

HANDBOOK FOR TENANTS

A guide to our services



EASTSUFFOLK
COUNCIL

October 2021

Equalities for All

East Suffolk Council is committed to equality of opportunity and valuing diversity in both the provision of services and in its role as a major employer.

We believe that everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

We are committed to the elimination of unfair and unlawful discrimination in all our policies, procedures and practices.

We are determined to ensure that no member of the public receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of their age, child care or other caring responsibilities, disability, gender, HIV status, language, marital status, race, religion, sexuality, membership or non-membership of a trade union, or by any requirement which cannot be shown to be justified.



WELCOME

to your Tenants Handbook

The Housing Team has produced this Handbook with help from tenants as a guide to the services we provide. It describes your rights and responsibilities as our tenant and the Council's responsibilities as your landlord.

The contents give you information about your tenancy. If you would like any part of this handbook explained we will be happy to help.

The handbook is designed to help answer questions you may have about your tenancy, your home and neighbourhood. The handbook is a general guide for our tenants, not a legal document and we have tried to be as clear as possible. From time to time our services and policies may change and may not be reflected here, but we will keep you up to date on our website www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/housing/ and via the Tenants' Magazine.

If you would like further information about a particular subject, please contact us.

Your Housing Officer can arrange to visit you at home to discuss your tenancy if you wish.

A big thank you to all tenants who took the time to complete the surveys or attended meetings and gave their opinions and ideas on what they would like to see included in the handbook. We hope you find it useful.

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Contacting East Suffolk Council

You can contact us in a number of ways including email, via the council's website, by phone, post or at our Customer Service Centre.



By Email

For housing management issues - housing@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

For repair issues - repairs@eastsuffolk.gov.uk



Website

www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/contact-us/



By Phone

Phone (01502) 523593



By Post

Housing Services, East Suffolk Council, Riverside.
4 Canning Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR33 0EQ

Social Media Accounts



facebook.com/eastsuffolkcouncil



twitter.com/EastSuffolk

Via our Customer Services Centres

East Suffolk Council Customer Service Centre

Marina Centre, Marina, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1HH

Telephone: 03330 162 000

Email: customerservices@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

Opening hours:

Monday to Wednesday - 8:45am to 5pm. Thursday - 9:30am to 5pm. Friday - 8:45am to 5pm



Beccles Library

Blyburgate, Beccles NR34 9TB

Opening hours:

Monday and Tuesday - 9.30am to 5:00pm. Wednesday - 9.30am to 1:00pm.

Thursday and Friday - 9.30am to 5:00pm

This office is closed from 1:00pm to 2:00pm



Woodbridge Library

New Street, Woodbridge IP12 1DT

Opening hours:

Monday to Wednesday - 8.45am to 5:00pm. Thursday - 9.30am to 5.00pm.

Friday - 8.45am to 5.00pm



Felixstowe Library

Crescent Road, Felixstowe IP11 7BY

Opening hours:

Monday: 10:00am to 4:00pm Tuesday to Friday: 9:00am to 5:00pm

Emergencies

In case of an emergency please contact one of the following numbers

Gas Leaks CADENT 0800 111 999

Power Cuts Dial 105

Anglian Water 0800 771 881

Essex & Suffolk Water 0345 7820 999



For emergency property repairs telephone:

During office hours: 01502 523593

Outside of office hours: 0800 440 2516

The Housing Management Team

The housing management team deals with enquiries from tenants regarding rent account management and rent arrears, neighbourhood problems and estate management. They can also help and advise if you are struggling financially.

Neighbourhood Manager:		
Jody Pallet	Jody.Pallet@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	01502 523120
Income and Service Charge Manager:		
Jo Barber	Jo.Barber@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	01502 523516
Housing Officers:		
Angie Woodrow	Angie.Woodrow@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	07979 721838
Jemma Lethbridge	Jemma.Lethbridge@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	07584 445558
Liam Poole	Liam.Poole@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	07500 995544
John Barber	John.Barber@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	07881 674825
Rio Herrod	Rio.Herrod@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	07502 929016
Simon Huggins	Simon.Huggins@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	07477 456580
Anti Social Behaviour Officer – Housing:		
Ian Richardson – Please contact Customer Services in the first instance.		
Income Officers:		
Myles O’Conner	Myles.Oconner@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	01502 523126
Tracey Blowers	Tracey.Blowers@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	01502 523122
Angela Felton	Angela.Felton@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	01502 523577
Karen Burroughs	Karen.Burroughs@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	01502 523124
Tenancy Engagement Officers:		
Trudi Robinson	Trudi.Robinson@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	01502 523519 07586 811897
Leah Anderson	Leah.Anderson@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	01502 523165 07350 372092
Financial Inclusion Officers:		
Tracey Pike	Tracey.Pike@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	01502 523578
Leasehold and Service Charge Officer:		
Jack Welham	Jack.Welham@eastsuffolk.gov.uk	01502 523176

Identifying Staff

East Suffolk staff will always carry official identification. If someone says they work for us or are calling on our behalf, they will be able to show you their identity card.

If you are in any doubt call the Council on 03330 162 000

- **Never** let anyone into your home without looking at his or her identity card.
- If you are not sure, take the card and ring the organisation to confirm the caller is who they say they are.
- **Never** let a doorstep caller into your home if you are alone. Tell them you are busy and they should call back at a more convenient time, preferably when you have someone with you.



Launched on 1st February 2021, myHome East Suffolk is East Suffolk Council's online tenant portal allowing tenants to manage their tenancy online 24/7. It enables those living in council properties to manage payments, request repairs and make appointments quickly and easily.

The service is accessible at any time of day, every day of the year which means you can access it at a time most convenient for you. It also removes the need to contact the Council's Housing or Customer Services teams during office hours.

Signing up to myHome East Suffolk is quick and easy. You may already have a 'MyEastSuffolk' account which enables you to use the Council's online services at eastsuffolk.gov.uk, such as managing a garden waste subscription or reporting a missed bin. Using the same email and password, you can now sign up for myHome East Suffolk.

To register, simply log in to your MyEastSuffolk account and click on the link for My Council Home – this will take you to the registration page which is quick and easy, using your existing MyEastSuffolk log in details. You can only access myHome if you have a MyEastSuffolk account. If you are not yet registered with MyEastSuffolk, you can sign up at my.eastsuffolk.gov.uk.

Once you have registered for myHome, you can easily view or change details about your tenancy, check rent charges and details of payments, set up direct debits, request repairs and more. You can also send messages directly to the Housing Team without any need to call or email.

Using myHome allows you to stay in control of your tenancy and resolve any problems quickly and easily.

The Housing Team are here to help so if you have any questions, please ask your Housing Officer or call us on 03330 162 000 and we'll do our best to assist you.

To register, simply log into or create your MyEastSuffolk account and follow the 'My Council Home' link using your MyEastSuffolk account details when registering.

Rent

Rent is our main source of income and we need it to carry out repairs and maintenance to your home and to provide you with services. Service charges, where applicable, are paid at the same time as your rent and include such things as grounds maintenance, emergency and communal lighting, communal cleaning and window cleaning. Council tax, gas, electricity, water and other charges are payable direct to the relevant organisations.

How to pay your rent

Direct Debit

Did you know it is the cheapest and most secure way to make regular payments?

We strongly encourage paying by monthly direct debit from your bank account, just ask your Housing Officer to send you a form.

Use your Plastic “swipe” card

This can be used at any **Post Office branch** or at any **Payzone retailer**. Show your card when making your payment – you will be given a receipt.

Online

We accept credit and debit card payments 365 days of the year.

You can pay your Housing Rent or Council Tax via our online payment system:

www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/make-a-payment

Telephone

You can pay by telephone using the same methods as the online payments.

Please call 03330 162 000 and select option 1 – calls are charged at a local rate

Before you call, please make sure that you have the bills you want to pay and your credit or debit card to hand. Please note that these systems are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Rent Arrears

Paying your rent is crucial in order to keep your home. Your tenancy agreement sets out that you can pay by direct debit in advance or by other methods as indicated to you by the Council. Your rent is charged weekly and is due on the Monday of each week.

If you do not pay your rent, you cannot keep your home.

You must keep your Rent Officer informed of any difficulties you have in paying your rent.

The important thing is to get advice before rent arrears become too large.

If you fall into rent arrears, your rent statement will show in arrears and your rent arrears officer will contact you in order to discuss your financial situation and will try to make an agreement for you to pay off arrears at an amount that is affordable to you.

What happens if I do not deal with my rent arrears?

If you do not deal with your rent arrears and they only increase then you are at risk of losing your home. We will always try and work with you in order to stop this happening and we will avoid if at all possible to evict you from your home. We will make every effort to engage with you but we will take legal action and take you to the County Court if you fail to address your arrears.

Free Independent Advice

In all our attempts to engage with you we will always advise you to seek independent advice about your arrears and other debts you may have:

- Citizens Advice - www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- National Debtline – Telephone 0800 8084000 or www.nationaldebtline.org
- Money Advice Service - www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

Other Services;

- Job Centre Plus for Universal Credit claims - www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus
- Housing Options - housing.needs@eastssuffolk.gov.uk

Universal Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit

What is it?

Council Tax Benefit (CTB)

Council Tax benefit is awarded to people on low income to help with payment of Council Tax. It is a Social Security benefit administered by East Suffolk. It is paid by direct credit to your Council Tax account.

Housing Benefit (HB)

Housing Benefit is money paid to people on low income who live in rented homes. It is a Social Security benefit administered by East Suffolk Council. This is paid weekly and is credited onto your rent account.

Universal Credit (UC)

Universal Credit rolls the following benefits in to one monthly payment that is paid directly to you:

- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Housing Benefit
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Income Support

If you're already claiming these benefits, your local Jobcentre Plus or Tax Credits office will tell you when you have to move to Universal Credit.

When on Universal Credit all the above benefits will stop. You will now get Universal Credit instead.

You may be able to claim Universal Credit if you're on a low income or out of work.

Who can claim?

Anyone who is liable to pay Council Tax or rent for his or her property can make a claim.

However, people who live with close members of their family cannot claim Housing Benefit.

NOTE: People with savings in excess of £16,000 cannot claim benefit. If you have any queries about entitlement and the benefit system and you should speak to your rent officer for more information.

How do I claim?

You must complete the Council's Council Tax/Housing Benefit claim form which is an online application found on the Council's website.

If you receive Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance (Income based) the Benefits Agency will notify East Suffolk Council that you are entitled to Council Tax/Housing Benefit, but you should still fill in the Council's own form.

You must tell the Council Tax and Housing Benefit Department if anyone leaves or joins your household or if there are any other changes in your circumstances e.g. returning to work; going into hospital etc. Changes may affect the amount of benefit you are paid.

If you have been in receipt of Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance (Income based) for 6 months or more you **may** be entitled to 4 weeks extra benefit (Housing Benefit Run On).

The Department of Works and Pension should advise you of this entitlement.

For Universal Credit you can only apply online at www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit. You will need to have an email address and a bank account. For more information visit www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk and click on 'Benefits'.

What can I claim for?

CTB – You can claim for your current Council Tax. Payments do not cover court costs, bailiff fees etc.

HB/UC – You can claim for rent and associated service charges depending on the type of accommodation in which you live, or your own special circumstances.

How are my benefits worked out?

CTB – If you receive Income Support/Job Seekers Allowance (Income based) you will usually receive maximum CTB if you are liable to pay Council Tax. Those who do not receive one of these benefits will be subjected to a means test. The Council compares your income against figures set by the government. If your income is the same or less than these figures you will receive maximum benefit. If your income is more than these figures your CTB will be reduced proportionally.

HB – The method of calculating Housing Benefit is exactly the same as for CTB above.

UC – This is also a means tested benefit and is assessed and awarded by the Department for Works and Pensions.

Why am I not getting all my Council Tax paid?

- Your income is higher than the Government's rate for someone in your circumstances.
- Your Council Tax includes something for which you cannot claim e.g. arrears of Council Tax, Court costs; bailiff's fees etc.
- You have someone over the age of 18 living with you. (This is called a "non-dependant deduction" and varies according to the income of that person).
- Your property is rated above Band E – CTB is restricted above this level.
- You should be given a full written explanation on your notification letter.

Childcare costs

Some of your income can be ignored if you are paying for a registered child minder or nursery care whilst working. Ask for more details.

Why am I not getting all my rent paid?

- Your income is higher than the Government's rate for someone in your circumstances.
- Your rent includes something for which you cannot get HB e.g. water charges, heating costs etc.
- The Rent Officer has applied a "Rent Restriction".
- You have someone over the age of 18 living with you, (this is called a "non-dependant deduction" and varies according to the income of that person).
- If you are under 25 your HB will be restricted to the cost of a room in a shared house.
- You should be given a full written explanation on your notification letter.
- Have you been paid too much Universal Credit/Housing/Council Tax Benefit?

The Council should not always ask you to repay CTB/HB that has been overpaid. In special cases the Council can use its discretion and not ask for repayments. You should be given a full written explanation of how the overpayment arose.

Repayment of a UC overpayment will be at the discretion of the DWP.

Overpayments of benefit are not arrears!

Special circumstances (Discretionary Hardship Payments)

If you receive CTB/HB/UC, you can ask the Council to use its discretion to pay more benefit. You must apply in writing giving reasons why you think you are suffering hardship the Council cannot pay more than your actual Council Tax or rent.

However, an overpayment can be recovered from current Housing Benefit. In this case payments must be made to your rent account to avoid increasing rent arrears.

Unhappy with the decision?

If you disagree with Council's assessment of your CTB/ HB, you should write to the Council and ask them to revise the decision. You must ask for a revision within 28 days of getting your decision, unless you have special reasons for being late.

For Universal Credit decisions you will need to contact the DWP.

Decision unchanged or still not happy?

If you are still not happy with the decision after the revision you can make an appeal. You must write to the Council within 28 days (unless you have a good reason for being late) stating the reason why you want to appeal. An Independent Tribunal hears appeals.

For Universal Credit appeals you will need to contact the DWP.

Other ways to lower your Council Tax bill

- If a member of your family has a disability it may be that your Council Tax banding can be reduced.
- If you live alone you can apply for a 25% discount (you may be considered as living alone even though there are other people living with you, as some people are discounted for Council Tax purposes e.g. students; people under 18).
- If you share your home with someone else that has a lower income than you, this person should be assessed for CTB instead of you. (Partners cannot claim for this!).

Benefit Fraud

Most people getting payments from Universal Credit/Housing Benefits to assist with their rent and council tax are in genuine need. However there are people who don't provide the Council with correct information about their personal circumstances or fail to declare a change in their personal circumstances, which they are obliged to tell us.

- Benefit fraud is committed when a person knowingly gives false or misleading information to obtain a payment to which they are not entitled.
- Or to obtain a greater payment than that to which they are not entitled.
- Or to obtain a greater payment than that to which they are entitled.

If an incorrect payment or fraud of some kind has been detected, the customer will be contacted about this and asked to explain why it happened. If this results in an overpayment of benefit, a debt will be raised for the incorrect amount and it will have to be repaid. In certain circumstances the customer may be prosecuted.

If you know of or suspect someone committing benefit fraud you can:

- Complete the online benefit reporting form
- Call our free to phone "Hotline" (0800 328 6340) between 8.30 a.m. and 6.30 p.m.
- Text us on 0800 328 6341
- Email information to: benefits@eastssuffolk.gov.uk

Repairs

We are responsible for maintaining the structure and exterior of your home in a reasonable state of repair.

This includes:

- The structure and fabric of your home i.e. roofs, walls, external doors, window frames and glazing, ceilings and plaster work, drains, gutters etc.
- The services within your home including water, gas, electricity, baths, sinks, toilets, heating and water heating (installed by the Council or where we have accepted responsibility).
- Communal areas; which include common entrance doors, entrance halls, stairs, landings, lifts, communal TV aerials, shared gardens, parking areas and entry phones.

Gas Servicing

We are obliged by law to service any gas appliance we have installed in your home, we will also visually check any of your own gas appliances – this is important and could save your life.

East Suffolk Council and their gas contractor Gasway will contact you with an appointment for the next check and service in advance of the current certificate expiry date. It is important for you to tell us if you are unable to keep the appointment so that an alternative one can be arranged.

You must allow our contractors access to your home to carry out this work. It is a condition of your tenancy agreement and if you refuse, we will take legal action against you to gain access. If we do this, we will seek to recover any legal costs from you.

If you want to have a gas cooker in your home it must be installed by a Gas Safe Registered Engineer.

If you do not have a gas boiler or appliances but have oil or air sourced heat pumps instead we still need to service these annually and will follow the same procedures for gaining entry to your home to do so.

How do you request a repair?

Should you need a repair to be carried out to your home you should contact the Council by one of the following methods:

- By completing an online repair request form at www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk - **This method should not be used for reporting emergency repairs.**
- Email: - repairs@eastsuffolk.gov.uk - **This method should not be used for reporting emergency repairs.**
- Telephone: (01502) 523593.

If you are reporting a fault with your gas boiler affecting your heating/hot water, solid fuel fire or air source heat pump you need to call Gasway direct on Freephone 0800 0470120 and they will arrange an appointment time with you.

When you contact East Suffolk Council, we will ask you for your contact details and the nature of the repair. This will help us to ensure we send the right trade or contractor to your home. We will arrange a time of day (morning or afternoon) for the work to be carried out.

Think you can smell gas or have a leak?
Call **CADENT** immediately on 0800 111 999.
OPEN doors and windows
DO NOT use electric switches or naked flames.

In some circumstances a Housing Maintenance Inspector may need to inspect the fault prior to any works being ordered. Generally this is in cases where further investigation is required to identify the cause of the problem, or where there is a need to determine the extent of the works required. We will explain this when you call if it is needed.

Once the inspector has determined the cause and the extent of any repair then they will advise you of their intended course of action and the expected timescale for the remedial works to be undertaken.

Right to Repair

The Right to Repair legislation was introduced on 1 April 1994. It ensures that small urgent repairs which might affect health, safety or security are addressed quickly. If such a repair is not carried out in the time allowed by law you can ask for a second contractor to do the job. The full list of qualifying repairs is published in the tenants section of the Council's web site or can be obtained by calling us on 01502 523593.

Emergency repairs

Emergency works are those that if not undertaken speedily could pose a risk to those people within the property, or to the property itself. Examples of these include: **Burst pipes, water leaks, gas leaks, complete power failure, insecure properties or dangerous structures.**

If you need an emergency repair, please phone East Suffolk Council on 01502 523593.

Should you have a emergency repair outside of normal office hours you can contact the Council's Out Of Hours emergency service on Freephone 0800 440 2516

This service is available from:

Monday – Thursday: 5.00pm until 08.45am

Friday 4.30pm until Monday 8.45am

If we are called to attend a non emergency out of normal hours you will be charged an attendance fee of £50.

If your emergency repair relates to a breakdown of gas, air source or oil fired central heating you should contact the Council's nominated heating contractor direct on: Freephone telephone number 0800 047 0120.

Please note all heating breakdowns will only be attended if reported before 8.00pm, reports after 8.00pm will be attended the next day.

How long will the repair take?

As you will appreciate, the time taken shall be very much dependent upon the nature and extent of the work involved.

All works ordered shall be prioritised into one of the following categories:

Priority 1 – Emergency attendance within 4 hours

Priority 2 – Works should be completed within 3 working days

Priority 3 – Works should be completed within 10 working days

Priority 4 – Works should be completed within 30 working days

Priority 5 – Planned works to be completed within the financial year

We will try to get to you as soon as possible and commit ourselves to attending within a defined priority period as shown above. However we cover a large geographical area so whilst we can't guarantee an exact time we will arrange either a morning or afternoon time slot with you on a specified day for the repair to be carried out.

If your emergency repair relates to a breakdown of gas, air source or oil fired central heating you should contact the Council's nominated heating contractor direct on **Freephone telephone number 0800 047 0120**. Please note all heating breakdowns will only be attended if reported before 8.00pm, reports after 8.00pm will be attended the following day.

Chargeable Works

The Council has limited budgets to undertake repairs and improvements for tenants. We cannot budget for unexpected repairs that result from malicious or accidental damage or loss caused by tenants, their families or their guests. As such tenants must be aware that repairs of this nature will need to be paid for in full by the tenant before the council carries out any works. If the full cost of repair cannot be determined before completion we will request a payment of 50% of the estimated cost and the remainder will be requested by invoice following completion. If you prefer you are able to use alternative qualified tradesmen to carry out these repairs providing the quality of work is of an acceptable standard as determined by the Council.

Our staff will make tenants aware of this policy from the outset when a repair request is made and we will do our best to provide an indication of what the costs may be.

The Repairs Charter

We are frequently asked to carry out repairs which are the tenant's responsibility. To make things as clear as possible as to who's responsibility a repair is we have published a separate Repairs Charter for ease of reference. This is also available on the tenants section of our web page. If you would like a printed copy please call us on 01502 523593 and we will send you one.

What standard of service can you expect?

The Council undertakes to deal with your request quickly, politely and as accurately as possible based on the information that you are able to provide. Whilst works are carried out we expect our employees and contractors to ensure that your home is treated with care and respect at all times. We shall strive to ensure any works are completed on time, to a high standard and to your satisfaction.

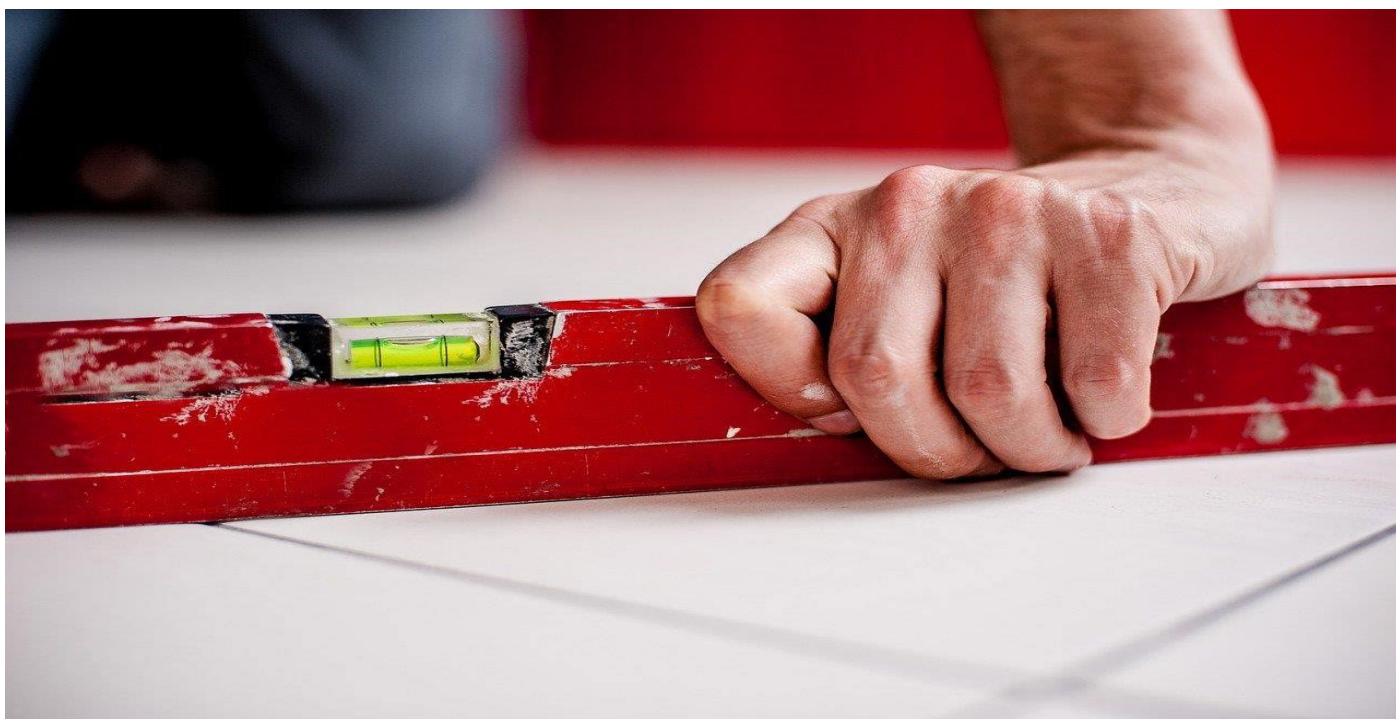
We appreciate that sometimes things do go wrong and in these circumstances it is always East Suffolk Council's priority to resolve any issues as quickly as possible. Should you have cause to complain about the service provided by East Suffolk Council please contact us as soon as possible on 01502 523593 or by following the normal complaints procedure as outlined in this handbook.

Adaptations for disabled Tenants

Should you be disabled, you may need adaptations to your home: for example – ramps, level access showers, handrails, a stair lift or a hoist for the bath, you may need to take the following steps subject to your requirements.

- The initial enquiry should be made to an Occupational Therapist at Social Services on 0808 800 4005. They will deal with your concerns and send any recommendations to us to carry out the necessary works.
- A letter from you G.P. or a referral from the hospital may also be considered.
- Minor works such as fitting grab rails, lever taps, etc. are usually carried out quite quickly.
- Any work done will be fully supervised by the Housing Services and Repairs Teams. If the adaptations required are either too costly or impractical, the Housing Services Team will find out whether a transfer is required, and if so, arrange for a Gateway to Homechoice application to be completed.

For further information or enquiries, please contact the adaptations team via email at Adaptations@eastsoffolk.gov.uk



Being a good neighbour

You and your neighbours

East Suffolk Housing is committed to ensuring that all its tenants enjoy the right to a decent and peaceful living environment, where they can enjoy their home without unnecessary disturbance from their neighbours or other people.

We will ensure that victims of nuisance or anti-social behaviour receive swift and effective support which leads to a resolution of the problem.

Nuisance and anti social behaviour

If a neighbour causes a nuisance, try to resolve the problem between yourselves. This is usually the quickest and best way to sort things out.

If the problem continues or you are afraid to contact the person concerned then please contact your Nuisance Enforcement Officer Michael Hill on 01502 523127 or 07919 113144 and at Michael.Hill@eastsoffolk.gov.uk

What we will do

We will respond to a complaint as soon as possible; contacting the complainant and those responsible for causing the problem. Often just discussing the complaint with the tenant will solve the issues. We will keep you informed of what we are doing.

We may ask you to keep a diary or record of the problem. We can only take legal action against a tenant who is in serious breach of their tenancy agreement and where there is sufficient evidence to have a good chance of succeeding in court.

There are a number of actions we can take to support you in serious cases including:

- Mediation/helping you to resolve issues
- Negotiating acceptable behaviour/parenting contracts, often with police involvement
- Negotiating Good Neighbour Agreements
- Obtaining legal injunctions to stop the behaviour
- Demoting tenancies (so they are not secure)
- Issuing notice of seeking possession and taking legal action to end the tenancy

Domestic Violence

We believe that no one should live in fear of violence or harassment from their spouse or partner or other member of their household. We are committed to a victim centred approach to reports of domestic violence and will support any tenant suffering from or threatened with domestic violence.

Incidents of domestic violence will be investigated and action taken against the guilty party. This may include taking legal action to end the tenancy or the use of other legal remedies under the Housing Act 1996 as amended, the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 and other relevant legislation. The victim's wishes and any health and safety issues will be fundamental in deciding the appropriate action.

1. You should also report the details of the nuisance to the Council's Environmental Services Team on 0333 016 2000, because they have a duty to investigate statutory nuisance, and they may be able to take some action
2. Can the Police help?
Although you should contact your Nuisance Enforcement Officer in the first instance, the Police may be able to help when officers from the Council are unavailable. Ring 999 for emergencies or 101 for non emergencies.



Compliments, Comments and Complaints

We are committed to providing excellent customer service first time, every time and we welcome feedback, positive or negative.

We recognise individuals and teams who have provided excellent service and we work hard to improve service where it is not as good as it should be.

We realise that sometimes we fall short and where customers are not satisfied so we have a clear and simple complaints process in place to put this right.

Complaints

Sometimes we make a mistake that can be sorted out quickly and simply. If this is the case you might not need to make a complaint. We will take the details and make sure that we put things right for you.

If we cannot put things right quickly and simply, we will log your complaint in line with our complaints process:

Stage 1 - Investigation

A senior officer from the service area your complaint relates to will investigate your complaint.

They will aim to reply to you in full within 15 working days. Sometimes they might need longer to make sure that your complaint is fully resolved. If it will take longer than 15 working days to reply, we will contact you to let you know.

Stage 2 - Internal review

If you are not satisfied that the council's reply to your stage 1 complaint resolves your issues, please contact us to ask for a review.

Please ask for a review within one month of our reply (for example, if our reply is sent on 28 March then you should appeal by 28 April). We will not usually investigate appeals received outside this timescale.

Be as specific as you can about what remains unresolved from your original complaint and how you would like us to resolve it

We cannot effectively review complaints without knowing what you believe is unresolved .

The Head of Service or Director for the service area your complaint relates to will review your original complaint and the stage 1 reply. They will send their report to the Chief Executive who will approve and reply to you within 20 working days. If it will take longer than 20 working days to reply, we will contact you to let you know.

If you complain about new issues which were not in your original complaint, we will investigate these as a new Stage 1 complaint.

Ombudsman

If you are not satisfied that the council's reply to your stage 2 internal review resolves your issues, you can contact the Ombudsman:

- For complaints about the council as a landlord (e.g. housing rent, repairs, maintenance) contact the Housing Ombudsman Service
- For all other complaints, contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Ombudsman will not usually investigate your complaint until you have completed the council's complaints process.

Information about you

Data Protection

As your landlord, East Suffolk Council has a legal contract with you in the form of a Tenancy Agreement.

Information provided by you about you and your household is processed and held securely and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 (and any updates).

Your information will be held in order to manage your rent account, and will only be shared as set out in our Privacy Notice.

The information we hold is kept confidential. Sensitive information, such as your ethnic origin or medical details, will be used only for purposes for which you have given your explicit consent, or for other lawful purposes (e.g. the detection and prevention of fraud).

When you contact the Housing Services Team we will ask for the property reference number in order to ensure that we are talking to the tenant.

We will hold your personal information for the entire time you are a tenant with us, and then for 6 years after your tenancy ends.

We will only share your tenancy or rent reference number with a bank or building society if you give us your signed permission (for example a signed direct debit mandate).

You are entitled to see any information we have about you, to check it is accurate and if necessary, correct it.

Further information about data protection can be found on the East Suffolk Website, or on request.



Tenant Involvement

Formal Tenant and Residents groups have existed since 1993. We encourage tenants to become more involved in the work that we do.

Any existing tenants or new tenants can become involved at any level of participation. There is a range of ways to be involved:

Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAS)

People in some areas have formed Residents groups which are open to all tenants and residents. They discuss local housing issues affecting their area and how the area can be improved. Some also organise social activities for residents and produce newsletters. Contact your Housing Officer for more information.

Tenants Forum

There is currently a Tenant's Forum. This meets four times a year at various locations. The Forum is the main formal representative council tenant's group. The Forum is made up of members from the Tenant's Associations, individual tenants who are interested in representing their immediate neighbours. This group receives all new policies proposed by the Housing Division, prior to councillor decision and is able to recommend changes.

Surveys and Questionnaires

Surveys are used to gauge satisfaction with the council and its service provision. We carry these out at frequent intervals and report findings back to the tenants.

Tenants Magazine

A group of tenants take responsibility for the production of the magazine and new members are always welcome at the discretion of the Editor. Every council property receives a copy of the tenant magazine and this is produced at least three times a year. You can get involved by writing articles, submitting photographs for the front cover or writing for our letters page.

Use of technology

Many tenants now have access to the internet and use social media to keep up to date with information. Where appropriate the council will make use of this facility but will always still provide the usual methods of communication for those who prefer it.

Expenses for tenants and training

If attending district wide meetings out of pocket expenses are available for tenant's car mileage, public transport costs, or taxi fares for those unable to take public transport. A budget for tenant training is also available to help tenants develop skills and talents to help support their work as tenant representatives.

Opportunities for Tenant Involvement

Tenants should be able to get involved at a level and in a way that best suits their needs and interests. This may be informal or formal, attending a meeting, answering questionnaires, attending community events, to receiving information or being part of an established group. If you are interested in getting involved please contact your Housing Officer.

Assistance will also be given to those wanting to start a new association in their local area, we will assist with arranging venues, gauging interest. We will provide access to staff support and resources. Please contact your Housing Officer we would love to hear from you, however small your commitment; we need your views and experiences to help us improve the service we provide.



General Information

a) Aerials/satellite dishes

If your house does not have a communal aerial or satellite dish, you may wish to provide one yourself. You should obtain written permission from the Housing Team first. You may need Planning Permission if you live in a flat for a satellite dish.

b) Buying your home

A Right to Buy application form and Information Booklet (RTB1) can be obtained online from www.direct.gov.uk/rtb1. Your property will be valued at its open market value with vacant possession, less any improvements carried out at your expense. A discount may be allowed depending on the length of time you have been a tenant.

c) Car parking

Parking on footpaths, grass verges or other land under the control of the Council is not allowed. Parking on grass and public footpaths causes expensive damage and is unsightly. You should always park carefully and not cause any obstruction.

d) Decoration

You are responsible for decorating the inside of your home. The Council is responsible for the outside of your home. If any damage is caused to your decorations or possessions due to water damage or fire you may be able to claim on your household contents insurance.

e) Door entry systems

Most communal dwellings have entry phones for security. For the safety and security of all residents, you should not allow people into the building unless you know them. Even if someone says they are visiting other tenants do not admit them, but ask them to use the entry phone. Don't leave the outside door open or jam the lock so anyone can get in.

f) Emergencies GAS / ELECTRICITY

See Emergencies section (page 8).

g) Fencing

You must not remove any part of the fencing or walls without the Council's written permission.

Front garden fences should be no higher than 1 metre (3 feet) and back garden fences no higher than 2 metres (6 feet).

Open plan front gardens and communal gardens should not have any fences, as the Council grass cutter will not cut the grass.

Hedges must not be allowed to overgrow to cause a nuisance or restrict use of footpaths.

h) Garages

To rent a garage from the Council you will need to complete an application form on our website. You may have to wait for one to become empty. You can only use the premises as a garage you must not run a business from it.

i) Gardens / Grass cutting

You must keep your garden tidy and trees and hedges must be kept in a manageable state. If you are elderly or have a disability and have difficulty keeping the grass cut, contact your Housing Officer. The Council may be able to cut the grass in the front garden up to four times a year.

j) Insurance

The Council is responsible for the building. You should insure the contents (furniture, possessions, etc.) against fire, flood and accidental damage. You should also insure for the replacing of window and door glass and the loss of keys.

k) Keys /getting locked out

The Council does NOT keep spare keys to any property. Make sure to have a spare key which you could keep with a friend or family member. You will be charged if we have to attend to change your lock as a result of lost keys.

l) Lifts

A specialist contractor and the Council's insurance company inspect all lifts on a regular basis. The Council Surveyor monitors the maintenance and repairs. Please report faults to your warden, caretaker or the Repairs section.

m) No Smoking Policy

East Suffolk Council has a No Smoking Policy in all our offices. Smoking is not permitted inside the communal areas of flats, i.e. landings, stairways, communal rooms, etc.

Tenants should also be aware that this can in certain circumstances, extend to their homes. Each council operative has the right to work in a smoke free environment whilst at work.

At times when council employees are required to work in tenants homes this is classed as a working environment, and as such tenants are politely requested to not smoke in the same room as the council employee is working. Should tenants not abide by this then the employee does have the right to refuse work in the property.

n) Loft Space

You should be aware that loft spaces are not provided for your use as part of the tenancy conditions. Loft spaces are provided solely for housing services to the property such as water and electric supplies. Tenants are therefore requested to not store items in the loft space, and should not require any access as a result.

o) Notice of Seeking Possession (NSP) Secure tenants / Notice of Possession Proceedings (NPP) Introductory tenants

If you do not keep to the Tenancy Conditions you may be served with either a Notice of Seeking Possession, or, if you have an Introductory Tenancy, a Notice of Possession Proceedings.

Having a Notice served on you for a breach of the Tenancy Conditions is the first step in legal proceedings that could mean you being evicted from your home.

To avoid legal action you must keep to the Conditions of Tenancy – for instance, by either paying the rent as and when it is due, or by not causing a nuisance.

In any circumstance, you should contact your Housing Officer without delay and come to an arrangement to avoid further problems.

p) Pets

You must not keep an animal in the dwelling where there is a communal entrance or communal garden area without permission. You must keep all pets under proper control at all times. You must not allow any pet to cause a nuisance or danger to people or other animals.

q) Sheds

You can erect a shed or greenhouse in your back garden if it measures 8ft x 6ft or less. You must get our permission in writing if you want to erect anything larger than this.

r) Short absences from your home

If you are going to be away from your home for more than four weeks, you should tell your Housing Officer. This is in case we need to do repairs at short notice or gain access in the case of an emergency.

s) Social Homebuy

Social Homebuy enables secure tenants to purchase a share in the home they currently occupy and pay rent on the share they do not own. The Council owns the remaining share (or equity) in the property, which means that both the purchasers and the Council share any increases or decreases in the property's value. You can increase your share until you eventually own the home outright. Contact the Housing Team for more details, or email: socialhomebuy@eastsoffolk.gov.uk

t) Sub-letting/Lodgers

You can sub-let to someone who pays rent to you for one or more rooms in your home and you may not enter these rooms without their permission. A sub-tenant may share some rooms (e.g. the bathroom) but will generally lead a separate life to your household. The Council cannot refuse consent to sub-let without good reason. If the Council refuses consent you must be given written reasons that you may challenge in the County Court. The Council will have to prove its case, not you. You also have the right to take in lodgers without the Council's permission.

However, taking in a lodger may affect the level of your entitlement to Housing Benefit. You are required to tell the Housing Benefit Section at The Marina that you have a paying lodger. Telephone (01502) 533436. (If you have an Introductory Tenancy, you must not take in lodgers.)

u) Working from home

You must not carry on a business or trade from your property without our written permission. Contact your Housing Officer for further advice. We won't give permission if the business you are proposing is likely to cause a nuisance or affect the residential nature of where you live to a significant extent.

v) Wheeled bin information

East Suffolk Council aim to collect your refuse on the same day every week (except where special arrangements are made for Bank Holidays). Wheeled bins are provided and should be left at the nearest accessible point to the highway on collection day. Check the East Suffolk website or telephone (01502) 527160 for details about collection days, recycling and disposal of large items such as furniture.

Please ensure that all bins are out for collection by 06:00 hours and not left on the public highway for more than 24 hours.

BLACK BIN



YES PLEASE

Turned into energy

- ✓ Bubble Wrap
- ✓ Cling Film
- ✓ Coat Hangers
- ✓ Crisp packets and food pouches
- ✓ Dust/dirt and vacuum cleaner contents (bagged)
- ✓ Film Plastic
- ✓ General/mixed household waste
- ✓ Nappies (bagged)
- ✓ Pet Waste (bagged)
- ✓ Polystyrene
- ✓ Rubber Gloves
- ✓ Scissors
- ✓ Nuts/Bolts/Screw etc.
- ✓ Toothpaste Tubes

NO THANK YOU

Please take to a Household Waste Recycling Centre

- ✗ Asbestos
- ✗ Batteries incl. car batteries
- ✗ Electricals
- ✗ Fluorescent tubes
- ✗ Gas canisters
- ✗ Garden waste
- ✗ Light bulbs
- ✗ Motor oil
- ✗ Paint tins (containing liquid)
- ✗ Rubber tyres
- ✗ Textiles and clothing

BLUE BIN



YES PLEASE

Clean, empty, dry waste
ONLY please

- ✓ Paper, newspaper, magazines and junk mail
- ✓ Cardboard, clean food packaging, boxes and cards
- ✓ Plastic bottles and tops (wash, squash and put the top back on)
- ✓ Plastic pots, tubs and food trays
- ✓ Steel and aluminium cans
- ✓ Aluminium foil
- ✓ Metal pots, pans and trays
- ✓ Cardboard cartons
- ✓ Books, paperback and hardback
- ✓ Empty aerosols (no paint, fertiliser or weed killer)

NO THANK YOU

They will spoil the recycling and
your bin will not be emptied

- ✗ Food waste
- ✗ Glass
- ✗ Textiles and clothing
- ✗ Electricals and batteries
- ✗ Nappies
- ✗ Plastic bags and film
- ✗ Polystyrene
- ✗ Crisp packets and food pouches
- ✗ Gas canisters

GREEN BIN



YES PLEASE

Garden waste ONLY please
(Fee payable)

- ✓ Grass, leaves and weeds
- ✓ Flowers and plants
- ✓ Hedge clippings
- ✓ Branches (not more than 6cm thick)
- ✓ Pruning and twigs
- ✓ Windfall fruit
- ✓ Hay/straw (bedding from non-meat eating animals only, such as rabbits)
- ✓ Vegetable waste from the garden (not kitchen waste)

NO THANK YOU

- ✗ Food or kitchen waste
- ✗ Soil
- ✗ Cat or dog faeces
- ✗ Vacuum dust or fire cinders
- ✗ Oil, stones or rubble
- ✗ Wood that has been treated or painted
- ✗ Plastic flower pots, trays or bags
- ✗ Shredded paper
- ✗ Invasive weeds such as Common Ragwort or Japanese Knotweed

Retired Living Schemes

Retired Living housing is a group of flats or bungalows specially designed and built for people who are over the age of 55.

As well as a Housing Officer who will be able to help with all your tenancy queries, each Scheme has an allocated Scheme Manager who will provide housing support and advice.

Retired Living tenants will have regular contact with their Scheme Manager which means that as your needs change, we can make sure the right support is in place so that you can remain independent for as long as possible.

Your Scheme Manager

Your Scheme Manager will visit you each week day (excluding bank holidays). You will also be provided with a pendant which is a way for you to access help in an emergency at any time of the day or night. When pressed your pendant links you to a response centre who can get help for you if you need it. Your Scheme Manager will show you how the system works and test the equipment weekly to ensure that it is working correctly.

Although your Scheme Manager will be available to provide advice and help, there are some things that they can't do such as:

- handling your money or dealing with your finances, but they will be able to help you to access the benefits you are entitled to and refer you for financial or debt advice if you need it
- giving you your medication
- lifting you if you have fallen, although they will try to make you comfortable and get help
- providing any home care service such as washing, cleaning or shopping, but they will try to help you find a service
- doing any DIY jobs, although they can help you to report repairs

Communal areas and activities

Many of our sheltered schemes have communal areas where you have the opportunity to meet up with friends and join in with activities such as Coffee Mornings, Lunch Clubs, Musical Entertainment and Bingo. Your Scheme Manager will show you around the communal areas and keep you informed about the activities which may vary from scheme to scheme. We also welcome older people from the wider community to our activities.

Your information

For us to provide you the services you need, we may need to share your personal information with other people. This may be other Council departments and organisations that provide services on our behalf. These providers have a duty to keep your information secure.

If we need to share your sensitive confidential information onto a third party we will only do so with your prior explicit consent or where we are legally required to do so. We may be required to share information when necessary to prevent risk of harm to you or another individual.

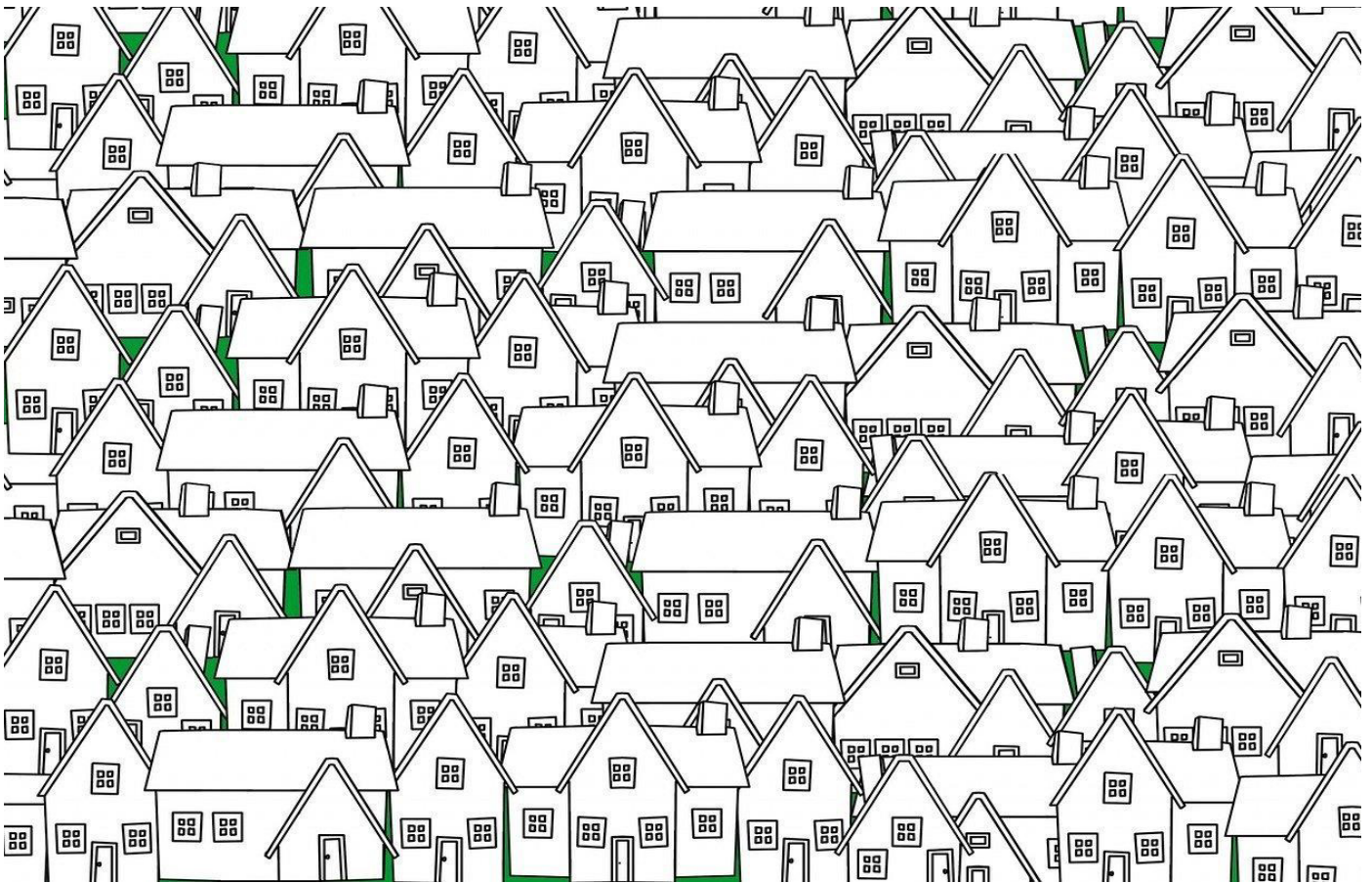
Mutual Exchange / Transfer

House Exchange is a website that has been designed to bring people together who are looking to swap their home. Using the site is easy and free.

Visit www.houseexchange.org.uk and complete your details online. Once you have registered, your details will be approved; your property will appear on the database and you will be able to search for specific properties, for people who want your property or search for a match both ways. It is also possible to conduct a three way search.

If you do not have internet access at home you can access the website at any library in the East Suffolk area as well as at the Marina Centre, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 1HH.

Once forms have been completed by all parties your housing officer will oversee the process. No exchange can take place until it has been authorised by an officer at East Suffolk.



Permission required

What do you need permission for?

There are many things that tenants would like to do with their property that require authorisation from the council. It is very important that you seek permission in writing for any changes beyond simple decorating. Failure to do so may put you in breach of your tenancy agreement.

What sort of changes require permission?

This list is not exhaustive but includes the most commonly asked for permissions:

- Satellite dish installation
- Sheds / Greenhouses larger than 8ft x 6ft
- Changes to fences and garden walls
- Painting external walls
- Patios / decking
- Hardstanding / driveways
- Changing internal fixtures such as doors, light switches, kitchens or bathroom suites
- The keeping of non domestic animals in the garden such as chickens
- Conservatories
- Working from home
- Property extensions
- Fish ponds
- External lighting

Will permission be granted?

Whilst permission for the majority of requests is granted this cannot be guaranteed. This is why it is very important to seek permission before you go ahead with any changes. Upon receipt of a request, your Housing Officer or Building Supervisor may call and see you to discuss your plans. You will always receive written confirmation of our decision.



Ending your Tenancy

If you intend to end your tenancy and are not moving to another home owned by East Suffolk you must do the following:

You must:

- Give four weeks' notice in writing of your intention to give up the tenancy (this is known as terminating your tenancy) and give us a forwarding address. A Termination Notice must be completed and signed by the tenant(s). A Termination Notice can be obtained from any East Suffolk Office or your Housing Officer.
- The tenancy must end on a Sunday (the law requires this)
- On the Monday your tenancy ends, the keys must be returned to any Council Office or to The Marina, Marina, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1HH before 10.00 a.m. You may be charged another weeks rent if you do not do so.
- Remove your belongings and any rubbish from the property and garden. You will be recharged for any debris and belongings East Suffolk have to remove
- Pay any rent and service charges up to the date your tenancy ends.
- Leave the premises and all fixtures and fittings in good condition.
- Pay for any work to repair damage that you have caused in your home.
- Contact the gas, electricity and water companies to give them your meter readings.
- Contact the telephone company to end your account.
- If applicable inform the Housing Benefit in addition to the Council Tax department (Revenues & Benefits Teams)

