, sometimes known as part rent/part buy, or you might be able to apply to buy the flat you rent from us.

The range and type of schemes to help first-time buyers changes frequently so it is worth finding out more about the latest schemes on offer. Your best starting point is the government website on home ownership [www.ownyourhome.gov.uk](http://www.ownyourhome.gov.uk)

## Right-to-buy

If you are interested in buying the flat you rent from us please contact your housing officer or refer to this government website for advice: <https://righttobuy.gov.uk>

# Section 16

## Listening to your views

Surveys and feedback

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Resident involvement

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## Section 16

# Listening to your views

We value your input into decisions we make on matters that affect the way we run your services and care for your homes.

### Surveys and feedback

Every three years we commission a survey of all our tenants to find out your views on our service.

The survey is done by an independent agency. The agency tells us what was said but not who said it so all your replies are kept confidential.

We may also do fairly frequent smaller surveys inbetween to make sure our information on what you think and need is up-to-date.

We also encourage you to give us feedback on specific matters. So if we order a repair for your home, we will write asking you to let us know how well the repair was done and whether the work was done promptly and our contractor was courteous and tidy.

Your feedback is essential to helping us monitor the standard of repairs. If your report suggests a contractor is failing in any way we will call them in to talk about their performance. If it doesn't get better, we will take them off our list of approved contractors.

We also encourage your voluntary input. For example, if we get feedback that suggests you and other tenants might benefit from a new or changed service, we could set up a panel of 'tenant experts' to help work out what is needed and agree the best way to go about doing this.

### Resident involvement

These are some of the ways you can get involved in our activities.

#### Tenant scrutiny panel

This group of tenants meets roughly every six weeks to review our services and performance and recommend changes.

#### Resident associations

Groups of tenants can come together to form an association to:

- have an effective way to make their views known to us
- build good community spirit and help neighbours get to know each other
- have more opportunities to comment on services we provide locally
- take part in walkabouts to inspect their property or the estate they live on and suggest improvements.

#### Board

Any tenant can apply to fill a vacancy for a tenant member on our board. You will have to go through a selection process and will need relevant skills.

The board has overall responsibility for running our business. All members are volunteers. They meet roughly five times a year. If you are interested in applying to join the board, please contact our corporate services team.



## Section 17 Keeping you informed

Your right to information

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Our annual report on  
our service standards

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Our newsletter for tenants

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Data protection

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## Section 17

# Keeping you informed

### Your right to information

All information and documents we produce can be seen on request unless we have good, practical reasons for refusing, or if showing them would break someone's lawful right to privacy.

### Our annual report on our service standards

Our regulator, the Homes & Communities Agency, expects us to report our performance across a range of services so every year we publish a report on our activities and performance over the past year. The report also explains how we keep to national guidelines set for housing associations.

### Our newsletter for tenants

We send *Pioneer Press* to all tenants and leaseholders four times a year.

The newsletter contains news, interviews and information on services and current

or planned activities. We allocate some pages to tenant groups so they can communicate with you and update you on matters that might interest you.

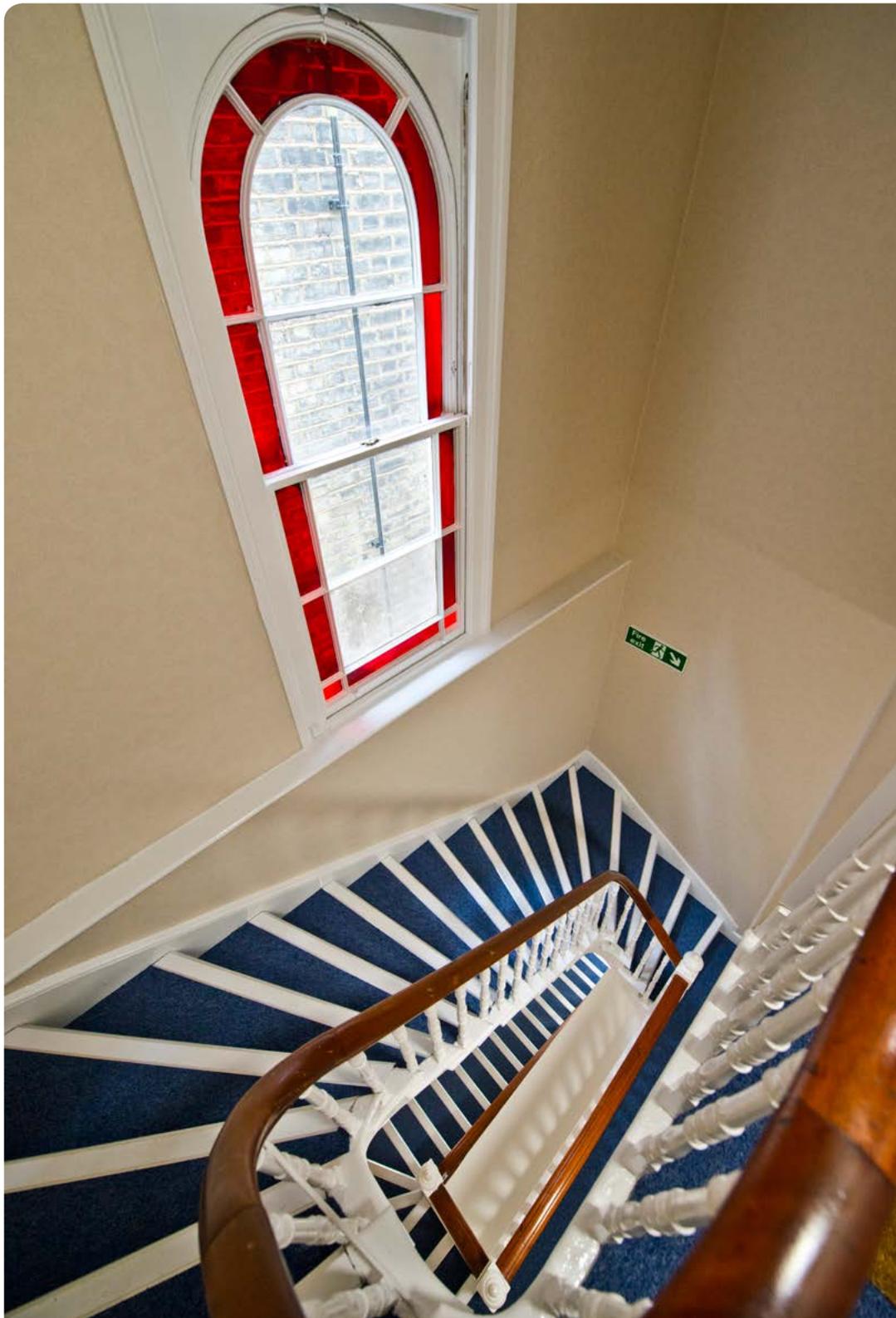
We will sometimes use the newsletter to consult you on policies or services that we think need to change.

### Data protection

Under the Data Protection Act 1984 you have the right to see certain information we hold on you on our computer system.

You are also allowed to see other personal information we hold on you or members of your family unless it has been given to us in confidence by someone else.

If you disagree with any of this information, you have the right to correct it or have us note your disagreement on our records. Please contact your housing officer if you wish to see this information.



## Section 18 Putting a problem right

Steps to take if you are  
unhappy with a policy

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Making a complaint  
about our service

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Questioning your  
service charges

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Treating you fairly

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## Section 18

# Putting a problem right

We try hard to provide you with the best service we can. But on occasion our service may slip up or we may have to refuse a request because it clashes with a policy or the law says we cannot do what you have asked. Sometimes there is simply not enough money in the budget.

This section set outs what we can or cannot do to help if you have a serious problem with a matter affecting your security or tenancy. It also explains what to do if you are unhappy with our service or with a decision affecting your home.

### Steps to take if you are unhappy with a policy

We are happy to listen to any criticism you have of our policies. We will try to explain how the policy was drawn up. We will also make sure your comments are considered when our board next reviews that policy.

### Making a complaint about our service

We have a three-stage procedure for dealing with complaints about our service. The system aims to sort out your complaint quickly and simply.

The system works in stages so if your complaint cannot be sorted out by the first person you raise it with it will go to a more senior person and so on.

If you are still unhappy with our response at the final stage, you can ask your MP or local councillor/s to act as a designated person to try to resolve the complaint.

### The independent housing ombudsman

If you have gone through all the stages of our complaints procedure and you are still not happy with our response, you can take your complaint up with the independent ombudsman service.

Independent Housing Ombudsman,  
Norman House, 105-109 The Strand,  
London WC2R 0AA. ☎ 0845 712 5973  
[www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

### Questioning your service charges

Your tenancy agreement sets out the services provided to your property. Service charges should be fair and reasonable.

If you believe your service charges are wrong or that you are being charged for a service you are not liable for under your tenancy agreement you should first raise it with us.

If you find you are unable to resolve the matter with us you can ask the First Tier Tribunal (FTT) of the Property Chamber to determine on your behalf whether or not you are liable to pay the disputed service charge.

You can ask the FTT to make a determination before or after you have paid the service charge. You can also ask the FTT to determine whether your tenancy agreement should be varied on the grounds that it does not have the correct provision for calculating and recovering the service charge.

If you apply to the FTT you will have to pay an application fee and may have to pay an extra fee if your case goes to an oral hearing. You may also have to pay legal costs, including any we run up, if the FTT rules against you. The FTT will always encourage both parties to resolve the dispute through mediation first.

### Treating you fairly

We are committed to treating fairly everyone who lives in one of our flats or uses our services.

If you believe we have discriminated against you on any of the following grounds, please get in touch with us so we can try to put matters right:

- your age
- a disability
- gender re-assignment
- marriage or civil partnership
- pregnancy or maternity
- race
- religion or religious beliefs
- sex or sexual orientation.

For help or advice, contact the Equality and Human Rights Commission at [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)



## Section 19 Moving out

Giving us advance notice

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Telling your power, phone,  
broadband and water suppliers

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Cancelling your council tax

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Forwarding your post

---

Final inspection of your home

---

Handing back your keys

---

Removing your belongings

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## Section 19

# Moving out

### Giving us advance notice

Your tenancy agreement will tell you how much advance notice you need to give us if you want to give up your tenancy. For most of you it is four weeks. If you move out without giving us the required amount of notice we will carry on charging you rent for that amount of time.

### Telling your power, phone, broadband and water suppliers

Make sure you take readings from your gas, electricity and water meters and give these to your suppliers. Also give them your new address. Please turn off all the supplies when you leave. If you aren't sure how to do this, please contact us.

You will also need to tell your landline (if you have one) and broadband providers that you will be moving.

### Cancelling your council tax

You will need to tell your local council you are moving so it can charge you the right amount of council tax. It will also want to know your new address.

### Forwarding your post

Contact the Royal Mail to arrange to have your post forwarded to your new address. It will take five working days to start working, from the date the Royal Mail gets your form. [www.royalmail.com/personal/receiving-mail/redirection](http://www.royalmail.com/personal/receiving-mail/redirection)

### Final inspection of your home

We will need to have a look at your home before you move out. We will let you know if there are any outstanding repairs that you'll need to have done before you leave. If you aren't able to let us in to inspect your flat and we later find that repairs were needed that you should have had done we will send you the bill for any work we had to get done.

### Handing back your keys

You must return to us all the keys we gave you at the start of the tenancy, including any for window locks, sheds, and any you have been supplied with or have had cut since. If you don't hand them back, we will bill you for the cost of changing any locks and will carry on charging you rent until the locks have been changed.

### Removing your belongings

You need to leave the property clean and tidy and take all your personal belongings with you when you leave. We will have to bill you for the cost of removing anything you leave behind.



## Section 20 Council contact numbers



## Section 20

### Council contact details

	Phone	Website	Address
Camden	☎ 020 7974 4444	<a href="http://www.camden.gov.uk">www.camden.gov.uk</a>	Camden Town Hall Judd St London WC1H 9JE
Ealing	☎ 020 8825 5000	<a href="http://www.ealing.gov.uk">www.ealing.gov.uk</a>	Perceval House 14/16 Uxbridge Rd London W5 2HL
Harrow	☎ 020 8863 5611	<a href="http://www.harrow.gov.uk">www.harrow.gov.uk</a>	Civic Centre Harrow Station Rd HA1 2XY
Hillingdon	☎ 01895 250 111	<a href="http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk">www.hillingdon.gov.uk</a>	Civic Centre High St Uxbridge UB8 1UW
Hammersmith and Fulham	☎ 020 8748 3020	<a href="http://www.lbhf.gov.uk">www.lbhf.gov.uk</a>	Town Hall King St London W6 9JU
Kensington and Chelsea	☎ 020 7361 3000	<a href="http://www.rbkc.gov.uk">www.rbkc.gov.uk</a>	Town Hall, Hornton St London W8 7NX
Wandsworth	☎ 020 8871 6000	<a href="http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk">www.wandsworth.gov.uk</a>	Town Hall Wandsworth High St London SW18 2PU
Westminster	☎ 020 7641 6000	<a href="http://www.westminster.gov.uk">www.westminster.gov.uk</a>	City Hall 64 Victoria St London SW1E 6QP

## Head office

227 Wood Lane, White City  
London W12 0EX

## Email

[info@womenspioneer.co.uk](mailto:info@womenspioneer.co.uk)

## Website

[www.womenspioneer.co.uk](http://www.womenspioneer.co.uk)

## Phones

main switchboard:  020 8749 7112

repairs hotline:  020 8743 4422

fax:  020 8749 9843