



Tenant's Handbook



A fresh approach to supported housing solutions

This handbook is a guide to your new home. Highstone provides this easy to understand guide to the formal tenancy agreement. It tells you about who we are and how we work. It tells you about your rights and responsibilities and gives you information we hope you will find useful.

Your reference number:

Your housing officer is: Jane Easter

Your Local Area Housing Office: Sheffield

Customer Services (tenant enquiries): 01484 609189 (option 2 - option 2)

Office Opening times: Monday to Thursday 9am - 5pm; Friday 9am to 4pm

To report a repair: 01484 609189 (option 2 - option 1)

Emergency out of hours repair support: 0330 0584090

You can phone Monday to Thursday from 5pm to 9am; Friday from 4pm to 9am

On Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays, lines are open 24 hours a day.

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1. Welcome to your Highstone Home

This handbook gives you important and useful information, which will help you to settle into your new home, understand your responsibilities as a tenant and our responsibilities to you as your landlord. A full list of responsibilities is detailed in your **tenancy agreement**.

Over the next few weeks your housing officer (whose name is on the second page of this information pack) will visit you to explain the documents which were given to you when you signed your tenancy agreement and check that you are settling into your home. Your housing officer will talk to you about any concerns or worries you may have and your support needs.

Our staff are here to make sure that all of our residents receive a first-class service, so if this doesn't happen please let us know.



2. Moving In

It is our responsibility to check the condition of the property before you move in. Any repair works considered necessary will usually be completed before your move in date. Occasionally there may be non-urgent repairs which are not scheduled to be completed until after your move in date. Please don't worry if this is the case as we will always complete repairs in accordance with our repairs timeline.



Once you have moved in you will be responsible for decorating the inside of your home. You must always ask for written permission from us before carrying out any improvements to your new home. You can contact your Housing Officer to discuss this.

There are a number of things you need to know before moving in:

- ◆ Where the fuse box is located;
- ◆ Where the turn-off points and meters for the gas, electric and water supplies are located; and
- ◆ How the heating and hot-water systems work.

Please make sure you tell the following people you are moving:

- ◆ Your doctor's and dentist's surgeries;
- ◆ Your gas, electric and water suppliers;
- ◆ Your insurance companies;
- ◆ The Post Office so they can organise the redirection of your post;
- ◆ Your Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax offices; and
- ◆ Your current landlord (if you have one).

There is moving-in check list to help you with this on page 21

3. About Your Rent

What Your Rent Covers

Rent is the money you pay to Highstone Housing Association, as your landlord, so that you can live in the property. Some of our rents include a service charge which pays for things such as lighting, heating, cleaning and gardening of shared areas, television aerials and fire alarm servicing. If your tenancy agreement includes a service charge, then we will provide a list of all the items covered by the service charge.

It is your responsibility, as the tenant to pay your Council Tax as well as electricity, gas and water bills. These are sometimes called utility bills.



How Your Rent is Calculated

The following points are important to know about your rent:

- ◆ We set your rent based on the size and location of your home following government guidelines.
- ◆ Each year we will review the amount of rent you have to pay. If the amount of rent you pay changes, we will tell you this in writing four weeks before the new charge starts. Any changes to your rent will be effective from the first Monday in April.
- ◆ If you do not agree with the change in rent, you may be able to refer this, within three months, to the Rent Assessment Committee. The Rent Assessment Committee is an independent panel who will decide whether the new rent we are proposing is reasonable or not. You will only be able to challenge their decision on a point of law.
- ◆ If you want to appeal or you want to know more about the Rent Assessment Committee, you should contact a housing advice centre or a citizen's advice bureau.

How To Pay Your Rent

It is your responsibility to ensure that you pay your rent on time.
You can pay your rent in the following ways:

- ◆ By **Standing Order** – through your bank or building society account. Please contact 01484 609189 (option 2 – option 2) should you require any advice or help in arranging this. You are advised to check your statements carefully to make sure that your payments are being made in line with your instructions. If you receive a letter from us informing you of a change to your rent, you must tell your bank or building society to change the standing order.
- ◆ By **Housing Benefit Direct** – If you are entitled to receive Housing Benefit you can arrange for this to be paid directly to us. If your Housing Benefit does not cover all your rent, you will have to make up the difference using the other payment method mentioned above.

Rent Statements

We will issue rent statements upon request, please ask your housing officer for information.

If you have any questions about your rent statements, please phone us on 01484 609189 (option 2 – option 2).



We will automatically provide you with a rent statement at the end of your tenancy. Please remember that you are responsible for paying all your rent and other bills until the end of your notice period (see Rent Arrears and Moving Out for more information)

Claiming Housing Benefit

If you are on a low income, you may be entitled to Housing Benefit to help pay your rent. You should apply for Housing Benefit as soon as you accept the tenancy. You can apply to your local authority's Housing Benefit Office (details below).

It is important that you tell the Housing Benefit Office, Council Tax Office and Benefits Agency as soon as you accept a tenancy. You must also notify them about any changes to your circumstances, such as: a change in your income, rent, the number of people living in your household. These changes could potentially affect your entitlement to Housing Benefit. See Information and contacts on page 18.

Rent Arrears

If you do not pay your rent on time, then you are said to be in 'rent arrears'. It is important that you always pay your rent in full and on time. If you are having difficulty paying your rent – for any reason – you must tell us straightaway. We are here to help, and we can offer support and advice. We may also be able to offer you a rent arrears payment plan.



You can also get debt advice from your local citizens' advice bureau (see page 18 for a list of useful phone numbers).

It is important you understand that failing to pay your rent on time and in full (including not meeting the terms of any revised payment plan, which may be offered to you) could result in the termination of your tenancy agreement. This means that we could apply to the court to ask you to leave your home.

If further action is necessary, you will receive a Notice of Seeking Possession and we will apply for a possession hearing at the local county court. We will normally ask the district judge for a Suspended Possession Order first, which will mean that as long as you make payments in line with the order, you will be able to stay in your home. However, if you do not make the correct payments in line with the order, we will ask for permission to apply for a warrant to evict you from your home.

4. Property Maintenance and Repairs

Our Responsibilities

As your landlord we are responsible for the repairs to the structure and the outside of your home, including:

- ◆ The roof;
- ◆ Drains, guttering and outside pipes;
- ◆ Outside walls, outside doors and windows;
- ◆ The paintwork on the outside of the property;
- ◆ Plasterwork;
- ◆ Inside walls, flooring, ceilings, doors, door frames, skirting boards and decorating the communal areas of the building;
- ◆ Chimneys, chimney stacks and flues;
- ◆ Pathways, steps or other essential access routes; and
- ◆ Stores that are part of the property.

We will also maintain any installations we have provided for supplying water, gas and electricity, and for space and water heating, including;

- ◆ Baths, basins, sinks, toilets, flushing systems and waste pipes;
- ◆ Electrical wiring, including sockets and switches and waste piping; and
- ◆ Water heaters, fire places, fitted fires and central heating systems.

Your Responsibilities

As the tenant you are responsible for the following;

- ◆ Any item that belongs to you, for example, your washing machine or fridge
- ◆ Any improvements you have carried out since moving into the property
- ◆ Decorating the inside of the property
- ◆ Reporting lost keys and paying for replacement keys if you lose them
- ◆ Reporting damaged or broken glass in the doors or windows, and paying for replacement if you do not give us a crime reference number
- ◆ Any damage, other than wear and tear, caused by you, your family or your visitors
- ◆ Promptly reporting any fault or damage to the property
- ◆ You may be asked to pay for any repairs caused by you

How to Report a Repair

You must report any problems or damage to your home as soon as possible so that we can arrange to repair the problem.

When reporting a repair, you will need to tell us the following information:

- ◆ Your name, address and contact telephone number;
- ◆ As much detail as possible about the repair required; and
- ◆ When you will be at home to let us in.

Timescales for Repair

1. Emergency Repairs

These are repairs to stop something harming you or the house. These include:

- Burst water pipes
- Burst water tank or back boiler
- No electrical power
- No lights
- A blocked toilet where you have only one toilet
- Blocked drain from toilet
- Water leaking through roof or ceiling
- Total failure of heating system (winter months only)
- Boarding up windows or doors to make your home secure
- No cold water

We will fix them **immediately**.

2. Urgent repairs

These are repairs that are not an emergency but cannot wait to be dealt with as routine repairs. We will fix them within **24 hours**.

3. General repairs

These are all other repairs. We will do them within **28 days**.

Adaptations and Care and Repair

Sometimes adaptations need to be made to a tenant's home to help them be independent, for example: replacing a bath with a shower, or fitting grab rails.

Social services may cover some of the cost of the adaptation. Please contact your local council office or your Housing Officer for advice.

Gas Safety

If you have gas appliances in your home, we will carry out a gas safety check every year. We carry out these checks to make sure your gas supply and appliances are working safely and efficiently. A gas appliance that is not working safely can put you, members of your household, any visitors and neighbours at risk. We will write to you to tell you when our Gas Safe Engineer will be carrying out the safety checks. Our engineer has a key for your property, so it is not necessary for you to be present, unless you wish to be. **Please remember, that by law we must carry out these safety checks every year, so you must let the engineer into your property when requested to do so. All our Gas Safe Engineers carry identification, please ask to see it.**

Insuring Your Personal Belongings

We have insurance to cover the structure of your home, but this does not cover your personal possessions. We do not insure your furniture and personal belongings against things like theft, fire, vandalism or any other risk. You are strongly advised to take out your own home contents insurance to protect your belongings.

If you need any advice, please contact your Housing Officer.



5. Living in Your Property

Your Responsibilities

“Do not break any rules or agreements made with Highstone Housing Association”

All your rights and responsibilities are set out within your Tenancy Agreement and we can't change them without consulting you first.

- ***Visitors***

“Do not have anyone else living in your home, without permission from Highstone Housing Association”

Visitors are not allowed to stay in your home for more than 3 nights per week. If you break this rule, you will be in breach of your tenancy agreement and could be at risk of being evicted from your home. Please see your Tenancy Agreement for details about how many people can live in your property.

- ***Subletting***

“Keep to all agreements made with Highstone Housing Association”

Subletting is when you rent all or part of your home to someone else. Subletting is strictly NOT allowed under any circumstances.

- ***Pets***

“Ask Highstone Housing Association if you want to keep pets”

You need our written permission before you can keep any animal, bird, insect, fish or reptile in your home, other than registered assistance dogs. Usually, if you have your own entrance, we will let you have one domestic pet, for example a cat. If you have a shared entrance or stairway, you are not allowed to keep any pets, except fish. You are responsible for keeping your pets under control and making sure that there is no animal mess in shared areas or in other people's gardens. If your pet does make a mess, you need to clean it up straight away. (For more information on our Pets' Policy, please contact your Housing Officer.)



- **Smoking**

“Do not smoke in your home”

We operate a strict NO SMOKING POLICY in all Highstone Housing Association accommodation except in specially designated areas, which will be clearly signed. This means that you cannot smoke in your home. Smoking causes irreparable damage to fixtures and fittings, so if you break this rule you will be asked to pay the cost of replacing any damaged fixtures or fittings, including redecorating. If there is a designated smoking area in your scheme you will be shown where this is by your Housing Officer or support staff, who will also draw your attention to safe cigarette disposal units. You MUST NOT smoke anywhere else.

- **Anti-social Behaviour**

“Do not annoy, cause distress or harm others in your home, scheme or neighbourhood”

Anti-social behaviour is behaviour which causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to others.

We will not tolerate anti-social behaviour. We will work in partnership with the Council and Police, where necessary.

Examples of anti-social behaviour include:

- Excessive noise
- Playing music too loudly
- Hate crimes
- Actual or threatened violence
- Sexual abuse
- Foul language
- Criminal damage
- Graffiti
- Smoking

(This list is not exhaustive)

Harassment

“Respect other tenants and neighbours”

You must not incite or condone anything which could harass or intimidate anybody because of their race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, religion, sexuality, disability, mental or physical impairment or other reasons.

We will hold you responsible for anything done by anybody in your household.

Illegal Activity

“Do NOT do anything in your home that breaks the law”

You must not use (or allow to be used) the property or its surrounding areas for any criminal or illegal activity.

Examples of illegal activity include:

- Storing, selling or using illegal drugs
- Growing or producing illegal drugs
- Receiving, storing or handling stolen goods
- Using the property for immoral purposes
- Possessing illegal firearms or other weapons

(This list is not exhaustive)

All anti-social behaviour concerns should be reported to your Housing Officer. You should keep a record of incidents such as time, date and the type of incident. It is particularly important to do this if your concern relates to loud noises or music.

For more information on our Anti-social behaviour policy, please contact your Housing Officer.

6. Breach of Tenancy

“Do not break any rules or agreements made with Highstone Housing Association”

It is your responsibility to meet the terms of your Tenancy Agreement. If you break any of the terms (rules), you are said to be “in breach of your tenancy”. If the breach is serious, Highstone Housing Association can ask the court to make you leave your home. This is known as eviction.

7. Eviction

We will always tell you the reason why we are planning to have you evicted from your home. This is called a written notice and it is important that you reply quickly to any written notice which you receive from Highstone Housing Association. The notice period is usually between 4 and 8 weeks unless you have committed a serious anti-social behaviour act, such as drug dealing or domestic violence. In this case we can start eviction procedures immediately.

8. Moving Out

“Tell Highstone Housing Association if you want to leave your home for good”

If you are moving out you must let us know, in writing at least four weeks before you leave. There is a blank ‘Notice to end your tenancy’ form on the next page. Please fill this in and return it to us at the address on page 20.

Final Rent Payments

Regardless of the reason for leaving your home, you are still responsible for paying rent (including arrears) and bills such as council tax, gas, electricity and telephone bills, up to and including the notice period end date. The notice period is normally 4-8 weeks. You will receive confirmation of the agreed notice period end date in writing.

If you receive housing benefit, DO NOT cancel this until after the last day of your notice period. You will be liable for any outstanding rent owed to Highstone Housing Association regardless.

Preparing to leave your home:

- You must leave your home tidy and take any rubbish with you
- You must take all your things with you
- You must make any repairs that have been caused by you. If you don't you will be charged for the repair
- You have to pay the full cost of certain repairs including:
 - Damage caused by you
 - Repairs which are your responsibility
 - Anything that is missing and belongs to us
 - Removing anything you leave
 - Cleaning the property and garden - if you have not left it clean
- Your Housing officer will check your home before you leave
- You must leave the building safe and secure and locked before you hand in the keys
- If you don't hand in your keys by 12 noon on the Monday following the end of your tenancy you will be charged weekly until you return the keys.



9. Complaints

If you have a complaint about the service you receive from us, you should follow the stages shown below. When dealing with your complaint, we will acknowledge that we have received it, investigate it and let you know what went wrong and what we are doing to put it right. You cannot use this procedure for neighbour disputes (please contact your Housing Officer for more advice and support with a neighbour dispute).

Please always discuss the problem with our staff first. They will do their best to sort out your problem straight away. You can complain to us in person, by phone, by letter or by email.



Write to Us

Head Office
Highstone Housing Association
Broadstone Farm
Browns Edge Road
Ingbirchworth
Sheffield
S36 7GR

Phone Us

For all enquiries and complaints please call 01484 609189
(option 2 – option 2)

Email Us

enquiries@highstoneha.co.uk

10. Useful Information and Contacts

Gas, Electricity and Water Supplies

- ◆ To find out who is supplying your gas, phone 0870 6081524
- ◆ To find out who is supplying your electricity, phone 0845 3300889
- ◆ For water supplies, phone Yorkshire Water on 0845 1242420

Useful Contacts

- ◆ Wakefield Housing Benefit Office – 0345 850 4504
- ◆ Wakefield Anti-Social Behaviour Team – 0345 850 6506
- ◆ Wakefield WMDC Housing Advice – 01924 302085
- ◆ Wakefield Citizens Advice Bureau – 0344 411 1444
- ◆ Crimestoppers – 0800 555111
- ◆ National Victim Support Helpline – 0845 3030900
- ◆ The Police (Non-Emergency Calls)– 101
- ◆ The Police (Emergency Calls) - 999
- ◆ Information Commissioners Office (ICO) – 0303 123 1113

11. How to Contact Us

Phone Us

- ◆ Your Housing Officer – Jane Easter – 07464 971884
- ◆ Customer Services (Tenant Enquiries)– 01484 609189
(option 2 – option 2)
- ◆ To Report A Repair – 01484 609189 (option 2 – option 1)
- ◆ Out Of Hours Emergency Repair Number – 0330 0584090

Please be aware that we may record and monitor phone calls for training purposes and to make sure we are providing the best possible service.

E-Mail Us

enquiries@highstoneha.co.uk

Write to Us

Highstone Housing Association
Broadstone Farm
Browns Edge Road
Ingbirchworth
Sheffield
S36 7GR

Registered with Homes and Communities Agency No: 4776
Highstone Housing Association



Notice to End Your Tenancy – (Please complete and return this form to Highstone Housing Association, Broadstone Farm, Browns Edge Road, Ingbirchworth, Sheffield, S36 7GR)

Name:

Address:

.....
.....

I am giving you four weeks' notice from Monday/...../..... to end my tenancy at the above address.

I will hand in the keys to Highstone Housing on/...../.....
(no later than 12 noon on the Monday following the end of my tenancy).

My new address is:

.....
.....

If we have a key to your home, are you happy for us to use it to show possible new tenants around the property before the end of the 4-week notice period?

Yes No

I can be available at the following times for you to carry out the final inspection of my home.

Date: /...../..... Time: From..... To

Date: /...../..... Time: From..... To

If this is not convenient, you can contact me on the following phone number to arrange a convenient time and date

Phone:

Your Signature: Date:/...../.....

Helpful Guide to Moving into a Highstone Property

With 4 Weeks to Go		
Task	Your notes	Done
Get estimates from removal companies, checking that comprehensive insurance cover is available against damage or loss, do they offer a packing/unpacking service?		
Buy contents insurance for your new home		
Arrange for change of address cards to be printed		
Contact a telephone provider to arrange for a phone line installation		

With 2 Weeks to Go		
Task	Your notes	Done
Draw up a list of things to pack, take the opportunity to clear out unwanted items and give them to charity, sell through classifieds/eBay, or take to the tip!		
Make sure you have enough packing materials, sturdy boxes, string and sticky tape.		
Tell your local chemist if you use their prescription delivery service		

With 1 Week to Go		
Task	Your notes	Done
Send off change of address cards and letters		
Arrange and pay for automatic redirection of your mail by the Post Office		
Put together all your important documents in one place		

With 1 Day to Go		
Task	Your notes	Done
Check all your lists to make sure nothing has been overlooked		
Complete your packing except for those items you are likely to need overnight.		
Prepare a picnic for moving day		
Make sure you have collected together important documents and valuables in a safe place		
Put together a bag with a few essential clothes, bedding, towels for your new home		

On Moving Day		
Task	Your notes	Done
Pack up final items		

Who to Notify		
Task	Your notes	Done
BT or Phone provider - Landline		
Mobile Phone provider		
Internet/Broadband		
Satellite or internet TV Provider		
TV Licence Office		
Lease or Rental Companies (e.g. TV Set)		
Electoral Registration Office		
Council Tax		
Department for Work and Pensions		
HMRC – Tax Office		
Bank		
Building Society		
Credit Card and Store Card Companies		
Insurance Policies		
Premium Savings Bonds Office (ask at the Post Office)		
The Post Office – redirect your mail		
Doctors Surgery		
Dentist		
Sports or Social Clubs		