



Our service standards

Our promise to you



watford
community
housing

We understand how important it is for customers to know what they can and can't expect from us.

We've created this booklet to set out clearly our promises to you, our tenants.

Our service standards

Our customers have told us that the most important thing about our services is that they are consistent. By making these standards available to you, and by highlighting how you can challenge us where we have not met them, we can help to ensure that everyone receives the best service possible every time.

This set of standards has been put together after consulting with our tenants, our Gateway Membership Team and our Board.

This document will tell you:

- What we will do for you
- How we will do it
- What we expect from you in return





Service standards for your tenancy

Ensuring the standard of your home

- We will ensure that your home meets the government's Decent Homes standard and that any improvements that need to be made are in line with our Property Standards policy.
- Where we use contractors to carry out works, we will ensure they meet these service standards and any additional requirements agreed with tenants involved in the contract procurement process.

Repairing your home

- You can report non-urgent repairs 24 hours a day using our website and we will respond to you during the next working day.
- You can also report repairs, for free, by calling 0800 218 2247.
- We will offer you a choice of appointments (except in emergencies)
 - Morning (8.00am – 1.00pm)
 - School hours (9.30am – 2.30pm)
 - Afternoon (12.00pm – 4.00pm)
 - Evening (Thursdays until 7.00pm)
- We will aim to complete the repair on our first visit. Where this is not possible we will let you know when it will be finished. We will make you aware of the dates and times of follow-up appointments by telephone, text or letter.

- If we miss an appointment and this causes an inconvenience we will abide by the terms of our Tenant Compensation Policy, which outlines what compensation you may be entitled to.
- We will resolve repairs within the timescales detailed on our website. There are different timescales for different repairs, depending on their urgency.
- It is a legal requirement for us to carry out annual gas safety checks at your property, as well as smoke alarm checks in some cases. We will arrange an appointment with you and you must then give us access at the arranged time.

The annual gas safety check is to ensure your safety and it is a requirement of your tenancy agreement that you allow us access to complete the check. You will be charged if we have to take legal action to gain access.

We will fix any faults with hot water and heating systems within five working days. During the colder months between October and April, we will fix faults that leave you without heating within 24 hours. For households where someone is elderly, has a disability or a chronic illness, or there are children under the age of five, we will fix heating faults within 24 hours at any time of year.

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Managing your tenancy

- We will visit your home, without notice, usually at least once every five years to carry out a tenancy audit. We will respond to any reports of fraud and breaches of tenancy resulting from this audit within five working days.
- We will provide or recommend support to help you manage your tenancy if your circumstances change or you're facing difficulties. We will only seek eviction as a last resort.

Rent and service charges

- We will set your rent in accordance with your tenancy agreement and, where applicable, in line with the Rent Standard set by the government regulator.
- We will send you a rent statement every six months and you will be able to access your balance online 24 hours a day through our online portal.
- We will send you an estimated service charge bill in February each year and an 'actual' service charge bill in September, confirming the final cost of the services we have provided.
- We will calculate charges carefully to make sure that the estimated bills and the actual bills are as close as possible.
- We will ensure that leaseholders are informed before we enter into any contract that would cost £100 per year, or before we commission any major works that a leaseholder would be required to contribute more than £250 towards.

- We will make paying your rent as convenient as possible and will list the range of ways that you can pay on our website and rent statements.
- We expect you to pay rent in advance of when it's due. If you have any difficulty paying your rent you are obliged to contact us as soon as you know there is a problem, and to work with us to find a solution that works for everyone.

Visiting your home

- We will always respect you and your home.
- Our staff will wear uniform or an identity badge and explain the purpose of their visit before entering your home.
- For pre-arranged appointments we will let you know we are coming by calling you in advance, or sending reminders by text, letter or email.
- We will always leave your home tidy after completing inspections or repair jobs. Where appropriate we will also ensure that our staff wear shoe covers to protect your carpets and flooring.
- We will respect any religious or cultural requirements that you may have in relation to visitors in your home. We would ask that you let us know about them in advance so that we can record them on our systems and respect them consistently.

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Neighbourhood and Community standards

- We will work with partners (such as the police, fire service and local charities) to try to make our neighbourhoods safer. We will give you clear timescales and an action plan when you report incidents of anti-social behaviour or hate crimes.
- We will keep to any timescales and action plans agreed with you and we will contact you before closing your case to ask how satisfied you were with how we handled it.
- We will encourage residents to be good neighbours by supporting activities that make our communities friendlier.
- We will not tolerate anti-social behaviour and will have fair policies and procedures to manage issues in a consistent manner. We expect you to adhere to these as well.
- We will visit and inspect neighbourhoods and communal areas every six weeks to check that the communal areas are up to standard and to identify any issues.
- Residents and local councillors are invited to take part in estate inspections which will happen every three months. Dates will be agreed in advance. After the event the feedback and action plans will be posted on our website.

- We will cut the communal grass areas up to 15 times each year (between March and October), weather permitting. We will litter-pick the communal grounds around our blocks every two weeks.
- We will clean communal blocks every week and ensure that the lists of agreed cleaning dates and cleaning tasks are displayed in each block. Windows in communal halls and landings will be cleaned every three months.

Tenant involvement and empowerment

- We will consult with residents if we change our Service Standards.
- We will offer you choices when we improve your home or change the services you receive. We will publish an 'Involvement Menu', setting out how you can help to improve and influence the services we offer.
- We will only spend money on projects that we believe benefit our tenants directly.
- We will have a dedicated budget of £295,000 to deliver projects that enhance communities and help to improve tenants' lives.





What we expect from you

Your responsibilities as a tenant

- We expect you to keep to the terms and conditions of your tenancy and we need you to let us know if you are struggling or if your circumstances have changed.
- When we agree an appointment with you we would like you to:
 - keep appointments and provide access to your home as agreed
 - reply within 48 hours when we request appointments from you
 - notify us, or our contractor, as soon as you know you cannot keep an appointment
 - ensure that an adult (over 18) is in the property at all times when we visit and that any children are supervised
 - keep your pets under control and away from work areas
- get ready for our visit by making sure that any areas where we may be working are clean and clear. This may involve:
 - emptying kitchen cupboards
 - removing shelving, mirrors, curtains, ornaments and other loose fittings
 - moving valuables or small appliances from the work area
 - cleaning items such as toilets before the operative arrives
 - removing any rubbish or pet waste from garden areas
 - keeping access points such as doors and alleyways clear.

What you expect from us

Governance and financial viability

- We will have a set of rules that sets out how we operate and the ways that tenants can be involved in helping us to run and holding the organisation to account.

Scrutiny

- Scrutiny of Watford Community Housing will be led by tenants on the Gateway Membership Team and they will report the outcome of any activities to our Board.
- We will provide financial statements and an annual report each September at our Annual General Meeting, so you can see where your money has gone and how it has benefited tenants and the wider community.

Getting back to you

- We will acknowledge written correspondence (including emails) that require a response within two working days. We will adhere to the rules laid out in our Complaints Policy.
- We will reply to all letters within five working days of their receipt. If we cannot provide a full response within that time, we will tell you why and keep you fully informed at all times. We will make it clear what we can do and when we will do it.
- Calls should be directed through our call centre, but we understand that you will sometimes want to speak to a specific staff member. We will ensure that our staff tell you if they are out of the office. All phone messages will be returned within two working days of the staff member getting back into the office.
- In some circumstances a tenant may request to have a face-to-face meeting or a home visit. If appropriate we will ensure that you are offered a choice of appointment times that suit your needs.

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Our staff

- Our staff are expected to demonstrate the following behaviours:
 - We're customer-focused
 - We work together
 - We act with integrity
 - We innovate
- We will:
 - Act with integrity. We will be courteous, helpful, open and honest in delivering our services to reflect our values.
 - Make our actions customer-focused. We will be welcoming, professional and friendly in our approach.
 - Work together – to build relationships and interact effectively.
 - Be positive about change, identifying opportunities to improve or simplify the way things are done
 - Be well-informed, so that we are able to help you.
 - Treat everyone fairly and equally, with respect and dignity.
- We will make sure that individual staff members are thanked if you tell us that you have received particularly good service from them.
- We will also pass on your feedback to managers and staff when we get examples of poor service, so that our staff can improve their customer service style and the way they are working.

Accessing our services

- We realise that each customer has individual needs and we will use our customer systems to record your requirements so that help can be accessed when you need it.
- We will inform residents in hostels, independent living and flexicare homes when staff will be on site and available to speak to. We will use notice boards in communal areas in these homes to promote messages about how to access our call centre and website.
- Our website and self-service portal is available 24 hours a day. Our office and call centre is open from Monday to Friday during the hours of 8.30am – 5.30pm. Our social media will be monitored during working hours. We will advertise the exceptions to this (such as Bank Holidays) on our website and through call centre messages.
- Outside of normal working hours we will provide an out-of-hours service to report emergency repairs and health and safety matters.
- We will use range of communications methods including letters, social media, texts and our website to share information in unforeseen situations or when we need to communicate with a large number of you at any one time.





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Watford Community Housing is a
registered society (30183) and is regulated
by the Homes and Communities Agency.