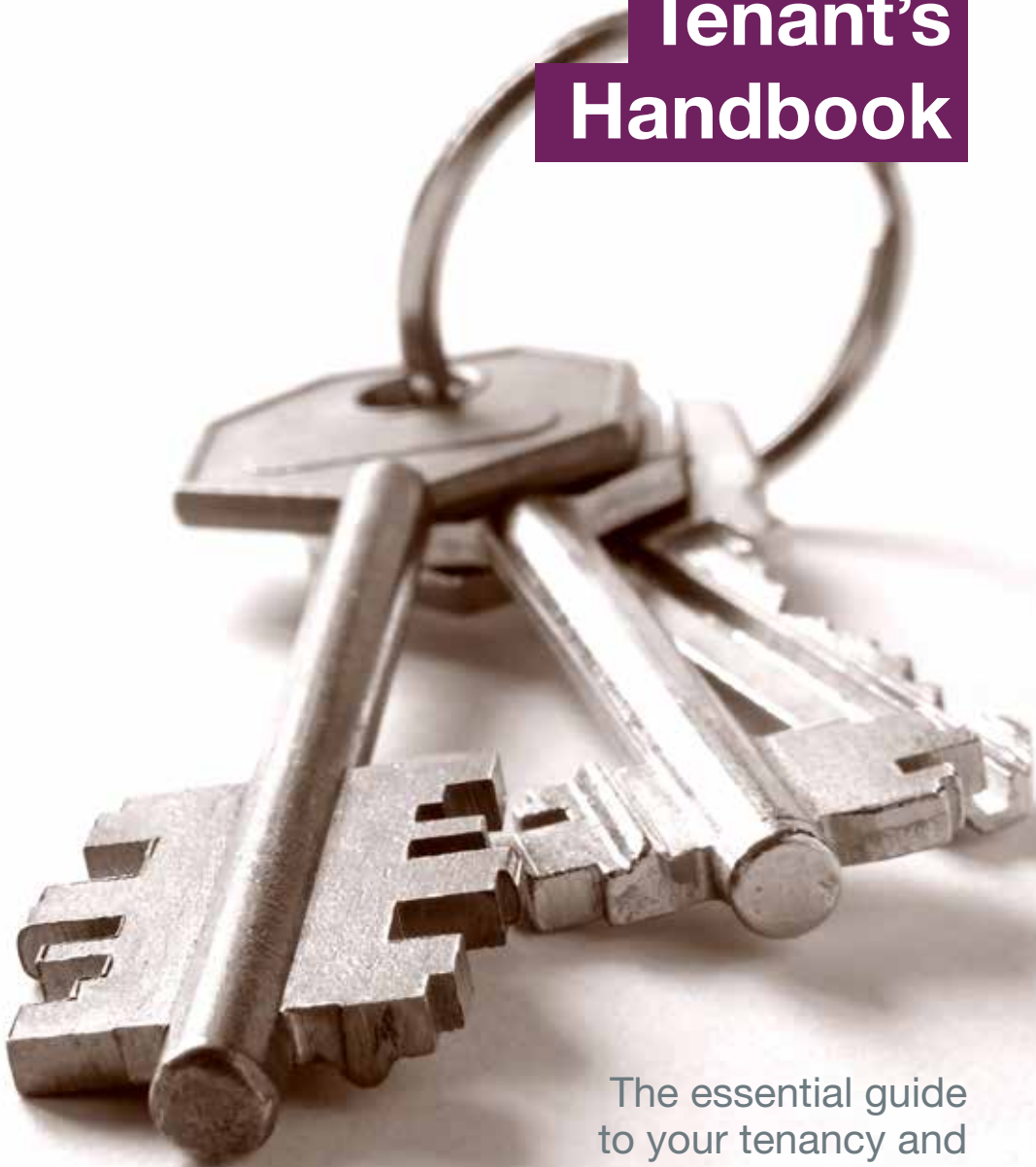


Tenant's Handbook



The essential guide
to your tenancy and
housing service.










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 Tenantstogether



www.warwickdc.gov.uk



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Welcome to your new home

Now that you have your keys, here is a list of the things you need to do to help you settle in quickly and easily:

Top tips on moving in to your new home

- 1. Make arrangements to ensure your rent is paid on time** – When you move in to your home, your tenancy agreement will tell you how much rent you will have to pay and from what date. There are a number of ways for you to make payment (these are set out on page 13). The easiest way to pay is to set up a direct debit, where your rent is automatically taken out of your bank account each month. Whatever method you choose you must pay your rent in advance and on time.
- 2. Make sure you are receiving all of the benefits you are entitled to** – Many people who fall behind with their rent find that they were entitled to help, but had not realised it. For example if you are on a low income housing benefit may cover your rent in part or in full. If you are not sure about your entitlement, contact us on: **01926 456129** and we will be able to advise you.
- 3. Take out home contents insurance** – If you rent your home from Warwick District Council, building insurance to protect the structure of the property is included in the rent. You will however be responsible for insuring the contents of your home e.g. furniture, electrical goods, clothes, jewellery against fire, theft, vandalism or water damage. Therefore Warwick District Council encourages all residents to take out household contents insurance. You can find insurance companies listed online or in the yellow pages. For information on the council's contents insurance scheme, which offers favourable rates to our tenants contact us on: **01926 456129**.
- 4. Read the meters and contact your utility suppliers** – When you first move into your home, you will need to make a note of the readings on your water, gas and electricity meters. You will then need to contact the suppliers to set up an account in your name and make arrangements for payment.
- 5. Make sure you have notified key people of your change of address** – It's important to make sure that you have informed organisations such as your bank and any credit card companies, of your new address. You can arrange for any mail sent to your previous home to be forwarded. This can be done online **www.royalmail.com** or by visiting your local post office. There is a small charge for this service.
- 6. Register with a doctor** – You will also need to notify your doctor and your dentist of your new address or, depending on how far you have moved, you may need to register with a new surgery. Details of surgeries, and other amenities in your area can be found online, in the yellow pages or in your local phone directory.
- 7. Make sure you have a television licence** – If you have a TV in your home and are using it to watch or record programmes you must buy a TV licence. Having a TV licence means you can watch or record live TV using any device you like, including, TV sets, laptops, tablets or mobile phones. It is an offence not to have one, which could lead to prosecution and a fine of up to £1000. You can purchase a TV licence at your local post office or online at: **www.tvlicensing.co.uk**.
- 8. Get spare sets of keys that you may need cut** – The council does not keep a spare set of keys for your home so if you lock yourself out and do not have a spare you will need to call and pay for a locksmith. We strongly advise you to have a spare set of keys cut, so that you can leave them with a friend, relative or neighbour who you trust.



Your home

This section covers the maintenance of and improvements to your home. It summarises what you are responsible for as a tenant, what we are responsible for as the landlord and what you should do if you need a repair

Maintaining your home

When you move into your home please make sure you study your tenancy agreement, so that you understand fully your responsibilities as a tenant for looking after your home and ensuring it remains in good condition. In general as a tenant you are responsible for internal decorating and minor plaster cracks, maintaining your garden, minor fittings such as light bulbs, plugs, fuses, door handles and toilet seats. You are also liable for equipment or improvements to your home that you have installed, such as a TV aerial or satellite dish, repairs to your own appliances, including external items such as fencing. If you have a problem and are not sure whether it is your responsibility or ours, please contact us using the contact details below. It's also important to note that you are responsible for ensuring that you, your pets, other members of your household and your visitors do not cause any damage to your home. If you do damage the property, we may charge you for the cost of carrying out any repairs that are needed as a result. As a tenant you are responsible for your own keys and locks. If you lose your keys or damage your locks it is your responsibility to replace them, although the Council can do this for you and re-charge it you. This also applies to glazing unless a crime is committed and you provide a crime reference number not an incident number.

As a WDC Tenant you are responsible for the removal and re-fitting of any floor coverings that require lifting for a repair.

Any repair required due to non - wear & tear will be re-charged.

If you need a repair

As a landlord, the council is responsible for maintaining and repairing the structure and fixtures of your home. This includes, for example: basins, sinks, baths and toilets, electrical installations, installations for heating your home and hot water, repairing damaged items such as doors and windows (not glazing), brickwork, guttering or external pipes. This list is not exhaustive, contact **01926 456450** for any advice. Fixtures and fittings damaged by the tenant or visitors are rechargeable.

You can organise a repair by contacting the Repairs team.

Tel: **01926 456129** (between 8.45am and 5.15pm from Monday to Thursday & 8.45 – 16.45 on Friday)

We will try to book an appointment to carry out the repair at a time that is convenient for you. It is important that you are at home at the time of your appointment, or can arrange for someone else e.g. an adult friend, relative or neighbour who you trust, to be there if you are unavailable.

Failed appointments are rechargeable.

For emergency repairs only, such as a burst water pipe or dangerous electrical fault, outside of normal hours Call: **01926 456129**.

Condensation

As a Tenant you are responsible for the removal of mould caused by condensation in your home. Dampness due to condensation can be difficult to prevent, but it can usually be controlled by a combination of ventilation, heating, insulating and wiping damp surfaces such as windows. For a condensation leaflet with useful tips and advice please Call: **01926 456129**.

Fire safety

In order that you can escape quickly in the event of a fire, you should ensure that hallways, stairs and passages to front and back doors in your home are kept clear at all times. If you live in a block of flats this also applies to all communal corridors. Our Tenancy Officer may contact you directly if we need your co-operation to keep these areas clear and safe from tripping or fire hazards. More detailed advice on fire safety is available from the fire service at: **www.fireservice.co.uk**.

Obstacles blocking communal areas will be removed.

Gas safety

We carry out a FREE annual safety check on your gas boiler and will contact you to arrange an appointment when it is time for a check to be carried out. We are legally required to carry out this check to ensure that your home is safe. It is particularly important that you ensure that we can get into your home at the time of your appointment, as an unsafe boiler could be a danger to you and to your household. If you refuse to allow us into your home to carry out this check, we may take legal action to require you to let us into the property and you may be charged for any costs that we incur as a result of this.



Electrical safety

We also offer a free electrical safety check in your home every four years. You will be contacted when the test is due to arrange convenient access arrangements.

Asbestos

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring material. Asbestos fibres are strong and resistant to heat and chemicals, this has led to its use in a wide range of building materials and products.

Why is asbestos dangerous?

Asbestos containing materials, if maintained in a good condition, are not dangerous. There are low levels of asbestos fibres in the air everywhere because it has been so widely used. Exposure at this low level is unlikely to harm people's health. However, when it is damaged, sanded, scrubbed, drilled or sawn it can become dangerous.

If damaged or disturbed, asbestos containing materials have the potential to release fibres into the air which can be breathed in and can lead to a number of harmful diseases.

If you think you have asbestos in your home:

- don't panic, it is usually only a problem if it gets disturbed or damaged
- don't disturb any damaged area or product that might contain asbestos
- don't carry out any DIY. Don't sand, drill, saw or strip any area that might contain asbestos
- don't dust, sweep or vacuum dirt of debris that might contain asbestos
- don't remove any material that you think contains asbestos

Improving your home

You have a right to make improvements to your home, such as replacing fixtures that were provided for you when you moved in, or installing a satellite dish. However, you must ask for our permission before you make any improvements. To do this please contact us on **01926 456129**. We will usually agree to these requests and will never unreasonably refuse permission. For some larger improvements, such as building an extension or a conservatory, you may also need to obtain planning permission and building regulation approvals.

From time to time we also carry out work to maintain and improve your home, for example, installing a new bathroom or kitchen, providing new windows or doors or electrical rewiring. There may be long periods of time between us carrying out this kind of programmed work.

We will inform you in advance if your home is part of an improvement programme.



Your rent

Your rent covers the cost of us managing, maintaining and repairing your home. Depending on the type of accommodation that you live in, additional charges may also be added to your rent to cover the cost of some further services that you receive, such as window cleaning, cleaning of communal areas and grounds maintenance. Making sure your rent is paid in full and on time is one of the main conditions of your tenancy. It is important that you pay your rent or that you contact us immediately if you are having difficulty paying. We will always try to help tenants who are having problems, but if you repeatedly do not pay your rent you could lose your home as a result.

How to pay your rent

When you move in to your home, your tenancy agreement will tell you how much rent you will have to pay and from what date. Rent is normally charged weekly. We are happy to agree for you to pay fortnightly or monthly, as long as you **pay your rent in advance and on time.**

There are a number of ways for you to pay your rent. You can choose from:

Direct debit. Direct debits are easy to set up and a convenient way to pay your rent straight from your bank or building society account. We will automatically calculate the correct monthly payment (taking into account Housing Benefit if applicable) and will give you at least 7 days' notice if the amount changes. There are 4 direct debit dates to choose from: 2nd, 8th, 14th or 23rd and this can be securely arranged by calling 01926 456031 or 01926 456408.

Standing Order. Standing orders are similar to direct debit, but you can choose the date of payment from your account.

Please note that if you do not have the funds in your account to pay your direct debit or standing order your bank may charge you.

Barcodes. Your tenancy letters and rent statements now have a barcode, which you can use to make a payment at any **Post Office, Payzone** or **Paypoint.**

Online. You can pay online at www.warwickdc.gov.uk and use the portal to check the balance of your rent account.

Payment line. Call 08000 283 377 option 3 to make quick, secure rent payments.

Contact numbers

Repairs – **01926 456129**

Emergency repairs – **35366**

Council Tax and Benefits **01926 456760**





Your tenancy

Changes to your rent

We will write to you in advance to tell you of any changes to your rent, this typically happens once a year at the beginning of April. We will inform you at least four weeks in advance if there are any other changes to your rent and you can end your tenancy if you do not agree to the new amount. Your rent statement will be sent to you every six months, however if you would like an additional statement you can email us hsgf@warwickdc.gov.uk or call **01926 456031**.

Rent difficulties and late payments

If you are having a problem with your rent you should contact us immediately. We will always try to help tenants who are having difficulty, for example by helping you to check that you are claiming all of the benefits that you are entitled to, telling you where you can get help with budgeting and managing your money or reaching an agreement so that you can pay back any rent arrears that may have built up over time, at a rate that you can afford.

If you wish to discuss your rent with us in confidence, please contact us on **01926 456438**.

For more information contact Keira – Financial Inclusion project Officer – keira.lymath@warwickdc.gov.uk **01926 456 336**

or Lisa – Tenancy Support Officer – lisa.crossland@warwickdc.gov.uk **01926 456 454**

At the beginning of your tenancy, you will have signed a tenancy agreement. Your tenancy agreement is a legally binding contract between you, as a tenant, and us, as your landlord. It sets out what you can expect of us (your rights) and in turn, what we will expect from you (your responsibilities).

We use two main types of tenancy, introductory and secure.

All new tenants sign an introductory tenancy agreement. This means that for the first 12 months you do not have all the rights of a secure tenant, and could be evicted more quickly and easily if you break your agreement.

If there have been no problems after the 12 month trial period you will be invited to become a secure tenant. A secure tenancy means you can stay in your home for as long as you choose, provided you do not breach any of the terms of your tenancy (for example by not paying your rent or by causing a nuisance to your neighbours).

Rights and responsibilities

All Council tenants have rights and responsibilities. However as an introductory Tenant you do not have an automatic right to:-

- Make improvements
- Exchange with another tenant

But you can apply to the Council for permission to take in lodgers or improve your property. The Council will then decide if you can go ahead on a discretionary basis.

If there are problems

Most people will pass smoothly from their introductory tenancy to secure tenancy, but we will act quickly against anyone who breaks their tenancy agreement. We will always investigate to see if things can be sorted out.

Anti - social behaviour

If we receive complaints that you have been acting in an anti-social way, we will investigate thoroughly, collect evidence and interview witnesses etc. If the complaint is justified we will take action. If the problem is minor we will ask you to modify your behaviour, and possibly involve a mediator.

It is important to remember that you are also responsible for the behaviour of anyone living with you or visiting your home, and we will take action if the nuisance takes place in your home, or outside your locality.

Owning a pet

Domestic pets can be kept in some properties, but you must be able to control them. Cats and dogs are not allowed if you share an entrance staircase or lift. Pigeons, poultry and other livestock may be kept in some types of garden, but you must get council permission. If any animal causes disturbance you will be asked to find another home for it.

Buying my home

Secure tenants may have the 'Right to Buy' their home at a discounted rate. However you must have been a tenant for at least three years before you can do this. If you want to discuss buying your home, you should contact us on: **01926 456409 or 6408.**

Ending your tenancy

You must give four weeks written notice to end your tenancy. Your tenancy is a weekly tenancy that begins and ends on a Monday so your notice must always run from a Monday and you need to return your keys, leaving the property clean, tidy and empty, no later than the Monday four weeks later.

Right to succession

If a Tenant dies the tenancy can be passed to their spouse or civil partner if there has not already been a succession. However if the property is not appropriate for their needs they may be asked to transfer to a more suitable property.



Your neighbourhood

This section provides information about living in your neighbourhood. It sets out how we expect you to be a good neighbour to those living around you, what we will do to keep your neighbourhood clean and tidy, and what you can do if you have a problem.

Being a good neighbour

We expect all of our tenants to show consideration for their neighbours and the area in which they live in for example by:

- treating others with respect and not using abusive or threatening language
- not causing excessive noise, for example by playing loud music
- disposing of their rubbish correctly and not dumping it anywhere in the neighbourhood
- keeping any pets under control

Please remember that you are also responsible for the behaviour of other members of your household and anyone who visits you. We treat complaints about neighbours whose behaviour is 'anti-social' very seriously and will take action to try to resolve problems and to prevent them from occurring again. If you are experiencing anti-social behaviour, such as noise nuisance, aggressive or abusive behaviour from one of your neighbours, please tell us about it.

You can do this by contacting one of our Tenancy Services Officers on: **01926 456129**. They will give you advice on how to deal with the situation and will usually arrange to visit you in person. Any information you give will be treated in confidence. If you experience a serious incident, for example involving violence or threats of violence, you should contact the Police.

We aim to help keep the neighbourhoods in which our tenants live clean and tidy. To do this we employ Neighbourhood Officers to deal with issues with cleaning, grounds maintenance and communal areas in our neighbourhoods. The officers visit the communal areas we maintain once a month at least to conduct Health and Safety inspections. We regularly complete estate walks along with local tenants and councillors. A schedule of upcoming walks is available on our website: www.warwickdc.gov.uk, or we can send you a copy on request.





Getting involved

There are lots of opportunities for you to get involved with making your neighbourhood a better place to live and having your say on the services we provide. Support and training is provided for those who take part and it can be a great way to learn new skills, enhance your CV and make friends. We don't want you to be out of pocket as a result of your involvement, so we will usually cover any reasonable expenses that you might incur, such as travel or child care costs. For more information please call **01926 456357**.



Moving on

Provided you do not breach any of the terms of your tenancy, you can stay in your home for as long as you choose (if you have a secure tenancy) or until your tenancy expires. However there may come a time when you want to move on, for example to be closer to friends or relatives or to your place of work or because your home has become either too big or too small for your household. If this happens you can either apply for a transfer or look for someone you can swap homes with, this is called a 'mutual exchange'. For further information please email hsgem@warwickdc.gov.uk or call **01926 456129**.





Complaints, comments and compliments

We welcome feedback to help us improve our services.

If you would like to make a suggestion about how we can improve, or would like to talk to us about something we have done well please let us know. You can make your complaints or suggestions to our Service Improvement Manager on **01926 456129** or email **performance@warwickdc.gov.uk**.

Equality Statement

Warwick District Council is committed to following the equality and diversity legislation ensuring everyone has equal access to services and information. Warwick District Council will always treat people with respect.



Who to contact

Buying your Council House	Right to Buy Email: hsgfin@warwickdc.gov.uk	01926 456129 01926 456409
Complaints	Service Improvement Email: performance@warwickdc.gov.uk	01926 456443
Garages	Applying for a garage	01926 456129
	Difficulties paying your garage rent/rent arrears	01926 456129
	Repairs Email: hsgrep@warwickdc.gov.uk	01926 456129

Tenancy Officers	For all issues relating to your tenancy agreement, neighbour nuisance or anti-social behaviour problems, mutual exchange and estate problems Email: hsgem@warwickdc.gov.uk	01926 456129 – press option 3
Household Insurance	Tenants Contents Insurance Scheme Email: hsgfin@warwickdc.gov.uk	01926 456031 01926 456408
Allocations Officers	For all issues relating to the letting of council properties and garages and the transfer incentive grants scheme (TIGS) Email: hsglet@warwickdc.gov.uk	01926 456129 – press option 2
Repairs	Repair Hotline (Gas, electric, plumbing, security, lifts etc.) Monday to Thursday, 8.45am – 5.15pm Friday, 8.45am – 4.45pm	01926 456129 – press option 1
	Emergency Out of hours (24 hour/365 days of the year)	01926 353366
Tenant Engagement	Engagement Officer Email: performance@warwickdc.gov.uk	01926 456357
Paying your Rent	Rent Payments and Rent Arrears Problems with paying your home rent	01926 456129 01926 456457 01926 456239
	Rent Direct Debits Email: hsgfin@warwickdc.gov.uk	01926 456031 01926 456408
	Paying your rent on the phone	0800 028 3377 24/7 Freephone line
	Financial Inclusion Officer	01926 456129



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