

Your Homes Newcastle: new tenant – what you need to know

1 Welcome

Hello, and welcome to this short film about Your Homes Newcastle. The film will run for about 12 minutes, and thank you for taking the time to watch. It will cover some of the important things you need to know as a tenant of Newcastle City Council. We'd like to make sure that you are very happy in your new home.

Your Homes Newcastle, or YHN, is an organisation responsible for the day-to-day management and improvement of Newcastle City Council's homes.

At the start of your tenancy we'll give you a copy of our Tenant's Handbook. It gives you lots of useful information about your tenancy and about YHN and all the services we provide. It'll help you to get settled in, and you'll find it useful to refer to throughout your tenancy. But if you do have any questions please get in touch with us straightaway. We're here to help.

You should have already been through the property standard list with your housing officer to ensure your new home is safe, clean and clear. Now before you move in, you need to go through the Sign Up procedure. This procedure covers your rights and responsibilities as a new tenant.

2 Sign up

Your housing officer will have told you what documents you need to bring with you at your sign up today. These can include a birth certificate, passport or driving licence as proof of your identity, and a current utility bill as proof of your previous address. You must also give us your National Insurance Number. You cannot sign up without these documents.

You may be able to get help to pay your rent by claiming housing benefit. If you think you may be entitled to housing benefit, then it is important that you complete the relevant claim form when you sign for the tenancy. You will need to bring all of your documents that show your income. Remember, housing benefit is only payable after you have moved into the property, and you must make a claim from that date in order not to fall into arrears with your rent.

Once you have successfully signed up for your new tenancy, you will need to have your gas, electricity and water supplies connected. Details about this can be found in your Tenant's Handbook.

If you need help in furnishing your new home, the Newcastle Furniture Service provides furniture packs for new tenants who need them. This service is accredited with a Charter Mark Award, and helps tenants to set up their new

homes. This service can also provide and fit electrical appliances like cookers.

Within three weeks of moving in, one of our housing services offices will visit you to check that everything is okay. And after six weeks we'll send out a survey asking you about our service. Please take the time to fill it in and send it back to us.

3 Tenancy Agreement

In your Tenant's Handbook, you'll find information about your Tenancy Agreement. Your Tenancy Agreement is a legally binding contract. As such, you have certain responsibilities as a tenant that you must fulfil. Most important, of course, is paying your rent. But you must also keep your home in a reasonable condition. You are responsible for minor repairs, as well as keeping your home painted and decorated.

If you have a garden, you will need to keep it tidy and free of rubbish. If you need help to keep it tidy you may be able to get help from our Garden Care team – ask at your housing office for more information. Tenants are provided with wheelie bins for ordinary household rubbish. Those who live in flats or maisonettes have rubbish chutes on the landing or staircase.

Can you keep a pet? Well, it depends - to find out you need to contact your housing officer.

Your tenancy agreement gives you and your family the right to live in your home free from anti-social behaviour. Other council tenants have the same responsibilities as you. It is important that we all respect the rights of others. We try to make sure that our neighbourhoods are peaceful and safe, and we want to work with you to achieve this aim. There are many ways for you to get involved. Check your handbook or ask at your housing office for more information.

And we regularly put items in our newsletter 'Homes and People' about how we deal with anti-social behaviour. The newsletter is delivered to your home every three months and is packed with information and news to help keep you in touch with what's going on, and how you can have your say in how your estates are run.

4 Paying your rent

One of your main responsibilities as a tenant is to pay your rent regularly and on time. Your housing officer will tell you the weekly rent charge and how this charge is made up. It is important that you pay your rent when it is due, in order

to avoid rent arrears.

There are lots of different ways that you can pay your rent. These are all listed in your tenants handbook and on our website www.yhn.org.uk

And if you keep your rent account up to date, we'll enter you into a free prize draw every three months where you could win £250. And if you pay your rent by direct debit you could win £50 in a separate monthly prize draw.

Unfortunately some tenants miss rent payments, and rent arrears soon build up. If you find yourself in this situation, contact us straight away. Our Advice and Support service are able to offer help and advice to anyone who may encounter financial difficulties. The service is free and is available to all tenants. Just arrange an appointment with staff at your local community housing office.

If you do fall into rent arrears, we can agree with you how much to pay on top of your rent to clear the debt. If, however, your arrears do not go down, we will inform you that we will apply for a 'possession order' against you. This is a legal document, which means we may take your case to court. This can result in tenants being evicted from their homes. These tenants not only receive a county court judgement – a CCJ, but are responsible for court costs also, which currently exceed £100. Some tenants believe that if they are evicted they can simply apply to be re-housed by YHN, but this is not the case - even if there are children in the house. Every year a number of tenants find themselves homeless because they have not paid their rent. Don't let this happen to you or your family. If you have financial concerns, talk to us.

5 Repairs and servicing

As well as help with finances, we also provide other services to help you look after your home. We are responsible for most repairs, maintenance and servicing to your home. This includes the structure and outside of your home, any shared or communal areas, and fixtures and fittings that we have provided for you. We want to maintain your home as best we can, and rely on you to help us by reporting repairs quickly. Please note, that if you decide to buy your council home, you will then be responsible for all repairs to the property.

We must carry out safety checks on our gas appliances at least once a year to make sure they are safe. We are legally obliged to carry out this work, so you **must** allow our contractor into your home to carry out this and other important work.

All our contractors and staff carry identification, which you should ask to see. If in doubt, do not let anyone into your home.

We will do all we can to carry out repairs and services as quickly as possible, but we give repairs priority depending upon the type of work involved.

We aim to provide a high-quality service to you at all times. Sometimes, we or our contractors, get things wrong. If this happens you should contact your housing office first, so that they can try to sort out the problem. We welcome your comments, ideas and suggestions for improving our service. However, if you're still not satisfied, you can make a formal complaint. You can get a complaints form from any of our offices.

If you damage, misuse or neglect your home then you will be liable for the cost of putting this right and we may take legal action to repossess your home, or to recover the costs.

You'll find details of repairs and servicing in your tenant's handbook.

6 Your estate

To help maintain the overall appearance of the area where you live, we are responsible for regularly mowing shared grassed areas, keeping shared hedges and shrub beds neat and tidy. If you need any work doing on shared areas around your home, contact your housing office or Envirocall with the details. Phone numbers can be found in your tenant's handbook.

Most large or bulky items can be removed for you, free of charge. For further information on this service, call into any of our offices, or again contact Envirocall.

The council's Neighbourhood Services employ street wardens, rapid-response staff and a graffiti team to work on estates.

7 Breaching the Tenancy

Your Homes Newcastle want to make sure that your neighbourhood is a pleasant place to live in, and we also want you to be happy living there. Everyone has the right to live in an area that is clean, safe and pleasant. We are committed to making sure that you can enjoy your home and your neighbourhood. As a tenant you should be a good neighbour, and be responsible for your own behaviour and that of your family and visitors.

No one should have the quality of their lives spoilt by nuisance, harassment or

anti-social behaviour caused by others. This includes: loud music, dog barking, graffiti, using offensive or racist language, being violent or threatening, and causing upset and damage. All are forms of anti-social behaviour and are not acceptable. If your behaviour causes nuisance or harassment to neighbours, or to YHN staff or contractors, you will be breaking your tenancy agreement. We will take action against tenants who continue to behave in an unacceptable way.

YHN are taking steps to deal effectively with anti-social behaviour, nuisance and harassment so that residents can enjoy a comfortable and safe city to live in. If you experience any of these problems at any time during your tenancy don't suffer in silence. Tell us about it.

8 Supporting you in your home

We know that tenants have a range of varied needs and some tenants may find it difficult to maintain a home successfully.

Through YHN you have access to a range of services that allow you to successfully stay in your home for as long as you want to. These include:

- a concierge service in the multi-storey blocks, which provides reception and 24 hour monitoring of closed circuit television.
- 24 hour response alarms and sensors if you are elderly, vulnerable, disabled or have other special needs run by our Community Care Alarm Service. These are linked, by phone, to our central control room. Staff are on duty there 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, so there is always someone to answer your call.
- the Adaptations Service provides physical adaptations to the homes of people with disabilities that allow them to stay in their homes if they want to. This includes stair lifts, ramps and showers.

There's a whole host of other schemes and services that you might find useful. You'll find all these and more in your tenant's handbook.

9 Ending your tenancy and moving on

Although we hope that you enjoy living in your new home, there may come a time when you need or want a different home because your circumstances have changed.

Your tenancy handbook gives you details about what is possible and how we can continue to help you. Just remember that as your needs and circumstances change we're still here to help.

If you decide to move on from living in a council property altogether, you must give us four weeks' notice when you are moving out. You will need to fill in a 'Termination of Tenancy' form and our staff will carry out a "pre-termination inspection" of your property before you end your tenancy. Before you move out, you must do as much cleaning as you think is needed to make your home fit for someone else to move in. Do any decorating and repairs that need doing. Make sure you have paid all of your bills and your rent up to the time of moving. When you move out, turn off the gas, electric and water. Put out any rubbish for collection. Anything belonging to you left in the house we will consider as rubbish and get rid of it. If we have to pay for clearing out or cleaning up after you, we will charge you the cost. Hand your keys to your community housing office. We will give you an 'End of Tenancy' survey to fill in. We will use the information you give us to help improve our service where necessary.

10 Conclusion/end section

We hope you'll be happy in your new home. Remember if you have any questions look in your handbook, and if you have any problems let us know.