

tenant information



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moving in

Once we've shown you round your new home, we'll ask you to **read and sign your tenancy agreement**. We'll then give you a signed copy of your tenancy agreement and a new tenant's pack.



Around the time of your tenancy starting, our housing officer will get in touch with you to check:

- If you've moved yet
- Your benefits are sorted out (if this applies)
- There are no outstanding repairs
- You've had the support you need

We'll then arrange another 'settling in' visit for 2–4 weeks time to make sure your rent's being paid on time, find out if you've settled in to your new tenancy and ask if you need more support.

One of the first things you'll need to do is arrange for gas and electricity supplies. Phone these numbers to check who currently supplies fuel to your address.

- **Electricity: 0800 048 3515**
- **Gas: 0870 608 1524**

Tip: It's useful to have your meter readings and meter reference numbers ready in case you need to give them. These are shown on the meters.

For extra advice call Advice Works on **0300 300 0300** or email **emu@renfrewshire.gov.uk**

The team can advise on how to reduce your fuel bills, what payment schemes are available and what to do if you are behind with your payments.

You may want to contact some or all of the following organisations before you move so you can tell them about your change of address:

- Renfrewshire Council's Council Tax section
- The Benefits Agency
- The post office (to redirect your mail)
- Your bank, credit card and savings organisations
- TV licensing
- The DVLA (for your driver's licence)
- Your employer
- The electoral register (for voting)

Register with MyAccount

View and manage your rent and Council Tax accounts online. You can:

- view your balance and payments
- pay by debit/credit card
- tell us about a change in address
- apply for benefit, discount or exemption
- Sign up at www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/MyAccount

Collecting rubbish

We will collect your household rubbish and items for recycling. We'll let you know about your rubbish and recycling collection days.

Please remember to bring your bin in from the street as soon as possible after we have emptied it.

If you have any bulky or awkward household rubbish you'd like us to take away, call us on **0300 300 0300**.

If there is a chute in your building, remember to wrap all rubbish tightly. Don't put any bulky items in the chute as this will cause a blockage.

You can only use your chute at certain times. Your neighbours (or caretaker or concierge in multi-storey flats) can tell you when this is. If you live in a multi-storey flat, your caretaker or concierge can also tell you how to arrange for us to collect bulky items.

Voting

If you want to vote in local or general elections, you need to make sure you're registered. You can register to vote at any time.

Don't wait until an election is called; make sure you register to vote **now**. Phone **0300 300 0150** for more information.

Community alarms

Community alarms are designed to reassure you that help will be on hand if you need it.

If you have a disability, or you are frail or housebound, we can provide a community alarm to help you or your carers call for help 24 hours a day.

We can fit an alarm in your home if you have a working phone line and modern phone socket. There is a small weekly charge for this service.

If you'd like a community alarm, call Renfrewshire Care 24 on **0300 300 1180**.

Tip: If you want us to move your community alarm to your new home, call Renfrewshire Care 24 or you can tell the community alarm control centre that you are moving by pressing the button on your community alarm. They will tell us that you are moving.

paying your rent

Paying your rent in advance and on time is very important in order to avoid unnecessary arrears.

Your rent depends on the size and type of your home, including the type of heating.

After consulting with you, a new rent structure has been introduced. Rent levels are reviewed on an annual basis. Paying your rent is not an option and while we understand sometimes you may struggle, we are always happy to help you and provide advice where required.

We may consider carrying out certain duties in relation to your tenancy which we may charge for, for example, cleaning shared areas and maintaining shared ground. We will consult you before we introduce schemes like this.

How to pay your rent

We'll give you a swipe card to use for paying your rent. You can use your swipe card at PayPoint facilities throughout Renfrewshire (for example, at cash collection points in your local corner store).

You can also pay your rent in the following ways:

- online at www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/MyAccount
- by Direct Debit or standing order;
- at the Customer Service Centres in Paisley, Renfrew or Johnstone;
- at payment kiosks in Ferguslie Park, Glenburn and Foxbar libraries or Johnstone Castle and Gallowhill community centres;
- at most post offices;
- by debit or credit card by phoning **0300 300 0222** (during office hours) or **0845 602 0355** (24 hours); or
- by post, making your cheque or postal order payable to '**Renfrewshire Council**' and sending your payment to: Director of Finance and Corporate Services, Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley PA1 1HY.

Please do not send cash unless you send it by registered post.

We'll send you a statement every three months showing the payments you've made. You can also access your rent account online with our free MyAccount service to check your payments and balance at the touch of button – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

If you're having problems paying rent or Council Tax, the most important thing is to get help and advice as quickly as possible – speak to an income advisor from our Advice Works service.

Universal Credit/Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit/Reduction

You may be able to get help to pay your rent and Council Tax. This will depend on your income, the age and number of people living with you, and the amount of your rent and Council Tax.

You should apply for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction straightaway – even if you don't have all the information we need to work out your benefit.

If you don't apply straightaway, you may lose out as we can't usually backdate benefit.

If you don't qualify for Housing Benefit when you first apply, but your circumstances change, you should apply again.

If you do receive Housing Benefit and your circumstances change, you must let us know as this could affect your benefit. If you don't let us know at the time, we will have to get back from you any amounts we have overpaid.

Examples of changes we need to know about are if:

- you start work;
- your income changes; or
- someone moves into, or out of, your home
- Become a student.

If you want to appeal against a decision on your claim, you must make your appeal in writing. Phone Advice Works on **0300 300 1238** and they'll advise you on how to make your appeal.

For information about the current benefit changes programme, call **0300 300 0288**.

Tip: You can also use your "council tax" swipe card at the Customer Service Centre in Renfrewshire House to pay your Council Tax.

If you signed up for your tenancy after April 1st 2016

The UK Government is making changes to Housing Benefit and to the housing costs element of Universal Credit.

If you signed up for your tenancy before April 1st, 2016, these changes will not affect you, but if you signed up for a new tenancy after April 1st, 2016 and you get Housing Benefit or the housing costs element of Universal Credit to help you pay your rent, you may find that the help you get to cover your housing costs does not cover the whole rent.

The maximum amount of benefit than can be paid towards covering the cost of rent and service charges is going to be capped to what is known as the Local Housing Allowance. The Local Housing Allowance maximum depends on two things:

- 1. Where you live:** this is because the Local Housing Allowance is based upon what private landlords can charge for rent.
- 2. The size of your household.** The Local Housing allowance is a lot less for a single person than for a family of four, regardless of the size of property being rented. For single tenants under the age of 35 without dependent children, the Local Housing Allowance is pegged at what is called the shared accommodation rate: if you are living alone, and you are aged under 35, you will only get this rate.

You can find out what the Local Housing Allowance is for where you live by visiting the Valuation Office Agency website:

<http://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/search.aspx>

If the rent you pay is currently above the Local Housing Allowance for the size of property you need, you will have to pay the difference: so for example:

- If your rent is £65 per week and you don't have a spare room;
- You currently get full housing benefit of £65;

- The Local Housing Allowance is £60;
- From April 1st, 2018 you would have to find £5 per week to cover the difference.

Between now and April 2018 Housing Benefit (and the housing costs element of Universal Credit) will still be calculated in the usual way. The Local Housing Allowance cap will then come into force on April 1st 2018 for any tenancy which started after April 1st 2016.

If you want to find how these changes affect you, if they do at all, please contact us on **0300 300 0222**.

about your tenancy

When you rent a council home, we will give you the keys and a **tenancy agreement**. Your tenancy agreement sets out the conditions of your tenancy, which protect both you and us. It is a contract, and records information such as your name, the date you became our tenant and how much rent you must pay. It also lists the conditions you must keep to as a tenant.



We cannot change the conditions listed in your tenancy agreement without your permission unless we get an order from the Sheriff Court. However, we can increase your rent as long as we give you four weeks written notice.

You should read your tenancy agreement carefully and keep it in a safe place. If you need us to explain anything, please ask at the Customer Service Centre or your local Neighbourhood Team.

You have the right to a **Scottish Secure Tenancy**. This means that we cannot evict you from your home (force you to move) unless we can prove in court that we have a good reason for doing so.

Examples of good reasons for evicting are if you do not pay your rent or look after the property, or if you cause a nuisance to your neighbours. Eviction is a last resort and we will do all we can to deal with any problems in other ways before we consider it.

You might also want to know more about the following:

Applying for rehousing

If you want to move from your council house, you should contact your local Neighbourhood Team to discuss your housing options. You can then choose the solution that meets your housing needs. This could be an exchange with a tenant from either a council house or another landlord (housing association or private), or through the Homes Mobility Scheme.

Joint tenancy

You may want to share the responsibilities of your tenancy with someone who lives with you. This can be a person who is not currently a tenant but lives in or plans to live in the house as their main or only home. This can be your husband, wife, partner, brother, sister, carer and so on. In this case, you need to apply to the Customer Service Centre or your local Neighbourhood Team for a joint tenancy.

Transferring your tenancy

If you are leaving your home to live somewhere else, you may be able to apply to transfer your tenancy to your partner or a member of your family who has lived with you for six months. Please ask the Customer Service Centre or your local Neighbourhood Team for advice.

Succeeding to a tenancy

If you die, your partner or a joint tenant has the first priority to succeed (take over the tenancy of your home).

If you don't have a partner or joint tenant, or if you do and they don't want to succeed, your home can go to a member of your family aged 16 or over as long as your home was their only or main home when you died.

Finally, we give third priority to a carer who is providing or has provided care to you or a member of your family. To qualify, the carer must be aged 16 or over, and have given up his or her only main home to live with you.

In all three cases, your house must have been the only or main home of the person who wants to take over your tenancy.

Mutual exchange

If you are a council tenant, you can exchange homes with another council tenant. This is called a mutual exchange.

You can also exchange with a tenant from a different council or housing association, or the tenant of a private property.

If you want more information about the procedure and what to next please contact us.

We will normally allow a mutual exchange if this will not cause overcrowding in either home and if there have been no problems with either tenancy. We will refuse an exchange if you are behind with your rent or there have been any complaints about your behaviour at your present home.

The appropriate landlords must approve all exchanges. You must not exchange homes without getting permission from us and any other landlord involved.

If you do, you could lose your home.

The Renfrewshire Council House Exchange website brings together tenants looking to swap their home. You can also search for tenants who live in other parts of the UK if you are considering moving from Renfrewshire. For more information, go to www.renfrewshire.houseexchange.org.uk

Ending your tenancy

If you want to end your tenancy, you must contact the Customer Service Centre or your local Neighbourhood Team **at least 28 days** before you plan to leave your home.

We will ask you to confirm this by writing to us or by filling in an 'end of tenancy' form at the Customer Service Centre or your local Neighbourhood Team.

If you don't give us 28 days written notice, we will charge you four weeks rent from the date you return the keys.

- We expect you to leave your home in good condition. If there is damage to your home or if we need to arrange to get rid of things you have left behind, we may charge you for this.

If you've made certain improvements to your home, you may be entitled to compensation when you end your tenancy, as long as you had our permission to carry out the work.

You must:

- have had our written permission to make any improvements before you started work; and
- keep any bills relating to the improvements you have made.

If you carry out alterations or improvements to the property without our permission, and we have to pay to put the property back to its original state, we may have to charge you for this.

For more information, please contact your housing officer.

What we expect from you

- You must pay your rent in advance.
- You must let us know if anyone moves into or out of your home, or if your name changes.
- You must look after the fixtures and fittings in your home.
- You must keep your garden tidy and cut the grass regularly. If you are elderly or disabled, you can ask us to include you in the Garden Assistance Scheme (this means we will send someone to cut your grass and hedge if you have one).
- If you live in a flat, you must make sure you take your turn to clean shared areas, like stairs and landings.
- You must ask for our permission to keep a dog. If you live in a multi-storey or sheltered property, you are not allowed to keep dogs. Please contact us for an application form.
- You must keep your pets under control.
- You must keep any noise in your home at an acceptable level.
- You must keep your home properly decorated. We do not recommend using Artex on your walls. If you want to use Artex, please contact the Customer Service Centre or your local Neighbourhood Team for advice. You may have to pay for it to be removed when you move out of your home.
- For your safety, you must not paint or varnish wooden gas-fire casings or fire surrounds.
- For your safety, you must not install ceiling fanlight fittings in rooms which have gas or solid-fuel appliances.

Please try not to fall out with your neighbours. You are living in a community. What happens in and around your home affects your neighbours. **Be considerate.**

We will hold you responsible if your visitors misbehave inside or outside your home. If you are having problems with your neighbours, please contact us. The good-neighbour agreement (which is included in your tenancy booklet) says that we will do everything possible to deal with the problem of antisocial behaviour effectively and firmly but in a fair way.

We also provide a mediation service to help sort out any problems between neighbours.

What you can expect from us

We have responsibilities to you. As your landlord, we will:

- make sure that the wind and rain cannot get into your home;
- carry out necessary repairs to your home;
- tell you, each year, about any change to your rent; and
- not refuse permission, without good reason, if you want to make changes to your home, or transfer or sublet your tenancy.

We are committed to providing good quality, affordable housing in an attractive and secure environment. To help us achieve this, you must look after your home and be a good neighbour.

When you need our permission

You must ask for our permission if you want to do the following:

- Make alterations to your home or change any of the fixtures and fittings (for example, change the doors, or install a fitted kitchen or laminated flooring).
- Transfer your tenancy to someone else.
- Exchange homes with someone else.
- Take in a lodger, or rent your home to someone else if you have to leave the area for a while.
- Leave your home for more than four weeks.
- Have a dog.
- Run a business from your home.
- Build a garage, a garden hut, or a fence.
- Build a driveway.
- Install a satellite dish.

protecting your home

From burglars and vandals to extreme weather, there are many things which threaten the safety and security of your home and can cause damage and loss.



To protect your home from burglars or any other criminals

- Always lock your windows and doors when you go out. Take a few minutes to check around. You should even lock up if you are only leaving your home for a few minutes.
- Leave a light on if you will be out after dark.
- Never leave keys hidden outside your home. Burglars usually know the right places to look.
- If you live in a flat with a door-entry system, make sure that you keep the door shut at all times. When you answer your handset, only let people in if you know them.
- Do not let strangers into your home. If someone comes to your home claiming to be a tradesman or official, insist that they show you their identity card. If they do not have one, don't let them in.
- Report anything suspicious to the police immediately.

It is an important condition of your Scottish Secure Tenancy that you contact us **if you plan to leave your home for more than four weeks.**

When you go away on holiday, you should:

- leave your valuables at a bank or other safe place;
- leave your keys and the address where you will be staying with someone you trust, preferably a neighbour;
- ask someone to keep an eye on your home; and
- stop your milk and paper deliveries.

Insurance

We have arranged buildings insurance for the structure of your home but you must insure the contents, your personal belongings and decorations.

We offer a low-cost home contents insurance scheme which you can pay for with your rent. You can get more information about our insurance scheme from your Customer Service Centre or local Neighbourhood Team or our website by visiting **www.renfrewshire.gov.uk**

If you don't insure your belongings, you risk having to pay the full cost of replacing or repairing them if they are damaged or stolen. The cost of household insurance is small compared with the cost of replacing all your possessions.

Fire safety

There are smoke alarms in your home. Some alarms are connected to the electricity supply. They will have a battery in case there is a power cut. Other smoke alarms will be battery operated.

You must check that your smoke alarm is working properly. Test the alarm every week by pressing the button in the centre. If your smoke alarm is not working, report the fault to Renfrewshire Council's repair line on **0300 300 0300**.

Your life, your family's lives and your neighbours' lives depend on an early warning if there is a fire. Do not disconnect your smoke alarm, even if the noise is irritating when the toast burns!

Tip: You must not fit polystyrene ceiling tiles. If there is a fire, these tiles are extremely flammable and give off a poisonous gas.

Some general fire safety tips are to:

Always:

- unplug electrical appliances at night when you are not using them;
- put out all cigarettes properly and empty all ashtrays at night;
- put a fireguard in front of open fires; and
- close all the doors inside your home at night.

Never:

- overload electrical power points;
- leave matches where children can reach them;
- leave open fires unattended; or
- leave a chip pan unattended on the cooker.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service are now offering free home fire safety visits to everyone in their area.

To arrange a visit call **0800 0731 999** or text "FIRE" to **80800** on your mobile phone. Your local fire station will call you back to arrange a time and date that suits you. During the visit, firefighters will check each room of your house with you, helping you make sure your house is safe.

Visit www.dontgivefireahome.com or www.firescotland.gov.uk for practical safety advice.

Or contact the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service on **0141 889 2222**.

What to do in an emergency involving water, electricity or gas

Water

There will usually be two water supplies in your home. To turn off the water, turn the stopcocks.

The first stopcock is usually in the kitchen next to or under the sink. The stopcock for the storage tank, which feeds water into your toilet cistern and bath, is usually in the bathroom or in a bedroom.

If you can't find your stopcocks, your repairs officer can tell you where they are.

Electricity

The electricity meter is usually in the hall next to the fuse box.

If a fuse blows and your power goes off, this means that something (usually an appliance) is overloading the fuse. If you know which appliance it is, unplug it. Repair the fuse and reset the circuit breaker (reset the switches on your fuse box). Ask an electrician to check your faulty appliance.

If you need to switch the electricity off at the mains, the switch is next to the fuse box.

We carry out essential checks to the electrical circuits in your house before you move in. Every vacant property must receive a certificate confirming that this has been carried out before it can be re-let to a new tenant.

By law, we must carry out an electrical safety check in your home every five years. Please try to keep any appointments we make for the safety check. If you need to change the appointment, please contact us beforehand.

Gas

If you need to turn off the gas supply, your customer control valve is next to the gas meter. Make sure you have turned it off completely.

When you turn it back on, make sure you turn the control valve fully and relight the pilot lights on all appliances.

We carry out essential checks to the gas supply and appliances in your house before you move in. We must provide every vacant property with a certificate confirming that this has been done before we can re-let the property to a new tenant.

By law, we must carry out a safety check on all gas appliances every year. Please try to keep any appointments we make for the safety check. If you need to change the appointment, please contact us beforehand.

Carbon monoxide is a very poisonous gas which you cannot see or smell. Any gas, oil or coal heater or fire can produce carbon monoxide. Breathing in carbon monoxide can make you feel tired and dizzy, and can give you headaches and chest pains.

Carbon monoxide can kill.

The carbon monoxide alarm in your home is designed to detect levels of carbon monoxide long before they reach harmful levels.

If the alarm detects carbon monoxide, it will make a continuous beeping noise to warn you.

If you have a carbon monoxide alarm, you still need to take basic precautions. Do not cover air vents in windows, walls, floors and so on and make sure you allow our experienced gas fitters to come into your home every year to carry out the gas-safety check on your appliances.

If you feel that your carbon monoxide alarm is not working correctly, contact our repair service immediately (0300 300 0300).

Cold weather

Here are some tips on coping with things like damp, condensation and frost.

To reduce condensation in your home:

- Make your home warmer.
- Increase the ventilation in your home.
- Allow fresh air into your home. Open windows a little and use any extractor fans you have. Do not cover airbricks or vents.
- Reduce the amount of moisture you produce.
- Dry clothes outside when possible.
- Make sure you vent tumble dryers outside.
- Open your kitchen window when you are cooking, and keep all your other doors closed to stop the steam spreading through your home.
- Do not use Calor Gas fires or paraffin heaters.

If you have any persistent condensation problems, please contact your repairs officer.

In very cold weather, frost can get into water pipes and make them expand. This can cause burst pipes. If your pipes burst, you should do the following.

- Turn off the water supply at the stopcock.
- Turn on all the taps.
- Switch off the electricity at the mains if the water has come into contact with electrical wires or fittings.
- Switch off your water heater or the central heating system. (If you have solid-fuel heating, put out the fire. Do not try to drain the boiler unless the fire has gone out.)

Sometimes water can freeze in the pipes. If this happens, you should:

- turn off the water at the stopcock;
- switch off the boiler or immersion heater; and
- turn on all the taps.

If you have any of these problems, contact our repairs service on 0300 300 0300. They will send a plumber to your home.

Additional safety information for high-rise flats

Living in a high-rise flat does not make you any more at risk from fire. Planning what you should do in the event of a fire is largely the same as for people in other homes.

But there are some key differences you should know if you live in a high rise flat.

Your building has been designed and built with fire safety in mind. The walls and the doors between flats, stairs and corridors are designed to resist fire and stop the spread of smoke.

Most fires don't spread across more than one or two rooms, so if there is a fire in your building you are usually safest in your own flat unless heat or smoke is affecting you.

If fire breaks out in the building

- If you smell smoke in the corridor, bin area or refuse chute, call 999.
- Stay inside your flat and close all windows and doors.
- Only leave your flat if you are affected by heat or smoke or told to do so by the firefighters or police.

If there is a fire in your flat

- Try to keep calm. Make sure everyone in your home knows about the fire. Then get out and stay out.
- Don't stop for valuables – your life is more important.
- Don't go looking for the fire.
- Don't open doors if they are warm to touch.
- If there is a lot of smoke, crawl on the floor as the air will be clearer there.
- Do not use the lift – go down the stairs.
- As soon as you can call 999, giving them your full address including your flat number and floor.

If your escape route is blocked

- Get everyone into a room with a window or balcony.
- Put cushions, bedding etc round the bottom of the door to keep out smoke.
- If possible, open the window for fresh air, wave a sheet and shout for assistance to let firefighters know you are there and need rescued.
- If the fire is outside your flat, seal your front door with tape, damp towels or bedding.
- Close any ventilators.
- Phone 999, giving the number of your flat.
- If your front door becomes hot, wet it down.

Make a fire plan

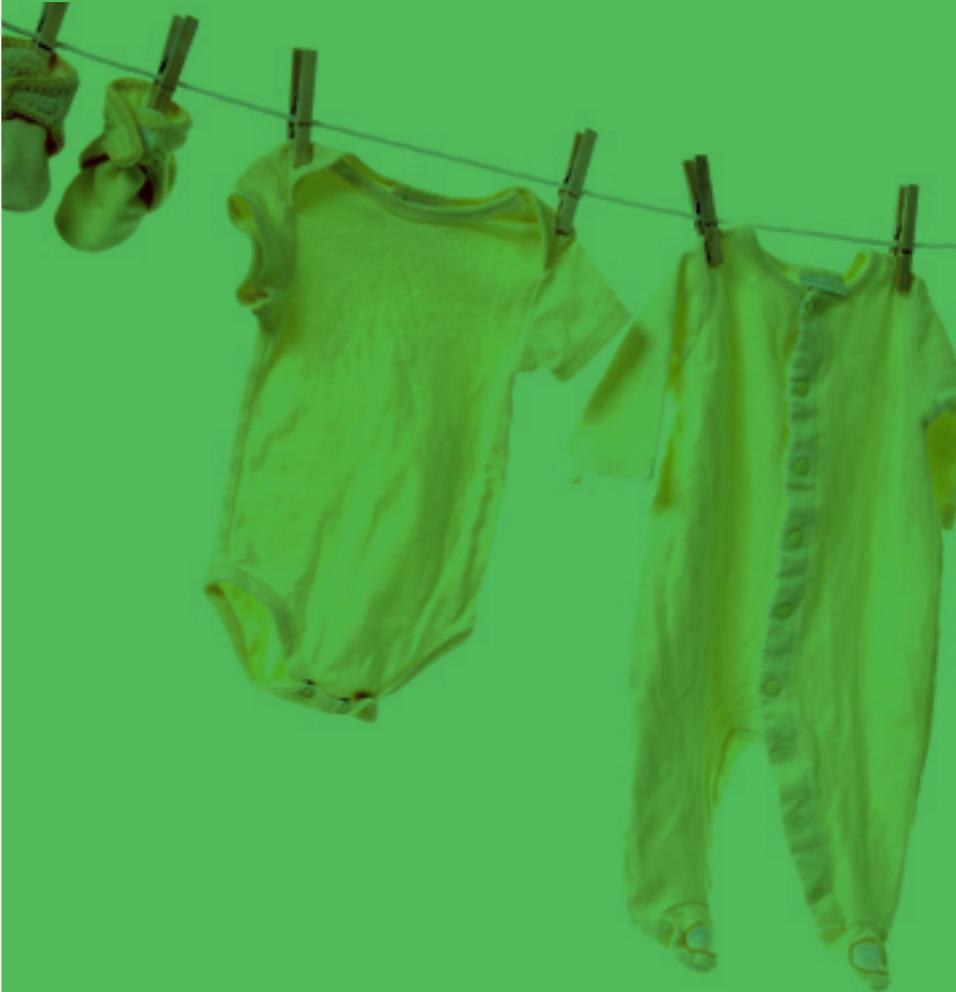
- Plan to make one room in your home a 'safe room' in case you can't escape. It's best if it's a room with a window and a phone.
- If you are trapped, go to the balcony or window. Wait for the fire and rescue services.
- If you are leaving your flat, do not use the lift – go down the stairs.
- Tell everyone in your home what the escape plan is.
- Tell everyone where the door key is.
- Practice what you would do if you had a real fire.

General advice

- Never use or store bottled gas cylinders.
- Never tamper with water inlets on landings. It could cost lives if they are not working properly when there's a fire.
- If you see a water inlet vandalised, report it immediately to your caretaker/concierge service.
- Outside the building, roads and other areas are designed so that fire engines can get as near as possible. They must not be blocked by parked vehicles.
- Keep landings and other common areas clear. Storing furniture, rubbish, etc, in these areas can pose a serious risk of fire and may hinder firefighters. If you see any rubbish etc, please report to your concierge/caretaker.

If you feel you'd need help to leave your home in the event of a fire, please inform your caretaker/concierge now. This will help the fire and rescue service if there is a fire.

looking after your estate



Permissions

There are certain things that you need our permission for:

Keeping a dog

You may keep a small domestic animal (for example, a cat, a hamster or a budgie) without getting our permission. We would only need to be involved if the animals cause a nuisance to other people.

Due to the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, you need our permission if you want to have a dog, even if it is a dog not covered by the Act. Please contact us to fill in an application form to have a dog.

If you have problems with stray dogs, contact our animal warden service on **0300 300 0380**.

Put up a satellite dish

If you want to put up a satellite dish, you must apply to us. You will have to provide proof of buildings insurance and fill in an application form giving details of:

- the size of the satellite dish;
- where you plan to put the dish; and
- how you will fix the dish to the property.

We will let you know the result of your application within 28 days. We may remove any satellite dish which you have put up without permission.

Build a garage or lay a driveway (or both)

If you want to build a garage or lay a driveway (or both), you must get permission from your local Neighbourhood Team and from our Planning section. You will have to pay a fee.

Please contact us and we will give you the application forms you need.

Put up a fence, hut or greenhouse

If you want to put up a fence, hut or greenhouse on your property, please fill in an application form which you can get from the Customer Service Centre or your local Neighbourhood Team.

If you are not sure which area of garden you are responsible for, ask your housing officer.

Antisocial behaviour

What happens in and around your home can affect the quality of life within your neighbourhood. You are living in a community and you should consider your neighbours, as should any visitor(s) to your home.

We will hold you responsible for your visitors' behaviour. The good-neighbour agreement included in your tenancy booklet says that we will do everything possible to deal with the problem of antisocial behaviour, effectively and firmly but in a fair way.

If you have any problems with your neighbours, call the Community Safety Investigators on **0300 300 0380**.

Abandoning your home

You may lose your tenancy if you do not permanently live in your home.

If your home appears to be empty, or if we believe that you are no longer using the property as your home, we can serve a notice which allows us to legally claim the property back. If you do not respond to the notice within 28 days giving the reason why you are not staying in your home, we will take action to end your tenancy.

Waste and recycling

Your normal household waste is collected in your grey bin one week and all your recyclable waste in your blue bin the next week. Glass is collected every four weeks in the green and blue boxes that were previously used for recycling.

Your bin must be presented for collection before 7am on the collection day and returned to its storage point as soon as possible after collection.

When you put your bin out for us to collect, don't block the footpaths. Always leave room for people, prams and wheelchairs to get past.

If you have large, bulky items to dispose of, you can use one of the Household Waste and Recycling Centres throughout Renfrewshire.

Alternatively, the special uplift service can collect bulky or awkward items householders are unable to deal with themselves. Tenants are limited to a maximum of two special uplifts per year. If any additional uplifts are requested, they will be charged at current rates.

You can get more information on special uplifts on **0300 300 0300** and more information on the recycling service on **0300 300 0380**.

Pest control

Normally, we expect you to deal with everyday insects, for example, flies, garden insects and the occasional wasp.

You can contact Environmental Services on **0300 300 0380** or use the online form on our website if your house is infested with larder beetles, fleas, bedbugs or cockroaches.

The department can also deal with wasps nests in or near your home, but you will normally be charged for this service. You can also contact the department if your house is infested with mice or rats.

energy
advice



Heating your home

Make sure you know how to use your heating controls and programmer. Set your timer to suit your personal requirements. If you don't understand how to use them properly, call the Advice Team on **0300 300 0300** or email emu@renfrewshire.gov.uk and request assistance from the energy team.

If you are struggling with your energy bills, have problems with meters or with suppliers, call **0300 300 0300** and ask the advice team to refer you to the Energy Advocacy Team.

As a guide, the Scottish Government set out what they call a 'Satisfactory' heating regime:

- For older and infirm people, **23c** in the living room and **18c** in other rooms for 16 hours a day
- For all others, **21c** in the living room and **18c** in other rooms for 9 hours a day (or 16 in 24 over the weekend) with 2 hours being in the morning and 7 hours in the evening. If it goes above **21c**, try turning your heating down. It should still be warm enough to be comfortable and it will help save you money.

Running costs vary according to the type and size of your house, how often you use your heating and the tariff you are on. However, the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) that comes with your property will tell you the estimated cost of heating. Based on previous EPCs, Ofgem report that the average cost in the UK is £470-970 a year in heating, water heating and lighting costs.

On top of this, you need to add on the running costs of your appliances.

Tariffs and methods of payment

You are responsible for all payments to gas and electricity suppliers. You should arrange with your supplier a heating payment plan that suits your circumstances.

Here is a summary of the main types of payment plans and what circumstances they might suit:

Standing charges

These are fixed charges that must be paid regardless of how much fuel you use. Some suppliers may offer lower charges or no standing charges at all. It is worth checking suppliers to see who offers the best deal.

Meters

Suppliers offer various types of meters that can be broadly divided into:

- Credit or quarterly meters, when fuel is supplied in advance of payment;
- Prepayment meters, when fuel is paid before consumption.

Credit meters are the most popular type and often the cheapest. The bill is sent at the end of each billing period and can be paid by direct debit or standing order. Make sure you get the meter read – estimated bills can mean you may not be paying enough to cover your actual use.

You can also arrange flexible payment and budget schemes that allow you to pay weekly, fortnightly, monthly or whenever you like. But you need to be careful that you have enough money in your bank account to cover the direct debit/standing order to avoid overdraft charges.

If you use electric storage heaters or immersion heaters, you should consider a variable rate meter, such as an Economy 7 or a White meter, to take advantage of their cheaper night-time rates.

Prepayment meters are generally the most expensive way to pay, but they are a 'pay as you go' budgeting method suitable for some people's circumstances. Be aware that if you do not put sufficient funds in the meter, you will effectively disconnect yourself. The meter can be reset to collect arrears, and you will pay for the supply of fuel, standing charges and any arrears you owe.

Types of **prepayment meter** systems available include:

Token meters

These meters use plastic tokens purchased from shops, post offices, petrol stations or 24 hour vending machines, and are available in £5 units. If your fuel runs out, you can use an emergency button on the meter to obtain a small amount of credit. The next token inserted will be used to pay for the emergency credit used.

Key meters

These operate the same way as token meters, but using a rechargeable 'key'. Emergency credit is normally available on the meter.

Card meters

These are similar to token meters but are operated by electronically-coded cards, inserted into the meter and available in units of £1 or £5 from customer service centres, vending machines and some shops, post offices and petrol stations. Emergency credit is available on the meter.

Quantum meters

Developed by British Gas, this is an electronically-coded card encoded with the customer's reference number and the meter serial number. Gas cannot be purchased from anyone else. The card reads the meter and passes the reading on to the charging point when you next purchase credit. Emergency credit is available on this meter.

Variable rate meters are available for electricity only.

Types available include:

Economy 7 / White meters

These meters allow you to pay for your electricity at two different rates, or 'tariffs'. A low rate is charged at night for heating and to heat water overnight, so you can cut your fuel costs if you run some electrical appliances (washing machines and tumble dryers) overnight.

All energy providers have to offer 'Warm Home Discounts' to help their most vulnerable customers cope with the high costs of gas and electricity. So if you're struggling to keep up with the rising cost of heating your home, talk to your provider and see if you qualify for their discount or can be moved to a cheaper tariff.

Getting the best deal

It's worth checking regularly if there are more competitive tariffs available from your own or other suppliers.

Before deciding to change supplier, get free advice from the local Energy Saving Trust centre, your current energy supplier and even energy price comparison service websites.

Switching energy suppliers generally takes 4 – 6 weeks. The only change you will notice is the name of the energy supplier on your bill, and the price you pay. You can change energy suppliers as often as you like, but if you are in a fixed-term contract there may be termination fees for breaking the contract early.

Once you have selected the supplier best suited to your needs, actually changing is a relatively simple process:

- Contact your chosen supplier, either direct with the company or via a comparison service and apply to switch your supply. You will receive a contract to check and sign which will start the transfer process.
- Inform your old supplier that you are switching to a new energy company and give 28 days notice. It's a good idea to do this by telephone and also provide written confirmation.
- Pay any outstanding bills to your existing energy supplier and cancel any direct debit with your bank.
- Read your meter on the day specified by your new supplier so they can update their records.

Use your energy wisely

Remember, any fuel you use, you will have to pay for. It makes sense to use it as wisely as possible. This doesn't mean sitting in a cold house – it means making sure you don't waste energy.

By following these simple energy saving tips, you can save money on your fuel bills:

- Turn your heating down by one degree and you could save 10% on your bill
- Always turn off lights when you leave a room
- Get lined curtains. Close your curtains at dusk to prevent heat escaping through the windows and check around windows and doors for draughts
- Do not leave appliances on standby
- Try to fill appliances such as washing machines and dishwashers
- Only boil the water you need in the kettle (but always remember to cover the element)
- Use energy saving light bulbs. They last longer than standard light bulbs and can save you £40 over the lifetime of the bulb.
- Use a lid on saucepans where possible so that the contents heat up faster and require less energy. Set your heating to go off 30 minutes before you leave the house and come on 30 minutes before you are due back
- When buying new appliances, try to buy those that have an energy rating of 'A' as these will cost you less to run

Tip: You can get free and impartial energy-efficiency advice from Home Energy Scotland advice centre on 0808 808 9989.

making your voice heard

You are our customer and we want to make sure you have a say in how we run the housing service.

You can play your part and influence decisions about housing policies, housing conditions and the standard of housing and other related services.



There are a number of registered **tenants' and residents' associations** in Renfrewshire. Call our Tenant Consultation Officer on **0141 618 6260** to find out if there is an association in your area.

If there isn't, and you're interested in setting one up, we can provide support and training and explain about the grants that are available to help with the costs of running an association.

There are nine area-based **neighbourhood housing forums** which meet regularly to monitor the performance housing services and discuss local housing issues, for example, particular problems with empty houses or antisocial behaviour. Each forum also has a budget for small-scale improvement works to be carried out in their areas.

Tenants' and residents' associations are invited to send two representatives to their local neighbourhood housing forum.

There are three **council-wide forums** each year, attended by representatives from registered tenants' and residents' associations and council officers from Development and Housing Services. At these forums, the representatives and officers discuss matters which tenants are interested in, and we consult them on any proposed changes in the way we deliver our services.

The **Council-wide Housing Forum Executive** is made up of two tenants nominated from each of the neighbourhood housing forums and two owners nominated from the council-wide forum. The executive meets at least four times a year and focuses on higher level issues such as policy development and overseeing the work of tenant/officer working groups.

making a complaint

What is a complaint?

We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.

What can I complain about?

You can complain about things like:

- delays in responding to your enquiries and requests
- failure to provide a service
- our standard of service
- our policies
- treatment by or attitude of a member of staff, or
- our failure to follow proper procedure.

How do I complain?

You can complete the online form at our website or:

- **phone:** 0300 300 0300
- **email:** complaints@renfrewshire.gov.uk
- **write to:** Complaints Officer, Renfrewshire Council, Renfrewshire House, Cotton St, Paisley PA1 1WB

What if I'm still not satisfied?

After we have fully investigated, if you are still not satisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to look at it.

The SPSO can't normally look at:

- a complaint that has not completed our complaints procedure (so please make sure it has done so before contacting the SPSO)
- events that happened, or that you became aware of, more than a year ago, or
- a matter that has been or is being considered in court.

You can contact the SPSO using the following:

- **phone:** FREEPHONE 0800 377 7330
- **web:** www.spsa.org.uk/contact-us
- **write to:** FREEPOST EH641, Edinburgh, EH3 0BR

As a Renfrewshire Council tenant, if you are unhappy about the services you receive or have issues about the way we operate, you can use the Council's complaints procedure noted above, to report your concerns.

A significant performance failure is something that your landlord does, or fails to do, that puts the interests of its tenants at risk. This is something that does, or could, affect all of your landlord's tenants.

If your landlord does not deal with the failure using the complaints procedure noted above, you can contact the Scottish Housing Regulator. Their 'Significant Performance Failures' webpage provides more information on what you should do and how to raise your concerns with them using the form provided by the Regulator.

Ren Repairs

If you have a smartphone or tablet, **Ren Repairs** is a new app you can download which lets you report any housing repairs.

Available for Apple or Android, it lets you do a number of different things:

- report repairs needed to windows, doors, heating and water systems;
- attach a photograph showing the extent of the damage;
- book appointments for annual gas servicing and more.

To download the app, go to the Apple or Android app store and search for 'Renfrewshire Council'.

Ren Repairs should only be used for routine repairs. Emergency repairs should be reported on **0300 300 0300**.

This document can be made available in braille, large print or audio.

A summary is also available in these languages on request:

જો આ દસ્તાવેજને કોઈ અન્ય ભાષામાં અથવા અન્ય રીતે જાણવાની જરૂર હોય તો, ત્યારબાદ અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, prosimy dać nam znać.

اگر آپ کو معلومات کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے پوچھئے۔

यदि आप किसी भाषा में या किसी अन्य रूप में जानकारी चाहते हैं, तो कृपया हमसे संपर्क करें।

 0300 300 0222