



Leaseholders' Handbook

June 2015



CONTENTS

Welcome to Darlington Borough Council	2
Your lease	5
Shared areas and services	13
Repairs and maintenance	16
Security	26
Estate services	28
Selling your home	30
Staying safe in your home	32



WELCOME TO DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Welcome to Darlington Borough Council and to your Leaseholders' Handbook. We hope that you will find this handbook helpful and that it gives a useful explanation of the services we provide.

Our aim is to explain both your rights and responsibilities as a leaseholder and our rights and responsibilities as your landlord / lessor. The handbook has been developed with members of our Leaseholder Group and Readers' Panel to give you general advice and guidance. It is not a complete statement of the law and does not replace your lease or insurance documents.

How to contact us

You can contact us in person, by phone, by fax, in writing, by e-mail or by visiting our website:

Housing & Building Services,
Town Hall, Darlington DL1 5QT

Telephone: 01325 405333

Fax: 01325 406197

Website: www.darlington.gov.uk

E-mail: housing@darlington.gov.uk

Opening times

Customer Services, Town Hall:

Monday-Wednesday

8.30am-5pm,

Thursday 9.30am-5pm

Friday 8.30am-4.30pm.

Office-based private appointments or a home visit by the Housing Management Officer can be made by telephoning 01325 405333.

Useful telephone numbers

Customer Service Centre
01325 405333

Out of Office Emergency Repairs 01325 405333

Out of Office Emergency Homeless 08702 402994

Housing Benefits
01325 388514

Debit and Credit Card Payments 0300 456 2671

Private Sector Housing Renewal 01325 388304

Environmental Services
01325 388799

Minicom 01325 365733
(this assists people who have hearing difficulties)

Police 0345 60 60 365

Neighbourhood Watch
01325 346832

Customer Engagement Team
01325 405333

E-mail:
enquiries@darlington.gov.uk

Website:
www.darlington.gov.uk/housing

Service standards

Our service standards show the level of service that customers can expect from us. Tenants and leaseholders have been involved in setting these standards and will be asked to help us review them on a bi-annual basis. If you would like to get involved in the development of these standards then please contact the Customer Engagement Team on 01325 405333 or email customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk

Consulting you

- We will make sure that there are opportunities for you to be involved in developing our services
- We will take into account your views when developing new services and provide training to help you influence our existing services
- You can find out about how to get involved by reading the Getting Involved leaflet available on Darlington Council's website or from Customer Services.

Leaseholders' Group

The Leaseholders' Group was set up to give leaseholders the opportunity to get involved in housing issues that affect them. The group meets every six months and meetings are open to anyone who wants to come along and take part.

If you would like more information about the Leaseholders' Group please contact the Customer Engagement Team on 01325 405333 or email customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk

YOUR LEASE

Each lease is a unique document and this handbook cannot provide a comprehensive guide to the legal rights and obligations contained in your individual lease.

However, in this section, we want to give a broad overview and offer general information to all our leaseholders about how a lease works. If you require more specific information on any points please do not hesitate to contact your Management Officer who, after referring to your lease, will be able to give you more detailed advice.

The lease you signed when you purchased your property is a legal document and forms a contract between you and us.

The original copies of your lease should be kept by you and/or your mortgage lender and can be obtained from them. If you are unable to locate a copy of your lease please contact the Council's Legal Services Department, Town Hall, Feethams, Darlington DL1 5QT, telephone Customer Services on 01325 405333 or email customerservices@darlington.gov.uk .

There may be a charge for providing a copy of your lease so please ask about this when you contact Legal Services.

Landlord rights

We have the right and a legal duty to make charges for:

- Ground rent
- Management costs
- Repairs to and maintenance of shared areas
- Improvements to the block.

You need to check the wording on your lease to see which of these charges apply to you.

Service charges (understanding your lease)

When you bought your lease, in effect you became a ‘shareholder’ in the building your flat is in. The service charge represents the cost to the landlord for providing services to you in your block and your communal areas.

As a landlord we have a legal duty to maintain the building and charge you for your share of the cost. We also have to pay our share.

The costs are shared equally among all the flats in the block (unless a cost belongs only to one flat or to part of a block). For example, if there are four flats in your block and three of them are rented to council tenants and the other is a leaseholder, the leaseholder will pay 25% of the cost and we will pay 75% for our tenants. The rent that council tenants pay covers the cost of repairs and services to council homes.

We bear in mind that when we have leaseholders, a fair proportion of repair costs are paid by them.

We will provide services such as repairs, lighting and cleaning, where these apply to your block of flats. As a leaseholder, you have to pay a share of the cost of these repairs and services. These costs are called service charges. Service charges are set out in the lease for your flat, and you should make sure you fully understand them before buying a leasehold property.

Your right to be consulted

Under Section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 and the Commonhold and Leaseholder Reform Act 2002 you have a right to be consulted:

- about works which will cost more than £250 per person if these would affect a leaseholder's flat;
- when we are tendering for a new contract;
- when we are making a long term agreement with a contractor or company.



How you get your bill

Leaseholders are sent bills (invoices) annually in a format agreed with the Leaseholders' Group and includes a detailed statement about any repairs that have been done.

Additional information giving details of contributions to repair costs is sent out every six months. This statement will help you with any issues you may have. If you have a query please contact your Management Officer.

What is included in my service charge?

Your service charge will depend upon which services your block of flats receive. There is a separate charge for each individual service which can change from year to year. Any costs incurred will be listed on your service charge invoice.

How the charges are calculated

- The bill will include charges for any repairs and maintenance, or major works that have been carried out during the year
- Your share of the cost for services and works will be shown on your bill, and is usually based on the number of flats in the block.

Please note actual charges may increase or decrease from the estimate. This will leave an amount that must be paid within 28 days.

Ground rent

Because leasehold is a tenancy, it is subject to the payment of a rent to the landlord, this is known as ground rent.

Ground rent is a specific requirement of the lease and must be paid on the due date. For information on the ground rent you need to pay please refer to your annual bill.

Your annual leaseholder statement explained

Repairs and maintenance

Based on actual costs incurred for repairs for the last year

a) Repairs

You are charged for repairs to the communal areas and to the fabric of the building. The charge is based on the actual cost of the work divided by the number of flats in 'your block', as stated in your lease.

b) Internal painting

This is your contribution towards the cost of painting of the communal stairwells and landings. The contract is reviewed every 5 years. Your contribution is calculated by dividing the contract cost by the number of flats in 'the block' so we have a unit cost for each property. We then divide that cost by 5, so the cost is charged equally across the 5 year contract

c) External painting

This is your contribution towards the cost of painting of the external fabric of the building and outbuildings. The calculation is the same as above

Insurance

Darlington Borough Council is responsible for providing buildings insurance cover for all of its stock. The annual insurance premium is divided by the total number of council

dwellings plus the total number of leaseholder properties to give us a unit cost per property.

Administration charge

Housing Services has to be self-financing. Rental income provides the overwhelming majority of our income. However, we are allowed to charge leaseholders for the services we provide specifically for them. These include: -

- a) Preparation of annual leaseholder/repair summary statement in April
- b) Preparation of half yearly repair summary statement in October
- c) Dealing with leaseholder enquiries and disputes on request
- d) Taking recovery action for non-payment of leaseholder service charges
- e) Reviewing our web pages and literature we provide to leaseholders.
- f) Administering the Leaseholder Panel
- g) Dealing with conveyancing enquiries from solicitors when leaseholders sell their property
- h) Updating records, including contact and correspondence details, when properties are sold or sub-let.

Our charges are reviewed annually and we aim to keep any increase to a minimum.

Ground maintenance

This is your contribution towards the maintenance of Housing owned land across the borough. Your charge is the same as that charged to our tenants

Electricity for communal areas

This is your contribution towards electricity consumption (lighting) in the communal areas. The price is based upon actual consumption figures provided by our utility supplier

Cleaning of communal areas

This is contribution towards the cleaning of the communal areas in the block. Your charge is the same as that charged to our tenants.

Ground rent

The £10.00 annual charge is set out in legislation. It is in Part 3 of Schedule 6 of the Housing Act 1985

Insurance

If you live in a flat, we are responsible for providing insurance cover for the building where you live. Under the terms of your lease you must have this insurance and the costs will be recharged to you as part of your service charge on an annual basis.

If you need to make a claim under our buildings insurance you should contact Customer Services.

We recommend that you also take out home contents insurance with a reputable company because items such as furniture or other personal belongings **are not covered by the buildings insurance that we have on your home.**

Leasehold legislation

Since 28 February 2005, leaseholders in England have improved rights and protection through the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002. Overall, the purpose of the act is to provide more rights and power for leaseholders and the greater protection of their service charge money.

The act covers changes to:

- Enfranchisement
- Leasehold Valuation Tribunals (LVT)
- Consultation on service charges
- Notice of ground rent being due.

Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (LVT)

The LVT acts as an independent arbitrator to decide whether or not the service charges we make are reasonable.

The tribunal can help with disagreements about:

- Insuring the building
- How much you are being asked to pay for service charges
- The quality of services you have received.

You can find out more about **Leasehold Valuation Tribunals** on their website or by contacting the **Residential Property Tribunal Service (RPTS) National Helpline** or by telephoning 0845 600 3178.

SHARED AREAS AND SERVICES

Living in any sort of flat is very different from living in a house. There are areas that you have to share with other residents, such as lifts, foyers, staircases and bin areas, so you need to consider their feelings at all times.

We are responsible for maintaining the shared areas in your block, but everyone living in the block has a duty to keep them clean and use them properly so we expect you to help by keeping your corridor, landing and bin room clean, and not letting rubbish build up in the shared areas. The more you and your neighbours do this, the better the block will be.

Remember that you contribute towards the cost of maintaining shared areas so if you see someone causing damage to or misusing stairways, landings, parking areas and other shared facilities, you should tell your Management Officer. If we can prove who caused the damage, we can charge them for it so that no cost falls to you and other leaseholders in the block.

Remember:

- If you live in a flat in a block that has one or two storeys, you and your neighbours are jointly responsible for making sure no personal belongings, or doormats, are kept in communal areas, including stairwells
- If you have shared grounds around your block we will maintain these. This includes looking after grassed areas, borders, paths, trees and litter picking
- If the lights are out on the stairs, please report this at once as it could cause an accident
- If a repair is needed in a shared area in your block, contact Customer Services on 01325 405333 or email customerservices@darlington.gov.uk . Please do not assume that someone else will do it.

Living with your neighbours

When you live in a flat you need to remember:

- You may have people above or below you and you may have to share landings and other areas.
- You have a right to the 'quiet enjoyment' of your flat, but so do your neighbours
- We will try to deal with people who cause a nuisance to you, but equally you must not cause a nuisance to them

- If a tenant breaches their tenancy agreement it could lead to them losing their tenancy but a breach of the terms and conditions of your lease agreement could lead to you having to forfeit your lease.

If you are experiencing nuisance, please contact Customer Services on 01325 405333 or email customerservices@darlington.gov.uk

Car parking

Most blocks of flats have shared parking areas. Remember that parking in shared areas is on a 'first come - first served' basis so please consider others when you park.

Garages

We have garages to let near most blocks of flats, although there may be a waiting list for garages in some areas. If you would like to rent a Council garage, please contact the Customer Services Centre on 01325 405333, email customerservices@darlington.gov.uk or look at our website www.darlington.gov.uk/Housing/Leaseholders/Car+Parking

Gardens

If your flat has its own garden, you are responsible for keeping it neat and tidy. Please remember:

- You should not allow rubbish to build up as it may cause a health hazard and encourage rats and other pests
- If there are shared grounds round your block, we will maintain them but you can help by not dropping litter and not parking on the grass
- You pay service charges towards maintaining shared grounds so please help us keep maintenance costs down
- Do not feed any animals on shared balconies or in gardens.

Pets

If you are thinking of getting a pet, please refer to the Pet Policy which can be found on the Council website www.darlington.gov.uk/housing or you can obtain a copy by telephoning 01325 405333.



Please remember to ask permission before you actually get a pet.

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

When you buy your flat and become a leaseholder, you effectively become a ‘shareholder’ in the block you live in and will be responsible for repairs and will have to pay a service charge towards the cost of maintaining the structure of the building and communal areas.

As a landlord we are responsible for making sure that the ‘communal parts’ of your block are kept in good repair. This means we will look after the structure of the building and the landings and hallways, including lighting and controlled door entry systems. As a leaseholder, you will have to pay a share of the cost of these repairs.

If you think we are responsible for a repair, contact Customer Services or visit the repair pages on the website www.darlington.gov.uk . Repairs reported by a leaseholder will receive the same priority as those reported by a tenant of the Council, and will be dealt with depending on the urgency.

Repair item	DBC	You	Comments
Structural/Brickwork			
Walls, ceilings and floor; including plaster and plasterboards		Yes	Except on common parts and joists shared between 2 or more dwellings
Roofs	Yes		
Balconies	Yes		
Stairs	Yes		Unless situated wholly within the dwelling for the leaseholders exclusive use.
Damp proof course	Yes		
Tiling and fire surrounds		Yes	
Foundations	Yes		
Electrical			
Wiring and circuits		Yes	
Light fittings, sockets, bulbs and fuses		Yes	
Appliances and heaters		Yes	
TV aerials and satellite dishes		Yes	
Smoke alarms		Yes	
Electric showers		Yes	
Gas, plumbing and heating			
Drains and water supply pipes	Yes		Except pipework wholly within the dwelling
Kitchen fixtures and fittings		Yes	
Guttering and downpipes	Yes		

Repair item	DBC	You	Comments
Gas, plumbing and heating			
Rain and soil pipes	Yes		
Central heating systems		Yes	
Bathroom fittings and sanitary ware		Yes	
Gas fires and cookers		Yes	
Water tanks		Yes	
Joinery, doors and windows			
Internal doors, frames, architraves and skirting boards		Yes	
Door furniture		Yes	
Exterior to dwelling	Yes		
Door bells, knockers, numbers		Yes	
Window frames and fittings	Yes	Yes	We are responsible for renewal of external faces. You are responsible internal faces and ironmongery.
Glass in doors and windows		Yes	
Kitchen units and worktops		Yes	
External decoration	Yes		
Internal decoration		Yes	
Floor boards and floor coverings		Yes	

Repair item	DBC	You	Comments
External and communal areas			
Hallway and staircases	Yes		
Bin areas	Yes		
Paths, fences, gates and garden areas	Yes		
Communal TV aerials and dishes	Yes		
Lifts and lights in lifts	Yes		
Drying areas	Yes		
Lighting to hallways, stairways and exterior of building	Yes		
Door entry systems and CCTV	Yes		
Fire precautions, alarms and extinguishers	Yes		

It is important that we all get value for money from the repairs service. If the job is not completed properly, or is not done within time, or you are not happy with the standard and quality of the work, please contact Customer Services on 01325 405333 or email customerservices@darlington.gov.uk

Consultation

Although by law, we have a duty to consult with you about any works we intend to carry out before entering into an agreement with the contractor, we think that it is really important to ask your opinion about any planned works.

This legal obligation is set out in the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 and has now been revised in Section 151 of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 that became effective on 31st October 2003.

We will:

- Keep you informed of any changes to the law about our rights and responsibilities that may affect you as a leaseholder
- Use a variety of methods to raise awareness of our rights and responsibilities
- Make sure that staff are trained to help them carry out the responsibilities of the landlord.
- Involve you in any consultations we organise for anything that would affect you
- Send you a copy of our quarterly newsletter Hot News
- Invite you to join the Leaseholders' Group
- Send you a copy of our Getting Involved leaflet that tells you about all the different ways you can be involved.

Repairs to your own flat

You are responsible for repairs to the inside of your flat and the glass in your windows. You will need to make your own arrangements to get someone to do the repairs for you.

If you, or someone you have employed, are carrying out repairs inside your flat, you must make sure that no damage is done to any shared services or the structure of the block.

You will be liable if any damage is caused to our property and you will have to pay to have it put right. If you are in any doubt about work you intend to carry out, contact Customer Services on 01325 405333 and explain the situation.

They will decide if an inspection is needed. You must not continue with the work if they tell you not to.

You must not do repairs to landings, stairways and other shared areas as you would not be covered by our insurance if you had an accident or caused damage. Please report any damage to Customer Services on 01325 405333.

If you, your visitors or members of your household cause damage to shared areas you will have to pay for the repairs.

Always report repairs in shared areas to Customer Services.

Customer care

Our staff and any operatives who work for us have an identification badge so please ask to see this each time a staff member or operative visits your home. If you are still not sure, ring Customer Services on 01325 405333 or email customerservices@darlington.gov.uk



Customer satisfaction

Once we have completed any necessary work we will ask you to fill in a satisfaction survey to tell us what you think about our service. Please take time to complete this so we know whether or not we are doing things right.

Aids and adaptations for disabled people

If you need a special adaptation to help you manage better in your home please contact Adult Social Care – Occupational Therapy Team on 01325 346200. The Occupational Therapy Team will assess what we need to do to meet your needs. You can get more information from Customer Services or our website.

Gas emergencies

If you think you can smell gas:

Phone the National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999 and:

- Don't turn electric switches on or off
- Don't smoke
- Don't use naked flames
- Do turn the supply off at the meter
- Do wait outside, if you can, until an engineer arrives

Electrical services

We have to complete a mandatory five year check of all electrical wiring and fittings in communal areas.

Gas appliances

You should have all gas appliances serviced every year and we would appreciate it if you could send the Housing Team a copy of your gas service certificate at Housing Services, Town Hall, Feethams, Darlington DL1 5QT.

Flame failure device (FFD)

It has always been the rule that if you want to install a gas appliance in your property you will need to ask a qualified Gas Safe (used to be called CORGI) registered engineer to carry out the fitting. From 1 January 2008, the rules that govern Gas Safe registered engineers changed, prohibiting the installation of a gas hob into a multi-dwelling building (block of flats), unless the gas hob has a Flame Failure Device. You can find more information about FFDs on our website www.darlington.gov.uk

Major Works

We carry out major works as part of our programme to improve the standard of properties and estates across Darlington. For leaseholders, this programme means that we will continue to improve the standard of the structure and shared areas of blocks where you live.

As a leaseholder you will be expected to contribute towards the cost of work in keeping with the requirements of your lease. As the managing agent, we have a responsibility to consult you about any works or service to your building or estate where you are likely to have to contribute more than:

- £250 for works, such as external decoration and repairs and/or
- £100 in any one year for each and every service, such as the cost of servicing a new lift.

How will you be kept informed about the works?

For any proposed capital works project, you'll receive two separate formal notices, and in some cases three:

Stage 1 - Notice of Intent - sets out the landlord's proposed works

Stage 2 - Provision of Leaseholder's Estimates - sets out your contribution towards the work.

Award of Contract - tells you which contractor we have selected to do the work.

At each stage, you will have the right to make comments on our proposed works, which we will then consider and respond to.

When major works are required to your block, such as lift installation, cavity wall insulation, window replacement or rewiring communal areas, we will confirm in writing:

- The details of the proposed works
- The estimated amount that you will be charged
- When the works are expected to start.

Your share of the cost of these works will be included as part of your service charge. Your share will usually depend on the number of flats in your block. For example, if you live in a multi-storey block of 100 flats and a new lift is installed at a total cost of £100,000, as a leaseholder your charge would be £100,000 divided by 100, which is £1,000. Please be aware that charges for major works can be high for schemes such as re-cladding or roof renewals.

Making alterations to your home

As a leaseholder, you have the right to improve your home but for some improvements you will need written permission from us. This is because as a landlord, we have an investment in the block and a responsibility to the other residents. We will not refuse permission unless we have a good reason.

You may also need to get planning permission and building consent before starting work. We do not need to know about minor work such as decorating, but we do need to know about any alterations that affect walls, windows, doorframes, plumbing and electrical services.

If you want to make alterations/improvements to your home you must get permission in writing from your Management Officer, who can be contacted on 01325 405333.

If you go ahead with work after we have refused permission you will be breaking the terms of your lease and we have the right to put things back as they were and charge you for this.

We will not charge you for permission before you carry out the work, but you will be charged if retrospective permission is required.

SECURITY

Some blocks of flats have door entry systems so you need to:

- Always make sure the door is locked behind you when you enter or leave the block. These systems are provided for your security and can be expensive to maintain
- Always make sure you know who the callers are before you let them into the block and be careful who you give a spare copy of the key to the shared door to
- Also, take care not to lose your fob. You may not be able to get a replacement for security reasons and will have to pay if you do get a replacement.

Noise

Noise in flats travels far and fast. It is important to consider your neighbours and keep any noise to a reasonable level when watching television or playing music. Showing reasonable and decent consideration for your neighbours will avoid any unnecessary conflict.



Television aerials

Most flats have a shared television aerial for the block. You need to ask for permission to install an outside aerial, mast or satellite dish. Please contact your Management Officer if you would like to do this.

Fire

If there is a fire in your block or flat, you must:

- Call the fire brigade
- Warn all the people in the building – if this does not put you in danger
- Leave the building, making sure you close all the doors behind you.



If the fire is on your landing, stay in your flat and close all the windows and doors, as your front door is designed to protect you as much as possible. Stand near the windows so the fire brigade can see you.

Preventing fires in flats

Home fire safety checks are available from the Fire Brigade by telephoning (0191) 3843381 or by email www.ddfra.co.uk

- Do not leave rubbish or bulky goods in the shared areas. If you need advice about how to get rid of rubbish, contact either your Management Officer or Customer Services
- Do not keep flammable materials (portable gas, paraffin or oil heaters) in your home
- Do not leave chip pans unattended, and always keep towels or laundry away from cooking rings
- Do not smoke in communal areas
- Do not throw lighted cigarettes on the floor.

ESTATE SERVICES

Rubbish collection

The Council provides a refuse collection service and all properties have been provided with a wheeled bin. If you receive a pension or are registered disabled, you may be entitled to an assisted collection. For more information about rubbish collection in your area and to see if you qualify for assisted collections, please contact Customer Services on 01325 405111 or email: customerservices@darlington.gov.uk

Bulky items

The Council will also collect bulky household items for a minimal charge. Please contact Customer Services on 01325 405111 or email customerservices@darlington.gov.uk

Recycling

All properties in Darlington are encouraged to recycle cardboard, newspaper, glass and plastic. To find out more about the collection in your area please go to www.darlington.gov.uk/rwc or telephone 01325 405111 or email customerservices@darlington.gov.uk

Household Waste and Recycling Centre

Darlington Borough Council provides a household waste and recycling centre at Whessoe Road.

If you are getting rid of household waste then you can use a car to drop them off between 8am and 6pm Monday to Sunday (except Christmas Day and New Year). If you need to use a van to dispose of household waste you need to apply for a free permit.

If you have any other items to dispose of please check with Customer Services what you can take.

Furniture recycling scheme

If you have good quality furniture in your house that you wish to dispose of, there are two options available to you. There are two recycling schemes in the Darlington area that will pick it up from you for free.

- a) F.R.A.D.E. (Furniture Reclamation and Delivery Enterprise) is a registered charity which provides people on low income with affordable pre-owned furniture. It relies on furniture donations to be able to provide this service.

The charity offers a free collection service to people who wish to dispose of their furniture who would otherwise just take it to the Household Waste Recycling Centre or dispose of it in environmentally damaging ways. These donations are then displayed in the F.R.A.D.E. warehouses for other people to purchase and use in their homes. Their warehouse is located at 14-16 Leadenhall Street, Darlington. For more information please contact them on 01325 357379.

- b) Kings Church Furniture Recycling Scheme offers a non-profit furniture recycling scheme. Anyone living in the Borough of Darlington and on state benefits can purchase furniture. Items can be taken straight away or the organisation can deliver it for a small charge

To donate furniture please call the Scheme Manager on 07591 623 469 or for more information please contact:
furniture@kingschurchdarlington.org

Kings Church can pick up your furniture for you, or you can drop it off at the warehouse. Unfortunately, they cannot accept electrical items. The warehouse is located at Prospect Place, Whessoe Road, Darlington DL3 0QT. The opening times are Monday to Thursday 9.30am to 3.00pm and Friday from 9.30am to 3.30pm for sales only.

Pest control service

We provide technical advice and practical treatment for a range of nuisance pests. Please note there may be a charge.

Contact us for advice or to book an appointment for pest control treatment by telephoning 01325 388799 or emailing customerservices@darlington.gov.uk or go to our Pest Control pages on our website www.darlington.gov.uk

SELLING YOUR HOME

As a leaseholder you have the right to sell your home privately or through an estate agent.

While you do not need our permission to sell your home or enter into an agreement to sell it, we would like you to tell the Right To Buy section that you are selling in order that the process runs as smoothly as possible and that we are aware of your forwarding address as well as any other information.

- If you bought your home under Right to Buy you may need to pay all or part of the discount back depending on how long you have owned the property.
- If you applied to buy your home after 18/01/05 you will have to repay all or some of the discount at a percentage of the market value of the property less the value of any improvements made, if you sell within five years of purchase.

Owners who purchase after 18/01/05 and wish to resell their home within ten years of having purchased it under the Right to Buy scheme must first offer it at market value to the Council, as their former landlord, or to another body prescribed by the Secretary of State.

Once you have found a buyer we recommend you use a solicitor or licensed conveyancer. During the sales process your solicitor should contact us and we will provide all the information they need in order to complete the sale. There is a charge made by us in respect of these enquiries and we also charge to register the Notice of Transfer on behalf of the purchaser. These charges are subject to VAT. Should you require any information regarding these, or any other charges please call Customer Services on 01325 405333.

Once you have exchanged contracts and completed the sales transaction you or the new owner must inform us of the change of ownership within one calendar month.

The purchaser's solicitor should send us a Notice of Transfer that shows who the new owner is and we would ask that you remind your solicitor that this should be sent within one month of completion to us. If we do not receive this legal Notice of Transfer we will not be able to terminate your service charge account.

This will result in service charges being added to your account which you will be responsible for paying and not the new owner.

Prior to completion all arrears of service charges and ground rent must be paid in full. Any sale cannot be completed if your account is in arrears or we do not have an undertaking from your solicitors to discharge any arrears prior to completion.

If you need any more help or assistance with your sale please contact a member of the Right to Buy team on 01325 405333 or email customerservices@darlington.gov.uk

STAYING SAFE IN YOUR HOME

Preventing accidents

Most accidents can be prevented. This section sets out some of the simple but effective things you can do to make your home safer:

Smoke detectors

Fit smoke alarms on each level in your home. Keep them free from dust and test them once a week. For more information please look at the Fire Brigade website www.ddfra.co.uk or telephone (0191) 384338.

Electrical safety

- Check flexes and plugs regularly to make sure there are no loose or bare wires
- Isolate any faulty socket or switch by switching off the trip switch at the unit
- Do not touch wet electrical fittings or exposed wires
- Do not overload sockets. Have no more than a total of 13 amps on each socket
- Turn off all your sockets before you go to bed, or if you leave the house.

Gas safety

- Do not seal off or block vents in walls or doors
- Check any appliances for signs that they are not working properly for example a yellow/orange flame, black soot deposits or any unusual smell
- Only use a Gas Safe engineer to install any appliances in your home, such as a cooker.

Using the stairs

- Don't leave items on the stairs such as shoes, bags or toys
- Make sure your shoes or slippers have non-slip soles.

Kitchens

- Make sure you keep pan handles turned inwards over the cooker to stop anyone knocking them over
- Don't overfill the kettle, this will make it heavier and you might drop it
- Make sure everything you need to make hot food and drinks are within easy reach
- If you have a chip pan or deep fat fryer, never fill more than one third full and never leave it unattended. If it does catch fire, turn the heat off and cover with a damp cloth or tea towel. Never throw water onto the fire.

Leaseholders' Handbook

