

Tenants Handbook



“Creating places where people are **proud** to live and work”

**Please read this handbook before you
sign for your tenancy.
Keep it safe, you may need to look
at it during your tenancy.**

Disclaimer

The information in this handbook is correct at time of production. Some details may change over time. When this happens updates will be issued. Generally these will be through pull out and keep inserts in our magazine for tenants, issued three times a year. If we plan changes that substantially affect your services, home or access to services we will ask you what you think, before making these changes.

This edition was printed December 2011

Contact Us

Whitefriars Housing Offices

9 Little Park St
City Centre
Coventry

 **024**
7676 7111

29-31 Riley Square
Bell Green
Coventry

 **024**
7670 8400


192 Torrington
Avenue
Coventry

 **024**
7649 6700

St James Lane
Willenhall
Coventry

 **024**
7651 6700

Repairs Centre (24 Hours)

(For reporting repairs)  **0300 7906 555**

Need help in your own language?

Arabic

"هل تحتاج إلى مساعدة بلغتك؟"

Turkish

Kendi dilinizde yardıma mı ihtiyacınız var?

Kurdish

ئايا پێویستت به یارمهتی به زمانێ خۆت ههیه.

Czech

Potřebujete pomoc ve svém jazyce?

Bengali

আপনার নিজের ভাষায় সহায়তা প্রয়োজন

Russian

Требуется ли Вам помощь на Вашем языке?

Portuguese

Precisa de assistência
na sua própria língua?

French

Vous avez besoin d'aide dans
votre propre langue?

Farsi

آيا به زبان خودتان به کمک نیاز دارید؟

Albanian

Keni nevojë për ndihmë në gjuhën tuaj

Urdu

اپنی زبان میں مدد کی ضرورت ہے۔

Spanish

¿Necesita ayuda en su propio idioma?

Cantonese

需要母語幫助

Lithuanian

Reikia pagalbos gimtąja kalba?

Somali

"Ma'u baahantahay in
lagugu caawiyo luuqadaadda"

Polish

Wymagają Państwo
pomocy w swoim języku?

 **024 7676 7000**

Do you want this document in a different format?

If you need this leaflet in audio, braille or large print format contact

 **024 7676 7000**

Contents

Each section signposts you to where you can get more information and advice. Our main standards for each service area appear at the end of each service section, and appear in full on our website.

1. Introduction	5	4. Rents, Housing Benefits and service charges	17
1.1 About us - Whitefriars Housing Group	5	4.1 Setting rents	17
1.2 Our vision and values		4.2 Service charges	18
1.3 How you can expect to be treated by us	6	4.3 Paying your rent	18
1.4 Our approach to equality and diversity	7	4.4 Different ways to pay	18
		4.5 Housing Benefit	19
		4.6 If you cannot pay your rent	19
2. Using our services	8	5. Data Protection and Your information	20
2.1 Using our services	8	5.1 How will your information be stored?	21
2.2 Helping you get in touch	9	5.2 How long will the information be stored?	21
2.3 Reporting repairs	9	5.3 Who will we share this information with?	21
		5.4 Your rights	21
		5.5 What do you need to do?	22
3. Your tenancy agreement	11	6. Insuring your home	23
3.1 Your main rights as an assured tenant	12	6.1 Insuring your belongings	23
3.2 Your main responsibilities	12	6.2 Joining our scheme	24
3.3 Your main rights as an assured tenant	13	6.3 Paying for your insurance	24
3.4 Your responsibilities in more detail	14	7. Taking care of and improving your home	25
3.5 Changes in who lives in your home	14	7.1 Things to check	25
3.6 If you are not going to live in your home for a while	15	7.2 Preventing condensation	26
3.7 Becoming a joint tenant with your partner	15	7.3 Aerials and satellite dishes	27
3.8 Giving up a share of a joint tenancy	15	7.4 Home improvements	27
3.9 Ending your tenancy	16	7.5 Looking after the outside of your home	27

Contents

8. Making a difference	28	12. Moving home	41
8.1 Our Customer Involvement Team	29	12.1 If you want to move to another home	41
8.2 You said it, we did it	29	12.2 Giving notice on your property	41
8.3 Getting in touch	29	12.3 Moving to another Whitefriars property	42
9. Comments, complaints and compensation	31	12.4 Mutual exchanges	43
9.1 When to complain	31	12.5 Emergency moves	43
9.2 How to complain	32	12.6 Buying your own home	43
9.3 How we will deal with your complaint	32	13. Being a good neighbour - flats	44
9.4 Compensation	32	13.1 How can I be a good neighbour?	44
9.5 Comments and suggestions	33	13.2 Keeping dogs	45
10. Repairs and maintenance	34	13.3 Shared areas - cleaning	45
10.1 What we will repair	34	13.4 What to do if neighbours cause problems	45
10.2 How to tell us about a repair	35	14. Keeping safe and secure	46
10.3 Doing your repairs	35	14.1 Gas	46
10.4 How quickly a repair will be done	35	14.2 Ventilation	48
10.5 If we do the repair	36	14.3 Electrical	48
10.6 Repairs that you must do	36	14.4 Fire	48
10.7 Repairs that you have to pay for	36	14.5 Water	49
10.8 Customer satisfaction	36	14.6 Security	50
11. Trouble where you live?	38	15. Useful telephone numbers	51
11.1 Anti-social behaviour	38		
11.2 Your responsibilities	38		
11.3 If you have a problem, tell us	39		
11.4 What you can expect from us if you report anti-social behaviour	39		

Section 1



Introduction

This handbook is a guide to our services, and to your own responsibilities as a tenant. It also contains information about your home. During your tenancy with us you may have questions. Many of these will be answered by this handbook. If you cannot find the answer to your question here, please contact any of our Housing Offices. The addresses and telephone numbers are given on page 2, and on the back of this handbook.

We aim to be a good landlord, giving all tenants a good service. We will keep you informed about things that may interest or affect you. Generally this will be through letters, leaflets, our magazine for residents and our annual report.

We also want to hear what you think about our services and the information we provide, including this handbook, so that

we can continue to monitor and improve them. The ways that you can do this are on pages 28.

1.1 About us - Whitefriars Housing Group

Our main purpose is to provide, manage and maintain homes for rent in Coventry. We currently have over 16,500 homes and

over 1,200 leasehold flats. Whitefriars is a charitable, industrial and provident society and a member of WM Housing Group.

This means that we are a non profit making organisation. We are a registered provider of housing and are regulated against national housing standards. We are run by a Board made up of Tenants, Coventry City Council nominees and independents. Independents are people who have particular skills and experience that they can offer to help run the organisation.



1.2 Our vision and values

Vision

“Creating places where people are proud to live and work”

Values

Providing excellent service

- We aspire to ‘excellence in customer service’ and at the same time seek ways to enhance communities.
- We will work to make each contact easy and trouble free and turn the ordinary into the extra-ordinary by going that ‘extra mile’ for you.
- We do what we say we will do, when we say we will do it. If we don’t, we will apologise and take whatever practical steps we can to put it right.

Valuing people

- We value you and will treat you with respect and understanding. We expect you to do the same when dealing with us and your neighbours.
- We see everyone as important. Even when we can’t meet every request you make we will try to help. If we can’t help, we will explain why.
- We want to get things right first time and we will involve you whenever we can on the things that affect you.
- We listen to what you tell us and use this to help improve the services you receive.

Acting with integrity

- We are honest in our dealing with you. We will always strive to keep our promises.
- We will run our business in a way which is ethical and decent by doing ‘the right thing’.
- We will use our resources and influence to help you and make sure our policies and practices reflect our commitment to an ethical business.

Delivering creative solutions

- We will work with you and our partners in a culture of mutual respect.
- Not all issues are as simple as ‘you ask, we do’. Some require more complex solutions and we will work with you and others, as far as is practical, to develop them.
- We will work with you and our partners to help find solutions which reflect your needs as individuals.

1.3 How you can expect to be treated by us

Our staff aim to treat all our customers with respect, be open and honest in what they say and be reliable and professional.

They will also try to find new and better ways of doing things from which you may benefit and involve you.

1.4 Our approach to equality and diversity

We want all of our customers to have equal chances to learn, work and live free from discrimination, harassment and prejudice.

Our values, aim to make sure that you are treated with respect and understanding. We will also value differences such as lifestyles, beliefs and cultures, and aim to meet the needs of individuals.

What will this mean for you?

- It will assist us in providing a service which more closely meets your needs
- Our staff will have an awareness and understanding of your individual needs.

How are we doing this?

- Welcoming everyone living in our community
- Promoting our services to reflect the needs of the community
- Developing training and employment opportunities for local people
- Listening to communities and understanding their needs
- Taking positive steps to tackle discrimination and prejudice.

Our way forward has been developed by a group of residents, staff and external experts. This group check that we are doing what we said we would do, and to suggest new things we should be considering. We would like more customers to be involved with this group to shape our services to meet their needs. If you would like more information about the group, please contact:

Joy Warren ☎ **024 7676 7099** or email: joy.warren@whitefriarshousing.co.uk



Information

More information about Whitefriars Housing is available in the housing offices or on our website: www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk

Section 2



Using our services

We provide a wide range of services. This handbook tells you about them. Most of our services are provided through our own staff. Your repairs will be carried out by HomeWorks, who are also part of Whitefriars. Other contractors are used for some works including grass cutting, lift and gas maintenance. Our staff and any contractors carry identification. You should not let anyone into your home unless they have identification.

2.1 Using our services

This can be done in a number of ways, by:

- ☎ Telephone to our offices or, for repairs our call centre, see page 3
- By leaving a message on our answerphone service, stating how we can contact you
- By personal visit to any of our Housing Offices
- By booking a home visit where necessary
- By appointment at one of our offices
- By email at: info@whitefriarshousing.co.uk
- Some services, including reporting a repair can be done online through our website.

You should:

- Tell us as much as possible about your issue so we can find the best person to help you
- Attend appointments on time or tell us if you cannot
- Be at home for the time we agree where we have made an appointment to visit you
- Give us a telephone number where we can reach you and tell us if this changes
- Treat our staff with respect.

2.2 Helping you get in touch

Details of our offices are given on page 2 and at the back of this handbook. You will have been told the opening hours of your Housing Office when you signed for your tenancy. If any of these details change we will let you know.

We will visit you in your home on request and where necessary. People who are older or who have a disability are encouraged to use this service.

Our offices have good access for wheelchairs and pushchairs. We have **hearing loops** in our offices.

We use **language line** and receive **type/talk** telephone calls from people with hearing disabilities.

2.3 Reporting repairs

Most people contact us about repairs. Let us know straight away if you think your home needs any repairs.

All Repairs should be reported by telephone to the Contact Centre ☎ **0300 7906 555** or through our website between 8.00am and 8.00pm. After these hours you can only report emergency repairs on the same telephone number.

You should:

- Tell us as much as possible about the repair that is needed
- Give us a telephone number where we can contact you.
- Where an appointment is made, be at home for the time we agree with you
- Complete any repairs which are your responsibility

We will:

- Normally make an appointment to do the repair
- If the job is one we cannot make an appointment for, the telephone number you have given us will help us contact you to arrange for your repair to be completed.

For more information on our repairs service, see Section 10 starting on page 34.





Information

More information about using our services is available in the housing offices or on our website: www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk

Section 3



Your tenancy agreement

Becoming a tenant means living in the property as your home and not subletting or using it for another purpose. If you keep to your tenancy agreement, then it is your home for as long as the term on the agreement.

But, if the conditions of your tenancy agreement are seriously broken we will consider ending your tenancy. That would only be possible by order of the court.

The tenancy agreement that we both sign sets out the conditions on which you live in the property. **Please read the tenancy agreement carefully and keep it in a safe place so that you can refer to it. If you are not sure about anything it says, your Housing Office staff will help you.**

The tenancy agreement is a legal document. This handbook helps to explain the agreement.

We let the majority of our properties as 'assured' tenancies, but we also have other different types of tenancy. You will be told what type of tenancy you have when you sign your agreement. There are limited differences between the tenancy types.

REMEMBER!

It is important that you understand what being our tenant means. If you are not clear ask your Housing Office staff.

3.1 Your main rights as an assured tenant

The agreement covers your rights and responsibilities as an assured tenant.

Normally your main rights are to:

- Receive a management service, including repairs and additional services that you pay for
- Buy/acquire your home from us
- Pass on your home when you die
- Pass on your tenancy to someone else
- Sub-let part of your home and take in lodgers
- Make improvements to your home
- Carry out repairs, if we fail to do so
- Be consulted about changes to services or management arrangements that may be suggested
- Make a complaint.

REMEMBER!

You need to get our permission before 'using' some of your rights as a tenant. Conditions sometimes apply.



3.2 Your main responsibilities are to:

- Pay your rent
- Live in your home as a home and not sublet or use it for another purpose
- Not break the conditions of your tenancy. This includes making sure that neither you, anyone living with you or visiting you, or your pets cause nuisance or annoyance to others or act in a way that is likely to do so
- Keep your home, and any garden, in good condition and insure the contents
- Ask us before using rights e.g to pass on your tenancy
- Tell us of any repairs needed
- Give four weeks notice to end the tenancy and leave the property in good order including the removal of any rubbish.

Please contact any of our offices for more information about rights and responsibilities. Some conditions apply before you can use some of these rights. You must always ask us for the details.

3.3 Your main rights as an assured tenant

Your tenancy agreement does not list all of your rights. These are set out in this section.

- **To live in your home** without interference from us, as long as you keep to the tenancy agreement. You may occasionally have to let us in to check or carry out repairs, but we will give you 24 hours notice of this unless it is an emergency
- **To stay in your home** unless the court says you must leave. Examples of when this may happen are:
 1. You have failed to pay the rent (see Section 4 'Rents, Housing Benefits and Service charges' for further details)
 2. You have caused a nuisance to neighbours
 3. You have obtained the tenancy by deception
 4. You have harassed someone
 5. You are no longer living there
 6. You are affected by demolition
 7. We need you to move out so we can improve the property
 8. You have used the property for an illegal or immoral purpose
- **To have your home repaired and maintained.** See Section 10 'Repairs and maintenance' for further details.
- **To be kept informed, and to be consulted about new programmes of maintenance, improvement or demolition or a change in our practice or policy.**
- **To buy your home from us.** You may have the Preserved Right to Buy or the Right to Acquire. A small number of tenants do not have this right, including if your home is let to older people.

This may be sheltered housing or bungalows

- **To pass on your home to someone else.** This includes exchanging, or swapping, with another tenant. See Section 12
- **To take in lodgers or let out part of your home** as long as you tell us and do not overcrowd your home. Permission will not be given if you want to rent out your entire home to someone else
- **To receive the services that you pay for,** such as the Security or Warden service in flats
- **The right for your tenancy to pass to others if you die** - this is called 'the Right of Succession' and generally applies to a member of your family who has lived with you for at least a year. See Section 3.5 on page 14
- **To complain** if you think that we have not treated you fairly or made a mistake. See Section 9 'Comments, complaints and compensation' for further details.
- **To run a business from your home.** You must get our permission first as we will want to make sure that your business will not cause a nuisance to your neighbours. You must follow any trading laws and planning rules that may apply
- **To improve your home** - as long as you have our written permission
- **To carry out repairs to your home,** if we fail to do this. You must tell us if you are going to do this.



3.4 Your responsibilities in more detail

- **To pay your rent regularly.** See Section 4 'Rents, Housing Benefits and Service charges' for further details
- **To use your home as a home** – you must live in it as your only home and not hand it over to someone else

- **Not to cause a nuisance and not to harass anyone.** Everyone in your area has the right to enjoy a peaceful life. Nuisance can be caused in lots of ways like making noise late at night or not keeping children or pets under control.

You are responsible for the behaviour of every person living in or visiting your home and any animals or pets. If you cause or allow a nuisance or harassment of anyone we will treat this as a serious breach of your tenancy agreement.

We may ask a court to end your tenancy and require you to move out.

- **To keep the inside of your home and garden clean and tidy.** The decoration of your home is your job
- **To tell us if repairs we are responsible for are needed.** You can do this by telephoning the Contact Centre and our Emergency Repair service (See Section 10 'Repairs and maintenance')
- **To carry out repairs you are responsible for**
- **To insure the contents of your home.** Please see section 6 of this handbook 'Insuring your home'
- **You must not keep dangerous items in your home.** This includes inflammable liquids or bottled gas. See Section 14 'Keeping safe and secure' in this handbook for further details.
- **You must not bypass electricity and gas meters.** This is very dangerous and may lead to you losing your home.

- **To park your vehicle considerately and to ensure that visitors to your home also park considerately.** You must not drive over pavements and grassed areas.



3.5 Changes in who lives in your home

Passing on your home to another person

A difficult subject, but if you are an assured tenant and die, your partner (or another member of your family who has been living with you for at least the last year) may be able to take over your tenancy. This is called 'The Right of Succession'. If you are worried about what will happen to your tenancy when you die, you can contact your Estate Officer for advice or read our leaflet about your rights. The person who wants to succeed to the tenancy must contact us.

Taking in lodgers

If you have an assured tenancy, you have the right to take in lodgers or, with our written permission, to rent out part of your home. This is called sub-letting. Don't forget that this could affect any benefits that you are receiving. You cannot sub-let the whole of your house to someone else.

Relationship break down

You should always seek independent or legal advice. There are complicated legal rules about this. The rules vary depending on who is named on the tenancy agreement as the tenant or joint tenant, and whether or not they are married. If your relationship breaks down, please ask your Estate Officer about your rights as a tenant. We will consider your legal rights and your individual circumstances. Our advice to you will depend on whether you wish to remain in the tenancy or move elsewhere, and what the Courts may say.

3.6 If you are not going to live in your home for a while

You should tell your Estate Officer if you are going to be away from home for more than a month.

This could be because you are going abroad, going into hospital or a nursing home or into prison. You will need to do two things:

- **Arrange to pay your rent.** Remember that if you claim housing benefit or income support, your benefit may be affected if you are away from your home for a long time. Please get advice from your Estate Officer before you intend to go away, telling us a forwarding address and when you intend to return
- **Arrange for someone to look after your home.** If you are going to be away during the winter, please drain down the water system before you go to prevent burst pipes.

3.7 Becoming a joint tenant with your partner

It depends:

- If you are married and wish your husband's/wife's name to be added to your tenancy, write or talk to your Estate Officer

- If you are not married but are living together, you must be able to prove that your partner has been living with you for 12 months. Again write or talk to your Estate Officer.

Sometimes we will refuse to add your partners name. We will look at each case separately, and give reasons for our decision.

3.8 Giving up a share of a joint tenancy

You can do this if you wish. But you need to do it in the right way. You will need to write or speak to your Estate Officer. Please remember that:

- You lose all legal rights to your home
- You are responsible, with your joint tenants, for any rent arrears that existed when you gave up your share of the tenancy
- Your other partner to the tenancy has to agree to become the only tenant
- If the home is too large for the remaining person, we may ask him or her to move to a smaller home
- Where possible, rent arrears should be cleared before the tenancy names are altered
- If the courts have given the tenancy to your partner, this is a legal decision and cannot be overturned except by the Court.



3.9 Ending your tenancy

You must give us four weeks' notice in writing. We will write to you to tell you on what date your tenancy will end after you have given your notice. This will always be on a Monday.

When you tell us that you will be moving out we will give you a checklist of things that you must remember to do. This includes telling your gas, water and electricity suppliers you are moving and arrange for them to read the meters. You must also make sure that you leave the property in good condition, clean and that no rubbish is left inside the property or in the garden and return all keys to us.



Information

**More information about tenancies and your rights and responsibilities as a tenant is available in the housing offices or on our website:
www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk**

Section 4



Rents, Housing Benefits and service charges

4.1 Setting rents

We work out our rents in a fair way. The Government tells all Councils and Housing Association landlords how they should work out their rents.

Rents take account of things like the number of bedrooms and average local earnings.

When you signed for your home you will have been told how much your rent is at the start of your tenancy. You may be able

to get some help with your rent through the Housing Benefit scheme. See that heading on page 19.

We will write to you each year telling you what your rent for the next year will be. We will give you at least 28 days notice of the change.

4.2 Service charges

In some cases we will make a charge to cover the cost of extra services that we provide.

These may include security, caretaking, cleaning or grounds maintenance. This should have been explained to you when you signed your tenancy agreement. If you are not sure, your Housing Office staff can tell you what service charges, if any, are included.

If you have signed an Affordable Rent Tenancy Agreement, any services we provide will be included in the rent that is charged and is not identified as separate service charges. The rent will be calculated at 80% of the market rent for a similar property.

4.3 Paying your rent

You must not fall behind with your rent payments. If you do, we will take action that may lead to the loss of your home.

Rent is due each Monday. Each payment covers the rent, including any service costs, for the week from Monday to Sunday.

When you signed for your home we will have told you how and when you should pay. You will have received a swipe card and further instructions shortly after your tenancy commenced.

REMEMBER!

We encourage you to pay your rent by regular payments from your bank, either by Direct Debit or Standing Order. It is easier for you to pay your rent in this way.



4.4 Different ways to pay your rent

- **Direct Debit**
This is the easiest way to pay your rent. Once the direct debit is in place you don't need to do anything else. Payments are automatically calculated and recalculated following the annual rent increase. Ask your Housing Office staff for more information
- **Standing Order**
This is where you request your bank to pay a regular monthly sum to us. You will need to tell your bank to pay us a new amount following any rent increase. Payments must be made in advance.
- **By using your swipe card**
You were sent this at the start of your tenancy. This allows you to pay by cash/direct debit or cheque at Post Offices or at Pay Point outlets throughout the country. We also send details on how and where you can use your card. You must pay by Friday of the week in which rent is due if you pay in this way.
- **By direct payment of Housing Benefit entitlement from the City Council.**
- **By phone using a debit card**
☎ ring your local housing office during office hours or ring our 24 hour payline on 0844 557 8321 when our offices are closed.



- **Online.** If you would like to pay your rent online, please go to our website www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk and click on the link to the Allpay site: info@whitefriarshousing.co.uk
- **Direct from employers** (Only some employers will do this).

4.5 Housing Benefit

You may be able to reduce the amount of rent and any service charges you have to pay by claiming Housing Benefit. This will depend on your income and your circumstances.

Coventry City Council are responsible for the payment of Housing Benefit. We can advise you if you are eligible and can help with completion of the claim form. If in doubt, please ask for help.

If you are in receipt of Housing Benefit you must make sure you provide details to the City Council and us of any change in your circumstance.

4.6 If you cannot pay your rent

You must pay your rent on time. We provide your home and services and have a legal right to collect rent for this.

If you cannot pay, contact your Housing Office at once. We can provide you with confidential advice on ways in which you can deal with the problem.

We have a fair but firm approach to dealing with arrears. We expect you to clear the arrears straight away. If this is not possible, we will reach an agreement with you to clear the arrears as soon as possible.

If you fail to make the agreed payments, we will take action. This may result in court action. If this happens, court costs will also be due. If you do not do as the courts instruct, this may lead to eviction from your home.

REMEMBER!

If you are having problems paying your rent or service charges, talk to us, we may be able to help you deal with it before it gets out of hand.



Information

More information about rents, benefits and service charges is available in the housing offices or on our website: www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk

Section 5



Data protection and your information

Whitefriars Housing Group is the Data Controller of your information and is registered with the Information Commissioners Office. We will use and protect your information in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

We will use your information such as your name, address, contact telephone number and any other information that you have given to us to:

- Provide you with a home and tenancy
- Maintain our records and to deliver a quality housing service
- Contact you if we need to with regard to your rent account
- Manage and enforce the tenancy conditions that you have agreed to.
- Support any claims that you may make for Benefits or Grants
- Support you in helping you to live independently
- Carry out repairs and maintenance to your home
- Help improve and shape our services.

5.1 How will your information be stored?

This information will be stored electronically and sometimes in paper files. The people that will be allowed to look at your information will be those employees who need to look at it to provide you with a quality service and good customer care.

5.2 How long will the information be stored?

Some information is destroyed as soon as the matter has been dealt with, if it is no longer needed. Most information will be stored for the time that you are a Whitefriars tenant. If you are no longer a tenant, the information may be kept for a period of time after the tenancy has ended so that if we are required to provide information at a later date, we are able to do this. This might be to recover money that is owed to us or to defend or pursue a legal claim in the courts.

5.3 Who will we share your information with?

We may share your information with repair and maintenance contractors working on our behalf, the Local Authority, Police, other Housing Associations, Legal Teams and any representative acting on your behalf that you have given permission to share the details with.

We work with the Police and other departments of the Local Authority to minimise risk to our tenants, children, the public, and our staff. If you leave a debt outstanding with anyone whilst living in one of our properties such as rent arrears, gas, electricity, telephone or a catalogue debt, we will share your information with the company trying to recover the debt if they are intending to take legal action.

We will also allow access to your information to people acting on our behalf such as our auditors so that they can ensure

that we are acting professionally and protecting your data.

We will only share your information in line with the Data Protection Act 1998.

5.4 Your rights

You have the right to:

- request to see information that we hold and is personal to you. We do charge £10 for this request to help with the cost of providing this information.
- You have the right to know what and why information is collected and how this is used.
- Know who the information will be or may be shared with

To see this information you will need to put in a request in writing and pay the £10 fee.

Please contact one of our Housing Offices for more information.

You will not be able to see information that has been provided to us by a third party (a person who does not work for Whitefriars) without consent of that person. Neither will we give information to you if the information has been provided with the agreement that the information is confidential. For example, if you are in a neighbour dispute with a neighbour, we will not give you information that they may have given to us, without their consent. Consent will not be requested if the information is given to us with the expectation that the information remains confidential. Neither will we give you information that we consider to be privileged information. This involves information passed between us and legal teams acting on our behalf.

If you do receive information from us in line with your rights, you will have the opportunity to say whether you think the information we hold about you is accurate or not. If you disagree with the information we hold about you, we may consider

removing or correcting the information. You can also ask us to stop processing personal data that is likely to cause damage or distress. We will inform you of whether we intend to keep, correct or remove the information that we hold.

entitlement and if this is the case, we will share this information with the organisation who is providing the benefit. You will still have to advise the appropriate agency of changes to your circumstances.

We need to know for example, whether you have the same people living with you or whether there have been any additions to your household such as a new baby, partner, brother, friend. Whether you have married or your emergency contact details have changed. We will contact the person you nominate if there is an emergency or if we are unable to contact you directly.

We may contact you to carry out a survey to improve or shape our services, so that we know what our customers expect or want from us. We would really like to hear your views but if you do not want to participate in the survey please let our employee know when they contact you or if it is a postal survey, do not return the survey to us.



5.5 What do you need to do?

You are required to let us know of any changes to the information that you give us to ensure that we are holding accurate data. This change may affect any benefit



Information

More information about data protection is available in the housing offices or on our website: www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk

Section 6



Insuring your home

We are not responsible for your personal belongings, furniture, carpets and internal decoration. If something happens to them then it is your responsibility. You need to take out your own insurance to protect your belongings.

6.1 Insuring your belongings

You should insure your furniture and house contents against fire, theft, flood and other accidents. If you have not yet insured your house contents, take a few moments to add up how much it would cost to replace them – probably more than you thought.

You should make sure you get cover for all

risks including fire, theft, frost damage and other hazards.

- your personal belongings including decorations,
- our fixtures, fittings, furniture and belongings against accidental damage; and
- yourself against any responsibility you may have to neighbours or other people.

We offer a scheme for our tenants through My Home Finance. This covers:

- External locks if keys are lost/stolen
- Freezer contents
- Fire
- Theft
- Vandalism
- Water damage.

6.1 Joining our scheme

You were given a booklet and information leaflet when you signed for your tenancy. This gives information on the scheme. If you decide to go with this scheme complete the application and send it to the address listed for My Home Contents Insurance, or ☎ **0845 337 2463** and they will help you fill in the form.

6.1 Paying for your insurance

You can decide how to pay when you fill in the form. Your options are:

- Weekly, by cash using a swipe card at any post office, or at the same location you pay your rent
- Fortnightly by cash, using a swipe card as described above

- Monthly by direct debit on interest free payments
- Every year by Cheque, postal order or debit/credit card.

REMEMBER!

If you are having problems paying your rent or service charges, talk to us, we may be able to help you deal with it before it gets out of hand.



Information

More information about insurance schemes is available in the housing offices or on our website: www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk

Section 7



Taking care of and improving your home

This section is about some of the things that you must do to look after your home, any gardens and communal parts like stairs and landings in flats. This section gives you a few tips on how to do this. By doing regular checks around your home you may be able to prevent larger problems arising. Most problems occur in the winter months, so we recommend you do an annual check-up in September or October.

7.1 Things to check

- Roofs – are there any missing or loose tiles? If so, report this to the Repairs Centre
- Gutters and down pipes – are they properly fixed and not leaking or blocked? Clear any leaves or rubbish from drains
- Oil the hinges and locks on doors and windows and check they are working
- Gates and fences – do hinges and catches work? Are fence posts firm (we

are not responsible for most fences - check with your Housing Office).

Stop taps and other controls

You should find out where all these are in case you need to shut off gas, water or electricity supply.

Mains electrical switch will be in the consumer unit or fuse board, normally found in your hallway or cupboard.

Mains water stopcock will be in footpath outside house, under kitchen sink or below bathroom basin. If you cannot find it, contact us.

Electric meter will be in a box inside or outside your property or in a cupboard by the front door.

Electric consumer unit will be in your hallway or cupboard.

Central heating controls - the thermostat will be in your hall or living room. The programmer will normally be in your kitchen, and the immersion heater switch (where provided) is inside or outside the airing cupboard.

Gas meter including stopvalve - location varies, but generally it is inside a cupboard or outside your property in a box by the front door.

REMEMBER!

To make sure that where you live now provides a good home for you and other families in the future, we both need to look after it.

7.2 Preventing Condensation

Condensation is caused by moisture in the air. This comes from cooking, baths and showers and drying clothes indoors. When moisture in the air cools on cold surfaces

like outside walls and windows, it turns into water.

This can cause mould to form on walls and other surfaces and causes mildew, damp or mould to form on clothing, wallpaper and windowsills.



It is up to you to prevent condensation

You should:

- Open windows
- Put lids on cooking pans and switch off kettles as soon as they boil
- Dry clothes outdoors
- Never use tumble dryers without external vents
- Never use bottled gas room heaters, bottled gas cookers or paraffin room heaters. As well as causing condensation they could be a safety risk – the tenancy agreement tells you not to use these items in flats. We ask that you do not use them at all
- Close kitchen and bathroom doors to prevent steam going into other rooms.

If you have bad problems with condensation, contact your Housing Office staff, download or pick up our leaflet on dealing with condensation and follow the advice.

7.3 Aerials and satellite dishes

If you are thinking of putting up an aerial or satellite dish you need our permission first. If you do not ask us for permission we may ask for its removal if you cause any damage, we may charge you for the cost to put the damage right.

Please contact your Estate Officer if you need advice about this.

7.4 Home improvements

You may carry out improvements to your home at your own expense, provided you get our permission. We will only turn you down if there is a good reason. When we agree that you may carry out improvements we make some conditions. For example, we could ask that:

- You ask your neighbours what they think, if the improvements will affect them.
- You carry out work to acceptable standards.
- You put back any original fixtures and fittings if you move house.

Don't forget that before starting work you may also need planning or building regulations approval, depending on what you intend to do.

You must let us know when you have finished the work so that we can look at it.

7.5 Looking after the outside of your home

Please help us keep your home in good condition by reporting repairs when you see them as noted in 'Things to check' (on previous page).

If you have a garden, this is your responsibility.

This includes making sure that all rubbish is removed and tipped safely. You are also responsible for cutting the grass, maintaining trees, hedges and any boundary planting. If you would like information about communal grass cutting and landscape maintenance, please ask your Housing Office staff for more details.

If you live in a flat, you have a responsibility to take care of the communal areas. This may include sweeping access paths and cleaning entrances, stairs and landings. This responsibility is shared with tenants and leaseholders of other flats.



Information

More information about taking care of your home is available in the housing offices or on our website: www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk

Section 8



Making a difference

Getting involved and influencing what we do

We encourage as many customers as possible to get involved because it is you who pay for our services, and who know how well we are doing in providing those services.

You are also the ones who are part of the local communities and know what it is like to live there and how things might be improved.

We can help make communities stronger by listening to your experiences and your ideas for improvement and using that feedback to make changes.

Getting involved can also offer you a sense of achievement through seeing things change, building confidence and developing other skills and contacts with people.

8.1 Our Customer Involvement Team

Although working with customers is part of everyone's responsibility in Whitefriars, we employ a team of Customer Involvement Officers to help set up and run involvement opportunities. They work with individuals and groups of customers to support their involvement and directly run a range of involvement options, including our Customer Auditor Project. Initiatives that encourage views from our under represented customers are also led by this team. The team are available to offer help, advice, information and support on a wide range of issues in a friendly and encouraging way.

Some of the ways you can get involved are:

- Reading what we send to you and responding where needed. This might be a letter, our magazine VIEW, leaflets about special or local issues
- Telling us what you think, through our Talk2us scheme. Talk2us offers different ways in which individual tenants and groups of residents can let us know what they think of our services. This includes though regular surveys, open days and drop ins, focus groups, complaints and just giving feedback to our staff
- Customer Auditor Project – where residents look closely at parts of our service and comment on them. This might be in the form of mystery shopping, a survey of customers by customers, telephone surveys and looking at processes to see if they can be improved
- Through groups – these can be formal residents groups, local issue groups or groups working on this like estate agreements to improve local services
- Customer Service Improvement Groups – you can have a real impact on our main services by joining one of these groups

- Local involvement – our housing office teams have a range of initiatives for tenant involvement in the area in which you live. Contact your housing office for details.



8.2 Getting involved in scrutiny

Tenants can now apply to become part of the customer scrutiny panel. This is a very different way of getting involved. Members of the scrutiny panel decide what parts of our service they want to check out in detail. They hold the Board to account for how well they direct the organisation.

8.3 You said it, we did it

We publish a Customer Involvement Strategy and Statement, that gives more detail about our approach to involvement.

Each year we also do an impact assessment. This means that we look at all the changes we have made to our services as a result of customer comments and involvement. We publish the results of this assessment so customers can clearly see how things are changing.

8.4 Getting in touch

If you would like to become involved in making a better future for tenants of Whitefriars, please contact one of our Customer Involvement Team on:

☎ **024 7676 7096**

Members of the team or your area office staff can tell you if a residents group exists in your area.



Information

More information about getting involved is available in the housing offices or on our website: www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk

Section 9



Comments, complaints and compensation

We try to give you the best service we can, however, things can go wrong and you may feel that you want to complain about it. If you have a complaint please tell us so that we can put things right. This will help you and other tenants and will make sure we improve our services.

9.1 When to complain

If you feel we have failed to:

- Keep a promise
- Respond in writing or by telephone to a query you have raised
- Keep an appointment without telling you
- OR
- Made a mistake and/or our standards are poor
- Treated you unfairly.

9.2 How to complain

- Telephone us and let us know about your complaint at one of our offices (listed on page 3 and on the back of this handbook)
- Call into any one of our offices and report your complaint to us in person
- Write to us at: **9 Little Park Street, Coventry, CV1 2UR**
- Email us at: **info@whitefriarshousing.co.uk**

REMEMBER!

You have the right to complain. We hope you do not have to complain, but if you do we will treat your complaint very seriously, and learn from it where we can.



9.3 How we will deal with your complaint

If you choose a formal investigation, we will expect you to go through the following stages. If you miss a stage, we will usually expect you to go back to it.

The process for investigating a complaint is:

Stage 1 - Original Complaint Received

Aim to respond within 10 working days.

If you are not happy with the outcome, let us know within 4 weeks, telling us your reasons.

Stage 2 - Review of Complaint by an Independent Head of Service

Aim to respond within 10 working days.

If you are still dissatisfied with the outcome, let us know within 4 weeks, specifying your reasons why.

Stage 3 - Formal Appeal to the Complaints Panel, made up of Whitefriars Housing Group Board Members and the Chief Executive

Aim to respond within 28 days.

A complaint can be closed before it has been through all stages of our complaints process. This may happen if a complaint is being pursued unreasonably or if it is considered inappropriate.

9.4 Compensation

When we make a mistake or our service falls short of our standards, we may pay compensation.

Claiming compensation

We may pay compensation for things like:

- Poor service
- Where we have not completed a repair within the time we said it would be done and you have given us access to do it.

Some claims for compensation might take a little longer because we may have to speak with our Insurance Administrator, such as:

- Damage to your property
- You have suffered personal injury from our negligence
- You have suffered a financial loss caused by our negligence.

Things that may affect your claim for compensation:

- Poor weather conditions
- Extra works are required and we keep you informed
- Waiting for materials to complete a job
- Accidental where we have not been negligent.

If you want to make a claim for compensation you should contact your local office by telephone, email or by letter. Contact details can be found on page two or at the back of this handbook.

9.5 Comments and suggestions

We aim to continually improve, and we welcome comments and suggestions about how we can do this. You can do this through a local tenants group that may be active in your area, or by completing the tear off slip in our 'Comments, Suggestions and Compliments' leaflet, available at any of our offices.



Information

**More information about comments, complaints and compensation is available in the housing offices or on our website:
www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk**

Section 10



Repairs and maintenance

We share responsibility for repair work in your home. If we are responsible we aim to carry out those repairs quickly and to a good standard. If the repairs are your responsibility we expect you to do the same.

10.1 What we will repair:

- The structure and outside of your home, including windows and doors
- The bathroom and kitchen fittings (if ours)
- Drains, guttering and outside pipes
- Supply of gas, water and electricity inside your home
- Heating and hot water systems (if ours)

If any of these items need repairing because of damage you, anyone living with you or visiting you, or your pets cause, it will be your responsibility to arrange and to pay for the necessary works to be carried out.

In the case of flats, we will also repair entrances, halls, stairways, lifts, rubbish chutes, lighting and door entry systems.

10.2 How to tell us about a repair

Let us know straight away if you think your home needs any repairs.

All repairs should be reported by telephone to the Contact Centre ☎ **0300 7906 555**. This is a 24 hour number where you can report all repairs between 8am - 8pm and emergencies at any other time.



You should:

- Tell us as much as possible about the repair
- Give us a telephone number where we can contact you.
- Be at home for the time we agree with you
- Carry out any repairs that are your responsibility

We will:

- Normally make an appointment to do the repair
- If the job is one we cannot make an appointment for, the telephone number you have given us will help us contact you to arrange for your repair to be completed.

10.3 Doing your repairs

Most of our repairs are done by our own repairs team HomeWorks. They may ask a small number of specialised contractors to do some work.

Repairs to any Gas fittings are done by our Gas contractors. Please note that not all of our homes have a gas supply. You should have been told this when you viewed the property.

REMEMBER!

If there are any gas appliances in your home we **MUST** be given access to your home to service them every year.

10.4 How quickly a repair will be done

There are different target times for different repairs, depending on how urgent they are. Here are some examples:

Emergency repairs

– attend within two hours

- Gas leaks
- Major incident/fire
- Major water leak.

– within 24 hours

- Blocked drains, toilets, manholes, rubbish chutes.

Urgent repairs – within 7 calendar days

- Repair water heaters
- Repair leaking or cracked wash hand basin.

Routine repairs - within 28 calendar days

- Repair kitchen units.

10.5 If we do the repair

We will try to make sure that the quality of our service and the repair is of the highest standard so that you get good value for your money. To help with this:

- We aim to inspect a number of completed repairs
- We will act upon complaints about the quality of work, the attitude of contractors and our HomeWorks staff
- We will produce and publish reports about our repair services in our annual report.

10.6 Repairs that you must do include:

- Decorating inside your own home, including minor plaster work
- Maintaining fixtures or fittings you have provided
- Where deliberate or accidental damage has been caused by you, anyone living at your home, your pets or visitors
- TV aerials and satellite dishes (except for systems provided by us serving more than one house)
- Fencing between gardens
- Keys and fobs (and locks if keys are lost or stolen)
- Altering doors

- Light bulbs and fluorescent tubes
- Door bells
- Plug and chains
- Glass
- Other minor repairs you are responsible for (see your tenancy agreement for more details).

These are examples only. Check with your Housing Office for more information.

10.7 Repairs that you have to pay for

Where you are responsible, we expect you to carry out or arrange for the repair to be done. We do, however, understand that there are occasions when you may need our help. If you would like us to carry out a repair on your behalf, please call our Contact Centre and we will provide you with a price. It is necessary for you to then pay in advance.

In exceptional circumstances, we may carry out repairs you are responsible for as an emergency. In these cases we will charge you afterwards. You can cover some items, like loss of keys, through insurance - see section 5. If you need help and advice about paying repair costs, please contact us.

10.8 Customer satisfaction

Telling us what you think

We have a range of ways to ask you for feedback on our repair service. These include postal surveys, telephone and text feedback.

We want you to tell us if you were happy with the work and also tell us how you were treated by our staff and the contractor doing the work. By doing this, you are helping us make sure that we are providing a good service. You are also helping us to know when we get it wrong.





Information

More information about repairs and maintenance is available in the housing offices or on our website: www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk

Section 11



Trouble where you live?

Anti-social behaviour, nuisance, harassment and disputes

A safe and reasonably quiet place to live is what most people want. We want this for our tenants as well. If you are not able to do this or you live in a way that means your neighbours are disturbed by you, your family, your visitors or your pets, we will take action. If how you live is likely to annoy or upset other people, it is called anti social behaviour (ASB).

11.1 Anti-social behaviour

A small number of people can make living by them difficult.

This can happen in all sorts of ways. It may include the rare acts of serious violence, hate crime and harassment, domestic violence to incidents like noise nuisance,

rubbish dumping, vandalism and graffiti.

11.2 Your responsibilities

If you are a tenant you are responsible for every person (including children) living in or visiting your home and for any pets or animals.

This includes what they do in your home and in the areas around your home. Lifts, corridors and out on the estate are included in this.

What you have to do, (your responsibilities), are in your tenancy agreement. If these responsibilities are not met, we will contact you and may take action, including asking the courts for possession of your home if the breach is a severe one. The costs of taking action will be passed on to you.

11.3 If you have a problem, tell us

It is important that you tell us, by reporting it to any of our housing offices. Their addresses and telephone numbers are on page 3 and on the back of this handbook.

One of our staff will talk to you in confidence about what action could be taken to help you with the problem. They will give you their name so you know who is dealing with your problem. They may pass the details to our ASB4 Team who deal with this.

How quickly we deal with it will depend on how serious the problem is.

But generally you can expect a response to:

- Serious cases (Harassment, assaults, violence and hate crime) within one working day
- Other cases (Noise, rubbish dumping, boundary issues) within five working days.

11.4 What you can expect from us if you report anti-social behaviour

It depends on the problem. Each problem of ASB may need different responses to try and put it right. It is important that you give us as many details as you can. We will:

- Help you talk with the people causing the problem, if you and your neighbours

want this. We have people trained to help you do this. This is called Mediation and can often sort the problem without causing bad feeling between you and your neighbour. It can also avoid legal action

- provide you with a named officer to support you from the point that you first make us aware of the problem. The officer will agree with you a plan of action on how best to deal with your case
- Be sensitive to your views and needs. Anything you tell us will remain confidential unless you tell us that we can share what you have told us with a third person or agency
- Make sure that any risk to you is carefully considered so we can offer further support, such as personal alarms, mobile phones and CCTV
- Contact the alleged person or people who have caused your problems whenever possible, but not if it poses a problem for your safety – we will talk to you about it first
- Arrange removal of racist or offensive graffiti within 24 hours
- Look at other ways to find information or evidence of anti-social behaviour for example professional witnesses or CCTV
- Use the law or other ways to control or stop a problem.





Information

More information about our response to Anti-Social Behaviour is available in the housing offices or on our website: www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk

Section 12



Moving home

Please use the information in this section as a guide. Do talk to your Housing Office staff for advice before you decide to move.

12.1 If you want to move to another home

Most people feel the need to move home at some time during their lives, for many different reasons. You may wish to buy a property or rent privately or transfer to another Whitefriars property. The following information is a useful guide to what you need to consider when you move.

12.2 Giving notice on your property

If you decide to end your tenancy, you will normally be required to give four weeks notice that you intend to leave your property. In exceptional circumstances, we may accept a shorter period of notice. (You can use a form, which is available from your Housing Office)

If you are moving to another property we own or to another Housing Association in Coventry, you will only need to give one weeks notice.

If you leave, without telling us, we will charge you for the rent until we end the tenancy. You will also be charged for any change of locks.

When you give notice you will be given a checklist of what you must do before you leave.



12.3 Moving to another Whitefriars property

If you wish to transfer to another Whitefriars property or another housing association property in Coventry, you need to register on the Coventry Homefinder Scheme.

Coventry Homefinder is a service for those people looking for social housing in the City. It is a partnership between Whitefriars Housing Group, Coventry City Council and other housing associations in the City. Each housing association will advertise their vacant properties through Coventry Homefinder.

You can complete the on-line registration application form, which you will find on their website:

www.coventryhomefinder.com

If you do not have access to the internet, a free service is available at the libraries throughout the City.

When you have completed the on-line application and successfully submitted the form, your application will be assessed and once you have been accepted onto the scheme, you can start bidding for properties you are eligible for.

For more information about the scheme, go to their website:

www.coventryhomefinder.com

If your bid is successful, we will check the following details:

- That you have a clear rent account
- That you have no debts owing to us
- Inspect your property to ensure it is to a good standard including the decoration

If you are in rent arrears or your property fails the inspection, your bid may be overlooked.



12.4 Mutual exchanges

You can exchange your property with another Whitefriars tenant or Registered Social Landlord or, Local Authority tenant. Exchanges are often a quick way for you to move.

You can register your details for a mutual exchange on the Coventry Homefinder website, www.coventryhomefinder.com

You can also register with Homeswapper on their website, www.homeswapper.co.uk This is a national scheme for social housing tenants looking to swap homes. There may be a small charge to join this scheme.

When you find a suitable person to exchange with, both of you need to write in to ask our permission to exchange.

We will consider your request within 42 days. We will check the following details:

- Both parties have a clear rent account
- Satisfactory inspections of your property
- Both properties being suitable to their new tenant. For example, not too big or small, or adapted or built for special needs such as disabled or sheltered accommodation

You should not make any financial arrangements with a possible exchange tenant.

Please ensure that your property is in good condition when you exchange as Whitefriars Housing will not be responsible for any works needed after the mutual exchange except for our normal repairing obligations.

Tenants who exchange properties without permission will be asked to return to their own properties and may have to pay our costs.

12.5 Emergency moves

If you have real problems, which make it difficult for you to live in your home, please contact your Estate Officer for advice. Every situation is different and all will be considered.

If it is agreed to move you to another property, your Estate Officer will contact you about the move.

12.6 Buying your home

You may wish to buy the property you are living in. There are two schemes under which tenants may be able to buy their home.

They are the Right to Buy Scheme and the Right to Acquire Scheme. If you qualify, you can buy your home at a price lower than the full market value.

There are certain qualifications to be eligible for these schemes. There are leaflets which explain the schemes in greater detail. You can get a copy from your Housing Office.

If you require more information on whether you qualify and what you need to do to buy your own home, please contact the Leaseholders Service Team on:

☎ 024 7676 7072



Information

More information about moving home is available in the housing offices or on our website: www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk

Section 13



Being a good neighbour - flats

This section looks at the things you must do to be a good neighbour if you live in a flat. Being a good neighbour is very important. This is because it is easy to disturb your neighbours through poor behaviour. Please remember that your neighbours have a right to privacy, security, a good night's sleep and to be treated with fairness. The action we will take if any of our tenants, their families or visitors are not 'good neighbours' is set out in section 11.

13.1 How can I be a good neighbour?

By doing the things listed below.

- Don't put flammable liquids or hot or burning items in the rubbish collection system
- Don't be noisy, especially late at night or early in the morning
- Don't leave any rubbish or obstructions, including sacks of rubbish, on the landings or chute rooms, as this could be a fire hazard

- Don't block any rubbish chutes with items that are too big
- Don't allow children to play in communal stairways
- Be quiet in the communal entrance and don't bang doors
- Make sure you close the communal entrance door behind you
- Only let visitors through the communal entrance that are for you

13.2 Keeping dogs

Many of the complaints we receive from people living in flats are about dogs. If you do have a dog, please make sure that:

- You do not allow it to bark a lot
- You arrange for someone to take care of the dog if you know it will disturb others by barking while you are out
- You do not allow it to mess on communal stairs, landings or balconies
- You do not let it on the estates on its own
- You keep it on a lead
- It has an identification collar
- You register your dog/s if a registration scheme is in operation in your area.

Contact your Housing Office if neighbour's dogs cause a problem.

13.3 Shared areas - cleaning

We provide some cleaning services to the communal areas in multi storey flats and we may offer cleaning services in low rise flats for a small charge.

You must clean:

- Area in front of your door
- Communal landings, along with other tenants
- Balconies - all flats
- Stairs - low rise flats

- Ground floor entrance area - low rise flats

We also try to keep the outside communal area litter free and in good condition. You can help with this by disposing of rubbish properly.

13.4 What to do if neighbours cause problems

You should discuss this with your Estate Officer, who will decide what we can do and who to get involved. Our response may vary from a visit to the neighbour causing the problem, or where more serious, a response through our ASB4 team, see section 11.

In some multi storey blocks we provide a team who work outside normal office hours, to improve security and reduce problems with neighbours. This, and the other services they provide, are paid for by a service charge where the majority of residents want the service.



Section 14



Keeping safe and secure

Keeping you and your family safe is a responsibility we share. You need to do a number of things to live safely in your home.

Important note: If you do anything to electricity and gas meters or communal supplies, including bypassing meters, this is very dangerous and if you are found to have done this we will take action to end your tenancy.

You must not use or keep any dangerous goods (or goods that catch fire easily, including paraffin or bottled gas) in your home or the shared areas, apart from goods needed for general household use.

With your neighbours, you must keep any shared areas and gardens clean and tidy and free from rubbish and obstructions.

14.1 Gas

If you smell gas:

Take action - mains gas can cause suffocation, explosions and fires.

- Turn off the gas at the mains tap at the gas meter (usually situated in a cupboard by the front door)

- Put out all cigarettes immediately
- Turn off gas cookers, fires and anything else with a naked flame
- Open windows/doors to get rid of the gas - If you live in a block of flats open door onto communal areas.
- Do not use any electrical equipment, including light switches, or mobile phones as an electrical spark could cause a fire or explosion
- Move away from the area
- Call our Repairs Centre, ☎ **0300 7906 555** immediately
- Call National Grid emergency services ☎ **0800 111 999** or ☎ **0800 371787** for minicom/textphone facility
- Inform your neighbours if you can still smell gas
- Do not re-enter your home until you are told it is safe to do so.

When you call Transco they may disconnect the gas supply but will not carry out the necessary repairs. You must notify our Contact Centre on ☎ **0300 7906 555** who will arrange for our gas contractor to carry out any repairs if required.

Danger of carbon monoxide

Faulty gas appliances such as cookers, boilers and fires can give off carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide is poisonous to breathe and can cause death.

The signs are:

- Cooker or fire burning with a yellow flame
- A dark mark on the wall above the cooker or fire
- You feel drowsy and sick.

If you suspect a problem, act:

1. Switch off the gas
2. Open the windows
3. Contact us straight away on:
☎ **0300 7906 555**.

Gas safe appliances

As a landlord we are responsible for carrying out an annual safety check on all gas installations in our properties. At the time of this visit, we will service all appliances owned by us. Tenants owned appliances will be safety checked and if found to be unsafe they will be isolated. Tenants will be responsible for any repairs costs to their own appliances.

To carry out this work we must have access to your home once every 12 months. If you do not help us to do this, we will take legal action to get in and do the work.

Installing your own gas appliances

If you fit a gas appliance, such as a gas cooker or fire, it must be installed by a GAS SAFE registered installer. If you do not do this you could end up in court. You must ask to see evidence of GAS SAFE registration before having work carried out in your home. All works must comply with gas regulations and all costs associated with the fitting of the appliances are the tenant's responsibility.



14.2 Ventilation

Good air flows are needed. Do not block any vents or air bricks in the property. Blocking them prevents adequate ventilation for central heating and gas appliances. It also causes condensation, damp and mould. It can lead up to a build up of carbon monoxide which is a killer.

14.3 Electrical

What should I do if I notice an electrical fault?

Call our Contact Centre straight away ☎ **0300 7906 555**. We do not repair your own electrical appliances.

Electrical faults can cause fire or injury. Don't risk it. Remember:

- Don't leave appliances plugged in and switched on unless they are actually being used
- Don't run wires or flex across rooms or under carpets
- Don't use electrical appliances in the bathroom, for example hairdryers, curling tongs, radios, and portable heaters. The only exceptions are appliances made for that purpose, such as showers
- Never touch anything electrical with wet hands
- Make sure all flexes are in good condition and appliances are fitted with the right fuse.

If you ever accidentally cut through a flex that is plugged into a socket, for example when you use a lawnmower, do not pick up the ends until you have taken the plug out of the socket.

14.4 Fire

If your home catches fire:

- If you live in a house or bungalow get everyone outside immediately. Use a neighbour's phone or mobile to call the fire brigade

- If you live in a flat, especially a high rise flat, it is normally better to stay inside your flat unless, of course, if that is where the fire is. This is because all the floors have special protection against smoke and fire
- Close as many doors as possible. Call the fire brigade. The emergency services will tell you if you need to leave the building.



Fire prevention tips

- Some doors are specially made to stop fires from spreading into other parts of the building. It is important that they always close behind you. If any fire door does not close, or is damaged, you must let us know immediately
- Do not wedge or prop open fire doors
- Do not use paraffin or portable gas heaters as they increase the risk of fire. Do not store flammable products like paint in your home
- Do not leave frying pans and chip pans in use unattended. Keep your eye on them.

The fire service recommends that you use deep fat fryers instead of normal chip pans, as they are safer. If your pan does set on fire, turn off the heat source and cover the pan with a damp cloth or blanket. Never use water or a soaking wet cloth - this can make fat spit and cause severe burns. Leave the cloth over the pan to make sure the fire has been put out.

- If a smoke alarm is fitted in your home, they are likely to have battery back-up in case of power failure. When the battery is run down, the alarm will 'beep' intermittently.

When this happens, you should change the battery as soon as possible (please note that we do not replace batteries). If you have any queries, contact your Housing Office or the Fire Service.

14.5 Water

Reducing the risk of water pipes freezing

- Keep your home as warm as possible, even when it is unoccupied
- Leave room doors open to allow warm air to circulate
- If there are pipes in exposed or draughty areas, insulate them with lagging
- Report leaking outside overflows to our Contact Centre
- Leave the doors to your sink unit open overnight as warmer air will prevent pipes freezing
- Leave your trap door to the roof space slightly open to let warm air in. This is only necessary if you have water pipes or tanks in the roof space.
- Run your taps frequently to get water flowing, moving water is less likely to freeze
- If you have an outside toilet, turn off the water supply to the toilet to prevent the supply pipe bursting.

If you have a burst pipe or major leak:

- Locate your main stop tap; turn off the water by turning the stop tap off, normally anti-clockwise. Your stop tap can usually be found under your kitchen sink, generally, close to where your water supply enters your home
- If you cannot stop the flow of water, drain the system by opening all your hot

and cold taps. **REMEMBER** to remove your sink plugs

- Switch off your electricity supply at the mains if there is a chance that water could come into contact with electrical wiring or fittings
- Call our Contact Centre immediately on ☎ **0300 7906 555** who will arrange for an engineer to attend to your repair.

Thawing out your pipes

- Never attempt to thaw out frozen pipes by switching on your immersion heater or central heating boiler
- Check for leaking joints or burst pipes
- Use electric fan heaters, only if it is safe to do so, to warm the room where the pipes are frozen to allow them to defrost
- Apply a hot water bottle or a thick cloth, soaked in hot water to the pipe to help them defrost. Begin at the end of the pipe (nearest the tap) and work your way along the pipe. If the pipes are frozen in the roof space, only enter the roof space if it is safe to do so
- **NEVER** use a naked flame to defrost pipes
- If your water pipe is frozen, try putting table salt or hot water down the waste outlet.

Freezing water can cause serious damage to plumbing.

If you go away in winter, drain water from the pipes by turning off the water at the stopcock then turning on all the taps until they have run dry.

14.3 Security

- Never leave your home without making sure that windows and doors are secured and locked.
- Never leave a key under the doormat, in a door or on a string behind the letterbox. If you want someone else to be able to get into your home while you are out, have a spare key cut for them. This will also help you if you ever lose your own keys or get locked out
- Cancel milk and newspaper deliveries if you are going away for a while
- Do not leave valuables, handbags, purses or wallets where anyone can see them
- Leave a light on if you are going out in the evening
- Lock up before you go to bed
- Check who the callers are - use a chain when you open the door and ask to see an identification card before you let them in. All our staff and contractors carry an identity card - ask to see it. If you are not sure - call us
- Where entry doors are fitted, ensure the door is locked behind you
- Join your local neighbourhood watch scheme
- Report anything suspicious to the police.



Information

More information on safety and security is available in the housing offices or on our website: www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk

Section 16



Useful telephone numbers

Whitefriars Offices and Whitefriars Repairs Contact Centre	See back cover
Anti-Social Behaviour (asb4)	024 7649 6749
Complaints Information	024 7676 7122
Customer Involvement Team	024 7676 7096
Independent Living Team (Tenancy support)	024 7621 4355
Age Concern	024 7623 1999
Benefits Agency (Enquiry Line)	0800 88 22 00
Citizens Advice Bureau	024 7625 2052
Coventry Jobs Centre	0845 6060 234

Coventry City Council:

General Service Enquiries.....	024 7683 3333
Housing Benefits	024 7683 1800
Community Safety Team	024 7683 2580

Neighbourhood Management:

(Neighbourhood Action	024 7683 5910
Coventry Council for Disabled People	024 7671 2984
Coventry Law Centre	024 7622 3053
Coventry Mind (Mental health services)	024 7655 2847
Cyrenians (Tenancy and personal support services)	0800 0180 579
Haven (Domestic violence)	024 7644 4077
Housing Ombudsman	0300 111 3000

Money Advice Centres:

Willenhall	024 7651 1117
Wood End	024 76613 629
Panaghar (Asian women domestic violence)	024 7622 8952
Refugee Centre	024 7622 7301
Severn Trent Water	0800 783 4444
National Grid	0800 111 999
Valley House (Domestic violence and single parents)	024 7626 6280
My Home Finance	0845 337 2463

Notes

Notes

Whitefriars Housing Offices

9 Little Park St
City Centre
Coventry

**☎ 024
7676 7111**

29-31 Riley Square
Bell Green
Coventry

**☎ 024
7670 8400**

192 Torrington
Avenue
Coventry

**☎ 024
7649 6700**

St James Lane
Willenhall
Coventry

**☎ 024
7651 6700**

Need help in your own language?

Arabic

"هل تحتاج إلى مساعدة بلغتك؟"

Turkish

Kendi dilinizde yardıma mı ihtiyacınız var?

Kurdish

ئایا پتویستت به یارمهتی به زمانی خۆت ههیه.

Czech

Potřebujete pomoc ve svém jazyce?

Bengali

আপনার নিজের ভাষায় সহায়তা প্রয়োজন

Russian

Требуется ли Вам помощь на Вашем языке?

Portuguese

Precisa de assistência
na sua própria língua?

French

Vous avez besoin d'aide dans
votre propre langue?

Farsi

آیا به زبان خودتان به کمک نیاز دارید؟

Albanian

Keni nevojë për ndihmë në gjuhën tuaj

Urdu

اپنی زبان میں مدد کی ضرورت ہے۔

Spanish

¿Necesita ayuda en su propio idioma?

Cantonese

需要母語幫助

Lithuanian

Reikia pagalbos gimtąja kalba?

Somali

"Ma'u baahantahay in
lagugu caawiyo luuqadaadda"

Polish

Wymagają Państwo
pomocy w swoim języku?

☎ 024 7676 7000

Do you want this document in a different format?

If you need this leaflet in audio, braille or large print format contact

☎ 024 7676 7000

Whitefriars is proud to be part of


wm housing group

www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk
email info@whitefriarshousing.co.uk



business for neighbourhoods



EQUAL OPPORTUNITY