

Promoting
Independent Living



Ability

HOUSING ASSOCIATION

TENANTS HANDBOOK

contents

1 About Ability Housing Association

- a What is Ability Housing Association?
- b Our values
- c Our service standards
- d How to make a complaint
- e How to contact Ability

2 Living in your Ability home

- a Your Ability Housing Association Scheme
- b Your Ability Tenancy Agreement
- c Your Rights
- d Moving in
- e Taking part
- f Moving on

3 Your repairs service

- a How to report a repair
- b Emergencies
- c Our response times
- d Maintenance and adaptations
- e Code of Conduct

4 Money matters

- a Your rent and service charges
- b FAQs about paying rent
- c Money saving tips
- d Energy saving tips
- e Cost cutting tips

5 Your support services

- a What type of support does Ability provide?
- b FAQs about support
- c Housing with support
- d Floating support

6 Useful stuff

- a Useful contacts
- b The Assured Tenant's Charter
- c Welfare benefits
- d Your tenancy agreement

Click on the section
heading to help navigate
through the handbook

contents

1 About Ability Housing Association

- a What is Ability Housing Association? (1.1)
 - Our Housing Services (1.1)
 - Our Support Services (1.1)
- b Our values (1.2)
 - Quality (1.2)
 - Respect (1.2)
 - Value (1.2)
 - Integrity (1.2)
- c Our service standards (1.3)
- d How to make a complaint (1.4)
- e How to contact Ability (1.6)
 - Our management team (1.7)



Welcome to Ability Housing Association

On behalf of everyone at Ability Housing Association, I would like to welcome you as a tenant. We all very much hope that you will enjoy living in your new home and that our team can help you achieve your goals for living more independently.

We also hope that you will find this handbook helpful and informative. Its purpose is to provide you with both practical information about your home and guidance about your rights and responsibilities as a tenant of a registered social landlord.

If you have any queries that are not covered by the handbook or your Tenancy Agreement, please speak to your Housing Support Worker, if you have one, or contact your area office.

David Williams

Chief Executive

Ability Housing Association

a. What is Ability Housing Association?

Ability Housing Association is a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) that specialises in providing people with disabilities with specialist housing and support services tailored to their individual needs to enable them to live more independent lives.

Founded in 1976, Ability now manages more than 350 units of housing in southern England and provides support services for over 500 people, including people with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, sensory impairment and, in some locations, to people recovering from mental illness.

Our services fall into two main types: [Housing Services](#) and [Support Services](#).

Our Housing Services include:

- Design and development of specialist housing for rent or shared ownership
- Housing management and maintenance
- Design and project management of specialist adaptations for disability
- Development and administration of Disability Housing Registers.

Our Support Services include:

- Housing with Support, including:
 - [permanent housing](#) with individually tailored support provided on-site in self-contained flats, bungalows and houses. In some services, support can be provided for up to 24 hours a day.
 - [medium stay housing](#) with intensive support provided to assist individuals to develop independent living skills and to prepare for moving-on to permanent housing. This type of housing can be in fully self-contained flats, bungalows or studio flats with some communal facilities or shared housing.

- **Floating Support** – a tailored and flexible support service for people living in their own homes, whether tenants of Ability or not. The level of support can be varied as an individual's needs change.

All our services are designed to enable our service users to enjoy five key components of independent living – **privacy, dignity, choice, respect and participation.**



b. Our values

Promoting Independent Living

Ability Housing Association is committed to providing affordable housing and support services that promote independent living opportunities for people with disabilities.

Our pursuit of this aim is underpinned by the following values:

- **Quality** – we desire always to provide a high quality service and to strive to improve upon our standards and performance wherever possible.
- **Respect** – we are constantly aware that our tenants and service users are individuals, each with their own unique needs and aspirations, and we respect them as such at all times.
- **Value** – we try to ensure that our housing and services are affordable, efficient and responsive to the needs of our tenants and service users.
- **Integrity** – we are committed to a culture of openness, honesty and accountability throughout the Association.

SECTION 1 About Ability Housing Association

We aim always to be:

- **Proactive** – seeking innovative and creative solutions
- **Prudent** – ensuring our long-term viability through managed, sustainable growth
- **Professional** – working with others to achieve outcomes that benefit our tenants and service users.

As a responsible RSL committed to the goal of continuous improvement, we have also ensured that all our services are compliant with and adhere to the performance standards set out by the Government and the Housing Corporation in the following recent initiatives:

- **Supporting People** – the new national framework for planning, paying for and setting standards for housing related support services.
- **Rent Restructuring** – a new national framework for setting rents and making sure they are affordable for tenants.
- **The Housing Corporation: Regulation and Inspection** – Ability is regulated and inspected to monitor our standards and performance.

c. Our service standards

Promoting Independent Living

The standards below apply to all aspects of how Ability delivers its services to you. This also includes the service provided by contractors employed by Ability.

- We will treat people fairly, with courtesy and respect
- We will provide clear and accessible information on the services we provide
- We will make our services accessible to all sections of the community
- We will communicate swiftly and effectively in an appropriate fashion
- We will regularly consult with our service users to ensure that we are providing the services that meet your needs

- We will treat all personal information in a confidential manner
- We will make and keep mutually convenient appointments with our service users
- We will deal with all complaints promptly and in a positive manner
- We will ensure that our staff are sufficiently resourced and trained to provide a high quality service
- We will ensure that all of our staff can identify themselves as employees of Ability.

d. How to make a complaint

At Ability we are committed to providing high quality services to our tenants and service users. We believe we succeed most of the time but there may be times when things go wrong and you feel dissatisfied.

When this happens we want to hear about it and have the opportunity to put things right and learn from any mistakes we may have made to ensure that they do not happen again. We also want to hear from you if you have positive suggestions for improving services.

Ability's commitment to you

We will try to sort your problem out as quickly as possible. We will be fair and will listen carefully to what you have to say. You will not be treated less favourably because you have made a complaint.

Informal resolution

Most problems can be sorted out informally at a local level and we ask you to make your concern known by talking first to the member of staff that you usually deal with. This will usually be a Housing Officer or Housing Support Worker.

In most cases we expect them to put right the problem. If they don't then you can make a formal complaint.

How do I make a formal complaint?

If you do not feel able to do this on your own, please speak to somebody you trust and ask them to help you. This might be a member of our staff, a friend, a member of your family, an independent advocate or an independent advice service such as a Citizens Advice Bureau.

The different stages of the complaints procedure are summarised below. At any stage you can contact your local or area office and ask for a copy of the full complaints procedure.

First Stage

Talk to your Area Manager about the problem; let her know what you would like to be done about it. The Area Manager will write down details of your complaint and report the problem to her Regional Manager. You will be told what action is going to be taken.

If you are still unhappy, you should go to the second stage.

Second stage

Put your complaint in writing to the Chief Executive of Ability. Our staff can help you to do this if you want, or you can ask someone else who you trust.

Your complaint will be looked into and you will have the chance to speak to someone about your concern. You will get a letter explaining what action is being taken.

If you are still dissatisfied you can appeal using the third stage.

Third stage

If you have been through the first and second stages and you are still dissatisfied, you can appeal. Your appeal must also be put in writing. It will be considered by the board of Ability when they next meet.

e. How to contact Ability

The card at the front of your handbook will tell you the names, addresses, telephone numbers and other relevant information for your local office and staff.

Most of the time, your local staff will be able to help you. If you have lost your card or think it might need updating, or if your local office has been unable to help you, please contact our head office at the address below:

Ability Housing Association
The Coach House
Gresham Road
Staines
Middlesex TW18 2AE

Telephone **01784 490 910**
Fax **01784 490 510**
Email **info@ability-housing.co.uk**
Website **www.ability-housing.co.uk**

The information in this handbook can be made available to you in other forms, such as, audio tape, large print and other languages. Please let us know what format you need.

SECTION 1 About Ability Housing Association

These people work at the head office in Staines:



contents

2 Living in your Ability home

- a Your Ability Housing Association Scheme (2.1)
- b Your Ability Tenancy Agreement (2.1)
 - Question & Answers
- c Your Rights (2.4)
 - Question & Answers
- d Moving in (2.7)
 - Gas, Electricity, Water, Telephone (2.7)
 - Electricity (2.7)
 - Gas (2.7)
 - Heating and hot water (2.8)
 - Water (2.8)
 - Frost precautions (2.8)
 - Council tax (2.8)
 - Getting benefit (2.9)
 - Doctors and dentists (2.9)
 - TV Licence (2.9)
 - Letting people know (2.9)
 - Redirecting mail (2.9)
 - Keys (2.9)
 - Insurance (2.9)
 - Security (2.10)
 - Smoke alarms (2.10)
 - Fire (2.11)
 - Condensation (2.11)
- e Taking part (2.13)
 - Involving residents (2.14)
 - Want to find out more? (2.14)
- f Moving on (2.14)
 - Transfers (2.15)
 - Exchanges - 'swapping homes' (2.15)
 - Other options (2.16)
 - Moving out (2.16)

a. Your Ability Housing Association scheme

Details of your Ability Housing Association scheme are shown on the card at the front of this handbook.

b. Your Ability Tenancy Agreement

Your tenancy agreement is in the plastic wallet at the back of this handbook. Below are some frequently asked questions about your tenancy agreement. Most Ability tenants have an 'Assured Tenancy', but a few will have a different type of tenancy agreement. If you have a different type of agreement, then some of your rights may be different.

Please contact your Area Manager or Housing Support Worker if you have any further questions about your agreement.

Q What is a tenancy agreement?

A Your tenancy rights are set out in your tenancy agreement. When you accepted your tenancy you agreed to the terms and conditions set out in that agreement.

Your tenancy agreement is a legal contract between you and us. It sets out your rights and responsibilities as a tenant and ours as your landlord.

You also have statutory rights, that is, rights that come by law. The Assured Tenant's Charter that is produced by the Housing Corporation tells you what extra rights an assured tenant of a RSL can expect from their landlord. There is a copy in Section 6 of this handbook.

Q Do we offer everyone the same type of tenancy?

A No.

SECTION 2 Living in your Ability home

A few Ability tenants have a Secure Tenancy. This is a tenancy that began before 1989 and secure tenants have some different rights from assured tenants. If you are a secure tenant, your Area Manager will be able to explain the differences in your agreement.

If your housing is for a fixed term because you live in a medium stay housing with support scheme and are preparing to move on to live more independently, you will have an Assured Shorthold Tenancy. If this is the case, your Housing Support Worker will have explained this to you when you signed your agreement and you will have a support plan that sets out how Ability will help you prepare to move-on and to find somewhere suitable to live when your tenancy comes to an end.

Q What is the difference between a ‘joint’ and a ‘sole’ tenancy?

A You are a sole tenant if only one tenant is named on the tenancy agreement. If two or more people are named on the tenancy agreement then you have a joint tenancy. Joint tenants each have all the rights and responsibilities set out in the tenancy agreement – even if one leaves. If one joint tenant formally ends the tenancy, the tenancy comes to an end, even if the other joint tenant/s did not know about it.

In order to change your tenancy to ‘joint’ or ‘sole’ you must ask, in writing, explaining the reasons. You must not be in breach of your tenancy agreement and you must have a clear rent account. We will explain any other conditions that might apply at the time. If we agree, we will take the action required by law to make the change.

Q Can I pass my tenancy to my partner, or to anyone else, when I die?

A When a tenant dies, the tenancy continues in the name of any surviving joint tenants. Even if not joint tenants, it would also continue in the name of a surviving husband, wife or common-law partner, so long as his or her main home is with the tenant at the time. This is known as ‘succeeding’ to the tenancy. However, this will not apply if the tenancy has already passed in this way.

We would offer an alternative property, and take legal action if necessary, if we consider that the existing property is unsuitable for the person taking a new or a continuing tenancy. An example would be if the property is the wrong size or has special facilities such as for wheelchair users that the new household does not need.

Q Can I run a business from my home?

A You do not have a right to run a business from your home, but we may consider granting you permission. You must ask our permission before you set up your business. We will consider all requests. An example of when we might refuse your request is if we think that it could disturb your neighbours or be unlawful.

Q What is subletting, and am I allowed to sublet?

A Subletting is where you rent out your home to someone. You may only sublet part of your home, but you must get our written permission before you do so. If you sublet the whole of your home, you will no longer have an assured tenancy and we will take steps to end your tenancy.

Q Am I allowed to take in a lodger?

A A lodger is someone who pays to live in your home, but does not have private use of any part of it. You are allowed to take in lodgers, but you must make sure that you do not overcrowd your home. If you have any doubts, you should contact us.

Q If I take in lodgers or sublet part of my home, will it affect my housing benefit entitlement?

A It may reduce your entitlement to housing benefit. Please make sure that you keep the housing benefit section of the district council informed of any changes to your circumstances.

c. Your Rights

As an assured tenant of Ability Housing Association, you have many rights and obligations. These are set out in:

- the law
- your tenancy agreement, and in
- the Assured Tenant's Charter published by the Housing Corporation (*see Section 6*).

Q What does it mean if I have 'security of tenure'?

A You can stay in your home provided you occupy your home as your only or principal home, and you keep to the terms of your tenancy agreement.

If you do not keep to your tenancy agreement, we may take legal action against you, and this could include action to take back your home. We will only do this if we have a valid reason and the law allows it.

Q What will you do if I do not keep to my tenancy agreement?

A If you break the terms and conditions of your tenancy, we will contact you and tell you what you need to do to resolve it. If you continue to break your tenancy conditions, we may take legal action. This can lead to:

- getting an injunction, which is a court order requiring you to stick to the terms of your tenancy. This is used mainly against tenants who cause excessive noise, abuse, threats, violence, racial intimidation or harassment, etc.
- seeking to take back your home. In this case we will:
 - warn you that we plan to take legal action by serving you with a Notice of Seeking Possession (NOSP)
 - apply to court for a possession order. If the court grants the order, we can then seek a warrant for your eviction. This would mean you would have to leave your home and not be allowed back.
- contacting the council or the police.

Remember, you are responsible under your tenancy agreement for the actions or omissions of everyone in your household and your visitors when they are on our land or property.

Q What is a Notice of Seeking Possession?

A When we serve a Notice of Seeking Possession, it is the first step of legal proceedings to end your tenancy. You should take it very seriously.

We normally give you four weeks' notice, after which we can then apply to court for a possession hearing. This notice period should be used by you to bring your tenancy back into order. For example, stop causing a nuisance, or clear your rent account. We could apply to the court at any time in the 12 months after we serve the notice, if you do not put matters right and keep to your tenancy.

In cases of severe nuisance, the notice period may be shorter than four weeks.

Q What are the reasons that Ability could apply to court for a possession order?

A We can apply to court for a possession order on one or more of the 'Grounds' set out in the Housing Act 1988 as amended by the Housing Act 1996.

Q If I get a possession order does this mean I will be evicted?

A No. Often we ask for possession to be 'suspended' provided you comply with the court order. However, if you still do not comply with your tenancy obligations, we will ask the court to issue an eviction warrant and bring in the bailiff. We would always tell you if we intend to do this.

Q If you evict me from my home would you offer me somewhere else?

A No, and, in some cases the council might consider you to have caused your own homelessness by breaking your tenancy terms, and so would not consider finding you alternative housing either.

SECTION 2 Living in your Ability home

However, in some circumstances (Ground 9), the court would only grant an order for possession if we can offer you suitable alternative accommodation. Generally speaking, we would use this if:

- We need your home to be empty to carry out necessary or major repair works, or redevelopment
- You inherit the tenancy from a member of your family (except your husband, wife or common-law partner who was a tenant of a transferring assured tenancy) and the home that you live in is bigger than you need
- You live in a house or flat that has special adaptations, features or services that are no longer needed by anyone living there.

We could also seek possession of your home if it is overcrowded. In these cases, help with finding suitable housing may be provided by the council.

Q Can I buy my home?

A No. Ability does not own any housing that is eligible for the 'right to buy' or 'right to acquire' schemes.

Q What other rights do I have?

A As well as the rights that are set out in your tenancy agreement, you have further rights as a tenant of a registered social landlord and these are set out in the Assured Tenants Charter, which is included at Section 6.

d. Moving in

The following is a list of things that you need to sort out when you move into your new home to make sure that everything goes smoothly. If you receive a support service from Ability, then your Housing Support Worker can assist you with the necessary arrangements:

Gas, Electricity, Water and Telephone

- Let the suppliers of all these services know that you are the new tenant. You may also need to make arrangements to get supplies connected. Even if the supplies are already connected, don't put off contacting the suppliers because you could end up with big bills to pay later.



Electricity

- If all the power in your home goes off, check the main fuse box or circuit breaker as well as the plugs to your electrical appliances.
- The replacement of fuses in the main fuse box is your responsibility. Do not attempt to replace a main fuse unless you are sure you can do it safely.
- Most new homes will have circuit breakers instead of fuses. These are switches that will automatically go to the OFF position when a fuse would normally have blown.

Gas

- It is dangerous and illegal to try and fit, repair or service your gas fire or cooker yourself. Choose a fitter who is registered with CORGI (the Confederation of Registered Gas Installers). All gas fires and boilers fitted by Ability will be serviced regularly by us.
- Your gas stopcock is likely to be near the gas meter. You may need to turn it off quickly in an emergency.

SECTION 2 Living in your Ability home

- **Ventilation** - gas appliances need fresh air to work safely. This is usually provided by ventilators in the wall, window or door. They must not be blocked off or wallpapered over.

Heating and hot water

Make sure that you know how your heating and hot water systems work. Ask a member of staff to go through it with you if you are unsure.

Water

- Your water stopcock is likely to be under the kitchen sink. Please check that it is working properly at regular intervals.
- **Overflows** - Cold water storage tanks and WC cisterns are fitted with overflow pipes to prevent flooding. If the overflow is running and you cannot stop it yourself (usually by unsticking the ball float) you should report it to Ability.
- **In the event of a burst pipe you should:**
 - 1 Turn off the water supply at the stopcock
 - 2 Turn on all taps to drain the system
 - 3 Find out where the water is coming from. Tie a rag around the leak if you can and put a bucket underneath.
 - 4 Contact Ability to report the burst or use our emergency service if it is outside normal office hours.

Frost precautions

Water can freeze inside pipes during cold weather. This cracks the pipes and can cause damage to the building and your own decorations and possessions. Always leave some heating on if your home is going to be empty overnight or for a day or two - it only needs to be on a low setting.

Council tax

Tell the council (council tax section) that you are the new tenant. You can arrange to pay your council tax in monthly installments. It's better to sort this out quickly as you could face a large bill later if you do nothing.

Getting benefit

If you are entitled to benefits, you should contact your local benefits office as soon as you move to ensure that you don't miss out on any payments. You may be able to get housing benefit to help pay some or all of your rent. Your council's housing benefit office will give you a form. Your Housing Support Worker or Housing Officer will be able to assist if necessary. *(See Section 6 for benefits information.)*

Doctors and dentists

Find out where your nearest doctors and dentists are (you could ask neighbours or the Ability team for recommendations) and register with them straight away rather than wait until you are ill.

TV Licence

You will need to update the address on your TV licence. (Write to TV licensing, Barton House, Bristol, BS98 1TL or phone 0117 937 7500.)

Letting people know

Make a list of people and organisations that should know you have moved. This could include your employer, benefit office, banks and building societies, credit card companies, GP, library.

Redirecting mail

You can get the post office to redirect your mail from your old home to your new one but you will be charged for this service.

Keys

Ability does not usually keep spare keys to your home so, if you lose your key and the lock has to be forced, you will be charged for the damage. If possible, leave a set of keys with a close friend or relative rather than in your home.

Insurance

Ability only insures the fixtures and structure of your home. We strongly advise you to insure your own possessions against fire, theft, flooding and accidental damage.

SECTION 2 Living in your Ability home

You should also insure yourself against accidental damage to other property. For example, if you left a tap running and flooded a neighbour's home, you would also be liable to replace our fixtures and fittings if you damage them.

Insurance is not expensive compared with the cost of replacing the contents of your home.

Security

The harder you make it for burglars to break into your home, the more likely it is that they will go somewhere else. You can often avoid a break-in by taking a few simple steps:

- Close all your windows when you go out, lock your entrance door and leave a light on.
- Never leave your key under the doormat or hanging on a string behind the letterbox as these are the first places that thieves look in.
- Check the identity of all callers before you let them in. Most officials and all Ability staff carry identity cards so ask to see them.
- Always cancel newspapers and milk when you go away. You should also inform Ability if you are going to be away from home for some time.

If you would like more guidance about how to protect your home, ask the Ability staff to arrange for a Crime Prevention Officer from the local police to visit you to give you advice.

Smoke alarms

Your home is fitted with a smoke alarm to give you an early warning if fire breaks out. You should never:

- Try to disconnect your alarm
- Paint over it
- Move it
- Remove the battery
- Delay replacing an old battery.

Check your alarm regularly to make sure that it is working properly. You can do this by pressing and holding the test button until the alarm sounds. The alarm should stop sounding after you take your finger off the button. If your alarm does not appear to be working properly after you have changed the battery, report it to Ability.

Fire

Fires can start easily and spread quickly. Please do not remove any internal doors or door closures in your home because these help to stop fires from spreading. If a fire does start you must:

- 1 Leave the building as quickly as possible
- 2 Close doors behind you if possible to stop flames and smoke spreading
- 3 **Phone 999** and give full details to the fire service
- 4 Warn your neighbours
- 5 Inform Ability staff.

You should also familiarise yourself with the fire safety instructions in your building.

Condensation

What is condensation?

Moisture is produced in all homes by breathing, cooking and washing. An average household produces 21 pints of water vapour a day.

However, there is a limit to the amount of water vapour that air can contain - the warmer it is the more it can hold. When the warm air comes into contact with a cold surface such as window, or when too much vapour is put onto the air, the moisture turns to liquid and forms as droplets of water - this is known as condensation.

Condensation frequently happens in warm, wet rooms like kitchens and bathrooms. It is seen on windows as steaming up and as patches of dampness on walls and ceilings.

SECTION 2 Living in your Ability home**Why is it a problem?**

Small amounts of condensation can be found in most homes but, if it is not dealt with, mould growth will occur and in severe cases this will make some health conditions worse.

If mould is allowed to grow on furniture, clothes or decorations they will become damaged.

What can you do?

If you think you have condensation in your home, there are a number of practical steps that you can take:

Raising the room temperature helps reduce condensation - so try to keep your home as warm as you can afford.

Use central heating if you have it. It is best to have the heating on for longer periods of time at a lower temperature. Try adjusting your central heating thermostat if you have one. Ask for advice about getting the most out of your heating system.

Insulate - use draught excluders where possible. If condensation does form on the windows, wipe it off.

Improve ventilation - open windows where possible. If you dry clothes indoors, open a window to allow air to circulate. Do not drip/dry clothes indoors if possible.

Try not to put furniture in front of radiators.

Do not block air vents.

NEVER use portable gas heaters.

If mould does occur, it can be cleaned off walls, floors, etc. using one part bleach solution to four parts water.

In Kitchens:

Keep lids on pans and open the window slightly when cooking.

If you have a tumble drier, ventilate it outside. If it is not possible, try not to use it when you are cooking.

Keep the internal kitchen door closed when cooking. Do not let kettles and pans boil longer than is necessary. If you have an extractor fan fitted, make sure you use it when cooking.

In Bathrooms:

Heat the room before taking a bath or shower. Open a window afterwards. Put cold water in to the bath before you add hot water. If your bathroom has no window, make sure the extractor fan is working. If it is not working, report it to your local staff.

What next?

If these measures do not improve the problem of condensation in your home contact your Area Manager. It may help to keep a record of the condensation; for example, when and where it occurs.

e. Taking part

At Ability Housing Association we aim to involve tenants in the management of their homes as we believe that participation helps communities to thrive.

Ability wants to hear what you have to say about the services we provide so that we can get it right. There are a number of ways that you can get involved at a regional, area or local level.



SECTION 2 Living in your Ability home**Involving residents**

The Ability strategy for involving our residents is called the Tenant Participation Strategy. You can request a copy of this from your Area Office. There are lots of ways that you can get involved including:

- Regional Consultative Committees
- Tenant and resident associations
- Surveys on tenant views
- Tenant newsletters.

Ability also has tenant members on the Board and its Committees. If you want to become involved with a committee or association, Ability will meet any travel expenses or other associated costs.

Want to find out more?

If you would like to find out more about becoming involved with Ability in your area, please contact your Area Manager.

f. Moving on

If you want to move from your current home, we will try to help you. Your reasons for wanting to move may be because:

- You are living in housing with support and you would like to move on to something more independent
- You are living in shared housing and would like a home of your own
- Your circumstances have changed and you now need a larger or smaller home.

Whatever the reason, we may be able to help by:

- Arranging for you to move to another of our homes – a transfer
- Helping you find someone for you to swap homes with - an exchange
- Finding another housing association or local council with a home which suits you better – the H.O.M.E.S scheme.
- Assisting you to own your own home through schemes such as Homebuy, Shared Ownership, Voluntary Purchase Grant or Right to Acquire.

Transfers

We would like every resident to have the home that best meets their needs. So, as your circumstances change, there is the opportunity to apply to transfer to another Ability property. We give a high priority to people moving on from shared housing or housing with support.

However, you are unlikely to be considered for a transfer if:

- You are behind with your rent
- You have damaged or neglected your home so badly that it will cost us a lot to make it fit for someone else to move in
- Your behaviour means that you are in breach of your tenancy agreement and you could face losing your present home as a result of the action we are taking.

Exchanges - 'swapping homes'

You have a right to swap your home with another of our tenants or a tenant of another housing association or council. You have to obtain our permission but we cannot refuse permission without a good reason.

Your local council has lists of people in council houses or other housing association homes wanting to move into the area. You can look at these lists at the council offices.

If you want to move to another part of the country, **HOMESWAP** is a national scheme for helping you find someone to swap with. It is a free service and you can get an exchange registration form by telephoning H.O.M.E.S. on 020 7963 0200.

When you find a person that you may be able to swap with, complete the form and return it to your Area Manager. We must give you a decision within six weeks.

Do not move until you have got the permission of both landlords.

SECTION 2 Living in your Ability home

Please note that we can refuse permission for an exchange if:

- Either tenant has a Court Order for Possession
- Your home is much bigger than the incoming tenant actually needs (ie. they would have more than one spare bedroom)
- Your home is in a housing with support scheme, or has been specially adapted, and the incoming tenant does not need those facilities
- The incoming tenant is not already one of our tenants and has an income too high to meet our charitable objectives.

Other Options

If you apply for a transfer and we can't help you, we can approach other housing associations or local councils to see if they can help. We are a member of H.O.M.E.S (Housing Organisations Mobility and Exchange Services) and have agreed to help the tenants of other landlords in exchange for them helping ours.

We have a register of where other landlords have property, so it is a good idea to telephone us to ask about the possibilities and get a H.O.M.E.S Application Form. When we get your form back, we will contact other landlords. If they think there is a possibility they could help, we will forward the form to them. They will then get in touch with you direct if they are able to make an offer.

Moving Out

Before you move out, you must give Ability four weeks notice in writing.

During the period, you will be contacted to arrange an inspection of the property. This is to ensure that the property has been maintained in a satisfactory manner and is going to be left in a condition that is fit for the next tenant.

You must return the keys to the property to your Housing Support Worker, or the Area Office, on the day the notice expires. During the notice period,

you will need to contact various people to advise them that you are moving out. The utility companies will need the final meter readings on the day you leave. Your Housing Support Worker will be able to assist you with this.

contents

3 Your repairs service

- a How to report a repair (3.1)
- b Emergencies (3.2)
 - Gas leaks (3.2)
- c Gas safety (3.3)
- d Our response times (3.3)
 - Emergency repairs (3.3)
 - Urgent repairs (3.4)
 - Routine repairs (3.4)
 - Completion targets (3.4)
 - Your responsibilities (3.5)
 - Inspecting repairs (3.5)
 - Before works start
 - After works have been completed
- e Planned maintenance and adaptations (3.5)
 - Aids and adaptations (3.6)
 - Doing improvements yourself (3.7)
- f Code of conduct (3.7)

We both have responsibilities for looking after your home. Ability has a legal duty to keep your home in good repair but we also expect that you will take reasonable care of the property.

We make sure that the most urgent repairs are carried out more quickly than other more minor repairs that can wait without causing further damage or inconvenience. We do this by working with carefully selected contractors to ensure that works are carried out properly, within appropriate response times, and provide value for money.



a. How to report a repair

If you need a repair to be carried out, you can tell us:

- By telephoning or calling into your local office
- By talking to your Housing Support Worker
- In writing, to your local office

When reporting repairs, please:

- Give your name, full address and telephone number
- Give us information about what is wrong and what part of the property is affected
- Give us information on how and when it happened
- Let us know when you will be available to provide access to your home for our contractor or for our staff to inspect.

Please make sure you tell us straight away if you think there is a problem that affects your safety or security.

b. Emergencies

Emergency repairs should be immediately reported to your local office during normal office hours.

For emergency repairs that happen out of normal office hours, you should telephone the 'out of hours' number at the front of your tenant handbook, or, if you have one installed, use the alarm system.

You should do whatever you can to minimise further damage or reduce danger. For example:

- Turn off stopcocks for plumbing emergencies
- Use lamps if your lights have failed
- Keep people away from areas of broken glass or tripping hazards until someone can arrive to deal with the repair properly.

In some circumstances, it will only be possible for us to make safe the damage and we will return at a later date to complete the full repair.

For example:

- Boarding a window and returning later to complete the re-glazing
- Taking down a dangerous wall or fence and returning later to put a new one back.

Gas leaks

If you think you can smell gas:

- Put out cigarettes immediately and do not use matches, lighters or any naked flames
- Stop using any electrical equipment
- Do not turn any light switches or wall sockets on or off
- Check if a pilot light has blown out or if a gas tap or cooker has been left on
- Turn off the gas at the meter.

Call Transco on 0800 111 999

c. Gas safety

To ensure your safety and to meet our legal obligations, we must service every Ability-owned gas appliance each year. We must do this even if the appliance seems to be working properly. The contractor who visits to carry out the service and safety check will carry out a number of tests on the gas appliances and will give you a copy of the Gas Safety Check Record so that you know all is well. The tests are designed to make sure that you are not at risk from carbon monoxide poisoning. The early symptoms of poisoning include tiredness, drowsiness, headache, pains in the chest and stomach pains.

Remember, you must **NEVER** use a gas appliance if you think it isn't working properly. Signs of a faulty appliance to look out for include yellow or orange flames, soot or stains around the appliance, and pilot lights that frequently blow out.

Remember:

- **NEVER** cover a gas appliance or block any air vents
- **NEVER** block or cover outside flues.

d. Our response times

Listed below are some examples of the different types of repairs carried out by us and details of how quickly we will carry them out.

Emergency repairs are those that cause an immediate risk to safety, security, health or the building and should be **completed within 24 hours**.

Examples of emergency repairs are:

- A burst pipe that you cannot stop by turning off the stopcock
- Total failure of your electricity supply
- A blocked drain or toilet if you only have one in your home
- Major structural damage.

SECTION 3 Your repairs service

Urgent repairs are those which are likely to cause damage or difficulties if not attended to fairly quickly and should be **completed within one week**.

Examples of urgent repairs are:

- Leaking radiators
- Entry phone system not working
- Leaking roof
- Toilet not flushing.

Routine repairs are less serious and can wait without causing major damage or inconvenience and should be **completed within 28 days**.

Examples of routine repairs are:

- Dripping gutters
- Repairs to internal doors
- Repairs to cupboards
- Plaster repairs.

Completion targets

We aim to complete at least 95% of:

**Emergency
repairs within**

24hrs

**Urgent
repairs within**

7 days

**Routine
repairs within**

28 days

These targets are very important to us and our local teams regularly monitor our performance against them. Each year you will receive a report showing our performance.

If we don't do the repair work within our target times at the second time of asking, you may be entitled to compensation. More information can be found in the Complaints Procedure. You can obtain a copy from your local or area office.

Your responsibilities

Ability has legal obligations to keep your home in good repair but you need to take reasonable care of it too and are responsible for some works inside your home. These include such things as:

- Decorating and filling small gaps or cracks
- Repairing or replacing electric plugs, light bulbs and fuses
- Clearing blocked sink, bath, basin or shower waste pipes
- Re-lighting boilers, setting heating controls and bleeding radiators
- Replacing broken glass
- Maintaining washing lines and rotary dryers
- Fitting extra locks or safety catches, replacing lost keys and changing locks.

If you receive a support service from Ability, your Housing Support Worker can assist you to carry out or to arrange these minor repairs.

Naturally, you are also responsible for any repairs needed through damage, misuse or carelessness by you, your family or your visitors.

Inspecting repairs

Before works start

For some sorts of repairs we will need to visit you to see exactly what work is needed before we can order it. Typical examples of the repairs for which we would need to visit are:

- Dampness
- Requests for new kitchen units or bathroom fittings
- Requests for new windows.

If a visit is needed, we will arrange to carry this out within a few days of your request. If our visit indicates that a big, expensive or complicated repair might be needed, there may be a delay while a specialist surveyor is asked to inspect the problem and report to us.

SECTION 3 Your repairs service**After works have been completed**

In many cases, we carry out an inspection to make sure the work has been done to the correct standard before we pay the contractor. The work we inspect is often selected at random although we will always visit where a complaint has been made about quality.

**e. Planned maintenance and adaptations**

As well as carrying out repairs that residents ask us to do, we also complete a wide range of larger projects. These include cyclical works such as external decoration, cleaning gutters and general routine maintenance to keep the properties in good condition and more major improvements such as renewing kitchens, bathrooms, windows and heating systems.

If you ask for a repair that is due to be included in one of these larger projects, then we may ask you to wait until that work starts. By doing so, we can make sure that the work is carried out to an agreed standard and style and that we achieve better value for money, which is in everyone's interest!

Aids and adaptations

If someone in your household is elderly, disabled or has a long-term illness, we may be able to help you by improving or adapting your home. This could be a simple adaptation like grab rails in the bathroom or a more major work such as fitting a stairlift or a shower.

If you think an improvement to your home could help someone in your household to be more independent, ask your Housing Officer or Housing Support Worker for more details.

We usually need to get an independent assessment by a qualified occupational therapist and this can take some time to arrange.

Doing improvements yourself

You can often make improvements or alterations to your home and, although you will need our permission first, we won't refuse permission without a good reason. To get our permission, you should write to your Area Manager describing what you want to do and a member of staff will contact you with more details.

Depending on the work you want to do, you may also need Building Regulation Approval or Planning Consent. Carrying out alterations or improvements without permission could result in you being charged for the cost of us returning the property into its original condition, so it is always best to ask before you start any work. For certain improvements, you may also qualify for compensation if you move home after doing the work. More details can be found in the policy on Compensation for Improvements.

f. Code of conduct

We expect those who work for us to behave properly whilst they are in your home and this means they should:

- Contact you to arrange a convenient time to carry out the repair
- Introduce themselves to you, show proof of their identity, and explain what they will be doing
- Carry out the works between 8.00am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday except in cases of emergency
- Not play radios or smoke in your home
- Treat you politely at all times

SECTION 3 Your repairs service

- Protect your belongings from damage while they are carrying out their work
- Keep your home secure while working there
- Work safely
- Leave you with all essential services (eg. water, electricity, gas, etc.) working at the end of each day even if they have not finished their work
- Clean up any mess they make and take away all rubbish and materials at the end of each day.

Please let us know if you feel the person carrying out your repair has not met these standards of behaviour or workmanship.

contents

4 Money matters

- a Your rent and service charges (4.1)
 - Service charges (4.2)
 - Water charges and council tax (4.2)
 - Paying your rent (4.2)
- b Some frequently asked questions about paying rent (4.3)
- c Money saving tips (4.4)
- d Energy saving tips (4.5)
- e Cost cutting tips (4.6)
 - Central heating (4.6)
 - Hot water (4.6)
 - Curtains (4.6)
 - Lights (4.6)
 - Electrical appliances (4.6)
 - Fridges and freezers (4.6)
 - Washing machines and tumble dryers (4.7)
 - Pots, pans and kettles (4.7)

a. Your rent and service charges

We aim to set rent that covers our costs but which you can afford if you are on a low income. In 2002, the Government introduced a new formula for setting a target for your rent and Ability has 10 years to ensure that your rent meets the Government target. The target rent is set taking into account:

- The value of your home
- Earnings in the area that you live.

Ability has set out a plan for how it will change rents to meet the Government targets. This may mean that your rent needs to go up each year by more than inflation or it may mean that your rent does not go up at all or by less than inflation.

Before we change your rent, we have to give you a month's written notice. For the majority of tenancies, the rent changes on the first Monday in October.

If you are a secure tenant, the Rent Officer Service sets a maximum rent every two years. We suggest the rent we want to charge and the Rent Officer decides if this is fair. If you think your rent has been set too high, you have the right to appeal to the Rent Assessment Panel. Often Ability sets the rent at less than the amount set by the Rent Officer Service and we cannot set a rent that is higher.

If you are an assured tenant or an assured shorthold tenant, we set your rent. We will usually change your rent once a year. If you think we have set your rent too high, you can appeal to a Rent Assessment Committee, but you should always get advice first. By law, the Rent Assessment Committee has to set a 'market rent'. This can often be higher than the rent we actually want to charge you.

You can get advice from a local law centre or Citizens Advice Bureau about making an appeal against a rent rise.

SECTION 4 Money matters**Service charges**

We may also charge you a service charge. This is a charge on top of your rent which covers the cost of the services we provide. The services we charge for might include:

- Cleaning areas that you share with your neighbours
- Gardening on your estate
- Lighting shared hallways and external areas
- The cost of providing an alarm system or door entry system
- Heating communal areas.

Every year we work out how much it will cost to provide these services. We will tell you about the services we plan to provide and how much they will cost. If you have a tenants' association, we will also speak to them about our plans.

Water charges and Council Tax

If you live in shared housing, your rent might include water charges and Council Tax, which we must collect on behalf of the authorities.

However, the rest of our tenants are responsible for paying water charges direct to the water company and Council Tax direct to the council. If you receive Housing Benefit, you may also be able to get Council Tax Benefit. You can apply for both benefits on the same form which you can get from your local council office.

Paying your rent

It is **YOUR** responsibility to make sure your rent is paid. However, we can help you to make this easier in the following ways:

- Helping you to claim Housing Benefit
- Arranging for any Housing Benefit to which you are entitled to be paid direct to us
- Helping you to set up a direct debit or standing order to pay your rent weekly or monthly
- Helping you to draw up a weekly/monthly budget
- In some cases, arranging for your rent (and any arrears) to be taken out of your wages direct.

b. Some frequently asked questions about paying rent

Q What should I do if I am having problems paying my rent?

A If you have problems or think you are going to have problems with paying your rent, you should contact us **IMMEDIATELY**. The sooner you let us know, the sooner we can help you. **We** can help in the following ways:

- Assist you with asking for your Housing Benefit claim to be backdated, if appropriate
- Chase up outstanding benefit claims with the relevant department/agency
- Make appointments with Citizens Advice Bureau, or local Welfare Advice workers, if appropriate
- Negotiate and make an agreement to repay your rent in installments.

In return, **you** are expected to:

- Contact your Housing Officer or Housing Support Worker as soon as you start having problems
- Keep us informed of any changes in your circumstances (eg starting work, changing jobs, benefits changing, husband/wife/partner leaving, etc). **DON'T ASSUME SOMEONE ELSE HAS TOLD US OR THAT IT DOESN'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE**
- Provide any information requested by housing benefit departments, Benefits Agency, etc **WITHOUT DELAY**
- Keep any appointments made
- Stick to any agreements made, or else contact your Housing Officer immediately.

SECTION 4 Money matters

Q How do I pay my rent?**A** There are a number of ways in which you can pay your rent:

- By standing order from your bank or building society account
- By bank giro or credit forms
- By cheque at your local/area office.

If you would like us to send you a standing order mandate form, please contact your Area Office.

Ability will send you a rent statement once a quarter. However, if you would like to order a statement before your next one is due, please contact your Area Office to request a statement. This will be sent to you in the post.

Q What help can Ability give me with budgeting my money?

A Your Housing Officer or a Housing Support Worker can give you advice and assistance in helping you to manage your money by, for instance, helping you draw up a weekly or monthly budget. If your circumstances are more complex, we can put you in contact with other agencies such as your local Citizens Advice Bureau. We can also help you maximise your income by helping you to complete benefit claim forms, or advise you as to which benefits you may be entitled to.

c. Money saving tips

- If in doubt, claim it! Our Housing Officers and Housing Support Workers receive training on welfare benefits and can provide you with advice and assistance. Alternatively, contact the Citizens Advice Bureau who specialise in money management advice.
- Check the way you pay your bills. Some service providers give discounts for paying by direct debit, whilst some charge extra for paying this way. Some give a discount for annual payments in full.

- Check that you are not paying too much for your gas and electricity. You are no longer tied to one provider.
- Credit unions are financial co-operatives owned and controlled by its members. They offer similar services to the high street banks but at much better rates. For example, they offer low cost loans and generally a higher rate of return (annual dividend) on savings than banks or building societies. They are ideal for people who may not have the right financial criteria to open a traditional bank account.
- Make sure you have a home contents insurance policy. It needn't cost more than a couple of pounds a week. Ability can arrange home contents insurance for some residents - contact your local office for more information. Alternatively, if you are over 50, Age Concern offers a range of insurance services at competitive prices.
- Check out the freebies. If you are on benefits, or over a certain age, you may be entitled to all sorts of free or discounted items such as insulation through the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, extra home security items through your neighbourhood watch or crime prevention schemes, ring and ride schemes for people with mobility problems, training, leisure passes, etc. Look out for further information in your local press, housing office, or benefits office, or contact organisations such as Age Concern.

d. Energy saving tips

Energy efficiency products obviously save energy and are good for the environment but they can also save you money by reducing the amount you have to spend on heating and lighting.

If you need any help or advice on energy efficiency, contact the Energy Savings Trust on 0345 277200.

Ability will also help by ensuring your home is well insulated and by replacing heating and hot water systems with more efficient equipment and controls as part of our planned maintenance programme.

e. Cost cutting tips

There are also many things that you can do at no cost to yourself which will save you money on your fuel bills.

Central heating

If you are too warm, turn the thermostat down by 1°C and cut up to 10% off your bill. If you are going away for a few days, turn the thermostat to a low setting so that it protects your home from freezing without costing too much.

Hot water

Water shouldn't be heated to a scalding temperature. Turn the thermostat on the hot water cylinder to no more than 60°C which is usually fine for washing and bathing. Always remember to put the plug in the basin or sink as leaving the hot water taps running without the plug in wastes water and is expensive.

Curtains

Close your curtains at dusk to stop heat escaping through the windows.

Lights

Always remember to turn off the lights when you leave a room and make sure you adjust your curtains/blinds during the day to make the most of the natural light.

Electrical appliances

Avoid leaving electrical appliances such as televisions, videos, stereos, cordless phones and electric toothbrushes on 'standby' or charge unnecessarily. But make sure you check the manufacturer's instructions so you don't affect the appliance's performance or memory.

Fridges and freezers

Don't leave the fridge/freezer door open for longer than necessary to stop the cold air escaping. Avoid putting hot food in which would make it work much harder. Defrost it regularly to keep it working efficiently and try not to put it next to the cooker, boiler or other hot surfaces.

When it's time to renew your fridge or freezer you could get a big grant towards the cost of a more efficient one. Contact the Energy Savings Trust for more information on 0345 277 200.

Washing machines and tumble dryers

Wait until you have a full load before using your washing machine or, if that isn't possible, use the half load or economy setting if your machine has one. Try to use the low temperature cycle as modern washing powders and liquids often work just as effectively at low temperatures. Don't put very wet washing into tumble dryers. Make sure you wring or spin it first to dry it quicker and more cheaply.

Pots, pans and kettles

Choose the right size pan for the food and the cooker ring so that heat isn't wasted up the outside and keep the lids on when cooking. Only fill the kettle with the amount you need but make sure you cover the element in electric kettles.

contents

5 Your support services

- a What type of support does Ability provide? (5.1)
- b Some frequently asked questions about support (5.2)
- c Housing with Support (5.3)
 - What is Housing with Support? (5.3)
 - How can I access the support services? (5.4)
- d Floating Support (5.4)
 - What is Floating Support? (5.4)
 - How can I access the Floating Support service?



We aim to provide a responsive support service to people with physical disabilities, learning disabilities or sensory disabilities and, in certain circumstances, to people with mental health-related support needs. We do this by providing practical support, advice and assistance to you in your home.

All of our support services are designed to maximise your respect, dignity, independence, choice of your own life.

a. What type of support does Ability provide?

The team provides support that promotes independent living, including:

- Assistance with learning independent living skills
- Advice and assistance with claiming welfare benefits and Housing Benefit
- Advice and assistance with budgeting and managing your bills
- Advice on aids and adaptations to your home
- Assistance with reporting repairs to your home and managing your tenancy
- General counselling and support with day to day living
- Assistance with arranging personal care and contacting other agencies involved in your care and welfare.

We regret that our Housing Support Workers cannot provide personal care directly but can help and advise you with making suitable arrangements for your personal care.

b. Some frequently asked questions about support

Here are some frequently asked questions about our support services.

Q What happens when I ask for support?

A A Housing Support Worker will arrange to meet with you. They will complete an assessment of your needs and draw up a support plan based on the information that you have provided.

Q How long will support be available to me?

A The support period and frequency varies depending on your individual needs. This will be set out in your support plan and will be reviewed at least once every six months. You can ask for a review of your support plan at any time if you feel your needs have changed.

Q Is there a charge for this service?

A If you receive Housing Benefit there will be no charge for the service. If you do not receive Housing Benefit, then the amount you will be asked to pay will depend on your circumstances and the charging policy of your local authority. Ability can assist and advise you with claiming benefits and managing your money.

Q Who can apply for this service?

A People with a physical or sensory disability, people with a learning disability and, in certain circumstances, people with a mental health-related support need can apply for support services.

Q Will you hold personal information about me or my circumstances?

A Our Housing Support Workers will keep records relating to the work that they are doing with you and you have the right to access any of this information.

Q Is the service confidential?

A Yes – Ability is a registered data controller under the Data Protection Act. There may be a need to discuss your circumstances with other service providers. If this is the case, we will always ask you to give your consent for information to be shared.

Q Who do I ask for more information?

A Contact your Ability Area Manager.

c. Housing with Support

What is Housing with Support?

Housing with Support, or Supported Housing as it is sometimes called, usually involves you moving into an Ability property where there are Housing Support Workers based at the scheme. The housing will have been specially designed or adapted to meet your needs, and the provision of housing will be linked to the provision of support. The support provided may be quite intensive and may be available for all or most of the day.



Sometimes, Housing with Support is offered for a limited time to provide you with an opportunity to develop and learn the skills you need for independent living before you move on to a home of your own.

SECTION 5 Your support services

Some of our Housing with Support is furnished or part furnished, but you can always use your own furniture if you wish. You can also decorate your own room and choose your own colours.

How can I access the support services?

To access Housing with Support you will need to apply for housing with Ability. In most circumstances, your local council will have the right to nominate applicants for housing with Ability and your best bet will always be to register with your council housing department first. You should let your council know that you think you need Housing with Support and ask them to nominate you to your local Ability scheme.

You can get help to apply from:

- Your care manager, social worker or occupational therapist
- The *Supporting People* team at your local authority
- Any advice or support agency
- You can apply directly.

d. Floating Support

What is Floating Support?

Floating Support is a flexible support service that helps you manage your affairs and to live independently. Our Housing Support Workers are specially trained to provide help and advice to disabled people in their own home. The support offered is available for as long as it is needed.

Your Housing Support Worker will discuss this with you and will draw up a plan with you that sets out what support we will provide and how and when that support will be delivered. The level of support can increase or decrease as your needs change.



How can I access the Floating Support service?

Ability's Floating Support service is available to tenants of Ability Housing Association and, in certain areas, to people who are not tenants of Ability. This can include council tenants, tenants of other housing associations, owner occupiers or people living in private rented accommodation.

Floating Support can be accessed via a referral from:

- Your Housing Officer
- Your care manager, social worker or occupational therapist
- The *Supporting People* team at your local authority
- Any advice or support agency
- Or you can apply directly.

contents

6 Useful stuff

- a Useful contacts
- b The Assured Tenant's Charter
- c Welfare benefits
- d Your tenancy agreement

a. Useful contacts

Here you will find details of lots of different organisations and websites that you may find useful, ranging from organisations that support tenant groups to those offering help with money problems or legal advice.

Citizens Advice Bureau - Advice Guide

This Citizens Advice Bureau website provides on-line basic advice and information on your rights.

ADDRESS

Myddelton House
115-123 Pentonville Road
London N1 9LZ

WEBSITE

www.adviceguide.org.uk

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)

Publicly funded, non-governmental body set up to tackle discrimination and promote racial equality.

ADDRESS

Elliot House
10-12 Allington Street
London SW1E 5EH

TELEPHONE

020 7828 7022

WEBSITE

www.cre.gov.uk

Association of British Credit Unions

A credit union is a financial co-operative which is owned and controlled by its members. It provides low interest loans and a good return (annual dividend) on savings. There are over 700 in the United Kingdom - this site gives details of your nearest one.

ADDRESS

Holyoake House
Hanover Street
Manchester M60 0AS

TELEPHONE

0161 832 3694

WEBSITE

www.abcul.org

Department of Work & Pensions

This is the government department that deals directly with all benefits as well as details of local benefit offices.

TELEPHONE

0800 88 22 00
FREEPHONE

WEBSITE

www.dwp.gov.uk

SECTION 6 Useful stuff**Disability Rights Commission**

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) is an independent body, established by Act of Parliament to eliminate discrimination against disabled people and promote equal opportunity.

TELEPHONE

08457 622 633
FREEPHONE

WEBSITE

www.drc-gb.org

Equal Opportunities Commission

The leading agency campaigning to eliminate sex discrimination, providing straightforward information and advice to help individuals and employers.

ADDRESS

Overseas House
Quay Street
Manchester M3 3HN

TELEPHONE

0161 833 9244

WEBSITE

www.eoc.org.uk

Gingerbread

This charity offers practical and emotional support to lone parents and their children, and campaigns on their behalf.

ADDRESS

7 Sovereign Close
Sovereign Court
London E1W 3HW

TELEPHONE

0800 018 4318
OPEN 10AM-4PM MON-FRI

WEBSITE

www.gingerbread.org.uk

Housing and Disabled People

This site promotes housing resources for disabled people in the UK to support choice in housing and maximise independence and quality of life. It is also the umbrella group for local Disabled Persons Housing Services (DPHS).

ADDRESS

17 Priory Street
York YO1 6ET

TELEPHONE

01904 653 888

WEBSITE

www.hodis.org.uk

The Housing Corporation

The Housing Corporation regulates housing associations such as Ability and monitors our performance and viability.

Head Office

ADDRESS

149 Tottenham Court Rd
London W1P 0BN

TELEPHONE

020 7393 2000

WEBSITE

www.housingcorp.gov.uk

Regional Offices

London - Working in Greater London.

ADDRESS

Waverley House
7-12 Noel Street
London W1V 4BA

TELEPHONE

020 7292 4400

South East - Working in Berkshire, Brighton & Hove, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Portsmouth, Southampton, Surrey, West Sussex

ADDRESS

Leon House
High Street, Croydon
London CR9 1UH

TELEPHONE

020 8253 1400

South West - Working in Bath and NE Somerset, Bournemouth, Bristol, Cornwall & Isles of Scilly, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, North West Somerset, Poole, Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Thamesdown, Wiltshire

ADDRESS

2nd Floor, Beaufort House
51 New North Road
Exeter EX4 4EP

TELEPHONE

01392 428 200

East - Working in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Derby, Derbyshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Leicester, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Luton, Norfolk, Suffolk, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland

ADDRESS

Attenborough House
109/119 Charles Street
Leicester LE1 1FQ

TELEPHONE

0116 242 4800

SECTION 6 Useful stuff**Housing Mobility and Exchange Service (H.O.M.E.S.)**

Provides assistance to tenants wishing to move to another geographical area.

TELEPHONE

020 7963 0200

WEBSITE

www.homes.org.uk

Housing Resource Guide

A search site for all social housing organisations on the web.

WEBSITE

www.housinguk.org

Independent Housing Ombudsman

Aims to provide a fair and effective way of dealing with complaints against member landlords from people who receive their services. Ability is a member.

ADDRESS

Norman House
105-109 The Strand
London WC2A 0AA

TELEPHONE

020 7836 3930

WEBSITE

www.ihos.org.uk

National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs)

CABs provide free, confidential, impartial and independent advice on a range of subjects including debt, benefits, housing, legal matters, employment, immigration and consumer issues. This website also provides details of your local CAB.

ADDRESS

Myddleton House
115-123 Pentonville Road
London N1 9LZ

TELEPHONE

020 7833 2181

WEBSITE

www.nacab.org.uk

National Debtline

Provides free, confidential, independent advice on money worries.

ADDRESS

The Arch
48-52 Floodgate Street
Birmingham B5 5SL

TELEPHONE

0808 808 4000

WEBSITE

www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

National Disability Council

Provides assistance to tenants wishing to move to another geographical area.

ADDRESS

Department for
Education & Employment,
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London SW1H 9NF

TELEPHONE

020 7273 5636

National Tenants Resource Centre

Charity based at Trafford Hall, Chester, offering training and support to all those living and working in low income communities around the UK to develop their skills, confidence and capacity.

ADDRESS

Trafford Hall, Ince Lane
Wimbolds Trafford
Nr Chester

TELEPHONE

01244 300 246

WEBSITE

www.traffordhall.co.uk

Shelter

National UK homeless charity offering advice and help through local offices and campaigns at both local and national level on behalf of the homeless.

TELEPHONE

0808 800 4444
24 HR HELPLINE

WEBSITE

www.shelter.org.uk

Tenants Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)

The national non-profit making organisation that provides information, advice, training, consultancy, seminars and conferences on all aspects of involving tenants in their housing management.

ADDRESS

5th Floor, Trafford House
Chester Road
Manchester M32 0RS

TELEPHONE

0161 745 7903

WEBSITE

www.tpas.org.uk

SECTION 6 Useful stuff**TV Licensing****ADDRESS**

Community Relations
Department, Porter's Place
11-31 St John Street
London EC1M 4GB

TELEPHONE

020 7309 1016

WEBSITE

www.tvlicensing.co.uk

UpMyStreet

This site is a neighbourhood guide with a whole range of local information. Simply put in your postcode and find out about property prices, local schools, amenities, local council performance. You can even check if you are using the cheapest gas and electricity providers.

WEBSITE

www.upmystreet.com

Welfare Benefits

These sites help you to calculate what benefits you may be entitled to.

WEBSITE

www.welfarewizard.co.uk

WEBSITE

www.ferret.co.uk

World Tenant

Links to social housing and tenant related sites around the world.

WEBSITE

www.worldtenant.com