

CONTENTS

1. [INTRODUCTION](#)

2. [OUR SERVICE STANDARDS](#)

3. [CONTACTING US](#)

4. [ABOUT YOUR TENANCY](#)

What is a secure tenancy?

What is an introductory tenancy?

What is a joint tenancy?

How do I convert my sole tenancy into a joint tenancy?

How do I take my name off a joint tenancy?

What is my tenancy agreement?

What are my principal rights as a secure tenant?

What are my principal responsibilities as a tenant?

Can I keep pets?

Can I run a business from my home?

How do I end my tenancy?

5. [MAINTAINING YOUR HOME](#)

Who is responsible for maintaining my home?

How do I report a repair?

What should I do if I suspect a gas leak?

What are programmed works?

What if my home needs large-scale repairs or refurbishment?

What is the Right to Repair Scheme?

Can I carry out improvements and alterations to my home?

What if I need my property adapted due to a disability?

Can I get involved in Housing Maintenance policy?

Who is responsible for maintaining my garden?

Can I cut down a tree in my garden?

Can I park on my garden?

Can I rent a garage?

Who maintains communal areas?

Who insures my possessions?

6. **PAYING YOUR RENT**

How is my rent calculated?
When do I need to pay my rent?
How do I pay my rent?
Where can I pay my rent?
Why should I pay rent?
What is Housing Benefit?
What happens if my rent falls into arrears?
What are former tenant arrears?

7. **WORKING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY**

Encouraging Community Involvement

What types of involvement are there?
Can I be involved?
What support is available for tenant participation?
I want to be involved - what do I do now?

Reducing Crime and Feeling Safe

Who is responsible for the security of my home?
Who deals with neighbour disputes?
What is harassment?
What is anti-social behaviour?

8. **MOVING HOME**

Who do I contact if I want to move to a different property?
What are choice based lettings?
What is a transfer?
How long will I have to wait for an offer?
How many offers will I receive?
Can I move if I have rent arrears?
Will my present home be inspected?
Can I get help with moving?
What if the property I am offered needs decorating?
What work does the Council carry out when a property is empty?
What is a mutual exchange?
How do I go about finding an exchange partner?
What do I do once I have found an exchange partner?
Can I exchange to another part of the Country?

9. **SERVICES FOR OLDER TENANTS**

What is sheltered housing?
What does a Supported Housing Officer do?
What is the Community Alarm Network?
Can I get help transferring into sheltered accommodation?
What is the Supporting People charge?

10. **BUYING YOUR HOME**

Is it possible to purchase my home?

What discount would I get?

How do I apply to purchase my home?

What is rent to mortgage?

11. **MAKING A COMPLAINT**

1. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to your copy of the 2005/2006 Tenants' Handbook.

We hope that you find this handbook useful and that it helps you to make the most of your tenancy.

Our aim is to provide you and your household with information on the rights and responsibilities of your tenancy and the services provided for you by the Housing Service.

If you have been a tenant for some time you may not have received an updated handbook for several years and much of the information in the old handbook will now be out of date. To avoid this happening again it is our intention to supply you with an updated handbook every year.

Using this Handbook:

The information in this handbook covers the services provided for you by the Housing Service.

We have tried to provide answers to the questions we are most frequently asked. We hope that you will find the query you would like answered in the Contents section on the pages to follow.

If the information given doesn't answer your enquiry or your question is not covered please use the telephone numbers provided to contact us.

If you have any comments or questions relating to this guide please let us know by contacting:

The Tenant Participation Team

Housing Management Service
Dacorum Borough Council
Civic Centre
Hemel Hempstead
Herts
HP1 1HH

Telephone: **01442 228961/966**

Email: **tenantparticipation@dacorum.gov.uk**

2. OUR SERVICE STANDARDS

We believe that you, our customer, deserve our enthusiasm and commitment. We want you to benefit fully from the Housing Service and be comfortable about contacting us. We have therefore adopted the following service standards:

We will ensure that our service responds effectively to your needs by:

- Listening carefully to your request and ensuring the correct level of priority is given to your circumstances.
- Arranging the delivery of our service at a time that is mutually convenient, understanding that your time is important and that you will have other commitments.
- Trying to overcome barriers imposed by disability, family circumstances or language.
- Dealing with someone you have authorised to act on your behalf.
- Taking full note of any comments or complaints you bring to our attention. (See section 11)

If you contact us by telephone we will:

- Aim to answer within three rings.
- Introduce ourselves with a friendly greeting, and endeavour to remain friendly and helpful throughout the conversation.
- Try to deal with your enquiry ourselves or explain the situation and forward you to a colleague more able to answer your enquiry.
- Transfer our telephone to a colleague who will be able to help or take a message if we are out of the office.
- Try to call back within one working day if you leave a message.
- Advise you of what response you can expect as a result of your call.

If you write to us we will:

- Respond within five working days of receiving your letter.
- Acknowledge your letter and aim to provide a full response within ten days if we are unable to give you a full response within five working days.
- Advise you of the action we intend to take in our response and give you the name and telephone number of the officer dealing with your enquiry.

In literature we send to you we will:

- Make any documents as readable as possible, easily understandable and free from jargon.
- At your request, provide the document in a different form that makes it easier for you to read and understand (for example larger print or in another language).

If you ask us to repair your property we will:

- Offer you an appointment for the work that adequately reflects the urgency of the work required.
- Take account (where possible) of any access restrictions you have advised us of.

For your security we will:

- Wherever practical, notify you in advance of when we intend calling.
- Ensure that we and any of our contractors, wear identity badges containing photographs.
- Only use your personal details for the purpose you gave them.

3. CONTACTING US

CORRESPONDENCE

If you wish to contact the Housing Service, you can write to us at either:

**The Housing Service
Dacorum Borough Council
Civic Centre
Marlowes
HEMEL HEMPSTEAD
Herts
HP1 1HH**

**The Housing Service
Dacorum Borough Council
Civic Centre
High Street
BERKHAMSTED
Herts
HP4 3HD**

OFFICE VISITS

If you would prefer to speak to someone in person you can visit us at either:

- **The One Stop Shop**
Located on the ground floor of the Civic Centre, Hemel Hempstead.
- **The Housing Reception**
Based on the first floor in the Berkhamsted Civic Centre (a lift is available).

Office opening hours are:

- Monday to Thursday 8.45am to 5.15pm
- Fridays 8.45am to 4.45pm

If you wish to speak to a specific member of staff please telephone them in advance to check their availability and make a specific appointment. Private interview facilities are available.

EMAIL

To contact a member of staff by email, please use:

firstname.surname@dacorum.gov.uk

TELEPHONE

All telephone numbers start with the area code **01442**.

HOUSING MANAGEMENT - AREA TEAMS

East Team

Areas covered include: **Adeyfield, Bennetts End, Grovehill, Highfield, Leverstock Green, Nash Green, Northend, Town Centre and Woodhall Farm**

Contact	Concerning	Telephone
Tenant Services Officers	Tenancy Issues, complaints, mutual exchanges, Tenants Removal Scheme	228898
Recovery Officers	Rent arrears recovery, recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments	228841
Debit Control Officers	Direct Debits, payment enquiries	228417 228409
Assistant Performance & Admin Manager		228832
Administration Officers	General enquiries	228424 228833
	Garage allocations, garage waiting list	228424 228433

West Team (Based at Hemel Hempstead Civic Centre)

Areas covered include: **Apsley, Boxmoor, Chaulden, Flamstead, Gadebridge, Markyate and Warners End**

Contact	Concerning	Telephone
Tenant Services Officers	Tenancy Issues, complaints, mutual exchanges, Tenants Removal Scheme	228489
Recovery Officers	Rent arrears recovery, recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments	228461
Debit Control Officers	Direct Debits, payment enquiries	228417 228409
Administration Officers	General enquiries	228424 228304 228460
	Garage allocations, garage waiting list	228424 228433

West Team (Based at Berkhamsted Civic Centre)

Areas covered include: **Aldbury, Berkhamsted, Bovington, Chipperfield, Gaddesden Row, Great Gaddesden, Little Gaddesden, Long Marston, Northchurch, Potten End, Tring, Wigginton and Wilstone**

Contact	Concerning	Telephone
Tenant Services Officers	Tenancy Issues, complaints, mutual exchanges, Tenants Removal Scheme	228947
Recovery Officers	Rent arrears recovery, recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments	228938
Housing Advisors	General housing advice, garage waiting list	228941

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE (All areas)

All Housing Repairs

Call free of charge (24 hours)

08000 186050

Emergencies only between 6.30pm and 8am and at weekends or Bank Holidays (please note that your call may be recorded)

MAINTENANCE

Contact	Concerning	Telephone
Surveyor	Structural Repairs	228458
Surveyor	Planned improvements and window replacement	228468
Maintenance Officer	Kitchen and bathroom project, electrical equipment (rewiring, etc.)	228248
Maintenance Officer	Kitchen and bathroom project, heating installations	228336
Maintenance Officer	General maintenance inspections	228437
Maintenance Manager		228639
Voids Team Manager	Empty properties	228257

TENANT PARTICIPATION (All areas)

Contact	Concerning	Telephone
Tenant Participation Officers	Tenants and Residents Associations, Street/Block/Village Voices, Focus Groups, Housing Advisory Panel	228961 228966

ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (All areas)

Contact	Concerning	Telephone
ASB Tenant Services Officers	Anti-Social Behaviour	228820 228834

OTHER HOUSING SERVICE SECTIONS

Contact	Concerning	Telephone
Elderly Services	Sheltered housing, Community Alarm Network	228347
Landscape Officer	Maintenance of communal amenity areas	228529
Housing Needs Officer	Housing allocations	228080
Senior Housing Needs Officer	Housing allocations	228848
Housing Needs Manager	Housing allocations	228436
One Stop Shop (Hemel Hempstead)	General housing Information/forms	228638
Housing Reception (Berkhamsted)	General housing Information/forms	228942
Insurance Administration Assistant	Home contents insurance scheme	228960

4. ABOUT YOUR TENANCY

What is a secure tenancy?

After the first twelve months most tenancies become secure. Secure means that you have rights laid down by Parliament which you hold for as long as you occupy the property and your tenancy continues.

What is an introductory tenancy?

To help create the peaceful and settled living conditions we aim to achieve on our estates, introductory tenancies impose a one year trial period for new tenants.

When you are offered your first tenancy with this Council it will be offered on an introductory basis unless you have previously held a secure tenancy with another Council or an assured or secure tenancy with a Housing Association.

Introductory tenancies last for twelve months and, provided that the tenancy is conducted in a satisfactory manner, a secure tenancy follows automatically. During your introductory tenancy you will have similar rights to those held by our secure tenants but the tenancy can be ended by the Council if you breach the terms of your tenancy agreement.

What is a joint tenancy?

If you have a joint tenancy this means that both you and your partner are responsible for ensuring that terms of the tenancy agreement are met (even if the other joint tenant leaves).

A sole tenancy is where there is only one named tenant.

How do I convert my sole tenancy into a joint tenancy?

If you are a sole tenant and you want your partner to be offered a joint tenancy you can request this by completing a joint tenancy application form. Both of you will need to sign the form. We would consider the circumstances of your request, taking into account the length of time that you had lived together. We would not normally grant a joint tenancy to a son, daughter or other relative.

How do I take my name off a joint tenancy?

If either of you want to end your tenancy you should contact your Tenant Services Officer. One joint tenant ending the tenancy has the effect of ending the tenancy for both of you. If requested, we will then decide if a new tenancy should be offered to the remaining former joint tenant.

We will always convert the joint tenancy into a sole tenancy if we are instructed to do so by the County Court following a divorce or legal separation.

What is my Tenancy Agreement?

Your tenancy agreement is the legally binding contract upon which your tenancy was granted.

It is important that you keep your copy of the agreement safe and refer to it if you have any doubts about your rights or obligations.

The terms of your tenancy agreement can only be amended with your prior approval, or in ways detailed by Parliament.

What are my principal rights as a Secure Tenant?

▪ To occupy the property

You can live in the property for as long as you wish, or until you are instructed to leave by a Court Order granted against you. We would only seek a Court Order as a last resort and for a very serious breach of your tenancy agreement.

▪ Security of tenure

Provided that you remain living in the property, your tenancy will continue until you choose to end it, or it is ended by legal action.

▪ One succession

If you did not originally obtain your tenancy by taking over a relative's tenancy when they died, on your death your tenancy will pass to a joint tenant (if there is one) or to your partner (or someone that had been living with you as a partner at the time of your death). If you have no surviving joint tenant or partner, another member of your family can ask to take over your tenancy provided that they have lived with you for at least 12 months prior to your death and have used the property as their only or principal home. Any successor may be asked to move to smaller accommodation if your home is significantly larger than their requirements.

- **Right to take in lodgers**

When you become a secure tenant you have the right to take in lodgers provided that this does not overcrowd the property **and that you inform us when your lodger(s) move in or move out**. You must also tell the Finance Department if you receive Housing Benefit and the Benefits Agency if you receive any other benefits.

- **Tenancy exchange**

You can exchange your tenancy with another tenant of this authority, or of another local authority or of a registered Housing Association provided that you have obtained the approval of both landlords before doing so. The accommodation would need to be appropriate for the family intending to move into it and you would need to be free from rent arrears or any other breaches of your tenancy conditions. If you are an introductory tenant the terms of your introductory tenancy continue until the original twelve months have elapsed. Introductory tenants do not have the right to exchange but we may still consider your application.

- **Right to apply to transfer**

You have the right to apply to move to another Council property by joining the Council's Combined Housing List. If you are an introductory tenant the terms of your introductory tenancy continue until the original twelve months have elapsed.

- **Right to buy**

When you become a secure tenant you may have the right to buy (leasehold in the case of a flat or maisonette) the property from us. We would not normally sell a property built or adapted for the use of an elderly or disabled person. If you are an introductory tenant you will not be able to apply to buy until after you have completed your introductory tenancy, although this period will count in calculating your discount. (See section 10)

- **To carry out alterations and improvements**

You have the right to make alterations or improvements to the property provided that you have sought and obtained our prior written approval (which we will not unreasonably withhold) and any other Planning or Building Regulation approvals that may be required.

- **Compensation for improvements**

At the end of your tenancy, you can claim compensation for certain major improvements that you have made to your home with our approval. Details of the eligible improvements and how compensation is calculated are contained in our leaflet Compensation for Tenant's Improvements, available on request.

- **Right to repair**

You have the right to request a different contractor and, in some cases, to receive compensation, if we fail to complete certain repairs within given timescales. Details are set out in the Repairs Notice you receive when you order work.

- **Right to view personal information**

You can view the personal information on our records relating to you or your household. You should make your request in writing, giving seven days notice. The permission of third parties may need to be obtained before you are able to see documents supplied by them. The Council complies with the terms of the Data Protection Acts and the Freedom of Information Act 2003.

- **Right to be consulted**

We will consult with you, both as an individual and/or as a member of a recognised group, on any issues of housing policy and practice which affect your tenancy, your home or your local neighbourhood.

- **Right of involvement**

You can start or join a Tenants and Residents Association. Such groups can focus and report the views of local residents in order that we can take them into account when deciding housing management policies. You have the right to attend meetings of the Council's Committees as an observer. You may also, subject to certain conditions (including giving notice in advance), speak directly to a Committee on an issue that affects you.

What are my principal responsibilities as a tenant?

- **To live in the property**

As a tenant it is necessary for you to occupy the property as your only or principal home. Your tenancy will end if you fail to do so. It is not possible to allow another person to occupy the property in your absence without our prior knowledge and agreement.

If you have to be away from your property for more than three weeks please inform your Tenant Services Officer. We can then put routine repairs or inspections on hold until your return. In winter, at your request, we can (on a

rechargeable basis) drain down your property before you go away to avoid it freezing and refill the water and heating system on your return.

In your absence we reserve the right in an extreme emergency to gain access to your property and carry out essential repairs needed to prevent injury to any person or extensive damage to property. We also reserve the right upon prior written notice to you to enter the property to carry out essential servicing of a gas appliance.

- **To pay your rent**

Your rent is due on the Monday of each week and is payable in advance. If you miss one or more rent payments please contact us straightaway and let us know the reason and how you intend making up the missed payments. It is very important that we reach agreement for the payment of arrears as continued failure to pay your rent could lead to the loss of your home.

If you are on a low income, the Council may be able to help with Housing Benefit which could reduce the rent you have to pay.
(See section 6)

- **To avoid causing problems to other residents**

You must avoid causing nuisance to others by any act or neglect on your part or on the part of your household, visitors or pets.
(See section 7)

- **To ensure that the property is well maintained**

You should promptly report to us any repairs required in your home that are not your responsibility. You are responsible for minor internal repairs and any disrepair that has been caused by you, your family or visitors. You are also responsible for maintaining good internal decoration.

We help our elderly tenants in designated elderly persons' flats and bungalows with internal decorations on a regular cycle.
(See section 5)

- **To maintain your garden**

If you have a garden allocated to you with your tenancy, it is your responsibility to prevent it from causing nuisance to your neighbours or becoming an eyesore. Under the terms of your tenancy agreement we can, if it becomes necessary, carry out essential maintenance work to your garden and recharge you our costs. We would only do this if you have failed to correct a problem that we had previously brought to your attention.
(See section 5)

Can I keep pets?

You are allowed to keep up to two domestic pets without our approval if you live in a house or one domestic pet if you live in a flat, bedsit or maisonette.

You must not keep a cat or dog if you live in a sheltered flat with access from a communal corridor.

You will need our approval to keep livestock or fowl and we will only give it in special, rural, circumstances.

You should not keep any pet in circumstances that cause it distress, suffering or injury. We will ask that you permanently remove from your property any pet that persistently:

- roams unattended
- causes noise nuisance
- suffers neglect
- damages or fouls communal areas
- threatens aggression

Your refusal to remove a pet after our permission is withdrawn would be a breach of your tenancy agreement and could cause us to take steps towards ending your tenancy.

We would recommend that you insure your pets against third party claims.

Can I run a business from my home?

You must obtain our written approval before carrying out any business from your home (please write seeking approval from the Tenant Services Manager for your area).

We are unlikely to approve any business that could cause nuisance or annoyance to your neighbours or that would require adaptation of the property.

You should not display any trade signs on your property or use your address in any advertisements that would attract regular visitors to the property.

How do I end my tenancy?

You can end your tenancy by giving four weeks notice in writing to the Council ending on a Monday. A Tenancy Termination form is available by post or from our Housing Reception areas in either the Hemel Hempstead or Berkhamsted Civic Centres. This must be signed by the tenant, or at least one (preferably both) of the joint tenants.

During the notice period you must allow our staff to inspect the property. You will be advised of any work that is needed to make good decorations or repairs before you leave (if this work is not carried out we can re-charge you our costs for doing the work).

On the day your tenancy ends you must ensure that all keys to the property are returned to the Housing Service by noon at the latest. If you do not return the keys on time we will charge you extra weeks' rent for each week, or part week, until they are returned.

Please leave the property clean and tidy, ensure that gas and electricity meters are read and supplies have been turned off. Please also ensure that the property is left secure.

5. MAINTAINING YOUR HOME

Who is responsible for maintaining my home?

We have agreed in your tenancy agreement that the responsibility for maintaining your home in good condition should be divided between us as follows:

We are responsible for:

the maintenance of the structure and services within your home, including:

- walls, floors, ceilings and roofs
- chimneys (other than routine sweeping)
- gutters and outside pipes
- electrical wiring, gas installations, water and soil pipes
- central heating and water heating*
- kitchen fixtures and sinks*
- bathroom fixtures and sanitary ware*
- external and internal doors*
- window frames*
- integral garages, sheds and stores*
- boundary walls and fences* (not between gardens)
- external decorating

* Where they were provided by us.

You are responsible for:

- minor internal repairs (cupboard catches, broken tiles, etc.)
- plugs for sinks, baths and wash-hand basins
- normal plaster cracks
- replacement glazing to windows and doors
- internal decoration and cleanliness
- maintaining any fixtures or fittings that you have provided
- any repair made necessary by damage or neglect by members of your household or visitors to your home
- supplying dustbins, rotary driers and fluorescent tubes
- maintaining any garden or other area included with your tenancy

How do I report a repair?

Within Office Hours

- Telephone our Call Centre on **Freephone 08000 186050**
(Your call may be recorded)
- Call in person to report your repair at either of the Civic Centres in Hemel Hempstead or Berkhamsted.
- Use our online repairs ordering service at **www.dacorum.gov.uk** (Online Services - Housing Repairs)

When you request an internal property repair you will be offered an appointment, which will be for a morning or an afternoon on a specific day during the working week. If for some reason you are unable to provide access at this pre-arranged time you must inform the Call Centre and re-arrange the appointment.

When you report a repair we will allocate a priority, that is a time within which we will try to complete the work. The priority and target date for the repair is set out in the Customer Repair Notice that we send to you. Where it is appropriate some work is designated as urgent and can be dealt with within one day. However, we expect to complete most routine repairs within 25 working days.

Where we need to get in to your property to carry out non-urgent repairs we send you a letter offering you the first available appointment that falls within the access times you have given us. Please ensure that someone is in to allow access on that day (or telephone the Call Centre to arrange an alternative appointment).

Out of Office Hours (Emergencies Only between 6.30pm and 8am)

- Telephone our Call Centre on **Freephone 08000 186050**
(Please note that all of our out of hours calls are recorded).

Please use this facility for reporting serious faults such as major electrical, plumbing or heating failures, which are a serious threat to your health or safety.

If appropriate we can send an emergency contractor to make safe the fault until a full repair can be carried out in normal working hours.

If a central heating system cannot be re-started on an emergency call out during winter months, the contractor may loan portable electric heaters (which must be returned to the Council directly, once the system is repaired).

What should I do if I suspect a gas leak?

If you suspect a gas leak or notice any fumes coming from a gas appliance:

- X **DO NOT** turn any electrical switches on or off.
- X **DO NOT** smoke.
- X **DO NOT** use naked flames.

- ✓ **DO** turn off the gas at the meter.
- ✓ **DO** open all windows and doors.
- ✓ **DO** telephone Transco on **0800 111 999** to report the leak.

What are programmed works?

In order to maintain your home to the highest standard we are working with a strategic partner, **Apollo plc**, to deliver an on going programme of maintenance work. This type of maintenance is usually referred to as servicing or programmed works, and includes:

- Rewiring works
- Replacement of windows
- Replacement of central heating boilers/systems
- External painting
- Replacement of kitchen and bathroom fixtures and fittings

When your home is included in any of these programmes, Apollo plc will notify you prior to the work commencing.

In addition to these programmed works, we also arrange the following works:

- Servicing of gas appliances
- Servicing of lifts
- Improvements
- Major structural repairs
- Repairs to garages
- Repairs to communal areas
- Estate works
- Environmental works

What if my home needs large-scale repairs or refurbishment?

Generally this type of work is scheduled well in advance and we would involve you fully in planning our proposals.

If the work required to your home is major and too disruptive to be carried out with you and your family living in the property, we will discuss your needs with you and arrange for you to move to more suitable accommodation while the work is carried out. We would also arrange and pay for the removals and meet any reasonable expenses you incur in the process.

You would retain the tenancy of your home and return once the work was completed.

What is the Right to Repair Scheme?

There are certain repairs which we are required by law to carry out within specified time limits. Examples of these repairs are:

- Total or partial loss of electricity, gas supply, central heating or hot water.
- Blocked sink, bath or basin waste.
- Leaking roof.
- Insecure external door, or window.

If we fail to meet two pre-arranged appointments to carry out these repairs within the specified time limits, you are entitled to limited compensation and can ask for another contractor to be appointed to carry out the work.

Can I carry out improvements and alterations to my home?

You have the right to carry out alterations to your home, **provided that you obtain our written approval prior to commencing the work** (please write seeking approval from the Maintenance Manager).

We will only say no if we feel that your proposals will adversely affect the property. If we say yes to your proposals we may impose certain conditions.

You will be responsible for any subsequent maintenance required to the work you have carried out and we reserve the right to ask you to reinstate the property to its original condition at the end of your tenancy.

You will not be charged additional rent for the improvements and in certain circumstances you may be entitled to compensation at the end of your tenancy.

What if I need my property adapted due to a disability?

If you are experiencing difficulties using your home due to a disability you should contact **Social Services** on **01438 737400** and arrange for an Occupational Therapist to visit you and assess what alterations could be made to your home. If the Occupational Therapist considers that alterations are necessary, a report will be sent to us detailing any work required.

We will carry out any minor adaptations requested as quickly as possible. Major work will only be undertaken where it is cost effective and where a transfer to a more suitable property is not possible.

Unless you are in receipt of a means tested benefit you may be asked to contribute towards, or meet, the cost of the adaptation.

Can I get involved in housing maintenance policy?

The Repairs and Maintenance Focus Group is a long-term register of tenants and leaseholders who have volunteered their services to provide support and advice to the Maintenance Service.

Areas in which the Focus Group are involved include:

- Budget setting
- Reviewing repairs and maintenance strategies
- Setting repairs priorities
- Setting service standards
- Informing policies and procedures
- Contract procurement
- Monitoring service delivery

If you are interested in joining this group, or would like more details please contact the Tenant Participation Team.

Who is responsible for maintaining my garden?

If you have a garden allocated to you with your tenancy, it is your responsibility to keep your garden tidy by regularly cutting the lawn and any hedges and keeping it free from rubbish (including furniture) and making sure that it does not become overgrown.

Can I cut down a tree in my garden?

If you have a large tree in your garden please do not attempt to carry out major work to it without first seeking the advice of our Landscape Officer. This type of work can be quite dangerous unless you have the right equipment and training.

Provided it is safe to do so, you may cut down a tree in your garden without our prior knowledge and written consent if it is under 30cm in stem diameter (measured at or near ground level).

For trees over 30cm you will require written permission from the Council prior to carrying out any major works (which would be at your expense).

Please contact your Tenant Services Officer if you have concerns about a tree that could affect your property.

Can I park on my garden?

You can only park a motor vehicle on your property if the vehicle is kept on a driveway or hardstanding that has been approved by us within the boundary of the property and the kerb has been lowered.

You must not park or maintain a trade vehicle or caravan on your garden without first obtaining our written approval.

Can I rent a garage?

We have garages to rent in a number of areas. If you require a garage contact the Administrative Officer for your area. If there are no local garages currently available your name will be added to a waiting list.

Who maintains communal areas?

If you live in a flat or maisonette there may be communal areas such as landings, stairs, lifts and passageways adjacent to your property. These are usually cleaned and maintained by us.

You must not place any of your possessions (or leave pets) in these communal areas as they could cause an obstruction, nuisance or disturbance to other residents.

If you notice any vandalism, graffiti or rubbish in a communal area please notify our Call Centre on **Freephone 0800 186050**.

Who insures my possessions?

We do not insure your possessions whilst they are in your home and strongly advise that you should do so.

Several tenants each year lose most, or all, of their possessions in a flood or fire. For those without contents insurance the loss can be devastating and very expensive.

You should insure the full value of replacing your possessions if they are damaged or destroyed by fire, flood or accident or if they are lost as a consequence of burglary.

The Council has a home contents insurance scheme (with Norwich Union) that you can purchase at special rates. The benefits of our policy include:

- Premiums can be paid weekly - when you pay your rent.
- Low minimum sums insured (£6000 for people over 60 and £9000 for others)
- “New for old” cover.
- No policy excess to pay on claims (other than £50 for accidental damage).
- Includes freezer contents cover and personal liability insurance in addition to insurance against fire, theft, accidental damage, vandalism and water damage.

For further details please contact the Insurance Administration Assistant.

(We recommend that you always compare policies and prices from more than one supplier).

6. PAYING YOUR RENT

We have given you a tenancy on condition that you regularly pay us the appropriate amount of rent.

How is my rent calculated?

The rent you pay is based upon a valuation of your property and average local earnings. It is calculated on a formula provided by central Government.

The amount that you pay usually includes an amount for water rates and sewerage charges but does not include Council Tax, which is charged separately.

We may vary your rent at any time by giving you at least 28 days written notice.

If you are on a low income the amount that you have to pay could be reduced by you claiming Housing Benefit.

When do I have to pay my rent?

Your rent is due weekly in advance every Monday. There are, however, four (and sometimes five) non-collection weeks when it is not necessary for you to make a payment. We shall notify you of when these weeks occur. If you are in arrears you should pay during these weeks as well, because it is an opportunity to reduce the debt.

You can, if you would prefer, pay your rent fortnightly or monthly in which case your payments should be made in advance.

How do I pay my rent?

To make a rent payment you will need a pink, rent payment swipe card (which ensures that the money you pay goes to your rent account). A rent swipe card will be sent to you shortly after you obtain your tenancy.

To make a payment you state the amount you intend paying and hand your swipe card, together with your payment, to the cashier.

An additional orange swipe card is issued if you have a home contents insurance policy with us. Please be careful to use the correct card for each type of payment.

Direct Debit:

If you have a bank account we would encourage you to pay your rent by Direct Debit. The advantages of this are:

- Not having to remember to make a payment
- No queues
- Only one form to fill in
- No cheques to write
- No postage to pay
- You're in control
- Early warning of any changes
- Refund if a mistake is made
- You can cancel at any time

We take four weeks rent from your Direct Debit each month (this takes account of the four rent free weeks each year). We only vary the amount to reflect changes in your rent, water / sewerage charge, or entitlement to Housing Benefit.

A Direct Debit form is available from any Council Office or by contacting your Recovery Officer or Debit Control Officer. Please note that your payments should be monthly, in advance, and that you will have to make any payments due up to the start date of your Direct Debit.

Where can I pay my rent?

You can pay your rent at any of the following:

- **Civic Centre Hemel Hempstead, Civic Centre Berkhamsted and Tring Branch Office** (by cash or cheque)

Cash Office Hours:

Monday to Thursday	9am to 5pm
Friday	9am to 4.30pm

Please make cheques payable to Dacorum Borough Council

- **At any Post Office within the UK**
Cash payments (only) with your swipe card
- **Over the Internet** using a debit card at www.dacorum.gov.uk
- **Over the Telephone** using a debit card - **(01442) 228880 or 867878**

- **Telephone banking** via your own bank
- **By Post** please provide your tenancy reference number with your payment, please do not send cash

Why should I pay rent?

Most of the cost of running the Housing Service is met from rent income. If some of our tenants fail to pay their rent the burden would fall on others to pay more and this is obviously unfair.

For this reason, we do not tolerate persistent arrears and, if necessary, take legal steps to end tenancies where the rent account is continually in arrears.

If you have a low income and need help with your rent you can claim Housing Benefit.

What is Housing Benefit?

Housing Benefit (sometimes called Rent Rebate) is a regular weekly payment made by the Finance Department of the Council to your rent account, reducing the amount that you have to pay. It is not intended to help with day to day living costs like food heating or water charges.

To apply for Housing Benefit you should complete an application form (available at all Council Offices). If you need assistance with the form, or have any questions relating to it, please contact the Benefits Section of the Finance Department, visit the One Stop Shop at the Civic Centre in Hemel Hempstead or ask at the Civic Centre in Berkhamsted or Victoria Hall in Tring.

As a Council Tenant you can apply for Housing Benefit whenever your income makes paying your rent difficult. You should apply as soon as you think you need to as Housing Benefit cannot normally be backdated.

To apply for Housing Benefit it **doesn't matter** whether:

- You are in work, or not
- You are employed, or self employed
- You have paid National Insurance, or not
- You are a pensioner, or not
- You are single, or have a partner
- You live alone, or with other people
- You are a British Citizen, or not

All Housing Benefit claims are calculated by the Council.

You will need to provide additional evidence to support your claim such as wage or payslips, pension entitlement, etc.

If your income changes, or if someone joins or leaves your household, you must inform the Finance Department immediately. If you don't, when we discover it later we will re-calculate your Benefit, possibly leaving you with Housing Benefit arrears to repay (it may also be investigated as fraud).

What happens if my rent falls into arrears?

We hope that you never have to face financial problems although the fact is that at some time many people do.

If you suffer a financial crisis please give your rent payments high priority. If you are unable to pay your rent please contact your Recovery Officer immediately.

If you do fall into rent arrears, and haven't made contact with us we may be forced to start legal action against you, which could lead to you losing your home.

If you are having difficulty in paying your rent, we offer as much advice and assistance as possible to help you with your financial problems.

If you have to miss a payment, or pay less than the amount due (or the amount that you have agreed to pay) it is always better to let us know why and what you intend to do to make up the payment.

If you persistently fail to pay your rent, particularly if you do not discuss the problem with us, we cannot overlook your arrears and allow you to get further and further into debt.

If it is necessary for us to begin recovery proceedings you may be served with a Notice of Seeking Possession (NSP) or Notice of Proceedings for Possession (NPP) for introductory tenants. This is the first step in legal action that could lead to the loss of your home.

Please do not ignore the problem. Even if you regard this as a temporary situation please let us know.

If your payments do not improve we will seek a County Court hearing and ask for a Possession Order against you. If you fail to comply with the terms of a Possession Order and do not repay the arrears we will ask the County Court to arrange your eviction.

It is therefore **very important** that, if you are finding difficulties in paying your rent, you contact us as soon as possible. Where necessary we will happily visit you at home to discuss the situation if you would like us to. Please contact your Recovery Officer in order to arrange this.

What are Former Tenant Arrears?

If a tenancy is terminated (or abandoned) with rent owing, we set up a former tenant arrears account and seek repayment of the debt.

If the debt is not repaid we take legal steps to ensure that all outstanding rent is recovered.

7. WORKING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Housing Service offers a variety of opportunities to encourage all tenants and leaseholders to participate actively in developing housing management policy and service delivery. In this way, tenants and leaseholders can help to shape services to meet their needs and expectations and improve the standards and safety of the areas in which they live.

What types of involvement are there?

- **Tenants & Residents Associations**

Tenants and Residents Associations are groups of local people with a common interest in improving the area in which they live. They work to resolve local problems and improve community spirit through social events.

In a bid to tackle anti-social behaviour and crime, Associations are also encouraged to operate Neighbourhood Watch in their areas, using their meetings, newsletters and notice boards for both activities.

- **Street/Block/Village Voice**

A Street/Block/Village Voice is a tenant or leaseholder who is willing to represent the views of residents in a particular area where there is insufficient support for an Association.

- **Focus Groups**

Focus groups are formed to discuss and make recommendations on housing and other issues that relate to tenants. Participation can involve as little as an hour of your time.

The Repairs and Maintenance Focus Group is a long-term register of tenants and leaseholders that are invited to consider different aspects of the Maintenance Service.

- **Project Specific Focus Group**

A focus group set up to deal with tenant issues for the duration of a specific project, for example a group was formed to represent the tenants' viewpoint in a recent three year refurbishment scheme.

- **Black & Ethnic Minority Consultation Register**

The purpose of this register is to encourage ethnic minority tenants and leaseholders to participate in consultation with the Housing Service. The aim is to address current low representation from ethnic groups within Dacorum.

- **The Housing Advisory Panel**

The Housing Advisory Panel (HAP) meets approximately every six weeks and is made up of two elected representatives from each formally recognised Tenants and Residents Association, two from the Leaseholder Group, one from other community groups and six elected Councillors. The role of the HAP is to comment on and help shape housing policy and service delivery. Council officers attend in a non-voting capacity and ensure that recommendations are passed to appropriate departments. Feedback from the HAP is reported to tenants regularly through Housing News & Views and the agendas and minutes are published on the Council's website, www.dacorum.gov.uk

Can I be involved?

- **I have special needs**

We want to be sure that no individuals or groups of tenants or leaseholders are excluded from participation or consultation because of their special needs. If you feel your specific needs are not being met, please contact the Tenant Participation Team.

- **I am a young person**

We also want to hear the views of children and young people. Their contributions will help to shape and tailor our services to meet their needs now and in the future. Some Residents Associations already have young representatives on their committees.

- **I live in sheltered housing**

Tenant Participation in sheltered housing is mainly centred around informal social events in individual schemes. Consultation methods such as questionnaires, surgeries and focus groups are often used to obtain the views of residents. Associations established in sheltered schemes get the same funding and support as other Associations.

- **I live in a rural area**

The Housing service is aware that the needs of rural participants may differ to those in urban areas. Area panels, Village Voices, telephone conferencing and consultation with Parish Councils aid this process.

- **I don't have the time**

It is recognised that not everyone has the time or is able to attend meetings. However, you can ensure that your views are considered by completing our satisfaction questionnaires that enable you to comment on the services you receive and help us to identify priorities.

What support is available for tenant participation?

We recognise that both practical and financial resources are needed to support tenants in setting up and sustaining Associations. There are two full time dedicated officers based at Hemel Hempstead Civic Centre to provide day to day advice and support on all forms of representation.

We will also provide any training and information that you would want to enable you to be an effective representative and expenses are paid for attendance at meetings and events.

I want to be involved - what do I do now?

The Tenant Participation Compact "**Be involved - Be informed**" sets out the opportunities for your involvement and confirms our commitment to participation as a key to delivering a quality housing service.

The compact can be viewed at www.dacorum.gov.uk. Alternatively you can request a copy or find out more about getting involved by contacting the Tenant Participation Team.

REDUCING CRIME AND FEELING SAFE

Who is responsible for the security of my home?

You are.

You should be concerned for your security and the security of your possessions. Please take all reasonable precautions to prevent unwanted visitors.

- Always lock your doors and close windows when you leave your home (and make sure the rest of your family are also doing this).
- Never leave valuables on display to tempt a burglar.
- If you go out at night leave a light on and draw your curtains.
- When you go on holiday cancel all deliveries of milk and newspapers and ask a trusted neighbour to keep an eye on your property.
- Always check the identity of any caller asking to enter your property. (Public service employees are required to show you an identity card with a photograph. Keep them waiting outside until you are satisfied who they are and if you have any doubts don't let them in. If you are suspicious telephone the organisation they say they are from, or the police.)
- If you live in a block of flats with an entry phone system never admit someone that you do not know or were not expecting.

Who deals with neighbour disputes?

Getting along with your neighbours often comes down to common sense and consideration. A moment of anger can rapidly escalate into something that can affect your comfort for many years.

The best way of avoiding problems is to tolerate minor nuisances and apologise when you know that you or a member of your family have caused a problem.

Wait until your anger has subsided before discussing the situation with your neighbour, be careful not to over-react in defence of your children or pets.

You should not, however, tolerate serious or persistent nuisance, illegal activities, harassment or anti-social behaviour.

If you are regularly suffering nuisance from a neighbour record the incidents in a diary noting the date, time, who was involved and how it affected you or your family. When you have enough examples to prove your point, report the situation to your Tenant Services Officer.

The most serious cases of harassment or anti-social behaviour are referred to Dacorum Borough Council's specialist Anti-Social Behaviour Team who work closely with the Police.

What is harassment?

Harassment is serious acts of nuisance carried out because of someone's race, religion, age, gender, colour, culture, sexual orientation, disability or lifestyle. **It is a criminal offence.**

Examples of harassment could be:

- Violence or threats of violence (either verbal or physical)
- Insulting or offensive graffiti
- Unwanted or unwelcome sexual remarks and comments
- Abusive comments
- Stalking
- Racist attacks of any nature

If you are experiencing, or have witnessed, any form of harassment please contact your Tenant Services Officer. We will offer advice and support and work closely with the Police to ensure the harassment is stopped.

What is anti-social behaviour?

Anti-social behaviour is when individuals or groups of people disrupt the lives of others with noise or nuisance. Examples of anti-social behaviour could be:

- Noise from music, televisions, children, pets, etc.
- Threatening gatherings of youths
- Vandalism and graffiti
- Overgrown gardens
- Abandoned cars
- Rubbish dumping and fly tipping

If you live in a block of flats other examples of anti-social behaviour could include:

- Slamming doors (both within the flat and communal doors)
- Carrying out DIY late at night
- Using the rubbish chutes at unsociable hours
- Wedging the security doors open
- Leaving personal belongings (such as bicycles or furniture) on landings

If you are experiencing, or have witnessed, any form of anti-social behaviour please contact your Tenant Services Officer in the first instance.

In the most extreme cases we refer you to our Anti-Social Behaviour Team. The Team work closely with a range of other agencies, such as the Police, Social Services, schools, Tenants and Residents Associations and other Social Landlords to bring about a solution.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Team can use a wide range of remedies, some non-legal such as a quiet word in the ear or a written Acceptable Behaviour Contract, to legal action such as injunctions, eviction or Anti Social Behaviour Orders.

8. MOVING HOME

Who do I contact if I want to move to a different property?

The Housing Needs Team is responsible for looking after the list of those tenants who wish to move to a different property as well as those who are seeking accommodation for the first time. The Team is responsible for allocating Council properties and nominating people to local Housing Associations for vacancies in their housing stock.

There are in excess of 1600 tenants registered for a transfer together with over 3000 other applicants waiting for accommodation. During 2003/04 we moved 231 of our tenants to other accommodation within our stock. Another 40 tenants took up accommodation with local Housing Associations.

What are choice based lettings?

We currently operate a choice based letting scheme, **Moving with Dacorum**, in three areas of Hemel Hempstead. Vacancies in these areas are advertised on a fortnightly basis in the Gazette, on the Council's website and in issue sheets (available from the One Stop Shop) and applicants are able to express an interest in properties they are eligible for.

We hope to extend this scheme during 2006 to cover all vacant properties within the Borough. Further details on this scheme are available from the Housing Needs Team.

What is a transfer?

A transfer occurs when we offer you a different Council or Housing Association property. To qualify you must have completed a request to register on our housing list. Priority is awarded according to your circumstances.

How long will I have to wait for an offer?

This depends on the level of priority your application has been allocated, the type of property you are requesting and the area you are seeking. If your application only has low priority you may have a very lengthy wait.

How many offers will I receive?

Generally, we will not make more than two reasonable offers. If you refuse both offers your application is likely to be deferred for 12 months.

Can I move with rent arrears?

No. Other than in very exceptional circumstances you must have had a clear rent account for at least three months prior to a transfer.

Will my present home be inspected?

Yes, a visit will be arranged to check the condition of your property and you may be asked to carry out work before an offer of another property can be made.

You must clear all unwanted goods or rubbish from the property (including the roof space, any sheds or outbuildings and the garden) before you move.

Can I get help with moving?

If you are moving as a result of a transfer you will normally need to make all of the removal arrangements, including notifying gas, electricity and phone providers and meet the full cost of removals yourself.

However, if you are over 65 years and giving up a home with two or more bedrooms you may qualify for help under our Tenants Removal Scheme (See section 9).

Similarly, if we have asked you to move due to major repairs, modernisation or demolition you may also qualify for assistance.

What if the property I am offered needs decorating?

Where necessary we will provide an allowance in the form of vouchers for decorating materials.

What work does the Council carry out when a property is empty?

All properties should have been handed back in a good state of repair and we will only undertake work necessary to meet the Decent Homes Standard (details of which are obtainable from the Voids Team Manager).

Most major work required to a property will be carried out before you move in, however, some problems require monitoring and could subsequently result in the work being carried out afterwards. You will be advised if we are monitoring a problem in the property you are allocated.

What is a mutual exchange?

A mutual exchange occurs when two (or more) tenants swap their homes. As a Council tenant you have a legal right to exchange, although we can say no if, for example, the exchange would result in overcrowding or the under-occupation of one of the properties, or if we have started legal action for possession against one of the tenants involved.

The possible advantages of mutual exchanges are:

- You can exchange with another tenant inside or outside of the Borough.
- You may be able to exchange with a tenant of a Housing Association.
- You may avoid a lengthy wait for a transfer.
- You can thoroughly inspect the other property and be sure that it is suitable for your family before seeking approval.

Possible disadvantages may include:

- You have to accept the new property in its present condition.
- The other party can pull out at any time up until you move.
- Only essential repairs are undertaken by the Council within one year of the exchange.
- You will have to accept responsibility for alterations carried out by the present tenant.

How do I go about finding an exchange partner?

If you wish to exchange to another part of Dacorum you will need to complete an application form to go onto our computerised register. You can also use the computer to find other residents seeking to exchange to your area. The computers are located in the One Stop Shop at the Civic Centre in Hemel Hempstead and the Housing Reception in the Berkhamsted Civic Centre. They have a simple touch screen operation that you can use and you can obtain a print out of any information that you may find useful. You can also access the mutual exchange register by visiting our website at www.dacorum.gov.uk

What do I do once I have found an exchange partner?

As you have to accept your new property in its present condition it is important that you always visit and inspect the property (and the area) thoroughly before agreeing to a mutual exchange. You also accept responsibility for the future maintenance or making good of any alterations or adaptations carried out by the previous tenant. We will only carry out essential repairs for a year after your exchange. If you have any doubts about repairs or adaptations to the property that you are proposing to exchange to, contact your Tenant Services Officer for advice.

Having seen each other's properties and agreed to exchange the next step is to obtain the landlord's approval. Both you and the other tenant must contact us, and any other landlord involved, to obtain our approval to your exchange. **You must not make any removal arrangements before you have received approval.**

Having received approval we ask that you notify us of your intended exchange date and we then send you a letter inviting you to an interview to assign the tenancy to you. You should not move until the tenancy has been assigned to you.

Can I exchange to another part of the country?

If you wish to exchange to another part of the country, as well as advertising in the area you wish to move to, you may register with the HOMES Mobility Scheme. This is a countrywide register of tenants wanting to move. We can give you the application forms to register and let you view the list of applicants wanting to move to this area.

9. SERVICES FOR OLDER TENANTS

What is sheltered housing?

Sheltered housing is specifically for people who are aged 65 years and over.

We have a total of 33 sheltered housing schemes across Dacorum, most of which are contained within large buildings, where each tenant has a self-contained flat, purpose designed for elderly occupants. However, we also manage a number of bungalows and non-sheltered flats which are also designed for the housing needs of elderly tenants.

Tenants of sheltered housing have chosen this type of accommodation because of the advantages it provides for them and not necessarily because they are frail. Indeed, a thriving social life is often available, for those who want it, within these schemes.

Each sheltered housing scheme has a Supported Housing Officer (working five days per week) who is employed to ensure the smooth running of the scheme and the well being of its residents.

Every sheltered property is also connected to the community alarm system.

What does a Supported Housing Officer do?

There are two types of Supported Housing Officers, those that are attached to a specific sheltered scheme and those that are mobile, working with older people living in non-sheltered housing.

Both types:

- Maintain regular contact with tenants to ensure their well being.
- Where necessary provide advice and assistance or refer to another, more appropriate agency (Adult Care Services, Occupational Therapy, etc.).

Within sheltered schemes the Sheltered Housing Officers also:

- Encourage residents to participate in social activities and foster a community spirit within the scheme.
- Ensure the smooth running of the scheme, identify maintenance and repair requirements and ensure that Health and Safety procedures are complied with.
- Deal with emergencies as they arise and summon help as necessary.

Other than in exceptional circumstances, the Supported Housing Officer's role does **not** include providing personal care, shopping or performing any financial errand or task.

What is the Community Alarm Network?

The Community Alarm Service is designed to assist people faced with an accident or medical emergency within their home.

Once the equipment has been installed, a caller can open a telephone link with a trained operator at the Control Centre by simply pulling a cord or pressing a button on the unit itself or on a pendant worn around the neck or on a wrist-strap. The equipment, which works in addition to your normal telephone, permits a two-way conversation without the caller needing to get to their phone.

The operator is able to identify the caller as soon as the telephone link is made and, from details held on the computer about the caller's medical history, next of kin and other relevant information, can decide on and contact the most appropriate person or service to assist.

The service provides continual cover, twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year.

In sheltered schemes, when on duty, the Supported Housing Officer receives and deals with calls from tenants. When they are off duty the system is switched through to the Control Centre.

We also offer the Community Alarm Service to elderly and disabled people who live in other types of accommodation within the Borough for a small charge.

Please note that all calls to our Control Centre are recorded.

For more information or to apply for a Lifeline unit contact Elderly Services.

Can I get help transferring into sheltered accommodation?

Older tenants living in family size accommodation and wishing to transfer to either a sheltered scheme or other elderly persons' dwelling can receive practical and financial help with their move under our **Tenants Removal Scheme**.

If required we can make the arrangements and pay for your move and help with the cost of renewing carpets and curtains. We also offer you a financial incentive (currently between £500 and £1000) based on the number of bedrooms of the property you are vacating. A further incentive (currently £1275) is available if you arrange and pay for your own removal.

Further details about the Tenants Removal Scheme are available from your Tenant Services Officer.

What is the Supporting People charge?

Since 1 April 2003 we have been required by the Government to charge our tenants for any support services they receive such as the services of a Supported Housing Officer or the Community Alarm Network (where it is provided as part of the tenancy).

This charge varies from property to property, but in sheltered housing is between £6 and £11 per week and is payable in addition to rent and other service charges such as heating.

If you receive full or partial Housing Benefit you will not have to pay this charge. If you do not qualify for Housing Benefit you may still qualify for help under the Herts County Fairer Charging Scheme.

10. BUYING YOUR HOME

Is it possible to purchase my home?

Provided that you are a secure tenant of the Council and have been for at least twelve months (two years for the Government scheme) you will normally be able to purchase either the freehold (for houses) or a long lease (for flats) under the Government's Right to Buy scheme.

If you are an introductory tenant you will not be able to apply to purchase your home until you become a secure tenant (although this period will count in calculating the discount you receive).

The only properties that **cannot** be purchased are those that have been specifically designed for an elderly or disabled tenant, properties that are currently vacant or those that are let as tied accommodation.

You will not be allowed to purchase your home if we have started legal action to repossess your home because of rent arrears or another breach of your tenancy agreement.

What discount would I get?

The discount you will receive varies with the length of your tenancy. If you live in a house after twelve months tenancy the discount you will receive is 30% rising to a maximum of 60% for a tenancy of 30 years or more.

If you live in a flat the discount you will receive is 40% after twelve months of tenancy rising to a maximum of 70% after 15 years.

All discounts are subject to a maximum of £34,000. If your home has been recently built or modernised the cost of construction may restrict the amount of discount you receive.

How do I apply to purchase my home?

If I live in a house:

You can apply to purchase your house by completing a Right to Buy claim form available from any Council Office. A booklet is issued with this form that will explain everything that happens next.

When we receive your completed application form we will check that you are eligible and calculate the percentage discount that you will be entitled to. We will then send you a form confirming whether or not you have the Right to Buy and arrange a survey to determine the value of your house (you do not have to pay

for this). Once the survey has been completed we will send you a notice which tells you the price you have to pay and the terms and conditions of the sale.

As you will become responsible for the future maintenance and repair of your home, you may want to arrange a private survey of the property at this point to make you fully aware of the condition of the building and any major defects that may not be apparent. (Your bank or building society will arrange a survey prior to granting a mortgage, but this is just to establish the value of the property).

If you wish to proceed you then set about arranging a mortgage. Most tenants use a bank or building society for this. You would be well advised to engage a solicitor to handle the legal side of the purchase for you.

If I live in a flat:

When you purchase a lease you have to pay service charges to the Council for your share of the regular maintenance of communal parts of the building as well as a proportion of any large scale improvement or repairing work. Before you take on your lease we have to advise you of the likely amounts you will be asked to pay for these works (and we cannot charge you more than these estimates in the first five years).

Please Note

If you sell the house or flat you have purchased from us within three years you will be required to repay all or some of the discount you received (the discount repayable to the Council reduces by one third per annum).

What is rent to mortgage?

Rent to mortgage is a form of shared ownership that can help if you want to purchase your home but cannot afford the mortgage to buy it all at once. Details of the scheme are available at our One Stop Shop in the Civic Centre in Hemel Hempstead and at the Housing Reception in the Berkhamsted Civic Centre.

11. MAKING A COMPLAINT

We would like to hear from you whenever you are particularly satisfied or dissatisfied with the Housing Service. In addition to putting right anything that needs to be put right, we will use feedback to improve future service to all tenants in the Borough.

If you have a complaint please make the officer responsible for the problem aware that you are unhappy and give them the opportunity of putting the problem right.

If you are unsure which member of staff you need to speak to, have tried contacting the officer responsible and are not satisfied with their response or it is this officer that your complaint relates to, please contact the relevant Customer Feedback Co-ordinator on:

Housing (01442) 228426
Housing Repairs (01442) 228809

The Customer Feedback Co-ordinator is there to listen to your views and to help you make a complaint.

Our commitment to you:

When we receive a complaint, we will respond to you within 20 working days.

In the unlikely event that you do not receive a response within 20 days, or you receive a response you are not happy with, please contact the Customer Feedback Co-ordinator again (please refer to the telephone numbers above). The Customer Feedback Co-ordinator will pass details of your complaint to a senior manager for further investigation. You will receive a response from the senior manager within a maximum of 20 working days.

If you still are not satisfied with the response you receive from the senior manager, you should ask the Customer Feedback Co-ordinator to pass your complaint to the Strategic Director responsible for the Housing Service.

If you still wish to take your complaint further, please ask for your complaint to be referred to the Chief Executive.

If you are not satisfied with the way we have handled your complaint you should contact the Local Government Ombudsman:

Commission for Local Administration in England

Millbank Tower

Millbank

London

SW1P 4QP

Telephone: **020 7217 4620**

Website: **www.lgo.org.uk**

Alternatively, you could speak to your local Councillor regarding your complaint. To find out who your local Councillor is visit **www.dacorum.gov.uk** or contact your Customer Feedback Co-ordinator for details.