



# Tenants' Handbook

**Solihull Community Housing**



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If you would like this handbook in another language or format please contact us on 0121 717 1515.



# Welcome to your new home

We hope that you will enjoy living in your new home. This short guide provides help and advice to access our services. Please keep this with your tenancy agreement. We have a number of leaflets which provide more details about each service if needed. You can download these leaflets from our website: [www.solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk](http://www.solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk)

Your tenancy agreement sets out your rights and responsibilities.

## Moving in checklist:

- ▶ set up a Direct Debit to pay your rent
- ▶ register for council tax
- ▶ set up an email account
- ▶ arrange contents insurance
- ▶ contact utility companies (including gas and electricity) and make sure you're on the best tariff
- ▶ get spare keys cut
- ▶ forward mail from your previous address
- ▶ let your bank, mobile phone provider and utility companies know of your new address
- ▶ join the electoral register: [www.solihull.gov.uk/About-the-Council/Voting/register tovote](http://www.solihull.gov.uk/About-the-Council/Voting/register tovote)
- ▶ set up television licence.



## We're here to help

### Contacting us

The quickest and easiest way to contact us is through our website: [www.solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk](http://www.solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk)

Our contact centre handles enquiries by phone, text and email. Our email address is [info@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk](mailto:info@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk)

You can call us on 0121 717 1515, Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm. Or text 07781 474 722.

You can report an emergency 24 hours a day. If you phone with a general enquiry outside of office hours we will ask you to call back when we are open.

We record most of your calls for training and quality purposes. Addresses and opening hours of Solihull Connect offices are available on our website.

All of our contact details are listed on the back page of this booklet.



# Your tenancy

Your tenancy agreement is a legal contract. It states the type of tenancy you have and sets out your rights and responsibilities as a tenant.

It also lists the services new tenants are entitled to in return for the rent paid. Keep it in a safe place and make sure that you understand it.

Please contact us if you have questions about your tenancy.

## Living in your home

Once you have signed your tenancy agreement and received the keys we expect you to move in. We will visit you to check that you have settled in. If you are going to be away from your home for more than 28 days you must let us know in writing.



## Spare keys

We do not keep spare keys for your home and will charge you for a lock change if you lose your keys. This can be costly and will require payment in advance. Leave a spare set of keys with a trusted relative, friend or neighbour.

If you live in a flat you may also receive a fob that lets you into the building through the shared door. If you lose your fob you must buy a replacement from a Solihull Connect office.

## Being neighbourly

Everyone is entitled to enjoy their home in peace. You are responsible for the behaviour of all members of your household, including your visitors and guests.

Antisocial behaviour (ASB) includes things like noise nuisance, name calling, physical abuse or assault and using the property for illegal or immoral purposes. We take ASB seriously and always investigate any reports. Issues such as dog fouling, graffiti and fly tipping are also investigated.

It is a good idea to try and resolve matters in a friendly way with your neighbour first.

To report ASB log a report via our website or call 0121 717 1500. We will agree the action that will be taken and keep you informed of progress.

If you witness a crime or an emergency you should always report it to the police first.

For more information please see the ASB leaflet.



# Your rent

Your rent is due weekly on a Monday. If you wish to pay monthly your payment must be in advance. All tenants have to pay water rates, even if they receive full housing benefit. Your rent may also include a service charge to cover communal services such as cleaning. You can view your account balance at any time on our website.

## Ways to pay

There are a number of ways you can make payments including:

- ▶ Direct Debit or standing order
- ▶ over the internet (e-payments) [www.solihull.gov.uk/epay](http://www.solihull.gov.uk/epay)
- ▶ telephone payments using debit or credit cards via the contact centre on 0121 717 1515
- ▶ via the automated telephone system 0300 456 0502 24 hours a day
- ▶ at any Post Office or Paypoint outlet using your rent card (gold swipe card)
- ▶ cash, debit card or banker's draft at our Chelmsley Wood Solihull Home Options office or Solihull Connect offices (see our website for opening times)
- ▶ wage or salary deduction if employed by Solihull MBC or Solihull Community Housing.



## Rental Exchange - Getting you a better credit score

We believe that you should be rewarded for paying your rent on time. That's why we have joined the Rental Exchange – a way to enhance your credit score report without needing to take on new credit agreements.

To do this, we will provide your rent payment record to Experian on a regular basis. You will therefore be recognised for paying your rent on time, similar to homeowners being recognised for paying their mortgage each month.

Sharing your rent payment history will help create an online proof of identity, proving you are who you say you are and that you live where you say you live.

Doing this makes you a more reliable potential customer to companies and easier for you to:

- ▶ open a bank account
- ▶ get a new credit card
- ▶ have a loan application approved
- ▶ shop online
- ▶ receive better gas and electricity rates
- ▶ receive better mobile phone rates.



## Housing Benefit

If you are looking to claim Housing Benefit make your application as soon as you sign your tenancy agreement. Housing Benefit will only be paid from the day you move into your home.

You can apply for Housing Benefit online via [www.solihull.gov.uk/Resident/benefits/housingbenefit](http://www.solihull.gov.uk/Resident/benefits/housingbenefit)

This is the quickest way to get your claim processed.

You must provide all evidence of your income and identity. If you don't provide all of the documents you are asked for, your claim will be cancelled.

We can give you information on where to access a PC if you don't have one of your own.

The Housing Benefit team is based at Solihull Council and can be contacted on 0121 704 8200.



## Difficulties paying your rent

Contact us if you are having problems paying your rent and let us help you. We can talk over the phone, meet you at a Solihull Connect office or visit you. Rent arrears can result in eviction and a court judgment to repay the arrears you owe.

We can:

- ▶ agree a plan with you to clear your arrears within a reasonable timescale
- ▶ make sure you get the benefits you are entitled to
- ▶ arrange for our Money Advice Team to help you to manage debts
- ▶ explain what happens if legal action starts, what you need to do and where you can get help.



For further information please see our Rent leaflet.



# Other household costs

## Council Tax

Contact Solihull Council on 0121 704 6000 to let them know that you have moved into your home and arrange for payment of your council tax. You can fill in a form on the council's website: [www.solihull.gov.uk/Resident/Council-tax](http://www.solihull.gov.uk/Resident/Council-tax)

## Contents insurance

Many tenants believe that the council automatically insures their furniture, belongings and decorations against fire, theft, vandalism or water damage such as burst pipes. **This is not the case.** Unfortunately some tenants only realise this after the damage has been done.

Solihull Council makes it easy for you to insure your belongings under a special household contents insurance scheme for council tenants and leaseholders.

You can pay for the insurance weekly and you can pay the premiums when you pay your rent. For more information please see our website.

## Services and Utilities

If there are gas appliances in your property you will need to arrange for your gas supply to be connected when you move in.

To do this:

- ▶ **phone National Grid on 0870 608 1524 to find out who your gas supplier is and how to contact them**
- ▶ **phone the supplier to arrange to get your supply connected. (You can change your gas supplier if you want to).**

We encourage you to use a fuel supplier called EBICo, a not-for-profit company who do not charge for using prepayment meters. EBICo also supply electricity. Phone them on 0800 458 7689 if you want to become a new customer and let them know you are a tenant or leaseholder of Solihull Community Housing.

Once you have arranged a gas supplier please contact us and we will send our contractor to your home to turn the gas on for you, do a safety check and explain how the heating works.

Your electricity will be on but you may need to top up the meter straight away. Contact your supplier to tell them you have moved in.



# Repairs & maintenance

## Reporting repairs

As your landlord we are responsible for keeping your property in good repair. We also maintain the shared parts of your home such as corridors, lifts and shared gardens. All of this work is paid for by rent and service charges. To report a repair visit our website or call us on 0121 717 1515.

## Your repair responsibility

Some repairs are your responsibility. Examples include:

- ▶ things you have fitted yourself
- ▶ replacing glass, lock changes and replacement keys
- ▶ repairing any damage caused by a forced entry from the police or others
- ▶ replacing bulbs, fuses and supplying additional electrical sockets and gas points.

If you are responsible for a repair you should make arrangements to have work carried out by a suitably qualified person.



## Rechargeable repairs and work

You are responsible for damage to your property, garden or communal areas. If you fail to keep these areas clean and tidy, or cause damage, we may charge you for any work needed to put them right. We will give you the opportunity to fix things first.

## Access to your home

We would normally contact you beforehand if we need to visit you at home. Our staff, contractors and agents all work to a code of conduct for home visits and carry an identity card. They will show it to you, if not you should always ask to see it. If you are still unsure call us to check their identity. Staff will not mind waiting outside while you make the call.

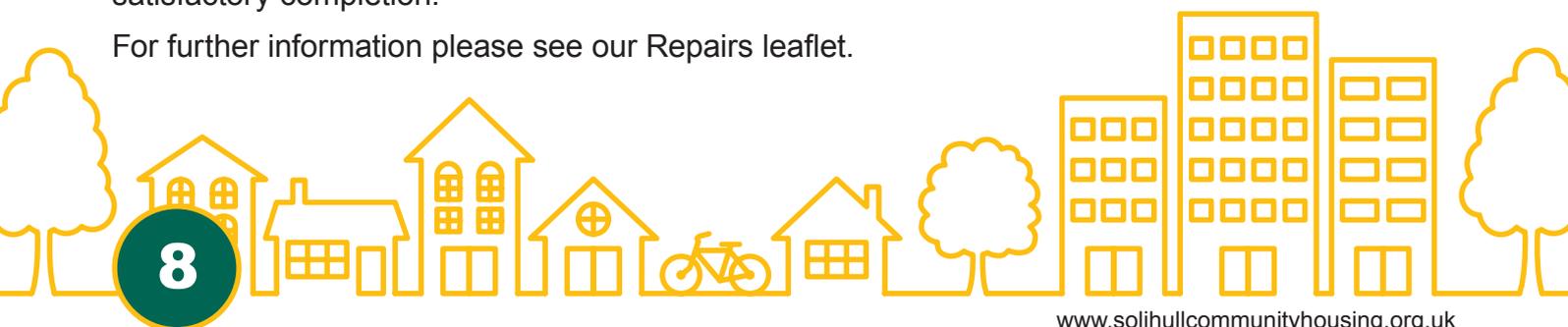
## Upkeep of your home, garden & communal areas

As a tenant you must keep your home in good condition and maintain your garden if you have one. Please do not leave items in communal areas as they are a fire risk or a trip hazard to others. Dispose of household waste responsibly. We offer a bulky waste removal service for a fee.

## Alterations

You must obtain permission in writing from us before making alterations or additions to your home. Before carrying out any work it is important to check our website for any asbestos located in your home. A surveyor may need details of the proposed work and inspect it for satisfactory completion.

For further information please see our Repairs leaflet.



## Gas safety

It is our legal responsibility to carry out an annual gas service. You must provide access for this to take place. We will take legal action if you do not give us access.

## Smell gas

If you smell gas or are worried about gas safety, you can call the National Grid on 0800 111 999 free of charge at any time, day or night, every day of the year. All calls are recorded and may be monitored.

If you smell gas:

- ▶ turn off the gas at the meter if you are able
- ▶ open doors and windows
- ▶ if the smell is inside the property, go outside if you can
- ▶ don't use naked flames or electrical switches.

Once you have reported the problem to National Grid you should then ring us on 0121 717 1515 and we will send an engineer.

# Supporting you in your own home

## Safe and Sound service

We offer a housing related support service which helps people live safely and independently in their own home. Our team also run a 24-hour responder service for emergencies. They provide different types of support depending on your needs. Help can be called from an alarm which can be activated by you.

We can also supply a range of telecare equipment, such as fall sensors, that can help you to remain living independently in your home.

In certain circumstances this service may be free.

## Solihull Independent Living

If you are unable to live comfortably in your home due to mobility problems, or other issues relating to a disability or poor health, we may be able to help by carrying out adaptations to your home.

Solihull Independent Living (SIL) is a not-for-profit organisation that offers people who are older, disabled or on a low income an affordable way to repair, improve or adapt their homes.



Further information and leaflets are on our website.



# Improving your service

## Have your say

Your views are important to us. We want you to be involved in helping us to keep improving our service.

You can be involved as little or as much as you want, by:

- ▶ following us on Facebook – just search for Solihull Community Housing and like our page
- ▶ following us on Twitter – @solihullhousing
- ▶ completing a survey
- ▶ attending a 'Hot Topic' meeting. Let us know your interests and we will invite you to meetings we have about them. Look out for updates on our website and social media
- ▶ carrying out mystery shopping and feeding back your experience.

For more information please see the getting involved page on our website.



## Complaints, compliments and feedback

We hope that our customers are satisfied with our services. In cases where they are not satisfied with any aspect of our service we have a policy which explains our approach to resolving complaints.

We handle complaints in a positive way, welcoming them as opportunities to improve the way we work. We commit to giving customers the highest standards of service at all times.

We will:

- ▶ ensure a full and fair investigation
- ▶ be effective and efficient in handling complaints
- ▶ learn from your feedback and use it to improve our services
- ▶ ensure this policy is well publicised and easy to understand.

We also have a number of ways to collect feedback from customers through satisfaction surveys. We use the information provided to improve our services.

Our full complaints policy is available on request and on our website.



# Treating people fairly

We are committed to equality and to ensuring that our services are accessible, appropriate and fair.

## The quality of service you can expect from us

We promise to:

- ▶ treat you with respect and offer you a polite and helpful service
- ▶ make sure you can contact us in a variety of ways
- ▶ use Plain English and clearly explain any technical terms or jargon
- ▶ promote equal opportunities
- ▶ identify any special needs to make sure all customers receive the same level of service.

Each service area has a set of service standards that they must work to. These can be viewed on our website.



# Your information

## Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA)

We promise only to use your information strictly within the Data Protection Act 1998. The Data Protection Act gives you the right to request, and in most cases to be given, a copy of the information we hold about you.

Any request must include enough information about yourself and the information that you want so we can identify you and your record(s). Further information and a request form can be found at [www.solihull.gov.uk/About-the-Council/Data-protection-FOI/dataprotection](http://www.solihull.gov.uk/About-the-Council/Data-protection-FOI/dataprotection)

Completed forms and written requests should be addressed to:

The Corporate Information Governance Team  
Corporate Performance, Policy and Information  
Solihull Council  
Council House  
Manor Square  
Solihull B91 3QB

You can find more information about the DPA online at [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk)



# Further information

## Ways to contact us

You can contact us by:

- ▶ filling in a form on our website
- ▶ phoning 0121 717 1515
- ▶ sending a text message to 07781 474 722
- ▶ emailing [info@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk](mailto:info@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk)
- ▶ writing to us at Freepost RLSS-UEBA-RTUZ, Solihull Community Housing, Endeavour House, Meriden Drive, Solihull B37 6BX
- ▶ calling in to a Solihull Connect office.

More information leaflets and policies are available to download on our website. Or we can send you a leaflet on request.

If you would like this handbook in another language or format please contact us on 0121 717 1515.

## How to end your tenancy

We hope you enjoy living in your new home. If you decide to leave you must give us four weeks' notice in writing to end your tenancy. More information is available on our website.



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