



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Housing Services Repairs & Maintenance Policy 2023-2028



Tenants
Panel
Approved



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Introduction

We are committed to providing safe, energy efficient and comfortable homes. By providing a robust, efficient, and effective repair and maintenance service we hope to build vibrant and resilient communities with safe and healthy homes.

This policy has been designed to be an effective tool to enable an efficient repairs and maintenance service for our housing stock. We will ensure that we take prompt action to carry out repairs, remedy issues and support our tenants, offering guidance, advice, and assistance throughout. It is important that we take prompt action and that tenants report issues so we can work quickly together to help resolve problems.

We have a legal requirement to manage repairs and complete any work required. It is also important that we recognise the impact that repairs or damage can have on our tenants and make every effort to ensure this is minimised.

Aims

Our Repairs and Maintenance Policy assists us to provide a tenant focussed service and ensure that we maintain our properties to ensure that they are safe and fit for purpose.

This policy aims to:

- Deliver a consistent, modern, and quality repairs and maintenance service.
- Ensure that all our homes are well maintained, safe and fit for purpose.
- Comply with relevant statutory and regulatory obligations.
- Provide an effective response to repairs and maintenance.
- Ensure that the fabric of our properties is protected.
- Ensure that tenants are treated in a fair and consistent way.
- Focus on working in partnership with tenants ensuring that a safe and healthy internal environment is provided.



Our approach

We are committed to delivering an outstanding tenant experience through our approach to repairs. This means that we will continually review working practices, policies, and procedures to ensure that this is achieved for our tenants whenever possible.

We aim to provide a service that is easy to use, causes the least possible disruption to our tenants and demonstrates value for money. To do this we will engage with new technology and working practices to ensure that we are providing the best experience for our tenants according to their needs and communication preferences.

Our Tenants Panel will carry out “mystery shopping” to test the quality of repairs from initial reporting through to repair completion.

Relevant Legislation

As a registered provider of social housing, we adhere to the required standards set out by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) in the Consumer Standards.

We will adhere to the standards set out in the Consumer Standards and determine how we meet these.

We will comply with the significant range of legislation and regulation which supports the delivery of repairs and maintenance and the standards that govern the way in which we operate, including (but not limited to):

- Housing Act 1985.
- Housing Act 2004.
- Defective Premises Act 1972.
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018.
- Data Protection Act 2018.
- Equality Act 2010.
- Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002.
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.
- Gas Safety (Installation and use) Regulations 1998.
- The Secure Tenants of Local Housing Authorities (Right to Repair) Regulations 1994.
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.
- Building Regulations Act 1984.
- Defective Premises Act 1972.
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, including requirements for Fire Doors and Means of Escape (MOE).
- Housing Health and Safety Rating 2006.
- Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012.
- Data Protection Act 2018.
- Building Safety Act 2022.

Links to other internal policies and procedures

This document should also be read in conjunction with:

- Housing Management Policy 2022-2026.
- Repairs Handbook.
- Housing Services Damp, Mould, and Condensation Policy 2023-2027.
- Leaseholder handbook.
- Fire Safety Policy for Sheltered and Extra Care Accommodation.
- Darlington Borough Council Customer Standards.
- Housing Services Tenancy Agreement.
- Housing Services Void Lettable Standards.
- Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure.
- Housing Services Climate Change Strategy. (due 2023/24)
- Housing Services Asset Management Strategy. (due 2023/24)

Scope of the policy

The scope of this policy covers how Housing Services, and our tenants are able to jointly control, manage, reduce repairs and damage to our properties.

This policy relates to all Housing Services owned properties that are tenanted, empty and communal. It also includes emergency / temporary accommodation, and any freehold buildings Housing Services own.

Advice and Information

A copy of this policy and the Repairs Handbook can be downloaded from the website www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/our-policies-and-performance/our-policies

Residents who do not have internet access can visit or phone Housing Services on 01325 405333.

Glossary of Terms

Appointable Repair - A repair that prevents immediate damage to the property

Emergency Repair - Any defects that put the health, safety or security of residents or anyone else at immediate risk.

EPC - Energy Performance Certificates summarise the energy efficiency of a building in line with European Union standards. Ratings range from A-G and the certificate will also contain tips on how to improve the home's energy efficiency rating.

Planned Repair - Non-urgent and can consist of replacement rather than repair. This can be internal/external.

Repair - Making good something that has been damaged or faulty either internally or externally.

Responsibilities

Housing Services Responsibilities

Tenant, leaseholder, and landlord responsibilities are clearly laid out within the tenancy or lease agreement, which is issued to each new tenant or leaseholder at the point of sign up or purchase.

For tenanted properties we are responsible for:

- Maintaining the structure and outside of the property and keeping it in good repair.
- Maintaining the installations for heating, water heating, sewerage and for water, gas, and electricity.
- Decorating the outside of all houses and apartments when necessary or as part of a planned maintenance programme unless tenants have done the work themselves with the relevant permissions.
- Repairing internal decoration where we have caused decorative damage when completing a repair.



Tenant/Resident -

Any tenant or leaseholder of a property managed by Darlington Borough Council Housing Services.

Void Property - A property which has no current tenant living in it.

Void Repairs - Work required in an empty property to ensure that it is safe and fit for purpose for the next tenant.

For leasehold properties we are responsible for:

- The main structure of the building, the shared parts and any shared services to a building or estate.

We will carry out all structural, external, and communal works where appropriate and recharge a share of the cost to the leaseholder in accordance with the terms of their lease and associated legislation.

We are responsible for ensuring the security of any empty properties that we own and may use external screening, alarms, and other security measures to ensure properties are kept secure.

For more information on responsibilities of repairs please see our Repairs Handbook at www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/our-policies-and-performance/our-policies

Tenant and Leaseholder Responsibilities

Tenants and Leaseholders should keep their home in a good condition and report any repairs, which fall within the Landlord's responsibility, in a timely manner in order to avoid small repairs escalating to a point which might affect their health and safety, or which might increase the cost of repair.

If the need for a repair is the result of neglect or damage (accidental or otherwise) on the part of the tenant, the tenant, is responsible for putting this right and paying for it. This includes damage caused by any member of their family, pets, or visitors.

If such a repair presents a health and safety or security risk, or is covered by disrepair legislation, we will carry out the repair for a tenant. The cost of this will be recharged to the tenant.

If the damage has been caused by the criminal act of another, the tenant will need to report the incident to the Police and provide us with a crime reference number, otherwise the tenant may be recharged for the cost of the repair.

Tenants - For more information on responsibilities of repairs please see our Repairs Handbook at www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/our-policies-and-performance/our-policies

Leaseholders - For more information on responsibilities of repairs please see your Leaseholder Handbook at www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/our-policies-and-performance/our-policies and your lease agreement.

Tenants should ensure that any works they carry out in their home do not cause a health and safety risk, such as damage to a fire door and frame. We will recharge for any damage which we believe is the result of neglect or damage (accidental or otherwise) and which compromises the safety of the property, residents, or neighbours.

Inspections & Surveys

Inspections and surveys can be carried out before a repair or improvement work is carried out, after works are completed or to ensure the safety of installations such as fire doors and gas boilers. We also carry out regular stock condition surveys of our properties.

Inspections and surveys are carried out by Housing Services Officers and Surveyors or our authorised contractors and may require tenants to allow access for these inspections. Where possible we will give reasonable notice of these inspections, usually 24 hours, however in the case of emergencies or health and safety concerns we may not be able to give prior notice.

We may take photographs of a tenant's home as part of any inspection or survey which will be stored securely on our ICT system.

Pre-inspections

A pre-inspection maybe required before a repair appointment can be arranged. This will include circumstances where the scope of the repair is unknown. Following the inspection, the repair will be diagnosed and planned within the appropriate timescales. Pre inspections will be carried out in person or may be via a video call.

The following reports of repairs would require a further inspection (not exhaustive):

- Damp, condensation, or mould.
- Fence repairs/replacement.
- Roofing repairs.
- Major kitchen or bathroom repairs.
- Structural damage or issues.

Post-inspections

To ensure we are delivering a high-quality repairs service, a sample of completed repairs will be inspected regularly. We will also carry out post inspections of any tenant improvements. We will also request feedback from our tenants at post-inspections to look at key areas of learning and improvement.

Regulatory Checks

Ensuring the health and safety of our tenants is an essential part of our repairs and maintenance service and we carry out regulatory checks, assessments, and servicing to (not exhaustive):

- Gas appliances (such as boilers and fires but excluding tenant's cookers. For tenants cookers - we will carry out a basic check of the flame picture and check for gas leaks only, we will not repair where faults are found).
- Electrics (excluding tenant's own appliances).
- Stair lifts (where fitted).
- Fire Risk Assessments (to communal areas).

Some of these checks are legally required to be carried out annually such as gas servicing, and we will consider court action where access is not given by a tenant. Court action will be our last resort and we will make all reasonable attempts to gain access before taking legal action.

We also carry out cyclical maintenance and checks to the following (not exhaustive):

- Communal doors.
- Fire doors.
- External painting (where required).
- Internal painting (to communal areas only).

Repairs

Types of Repairs

Dependant on the type of repair that is required we will allocate work as follows, so that we ensure that we provide the best possible service to our tenants.

Routine Repairs – Repairs which will not seriously interfere with the comfort and convenience of the resident, for example:

- Repairs to plasterwork.
- Repairs to doors and windows.
- Repairs to bathroom and kitchen fittings.
- New sanitary fittings (bath, toilet, and wash-hand basin).

Urgent Repairs – Repairs which seriously affect the comfort of the resident or cause potential damage to the property, for example:

- Plumbing and drainage faults.
- Roof leaks.
- Majority of gas repairs.
- Partial loss of heating.
- Damp, mould and condensation.

Emergency – Repairs which, if not attended to, could cause serious damage to the building/property, or pose a high safety risk to the health of the resident, for example:

- Gas Leaks (please report these firstly to the National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999)
- Total electrical failure.
- Total heating failure (winter).
- Burst pipes.
- Making the property safe, after storm damage.
- Repairs to essential safety features.

Priorities and target times are set out on our website and within the Repairs Handbook which can be found online at www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/our-policies-and-performance/our-policies

Reporting repairs

Tenants can report repairs by any of the following means:

- Online through Darlington Home Online.
- By telephone 24/7, 365 days a year on 01325 405333.
- Email: housing@darlington.gov.uk
- In writing to Housing Services, Rm G02, Town Hall, Feethams, Darlington, DL1 5QT.

We will agree a mutually convenient appointment during normal office hours for any repairs that are reported out of hours but are not considered an emergency.

Out of hours or callout repairs

We will ensure that all emergency callout repairs are attended within appropriate timescales and made safe at first visit, we aim to respond to emergency repairs reported out of hours as quickly as possible to make safe. Any further work will be ordered the next working day and carried out within the appropriate timescales for appointed repairs. The service will be available 365 days of the year outside of normal office hours. Tenants can call 01325 405333 to report emergency out of hours repairs.

We define an emergency repair as:

- Any fault which could lead to death or injury of occupants, visitors or public.
- Any fault which could seriously endanger the health of occupants, visitors or public.
- Any fault which could cause extensive damage to our property or your belongings.
- Major incidents including substantial structural defects, flood, or storm damage.

Examples of emergency repairs that we would attend to out of hours (not exhaustive):

- Collapsed floors or ceilings.
- Toilet will not flush, when there is only one toilet in the property and a tenant cannot flush this themselves.
- Total loss of hot or cold water (where there is no supplier issue).
- Total loss of heating in winter (31st October to 1st May).
- Total loss of electric power (where not caused by supplier issues).
- Renewal of lock when door cannot be secured or accessed (we will recharge for lost or stolen keys).
- Burst pipes or tanks (but not dripping/leaking pipes or dripping taps) where the leak is uncontrollable.
- Blocked drains where waste is leaking into the property.
- Securing a property following vandalism or criminal damage such as broken window or damaged door (please note recharges will apply unless a crime reference number is provided).

We will ensure that the service has access to skilled staff from across all trade areas to ensure that we can respond to all types of emergencies.

We will agree a mutually convenient appointment during core working hours for repairs that are reported out of hours but are not considered an emergency by us. We will consider tenant and household vulnerabilities such as age, disability, health etc when classifying a repair for an out of hours response.

We will consider recharging for any emergency repair if, on attendance, it is found not to be an emergency repair. This could be where a tenant has given us misleading information meaning we have wrongly classified a repair as an emergency.

Access

Tenants must allow us access to their property in order to carry out any work that is needed or to carry out any inspections required by law such as fire door inspections, gas or electrical safety testing. We will give the tenant reasonable notice that we require access, except in the case of emergency.

We will make every effort to arrange access but ultimately, we will consider legal action in cases where we are unable to gain access.

We aim to offer a range of appointments that are convenient for our tenants. We will provide confirmation of the appointment slot so our tenants are clear on when the repair will take place.

We will make necessary adjustments to ensure that we consider any vulnerabilities or additional needs of the tenants when planning access to complete any repairs that are needed.

Void Repairs

When a property becomes vacant, we will ensure it is made secure. We will then assess what work needs to be done, carry out all of the work, clean the property and ensure it is in a lettable condition ready for the next tenant. Our Void Lettable standard gives specific detail on what works we will carry out.

Before a new tenant moves in, we will ensure that all fixtures and fittings are secured and in proper working order and that all required Health and Safety checks are carried out with all relevant certificates provided, including:

- Gas Safety Checks.
- Electrical Tests.
- Smoke detectors.
- EPC.

We will always ensure that any signs of damp, condensation or mould are inspected and dealt with before allowing anyone to move into our properties.

Recharges

Recharges can occur in some instances with repairs. Darlington Borough Council have an agreed rechargeable repair procedure in determining when a recharge should be applied.

Recharges may occur for (not exhaustive):

- Repairs that are a tenant's responsibility.
- Repairs that are caused by damage, negligence or alleged criminal damage (where no crime reference number is provided).
- No access for pre-planned repairs.
- Changes to a property that have not been approved.
- Damage to safety features such as fire doors and frames.
- Repairs to be carried out which are caused by a Police warrant, where access has been refused and if charges are brought against the tenant or household by the Police.
- Tenants who vacate their property leaving items that must be removed, or cleaning is required or other repairs such as overgrown gardens or damage to fixtures.
- Misuse of the callout service.

High Levels of Repairs

Where a tenant has reported a high level of repairs over a period of time, an inspection will be carried out to the property to determine the cause of the repairs. The inspection will identify whether further repairs can be raised and the cause of the high level of repairs.



The Right to Repair

Housing Services tenants have the Right to Repair which means that they can request certain qualifying repairs to be completed within certain timescales. Tenants have the right to have certain urgent repairs done quickly and at no cost to them where the repair may affect health, safety, or security and where the repair has not been completed within a specified timescale.

Under the Right to Repair scheme we must pay tenants compensation if qualifying repairs are not done within set timescale and after a further request to complete the work within the specified timescales has not been completed.

A maximum of £50 compensation can be claimed if any repairs listed below are not completed within the specified time. The actual amount will be calculated at £10, plus a daily rate of £2. In some cases, we may exceed the maximum allowed under this scheme.

Repair Type	Response Time (working days)
Total loss of electric power (where there is no supplier issue)	1
Partial loss of electric power (where there is no supplier issue)	3
Unsafe power of lighting socket or electrical fitting (excludes tenant appliances)	1
Total loss of water supply (where there is no supplier issue)	1
Partial loss of water supply (where there is no supplier issue)	3
Total or partial loss of gas supply (where there is no supplier issue)	1
Blocked flue to open fire or boiler	1
Heating or hot water not working (where there is no supplier issue) (between 31st Oct and 1st May)	1
Heating or hot water not working (where there is no supplier issue) (between 1st May and 31st October)	3
Blocked/leaking foul drain, soil stack or toilet	1
Toilet not flushing (only one in property)	1
Blocked sink, bath or basin	3
Tap cannot be turned	3
Leak from water pipe, tank or cistern	1
Leaking roof	7
Insecure external window, door or lock	1
Loose or detached banister or handrail	3
Rotten timber flooring or stair tread	3
Door entry phone not working	7
Mechanical extractor fan not working	7

The Right to Improve

We acknowledge the right of our secure tenants to request permission to make improvements to their home. Introductory tenants do not legally have the right to carry out any improvement works to their home during the introductory period (usually 12 months unless extended).

We will consider each application on a case-by-case basis and permissions will be granted or declined following an inspection and assessment carried out by Housing Services. Any improvements that involve major works or structural alterations would need to be inspected by Housing Services Surveyors.

If a request to improve is refused following an inspection, a full explanation will be provided to the tenant.

Home improvements are subject to approval. Any requests for improvements should be put in writing to a Housing Management Officer, either by email or letter.

Permission must be granted before any improvement works are started. If works commence without getting prior permission, tenants may have to return the property to its original condition or may be recharged if we have to return it to its original state.

Some improvements require planning and building control approval. Any associated costs will be a tenant's responsibility.

Tenants must get approval for the following (not exhaustive):

- Carrying out alterations to the property.
- Putting a greenhouse or shed in the garden.
- Putting a garage on the property.
- Fitting a satellite dish.
- Constructing a parking space or drive.
- Erecting a pigeon cove or aviary.
- Decorating the outside of your house

Secure tenants may be entitled to receive compensation for improvements when their tenancy ends. Secure tenants can make a request for compensation when their tenancy ends by using the Tenants Compensation Form for Improvements which is available at www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/our-policies-and-performance

If secure tenants are given permission to carry out work, they must follow any requirements laid down by Housing Services, and by Darlington Borough Council's Planning Department and Building Control Section. They must also obtain any other statutory consents required in connection with the proposed work.

Tenants will need to specify exactly what type of work they wish to carry out, timescales for completion of the work and should provide a detailed plan or drawing showing their proposals, together with the details of their chosen contractor. These should be provided prior to any work is started so we can check their registration is up to date. Following completion of any works all documentation and certificates for work must be provided to us for our records. We will provide asbestos surveys if required.

All improvement works should be completed in full 12 months after the date permission was granted. Once improvement works are completed, tenants are fully responsible for the maintenance and repair of their improvements, we may recharge for any repairs that we are requested to carry out on tenant improvements.

If any of the proposed works include work next to/near or involve gas pipes or heating appliances, the contractor must be Gas Safe registered and tenants must provide us with the contractors details and registration number prior to any work commencing so we can check their registration is up to date. A copy of the Risk Assessment Method Statement (RAMS), specification of works must also be provided.

If any of the proposed works are to be carried out near/next or involve the electrical cables, consumer unit or electrical circuits the contractor must be NICEIC registered and tenants must provide us with the contractor details and registration number prior to any works being completed so we can check their registration is up to date. They must also provide us with a copy of the Risk Assessment Method Statement (RAMS), specification of works.

Following completion of any improvement works, a post-inspection will be required by Housing Services to ensure it meets our standards. Should they not meet our standards, tenants will be required to make the appropriate changes as directed by us or permission will be retracted. Tenants must allow access for this post-inspection or approval will be withdrawn and the tenant will be required to reinstate to the original specification.

Planned Maintenance and Improvement Works

Housing Services invests in the properties we manage to maintain the quality of homes. We want our tenants to live in homes that are modern, warm, comfortable and are of a good standard. Work is planned in line with our priorities and includes:

- Replacement programmes: new bathrooms, new kitchens, new boilers, roofing programmes, external doors/windows, and fire doors.
- Environmental programmes: new driveways, railings, fencing.
- Communal upgrades: new door entry systems, fire alarm upgrades and communal heating.
- Energy efficiency improvements

We have a planned programme of work to ensure our properties are being improved. We will write to tenants when their home is due for any improvement works to give a timescale for the works to be completed.

We will also send out further letters to arrange visits to our properties. The work will normally be completed in an agreed timescale with the tenant. However, if a tenants home requires additional works it may take longer. We will always communicate any delays with the tenant as soon as possible.

Access will be required throughout this time, and we will also need access to carry out a final inspection and complete any remedial work.

For more information please see the Repair Handbook at www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/our-policies-and-performance/our-policies



Adaptations

We are committed to ensuring that aids and adaptations are accessible to all our tenants. We will do everything possible to ensure that our tenants can live independently in their homes for as long as possible whilst ensuring we make the best use of our housing stock. We aim to ensure that tenants are aware of the range of options if we are unable for any reason to adapt their current home and to deliver a cost-effective service.

We will work in partnership with agencies including Occupational Therapists, NHS, Social Care and Housing Asset Surveyors (not exhaustive) to ensure that we carry out effective, long-term adaptations that meet tenants current and future needs and provide value for money.

It is not always possible for us to adapt a tenant's current or prospective home and we will work closely with them to find suitable, alternative accommodation when this occurs. We will also take an active stance to assist tenants in finding

alternative accommodation when circumstances change, for example when they no longer require adaptations, to ensure we can make the best use of our housing stock and meet regulatory requirements. We will do everything we can to support tenants through the re-housing process.

Applications for adaptations are assessed on a case-by-case basis and we will take the following into account (not exhaustive):

- Availability of other suitable accommodation within the Borough.
- Individual circumstances and local connections.
- Future needs of the tenant.
- Location of the property.
- Type of property.
- Suitability of property for adaptation.
- Accessibility.
- Cost of adaptation.

Leaseholder Improvements

Leaseholders can carry out work to improve their home, but for some improvements they will need prior written permission from Housing Services, in accordance with the terms of their lease.

Leaseholders may also need to get planning permission and building consent for the work, together with any other relevant statutory consents.

Climate Change

As a local authority and social housing landlord we are fully committed to reducing our impact on the environment and our Housing Services Climate Change Strategy will help us to meet Government targets for decarbonising properties.

In order to meet government carbon zero targets by 2050, our programme of improvements to our existing homes will include measures which aim to make them more energy efficient through internal investment and government backed funding streams such as solar panels, internal and external insulation and improved windows and doors.

Staff Qualifications and Training

We are responsible for ensuring that staff will receive appropriate training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities as stated in this policy.

We will ensure any sub-contractors/agency carrying out any works on our behalf will be qualified to the appropriate standards.

We will ensure that all contractors have appropriate identification so tenants can easily confirm they are working for us.

Equality and Diversity

We are committed to ensuring that we do not discriminate against any of our tenants, and we want to provide excellent services to all our tenants. This means that for all our policies and strategies we need to consider any specific issues that might be faced by protected groups.

Performance and Monitoring

To assist in our continuous improvement of the repairs and maintenance service we will collate and monitor performance information. We will involve our Tenants Panel and Council Members in monitoring this. We will also ensure that our performance is provided to the Regulator of Social Housing through Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

We will provide information on our performance on our website, our annual report and in our in-house magazine, Housing Connect.



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