Ways to contact us

Call us on: **033 0678 0277**
E: **mearsliving@mearsgroup.co.uk**

Visit: **www.mearsliving.co.uk/contact**

Write to us at:
Mears Housing Management Ltd.
Innova House, Innova Park,
4 Kinetic Crescent, Enfield EN3 7XH

Be fair

We will always listen to your complaint and we recognise that you may be upset or annoyed if something has gone wrong. However, we will not accept aggressive or abusive behaviour to our staff. If we consider your behaviour to be inappropriate, we may review the way we communicate with you.

Get involved

If you have ideas about how we can improve our services to tenants, we'd love you to get involved. We have a number of tenant panels – actual and virtual – where tenants can share their views, scrutinise what we do and help shape the way we design and deliver services. See our website or contact us for more information.

MEARS Living

Compliments and Complaints

How to provide feedback

When to call us in

Sometimes, mould and damp is caused by a more serious problem, such as:

- Leaks – from pipes, windows roofs or guttering for example
- Moisture penetrating walls
- Rising damp

If you suspect this is the case in your home, let us know so we can arrange to fix it.

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Mears Housing Management Limited
Innova House, Innova Park,
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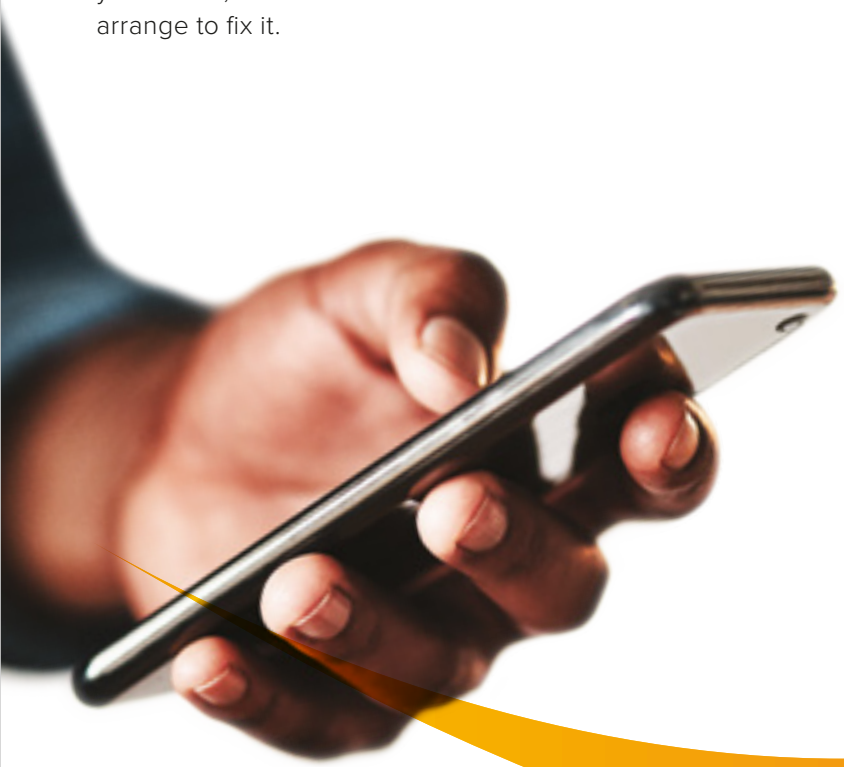

MEARS Living

How to prevent damp and mould in your home

Ways to contact us

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MEARS Living

Tenant Handbook

Essential things you need to know about your home

About us

Mears living is a national provider of emergency, social and affordable housing. We work in partnership with local authorities, providing homes and services to a whole range of customers, from students looking for digs, to people in need of a temporary home, to families looking to put down roots in an area longer term.

About half of our homes are provided through our whole owned registered providers – Plexus and Omega – and these are regulated by the Regulator for Social Housing. We are also regulated by the Housing Ombudsman and the Property Ombudsman.

(Not sure if this is needed)

Accessible formats

If you would like this information in a different format, please contact us.

Language strap-lines

Welcome to your new home

We hope you will be happy here

Please keep this booklet handy; it contains lots of useful information about living in your home, as well as details about our services and how to get in touch with us.

If you have questions about your home or your tenancy or licence agreement and can't find the answer here, or if you are concerned about paying your rent, please get in touch with us as soon as you can on 0330 678 0277.

We are here to help.

From time to time, we update this handbook. For the latest version, please check our website.

www.mearsliving.co.uk

As soon as you have the keys and have signed your tenancy or licence agreement, you will be able to move into your new home.

At your sign-up meeting, your housing officer will:

- Explain the terms of your tenancy
- Make sure you understand your rent and other charges you are responsible for
- Agree an inventory with you and make a record of the condition of the property as it is when you move in
- Show you how to use the property, including the heating and hot water
- Explain how your deposit will be held (if relevant), the process for returning it at the end of the tenancy and how to minimise deductions
- Explain how to report a repair
- Discuss the frequency of future visits

Home Contents Insurance

We will arrange buildings insurance, which protects against damage to the structure of your home, along with its fixtures and fittings.

You will need to take out contents insurance to protect against damage or loss to your personal possessions.

Council Tax

Unless we tell you otherwise, you are responsible for paying the Council Tax for your new home.

Contact your local Council to set up your account.

If you have a low income or receive certain benefits, you may be entitled to a reduction in your Council Tax. **Find out more here: www.gov.uk/apply-council-tax-reduction**

When you move in, there are a number of things you need to do.

Move-in checklist

Make sure you know where to find your gas, electric and water meters, your boiler and water stop cock.	X
Notify gas, electricity and water suppliers when you move in. Take a meter reading to make sure you are charged the right amount when you get your first bill.	X
Contact your benefits office to make a new Housing Benefit or Universal Credit claim or to tell them about your new address and any other changes to your circumstances if you already have a claim in place.	X
Notify other relevant organisations of your new address; e.g. your doctor, dentist, children's schools, bank and other service providers.	X
Apply for a television licence for your new home.	X
Arrange home contents insurance.	X
Contact your Local Authority to set up your Council Tax account.	X

When you sign your agreement, you agree to meet the terms and conditions set out in it, including things like paying your rent on time, taking care of your home and being a good neighbour.

Your tenancy or licence agreement is a legal document which sets out your rights and responsibilities as a tenant, as well as our rights and responsibilities as your landlord.

It also describes things like the length and type of tenancy you are entering into and what you can and can't do.

Please make sure you read your agreement and get in touch with us if there is anything you don't understand.

Ending your agreement

If you want to end your tenancy, you must give us notice.

- To end your tenancy agreement, we need 4 weeks' notice, in writing. You can send this to us by post or by e-mail
- To end a licence agreement, we need 7 days' notice in writing by post or email.

If it is not possible to give the required amount of notice, please get in touch with us.

You must leave your home in a clean state and remove any rubbish and personal belongings. You must also pay for any damage and outstanding repairs which are your responsibility.

Your tenancy will only end once you have left the property, returned your keys and signed a relinquish tenancy form. Please note, you will still be liable for rent until you have done this.

If you do not abide by the terms and conditions in your tenancy agreement, we may end your tenancy and evict you.

We have to get a court order to do this and you will be informed in writing about our actions and your options throughout this period.

Paying your rent

Your rent and service charge (if applicable) needs to be paid in advance.

You have a legal obligation to pay your rent. If you fail to pay your rent, we could take legal action against you which could result in you losing your home.

If you are entitled to benefits to help pay your rent, it is your responsibility to:

- Check which benefits you are entitled to
- Make a claim
- Ensure your benefits are in place for the start of your tenancy

Housing Benefit

If you are entitled to Housing Benefit, this will be paid directly to us, but it is your responsibility to make your claim. Your Housing Benefit may not cover the whole rent amount. If this is the case you need to make sure you set up payments to cover the difference.

Universal Credit

If you are in an area which has moved from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit, you will need to make a claim, even if you have previously been receiving Housing Benefit. You will need to pay your rent out of the Universal Credit payment you receive. Although Universal Credit is paid in arears, you can ask for an advance to cover your rent which is due in advance.

Ask us for help

We can help you with making benefit claims or setting up rent payments. Ask your Housing Officer about this, or contact our Customer Service Centre on **033 0678 0277**.

You can check what benefits you are entitled to at www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators

Or get advice from Citizens Advice: www.citizensadvice.org

How to pay

There are several ways to pay your rent.

Direct Debit or Standing Order

This is the easiest way to pay your rent. Once it is set up, you don't need to worry about remembering to pay each week or month.

If you are able to pay by Direct Debit, you will be invited to complete a direct debit form when you sign your tenancy agreement, or you can set it up later by calling us on **033 0678 0277**.

If you would like to set up a Standing Order, your Housing Officer will provide you with our bank account details and you can use internet banking or contact your bank to set up your payment.

Debit / Credit card

You can pay with a debit or credit card over the phone by calling us on **033 0678 0277**. You may want to set a reminder to make sure you remember to pay on time when your rent is due.

Rent arears

If you get behind with your rent payments, you will build up arears on your account.

We take this very seriously and could take legal action to recover rent arears owing to us. This could lead to you being evicted from your home.

Rent statements

We can send a rent statement to you if you need one. Get in touch using any of the ways to contact us to make a request.

We want to help

Please contact us if you are worried that you can't pay your rent so that we can help you before it becomes a problem.

See our website for tips on managing your money.

You can also get lots of useful advice and support – about benefits, paying your rent and much more – from Citizens Advice: **www.citizensadvice.org.uk**.

When will your repair be carried out?

Emergency repairs – within 24 hours

Where there is an immediate risk to your health and safety, or the structural integrity of your property – for example, flooding, total loss of electrical power, total loss of heating and hot water in winter, overflowing drains flooding – we will visit and make your home safe within 24 hours.

We may have to arrange follow-up works to complete the repair.

Standard repairs – within 20 days, or your choice

For less urgent repairs, we can usually offer you a choice of appointments. We aim to visit you and complete the repair within 20 days.

Sometimes, we may have to carry out an inspection of the works before we complete the repair.

When you request a standard repair, we will offer you a morning or afternoon appointment. On the day, we will send you a text message with a more accurate arrival time. If we are unable to keep our appointment, we will inform you as soon as possible and agree an alternative date or time.

Equally, if you need to rearrange an appointment, please let us know as soon as possible. If we are unable to gain access to your property to carry out the work after making reasonable efforts, we will cancel the job order.

Once the job is complete, we'll send you a survey to ask you how we did. Please fill it in: this helps us to understand what we are doing well and where we need to improve.

Please note, if we arrive to carry out a repair and then find the damage has been caused by you or anyone living in or visiting your home, we will charge you for carrying out the work. Continued damage to your home will not be tolerated and would be considered as a breach of tenancy.

Requesting repairs

Your home should be in good order when you move in. If you do need to ask us to carry out a repair, you can do this:

Online:
www.mearsliving.co.uk/reportarepair

Over the phone:
033 0678 0277

By e-mail:
mearsliving@mearsgroup.co.uk

Keeping your home safe

We are legally obliged to regularly inspect and service the gas appliances in your home to check they are safe.

We will give you plenty of notice when we need to carry out these checks. You MUST keep your appointment and allow us to access your home. We will take legal action to gain entry if we need to.

If gas appliances, such as ovens, cookers and boilers, are not properly maintained, there is serious risk of fire, explosion, gas leaks and carbon monoxide poisoning.

If you smell gas, call 0800 111 999.

Communal areas

Where we are responsible, we will keep the shared areas in and outside your home in good condition. If you are concerned about the standard of communal areas in your home, please get in touch with us.

Doing your bit

Under the terms of your tenancy or licence, you are expected to take good care of your home, by:

- Keeping it clean and tidy
- Keeping the inside in good decorative order
- Keeping gardens tidy (including fences, walls and hedges) and free from rubbish
- Parking considerately
- Reporting repairs promptly

You are also responsible for repairing any fixtures and fittings that belong to you, as well as carrying out minor repairs. Some examples are:

- Unblocking drains and toilets where you caused the blockage
- Any damage caused by you, your family members or visitors
- Taking reasonable steps to prevent and remove mould caused by condensation
- Replacing light bulbs, toilet seats, bath and sink plugs
- Fixing broken or loose internal door handles
- Replacing lost keys

Check our website for some useful guides on how to look after your home and carry out simple DIY tasks!

Did you know?

Condensation is the biggest cause of damp and mould in homes, and is something YOU can take care of yourself! See our leaflet or visit our website to find out more about simple action you can take to avoid the problems associated with condensation in your home.

Being a good neighbour

When you signed your tenancy or licence agreement, you agreed not to act in a way that will cause annoyance, distress or harassment to your neighbours. If you, or anyone in your household, acts in an anti-social manner, we will take action. Anti-social behavior includes things like:

- Breaching the house rules in shared accommodation
- Harassing other residents or neighbours
- Dumping rubbish and fly-tipping
- Making excessive noise
- Using parking areas you are not entitled to use
- Allowing pets to be a nuisance

Reporting anti-social behavior

If you experience anti-social behavior from others, you can report this to us and we will work with you, your neighbours and other agencies to resolve the problem.

You can let us know about this via any of the contact methods listed on the back cover.

Domestic Abuse

Domestic violence is a crime. We define domestic violence as an actual or threatened act of harassment, assault or abuse (mental, physical or sexual) against any person living in the same property.

If you, or someone you know, is in danger of domestic violence, you should contact the police immediately by dialing 999 or 101 for a non-emergency response.

Harassment

You are protected from harassment under law. Harassment is defined as unwanted conduct on the grounds of race, gender, religion, age or disability which has the purpose of violating a person's dignity or intimidating them. If you, or a member of your family, are being harassed you should notify the police immediately.

We will not tolerate harassment. If you report an incident of harassment to us, we will contact you within 24 hours. We will work with you to agree an action plan for managing your case. This will include agreeing on how (and how often) we will communicate with you throughout the case.

We aim to put our customers at the heart of everything we do.

We want to make sure you have the chance to tell us what you think, and to influence the decisions we make about the way we design and deliver our services.

There are different ways to get involved depending on whether you have very little time or more time to offer.

Ways to get involved:

Customer surveys

After every contact with us, we'll send you a short questionnaire – by text or e-mail - to ask you how we did. And then, once a year, we will ask you to complete a more in depth questionnaire. Fill it in to have your say! Your feedback is invaluable and will be used to adapt and improve our services over time.

Join our virtual panel

Sign up to be one of our residents who we go to for more detailed feedback on particular issues or areas of our service. We will contact you from time to time – either over the phone or by text or e-mail, to ask for your feedback, thoughts and ideas on a range of housing issues.

Become a Your Voice panel member

Apply to join the Mears Living"Your Voice" tenant panel which meets several times a year – either in person or virtually – to scrutinise our services and the way we work. This might include things like reviewing our process for carrying out repairs, or looking at how we deal with customer complaints.

The work of the panel informs decisions made by the Board of directors about how the business is run.

Get involved in local and community events

Look out for information about community activities and events we are running or supporting in your area. You can find out more about how to get involved with your community on our website.

Compliments and Complaints

When we do something wrong – or right – we want to hear from you. Your feedback helps us to understand what we are doing well and what we need to improve.

Making a complaint

We value the opportunity to put things right before you need to make a formal complaint. If you have a problem, please get in touch with us as soon as possible so that we can try to find a solution.

If you need to make a formal complaint, you can do so by using any of the ways to contact us.

We have a formal three-stage complaints process which has been designed to make you feel confident that your concerns will be fully investigated, acted upon fairly and in a timely manner, and resolved to your satisfaction.

See our Compliments and Complaints leaflet or our website for more information about our complaints process.

Compliments

Like most businesses, we only really get to hear about the things we do wrong! But positive feedback is also very useful to us, so please do get in touch with positive or constructive comments, too!

Your information

Under the Data Protection Act 2018 we have to follow strict rules about how we can collect, store and use personal information. We recognise your right to privacy and we will make sure that any information we hold about you is handled sensitively, confidentially and in accordance with the law.

Inside back cover