

Tenant Handbook



Infinite Possibilities



Contents

1	Welcome to your new home	1
2	About us	3
3	Our promise to you	5
4	How to contact us	7
5	Moving into your home	9
6	Paying your rent	13
7	Your tenancy contract	17
8	Your responsibilities	23
9	Customer services	29
10	Getting involved	33
11	Ending your tenancy	35

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*This number is only valid until **1 December 2008**. From then, the number will be **0800 111 4013**.

Welcome to your new home

About us

Our promise to you

How to contact us

Moving into your home

Paying your rent

Your tenancy contract


Your responsibilities


Customer service

Getting involved

Ending your tenancy

In the Handbook we show where you can find further information by the following signs:

 = Leaflet

 = Factsheet

Welcome

1



Longhurst Homes Senior Management Team



Welcome to your new home

Welcome to our Handbook. It outlines the main services we provide, as well as your main responsibilities as a tenant. We hope it will be helpful to you throughout your tenancy.

We aim to provide you, as a new and valued customer, with an excellent standard of service, now and throughout your tenancy. The Handbook tells you about the standard of service that you can expect.

We are always looking for ways to further improve our service and are open to new ideas. We regularly monitor the standard of our services, and encourage your feedback and involvement in helping us to improve our services.

We value and reward loyal customers who keep to their tenancy conditions and help us to provide our services more efficiently. We ask that you look after your home, behave

reasonably to your neighbours, and pay your rent on time. Our 'Just Rewards' scheme provides a range of benefits, as our way of saying thank you.

We hope you will enjoy living in your new home.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Hardy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Managing Director



For a different language or format, please contact us.

如果您需要其他语言或格式的幫助，請联系我们

В случае необходимости получить и формацию на другом языке или в другом формате просим связаться с нами.

Pour tout autre langue ou format, veuillez nous contacter

بۆ ھەر زمانىكى تر يان ھەر شيوازيكى تر ، تكايه په يوه ندييمان پيوه بکه

बिसे ही उर भासा नां रुप लष्टी बिरपा बरवे साडे ढाल संपरक बटे ।

Haddii loo baahdo luqad kaleama qaab kale loo sameeyo, fadlan nala soo xiriir

অন্য ভাষা অথবা তর্জমার জন্য আমাদের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করুন

لأى لغة أو صيغة أخرى برجاء الاتصال بنا

کسی دیگر زبان یا شکل کے لیے برائے مہربانی ہم سے رابطہ کیجیے

About us

2





About us

We are a charitable housing company operating across the East Midlands and surrounding areas. We are a 'registered social landlord' regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency and the Tenants Services Authority.


We aim to provide high-quality services that meet our customers' needs. An important part of this is through providing good-quality homes and developing communities in which people want to live.

We work with our customers, partner organisations and local communities to make lives better, recognising people's diverse needs and helping to keep neighbourhoods safe and well maintained.

Board of Management

The Board is responsible for making plans and setting the direction of the association. This includes taking key decisions and approving our budget and accounts. The Board is made up of the following members:

- five customer representatives (three tenants, one leaseholder and one shared owner)
- ten independent members from local communities
- five co-optee members with relevant skills and experience.

We encourage customers to get involved in all areas of our business, including Board membership. 

Longhurst Homes and Longhurst Group

The company was set up in 1973. We now have over 5,000 units of accommodation, including homes for rent, shared ownership homes, and leasehold housing for older people. As a member of the Longhurst Group of companies we benefit from shared skills and services, including property development, information and communication technology (ICT), treasury management and human resources.

Our promise to you

3



Customer Service

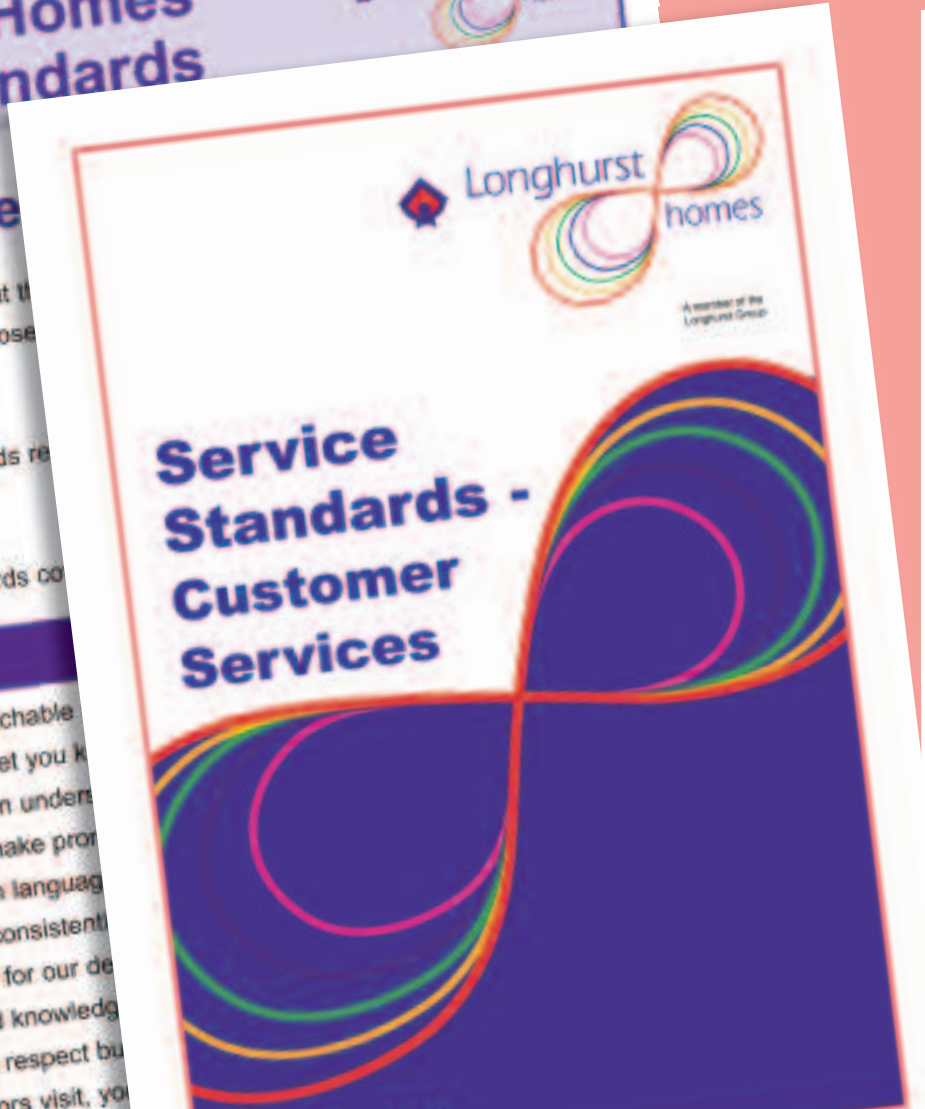
This Customer Service Charter sets out the standards we will meet. These standards have been chosen because they are the matters most to them.

We will review these service standards regularly to ensure they are the matters most to our customers.

We have developed service standards covering the following areas:

Our promise to you

- We will be friendly and approachable
- When you contact us we will let you know what we can do for you
- We will listen to you to gain an understanding of your needs
- We will be realistic and not make promises we cannot keep
- We will communicate in plain language
- We will treat you fairly and consistently
- We will explain the reasons for our decisions
- Our staff will be trained and knowledgeable
- Our staff will treat you with respect but we will not accept abuse





Our promise to you

We aim to give you an excellent standard of service that meets your needs.

Customer service centre

Our team of skilled advisors are available to deal with a wide range of enquiries, including repair requests, housing advice, lettings and allocations, and initial advice on anti-social behaviour.

Our advisors aim to deal with most enquiries on the spot. They will pass more detailed enquiries to our specialist teams. Our separate Income Team can advise you about rent payments.

Income Team

This team can handle all your phone calls about rent payments. They can also:

- advise you on how best to pay your rent
- advise you on benefits you may be entitled to
- refer you to other agencies that may be able to offer you support

- advise you on managing debt
- answer all your questions about our loyalty scheme 'Just Rewards'.

The team also monitor rent payments and will contact you if your account goes into arrears.

They will talk to you about how you can reduce your arrears; for example, by arranging affordable repayments.

Neighbourhood Team

This team's role is to make sure our housing schemes are good places where people want to live.

They do this by stepping in early where there are problems; providing support; and dealing swiftly and firmly with anti-social behaviour. They can also provide other information and advice about your tenancy.

The team help you to improve and develop your local community. They do this by working with you to help you and your neighbours solve community problems. They also work with the Property Services Team to keep our estates in good order.

Property Services Team

This team are responsible for ensuring the overall standard and quality of our homes. They manage the day-to-day repair service, making sure jobs are completed. They also monitor costs and quality.


The team plan and carry out our long-term major repair programme. This covers planned repairs to major items such as bathrooms, kitchens, doors and windows, to keep properties to a good standard. The team take responsibility for setting up and monitoring contracts such as gas servicing and external painting.

The team are also responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of our estates and communal areas. This includes setting up and monitoring services such as gardening and caretaking.

Pre-Tenancy Services Team

This team manage our waiting list and the way we let our empty homes. They provide advice to make sure new tenancies get off to a good start. With our Property Services Team they also make sure that homes due to be re-let meet our published 'lettable standard'.

Help us to improve the service

If you think you can help us to improve the way we deliver our services, please tell us about your ideas. You can complete a customer suggestion form, or make a comment or suggestion in person or by phone to a member of staff. Please read the section on customer involvement in this Handbook to find out about more ways of getting involved. 

How to contact us



4



How to contact us

Customer service centre

The customer service centre deals with enquiries about:

- repairs
- lettings and allocations
- anti-social behaviour
- other tenancy issues.

To contact us, please call **0845 30 90 700**, 8am–6pm, Monday–Friday. This number is only valid until 1 December 2008. From then, the number will be **0800 111 4013**.

Or email: service.centre@longhurst-group.org.uk

Income Team

For rent enquiries – please call the Income Team on freephone **0800 345 75 80**, 8am–6pm, Monday–Friday.

Or email: incometeam@longhurst-group.org.uk

Out-of-hours emergency repair service

If you have an emergency repair outside our

published opening hours, please call **0845 30 90 700**. This number is only valid until 1 December 2008. From then, the number will be **0800 111 4013**.

Other ways to contact us:

Website: www.longhurst-group.org.uk

You can use the website to report a repair and to download leaflets and forms.

Area offices: our staff teams will be able to deal with general enquiries, but please make an appointment if you wish to see a specific member of staff or have a detailed enquiry.

Office opening hours

Boston (Head Office):

Leverett House, Gilbert Drive, Endeavour Park, Boston PE21 7TQ
Monday–Friday, 9am–5.15pm

Lincoln Area Office:

14 Melville Street, Lincoln LN5 7HW
Monday–Friday, 10am–1pm

Nottingham Area Office:

5 The Triangle, Enterprise Way,
NG2 Business Park, Nottingham NG2 1AE
Monday–Friday, 9am–5.15pm

By letter: please write to:

Longhurst Homes Limited
Leverett House
Gilbert Drive
Endeavour Park
Boston
Lincs
PE21 7TQ

Bringing our services to you

Our staff teams work in the community and are available to visit you in your home.

Please call **0845 30 90 700** to make an appointment. This number is only valid until 1 December 2008. From then, the number will be **0800 111 4013**.

We also have a programme for planned visits to specific areas. We will let you know when the community vehicle is in your area.

Moving into your home

5





Moving into your home

This section of the Handbook tells you about the standards you can expect in your home and the services we provide. It also tells you the things you will need to do to make sure your move into your new home goes smoothly.

We hope you will join our Just Rewards scheme, so that you can benefit from the reward package. **L**

Keys

We will give you two sets of keys for each of the locks in your new home. We do not hold spare keys, so it is a good idea to leave a key with a trusted family member. If you need extra keys or lose your keys, you will need to pay for them yourself.

The condition of your new home

When you sign your tenancy contract, we will give you a copy of our 'lettable standard'. This explains the level of repair and cleanliness that you can expect when you move in. Our customers have helped us set this standard and we regularly review your

feedback on it through our new-tenant questionnaire.

Connecting services

When you first get your home we will normally have changed your gas and electricity supply to a low-cost tariff. If the previous tenant left a debt on your meter, you will need to arrange to have this cleared. You'll find advice on what to do in your Homepack.

To make sure your home is safe, we will arrange for safety tests on your gas and electricity supplies as soon as you have your supply available. If you have a card meter, there must be sufficient credit on the meter to do these tests.

It is essential that you allow us into your home to carry out these tests. If you do not allow us prompt access, we will have to consider taking legal action to end your tenancy. Until we carry out these tests, your gas supply will be 'capped' and you will be unable to use it.

We will show you where to find your electricity and gas consumer units, and the gas stop-taps, so that you can quickly shut off the supplies if there is a problem.

Water

Your water supply will normally be connected when you move in. All you need to do is contact the water company and give them your name and address, the date you moved in and any meter readings, so they can set up your new account. We will show you where to find your cold water stop tap, so that you can shut it off quickly if there's a problem.

Phone

If you want to have a landline phone in your new home, you will need to contact the phone company that you would like to use. If you had a phone at your last address, you may be able to keep the same number.

Benefits

If you are claiming welfare benefits such as income support or housing benefit, you will need to tell the housing benefits office and the Benefits Agency about your new address. You may need to make a new claim for housing benefit. You must also tell the council tax office about your new address.


Other contacts

You should let the following people know about your change of address:

- post office – for redirecting your mail
- TV Licensing
- your bank, building society and credit card companies
- your employer
- your doctor and dentist.

Contents insurance

We provide buildings insurance. It is your responsibility to insure the contents of your home against, fire, theft, flooding and accidental damage. You will be responsible for re-glazing broken glass and replacing lost keys.

Your Homepack will contain details of a low-cost home contents insurance provider. 

However, you may wish to arrange contents insurance yourself through another insurance provider.

Improvements and alterations

An improvement or alteration is any addition or change to the property, or its gas, electricity or water supply, or drainage. This can range from putting up a shed or satellite dish to installing a new kitchen or bathroom.

Before you do any work on your home, you must write to us to get permission. We have to make sure that the work will not damage your home or make it unsafe. It is your responsibility to get any planning permission needed, and comply with building regulations. For more information please see your Repair Handbook.

Safety in your home

Please take care to ensure your safety in your home.

- **Don't** store dangerous or inflammable substances in your home.
- **Don't** leave appliances or candles unattended.
- **Do** keep matches out of reach of children.
- **Do** fit a smoke detector in your home and service it regularly.
- If you have a gas appliance **do** install a carbon-monoxide detector.

Home visit

Once you have settled into your new home, we will come to see you to answer any questions you may have and give you more information about our services.

Looking after your home

When you move in we'll ask you to sign to confirm that your home meets our 'lettable standard' and that you accept it in its existing condition. Please take care of your home, so that you leave it in the same condition as when you moved in. If you damage your home and do not repair the damage we will recharge you for this work.

Paying your rent





Paying your rent

When to pay your rent

Under your tenancy contract your rent is due weekly in advance. This means you should pay your money each Monday for that week. We will expect you to pay in advance each week unless we have agreed other payment arrangements with you, such as paying once every month for the following month.

Please remember that if you do not pay your rent, you are at risk of losing your home.

Ways to pay

Before you move into your new home we will talk to you about ways of paying your rent. We offer several options. We will take the first payment from you when you sign your tenancy contract.

You can pay your rent in various ways including:

- direct debit
- Allpay cash payments
- internet and telephone banking. **F**

Just Rewards

We hope you'll join our Just Rewards, tenant loyalty scheme, as this is our way of recognising and rewarding tenants who keep to the terms of their tenancy contract. Joining is simple and brings you a range of attractive benefits. **L**

Help with your rent

Depending on your circumstances, you may be able to claim housing benefit to help you pay your rent. We can carry out an assessment to see if you may be entitled to benefits, or you can contact your local housing benefit office directly.

If you need advice on claiming housing benefit, please contact us.

Claiming housing benefit

It is very important to make a claim as soon as you feel you may be entitled to it, as any benefit will only start from the day you make your claim. Please remember that it is your

responsibility to provide all the information needed to assess your claim. If you are asked for more information, you should supply this immediately.

You must tell us and your council straight away of any changes in your circumstances, for example if you get a job or your earnings increase.

Housing benefit is usually paid directly to us and we then credit your account. You are responsible for repaying any overpayments of housing benefit that are made.

What to do if you cannot pay your rent

If you have difficulty paying your rent, please ring us straight away on **0800 345 75 80**.

This is a freephone number. We will take the time to listen and understand your circumstances and agree the best way to clear your debt. Rent arrears are a priority debt and it is always easier to solve problems at an early stage, rather than allow the debt to get out of control.

Our team of trained staff will answer your queries on how to pay your rent, and advise you on benefits you may be entitled to. We can also refer you to other agencies that may be able to offer you tenancy support or financial advice on managing debt.

If you have other debt problems, we can tell you where to find further help and advice.

You can also contact these people directly:

- Citizens Advice Bureau – we can direct you to your local office
- National Debtline – **0808 808 4000**
- Community Legal Service Direct – **0845 345 4 345**.

All these agencies offer free, confidential advice covering things like:

- claiming benefits
- re-negotiating debt payments
- other financial help
- prioritising your debts.

What happens if you do not pay your rent?

Our Income Team will monitor your rent account every week and contact you if arrears are increasing or you are not keeping to an agreement to pay.

We will encourage you to agree an arrangement to pay off your arrears in affordable amounts. This will be based on your income and spending.

We will only use eviction as a last resort. But if you do not pay your rent and do not work with us to reduce your arrears, we will take legal action to end your tenancy.

Joint tenancies

Joint tenants are 'jointly and severally' liable for rent payments and any arrears. This means that if one of you fails to pay their share, the other must pay the whole amount. It is important that you are both aware of your rent account balance. If you feel you have no control over the rent payments or your partner leaves the property, please contact our Income Team.

For more about how we set and use rent, see 'Your tenancy contract' on page 17.

Your tenancy contract

7





Your tenancy contract

Your tenancy contract sets out your rights and responsibilities. These may vary depending on the type of tenancy you have.

We mainly use three types of tenancy contract. These are assured, introductory and assured shorthold tenancies. Please check the wording of your own tenancy agreement to find out about your own particular rights and responsibilities.

Assured tenancies

This is the most secure form of tenancy that we use. It allows you to remain in your home for as long as you want, provided you keep to the terms of your tenancy contract. It can only be ended by you or a joint tenant or by a court order.

Assured shorthold tenancies

We normally use this type of tenancy when we are leasing a property from another landlord, or if you are under 18, or where you need extra support to maintain your tenancy. Extra support would normally be provided by a tenancy support worker. **F**

This type of tenancy does not have the same rights as an assured tenancy. We can end it by giving you two months' notice and obtaining a court order. If you disagree with our decision you can appeal against it to the Board of Management.

Introductory tenancies

During the first 12 months of the tenancy you have an introductory tenancy with the same rights as those of an assured shorthold tenant. We will normally give you a full assured tenancy after a year, as long as we have not started legal action against you because of a breach of tenancy (except for rent arrears). **L**

The table overleaf summarises your rights.

Joint tenancies

We usually give joint tenancies to married couples, civil partners, and cohabiting couples, including same-sex partners. Joint tenants are equally responsible for the tenancy and have the same rights. It is up to

Summary of your rights and responsibilities

	Assured tenancy	Assured Shorthold tenancy
Occupy your home	✓	✓
Stay in your home	✓	✓
Exchange your home	✓	✗
Have a lodger	✓	✗
Create a sub tenancy on part or all of your home	✗	✗
See information held about you	✓	✓
Pass on your tenancy	✓	Spouse or partner only
Right to Buy	✗	✗
Right to Acquire	*	✗
Make improvements to your home	✓	✗
Claim compensation for approved improvements	✓	✗
Have repairs carried out	✓	✓
Compensation if repairs are not carried out	✓	✓

We have listed above your repair rights. Please see our Repair Handbook and factsheets on the right to repair and compensation for improvements carried out.

* Not all tenants will have the Right to Acquire. **F**

the association to decide whether or not to grant you a joint tenancy.

One or both of you can end a joint tenancy by giving four weeks' notice in writing. If a joint tenant moves out, leaving you alone in your home, we will consider granting you a tenancy in your sole name, but it is not an automatic right. It depends on how well you have conducted your tenancy and whether the property is the right size for your household. Also, the tenancy must have been ended by one of the joint tenants or assigned to you by the outgoing joint tenant.

Please contact us if you have a joint tenancy and one of you wants to move out. You are still responsible for the tenancy until your contract has formally ended. This includes remaining responsible for paying the rent.

Lodgers

You have the right to take in a lodger. You must tell us about this, so that we can check that it does not cause overcrowding in your home.

Sub-tenants

You must not create a sub-tenancy in any part or all of your home.

Passing on your tenancy

Succession

When you die, your tenancy can normally be passed on to your spouse or partner, provided they were living with you at the time of your death. (This includes same-sex partners and civil partners.)

If you do not have a spouse or partner, your tenancy may normally be passed to a close family member provided that they have been living with you for more than 12 months at the time of your death.

We may also grant a right of succession to someone who will become legally responsible for any of your dependent children, or to someone who was a live-in carer for you at the time of your death, and has no suitable alternative accommodation.

The right of succession applies only once. If you are a joint tenant and one tenant dies, the remaining tenant will automatically take over the tenancy. This counts as a succession.

If you are not elderly or disabled, you will not normally be able to succeed to a property that has been specifically designed or designated for older or disabled people. In some cases we will offer suitable alternative accommodation.

For further information about succession, please ask our customer contact centre for a factsheet and refer to your tenancy contract. **F**

Assignment (legally transferring a tenancy)

It is possible to pass on your tenancy to someone else before you die. This must be somebody who would be entitled to succeed to your tenancy on your death. A tenancy may also be assigned when the court has granted this under a Matrimonial Order.

You must get our written permission before assigning your tenancy.

Mutual exchange

Provided you meet certain conditions, you may swap your home with another tenant of a housing association or council. If you find a suitable swap, you will need to contact us so that we can send you a mutual exchange application form. **F**

You must not move home until you have received written approval from both landlords and signed all the paperwork.

Your rent and service charges

This section explains how your rent is set. Paying your rent is very important.

We use the rent we collect to:

- repair and maintain your home
- manage the housing service
- support community development and involvement
- repay money we have borrowed to build or improve homes.

Setting your rent

Your rent is stated in your tenancy contract. It is reviewed each year, normally in April. We will give you four weeks' written notice of any changes in your rent.

Your tenancy contract sets out how we can increase your rent. To prevent landlords setting unreasonably high rents, the government has also limited any increase we can make. **F**

For more about rent, see 'Paying your rent' on page 13.

Other charges

Your tenancy contract states what charges you have to pay in addition to your rent. These may be for caretaking or communal facilities. We will write and tell you about changes to your service charge at the same time as changes to your rent. Your tenancy contract explains how we set and review your service charge.

You may have to pay other charges for services such as scheme managers and community alarms. You may be entitled to help towards these charges from Supporting People.

On some schemes your rent includes charges for heating, water and council tax, which are not eligible for housing benefit. You must pay these charges yourself. (Please ask us for further information.)

Consultation and involvement

We believe that actively involving tenants is the best way of ensuring that we provide high-quality services.

We will consult you and consider your views before making any changes to the way we manage or maintain your home, if they are likely to substantially affect you.

We will also encourage you to take part in all aspects of the management of your home at a level you choose. Please see the 'Getting Involved' section of this handbook.

Applicants and residents charter

This sets out the rights and levels of information and consultation you can expect as a housing association resident. We will give you a copy of this document when you sign your tenancy contract.

Your responsibilities

8





Your responsibilities

Our tenant incentive scheme, Just Rewards, is a way of thanking customers who keep to the terms of their tenancy contract.

Before you sign your tenancy contract we will explain the terms and responsibilities to you.

Your tenancy

Your tenancy is a legal contract between you and us. It sets out your rights and your responsibilities. When you sign your tenancy contract you are agreeing to keep to its conditions.

The main terms of your contract are as follows:

- You must pay your rent on the Monday of each week – covered under ‘Paying your rent’.
- You and the people you are responsible for must not act in a way that causes or is likely to cause nuisance or harassment to your neighbours and people living in your community.

- You must not use your home, or allow it to be used, for any illegal or immoral purposes, such as the sale of drugs, prostitution, or any other criminal activity.
- You must tell us straight away about any repairs that are needed to your home and any shared areas for which we are responsible – please see your Repair Handbook.
- You must allow us, or anyone working for us, into your home when we ask. We will normally give at least 24 hours’ notice, but in an emergency we may need to enter your home immediately. You must let us into your home each year to service your gas appliances.

Your home

- You must keep the inside of your home clean and decorated to a reasonable standard, and you must carry out any repairs for which you are responsible.

- You must get our written permission if you want to make alterations or improvements to your home, such as fit a shower, fit a satellite dish or alter the structure of your home. (Please refer to your Repair Handbook.)
- You must look after your home in a reasonable manner. You must replace or repair anything that is damaged deliberately or carelessly. We may take legal action against your tenancy or charge you if we need to put right any damage.
- You must keep your garden tidy and free of rubbish. Please do not plant any conifers in your garden.
- You must keep the outside of your home, including shared areas, free of rubbish and litter. Please dispose of your rubbish in line with local refuse arrangements. If you have large items to get rid of, you should contact your local council. A charge may apply.

Living in a flat

If you live in a flat you must also make sure that you:

- keep shared areas clean, tidy and free from rubbish
- keep the shared areas free of bikes or any other item that may catch fire or cause a dangerous obstruction
- do not leave communal doors open or allow strangers into the building
- do not let children play in the shared areas.

Parking

You must not park a vehicle, except in the proper parking space. You must get our permission before you park any large van, boat, trailer or caravan or an untaxed or unroadworthy vehicle at your home or on any shared areas.

We will remove any vehicles if we have not granted permission for them, and will charge you the cost of doing so.

You must not carry out repairs, other than ordinary maintenance, to any vehicles at your home, on shared areas, or on the road.

Getting on with your neighbours

Everyone has the right to enjoy life in their own way provided it does not cause a nuisance to people living near them. A good

neighbour will tolerate and understand the different lifestyles of others.

You are responsible for the behaviour of every adult and child living in or visiting your home. You are also responsible for any pets you keep.

To help you get on with your neighbours, please tell them in advance about anything that is likely to cause a disturbance, such as DIY, a party or a barbecue. Even so, if these activities happen regularly, others may find them a nuisance. **F**

We don't normally regard children playing in the street as anti-social behaviour. We will only take action if the children are directly and knowingly causing you distress, harassment or annoyance.

Noise

Noise from loud parties, shouting, televisions, barking and howling dogs, doors slamming, music systems and radios are all examples of things that could cause nuisance to your neighbours – if they happen regularly at unreasonable levels.

You can help to stop these problems by doing the following:

- Place your television and speakers away from walls that are shared with your neighbours.

- If you like loud music, use headphones.
- Carpet floors, especially in flats.
- If you live in a flat, consider not wearing outdoor shoes when you come inside.
- If you want to use your washing machine late at night or in the early hours of the morning, check whether it disturbs your neighbour.
- Check with your neighbour to see if your dog is barking or howling when you are out. Try not to leave a dog for long periods, or try arranging for a friend to care for your pet while you are out.

What to do when things go wrong

Wherever possible it is best to try and talk to your neighbour to make them aware of the problem and to agree a solution. If you cannot do this or the problem continues, please call our customer service centre on **0845 30 90 700** for advice. (This number is only valid until 1st December 2008. From then, the number will be **0800 111 4013**.)

We may suggest independent mediation if conflict has arisen and communication has broken down. Mediation gives an opportunity to agree a solution to a problem. **F**

If loud music is causing the problem, we may also ask you to contact the environmental

health team at your council. We will usually need the team to judge if the music is excessive and causing statutory nuisance, before we can take action under the tenancy contract. **F**

You can also help resolve problems in other ways, such as reporting to us and the council where you see people dumping rubbish; or vandalism and graffiti; or dog fouling. This will help to keep your neighbourhood looking good, as well as helping to reduce costs.

Racial harassment and hate crime

We will not tolerate racial harassment or hate crime of any nature. A hate crime is a crime committed against a person because of their race, ethnic origin, nationality, age, disability, gender, sexuality or political or religious beliefs. We have a separate procedure for these incidents, which aims to protect and support victims, and means taking firm action against those who are responsible.

If you experience any form of harassment, you should contact us and the police straight away.

Remember harassment is also a criminal offence. **F**

Abusive, threatening or violent behaviour

We will not tolerate any abuse, threat or violent behaviour against our customers, staff

or those working on our behalf, such as contractors. It is a condition of your tenancy that you are not abusive or violent to our staff or agents, and we will always consider taking legal action to prevent and tackle any problems. If you behave like this, we may ban you from our offices, refuse to visit you in your home, or take extra security measures when visiting you.

Drug misuse

If you believe that your neighbour is dealing drugs, you should report it to the police and us. We will consider taking legal action against any tenant convicted of supplying drugs from their home.

Domestic violence

We recognise that domestic violence seriously affects people's lives, both emotionally and physically. We are committed to taking all reasonable steps to combat domestic violence and its effects on those being abused and on children affected by it; and to challenge the behaviour of alleged wrongdoers.

Where an individual is in fear of or is the victim of domestic violence, we will try to involve other organisations in providing support, advice and assistance.

We will consider taking legal action against anyone alleged to carry out domestic violence, using the powers available to us under the Housing Act 1996 and other relevant legislation, if the victim wishes us to do so.

Dealing with anti-social behaviour

We will not tolerate anti-social behaviour. Anti-social behaviour is any act that causes nuisance, annoyance, alarm or distress to neighbours, local community, our staff or other agencies.

Please let us know if you are affected by anti-social behaviour. We will investigate all reports and take action to resolve them. We aim to stop the problem as soon as possible. We have a team of specially trained staff to deal with anti-social behaviour and they will gather evidence to support the complaint. Depending on the seriousness of the case we use a clear three-stage warning system to encourage people to keep to the terms of their tenancy contract. If this does not work, we will consider taking action such as:

- acceptable behaviour contracts
- injunctions (court orders requiring certain actions to be stopped)

- demoted tenancies
- anti-social behaviour orders
- possession orders.

We adopt a problem-solving approach, working closely with other agencies, such as the police, community mental health teams and youth services. We may also offer extra tenancy support.

We use eviction only as a last resort, where other actions have failed. **L**

Being realistic and working together

Our team are very successful at dealing with anti-social behaviour, but we usually need your help to resolve problems. If a case has to go to court, we need to convince the judge that it is reasonable to end a tenancy or grant an injunction to stop anti-social behaviour. We are more likely to succeed if complainants are willing to act as witnesses or give personal statements about the problems. In all our successful cases we have worked in partnership with the affected tenants.

Support for witnesses

We will give as much support as we can to witnesses or those complaining of anti-social behaviour, particularly if they have to attend court.

We will talk to you and draw up an action plan to tackle the problem. We will keep you regularly informed about the progress of the case. We may also support you by taking extra security measures, such as providing emergency alarms, mobile CCTV or additional lighting.

Customer service

9





Customer service

We are committed to providing a high-quality service that meets the diverse needs of our customers. We offer choice in the way that you can access our services and be involved in helping to shape them.

Service standards

We aim to provide an excellent service at all times. To ensure that you are clear about what you can expect from us, we have developed a set of service standards in consultation with our customers. **F**

We involve you in reviewing services against these standards. We seek and study your feedback on how you've found our service, so we can learn and improve.

Equality and diversity

We encourage tolerance and respect for different lifestyles, beliefs and views. We value diversity and believe that everyone should be treated with dignity and respect.

We will not discriminate or tolerate discrimination against any person or group on

the grounds of their race, ethnic origin, religion, age, disability, gender or sexual orientation. We seek to meet individual needs, including the specific needs of minority ethnic, disabled and vulnerable customers.

We aim to demonstrate these values through all areas of our business, including the new homes that we build, the staff that we employ, the way that we provide our services and how we respond to our customers.

From time to time we may ask you to give us information about your race, ethnic origin, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion and marital status. We use this information to ensure that we are achieving equality and diversity in all that we do.

Meeting your needs

We will ask how you would like us to contact you and share information. We can do this in various ways, such as:

- written translation from English into another language

- an interpreter to translate information into another language by telephone or face to face
- providing information in large print
- providing information on audio-CD or in Braille
- providing access to a sign-language service
- home visits by officers
- email
- through advocates or other agencies who are supporting you.

Using personal information

We will collect, use and store information in line with the Data Protection Act.

Information we hold about you will be treated as confidential. Normally, we will only pass on information to others with your specific permission. In some cases, however, we may have a legal duty to share information with other public bodies; for example:

- to the police if they formally request information to help detect crime or deal with anti-social behaviour
- to social services departments investigating allegations of abuse or issues concerning the well-being of adults or their dependants

- to local councils investigating homelessness applications
- to housing benefit departments or the Benefits Agency to help resolve a claim for housing benefit or if we discover that any tenant is involved in benefit fraud.

We will only supply details that are relevant to the situation.

If you wish to check the information we hold about you, please contact us. There will be a fee for accessing your files. **F**

Respect for staff

We enjoy good relationships with most of our customers. Unfortunately, a customer may occasionally be abusive or threatening to staff. If you behave in this way or we feel there could be a risk to staff when dealing with you, we may place special conditions on the way we deal with you. For example, we may visit in pairs, or only interview you in the office. If this happens, we will write to explain the reasons for our decision.


Any customer who threatens or abuses our staff is breaking their tenancy conditions and is at risk of losing their home.

Complaints and compliments

We want to learn from your experiences of our services. We do this by recording and monitoring complaints and compliments. We value the feedback we receive and use it to build on our success and learn from our mistakes.

We make every effort to deal with problems as soon as they arise and aim to give you the highest standards of service. However, we realise we may not always get it right. We have a simple complaints procedure that you can use if you are unhappy with the service you get.


If you have a complaint, please contact us and we will try to put the problem right straight away. If we cannot resolve it straight away or you are still unhappy with our service, you can make a formal complaint.

Formal complaints can be made by telephone or in writing. Please contact us or download a copy of our complaints leaflet from our website www.longhurst-group.org.uk 

Compensation

As part of our compensation policy we may make payments to you if we have failed to provide a service. This may include compensation for:

- missed appointments
- failure to complete repairs on time
- not responding to complaints within the target time.

We will not normally pay compensation where there are good reasons why we have missed our targets. 

Getting involved

10





Getting involved

Customer involvement

We want you to work with us to shape our services. Getting involved is the main way to do this. We aim to offer you a choice of ways to take part, at various levels of involvement and responsibility. The options range from completing a customer survey to joining the Board of Management.

We value your involvement and we aim to increase the number of our customers helping us to shape our business – both our day-to-day local services and our long-term plans.

This will allow us to provide the best possible housing service for all our customers.


Making a difference – why get involved?

To help us decide how to improve, we need your views about how well we are doing now, and how we could do things better.

Your ideas and suggestions will help us make better decisions and better use of resources.

Menu of options

Our menu of options lists a range of ways to get involved. At the start of your tenancy we will give you a copy of this menu.

If you decide you'd like to get involved in something at any time, please look out for information in our customer magazine or contact us on 0845 30 90 700. (This number is only valid until 1 December 2008. From then, the number will be **0800 111 4013**.) 

Community development

Community development is about giving you the power to improve your life and community. We will help and encourage you to get more involved in your neighbourhood, so that you can take a lead in building safer and more inclusive communities. This involves a range of initiatives, including:

- surveys to understand neighbourhood needs and priorities
- estate-based community projects
- environmental works

- partnership working between you, us and other agencies to find and deliver ways to improve your community.

We will also support local resident groups to find and apply for, external funding for their projects. We will provide training to help you develop the skills and experience you will need to contribute effectively to community projects.

Ending your tenancy


11





Ending your tenancy

If you want to end your tenancy, you will need to give us notice in writing. If you have a weekly tenancy, you must give us four weeks' notice, starting on a Monday. If you have a monthly tenancy, you must give us one calendar month's notice. You must also provide a forwarding address for sending on mail.

We will confirm when your tenancy will end. We will also need to visit you at your home to complete our end-of-tenancy survey. 

Thank-you bonus

If you hand back the tenancy in the way that we ask, we will give you £100 in vouchers.

You must:

- allow us to complete our end of tenancy survey
- return all the house keys, including any window, shed and letterbox keys, to us before 10am on the day your tenancy ends
- make sure your home is safe and secure when you leave
- take all possessions with you, including furniture, appliances, carpets, animals and any rubbish
- leave your home and all the fixtures and fittings we have provided in good condition
- make sure your home is decorated to a reasonable standard
- leave your garden tidy and free of rubbish, including scrap, furniture and appliances
- not leave anyone else living in your home
- remove any gas appliance that you have fitted – by law this must be done by a CORGI-registered plumber
- switch off all gas and electricity supplies
- allow us to show prospective tenants round to view your home before you move out.

Recharges

Before you leave your home we will carry out a survey to see if your home is in an

acceptable condition. If you have damaged your home or it is not in reasonable decorative order, we will ask you to put this right before you leave.

When you return your keys we will carry out a full survey of your home and re-charge you for any repairs that are your responsibility and for removing any items that you left behind. In some cases we may apply for a court order to recover our costs.

Compensation for improvements

If we granted you permission to make any improvements to your home during your tenancy, you may be eligible for compensation. Please ask us for more details.

Compensation is normally only paid for major alterations such as installing a new kitchen or bathroom. **F**

Your rent account and other debt

We will let you know if you owe us any money at the end of your tenancy, and you should pay this in full before you leave. If you are claiming housing benefit, you should check it is paid to the end of the tenancy. In some cases you may be able to apply for an overlapping benefit payment if you have to move out to start a new tenancy.

If you owe any money and are eligible for our thank-you bonus, we will deduct any money you owe us before sending you the vouchers. If you still have a debt, please contact us to make an agreement to pay. Failing this, our debt recovery team will take further action to recover the debt.

Who else needs to know your new address?

Remember to let the following people know that you are leaving:

- council tax department
- benefit offices
- gas, electricity and water providers
- post office – for redirecting your mail
- TV Licensing
- your bank, building society and credit card companies
- your employer
- your doctor and dentist.

Your tenancy with Longhurst

We hope you've been happy as a Longhurst customer. If you have any queries about ending your tenancy please contact us.