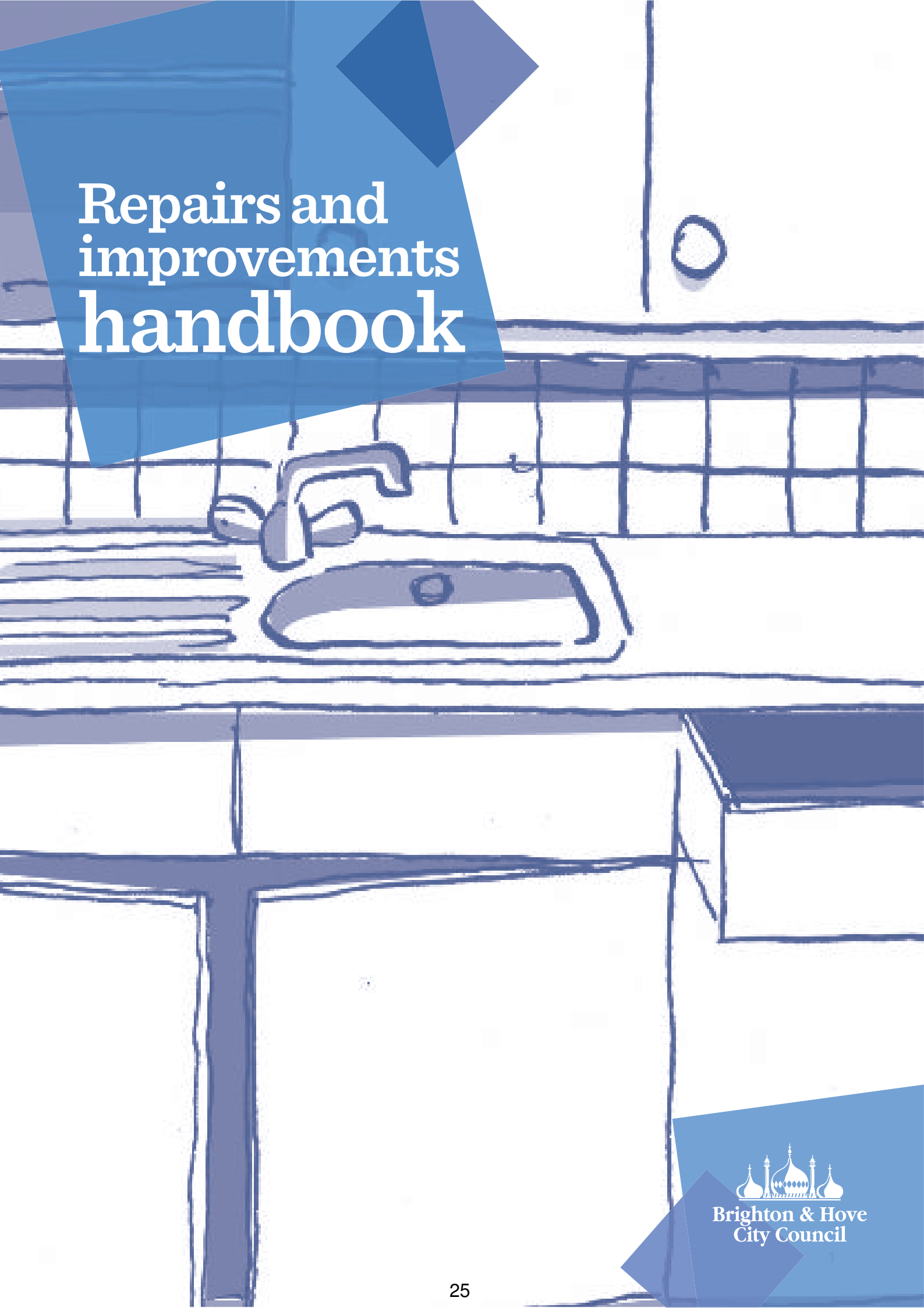


# Repairs and improvements handbook





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# 1. Welcome

This is your repairs and improvements handbook. It has been put together by staff and tenants to give you information and guidance about Brighton & Hove City Council's repair service.

This handbook includes:

- how to order repairs for your home
- what to do in an emergency, eg if you smell gas
- an explanation of your rights and your responsibilities
- the council's responsibilities as your landlord
- information about the steps you must take when planning your own improvements

We would like to express our special thanks to the tenants involved for all the hard work they put into helping us develop this handbook. They spent many hours making it as clear and useful as possible for you.

Tenants are involved in everything that we do because tenant involvement is at the heart of all the services that we provide. Our repairs partnership is made up of the council, contractors and tenants. From an individual tenant's comment to city-wide groups like City Assembly, residents have a say in shaping the repair service that we deliver. Tenants monitor the service that we provide and lead on making the improvements that are important to you. Your opinion is important to us so please contact your local association or Resident Involvement Officer to find out how you can influence the repair service that you receive.

## Estate Development Budget

Is there something you'd like improved in your neighbourhood?

The Estate Development Budget is a 'tenant choice' budget of over half a million pounds a year that delivers resident-led improvements for their area. Each idea is considered by an elected panel of resident representatives and the work done can really make a positive difference to a neighbourhood.

If you have ideas on the improvements that your area needs, contact your local resident association or your Resident Involvement Officer and let us know.

## 2. Reporting a repair

**To report all repairs just call:**

**0800 052 6140**

24 hours a day, seven days a week

**You can also report a repair:**

- by completing our online repairs reporting form at [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/report-repairs](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/report-repairs)
- by e-mailing [BHCC.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk](mailto:BHCC.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk)
- by calling 01273 294409 from your mobile phone
- via the freephone at your housing office
- by writing a letter to the Repairs Helpdesk, Housing Centre, Unit 1, Fairway Trading Estate, Eastergate Road, Brighton, BN2 4QL

Before you report a repair, please gather as much information about the problem as you can, as this helps us to order the correct repair. Our helpdesk staff are trained to identify and order the correct repair for your home, and you can refer to the diagrams at the back of this book to help you.

### **Gas leaks**

If you smell gas, you must turn off all gas appliances, then leave the property and call the **National Grid** immediately on **0800 111 999**.

# 3. When will my repair be done?

## Emergency repairs

An emergency repair is one which needs to be carried out quickly to avoid danger to you or serious damage to the building. An emergency repair will be completed within 24 hours and wherever possible you will be given an estimated time of arrival.

### Examples include:

- serious water leak
- no power in property
- no heating or hot water from boiler (winter months only)
- overflowing drains
- collapsed ceiling or roof
- ground floor window not closing
- attending a lift breakdown
- a blocked toilet (if it's the only one in your home)

If an emergency repair is needed due to deliberate damage, vandalism, neglect or botched DIY by any members of your household or visitors to your home, we will carry out your repair and recharge you.

## Urgent repairs

An urgent repair will be complete within three working days and you will be offered an appointment.

### Examples include:

- a containable water leak
- no heating or hot water from boiler (summer months)
- no hot water from shower unit
- a broken bathroom light (where there is no window)
- smashed glass in a window or front door
- a blocked toilet (where there is no access to another one)

## Routine repairs

A routine repair will be complete within 20 working days and you will be offered an appointment.

### Examples include:

- anti-fungal wash down for mould on walls
- adjusting a communal door closer
- broken kitchen units
- broken paths and paving
- flashing light in communal area
- a dripping tap

## Out of hours (emergencies only)

Between 8pm and 8am, we provide a service for emergency repairs only. In these cases, we only carry out a temporary repair to stop the emergency situation or make it safe. We'll then order a further job and make an appointment with you, so that the repair can be completed.

Some jobs are larger than a simple repair. If this is the case with work needed in your home, we will write to let you know that you are included in the 'Planned Work' programme and tell you when the work is due to start.

# 4. Repair responsibilities

## What repairs are the council responsible for?

By law, the council has an obligation to look after the structure of your home. Repairs must be carried out to make sure that fixtures and fittings for water, sanitation, gas and electricity are safe and in working order. The council must also maintain any equipment it has installed to provide hot water and heating, and communal facilities, such as lifts and door entry phones.

We are responsible for checking for any repairs needed in the communal areas, and carry out quarterly estate inspections. However, if you do see anything that needs repairing, please call the repairs helpdesk as you would for home repairs. In sheltered housing schemes, tell the scheme manager about communal repairs and they will report them.

## What repairs am I responsible for?

You are expected to make sure that your home, garden and balcony are kept safe, clean, free from rubbish, and are not neglected. As a tenant, you are responsible for all fixtures and fittings in the property.

**The table below gives examples of who is responsible for a repair:**

Repair	Comment	Responsibility	
		Council	Tenant
Central heating	Problems with boilers, storage heaters, radiators, hot water, etc	•	
Chimneys	Brickwork, replacement pots, etc	•	
Clothes lines / rotary driers	Except communal areas		•
Cookers	Gas and electric, including connections		•
Coal bunkers			•
Internal decoration, including the inside of the front door	Except making good following other repairs		•
Doors	Except lost or stolen keys, repairs to internal doors, door numbers and door bells	•	
Drains	Blocked drains and gullies	•	
Electricity	Except tenants' own fittings, appliances, plugs, fuses, light bulbs and meters	•	
Fire places	Except tiled surrounds	•	

Repair	Comment	Responsibility	
		Council	Tenant
Fire and smoke alarms	Unless battery operated	•	
Floors	Including concrete structure and floorboards	•	
Floor coverings			•
Garages	Including structure and doors	•	
Gas cooker	Including connections and meters		•
Gutters	Clearance and repairs to gutters and fascia boards	•	
Immersion heaters	Repair or replacement	•	
Keys and locks	Including garage keys		•
Lifts		•	
Outhouses and sheds (council)	Except lost or stolen keys and glazing	•	
Paths	Leading to front or back doors but not patios	•	
Pipes, water tanks and cylinders		•	
Plumbing and fittings	Replacement of toilets, sinks, baths, wash hand basins (including refix of brackets)	•	
	Taps running continuously, tap replacement and other tap repairs	•	
	Replacement of WC seats and toilet chains		•
	Blocked toilet, bath, sink or wash hand basin	•	
	Repair/replacement of kitchen and bathroom tiles		•
	All plugs and plug chains		•
Roofs	Loose or damaged tiles, rain penetration, flashings, etc	•	
Stairs		•	
Utilities	Gas and electrical meters (including key and card types), water meters		•
Walls	Rendering, brickwork, pointing and internal plastering	•	
Windows	Glazing (except wilful damage, which requires a crime reference number)	•	
	Misted / fogged windows	•	
	Secure window frame	•	
	Window not opening/closing	•	
	Repair or replace window catches and handles	•	
	New window frame sills	•	
	Rain penetration	•	
	Lubricating catches, hinges, etc		•
	Maintenance of locks		•
	Lost or stolen keys		•



Exceptions are made in some cases for vulnerable tenants, including people over pensionable age, people who are registered disabled, and sheltered housing tenants.

## What if I lose my keys or fob?

It is your responsibility to replace any lost or stolen keys. If you have lost a key or fob to a main entrance door, please contact us to purchase a replacement. We need two forms of identification before we can issue any replacements.

If you become locked out of your home, you are responsible for regaining entry. Exceptions are made in some cases for vulnerable tenants - please contact the repairs helpdesk for advice.

If you would like **additional** copies of a main entrance door key, you need written consent from us that you then need to take to either of our approved locksmiths below:

- Dockerills Ltd, 3 North Road, Brighton
- Thomas Locksmiths Ltd, 97 Portland Rd, Hove

## Home Contents Insurance

The council is responsible for insuring the building but not the contents in tenants' homes. You are responsible for insuring your furniture, belongings and decorations against theft, fire, vandalism and water damage.

You can insure your contents privately or through the council scheme. We have negotiated competitive rates with an insurance company and premiums can be paid weekly with your rent.

For further information, please contact the Rent Accounting team on 01273 293303.



# 5. Planned work

## What is planned work?

The planned work programme includes major project work throughout the city to improve the condition of our buildings internally and externally. This work includes communal area decorations, renewal of roofs and guttering, and lift replacements.

It also includes the work required to bring your home up to the Brighton & Hove Standard, such as replacement gas boilers, rewiring, external doors, kitchens and bathrooms.

### What is the Brighton & Hove Standard?

This is a quality standard for council homes developed in consultation with tenants. The standard is based on the government's Decent Homes Standard, with additional items agreed with tenants to meet local priorities.

#### The Brighton & Hove Standard means that your home will:

- meet the current minimum standard for housing
- be in a reasonable state of repair
- have reasonably modern facilities
- be warm and comfortable
- include other items above the national standard which have been agreed in consultation with tenants

For more information on the standard:

- go to [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/bh-standard](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/bh-standard)
- get a leaflet from your housing office
- call the Property & Investment team on 01273 293346

## How will I know if work is due in my area?

A surveyor from our repairs partnership will visit and carry out a survey to decide whether your home meets the Brighton & Hove Standard. Work will only be done in homes that **do not** meet this standard.

To see when work is provisionally planned for your area, have a look at our planned work programme by:

- visiting [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/hm-investment-programme](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/hm-investment-programme)
- requesting a copy from the Property & Investment team on 01273 293346

## Do I get a say in the style of improvements?

Yes, you can choose the following:

- door - a choice over the style and finish
- bathroom - a choice of flooring
- kitchen - you are involved in the design and choice on the style of kitchen doors, worktops and flooring

You will be given details on the choices available before the work begins.

## What quality of work can I expect?

The council and its partners are committed to delivering quality work to your homes. We ensure that this is achieved by:

- involving tenants at every stage in all we do
- inspecting work and monitoring quality
- measuring and monitoring performance with tenant representatives
- asking you to complete a customer satisfaction survey once work is complete
- carrying out mystery shopping exercises to test quality

# 6. Customer care

We aim to deliver an excellent service by putting tenants at the centre of everything we do. In this section, we detail the customer care you can expect from our repairs service.

## Code of Conduct

To ensure that you and your home are treated with respect, tenant representatives worked with the council and its partners to develop a Code of Conduct for all staff to follow when working in your home. Here are our promises that make up the code:

### When visiting tenants, we promise to:

- drive and park courteously at all times
- introduce ourselves to you and show our identity cards
- explain the work we are there to do
- behave in a polite and courteous manner
- store all our materials and equipment in a safe manner
- always use dust sheets, unless it is unsafe to do so
- never smoke in or around your home
- never use any of your items, including phone, tea, coffee, etc
- clear and remove all waste or make arrangements to collect it
- show you the work we have done and get your signature on completion of the job

If you feel that a member of staff has not stuck to any of our promises, please call the Repairs Helpdesk immediately on 0800 052 6140.

### You can help us by:

- being at home for your appointment
- ensuring clear access to the repair area
- treating staff with respect
- giving feedback and reporting any areas where we might have fallen short, as this helps us deliver a high level of customer service

## Customer satisfaction surveys for repairs

To ensure that you are happy with the service received, we'll ask you to complete a customer satisfaction survey.

Your feedback is vital in helping us to provide excellent customer service, so please do take the time to respond.

Your responses are used to identify any service areas that need improving and to build our training programme for staff. We investigate any negative responses and make sure we put things right.

We use a more in-depth customer survey to measure your satisfaction with any planned work done in your home.

We may also invite you to jointly inspect the work with a member of staff to make sure that the work is finished to your satisfaction.

## What can I do if I'm not happy?

### Step 1: Who do I contact if I wish to raise an issue?

We always try to get things right first time but appreciate that this does not always happen. If you are not happy, your first step is to speak to a member of staff on the Repairs Helpdesk by calling 0800 052 6140. Trained repairs staff are there to help resolve your issues quickly and will refer your query on if necessary.

### Step 2: What do I do if I am still not happy?

If you are not satisfied with our first response, you can raise the issue with our repairs partnership team on 01273 574354.

The liaison staff will investigate your complaint thoroughly and may arrange for a member of

staff to visit your home in order to resolve your issue to your complete satisfaction.

### Step 3: What next?

If you are still unhappy, or think what you have been told will not help, you can make a formal complaint. Our 'Complaints, Comments & Compliments' booklet explains the process and includes a complaints form you can complete. You can hand it in at any council office or post it free of charge, or can:

visit: [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/complaints)

e-mail: [complaints@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

phone: **0500 291229 (freephone)**

fax: **01273 291535**

## Right to Repair Legislation

The Right to Repair scheme came into force in April 1994. The scheme covers small urgent repairs costing up to £250 which have to be completed within specified times.

If the repair is not completed within this time, you can ask the council to appoint a second contractor to complete the work.

If the repair is still not completed by the end of the second period, you will be entitled to

compensation of £10, plus £2 a day for every day the repair remains outstanding, up to a maximum of £50.

### The Right to Repair Scheme does not apply if:

- you have agreed an appointment for the repair to be carried out beyond the specified time
- you have told the council you no longer want the repair carried out
- you haven't allowed the contractor access to carry out the work

In some cases, the council may have to inspect the repair before work begins to make sure that it is covered by the Right to Repair Scheme.

If parts are required to complete the repair, the scheme allows for the specified time to be reasonably extended. All repairs should be reported to the council as normal. If you want further information about claiming compensations, please contact us.

For more information about the scheme, see the 'A Better Deal for Tenants: Your Right to Repair' booklet, which is only available online at [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/138340.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/138340.pdf)

# 7. Tenant alterations and improvements

## Can I carry out my own improvements?

The council allows you to make improvements to your home, but you must get written permission from us before starting. Only secure tenants can carry out improvements. If you are an introductory tenant, you need to wait until your tenancy is secure.

You do not need our permission to decorate the inside of your home, lay carpet or carry out minor improvements. You must contact us before starting all other work, including:

- laying laminate or tiled floors
- erecting a shed or greenhouse
- replacing a kitchen or bathroom
- installing a new aerial or satellite dish

It is vital that you get our permission, as there

may be health and safety issues concerning the area you plan to work on. Your home may contain asbestos which is dangerous when disturbed, so you need to contact us before doing any structural or maintenance work. Your home may have been tested for asbestos in the past and we will have that information. We may visit you to check for any risks.

We will always write to tell you whether you have permission for the work. We will normally give permission, unless the work is likely to affect the safety of the building, cause a future maintenance problem, or cause a nuisance to your neighbours. We may attach conditions to the permission, such as insisting that the work is carried out by a competent contractor and to a satisfactory standard.

**Some alterations and improvements may also require planning permission or building regulation permission. You must get this in advance, as it could cost you a lot to put things right afterwards.**

Please remember that any improvements that you do could affect your eligibility for planned work as part of the Brighton & Hove Standard. For example, if you replace your kitchen or bathroom to a high standard, your property may not then qualify for a replacement kitchen or bathroom under the standard.

## What happens when I move out?

If you move, you will be expected to leave your home in a good condition. You should leave any alterations that we have given permission for in place. If we have to do any work as a result of authorised or unauthorised alterations that you have done, the cost will be recharged to you.

If you have made improvements to your home with our permission, you may be able to apply for compensation. To make a claim, you will need to give us details of the improvement when you give us notice to end your tenancy. We will need to see bills for the work or, if you don't have these, tell us the cost and when the work was done. Any payment will depend on when you made the improvement, how much you have benefited from it, the cost, and its quality and condition.

## Adaptations

If you or someone living with you has a disability there are a number of ways we can help you live more independently in your home. These include providing equipment to make daily tasks easier, adapting your home to improve access or helping you to use bathing facilities, etc.

Adaptations include providing ramp access, widening doors, raising electrical sockets, replacing a bath with a level access shower, or installing special equipment for people with hearing or visual difficulties. If you think that you need an adaptation please contact the Access Point team:

e-mail: [accesspoint@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:accesspoint@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

phone: **01273 295555**

minicom: **01273 296388**

Some small adaptations such as grab rails, lever taps and window openers can be fitted by us without a referral from an Occupational Therapist. Call the Repairs Helpdesk on 0800 0526140 and they will let you know if we can install the item you need.

The Repairs Helpdesk will also help if your adaptation needs to be repaired. If an adaptation needs repairing within 12 months of being installed, please tell us, as the item will still be under warranty.



# 8. Safety in your home

## Gas and carbon monoxide

By law, it is essential that we service all gas appliances installed by us once a year - this could save your life. If an appliance is in a poor condition, it can produce too much carbon monoxide gas. Carbon monoxide cannot be seen or tasted and does not smell, but it is poisonous if breathed in, even for a short time.

When your property is due for a service, one of our gas contractors will contact you directly to make an appointment. You must allow them to access your home to carry out the service. It is a condition of your tenancy agreement and, if you refuse, we will take legal action against you to gain access. If we do this, we will seek to recover any legal costs from you.

## Are there signs of carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide is difficult to detect but there are a number of ways that you can see if an appliance is faulty. **These include:**

- the boiler pilot light continually going out
- an orange or yellow flame (pilot light and gas cooker)
- a black, brown or scorched area on the appliance
- a musty smell or signs of soot

## What can I do to reduce the risks of carbon monoxide poisoning?

- always allow engineers in to your home to carry out yearly checks of your gas appliances
- never cover the appliance, vents or flues as they provide the air the appliance needs to work properly
- do not let anyone sleep in a room with a gas fire – this is very dangerous
- buy a carbon monoxide detector and check it regularly

If you have doubts about the safety of gas appliances in your home, call the Repairs Helpdesk on 0800 052 6140 without delay.

## Fire

### What precautions can I take?

- never leave cigarettes burning
- never smoke in bed
- keep matches away from children
- never leave the room when a hob or grill is on
- regularly check electrical appliances and their leads and do not overload plug sockets
- make sure you know where your door and window keys are
- close all inside doors at night when you go to bed
- if you have battery-operated smoke alarms, check them every week

If you do not have any smoke alarms, please contact the Fire Brigade who may be able to install one for you.

**If a fire breaks out in your home, call 999 immediately and follow the advice they give you.**

## Legionella

### What is Legionella?

Legionella bacteria are common in natural sources of water. Under certain circumstances, Legionella can be a risk and infection can occur, but this is extremely rare.

### What can I do?

To reduce the risk, you can take the following precautions:

- if you have a shower, regularly descale and clean the shower head to protect against the risk of legionella
- if you are going on holiday or away for

longer than a week, take the shower head off and place it in a bowl of diluted disinfectant or a shower head cleaning agent

- when you return, run the shower without the shower head for a few minutes and then refit it

## Condensation

Condensation is dampness caused by water vapour and it can cause a lot of damage to your home. Condensation occurs when there is too much water vapour in the air or when warm moist air meets cold surfaces.

Condensation is worse in cold damp weather and when heating is poor, but it can be controlled by proper heating and ventilation.

### You can minimise condensation by:

- closing kitchen and bathroom doors when cooking and bathing to stop water vapour spreading through the home - it also helps to have a window open
- avoiding drying clothes indoors - if you have to, always dry clothes near an open window with the door to the room closed
- avoiding using bottled gas heaters as these give out a lot of water vapour
- keeping a constant level of heat throughout your home
- using air vents and opening windows slightly - never block air vents
- wiping your windows and sills regularly to prevent mould growth and other damage from standing water, which is quite common in winter

- washing off black mould growth with a weak solution of bleach - this is a common symptom of condensation but it will not usually become a serious problem if you remove it
- leaving a gap between your furniture and the wall to let air circulate

If you follow these tips but still have problems, report it to the Repairs Helpdesk on 0800 052 6140.

## Asbestos

There may be asbestos in your home, but it is only dangerous when it is disturbed and fibres are released into the air. This can happen when it is cut, sanded or drilled, which is why it is important that you contact us for permission before starting any improvements. If the asbestos in your home is not likely to be disturbed, we may decide not to remove it.

### Asbestos could be found in:

- corrugated or flat cement roofing and wall panels
- ceiling and floor tiles
- bath panels
- textured coatings such as Artex
- boilers and flue pipes
- drainpipes and gutters

If you think that you have got asbestos in your home, please call the Repairs Helpdesk on **0800 052 6140**.



# 9. Reporting repairs – illustrated guides

The following pages contain illustrations designed to help you when reporting a repair. You can refer to these to give us better information about your repair.

