



home
group



**Your rented
home handbook**

A guide to living in your
Home Group home

England version

Living in your Home Group home



At Home Group, customers and communities really are at the heart of everything we do. We're a social enterprise and a charity, and one of the UK's largest providers of high quality homes and integrated housing, health and social care.

This guide will give you important details about your home, tenancy and responsibilities while living with us, as well as handy tips on how to look after and stay safe in your home.

Remember if you have any questions or concerns, we're here to help. From maintenance and health and safety, to housing management and financial inclusion - we have trained teams across the UK, and all our colleagues work together to help us keep our customer promise to you.

We hope you have many happy years with us and enjoy your home!

Contents

3	Customer promise
4	Contacting us
6	Your tenancy
8	Your rent and service charges
9	Ways to pay
10	Financial inclusion team
12	Repairs
18	Making changes to your home
20	Staying safe
26	Living in your neighbourhood
28	Getting involved
26	Moving on

We promise...

Our customer promise makes sure that you can hold us to account on the things that matter most to you. We worked with almost 300 customers to create it.



...to provide a safe place to live

- We'll guarantee your home meets all fire safety standards and contains a working smoke alarm
- We'll make sure gas and electric safety checks are carried out in the required timeframe - it's your responsibility to allow us access to carry out these checks
- We'll make sure your home is secure and all external doors fully meet the relevant British Standards



...to deliver a reliable repairs service

- We'll aim to attend emergency repairs in six hours and make sure any damage is made safe
- We'll aim to resolve all standard repairs in 14 days
- We'll keep you updated on the status of your repairs and maintenance work and share all relevant information



...to care about you

- We'll make our complaints process easy to access and simple to understand
- We'll make sure our colleagues have the relevant up to date skills and training
- We'll recruit caring colleagues who understand their customers' individual needs and can offer the support needed



...to help communities grow

- We'll make local investment to support communities to thrive
- We'll carry out inspections to make sure your neighbourhood or service is clean and tidy
- We'll take strong action where anti-social behaviour happens and work closely with partners to tackle incidents



...to tell you where your money goes

- We'll tell you how your rent and service charges are calculated each year
- We'll tell you how and why we make decisions on large projects and spend from head office
- We'll tell you how and why we spend money on your home and community



...to work together with customers and partners

- We'll help you contact agencies who can offer specialist advice, such as the police, charities and your council
- We'll work with partner organisations to offer you full support
- We'll work with you to receive feedback and improve our services

Contacting us



If you have a question or need to chat to us about anything, there's lots of ways you can get in touch:

- Speak to us on live chat at homegroup.org.uk
- Email us at contactus@homegroup.org.uk
- Speak to your **housing manager**
- Call our customer service centre on **0345 141 4663**

Our customer service centre is open:

Monday-Friday: 7am-8pm

Saturday: 8am-12noon

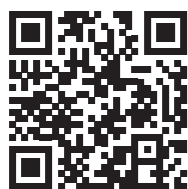
Emergency repairs can be reported at any time and calls are charged at local rate.

Using the Home Group website

Safe and secure to use, our website homegroup.org.uk makes it quick and easy to manage your home online and saves you having to pick up the phone.

You can use the Home Group website to:

- ✓ Live chat with us
- ✓ Report a repair
- ✓ Report anti-social behaviour
- ✓ Find answers and advice
- ✓ Sign up to **My Home Account** – where you can manage your details, payments and repairs all in one place



Scan me to visit the Home Group website

Signing up to My Home Account is quick and easy

1. Get your email address and customer reference number or postcode ready
2. Visit myaccount.homegroup.org.uk using your laptop, tablet or phone
3. Sign up and join over 20,000 customers already using My Home Account!

On My Home Account you can:

- ✓ Check the status of your repair
- ✓ View your payment history and account balance
- ✓ Make secure card payments
- ✓ Set up and manage regular payments with a direct debit
- ✓ Message us

Contact us if you need any part of this document to be translated, or would like an audio or large print version.

"We're really proud to employ customers at Home Group and in addition, we have an active apprenticeship programme especially for customers. To make sure these customers are able to be part of your community, we take steps to make sure they have strong boundaries and have a good understanding of confidentiality. We hope you'll be welcoming to Home Group colleagues and will respect their work life balance."

Claire, head of customer engagement



Your tenancy

Before you move into a Home Group home, you sign something called a tenancy agreement.

Your tenancy agreement is a legal document that explains Home Group's responsibilities as a landlord, what services we'll provide and what all of your rights and responsibilities as a customer are – please keep it safe.

What are the different tenancy types?

Starter tenancy – this is more of a trial or 'probationary' tenancy, it's very much like an assured customer tenancy but we could choose to end the tenancy without having to go to court – don't worry though, we'd only do that as a last resort if you break the terms of your tenancy agreement. If you stick to the terms, then your agreement gets changed to a full assured tenancy after 12 months.

Assured and secure tenancy – this type of tenancy is pretty much permanent as long as you live in your property as your main home, keep to the terms of your tenancy agreement and pay your rent on time – secure tenancies aren't offered to new customers.

Joint tenancy – if more than one person signs the agreement then this is called a joint tenancy – you now both have equal rights and responsibilities for the property

(for example, if one person fails to pay the rent and moves out, the person left behind is still responsible for the debt). Please note any court action can still be taken against both customers, as in a joint tenancy both customers who signed the agreement are liable for the bills including rent arrears.

Equitable tenancy – This means your tenancy is held 'in trust' until you turn 18, then you'll change onto a different agreement, like the ones listed above, after your 18th birthday.

Fixed term tenancy – in some areas, we can offer what's called a fixed term tenancy – these are just for new customers and last for a minimum of five years, as long as you keep to the terms of your agreement. After five years, we generally just renew the agreement. We'd only have to ask you to leave if your home if it's no longer suitable because there's been a significant change in your circumstances since you first moved in (for example, a smaller home might now be a better fit for you).

Assured shorthold tenancy – this is the most common type of tenancy if you rent from a private landlord or letting agent in England.

What happens if I breach my tenancy agreement?

A breach is doing anything that goes against what you've agreed to do in the tenancy agreement. If you do break the agreement we might be forced to take legal action and you run the risk of being evicted from your home. This is an absolute last resort and we'll always make every effort to work with you to resolve the situation before this stage.

Luckily, it's very rare that anything like this happens. We think our policies are fair and would rather help our customers than see them in any trouble. If you're worried in any way that you might be about to breach your agreement, please contact us and one of our team will be happy to have a chat with you (you can find out the different ways to contact us on **page 4**).

"We'll be doing our best to make sure you have a brilliant experience with Home Group, but from time to time, things might not go to plan. We're really keen to sort out any problems so we want to hear about your complaints. You can find out more about our complaints policy at homegroup.org.uk/complaints but to keep it simple, you can make a complaint by ringing our customer service centre on **0345 141 4663**. Our complaints team will log your complaint and will find the best person to help you resolve it."

Claire, head of customer engagement

What if Home Group doesn't meet my expectations?

If you're not happy with something we've done or don't think we're living up to our customer promise, you can get in touch to give us some feedback or make a complaint. You can find out more about our complaints process at homegroup.org.uk/complaints

Your rent and service charges

The money we get from rent payments is used to fund the services we provide. Without it, we can't do what we do. So for us to be able to keep helping people, it's really important that we get rent charges right.

We reinvest the rent that you pay by delivering on our customer promise, supporting our communities and maintaining and improving our homes.

Your rent will be charged be either weekly or monthly and is reviewed on an annual basis.

How will I find out about changes to my rent?

Don't worry, we'll always send you a letter before any changes happen so you have plenty of time to prepare.

We're legally required to tell you if your rent is going to increase, but we'll also send you a letter if it reduces too; just so you're always kept up to date.

Your new rent amount and how it's been worked out will be explained in the letter you receive.

Service charges

You might need to pay towards other services as part of your rent payment. This is called a service charge and will cover the cost of the services we provide to help keep your home and surrounding area in tip top condition.

Your tenancy agreement will tell you what exactly your service charge will cover, but in general it might include:

- Gardening and grass cutting in communal (shared) gardens
- Cleaning communal (shared) areas, stairs and car parks
- Lighting communal (shared) areas
- Maintaining door entry systems and other safety features
- Window cleaning in communal (shared) areas
- Maintaining communal (shared) lifts so they're clean and working properly
- Litter picking in the communal (shared) areas or outside
- A management fee (to cover the cost of administering the services provided)

We review your service charge every year. If the amount you pay changes, we'll always send you a letter to let you know first.



Ways to pay

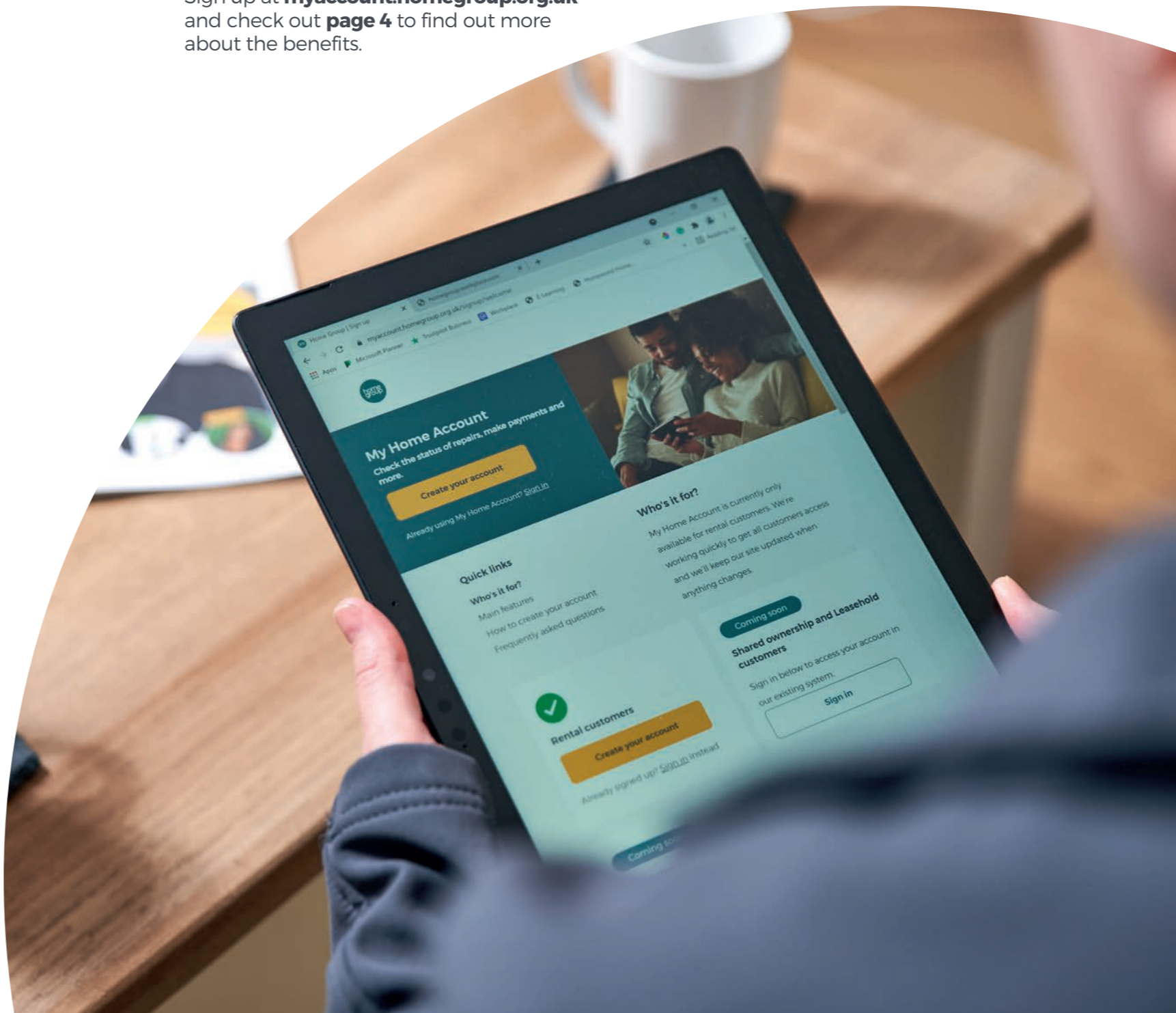
The quickest and easiest way to make a payment is online by signing up to My Home Account, our safe and secure digital account system.

On My Home Account you can:

- ✓ View your payment history and account balance
- ✓ Set up and manage regular payments with a direct debit
- ✓ Make secure card payments

Sign up at myaccount.homegroup.org.uk and check out **page 4** to find out more about the benefits.

You can also make a payment over the phone, by calling our customer service centre on **0345 141 4663**.



We're here to help

If you're struggling with money, we're here to help you get back on track. Our **financial inclusion team** can give customers free, one to one support on all money matters.

They support **thousands** of customers each year, and can give you info tailored to your circumstances. They can provide expert advice on:

- ✓ Claiming benefits
- ✓ Budgeting and saving
- ✓ Filling in forms
- ✓ Universal Credit journal updates
- ✓ Looking for a new job

You can have a one off chat with them or arrange regular catch ups to help keep on top of things.

There are lots of ways you can ask for a referral to the financial inclusion team:

- Speak to your **housing manager**
- Speak to us on live chat at **homegroup.org.uk**
- Call our customer service centre on **0345 141 4663**

"Michelle is absolutely wonderful. She began fighting for us immediately, filled out the paperwork and kept pushing until we got results. Without her, we would have been homeless. We honestly can't say enough good things about Michelle, she's been amazing - she's a Home Group customer too and just completely understands our situation and has provided great support both financially and emotionally."

Home Group customer

On average, the financial inclusion team help customers increase their income by £744 a year.

"I spoke with Kevin, one of the financial inclusion workers and what a positive experience it was. He was polite and well mannered throughout and had a real sense of genuine compassion. Well recommended to anyone with money struggles."

Home Group customer

"Joshua has been nothing but amazing! He has been so understanding and supportive in my situation and really helped with great advice. Thank you Joshua!"

Home Group customer



Other organisations that could help

As well as the financial inclusion team here at Home Group, there are lots of other places where you can find support and guidance if you're worried about money.

Connect for Help

They offer free energy and money saving advice in England. They can also give you guidance if your home has been fitted with an air source heat pump or solar panels.

Phone: **0800 029 4548**
connectforhelp.org.uk

Citizens Advice

They help people with a range of issues, including money worries, by providing free, independent and confidential advice.

Phone: **0800 144 8848**
citizensadvice.org.uk

MoneyHelper

Set up by the government, they help you manage your money better by giving free, unbiased money advice.

moneyhelper.org.uk

Repairs

Over the course of your tenancy, repairs may need to be made in your home. To make sure your repair is dealt with as quickly and smoothly as possible, it's important you know if the repair is our responsibility or yours.

Here you can see examples of repair responsibilities, but always remember to check your **tenancy agreement** for full details.

Our and your responsibilities

Electrical

Home Group's responsibilities:

- Electrical wiring
- Fuse boxes
- Fuses in circuit breakers and fused spurs
- Wall sockets
- Washing machine fittings provided by us

What are my responsibilities:

- For your safety, electrical repairs must always be carried out by someone qualified to do so
- Domestic appliances such as cookers, freezers, fridges and washing machines (unless provided by Home Group and specifically referenced in your tenancy agreements)
- Replacing light bulbs
- TV aerials (this might be different if it's in a communal area)
- TV and telephone outlet points

Plumbing and heating

Home Group's responsibilities:

- Banging pipes
- Chimney and flues
- Chimney sweeping
- Coal bunker if you have solid-fuel heating
- Domestic cold-water supply
- Electric storage system
- Electric warm-air system
- Fireplace tiles
- Gas-fired system with radiators
- Gas-fired warm-air system
- Smoke detectors
- Solid-fuel system
- Tiles loose or broken around the fire

Bathroom

Home Group's responsibilities:

- Baths and showers
- Sinks
- Some fixtures and fittings
- Taps
- Tiles fitted by us
- Toilet

What are my responsibilities:

- Bath and sink plugs or chains
- Clearing blockages caused by misuse to baths, sinks and basins
- Shower curtains or rails
- Toilet roll holders
- Toilet seats

Kitchen

Home Group's responsibilities:

- Cooker sockets
- Drawers
- Electric cookers provided by us
- Extractor fans
- Kitchen units fitted by us
- Plinths
- Sink bowls and drainers
- Tiled splashbacks fitted by us
- Worktops
- Units

Windows and doors

Home Group's responsibilities:

- All locks fitted by us
- Door chains fitted by us
- Door entry systems
- Doorbells fitted by us
- External doors
- Handles and latches to internal doors
- Internal doors
- Replacing glass in doors and screens caused by criminal damage
- Window frames and fittings

What are my responsibilities:

- Curtain tracks or battens
- Doorbells and alarms (if installed by you)
- Hasps, padlocks or door locks (if installed by you)
- Internal doors, finishes and fittings damaged by misuse or neglect
- Replacing glass in doors and screens (unless due to criminal damage)
- Replacing or cutting new door keys
- Wilful property damage

You can find more answers and advice about repairs on our website at homegroup.org.uk/repairs



Structural

Home Group's responsibilities:

- Ceilings
- Damp-proof course
- Floors
- Skirting boards
- Stairs
- Walls
- Brickwork
- Chimneys
- Flashing
- Handrails
- Render
- Roof
- Balustrade

What are my responsibilities:

- Minor plastering to repair a small crack

Garden

Home Group's responsibilities:

- Brick and concrete sheds provided by us
- CCTV
- Downpipes (rain and soil)
- Fences between gardens (in Home Group's ownership)
- Footpaths
- Gates
- Graffiti
- Gutters
- Loose or missing flashing
- Manholes and drains
- Outside decoration
- Outside woodwork
- Posts and wires that are boundaries (in Home Group's ownership)
- Steps to entrances
- Trees in communal areas not adopted by a local authority

What are my responsibilities:

- Cutting grass, hedges or shrubs within your property
- Sheds
- Trees within your garden
- Washing lines or rotary dryers

General

Home Group's responsibilities:

- Ceiling hatch
- Communal lighting
- Emergency lighting
- Entry phones
- Fire extinguishers
- Gas appliances
- Lifts
- Refuse chutes

What are my responsibilities:

- Cleaning and replacing carpets and flooring
- Door furniture including cupboard doors (if installed by you)
- Floor tiles and floor finishes
- Rubbish disposal
- Wardrobes

Did you know?

We have repairs advice and handy how to guides on our website, this includes:

- ✓ How to look after a boiler
- ✓ How to deal with frozen pipes
- ✓ How to prevent condensation and mould
- ✓ How to bleed a radiator
- ✓ How to fix a dripping tap

Take a look at homegroup.org.uk/diy

Home safety checks

Aside from when you've reported a repair, there are a few other reasons why we might need to access your home:

- **Safety checks** – routine gas and electrical safety checks are a legal requirement
- **Maintenance surveys** – these are used to check if we need to make any improvements to your home
- **Settling in visits** – your housing manager might check in to see how you're finding your home when you first move in

You should always receive notice from us if we do need to access your home, and we'll always try our best to arrange an appointment time that suits you – if you're not sure why a repairs contractor or Home Group colleague is at your home though, give us a call on **0345 141 4663**.

Insurance

Home Group organises buildings insurance which covers the cost of repairing damage to the structure of your home. Home Group doesn't insure any items belonging to you or any damage caused to the property by you (accidental or not). You should protect the contents of your home by taking out a home contents insurance policy.

Remember all our repairs contractors and Home Group colleagues carry ID, so please do ask to see this before letting someone into your home.



What is an emergency repair?

An emergency repair is something that poses an immediate risk to your health, safety or security. Some examples of emergency repairs include:

- Total loss of electricity, water or gas
- Partial loss of power, such as no lights or no drinking water
- A serious plumbing or gas leak
- A serious roof leak or major structural failure
- Your heating breaks down in winter or a member of your household is elderly, disabled, chronically sick or you have children under the age of five
- Your hot water stops working and a member of your household's health relies on regular bathing or you have children under the age of five
- You only have one toilet and you can't use it
- You need to secure your home following an incident of racial harassment, fire, domestic violence, police activity or if the property becomes empty
- Any other repair that puts you or others around you in danger

Always report emergency repairs by phone so we can help you more quickly.



How do I report a repair?

You can report a repair to us:

- Online at homegroup.org.uk/repairs
- On the phone by calling **0345 141 4663**

Our repairs partners should attend your home within **six hours** to assess an emergency repair and will aim to complete the repair within **24 hours**. Our repairs partners aim to complete routine, non-emergency repairs in **14 days**.

You can also check the status of any repair you report on **My Home Account**, which you can sign up for at myaccount.homegroup.org.uk

If your repair is not an emergency, please don't exaggerate your repair to get a quicker response. If you do, we might have to charge you for the cost of an emergency call out.

Making changes to your home

We all want our house to feel like a home and sometimes that means putting your own stamp on things.

Can I make changes to my home?

In most cases we'll be happy for you to paint, decorate and do some minor DIY in your home, but you'll need to check with us first before you start any work. Your tenancy agreement can give you an idea of whether home improvements are usually allowed in your property.

Once you contact us and have asked for our permission, we'll come back to you within six weeks, sometimes sooner. If we think we'll need a little longer to assess your application and make a decision then we'll send an interim reply during that time.

Please don't start any work on your home until we've said yes. If you do, you might put your tenancy at risk or we may have to recharge you for any repairs to reverse the work. If we give permission, we will usually expect any works to be completed within 12 weeks – please talk to us if you think the work might take longer.

If we say no, we'll always give a reason why. If you're unhappy with our decision you'll have the opportunity to appeal.

Please note, we don't normally allow changes to be made in communal (shared) areas.



You can find more answers and advice about making changes to your home on our website homegroup.org.uk



Can I have a home adaptation?

We want you to be able to enjoy your home and live comfortably. If you find it difficult to access parts of your home, we may be able to help make things easier for you.

Before you request aids or adaptations to your home, you should first contact the social care team at your **local authority**. They'll be able to help you work out which aid or adaptation would be best suited to your needs. The social care team will also be able to advise whether you need to be assessed by an occupational therapist. Occupational therapy assessments are provided free of charge.

Once an assessment has been carried out, the occupational therapist may contact Home Group directly to request the adaptation. If not, you or a family member should contact us to make the request. Remember if you receive a reference code from your local authority you should let us know – we may use it if there's anything we need to clarify with them at a later date.

While we'll always do our very best to provide the right aids and adaptations for you, there might be times when we can't help. This could be due to costs or the specialist nature of any equipment you need. But don't worry, if we can't help for any reason we can discuss your housing options with you or point you in the direction of other organisations that could help.

If you live in England, we might be able to fit some minor adaptations in your home, such as grab rails or lever taps without the need for a full occupational therapy assessment. However, all major adaptations will need to be supported by an occupational therapist.

Staying safe

Keeping you safe is our top priority. But there are lots of things you can do to protect yourself, your family and your home too.



Fire safety

It's really important that we all have a fire safety plan and make sure everyone in our homes knows what to do should a fire breakout. We've pulled together some helpful reminders and tips to help keep you safe.

In the kitchen

- ✓ Always test your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors once a week to make sure they're working
- ✓ Keep cooking areas clear from flammable items like tea towels, oven gloves and food packaging
- ✓ Never leave pans unattended while cooking and avoid using chip pans
- ✓ Clean your oven and grill regularly – a build up of fat and grease could cause a fire
- ✓ Remember to close your kitchen door if you're going out or off to bed; if a kitchen fire breaks out this can help buy you valuable escape time

Overloading sockets

- ✓ Overloading a plug socket can also cause fires
- ✓ Check your electrical appliances are in good working order – if the wires are damaged or frayed don't use them
- ✓ It's advisable to unplug all items before you go out or go to bed
- ✓ Never overload plug sockets or plug one extension lead into another – remember appliances like washing machines should have a single plug to themselves as they're high powered

Glass ornaments and mirrors

- ✓ Think about where you are putting glass ornaments and mirrors – if they're on windowsills and where they can catch the sun they could cause fires – especially if they're next to windows and curtains

Candles and incense burners

- ✓ We recommend not to use candles in your home – but if you do, never leave burning candles unattended, keep them away from flammable objects and always put them out before going to bed
- ✓ Using candle holders and making sure the candle fits firmly inside to reduce the risk of them falling
- ✓ Keep them away from draughts, curtains, furniture, and anything else that can catch fire
- ✓ Lit candles of any sort on top of televisions or other plastic surfaces could burn through
- ✓ Keep candles out of the reach of children and pets
- ✓ Never move a candle once it is lit. Use a low watt mains or battery lights for children rather than candles
- ✓ Remember to blow out candles when leaving a room or going to bed

Other areas

- ✓ Never leave washing machines, tumble dryers or dishwashers running overnight
- ✓ Remember heaters should be kept well away from clothes, curtains, furniture and other flammable materials – make sure they're switched off and unplugged before you go to bed
- ✓ Never use heaters to dry clothes
- ✓ Never use a BBQ indoors or on a balcony

Smoking in your home

- ✓ Our general advice is not to smoke in your home, but if you do, always check it's fully extinguished before leaving it
- ✓ Never smoke in bed – take extra care if you smoke when tired, taking prescription drugs that make you feel drowsy, or have been drinking
- ✓ If you smoke, always use a proper ashtray that can't tip over
- ✓ Be careful if you use emollient creams – they can soak into clothing, bedding and dressings leaving a flammable residue
- ✓ Cigarettes, cigars or pipes should not be left unattended – they can easily overbalance as they burn down

Checks to carry out before you go to bed

- ✓ Closing all doors helps to prevent fire spreading
- ✓ Switching off and unplugging electrical items such as TVs and avoiding charging devices like mobile phones when you sleep are all precautions that help reduce the fire risk
- ✓ Make sure candles are out before you go to bed and check your cooker and heaters are turned off

Planning what to do if a fire breaks out in your home

Whether you live in a house, block of flats or shared accommodation, it's always helpful to have a plan or know what procedures to follow, in the event of a fire or an emergency. Make sure any children or elderly people also know what to do.

If you live in a flat, block or shared accommodation

- ✓ Be familiar with your fire procedure for your block/ flats as these may vary depending where you live
- ✓ Keep exits clear from clutter and obstructions
- ✓ Keep your door and window keys in a known and accessible place
- ✓ Think of a second escape route in case the first one is blocked
- ✓ If you have an emergency pendant, make sure you wear it and have it close by when you go to bed

In a lone property

- ✓ Plan an escape route and make sure everyone in the home knows this in the event of an emergency

Lots of local fire services offer free home visits where they'll advise on fire safety and fit smoke alarms free of charge. Get in touch with your local fire service to find out more. You can also find more fire safety guidance on the government's website [gov.uk/government/collections/fire-safety-guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-safety-guidance)

If a fire breaks out in your home, call 999 immediately

Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors

Home Group will supply you with a smoke alarm and check this periodically, however it's always a good idea to check weekly they are working or if the batteries need replacing.

If there's a problem with your alarm please call our customer service centre on **0345 141 4663**.



Gas safety

Anyone who has gas appliances in their home is at risk if those appliances don't work properly. If you notice anything odd about the gas appliances in your home and aren't sure what to do, please get in touch with us straight away on **0345 141 4663**.

By law, Home Group has to inspect the gas appliances in your home every single year - this is part of our service to you.

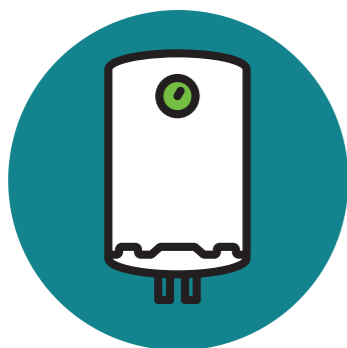
There are also steps you can take to keep your home as safe as possible:

- ✓ Make sure you know when your appliances were last checked by us - you should be given a copy of the Landlord's Gas Safety Record when you first moved in
- ✓ Allow us access to your home as soon as your annual gas safety check is due
- ✓ If you don't think you've had a gas check in the past year, please call us on **0345 141 4663**
- ✓ Try not to damage any of your gas appliances and only use them to do the jobs they're supposed to do

- ✓ Don't install or try to repair any gas appliances yourself - it's really important that only Gas Safe registered engineers work on your gas appliances, and remember Home Group need to give permission before you can make changes to your home
- ✓ Keep an eye out for any warning signs that your appliances aren't working as they should - a slow yellow flame, suddenly seeing lots more condensation on your windows and yellow or brown marking or staining on and around gas appliances can all be signs that there's something wrong - if you spot any of these, please call us straight away on **0345 141 4663**

What should I do if I have a gas leak?

- ✓ **Do** get everyone out of your home as quickly as you can
- ✓ **Do** call the gas emergency line immediately on **0800 111 999**
- ✓ **Do** turn the gas supply off straight away
- ✓ **Do** open all doors and windows
- ✓ **Do** make sure you get checked out by a doctor
- ✓ **Don't** smoke
- ✓ **Don't** turn electrical switches on or off - just leave everything as it is



Water safety

We want to keep your home safe and sound. One way you can help us to do this is by being aware of water safety in your home.

What is legionella?

Legionella bacteria is commonly found in many water sources. Hot and cold water systems in homes can be a potential source.

Legionella bacteria can cause a form of pneumonia called Legionnaires' disease, caused by the inhalation of small droplets of contaminated water. The bacteria doesn't spread in drinking water or person to person, and not everyone who comes into contact with the bacteria will become ill.

Symptoms of Legionnaires' are similar to the flu and include high temperature, fever and chills, cough, muscle pains and headache. If you're worried you might have Legionnaires' disease, you should contact your GP as soon as possible. If your doctor diagnoses Legionnaires' disease, please call us on **0345 141 4663** to let us know immediately so we can check and, if necessary, treat your water system.



What can I do to reduce the risk of legionella in my home?

To reduce the risk, it's really important that:

- ✓ Hot water in the system remains hot
- ✓ Cold water is kept cold
- ✓ The water in the system is circulated regularly

To help with this, there are a few simple steps you can take:

1. Your boiler or hot water system is set to heat water to 60°C. Please don't change this setting, as lower temperatures can provide better conditions for the bacteria to live and multiply. Beware of scalding at this temperature though, particularly if there are children in your home. And if you think your hot water isn't heating up correctly, please report a repair
 2. Use all your taps at least once a week - if you have taps which are used infrequently, it's important to let them run regularly to keep the water circulating in the system
 3. Keep shower heads, hoses and taps clean and free from limescale and mould by descaling them every three months
 4. If your property has been empty for a while, you should flush the whole water system on your return - keep out of the way while this is being done to avoid any droplets:
- ✓ Slow run all your taps for at least five minutes
 - ✓ Flush the toilet with the lid down
 - ✓ Run the shower for at least five minutes, using both hot and cold water

Electrical safety

As part of our service to you, we'll carry out a full electrical safety check in your home every five to ten years. But there are also things you can do to protect your home from the dangers of electricity.



The number one cause of electrical problems at home is the misuse of electrical equipment. Keep an eye on your appliances on a day to day basis and immediately stop using anything that looks damaged.

You don't need to be an electrician to do basic checks – checking the wires, keeping them away from water and not overloading sockets are simple things you can do in your home to keep things safe.

Follow our top tips to avoid dangers in your home:

- ✓ Turn off electrical appliances when you've finished using them
- ✓ Check cables – if anything looks worn or loose, don't use the item
- ✓ Don't let the leads from your kettle, toaster or other kitchen appliances trail across your cooker
- ✓ If you see burn marks, sparks or your sockets feel hot, call us on **0345 141 4663** straight away and don't use them until we've checked them over
- ✓ Test your smoke alarm on a regular basis, just in case there's an electrical fire
- ✓ Never use a bulb with a higher wattage than the light fitting says is safe
- ✓ Don't run the cables from your appliances under carpets or rugs
- ✓ Never overload your sockets or adapters by plugging too many appliances into one place
- ✓ Defrost your fridge and freezer at least once a year
- ✓ Don't leave your washing machine or tumble dryer on when you're out of the house or overnight
- ✓ Check that your microwaves, fridges and freezers have enough space around them
- ✓ Never use water to put out an electrical fire

Electrical safety checks

Depending on the age of your wiring, property type and how much use it's getting we'll carry out a full electrical safety check in your home about every five to ten years. We'll come round and make sure your wiring, fuse board and electrical system are all in safe, working condition.

How often we'll come out to do these checks depends on what type of home you live in. We keep a record of the last checks done and will get in touch to let you know when you're due the next one. Please help us to help you by making it easy for us to visit your home and complete our electrical safety checks as quickly as possible.

Register your appliances for added safety

For extra peace of mind, it's a good idea to register your electrical appliances with the manufacturer. This will allow you to check for product recalls or safety repairs.

Concerned about electrical safety in your home?

If you're worried about electrical safety in your home, or see burn marks, sparks or your sockets feel hot, call us on **0345 141 4663** as soon as possible. If you ever feel like there's an immediate risk to your safety call **999** straight away.

You can find even more electrical safety advice on the electrical safety council's website electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk

Condensation and mould

While condensation is usually nothing to worry about, it can sometimes lead to damp and mould growth if left for too long.

Here are a few simple tips you can use to reduce condensation and mould in your home:

- ✓ Opening a window in the morning can help get rid of moist air and help dry out damp
- ✓ Wipe windows and walls daily of condensation to help avoid mould
- ✓ If you do get mould, use a mould cleaning product to remove it
- ✓ Keep lids on pans when cooking – this will prevent steam escaping and save energy too
- ✓ Tumble dryers can cause a build up of condensation, try to vent them outside if you can
- ✓ Dry clothes outside when possible
- ✓ Set your heating to come on for longer at a lower temperature – this can help reduce condensation
- ✓ Use extractor fans if you have them in your bathroom or kitchen

Sometimes, dampness and mould can be caused by an issue with your property and we may need to carry out some maintenance. If you do see damp and mould and have tried the tips we've shared but it's not making a difference, please report it to us as a repair.

You can find more health and safety tips on our website at homegroup.org.uk/safety



Living in your neighbourhood



Here's some useful info to remember while living in your neighbourhood.

Anti-social behaviour

We describe anti-social behaviour as something that causes alarm, fear or distress to others. This could be a neighbour causing a lot of noise, to more serious situations such as criminal damage, threats or acts of violence. We know how we deal with anti-social behaviour is important – as part of our customer promise, we've put together these commitments:

- We acknowledge reports of anti-social behaviour within one working day
- We prioritise reports of anti-social behaviour based on an assessment of risk our timescales are:
 - Personal – one working day
 - Nuisance – three working days
 - Environmental – ten working days
- We will agree an action plan with you once we have assessed your case and keep you up to date in a way that suits you
- We commit to using the appropriate legal powers available to us to help tackle anti-social behaviour
- We make sure our colleagues are appropriately trained so that the service you receive from us is the best it can be
- We continually look for ways to prevent anti-social behaviour from occurring in the first place
- We take steps to support anyone experiencing anti-social behaviour – this may include working with other organisations to help improve your quality of life – such as the police or your local authority

Anti-social behaviour definitions

- **Definition of personal:** either deliberately targeted at an individual or group or having an impact on an individual or group rather than the community at large.
- **Definition of nuisance:** where the behaviour affects the local community in general rather than individual victims.
- **Definition of environmental:** where the effects of anti-social behaviour have an impact on the natural, built and social environment.

How can I report anti-social behaviour to Home Group?

- Tell your **housing manager**
- Call us on **0345 141 4663**
- Report it online at **homegroup.org.uk/asb**

If it's out of hours and not an emergency, you can also report the incident to the police by calling **101**. Or if you think there's an immediate risk to your own or someone else's safety always call **999**.

Remember you're responsible for the behaviour of your pets, friends, family and visitors to your home.



Waste

It's your responsibility to properly dispose of your household waste. Remember household waste and recycling services can vary depending on where you live, and you should get in touch with your local authority to find out more about your local collection services.

Disposal of larger items, such as unwanted furniture, is also your responsibility and should be arranged separately – either by visiting the local refuse or recycling centre, or by arranging for your local authority to collect them.

If you don't dispose of larger items or household waste correctly, the local authority may not collect your bins. If you leave any larger items in communal bin stores, directly outside your home or fly tip in other areas, Home Group may also need to recharge you the cost of the waste disposal through your rent account.

Parking

Car parking in your area might be restricted unless your home has its own driveway – remember you can't guarantee a parking space unless one is specifically detailed in your tenancy agreement.

Please don't park commercial or heavy trade vehicles, caravans or boats in the parking areas or on the roads. In extreme cases, where parked or abandoned cars cause a nuisance, we might need to work with your local authority and the police or take legal action against the person responsible. This could lead to this person losing their vehicle or even their home.

Pests

If you have a problem with pests in your home, you can get in touch with us and we'll ask you a few questions to help work out whose responsibility it is and what the next steps are.

If the responsibility is yours, we'll tell you who you need to contact to deal with the infestation. You might need to get in touch with your local authority, who can also advise on how to deal with the problem.

If the pest infestation is in a communal area or has happened because of a structural problem in your home, such as gaps or cracks in the wall or floors, then it's the Home Group's responsibility to fix it.

How can I prevent a pest infestation?

There are some simple things you can do to keep unwanted visitors like mice, rats, ants and wasps at bay:

- ✓ Don't leave food or rubbish out
- ✓ Keep your bin lids shut
- ✓ Store your food in sealed containers
- ✓ Regularly check your pets for fleas
- ✓ Keep your home clean and tidy, especially the kitchen
- ✓ Vacuum your mattresses regularly

What if I'm not happy with the condition of my neighbourhood?

If you're not happy with the condition of your neighbourhood there are different ways you can report this:

- If the area you're not happy with is owned by Home Group you can tell a colleague, report it to us on our website **homegroup.org.uk** or call our customer service centre on **0345 141 4663**
- If the area you're not happy with isn't owned by Home Group you'll need to contact your **local authority** (remember they'll also be able to help with removal of bulky rubbish or fly tipping in outdoor areas)

Getting involved

There are lots of ways to have your say and help us improve.

When you get involved you also meet new people, use your skills and learn new ones too. Activities fit around your work and home life, and we'll cover your out of pocket expenses and provide training where needed.



What can I get involved with?

Whatever time you have, from 10 minutes to a whole day there are lots of opportunities to get involved and make a difference:

Viewpoint teams

You can scrutinise our performance in rented, supported and leasehold services by joining one of our regional viewpoint teams across England and Scotland.

Customer assessor teams

You can visit our services and neighbourhoods and talk to the customers who live there to measure how well we're doing at delivering our customer promise.

Independent complaints panel

You can review and make recommendations to resolve complaints that have exhausted our complaints process.

Complaints scrutiny group

You can review our complaints performance and make sure we learn and improve from them.

Equality and diversity

You can raise awareness and challenge stereotypes and stigma by sharing personal stories and experiences at life swap and role model sessions; advise us on diversity issues and help with equality analysis and training.

Training

You can help us deliver training to colleagues, other customers and stakeholders.

anyone@home

You can join our digital customer group by email or via the website and give your views and opinions on a range of issues from the comfort of your own home anytime, day or night.

Public affairs

You can represent Home Group at conferences and other internal and external events.

What happened here?

You can review health and safety, anti-social behaviour and serious incidents and advise how we could have dealt with them better and avoid them in future.

Keep it short and simple group

Keep it short and simple (KISS) looks at and changes customer-facing documents using our KISS standards or you can join our virtual KISS group and change documents by email.

Recruitment

Help us recruit new colleagues in ways that work for you.

Design and development

Help shape regeneration and the design and development of new schemes and communities.

"I really enjoy getting involved, especially doing promise assessments and I get the right support to do it, which is really important to me."

Diane, Home Group customer

"Being involved helps me keep active and I get great satisfaction from helping others."

Pam, Home Group customer

To find out more about getting involved, visit homegroup.org.uk/getinvolved

Moving on

We know there’s lots of different reasons why you might want to move out of your home and we’re here to support you through the process of ending your tenancy.

I want to move out, what do I need to do?

If you decide you want to move out, you’ll need to get in touch with us first and complete some paperwork – this is called **giving notice**. We can’t officially accept it until we’ve received your notice in writing – please speak to your housing manager to request a notice of termination of tenancy form to complete.

How much notice is needed at the end of my tenancy?

If you’re on a weekly tenancy, we need at least four weeks’ written notice. If you’re on a monthly contract tenancy, we need at least one month’s written notice. You’ll find the amount of notice you need to give in the tenancy agreement you signed when you moved in.

Can I end my tenancy early?

If you want to move out earlier than your notice period, you’ll need to speak to us (you can find out the different ways to contact us on **page 4**). You have a right to feel happy and safe in your home and if you want to move out quickly we’d like to help where we can. We’ll discuss the circumstances with you, though in most cases you’ll need to give the same notice as per your tenancy agreement.

Are there any rules I need to follow when moving out?

- Make sure all of your utility bills are paid up to date and that you’ve told your suppliers the date that you’re moving
- Don’t forget to give us all copies of your keys – if you don’t, we’ll probably have to charge you for the cost of changing the locks, or we might even have to keep charging you rent until we have them back
- Leave your home in a tidy, empty and clean condition – everything should be put back to the way it was when you moved in, we’ll have been out to visit you to check if there are any repairs that need to be finished before you move out too, so please make sure they’re all done
- If we have to do any repairs which should’ve been your responsibility, we’ll have to charge you for the work
- If you’ve made improvements to your home with our permission, you may be entitled to some money back if you haven’t already claimed for this – please check with us if you’re not sure
- We’ll need you to leave us a forwarding address in case we need to send you anything or contact you in the future
- We’ll probably need to show some new people around your home while you’re still there, so we can let someone else move in when you leave – don’t worry, we’ll always be there to show them around and we’ll always pick a time that works for you
- Your rent still needs to be paid in full until the very end of your tenancy because the property is still yours until the end of the notice period – this does mean that if you suddenly stop paying, even if you’re leaving soon, we still might have to take legal action (if you leave and owe us money, other housing providers might not give you a home in the future too, but we’ll always try to work with you to avoid any action being taken)

Notes

Add any more useful details about your home here.



Contact us if you need any part of this document to be translated, or would like an audio or large print version.

**Afghani
(Pushto)**

که اړتیا لری چې د دې کومه برخه وژباړئ ،
هیله ده زموږ له مرکزي دفتر سره اړیکې ونیسئ

Hindi

यदि आप इसमें से किसी अंश का हिन्दी अनुवाद चाहते हैं तो कृपया प्रकाशक से संपर्क करें।

Mandarin

如果您希望得到该文件任何部分的译文，
请与我们的总部联系

Somali

Haddii aad rabtid in qeyb ka mid ah
kan la tarjumo, fadlan la xiriir
daabacaha

Gujarati

જો તમારે આમાંના કોઈપણ ભાગનું ભાષાંતર કરવું
હોય, તો કૃપા કરી પ્રકાશકનો સંપર્ક કરો.

Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس کے کسی حصے کے ترجمے کی ضرورت ہو تو براہ
کرم ناشر سے رابطہ قائم کریں۔

Thank you

**We hope you enjoyed reading
about what to expect when
you're one of our customers.**



www.homegroup.org.uk