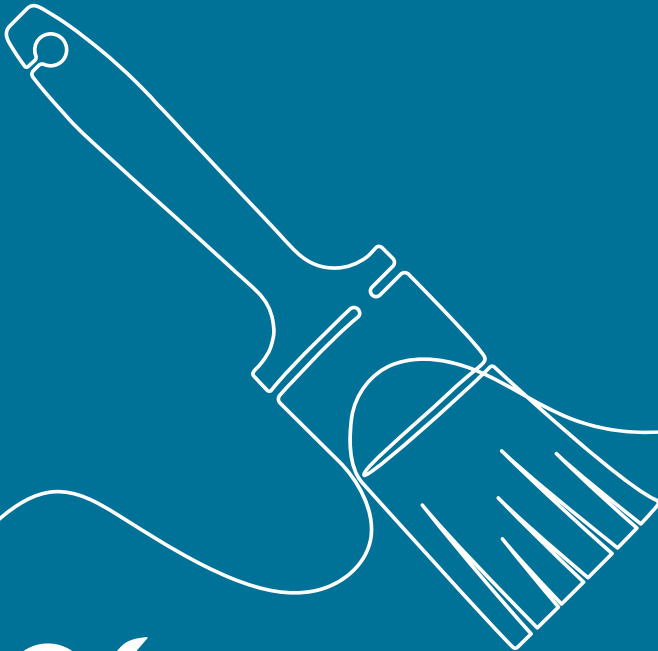




DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Housing Services

your guide to alterations
or improvements
in your home



We are committed to providing safe, energy efficient and comfortable homes to you. We hope to build vibrant and resilient communities with safe and healthy homes and understand that during your tenancy you may wish to improve your home. All secure tenants have the right to improve their home with our permission under housing legislation.

Why do I need permission??

Permission is required for any alterations or improvements to your Council home because Housing Services are the landlord of the property, and we need to ensure that any changes made are safe and are permitted under planning and Building Control regulations.

Introductory tenants do not legally have the right to make alterations or improvements, this is usually during the introductory period of 12 months (unless this is extended). Secure tenants must not carry out alterations until permission is granted by Housing Services

We will consider each application on a case-by-case basis and permission will be granted or declined following inspection or assessment.

When should I ask for permission?

If you want to make any alterations or improvements to your home, you will need to ask permission from us. Permission must be granted **before** any works are started.

Your Tenancy Agreement gives clear guidance on alterations and improvements and the information can be found on page 24 of your tenancy agreement section 10, sub-section 10.16. You can also find information in our Repairs and Maintenance Policy.

What do I need permission for?

You will need permission for the following (list is not exhaustive)

- Installing your own kitchen and bathroom.
- Removal of interior walls or changes to the original floorplan.
- Replacing internal doors.
- Replacing architrave (door frames), skirting boards and windowsills.
- Installing floor tiles, laminate, or wood flooring.
- Any alterations to gas, electrical and water installations.
- Installation of a wood burning stove.
- Installing a shed or garden building.
- Altering the garden by installing a patio, walls or ponds.
- Removal or installation of fencing.
- Boarding your loft space or converting the space.
- Adding render to the external finish of your home.
- Painting the outside of your home, external doors and UPVC frames and windows.
- Any Security lighting or CCTV.
- Painting or staining of garden fences.

How do I ask for permission?

All permission requests need to be made in writing to your Housing Management Officer at Housing Services, Town Hall, Feethams, Darlington, DL1 5QT or by email to housing@darlington.gov.uk

You should include what type of work is being carried out, timescales for completion, your chosen contractor and we will ask you to provide a detailed plan of the work so we can ensure it would be carried out correctly and by a competent person.

We aim to respond to all written correspondence within seven working days of receiving them. You must not start any work on your home unless you have received written permission that it is ok to do so.

What happens after I am granted permission?

Once permission is granted you are free to carry out the alterations you have applied for in line with any criteria we have specified. Work must be carried out to a high standard and by the relevant qualified tradesmen.

All works must be completed by you at your own cost with no contribution by Housing Services. All future repairs and maintenance will need to be completed by you and are your responsibility to maintain. If we have to repair any of your own alterations this will be rechargeable to you. All materials must be new (not second hand) and good quality.

Once the work is completed you must contact Housing Management Officer to arrange an inspection of the work to see if it meets our standards. Any work not carried out satisfactorily must be made good to our standard. You will be asked to make the changes as directed by us and permission will be retracted if not completed. If this is not carried out Housing Services will make steps to repair the work and return it to standard which will be rechargeable to you.

If a visit is not carried out after the works completed permission will be revoked. If a request to improve is refused a full explanation will be provided to you.

Do I need to provide certificates of the work?

Yes, any work carried out needs to be by a competent tradesperson. It is your responsibility to collate any warranties, completion certificates or safety checks.

Any work involving gas alterations will need to be carried out by a fully registered gas engineer and we will ask for evidence of who is carrying out the work as well as asking for completion certificates to prove the work is compliant. Housing Services are required by law to check and service boilers, pipework, and flues even if they are installed by you.

All electrical work needs to be carried out by a fully registered NICEIC tradesperson and we will ask for an electrical safety report on completion of any work to your home.

Some works including fencing and garden works may require planning permission or Building Control. It is your responsibility to contact these departments prior to work commencing and to ensure that everything meets regulations. If either department refuse work, then permission will not be granted by Housing Services to continue. If a party wall notice is required this will be your responsibility to organise.

What If I have already carried out alteration work?

If you have already carried out alteration work without permission from us, you must contact your Housing Management Officer to notify them. They will arrange to visit or contact you and gather details of the work you have completed. If they are satisfied with the alterations, they may grant you retrospective permission to keep these in your home.

If, however, they are not satisfied with the alterations or quality of work you will be asked to make good the work or return it to its original condition. If you are unable to complete the works Housing Services will arrange the work and this will be recharged to you.

If you do not allow us to carry out this work, we may take further legal action for the breach of your tenancy agreement and look to seek possession of your home, especially if the alterations are a danger to our property and others around you.



What happens if I move out?

If you end your tenancy, you must give us four weeks written notice to do so. A pre-termination visit appointment will be made with your Housing Management Officer where they will discuss any alterations you have made to the property.

If you have not had permission for the alterations, you must rectify these prior to moving out and the property must be put back to standard as per our Void Lettable Standard.

Secure tenants may be entitled to compensation for improvements when the tenancy ends. You can make a request for compensation by using the Tenants Compensation Form for Improvements which is available at www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/your-home/your-tenancy/starting-and-ending-a-tenancy/

Are there alterations I will not be allowed permission for?

Yes, we may not give permission for some alterations including loft spaces.

Loft spaces must not be boarded out or the openings altered in anyway. Loft spaces must not be used for storage and should be kept clear at all times. The joists in loft spaces are not designed to be boarded and to take the weight of storage items, putting extra pressure on the joists and trusses can be dangerous and cause structural issues. There is also the potential that electrical cables may over heat if boarded out or items are stored in the loft space.

We ask that the loft space is kept clear, so we are able to maintain and insulate the space and provide ventilation installation as part of our ongoing improvement programme.

Housing Services are committed to improving our properties and as part of our planned works we also need to ensure there is an adequate amount of loft insulation to help keep your property warm and bring down energy costs. Placing boards over insulation will compress it, potentially reducing your homes thermal performance, increasing energy bills, and making cold spots in the winter months.

If Housing Services require access to your loft space and your alteration needs to be removed, this will be your responsibility to remove the alterations, the council will not be liable for this and any damage caused.

We also cannot give permission for replacement or alteration of external doors where they are classed as a fire door. Fire doors are a legal requirement for flats that open onto a communal area shared with other tenants. This is to make sure crucial escape routes are protected if a fire breaks out.

Permission will not be allowed to install external taps. All external taps previously installed are removed by us when a property is empty and we will not give permission to install your own. This is to comply with Legionella rules and to make sure our homes are safe and compliant.

How do I appeal if you have refused permission?

If you are unhappy with our decision to refuse permission for alterations or improvements, you have the right to appeal through the appeals process.

All appeals should be submitted in writing to us within 21 days of you receiving your decision letter. You should submit any evidence you feel appropriate to Head of Housing, Town Hall, Feethams, Darlington, DL1 5QT. You should state your reasons why you feel the decision was unjustified, together with any other information you wish to bring to our attention.

You also have the right to complain if you are not satisfied with the way Housing Services have handled your request for service. You can make a complaint by:

- Using our online complaints form.
- Emailing complaints@darlington.gov.uk
- Telephoning the Complaints and Information Governance team on 01325 406777.

You can also contact the Housing Ombudsman at:

Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ.

Tel: 0300 111 3000

Fax: 020 7831 1942

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us/

Housing services contact details

 01325 405333

 housing@darlington.gov.uk

 www.darlington.gov.uk/housing

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