

# **ARHAG HOUSING ASSOCIATION**

## **RESIDENTS' HANDBOOK**

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Fax: 020 7267 6200

Hostel: 020 8519 4156

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Website: [www.arhag.co.uk](http://www.arhag.co.uk)

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## **1. Welcome**

Welcome to your new home.

We aim to give you the highest possible level of service. We have produced this handbook to help you. It contains useful information about us, the services we provide and your rights and responsibilities.

We are responsible for managing your property, but we work closely with our partners to make sure that our services are of a high standard and good value for money.

We have tried to include as much useful information as possible in your handbook, but if you don't find what you are looking for, please contact us.

We hope you will be very happy in your new home.

## 2. About Us

Arhag was set up in 1979 as a community organisation to support African refugees that were experiencing housing problems. From our early beginnings as a community organisation, we have developed into a thriving independent Housing Association, successfully meeting the diverse needs of our residents. We became a Housing Association in 1988 and started to develop permanent homes in 1989. In the mid 1990s we began to house people from all countries and continents who were experiencing the same housing problems as Arhag's existing residents.

### *Our Vision*

‘A positive living experience’

### *Our Mission*

We are an independent BME organisation that gives stability and security to vulnerable refugees and migrants in London by providing support and housing so that they can achieve independence and an equal opportunity in life.

### *Our Goals*

- To maintain good governance
- To acquire and maintain good quality homes
- To get people in greatest need into homes faster
- To ensure residents have influence over and are satisfied with Arhag's services
- To attract, develop and retain high quality staff
- To grow through collaboration with partners
- To support refugees and migrants to improve their social and economic well-being

### *Our Values*

- To have integrity and be honest in all our dealings
- To be professional and respectful at all times
- To be transparent, building and maintaining trust with our customers, partners and stakeholders
- To be accountable, taking responsibility for our actions and decisions
- To achieve high standards of customer care by being accessible and responsive to customers' needs

### 3. Contacting Us

When you contact us we will treat you with respect and offer a friendly and polite service.

Contacting us by phone

For all enquiries you can contact us on our customer services number: 020 7424 7370

Fax: 020 7267 6200

Hostel residents can ring 020 8519 4156

If you are responding to a letter we have sent you, it will include the name of the person you need to contact and a direct-dial phone number. If you ring that number, you will get straight through to that person. If they are out of the office, you may get a voicemail where you can leave a message for them to ring you back. Or you can ring the customer services number above.

When you contact us by phone we will do the following;

- Answer your phone call within 4 rings and give you the name of the person you are speaking to and greet you in a polite and pleasant way.
- Have up-to-date voicemail messages that are checked every working day.
- Return calls and messages within one working day.
- Provide a 24-hour telephone emergency service every day.
- Arrange an interpreter to translate a conversation over the phone if you need it.

You can write to us or visit our main office at;

Arhag Housing Association  
Unit B, Mary Brancker House  
54 – 74 Holmes Road  
Kentish Town  
London NW5 3AQ

When you contact us in writing we will do the following;

- We will acknowledge all letters within 2 working days and provide a full response within 10 working days.

You can email us on [contact@arhag.co.uk](mailto:contact@arhag.co.uk) or visit our website and register at: [www.arhag.co.uk](http://www.arhag.co.uk)

*Visiting our offices:*

Our opening hours are 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday

When you visit our offices we will do the following;

- Treat you with respect and offer a friendly and polite service.
- Provide offices that are clean, tidy, comfortable and accessible to people with disabilities.
- Provide an area where you can speak to us in private.
- See you at the time of your appointment.
- See you within 15 minutes if you do not have an appointment.
- Have minicom and hearing loops available for people with hearing difficulties.
- Have a range of up-to-date leaflets
- We will arrange for a signer or interpreter if you need one for your appointment (and you tell us beforehand).
- Have offices and services available from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday (except bank holidays).

## 4. Your Tenancy Agreement

The property you are moving into offers you a home as long as you meet your responsibilities as a tenant. Your tenancy agreement forms a legal contract between you and us. When you signed your tenancy agreement, you made a legally binding agreement with us to keep to the terms of the agreement and accepted the responsibilities of the agreement. Your tenancy agreement will state at the front what type of agreement you have. To meet your responsibilities we will expect you to:

- Pay the rent in advance;
- Look after your home;
- Behave appropriately; and
- Be a responsible householder.

Different agreements give you different rights:

- An assured tenancy is a periodic tenancy granted to housing association tenants on or after 15 January 1989. They offer some security in that as long as you do not break the terms of the tenancy agreement you may continue to live in the property.
- Assured short-hold agreements have less security than an assured tenancy. We will only issue these in limited circumstances. For example, if we do not own the property we are letting to you, we may only be able to give you a temporary tenancy. These agreements also apply to supported housing schemes.
- Starter tenancies have a probationary period of one year and during this time you will be an assured short-hold tenant. This means it is easier for us to end your tenancy if you break its conditions. Your tenancy will normally change to an assured tenancy after 12 months although we can extend the probationary period if there have been problems with your tenancy.

The following highlights the main clauses of your tenancy agreement and how they affect you. You need to check what agreement you have and see what applies to you. If you are not sure, you should contact us and we will confirm what your agreement says. We have put them in alphabetical order to help you refer to them.

- *Antisocial behaviour, domestic violence and harassment:* There are clauses in your tenancy agreement which commit you to not taking part in antisocial behaviour, including domestic violence and harassment.
- *Being away from the property:* You must move into the property immediately. If you do not, we may think you do not need the home or have abandoned the property. You must contact us if you are going to be away from the property for more than three months if you have an assured tenancy, or 28 days if you have an assured short-hold tenancy. If you do not tell us that you have gone away, we will assume that you have abandoned your property and may take action to repossess your home. If you are living in supported housing, you must check your tenancy to see what notice you have to give if you are going to be away.

- *Ending your tenancy:* You must give us at least 28 days' notice in writing when you want to end your tenancy. This notice must end on a Sunday. In certain circumstances, it may be possible for your tenancy to pass to another member of your family. Different tenancies have different rights so you need to check what your agreement says.
- *Pets and animals:* You may keep an animal with the permission of Arhag. Where permission has been given, you must;
  - Always keep it under control;
  - Not allow it to cause a nuisance or danger to any person;
  - Not allow it to damage our property;
  - Not allow it to foul any shared or public area.Arhag retains the right to withdraw permission, where permission has previously been granted, should a tenant fail to comply with the conditions or the pet or animal becomes a nuisance. In some properties, such as supported accommodation, you will not be able to keep a pet. For more information, please check your tenancy agreement.
- *Rent:* You must pay your rent every week for the week to come. It is very important to do this, and we will take your failure to pay your rent very seriously.
- *Transferring your tenancy ('assignment'), lodgers and sub-letting:* You are not allowed to assign your tenancy (transfer your tenancy rights to another person), without our written permission or the permission of a court. Some tenancies forbid lodgers and sub-tenants so you will need to check what your agreement says. Before taking in a lodger or sub-tenant, you must let us know. You must not sublet (rent out) or give away, all or part of your home.
- *Using the premises:* You must live in the property as your only or main home and you must not allow any illegal activities to take place in it or from it. You must get our written permission if you want to run a business from your property. In some properties, such as supported housing accommodation, we will not allow this.
- *Work to your property:* You must make sure that you keep your home in good repair and condition. There is more information about your rights and responsibilities for making improvements to your property later in this handbook.

### *Data protection*

We will only ask you for information we need to know. You have a right to see the information we hold about you. We will not provide information to someone else if it is marked as confidential or relates to legal action against you.



## 5. Paying Your Rent

Rent and, if applicable, your service charges covers:

- The cost of providing the building;
- The cost of maintaining the property – repairs, decoration outside and so on; and
- Our management costs.

It is very important that you pay your rent. There can be severe consequences to not paying your rent. If you fail to pay your rent you could lose your home, and possibly struggle to be re-housed by another housing association or local authority. We will review your rent every year and you will receive 28 days' notice of any changes. Your rent is due in advance at the beginning of the week. If you miss any payments your account will be in arrears and we will act in line with our rent arrears management policy, *which may lead to you losing your home*.

You can arrange to pay your rent in different ways. You can:

- Make direct debit payments on any day of the month (up to the 28th) either every week, every two weeks, every four weeks or every calendar month, but you must pay in advance for the full period. We can set up direct debits over the phone so you do not always need to fill in a form.
- Pay at a post office or at PayPoint outlets. We will give you a rent payment card to let you pay at any post office or outlet showing the 'Pay Zone' or 'PayPoint' signs. Payments will normally take three days to reach our account.
- Pay by debit or credit card. You can pay over the phone, at our main offices, or by using our automated, AllPay 24-hour payment line, on 0870 243 6040.
- Pay by the Internet. You can pay through 'AllPay' at [www.allpay.net](http://www.allpay.net) Payments will normally take 24 hours to reach our account.
- Register and pay through our web-site at [www.arhag.co.uk](http://www.arhag.co.uk)
- Pay using SMS. If you have a UK registered mobile phone and a current debit or credit card, you can register online at <https://www.allpayments.net/textpay> and pay your rent on the move anytime, anyplace anywhere.

### *Housing Benefit*

Housing Benefit is available from the council for all tenants to help with rent payments if you are on a low income or not working. You need to make a claim to the Housing Benefit department at your local council and make sure that they are paying. It is your responsibility to claim Housing Benefit but if you are having difficulties making a claim for Housing Benefit, please contact us and we will help you.

Whilst Housing Benefit is paid in arrears (usually every four weeks) we still expect residents to make sure that they are paying their rent in advance. We will help you to work out how to do this, so your rent account is paid in advance and remains that way. This is the case whether you are entitled to partial or full Housing Benefit.

If you are overpaid Housing Benefit, you will have to pay this back.

### *Managing rent arrears*

We will not accept rent arrears but we will give you every opportunity and support to pay your rent. If for any reason you think that you will have difficulty in paying your rent, contact us before we contact you. We will be able to give you advice and refer you to our specialist advisors for support to help you pay the rent and manage your money. For money advice you can also contact the Citizens Advice Bureau, who can offer free and independent advice.

### *Former tenant arrears*

If you leave your home owing rent we will insist you pay what you owe. We will send you one reminder to make arrangements for payment. If you do not make arrangements to pay or we do not have an address for you, we will then either use a tracing agency or refer your debt to a debt-collection agency. The agency will then take the appropriate action to recover the debt and you will need to make your payments to the debt-collection agency.

### *Service charges*

In addition to your rent some properties have a service charge for services provided to your home and not charged for in your rent. These may be things like:

- Lighting and cleaning of communal areas;
- Grounds maintenance;
- Lift maintenance costs;
- Pest control; and
- Fire alarms and fire maintenance equipment.

We will review your service charges every year and we will give you at least 28 days' notice of any changes.

## 6. Tenancy Support

Sometimes tenants need a bit of extra support and advice to help them manage if they get into difficulty with paying rent, getting on with neighbours or managing other areas of their tenancy. If we think that you could benefit from some support, we will ask a member of staff to visit you. You can also contact us if you think that you need some help.

We give our staff special training. They recognise there may be problems at times that can affect your ability to pay your rent and bills and manage your tenancy. If needed they will meet with you regularly to support you through this time.

If you live in supported housing all these services will be provided through your support worker. If you feel you need more support than you are getting talk to your support worker about it.

Staff can also give you information on other organisations that may be able to help, for example:

- We can refer you to a specialist debt and welfare advisor, who can provide advice about money issues.
- We can refer you to a floating support service, provided by a local organisation. Floating support is a type of support you can get on a range of housing issues, according to how much or little help you need.
- We can refer you to specialist partners who can help you with advice and training to find work, improve your career, even start your own business etc.

There are lots of other organisations which provide support, depending on your needs and aspirations. You can also contact us for advice about how to get support for physical or mental health problems, including getting adaptations done to your home if you, or a member of your household, has mobility problems.

## 7. Moving Into Your New Home

It is important to move into your new home quickly, at the start of your tenancy. If not, we may think that you do not need it or have abandoned the property. Also, if you are eligible for Housing Benefit, you will not be entitled to it when you are not living in the property.

### *Our standards for letting properties*

After the last resident has moved out and before you move into your home we will carry out general repairs and maintenance to make sure that it meets the Decent Homes Standard. The Decent Homes Standard is the minimum quality standard for housing set by Government. The amount of work that we have to do largely depends on the age and condition of the property when it is handed back to us, but we will bring all properties up to the same standard before you move in. We want you to be happy and comfortable in your new home and we will provide you with a property that just needs you to decorate and personalise it to make it your own.

### *Settling in visits*

At sign up an appointment will be made to visit you within the first six weeks of your tenancy.

The officer will check that:

- You have settled in and are not having any difficulties, for example using the central heating;
- All repairs we agreed when you accepted the tenancy have been carried out;
- Whether further repairs are needed;
- You understand the conditions of your tenancy; and
- You don't have any problems paying your rent.

### *Being neighbourly*

Now that you've moved in, here are a few do's and don'ts.

Always be considerate to your neighbours and remember that things you do may cause a nuisance and may be a breach of your tenancy conditions – for example:

- Noise from DIY;
- Shouting and swearing;
- Alarms;
- Noise from hard flooring;
- Revving engines;
- Barking dogs;
- Loud music or parties; and
- Untidy gardens.

If you have difficulties with your neighbours, it is best to talk to them, as they may not be aware that they have disturbed you. If this is not successful, please contact us for more advice.

### *Shared areas*

If you live in a property where you share doors, stairs, gardens or any areas with other people, they are part of your home and must be treated with the same respect.

### *Costs of running a home*

There are quite a lot of expenses associated with running a home, which you are responsible for. If you feel that you need some advice about budgeting for these, some of which can be quite large, please contact us. Some of the charges that you will need to pay, as well as your rent, are:

- Council tax – which you must pay to your local council
- Water and sewerage charges;
- Fuel charges – electricity, gas, oil and solid fuel;
- Phone and internet usage charges;
- Television licence, cable TV or satellite charges; and
- Contents insurance for your personal possessions.

### *Gas*

To find out who supplies your gas, call the meter number helpline on 0870 608 1524.

### *Electricity*

To find out who supplies your electricity, contact your local electricity distribution company – their number should be in the phone book under electricity. You should ask for the company's meter point administration service.

### *Water*

You can't change your water provider, as it is based on where you live. You can ring Water UK to find out who your provider is on 020 7344 1844.

### *Phone*

The phone line should have been disconnected before you moved in. To connect the phone, you can contact BT. Once you have a BT line, you can decide which company you want to provide your phone service.

### *TV licence*

You can ring the TV licensing company on 0870 241 6468.

## *Insurance*

What insurance do you need? There are two types of household insurance policies – buildings insurance to protect against damage to the structure of your home together with its fixtures and fittings, and home contents insurance that protects you against damage or loss of your possessions. We arrange buildings insurance but you need to arrange your own home contents insurance. You need to make sure you have enough cover for your possessions.

Generally speaking a contents insurance policy should cover just about everything you own in your home – furniture, furnishings, household goods, kitchen equipment, televisions, video, computers, audio equipment, clothing, personal belongings and valuables up to certain limits.

There are a wide range of contents policies available which will provide either replacement as new or new-for-old, or indemnity cover. For tenants many policies provide some cover for your liability for damage to the building. The policy is a contract between the insurer and you. It places legal obligations on both you and the insurer. For example, the insurer agrees to cover you against loss, damage or legal liability, which may happen during the period of insurance which you are covered for. In return, you and members of your household must keep the insured possessions in a good state of repair and take all reasonable steps to prevent injury, loss or damage.

## *Your other responsibilities as a tenant*

You are also responsible for:

- Replacing broken windows;
- Minor repairs, such as replacing keys, sink/bath plugs and so on;
- Getting rid of fleas, wasps, bees and so on;
- Keeping gullies and drains outside free from grease and blockages;
- Other minor work; and
- Repairing any damage caused by you, your householders, or visitors to the property.

If you live in supported housing we will usually do the work for you and may charge you the cost.

## 8. Living in Your Home

This section has lots of helpful tips for living in your home. If you live in supported housing most of this section does not apply to you - you can ask your support worker for more information.

*Looking after your home:* You have a responsibility to keep your home in good condition by:

- Keeping it clean and tidy both inside and outside;
- Keeping the inside well decorated;
- Keeping gardens cultivated, tidy and free from rubbish;
- Keeping the garden and dividing fences, walls and hedges (except those next to public footpaths or roads) in good condition;
- Finding out what the rules are about bonfires before having one – the environmental health department at your local council will be able to tell you about this;
- Putting your rubbish out regularly on the day of the bin collection – it is a good idea to recycle as much of your rubbish as you can;
- Parking appropriately;
- Repairing, at your own cost, any damage caused by you, your family or visitors;
- Reporting all repairs promptly; and
- Only making alterations with our permission.

*Regular checks:* You need to check your property regularly to keep it in good order:

- Test your smoke detector every week and change the battery every 12 months;
- Check your stop cock and gate valves every six months;
- Check the water system (pipes, bathrooms, toilets, kitchens, water tanks, radiators) for minor leaks every three months;
- Check plugs and flexes every month for wear and tear; and
- Allow access for the gas safety check each year.

*Safety:* Here are just a few tips to keep you and your home safe:

- Don't make any alterations to your home without our approval;
- Never run cables under carpets or overload sockets;
- Take care when smoking in your home and make sure you put cigarettes out;
- Don't store products on your premises which catch fire easily;
- Make sure you know who is at your door before you open it. If in doubt, ask for identity and check with their office;
- Before you go to bed, turn off all appliances and close all doors; and
- Before you go out make sure that:
  - You shut and lock doors and windows;
  - You close curtains and leave a light on at night;
  - You lock garden sheds; and
  - You keep ladders securely locked away.

*Condensation and mould:* Most of the complaints we receive about dampness turn out to be a problem with condensation. This is caused when moisture carried by warm air reaches a cold surface and appears to make the surface damp. Condensation can cause damage to decorations, floor coverings, clothes and bedding. You can limit condensation and mould growth by producing less moisture. Try to reduce the amount of water in the air by:

- Using heating systems according to their design recommendations;
- Keeping lids on saucepans;
- Opening windows for ventilation;
- Not using paraffin or portable gas heaters;
- Keeping kitchen and bathroom doors closed when these rooms are being used;
- Trying to keep your home warm enough so you don't have cold surfaces;
- Not blocking up any airbricks or vents;
- Using extractor fans, where installed, in the kitchen and bathrooms;
- Wiping surfaces which have become wet with condensation;
- Cleaning off any mould with an anti-fungicidal solution or a dilution of household bleach mixed with water;
- Properly ventilating tumble dryers to the outside;
- Drying clothes outside rather than inside; and
- Ventilating behind wardrobes and cupboards by leaving a space between the back and the wall.

*Preventing dampness:* There are damp proof courses in the brickwork of your home to stop dampness rising from the ground. There are often air bricks in walls below suspended ground floors to prevent moisture building up under the floor. It is essential that the soil level is below the level of the damp proof course and you keep air bricks clear.

*Frost damage:* Cold spells in winter can cause problems such as burst or frozen pipes. There are things you can do to avoid this:

- Heat your home and try to maintain a minimum temperature at all times. If you have central heating with a thermostat, set it to at least 10 degrees;
- If your thermostat is in a hallway, use the radiator in the hall or the temperature may not reach 10 degrees;
- If you are going away for a few days, try and have the heating on for at least a short time every day;
- If you are going away for a longer time you should drain the pipes to prevent pipes from bursting; and
- Let warm air circulate to unheated parts of your home.

*If your pipes freeze:*

- Turn off the water at the stop cock;
- Turn your taps on;
- Switch off your immersion heater, if you have one, or turn off the boiler; and
- Phone our customer service team for advice and help.



*If you have a burst pipe:*

- Turn off the water at the stop cock;
- Switch off the electricity at the mains if water is coming into contact with wiring or fuses;
- Switch off your water heaters or central heating;
- Turn your taps off;
- Phone customer services for advice and help; and
- If you are in a flat, warn your neighbours below that water might seep into their home.

*Pests:* We normally carry out pest control treatments in blocks of flats or the communal areas of schemes. Costs incurred in the treatment are paid by residents through their service charge.

We do not generally carry out pest control treatment for street properties and houses, and advice will be given to affected residents on how to tackle pests or where to seek treatment. If we do carry out treatments the costs will be charged to the resident.

For more information about how to deal with pests contact your local environmental health department.

*When you are away:* Before you go away you should:

- Make sure that all your windows and doors are closed and locked;
- Adjust the heating so that you don't have to pay unnecessary costs, but also so your pipes don't freeze;
- Make sure that all taps are off;
- Cancel all deliveries of milk, newspapers and so on;
- You might want to ask a neighbour to clear the post away from inside the front door and water your plants;
- You should also turn off your water at the stop cock and in winter drain down the water system to prevent flooding and pipes freezing; and
- If you are going to be away for over three weeks, run the taps for five minutes after turning off the stop tap to prevent the build up of legionella bacteria.

## 9. In Case of Emergencies

*In an emergency:* You need to know where the gas, water and electricity supplies come into your home and how to turn them off.

### *Gas leaks*

If you smell gas or think you have a gas leak, contact Transco immediately – their number is 0800 111999 (in the phone book under Gas) and take their advice. Also;

- Do not smoke.
- Do not turn any light switches or electrical equipment on or off.
- Open doors and windows.
- Check if a gas appliance has been left on or a pilot light has blown out.
- Turn off the gas supply at the meter.

### *Accidents*

If someone has an accident, call 999 immediately and ask for an ambulance. Here are some situations where you must call an ambulance;

- If someone is unconscious or slipping in and out of unconsciousness.
- If you suspect a stroke.
- If someone is bleeding heavily.
- For suspected broken bones.
- If someone has a deep wound such as a stab wound.
- If you suspect a heart attack.
- If someone has difficulty breathing.
- For severe burns.
- If there is a severe allergic reaction.

### *Fire*

If you discover a fire in your home:

- Call the fire brigade by dialling 999; and
- Make sure everyone leaves the property immediately.

### *Water leaks or floods*

If you have a water leak in your home:

- Try to catch the water in a container;
- Turn off the water at the stop cock; and
- Call out our repairs service.
- If you are at risk of flooding, call Floodline on 0845 988 1188.

*Electricity failure*

If you have an electrical emergency:

- Do not touch bare wires, or sockets or switches; turn the power off at the mains; and
- Call out our repairs service.

## 10. Repairs and Maintenance

Our aim is to give you an efficient day-to-day repairs service that responds to your needs.

Our repairs service operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. You can report repairs to us by phone, e-mail, through our website, or in person at our offices during normal opening hours.

Don't worry if you do not speak English as your first language. Many of our staff speak more than one language, and if there is no one who speaks your preferred language available we can arrange for a phone translation within a few minutes.

Outside our normal opening hours an external supplier provides an emergency phone service. They will send a contractor to visit you to make safe any fault in your home that is an immediate danger to any person, or to the fabric of the building. We will investigate other repairs and book them in the following working day.

Our e-mail and website repair-reporting services also operate 24 hours a day. However, please note that these services are only staffed during our normal opening hours and we cannot check and carry out any repairs until the next working day. **Please do not use these methods of reporting a repair if it is an emergency which needs an immediate response.**

*What we will do for you:* As your landlord we must make sure that your home is structurally sound and weather tight, and that you are provided with hot water and a means to keep your home warm.

The type of repairs that we will carry out include repairs to:

- Heating and hot water;
- Electrical wiring, sockets and light fittings;
- Plumbing;
- Roofs, outside walls, windows and doors;
- Drains and gutters;
- Inside walls, floors, ceilings and doors;
- Kitchen units; and
- Baths, basins and toilets.

If we have to lift any laminate flooring that you have fitted to carry out repairs, you are responsible for refitting it. We cannot be held responsible for any costs you may have to pay for re-laying or replacing this type of flooring.

*Repairs we can charge you for*

We will charge you if we have to carry out a repair to your home for which you are responsible. You will generally need to pay before we carry out the work and we will charge you the full cost of the repair plus an administration fee and VAT. An adviser will give you more details if this applies.

We will always complete every repair as quickly as we can. We split the types of repair into three main categories (depending on how urgent the work is). Each has a maximum target time to complete the job.

*Emergency repairs* are mainly those that have serious effects on people or damage to your home. They include, but are not limited to:

- A water leak that cannot be contained;
- Total loss of electrics or water;
- Fire damage and flooding;
- Major structural damage;
- Repairs to doors and windows where your property is not secure;
- Serious blockages to main drains (or blocked toilet if it is your only one);
- A complete loss of heating where no temporary heating is available;
- A broken-down lift; and
- Offensive or discriminatory graffiti.

You will not have to wait more than 24 hours for a contractor to come to your home and make it safe, but please note that we may have to return at a later date to complete a full repair.

*Urgent repairs* are those that are inconvenient, affect your comfort and which, if left incomplete, may cause damage to your home. This includes but is not limited to:

- Heating and hot-water breakdowns (the contractor will always try to visit within 24 hours but if parts are needed to complete the repair, a second visit may be needed);
- Minor leaks and blocked drains and pipes; and
- Faulty electrical fittings and minor electrical faults; and leaking roofs.

You will not have to wait more than seven calendar days for our contractor to complete this type of repair.

*Routine repairs* are those that cause inconvenience to you but are not urgent and do not pose an immediate risk to your health and safety. This includes but is not limited to:

- Repairs to walls outside;
- Repairing and replacing individual kitchen units;
- Replacing door and window furniture (if there is no safety or security risk);
- Repairs to plasterwork;
- Replacing wall and floor tiles;
- Minor plumbing work and replacing taps;
- Repairing and clearing guttering and downpipes; and
- Minor roof repairs.

You will not have to wait more than 28 calendar days for our contractor to complete this type of repair.

### *Arranging an appointment*

Wherever possible we will agree an appointment that is convenient for you and us. This will normally be either a morning or afternoon appointment but if there are certain times that you are not able to be at home (for example, if you are taking or collecting children from school) do let us know and we will do our best to help. If your circumstances change and you are unable to keep your appointment please let us know as soon as possible. We can then rearrange your appointment and give your old appointment slot to someone else.

If you have an emergency repair, we will try to give you an idea of when you can expect someone to visit you but we may not be able to give you a precise time.

### *How can I let you know what I think of the repairs service?*

After the repair has been carried out we will send you a questionnaire and may call you to ask a couple of questions to make sure that you are happy with the work we have done. We really do appreciate your views on our services and we do make changes to our service based on the feedback you give us.

### *Your right to repair*

If we fail in our duty to have a ‘qualifying repair’ carried out within the set period, and (after a further request) fail to complete the work within the second set period, we will pay you compensation in line with our Compensation Policy. A qualifying repair is one which does not cost more than £500 and which, if not carried out within a set period, is likely to put your health, safety or security at risk. It is the type of repairs listed under Emergency and Urgent.

You need to report repairs in the normal way. When the repair order is issued we will send you a letter showing the date it is due to be completed. If the repair is not completed within the time shown and you consider it to be a qualifying repair, you should report the fault again stating that you consider it a qualifying repair. If this is agreed, we will send you a second letter confirming that the repair qualifies and give you a new date for completion.

There is no right to compensation if you do not co-operate with us in providing reasonable access to inspect or carry out a repair.

However, we may use any compensation towards any money you owe us, for example outstanding rent payments.

### *Planned repair and maintenance programmes*

We regularly carry out planned repair, maintenance and improvement work to all of our homes. We aim to carry out this type of work to make sure that we replace areas like your kitchen and bathroom at the end of their natural lifespan. The types of work that are often carried out as part of this programme include:

- Replacing kitchens and bathrooms;
- Replacing gas central-heating boilers;
- Yearly gas servicing;
- Decorations and repairs outside;
- Replacing roofs and windows;
- Replacing fencing; and
- Electrical testing and rewiring.

We will write to you to advise you when your home is due to receive planned maintenance as part of one of these programmes of work.

*Types of repair you will need to arrange yourself:* You are responsible for carrying out any repairs that are caused by accidental damage, misuse or neglect. This includes any damage caused by friends and visitors to your home. There are different rules if you live in supported housing - please talk your support worker for more information.

You are also responsible for:

- Decorations inside;
- Replacing light bulbs;
- Door handles and latches inside;
- Replacing keys and locks if you have lost your key or it has broken in the lock;
- Clearing blockages to sinks and basins if you have caused the blockage; and
- TV aerials (unless you have a shared aerial we have provided), phone lines, satellite and cable TV, and broadband.

*What do I need to do if I want to repair and improve my home myself?*

You can carry out minor repairs to your home without our permission. Examples of a minor repair are:

- Unblocking a drain or toilet;
- Replacing light bulbs;
- Replacing a toilet seat;
- Replacing a tap washer;
- Changing internal door handles; and
- Changing a tap.

If you want to carry out any other type of improvement, you need to write to us to seek permission giving details of the work that you want to do and who will be carrying out the works. You need to make sure that anyone carrying out work in your home is suitably qualified and competent to carry out the work. In particular, gas installers must be registered with Gas Safe and anyone carrying out electrical work needs to be a 'competent person'.

We will write to you and confirm whether we have given our permission for you to go ahead with this work. Some improvement work, particularly if it involves electrical or heating

improvements, will need building regulations approval. You will need to discuss this with your local council and make sure that copies of any final certificates are sent to us.

Whenever you are carrying out any home-improvement work yourself, please remember to limit any noisy work to times that will not cause your neighbours any inconvenience.

### *Asbestos*

It is very important that you are aware of the risks of asbestos when carrying out work. You cannot tell whether a product contains asbestos simply by looking at it. The greatest risk arises when asbestos is damaged or drilled, sawn, scrubbed or sanded. When damaged, asbestos releases fibres that can cause serious lung disease. DIY work can result in brief but high levels of exposure. If you think a material might contain asbestos, don't work on it - get expert advice.

### *Satellite dishes*

Erecting a satellite dish comes within the definition of carrying out an improvement. You must seek permission from Arhag before erecting a satellite dish. You should also check whether you need planning permission. If you live in a block of flats, the likelihood of getting permission is very low. Arhag is ensuring the provision of digital services within its blocks, to enable residents take a digital subscription.

### *Annual gas servicing*

Every year around 30 people in the UK die because of poorly maintained gas appliances. If you have any gas appliances in your home we will visit you once a year to inspect and service them. By law we have to carry out this work every year to make sure that the gas appliances in your home are safe to use.

We take this duty very seriously and will take legal action against any residents who do not provide access for us to carry out this vital work. We may also claim back our legal costs from you if we have to issue court proceedings. We will normally contact you between eight and twelve weeks before the anniversary date of your last inspection to arrange a visit.

### *Aids and adaptations*

We are committed to providing adaptations to the homes of residents who are disabled or have problems moving round so they can live safely and independently for as long as it is possible. We provide in-house funding for minor adaptations, and will assist you to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) from a Local Authority for major adaptations.

Adaptations **do not** include the following work:

- Work outside unless it is necessary to allow access to the property;
- Supplying or installing mobility scooter ramps or storage space;
- Portable aids and equipment, and adaptations which are not fixed or fitted to any part of the building - these are the responsibility of the local authority;



- Sound insulation, double glazing and central heating; and
- Like-for-like replacements.

If you would like to request an application please get in touch. There is a very high demand for major adaptations. If there is funding available and there isn't a need to apply for a DFG, we will add your details to the adaptations programme waiting list.

## **11. Estate Properties & External Areas**

We always aim to make sure that the shared areas of your home and any gardens that we are responsible for are maintained to a high standard. We want your home to be a nice place to live. Many of our residents who live in flats or on an estate receive a cleaning or grounds maintenance service (or both) from us. If you are entitled to receive this service you will already be paying a service charge for this on top of your weekly rent.

If you pay a service charge we will write to you every year and give you a breakdown of the different services that you are paying for in your service charge. We will also provide a full specification of the estate services that you should be receiving when you move in. However, if you do want to check on the estate services that you should be receiving, please contact us.

Do not use shared areas of your property for storing personal items. If we find personal belongings stored in shared areas we will write to you and give notice that we will remove these items as they may be a hazard if there is a fire.

### *Abandoned vehicles*

We will deal with nuisance caused by abandoned and illegal vehicles for the benefit of all residents and the wider community. These vehicles are often in an unsafe condition and may pose a health and safety risk. They can also be a target for vandalism.

### *Bulk refuse*

If you have any large items of furniture or domestic appliances (for example beds, fridges or wardrobes) that you want to get rid of, you should contact your local council to arrange for them to collect it and get rid of it properly. Most local authorities offer either a free or low-cost bulk-refuse removal service. We will:

- Remove all abandoned bulk refuse within five days of you telling us about it - any abandoned bulk refuse that may be a fire hazard will be removed within 24 hours;
- Add the costs of removing the refuse to the overall cost of your service charge unless we are able to find out who is responsible for dumping the refuse (if we are able to identify the person responsible, we can charge them the full cost of removing the refuse, and an administration fee); and
- Normally take photographic evidence when arranging to clear abandoned bulk refuse.

### *Cleaning & grounds maintenance*

Members of staff will visit regularly to check the quality of the cleaning work. We will often take photographs as part of this inspection, particularly if we want to draw our contractors' attention to areas that need further attention. We will:

- Make sure that we have an appropriate arrangement in place for a contractor to carry out this work;

- Treat you and your home (including any shared areas and gardens) with respect at all times;
- Visit regularly to clean shared areas;
- Leave a notice in the shared areas detailing exactly what work the cleaners should be carrying out and how often, with space for the cleaner to sign and date when they have carried out the work.
- Mow any lawn areas regularly and keep them at an appropriate height during the growing season (normally between March and September);
- Make sure that any flowerbeds are planted with shrubs that are appropriate to the local environment and that will not normally need extra watering to grow well;
- Remove or treat weeds on paths and other paved areas with an approved weed killer;
- Clear leaves from paths and paved areas during the autumn months to reduce the risk of slips and falls;
- Prune hedges to keep them at an appropriate height and to stop branches from blocking footpaths;
- Check for and remove litter on each visit;
- We will remove all graffiti as soon as possible after we have been told about it. Priority will be given to removing racist, sexist or other particularly offensive graffiti. We aim to remove this type of graffiti within 24 hours of it being reported.

### *Estate inspections*

We will carry out estate inspections at least once every month on schemes with 10 or more homes, and once every quarter for schemes with less than ten to:

- Identify repairs that need to be done in shared areas;
- Make sure that there are no health and safety issues; and
- Generally make sure that the area is being looked after and cleaned to a satisfactory standard.

Residents are invited to join staff and contractors on estate inspections as well as partake in the sourcing, to reflect satisfaction with the current standard and suggestions about improvements that need to be made.

### *Parking*

If you own a car or motorbike and park it in a car park or bay we have provided, you must make sure it is roadworthy, properly taxed, licensed and insured. You must not:

- Park commercial vehicles, caravans, boats, trailers and so on, on any of our properties unless you have our written permission;
- Repair vehicles in a way that damages the premises or damages parking areas;
- Park in places that are not authorised spaces;
- Block roadways, access areas, footpaths or cause any other obstruction; or

- Leave untaxed, unlicensed or un-roadworthy vehicles, including those holding a 'SORN' (statutory off-road notification) on the premises, within parking areas set aside for tenants or on the public highway.

We will consult residents and choose a reputable company to run any parking schemes that we set up, so that we can avoid careless parking on estates, arguments between neighbours about parking, vehicles being dumped illegally and problems for emergency vehicles if routes are blocked.

## 12. Getting On With Your Neighbours

### *Anti-social behaviour*

We expect you, your household and your visitors to behave in a responsible way and to respect other tenants and residents in your local area. We will act if you or your household do not behave appropriately, cause nuisance or annoy anyone else, or act in an anti-social way. Unacceptable behaviour includes:

- Vandalism or damage to property;
- Rowdy or drunken behaviour;
- Drug dealing or drug use;
- Noisy behaviour or loud parties;
- Rubbish or litter on the streets;
- Intimidating or insulting other people on the street;
- Abandoning or burning cars;
- Attacking or harassing people; or
- Any other behaviour that causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress.

We want to prevent antisocial behaviour. If you feel that you are suffering as a result of this type of behaviour, you should report it to us immediately and we will work with you and other agencies to sort out the problem. There are no instant solutions but we do have a procedure for dealing quickly with situations as they happen, up to and including the eviction of perpetrators.

### *Domestic abuse*

Every person has the right to be safe from abuse and fear. Domestic abuse is a crime and will not be accepted. We define domestic abuse as any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.

Our tenancy agreements contain a domestic abuse clause. There are a number of legal tools we can use against those who carry out domestic violence. After the first report of domestic violence a member of staff will contact you within 24 hours. We will work with you to agree an action plan for managing your case. This will include agreeing on how (and how often) we will communicate with you throughout the case.

### *Harassment*

We recognise that harassment may take place as a result of someone's (or a group's) race, religion, sex, disability, sexuality or age. Sometimes harassment can be for other reasons as well. We have a harassment clause in the tenancy agreement and there are a number of ways we can take action against those who carry out harassment. In harassment cases, we will contact you within 24 hours and work with you to agree an action plan for managing your case. This will include agreeing on how (and how often) we will communicate with you throughout the case.

### **13. Consultation and Getting Involved**

We will consult you about any changes in housing management or maintenance that are likely to have a substantial effect on your tenancy. If you ask us, we will send you copies of our policies that affect your tenancy, for example, allocations, complaints and dealing with antisocial behaviour, or check out our web-site on: [www.arhag.co.uk](http://www.arhag.co.uk)

We welcome tenants getting involved in the way we work, in managing their homes and the neighbourhood where they live. There are many ways and opportunities for you to have your say and influence decisions that we take. Many people do not get involved because they worry they will have a lot of work to do, but there are many different ways to be involved which need different levels of commitment. Getting involved could make a real difference both for you and other people living in your area.

Involving residents and service users is really important to our future success and helps us to continuously improve quality and value to existing customers and attract potential customers to share those standards. If you want to know more about getting involved in Arhag, please get in touch and talk to our Community Engagement Officer.

## 14. Moving Home

### *Transfer*

A transfer is when you move to another home we own, or one owned by another housing association or local authority. You may be eligible for a transfer, and can contact us to find out more. There are a lot of people who want to transfer their properties, and it is important to understand that there is often a long waiting time before you can transfer. We prioritise applications according to your needs. If you want to move urgently, you can look into other options rather than transferring. You can look at the possibilities of private renting, or join a local-authority waiting list. One of the best options could be mutual exchange.

### *Mutual exchange*

When two or more tenants swap their homes, it is called a mutual exchange. This can be a good option for tenants wanting to move to a new place but not wanting to spend time on a waiting list. Any tenants who have an assured tenancy can apply for a mutual exchange. You can swap your property with:

- Another tenant of your current landlord;
- A tenant of a local authority; or
- A tenant of another housing association.

You can find an exchange partner by:

- Using the HomeSwapper website (HomeSwapper is a website designed to help people who want to swap their homes);
- Using other website services;
- Placing advertisements in local newsagent and other shop windows;
- Advertising in local or national newspapers or on websites such as [www.loot.com](http://www.loot.com); and
- Asking friends and people that you know.

When you have found a tenant to exchange with, this is what needs to happen:

- You should fill in a mutual-exchange application form (ask us for one);
- We will check your tenancy to make sure you do not owe any rent;
- We will inspect your property;
- Both landlords will write a report on their tenant;
- Both landlords must agree on whether the exchange can take place. We may refuse an exchange if the property is too big or too small for the tenant moving in;
- We will write to you to confirm the decision we make; and
- If agreed, both tenants will need to sign an 'assignment'. These are the legal papers needed to make the exchange legal.

There are other conditions around mutual exchange. If you want to find out more, you can contact us and we will help you.

## 15. Ending Your Tenancy

You may decide to end your tenancy. If you do, you should follow the instructions in this section. In some cases we may want to end your tenancy. We can only do this in certain circumstances and we need to follow a set of rules. When you want to end your tenancy you should do it properly to avoid extra costs. To end your tenancy you need to:

- Give four full weeks' notice in writing ending on a Sunday – you can get a termination form from our Customer Services Team or your Housing Officer;
- Allow us access for a property inspection before your tenancy ends - we will tell you if you need to do any repairs before you move out;
- Arrange to return the keys to us by 12.00 noon on the Monday following the termination date;
- Make sure your rent account is up to date;
- Remove all your belongings and rubbish from the property and garden;
- Repair any damage you are responsible for;
- Fix any holes in walls and leave the decoration in a reasonable condition; and
- Leave the property and garden clean and tidy.

If you do not return your keys on time or some are missing, we will charge you for lock replacements. If you do not leave the property in a clean and tidy condition, we will charge you what it costs us to do the work. Our customer services team can give you more information.

If we want to end your tenancy we will serve a 'notice of seeking possession'. If you do not leave we will apply to the county court for a possession order to repossess your home. The Housing Act 1988 (as amended) gives the situations when an assured tenancy may be ended. The main reasons are:

- Not paying your rent;
- Breaking the conditions of your tenancy;
- Causing damage to the property;
- Being involved in antisocial behaviour;
- The tenant dying; or
- If you are not living in your home.

This is not a full list and only outlines the main points. In exceptional circumstances, for example if your property is re-developed, we may need to end your tenancy. In these circumstances, under the Housing Act 1988, we have to make sure that suitable alternative accommodation is available for you or will be available for you when the order for possession comes into effect.

### *Succession*

Succession allows a tenant, when they die, to pass on their tenancy to their husband, wife, partner or other close family member. Not everyone is able to succeed to a tenancy. We can give you more information on this.



## 16. Finally

We hope you will be happy in your new home, and also that you have found this handbook useful. Please keep it safe as it provides a handy reference guide. If you need more information about anything to do with your tenancy, please contact us. Our staff will be happy to help.

For all enquiries you can contact us on our customer services number: 020 7424 7370

Fax: 020 7267 6200

Hostel residents can ring 020 8519 4156

You can write to us at;

Arhag Housing Association  
Unit B, Mary Brancker House  
54 – 74 Holmes Road  
Kentish Town  
London NW5 3AQ

You can email us on: [contact@arhag.co.uk](mailto:contact@arhag.co.uk) or

Visit our website and register at: [www.arhag.co.uk](http://www.arhag.co.uk)

## **Translations**

Albanian

Amharic

Arabic

Bengali

French

Somali

Tamil

Tigrinya

Turkish

Vietnamese