



# TENANTS' HANDBOOK



*Living in your  
home and  
neighbourhood*

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### Introduction

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# INTRODUCTION

## Welcome to your home

The Board of Management and employees of West Devon Homes are committed to delivering the highest standards of customer care and to involving our tenants in improving the services we provide.

This handbook has been published to help you access our services and give you essential and useful advice about living in your home and neighbourhood. It does not replace your Tenancy Agreement.

For further advice on the content of this



handbook you can contact the relevant team listed where you see this symbol.

Available guidance leaflets, which provide more detailed information about our



services are listed next to this symbol in the relevant section and in Section 6: Information.

If you would like to ask any questions about the content of this handbook or would like it in another language or format, please contact us on: **01822 813770**

### How to Contact West Devon Homes

- General Enquiries . . .01822 813770
- Repairs Hotline . . . . .01822 813205
- Out of Hours  
Emergency Repairs . .01822 813204
- Website . . . . .www.wdh.org.uk
- Email . . . . .enquiries@wdh.org.uk



# Section 1: Your West Devon Homes

## What is West Devon Homes?

West Devon Homes is a locally based housing association, with offices in Tavistock and Okehampton, set up to meet the existing and future housing needs of people in and around West Devon. West Devon Homes, although an independent organisation, is committed to working closely with Local Councils and other Registered Social Landlords to meet housing needs.

West Devon Homes is a non-profit making organisation, which means that surplus income generated from rents and other charges is reinvested to improve or enhance properties and services.

## Our purpose

The Company has a Corporate Objective, or Mission Statement which is:

*"To support local communities through the provision of affordable homes and services."*

## Our history

West Devon Homes was formed in 1997. The previous Landlord of many of our current homes, West Devon Borough Council, held a ballot of all tenants living in Council accommodation in February 1998 during which 81% of tenants voted to transfer the ownership and management of their homes to West Devon Homes. West Devon Homes started trading in February 1999 following the transfer of the Council's former housing stock. Since the transfer our stock has risen to over 1,500 homes.

## Our regulator

West Devon Homes is a Registered Social Landlord. As such, we ensure that we meet and maintain nationally agreed standards monitored by the Housing Corporation. In 2009, the responsibility for this transfers to a new agency created from the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships. Our policies and procedures are also inspected by the Audit Commission.

## Our Board

The Board of Management, with guidance and support from West Devon Homes' professional staff, is responsible for setting policies and rents and ensuring that the Company works effectively and efficiently. The ultimate responsibility for decision making lies with the Board.

There are 12 members of the Board of Management, which is made up as follows:

- 3 Tenant Trustees
- 3 Council Nominated Trustees
- 6 Independent Trustees

### *Where are we and when are we open?*

Head office: West Devon Homes, The Quay,  
Plymouth Road, Tavistock PL19 8AB

Our Tavistock office is open:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday: 9am – 5pm

Wednesday: 10am – 5pm

Friday: 9am – 4.30pm

Okehampton Office:

13 East Street, Okehampton EX20 1AS

Our Okehampton office is open Monday,

Wednesday and Friday: 9.30am – 12.30pm

# Section 2: Your Tenancy



Call 01822 813770 to speak to:

- Neighbourhoods & Communities team
- Rents team
- Lettings team



Leaflets available:

- Paying Rent: help and guidance
- Moving In: welcome to your home
- Moving Out: a guide to vacating your home
- Avoiding Recharges: when you move out

## The Tenancy Agreement

Before you moved into your new home, you will have been asked to read and sign West Devon Homes' 'Assured Tenancy Agreement.' You must keep your copy of the agreement. You will find it useful to refer to if an issue arises surrounding your tenancy, or if you need more detail about:

- **The Particulars of the Tenancy**, for example, your details, the address and description of the property, the rental charge, service charge if applicable, and how often these are to be paid.
- **General Terms**, for example, what happens about rent changes and how Housing Benefit affects rent payments, if applicable. See 'Your Tenancy: paying rent' on page 5 for further advice about rents.
- **Our Obligations** as your Landlord. For example, the Assured Tenant's Charter and the repairs West Devon Homes is obliged to carry out. See 'Your Home: Repairs and Out of Hours Emergency Repairs' on page 13 for more information about your repairs service.
- **Your Obligations**, for example, what is required of you as a tenant with regard to rent payments, behaviour and looking after your home. See page 14 for more information about your responsibilities with regard to repairs.

- **Rights and Security of Tenure** for example, your grounds for Possession and further rights, including your Right to Consultation and Right to Exchange. See 'Your Tenancy: buying, transferring or exchanging your home' on page 8 for further information.

## The Tenants' Charter

This publication, set out by our regulator, tells you what you can expect from West Devon Homes as a social landlord. You can use it to check that you are getting the service we should be providing. All new tenants are issued with a copy of the Tenants' Charter. The Charter is set out in the following sections:

- **The way things are run:** who's in charge and how things should be managed
- **Getting a new home:** your rights and what to expect
- **You and your housing association:** your rights and responsibilities
- **Information, consultation and involvement:** getting involved in the running of West Devon Homes
- **Making a complaint**
- **Finding out more:** useful contacts

## Data Protection

All the information you give West Devon Homes will be held either on our computer or in a manual file and is protected by the Data Protection Act 1998. This information will be used only in connection with your West Devon Homes tenancy. In some circumstances it may be disclosed to other agencies working in partnership with West Devon Homes. With a few exceptions, this will only be done

where we already have your approval to release this information, on a confidential basis, to other organisations, e.g. West Devon Borough Council.

### Important: changing your name

If you change your name you must inform the Company in writing so that your tenancy details can be altered. We may request legal evidence of a name change such as a marriage certificate.

## Paying rent

Our Rents Service is responsible for ensuring that rents and service charges are correctly applied to all tenancies, and that rent increase notices are sent at the appropriate time and comply with legislation. The service processes all your rent payments and ensures that these are applied to rent accounts.

### What can I expect from this service?

- Help and guidance to pay your rent and maximise your income by assisting you to claim for any benefits you may be entitled to
- An approachable service if you experience difficulty in paying your rent
- Effective action, in accordance with company policy, against tenants who do not pay their rent

### How can I pay my rent?

When you are allocated a property by West Devon Homes a rent payment card will be ordered for your use (this can take up to 4 weeks to deliver). You can pay your rent using one of the following options:

- By Standing Order. Forms available on request
- Make a payment, free of charge, using your rent card at a Post Office
- By debit/credit card either over the phone or in our Tavistock or Okehampton offices

If you are unable to pay by any of the above methods then we may be able to accept cash or cheque payments at our offices.

Your rent is due fortnightly in advance on the first Monday of each fortnight. The Rents Section will provide you with a calendar which has rent due dates highlighted.

Your rent will usually increase at the beginning of each April. You will be notified in writing of any changes at least four weeks prior to the date.

### Can I claim Housing Benefit?

If you think you may be entitled to claim Housing Benefit, you should contact your local authority for the necessary claim form. If you are a tenant of West Devon Homes and need assistance completing the form, we are able to help.

### What will happen if I do not pay my rent?

Paying your rent is a condition of your tenancy. If you do not pay then you could lose your home.

If you are unable to pay your rent for any reason you should contact West Devon Homes Rents Team immediately for advice. West Devon Homes may be able to reach an agreement with you, whereby we will accept a reasonable and realistic amount in addition to your weekly rent payment.

We want to keep our tenants in their homes and will do everything possible to help avoid eviction. However, failure to pay your rent is a breach of your tenancy and could lead to you being evicted from your home.

### Rent Statements

A statement of your rent account will be sent to you automatically every six months and you should cross-check your receipts with the payments on your statement. If they correspond you can then dispose of your receipts. You can, of course, request a statement of your account at any time.

## Section 2: Your Tenancy

### Home and neighbourhood

The Neighbourhoods and Communities Team responds to complaints from tenants and residents about possible breaches of tenancy conditions. The team is responsible for ensuring that the Company complies with legislative requirements in relation to prevention of anti-social behaviour and enforcement. Its wider estate management responsibilities include ensuring that property and land in our ownership is well maintained. This service also provides support to Tenant Panel and Tenants' and Residents' Associations.

#### What can I expect from this service?

- Advice about your conditions of tenancy and where you may be in breach of these conditions
- Swift action where problems occur to prevent escalation and fair and equal treatment for both complainants and perpetrators
- To have your complaint taken seriously and an appropriate and proportional response to any apparent breach of tenancy
- Pro-active work to ensure that property and land in our ownership is well maintained.

#### How can I access this service?

If you require advice or wish to have a complaint investigated regarding a problem in your neighbourhood, contact the Neighbourhoods and Communities Team on 01822 813770.

### Some essential advice about living in your home and neighbourhood:

#### Nuisance and Noise

Everybody has the right to live peacefully in their homes and we expect all West Devon Homes' tenants to show consideration for others. It is therefore a condition of your tenancy that you must not do anything which causes, or may cause, a nuisance, annoyance or disturbance to others. Noise is the most common form of

## Note:

Don't suffer in silence from victimisation or domestic violence - speak to us in confidence! We can connect you with the right support

nuisance and there are steps you can take if you feel that your neighbours are unreasonably noisy.

#### Victimisation: harassment, hate crime

West Devon Homes will not tolerate racist, homophobic or any other prejudicial or non-prejudicial harassment or abuse. Any such behaviour will be considered a serious breach of tenancy conditions.

If you feel you are being victimised or harassed in any way, perhaps by somebody in your community, we can help. If you are the target of racist, homophobic or any other prejudicial abuse or harassment, we can and will, if requested to do so, find ways to support and help you. We can help you to make contact with the police or other specialist support agencies. Reporting this form of crime helps to stop the problem and we would always encourage this. However, if you feel you cannot talk to the police, do not suffer in silence. We can put you in touch with people who can help.

#### Domestic violence

If you feel you may be in a situation of domestic abuse and/or violence, we can put you in touch with people who can help. Our Neighbourhoods and Communities team and our Sheltered Housing Support Officers receive training to

ensure that they approach situations of domestic violence and/or abuse appropriately, sensitively and discretely. For example, they will not raise any concerns of this nature whilst others are present if they believe you may be at risk. We can help to support you and would encourage you to speak to us about ways we can help. You will also find some useful telephone numbers in the 'Information' section of this handbook.

### Security

Anyone calling from or on behalf of West Devon Homes, including our contractors, must show you identification before entering your home. The majority of West Devon Homes' visits made are by appointment. If you are called on unexpectedly and are unsure, ask for the caller's identification and call the office on 01822 813770 to check that your visitor is genuine.

**Do not let anyone into your home without seeing their identification.** If you are registered blind, you can set up a simple password system. Contact the Corporate Issues Officer for details on 01822 813770.

### Pets

We will normally allow tenants to keep domestic pets, as long as they are well behaved, kept under control and, in the case of dogs, are not a breed banned by the Government. Under no circumstances will pets be allowed to cause a nuisance to neighbours or visitors to the property. The Company will only allow tenants to keep a 'reasonable' number of pets and we retain ultimate discretion to decide what is 'reasonable'. If your home has a communal entrance area (e.g. flats) you will not be permitted to keep cats or dogs unless they assist you with special needs, such as a guide dog.

### Rats, mice and other pests

You should contact the Environmental Health section of your Local Council if you discover rats,

mice, fleas or any other pests at your home. The Council will normally deal with the problem of rats free of charge, but may need to charge for dealing with other vermin. Please contact us if you would like some help or support in getting this problem sorted out.

### Communal areas and parking

Some of our properties, for instance flats and maisonettes, have common areas such as corridors and balconies that all tenants will use. All tenants living in such properties have a joint responsibility to keep these areas clean, tidy, and free from dangerous obstructions.

There are many areas of shared car parking where spaces cannot be reserved and these parking spaces are provided for all residents or their visitors to use should they wish to do so. Please park carefully and give some thought to other users. Do not cause obstructions to other drivers, pedestrians or vehicles from the emergency services. Parking facilities are not for use by large commercial vehicles, caravans, tractors, boats and trailers, untaxed and un-roadworthy vehicles, or for constant repairs to your own, or other peoples' cars by you, or anyone in your household. Please do not park a car, caravan or other vehicle on a garden, grass verge or other open space.

### Running a business

You must get our permission if you intend running a business from your home. Most domestic properties are not suitable as premises from which to run a business. If this is your intention you must apply in writing and a full assessment will be made of your application, which will include the likely impact of your proposed business on those living around you and any likely environmental consequences. You will also be required to obtain any relevant Planning Permission from your Local Planning Authority.

## Section 2: Your Tenancy

### Buying, transferring or exchanging your home

#### Can I buy my home?

Tenants who transferred to West Devon Homes from West Devon Borough Council in 1999 retained the Right To Buy (this is known as 'The Preserved Right to Buy') and may be eligible to purchase their present home at a discount. This right is applicable providing that the tenancy of the claimant has been continuous. New tenants of West Devon Homes do not have the Right to Buy but may instead have the Right to Acquire; a different scheme enabling tenants to purchase their home. Only tenants living in property situated in the larger towns in the district, i.e. Okehampton and Tavistock, will have the Right to Acquire. Properties outside the two large towns are exempt from the scheme.

#### My housing needs have changed. Can I transfer to another property?

The Company recognises that the ability to transfer allows its tenants the means to secure accommodation more suited to their changing needs. The Company considers transfer applications within its overall allocation scheme on the basis of need.

The Company allows all current tenants to register for a transfer. However, there are some circumstances where a transfer offer will not be permitted:

1. If the transfer applicant's current property is not in a lettable condition due to neglect or wilful damage.
2. If the transfer applicant has any outstanding rent arrears or debts for rechargeable repairs to the Company, the Local Authority, or any other Registered Social Landlord. These debts must be cleared.
3. If you or any member of your household have been involved in anti-social behaviour.

#### Is there any incentive to move into a smaller property?

There is always strong demand for family sized accommodation. For tenants considering a move to a smaller property the Company may offer some assistance with the costs of removal and disturbance.

#### Can I exchange homes with another tenant?

As a tenant of West Devon Homes you have the right to exchange homes with another tenant of West Devon Homes, a tenant of another Registered Social Landlord or a tenant of a Local Authority. Tenants who occupy specialised accommodation such as sheltered or adapted accommodation will only be able to exchange with someone who has an identified need for that type of accommodation. You will need our permission to exchange homes.

#### Can I assign my tenancy to someone else?

Under certain circumstances, **and only with our permission**, you may be allowed to assign your tenancy to someone else.

### Your tenancy and other people in your home

#### Taking in lodgers

A lodger is someone who lives with you as a member of your family, sharing your facilities such as the bathroom and kitchen. West Devon Homes has no objection to you taking in lodgers. However, you must let us know as we are legally required to make sure that your home is not overcrowded. If you do take in a lodger you must remember that any entitlement you may have to Housing Benefit is likely to be reduced. If you are in receipt of Housing Benefit you must notify the Council's Housing Benefit section of any change in your circumstances.

## Note:

Family-sized accommodation is always in high demand! Incentives are offered for moving to smaller properties.

### Sub-letting your home

If you wish to sub-let part of your home you must first get our permission. If you are granted permission you should note that your tenant will not be an assured tenant of West Devon Homes and they will have no security of tenure with the Company. You are advised to seek detailed advice before you consider sub-letting.

### Taking over a tenancy by succession

If a person dies while a tenant of the Company, it is possible under certain circumstances, that another member of the family can take over the tenancy.

### Sharing your tenancy

If you are a sole tenant it is sometimes possible to add another person onto your tenancy to create a joint tenancy. However, this is at the Company's discretion. It is important to remember that joint tenants are jointly and severally responsible for meeting the obligations of the tenancy such as paying the rent. The Company can only convert a joint tenancy to a sole tenancy either by Order of the Court, on the death of any party, or should any party to the tenancy officially surrender their interests in the tenancy. This is at the discretion of the Company.

### If someone dies

If you have a joint tenancy and one of the tenancy holders should die, please let us know in writing. You will need to send us a copy of the death certificate. This means we can update our records.

### Ending your tenancy

If you wish to end your tenancy you **MUST**:

- Give us four weeks' notice in writing of your intention to end your tenancy. During this notice period, a member of staff from Housing Services will contact you to arrange a convenient time to visit your home, in order to carry out a 'Leaving Visit'. During the visit, the procedure for handing in door keys and meter key/cards and the condition in which you must leave the property will be explained. You will also be given information leaflets to remind you what must be done before you leave.
- Give us a forwarding address in case we need to contact you
- Pay your rent up to date
- Return your keys, and any gas and/or electricity keys/cards to one of offices in person on the date of the end of your tenancy. **WE WILL CONTINUE TO CHARGE RENT UNTIL WE RECEIVE THE HOUSE KEYS.**

**IMPORTANT:** See 'Your Home: moving out' on page 18 for more information about vacating the property, including the condition in which you must leave the property to avoid being charged for any necessary clearing/repair works we may have to carry out after you have left.

### How can West Devon Homes end your Tenancy?

The Company can normally only end your tenancy by getting a Court Order for possession of your property. The first thing we would do is to give you four weeks' written notice of our intention to go to Court to seek a Possession Order. This Notice will advise you of the grounds under which we will be asking the Court to give us possession of your home. The serving of this notice may give you the opportunity to take steps to prevent Court action being taken, for instance, you might be able to pay outstanding rent. If a property has been abandoned by the tenant we may be able to regain possession without a Court Order.

## Section 2: Your Tenancy



Call 01822 813770

to speak to:

- Sheltered and Supported Housing Team



Leaflets available:

- Sheltered Housing: a safer solution for independent living
- Your Support Plan: helping you to stay independent
- Support Plan Risk Assessments: working to keep you safe

### Sheltered Housing

Sheltered Housing is specifically designated accommodation that is principally intended for occupation by people of retirement age, who are in need of support to remain independent. These people benefit from the added security of knowing there is help at hand should a problem arise.

West Devon Homes has 202 sheltered housing homes on eight different sites across West Devon. Any prospective tenants have a Needs Assessment undertaken to ensure they require the support available in Sheltered Housing.

Our schemes at The Glen, Cranley Gardens, Pinder Court, Crelake Close and Briar Tor have communal rooms and tenants are encouraged to take part in and to organise various activities.

#### What can I expect from this service?

- 24-hour emergency alarm cover for all tenants in sheltered accommodation.
- A Support Service that will support clients in day-to-day living through signposting, advice and acting as an advocate, where required
- A confidential, personal 'Support Plan' to identify any areas of personal risk or where Support Officers may be able to work with a tenant to obtain goals, or after a personal crisis, and identify where further support may be needed from other agencies. This is updated annually.
- Caretakers on appropriate sites to maintain the communal areas and monitor the Ground Maintenance Contract

### Note:

At retirement age and in need of support?  
Sheltered Housing may be just what you need!

# Section 3: Your Home



## Call:

- Repairs Hotline (01822 813205)
- Out of Hours Emergency Repairs (01822 813204)



## Leaflets available:

- Repairs and Maintenance: know what to expect
- Recharging for Repairs: when you have to pay
- Gas: annual servicing and safety checks
- Home and Dry: how to manage condensation and avoid damp and mould
- Moving Out: a guide to vacating your home
- Avoiding Recharges: when you move out

## Essential advice

### Know your home

It is important for you to know where essential items relating to utilities are located within your home.

### Make sure of the location of the:

- Stopcock
- Fuse box
- Gas mains on/off lever
- Hot water cylinder
- Cold water storage tank
- Central heating boiler

### Gas leaks

If you smell gas:

- Do not turn on any light switches, sockets or light matches
- Turn off the gas supply – using the on/off lever which is next to your gas meter
- Open all windows and doors
- Call Transco on 0800 111 999
- Contact West Devon Homes immediately

### Major water leaks

If you have a major water leak in your home, such as a burst frozen pipe or water tank:

- Turn off the water at the stopcock
- Switch off the electricity at the mains
- Switch off the central heating
- Open all taps to drain the tank fully (collect some water for drinking and to flush the toilet)
- Contact West Devon Homes immediately

### Immersion heaters

*Important advice if you have an electric immersion heater:*

Electric immersions installed within the hot water cylinder have an automatic cut-off thermostat which is activated when the water temperature reaches 60°C. In the unlikely event that this component should fail the hot water will be continually heated by the immersion until it reaches boiling point. The boiling water will then be re-circulated into the cold water tank and, if left over a period, may cause the cold water storage cistern/tank to fail. The consequence of this failure may lead to boiling water flooding the property from the area where the tank is located, e.g. loft space.

Although such incidents are rare and have not occurred in any of West Devon Homes' properties, we would ask that you be vigilant. There are three main indications of failure to be aware of:

- Excessive hot water from hot water taps, showers, etc.
- Cold water supply from taps in the bathroom become warm or hot
- Water can be heard to boil/bubble into the cold water cistern

If you suspect any of the above you should immediately turn the switch to the immersion heater off, therefore making the system safe. Once the system has been isolated you should phone West Devon Homes immediately.

## Section 3: Your Home

### Smoke Detectors

Never disconnect the smoke detector alarm in your home. It is important to test these alarms weekly, by pressing the 'test' button. If the alarm does not go off and the unit is beeping, you should change the batteries. If the alarm does not work and is not beeping, call our Repairs Hotline on 01822 813205 to report it.

### Leaving your home empty

If you are going away for more than a few days, you can take some precautions:

- Turn off the water supply at the stopcock
- Turn off all gas appliances and/or immersion heater
- Run all taps until the flow of water stops
- ON YOUR RETURN: DO NOT TURN THE BOILER/ HEATING/HOT WATER SYSTEMS ON UNTIL YOU HAVE TURNED THE WATER BACK ON AT THE STOPCOCK.
- Turn off sockets and take out plugs on all appliances EXCEPT fridges and freezers
- You may want to consider fitting a timer to certain lights in the house so it is less obviously empty
- You may want to tell a neighbour you are going away and leave a contact number
- If your home will be empty for a prolonged period of time, for example a long stay in hospital, it would be helpful if you could let us know

### Asbestos

Some of our homes may contain asbestos as part of the building material. We carry out a survey of all our properties every five years. This includes checking the condition of any materials which may contain asbestos, but are completely safe when undisturbed. We keep a record of what is found and remove anything that may pose a hazard to health. If you want to carry out DIY and are unsure of any board or wall you need

### Note:

Remember: if fire breaks out: GET OUT. STAY OUT. GET THE FIRE BRIGADE OUT. Plan and practise your escape route with your family!

to disturb, you must contact us, and we will arrange for a Technical Services Officer to visit to ensure it is safe to do so.

### Radon

Radon is a radioactive gas that occurs naturally. It has no taste, smell or colour; in fact, special devices are needed to detect it. Radon is everywhere, usually at levels that pose negligible risk. However, when Radon stays in enclosed spaces concentrations can build up which can pose a risk to health. If you have any concerns about Radon in your property, please contact Technical Services.

### Insurance

The Company's insurance policy relates to 'buildings cover' only. It is the tenant's responsibility to insure their home contents (furniture, clothing, etc.). If a pipe or water tank bursts and damages your belongings (or that of a neighbour), the Company is not normally responsible.

If you would like to find out about affordable insurance for social housing tenants, please call our Finance Section.

## Repairs and Out of Hours Emergency Repairs

West Devon Homes provides a responsive repairs service to over 1,500 properties and an additional 256 garages, which make up the Company's stock in and around West Devon.

Every year West Devon Homes receives more than 5,000 repair requests from tenants. It is very important that we are able to respond to the most serious situations quickly, especially if there is a risk to anyone's health or safety.

To ensure all our tenants receive a high and fair standard of service, each repair request we receive is assessed against the guidelines provided by our regulator.

### What can I expect from this service?

- A flexible, convenient and tenant-orientated service
- A prompt response to repair requests
- Your safety to be treated as a priority and repairs to be carried out within defined timescales
- Repairs carried out efficiently and to a high standard
- Technical advice to tenants wishing to carry out permissible alterations themselves.
- Confidence that the Company complies with statutory and contractual obligations to tenants and leaseholders

Your repair request will be assessed by a Technical Services Assistant, and assigned to one of our priority categories (see page 15).

## Note:

For Out of Hours  
Emergency Repairs  
call 01822 813204

For day-to-day repairs  
call 01822 813205

### Out of Hours Emergency Repairs

Our Out of Hours Emergency Repairs service is provided by an external call centre. If you experience an emergency Out of Hours – that is any fault/problem that represents an immediate risk to yourself, a third party or the structure of your home, for example major flooding, major structural faults or fire damage, please call the **Out of Hours emergency number on 01822 813204**. Please note, our contractors are required to make the situation safe for you and your household. Any necessary repairs may be carried out at a later date.

If you call the Out of Hours Emergency Repairs line and your problem is not an emergency, you will be asked to contact West Devon Homes on the next working day.

## Section 3: Your Home

### Is it my responsibility, or West Devon Homes'?

Before you request a repair, check the lists below to ensure that the repair is West Devon Homes' responsibility. Although most repairs to the structure of your home and its essential services are the responsibility of West Devon Homes, there are some repairs which you are responsible for. If we have to carry out any such repairs, for example, once you have left your home, you will have to pay.

#### In general, tenants are responsible for:

- The repair and replacement of any fixtures, fittings and appliances that were not originally provided by West Devon Homes. For example: curtain rails, shelving, floor coverings, cylinder jackets, electrical appliances, sink/bath plugs and chains, fuses, patios and fences and lost keys (including the cost of re-entry if you are locked out).
- Works to repair or replace damage to West Devon Homes' property caused accidentally or deliberately by the tenant, other household member or visitor.

#### In addition, tenants are also responsible for repairing damage to:

- external and internal glazing
- minor damage to plasterwork
- minor repairs to kitchen unit cupboards and drawers
- clearing drain gullies, chimneys, internal waste pipes and traps.

This list is not exhaustive – if you are unsure about your responsibilities for any particular item or circumstance of breakage in your home, call our Technical Services team.

## Note:

There are some repairs that are your responsibility! See the list on the left for more information!

### Inspections

Some of the repair requests we receive from tenants need to be looked at, to help us decide what works are required. In addition, we are required to check around 10% of all repairs, to ensure that the works carried out are to a high standard.

If you call our hotline to report a repair, and our Technical Services Assistant feels that an inspection will be necessary in order to assess the extent of the work required, you will immediately be offered a convenient inspection appointment. You will then be sent a letter to confirm your appointment date and time (morning or afternoon).

Our Technical Services Officers visit a number of different neighbourhoods each week, with a list of all repairs undertaken in the area. If one of these repairs was completed at your home, the officer may call and ask to inspect the repair. If your neighbourhood is due a visit we will write to you and let you know beforehand. However, please note this is not definite appointment and you need not stay in or contact us about this. If our officer does call at a time convenient for you, we would be most grateful if you would allow the officer to inspect the repair.

## How quickly will my repair be done?

When you request a repair, our staff will inform you how quickly your repair should be completed. This decision will be made using Company guidelines and procedures. West Devon Homes use the following response priorities for repairs:

### 1

**Emergency: up to 24 hours**  
(please note: priority is to make safe – repairs will only be completed within this timescale if practical to do so)

- **Definition:** Any fault/problem that represents an **immediate risk** to yourself, a third party or the structure of your home
- **Examples:** Total loss of water, flooding, total loss of electricity, total loss of gas supply, gas leaks or blocked flue, breaches of security to outside doors and windows, blocked main drains, soil pipe or blockage of only toilet, fire damage, loss of heating and/or hot water during the period from 31st Oct to 1st May\*, offensive or racist graffiti

### 3

**Routine: up to 14 calendar days to complete**

- **Definition:** Defects that will cause **some inconvenience** but not serious discomfort or nuisance to the tenant (or others) or deterioration of the property itself
- **Examples:** Repairs to door, windows and floors, external walls, fences and paths, walls, brickwork, slates or tiles, kitchen fittings, plaster work (except small cracks), dripping or leaking taps or shower units, easing doors and windows

### 2

**Urgent: up to 7 calendar days to complete**

- **Definition:** May cause **serious discomfort, inconvenience or nuisance** to the tenant (or others) or deterioration of the property itself
- **Examples:** Heating/hot water faults or heating/hot water breakdowns\* after 1st May and before 31st Oct, minor plumbing leaks/defects or blocked drains, sinks, bath, toilet (if not the only toilet in the property) a defective cistern or overflow, minor electrical faults, roof leaks, blocked gutters, faulty extractor fans

### 4

**Routine: up to 31 calendar days to complete**

- **Definition:** Defects that will cause **little or no inconvenience** and not serious discomfort or nuisance to the tenant (or others) or deterioration of the property itself
- **Examples:** as above

\* West Devon Homes recognises that some tenants may be particularly vulnerable in the event of losing these services at any time of year (e.g. due to a medical condition). In such cases we continue to respond to loss of heating and/or hot water as an emergency through the year. Our employees will automatically ask you a range of questions to ensure that your request is fairly categorised according to your needs.

## Section 3: Your Home

### Gas and oil servicing

#### Gas Safety

If a gas supply is connected to your home, when you moved in you will have been given a copy of the Gas Safety Certificate. This is your record that the gas fired hot water and/or heating appliance/s in your home have been safety checked.

#### Why do I have to allow West Devon Homes to carry out a gas safety check annually?

##### 1. Safety

Every year about 30 people die and many others suffer from carbon monoxide poisoning, often as a result of faulty gas appliances. (Source: Health and Safety Executive: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/>) Gas explosions are rare, but possible. For the health, safety and welfare of your household, you must allow us to carry out this safety check.

##### 2. Legal Requirement

As landlords, annual gas safety checks are a legal requirement (Gas Safety Installation and Use Regulations 1998). As tenants, failure to allow us access to your home when your annual service/safety check is due is a breach of your tenancy and could lead to you being evicted from your home.

##### 3. Good practice

An annual service and safety check will ensure that gas and oil systems are properly maintained, the lifespan prolonged and the risk of breakdown minimised.

Our nominated Gas and Oil servicing contractor will provide you with at least two weeks' notice in writing. **Help us to keep you safe by keeping the appointment.**

### Planned maintenance

The Planned maintenance function deals with all the major works and improvements to properties. This includes the renewal or replacement of damaged or worn-out components such as kitchens, double glazing, heating systems, kitchens and bathrooms.

#### What can I expect from this service?

- A rolling programme of works to ensure that all the Company's properties are kept in good order
- To be informed about any improvements planned for your home including the nature of improvements and timing of works
- To be consulted on your views about the planned works both prior to, during and after completion
- To have access to a named contact whilst works are taking place
- To be offered choice wherever possible

West Devon Homes has carried out a 100% survey across all housing stock. This is used to produce a cost and time efficient, five year rolling programme of planned maintenance. If your home is due for planned works we will write to you directly. Every year the Company will carry out a 20% survey of its stock so that all properties will be re-inspected over a rolling five year period.

## Making changes in your home

### Improvements

You have the right to improve your home, but you must first obtain the written agreement of the Company, and you may also need planning or building regulations approval. Improvements and alteration works are subject to various conditions, however, consent will not be unreasonably withheld. If we have to refuse your request you will receive a written explanation telling you why.

You must also bear in mind that you will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance and servicing of any alterations or improvements that you make.

Some improvements you make may entitle you to compensation should you subsequently leave your home. Please let us know if you would like further advice about the 'Rights to compensation for improvements' scheme.

### Decorating

It is up to you to decorate the inside of your property. Redecoration of communal areas in a building is the Company's responsibility.

If your decorations are damaged by any work we do in your home the Company will make good the affected area or offer you a decoration allowance to enable you to make good. When we refer to 'making good' we do not mean redecorating the entire wall, ceiling or room. It simply means that the Company will use its best endeavours to redecorate the affected area to match existing decorations.

## Note:

*Did you know that you can improve your home - but you must have written agreement from us first!*

### Disabled adaptations

If you require your home to be adapted in some way for a medical reason, for example, handrails at your entrance door or a shower unit instead of a bath, you should first have an assessment carried out by an Occupational Therapist. You can contact Social Services about this. They can make an application for adaptations to us on your behalf. If you live in Sheltered Housing, please speak to your Support Officer.

## Section 3: Your Home

### Moving out

This section relates to the condition in which you must leave your home and what to do about essential services when you move out. If you are thinking of moving out of your home, please see 'Section 2: Your Tenancy: ending your tenancy' on page 9 for further information.

### The Leaving Visit

Once you have informed us in writing of your intention to end your tenancy, a member of our Housing Services team will contact you to arrange a convenient time to visit your home, in order to carry out a 'Leaving Visit'. During this visit, amongst other advice, you will be told exactly in what condition you must leave the property in order to avoid us 'recharging' you for any works we have to do once you have left. In addition, you will be given a detailed information leaflet.

The Leaving Visit is not a formal inspection, which can only be carried out when the property is empty. You may be liable for additional recharges once an inspection is carried out by a Technical Services Officer, which will take place after you have left the property.

## Note:

*Moving out? We need to visit to advise you of things you need to do before you go - it could save you money!*

### Can I leave anything I have fitted in the property?

NO. In general, you MUST ensure that the property is clear of:

- Debris and infestation
- Any substance hazardous to health
- Graffiti
- All furniture, floor coverings including carpet, underlay and laminate flooring
- Personal possessions and rubbish
- All fixtures and fittings you have installed, for example, shelves, sheds and including light fittings which must have been replaced with standard fittings

### Remember

- You must leave the property in a clean and tidy condition, with all dirt and surface stains, including nicotine stains, removed
- Even if items, such as carpets and/or laminate flooring, are in a pristine condition, you must remove everything listed and/or explained at your leaving visit

### What about the utilities?

It is your responsibility to contact the relevant utility companies and tell them:

- you are moving out
- your forwarding address
- your final meter readings

# Section 4: Your Service Standards



## Call 01822 813770 to speak to:

- Administration Team (Customer Care, Complaints)
- Chief Executive's Office (Equality and Diversity, Service Improvement)



## Leaflets available:

- How to Make a Complaint

## Customer care

Whenever you make contact with us, e.g. visiting or telephoning our Reception or attending an appointment, calling the Repairs Hotline, or sending us emails or letters, there are certain standards of service you can expect to receive.

### What can I expect from West Devon Homes?

- An efficient, responsive and tenant focused point of contact
- High standards of customer care, ensuring equal opportunity and equal standards of service for all tenants
- High standards of communication

### To achieve this we will aim to:

- Be flexible and responsive in listening to tenants and keeping them informed
- Provide on request a choice of information formats (including a translation service if required)
- Ensure that our tenants are treated with courtesy, respect and dignity at all times
- Ensure tenant confidentiality is respected at all times
- Provide choices and opportunity for involvement wherever possible
- Provide clear, accurate and timely information about our services and any issues which affect our tenants
- Deal with all complaints efficiently, and in line with the Company's Complaints Policy
- Make available an appointment system to enable tenants to raise specific enquiries with the relevant member of staff

If you are unhappy with any aspect of the service you have received, we would encourage you to tell us!

## Equality and diversity

West Devon Homes has a commitment and a duty to ensure that its services are equally accessible to all tenants. This means that we foster a culture of respect for difference and an understanding of fair treatment for all throughout our organisation. No tenant shall be hindered from gaining fair and equal access to services or receive a lesser service because of their race, religion or belief, age, gender, disability and/or sexual orientation.

### We aim to ensure:

- Equality of opportunity for tenant involvement in our decision making processes
- Equality of access to services
- Equality of service delivery standards

We expect our employees, contractors and any agent acting on behalf of the Company to behave in a fair and respectful manner towards all tenants.

We expect tenants to behave respectfully towards each other, their neighbours, our employees and contractors and will act swiftly and effectively to stop any prejudicial harassment and abuse.

We can provide any information we produce, including this handbook, in an alternative format for you.

## Section 4: Your Service Standards

### Complaints

We aim to provide a high standard of service for all tenants. However, we do get things wrong from time to time, and therefore it is important that dissatisfied tenants are given the opportunity to tell us why they are not happy with any aspect of our service, to give us the opportunity to put things right.

#### What can I expect from this service?

- To feel confident that a complaint is being dealt with effectively and fairly
- For us to use complaints positively and take subsequent action to maintain and improve service quality
- An easily accessible, straightforward means of making a complaint which offers prompt action and a speedy resolution

#### How can I access this service?

If you feel you need to complain you can do so in a number of ways:

- In writing. Please send your comments to: The Admin Co-ordinator, West Devon Homes, The Quay, Plymouth Road, Tavistock PL19 8AB, or request a complaint form and pre-paid envelope from our reception
- By telephone: contact us on 01822 813770
- By fax: on 01822 813799
- By email: [enquiries@wdh.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wdh.org.uk)
- Via our website at: [www.wdh.org.uk](http://www.wdh.org.uk)
- In person: please call us to make an appointment if you wish to discuss your complaint in person with a member of staff.

If we receive a complaint we may contact you by telephone or arrange a visit. We will also send you a letter within three working days to say we have registered your complaint, and ensure that your complaint is investigated thoroughly.

#### What happens next?

On completion of the investigation, we will send you a full reply. This will occur within 28 calendar days of acknowledgement of your initial complaint. If you are not happy with the decision, you have the right to appeal. If you are still not satisfied, you will have the right to have your complaint assessed by the Housing Ombudsman Service.

### Service improvement: Annual Report and Performance Improvement Plan

Each year West Devon Homes undertakes an annual assessment of performance across all services. This process enables us to identify where service strengths and weaknesses lie. This information is then used to develop our Performance Improvement Plan, detailing the improvement objectives for the year ahead.

Every year, in September, we publish and send you our Annual Report and a summary of our Performance Improvement Plan. The Annual Report tells you what we have been doing throughout the previous 12 months and highlights our achievements during the year. In contrast, The Performance Improvement Plan focuses on areas of our services where improvement is most needed and tells you why and how we intend to improve on tenant focused services.

### Note:

If you think we've got something wrong - tell us! Your feedback helps us improve our services!

# Section 5: Your Voice



## Call 01822 813770 to speak to:

- Administration Team (Company Membership)
- Chief Executive's Office (Think Bank)
- Neighbourhoods and Communities Team (Tenant Panel and TRAs)



## Leaflets available:

- Company Membership: be counted, be heard
- The Think Bank: your thoughts shape our services
- The Garden Assistance Scheme

## Performance promises

It is very important as a social landlord that we demonstrate our commitment to tenant involvement and our ability to deliver on this. To ensure this we have made the following promises to tenants:

- We will ensure that we keep tenants informed of satisfaction with our services.
- We will publicise our service improvement objectives annually and evidence how these have taken into account the main concerns and priorities raised by our tenants.
- We will keep tenants updated regarding our progress against these improvement objectives both in relation to their delivery and any subsequent change in performance.
- We will ensure that we involve tenants when working to improve services

As well as having three tenant trustees on our Board of Management, there are several ways we involve our tenants in our decision making processes:

- Company Membership
- Tenant Panel
- The Think Bank
- Tenants' and Residents' Associations
- Tenant satisfaction surveys

## Company Membership

Would you like the opportunity to make your mark and vote on our major Company issues? If you become a member of West Devon Homes

## Note:

*There are many ways to get involved and have your say in our decision making - choose one or more that suits you!*

you will be able to vote on such issues once a year at the Company's Annual General Meeting.

Any tenant can apply to become a Member of West Devon Homes, with the exception of those involved professionally with the Local Authority. If you would like to join you will need to complete an application form, which can be obtained from either of West Devon Homes' offices.

## Tenant Panel

The Tenant Panel is one way for tenants to have a direct say over a range of Company issues. West Devon Homes consults with the Tenant Panel on major issues within the Company that affect tenants. At the Tenant Panel AGM, three tenants are elected to sit on our Board of Management. In addition, as part of its Performance Improvement Model the Company is required to demonstrate to the Tenant Panel how

## Section 5: Your Voice

it has taken into account the views of the wider tenant population, in shaping and developing its services. The Chair of the Tenant Panel and the Chief Executive of West Devon Homes also attend programmed estate visits along with our Neighbourhoods and Communities team.

The Tenant Panel has its own budget, provided by West Devon Homes, for administration, training and expenses and for community projects that benefit our tenants and the neighbourhoods in which they live. Our Tenant Panel introduced the Welcome Pack of goodies you received when you moved into your home. They also organise events to raise funds for their nominated charity, which changes each year.

The Tenant Panel, in partnership with the Company, also introduced the Garden Assistance Scheme. This scheme enables tenants, who are over 60 or disabled, to receive a 'one-off' visit from a qualified contractor, to turn an overgrown garden into one that will be easier for the tenant to manage. This service is free of charge to tenants who qualify. Contact our reception for an information leaflet and application form.

### The Think Bank

The Think Bank is a group of tenant volunteers who have expressed specific interest in becoming involved in shaping the services that West Devon Homes delivers.



Think Bank members specify which services they are most interested in and how they would like to be involved. This could be completing a postal, internet or telephone questionnaire, taking part in a group meeting, or answering a snapshot

question via text message. When we are reviewing a service, we may contact those who have expressed an interest in that service for their views – it's as simple as that.

We really act on the feedback we receive and you can make a real difference in shaping the services we provide. Our Think Bank is constantly growing, and we would encourage all our tenants to register. All we need to know are your contact details, the service/s you are interested in and how you would like to be involved.

### Tenants' and Residents' Associations

Tenants' and Residents' Associations (TRAs) are active in community issues, organise their own community events, fund-raise and provide articles and information for the Tenants' Newsletter. There are numerous West Devon Homes' Tenants' and Residents' Associations in and around West Devon, and each has regular meetings and representatives on the Tenant Panel.

The Tenant Panel and Tenants' and Residents' Associations work closely with other agencies including the Police, Fire Service, Parish Councillors, Devon Highways and voluntary agencies for the benefit of the communities in which they live.

### Tenant satisfaction surveys

Our tenant satisfaction survey results are used to monitor service performance and to identify and target service areas in the greatest need of improvement. Please help us by completing and returning (freepost) any questionnaires you may receive.

If you would like help completing questionnaires for any reason, we can arrange for someone to help you, either by telephone or personal visit.

# Section 6: Information

As well as writing to you directly, the Company communicates important information in a number of ways, to ensure you are kept informed about things that may affect you.

## Newletters

We publish two newsletters quarterly:

1. 'Tenant News', which contains news about your Tenant Panel, Tenants' and Residents' Associations and your neighbourhoods and communities. This publication is written by tenants
2. 'The Key', which contains essential Company information and articles we think will be useful to you

If you have an idea for the Tenant News, please contact us.

## Website

The Company's website address is [www.wdh.org.uk](http://www.wdh.org.uk). On it you will find a wealth of information about the Company and our services, and you can also access any current job vacancies that we may have available.

## Note:

If there's any guidance you would like to see published- let us know on 01822 813770!

## Support literature



The following guidance leaflets are available at our offices, or we can send them to you free of charge. Please call 01822 813770 if you would like a copy.

Guidance is published continually and any new leaflets will be publicised in 'The Key', our Company newsletter.

### *Housing Services*

- Moving In: welcome to your home
- Moving Out: a guide to vacating your home
- Avoiding Recharges: when you move out
- Paying Rent: help and guidance

### *Sheltered and Supported Services*

- Sheltered Housing: a safer solution for independent living
- Your Support Plan: helping you to stay independent
- Support Plan Risk Assessments: working to keep you safe

### *Technical Services*

- Repairs and Maintenance: know what to expect
- Gas: annual servicing and safety checks
- Home and Dry: how to manage condensation and avoid damp and mould

### *Involvement*

- Be Counted, Be Heard: Company Membership
- The Think Bank: your thoughts shape our services

## Section 6: Information

### Useful telephone numbers & websites

#### West Devon Borough Council

- General Enquiries . . . . .01822 813600
- Housing Benefit . . . . .01822 618888
- Council Tax . . . . .01822 618800
- Focsa . . . . .01822 616408  
(bulky items - (charge for collection))
- Graffiti . . . . .01822 813656
- Abandoned Vehicles (no tax) . . .01822 813600
- Recycling and Garden Waste . . .01822 813600
- Street Cleaning . . . . .01822 813600
- Care and Repair . . . . .01822 613638

#### North Cornwall District Council

- General enquiries . . . . .01208 893333  
website: [www.ncdc.gov.uk](http://www.ncdc.gov.uk)

#### Housing Ombudsman Service

- Post: 81 Aldwych, London WC2B 4HN
- Telephone . . . . .020 7421 3800  
Lo-Call: 0845 7125 973  
Minicom: 020 7404 7092  
Fax: 020 7831 1942  
Email: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

#### Health and Welfare

- Citizens' Advice Bureau . . . . . 01822 612359  
(Tavistock CAB) fax: 01822 618990  
website: [www.tavistockcab.org.uk](http://www.tavistockcab.org.uk)
- NHS Direct . . . . .0845 4647  
website: [www.nhsdirect.co.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.co.uk)
- Benefits and Tax Credits . . . . .0800 882 200  
0845 300 3900 (Tax Credits)  
website: [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)
- Devon and Cornwall Police . . . .08452 777444  
(general enquiries)  
999 (emergencies only)  
website: [www.devon-cornwall.police.uk](http://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk)
- Women's Aid . . . . .0808 2000 247  
website: [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)  
Confidential domestic violence  
and abuse helpline
- Childline . . . . .0800 1111 (24 hours)  
website: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
- Connexions . . . . .0800 975 5111  
website: [www.connexions-cd.org.uk](http://www.connexions-cd.org.uk)  
Advice for young people
- Parentline Plus . . . . .0808 800 2222  
website: [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)  
Support to parents on a wide range of  
parenting issues, such as family conflict,  
discipline, alcohol, etc.

- 'Talk to Frank' .....0800 77 66 00  
*(Formerly National Drugs Helpline)*  
*website: www.talktofrank.com*
  
- Devon Racial Equality Council .01392 422566  
*website: www.devonrec.org.uk*
  
- London Gay and Lesbian Switchboard  
 .....020 7837 7324
  
- Victim Support .....0117 963 1114  
*(Monday to Friday 9.30am to 3.00pm)*
  
- Alcoholics Anonymous .....0845 769 7555  
*(UK helpline – 24 hours)*
  
- Narcotics Anonymous .....0207 730 0009  
*(National helpline)*
  
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission  
*(Disability, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion and belief and human rights helpline) . . . . .0845 604 6610*  
*textphone: 0845 604 6620*  
*fax: 0845 604 6630*  
*website: www.equalityhumanrights.com*

*The Equality and Human Rights Commission champions equality and human rights for all, working to eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights and to build good relations, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society.*





[www.wdh.org.uk](http://www.wdh.org.uk)

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E: [enquiries@wdh.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wdh.org.uk)