

DARTFORD

BOROUGH COUNCIL



Housing Repairs Policy

2014

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1. Introduction

This Policy covers the repairs service provided by Dartford Borough Council to tenants and leaseholders. It applies to works in individual properties and communal areas of housing land.

The development of this policy was undertaken in consultation with the tenant and leaseholder representatives of the Dartford Borough Residents' Forum.

The Policy's aim is to ensure that tenants and leaseholders continue to receive a high standard of service focused upon the main areas of repair that the Council undertakes. Furthermore, the Policy identifies areas of repair that are the responsibility of tenants.

The Council has a statutory duty to undertake certain areas of repair works in accordance with Section 11 of the 1985 Landlord and Tenant Act. The Policy complements the agreement already made with tenants to undertake repairs to their home contained within the Tenant's Handbook.

2. Repair Service Standards

The Council's Housing Repairs Team is there to assist tenants with queries about housing repairs and arrange for contractors to carry out those repairs that are the responsibility of the Council.

The Council will aim to deal effectively with requests for those repairs that are the Council's responsibility. Once the Council has decided what works are required, a date for completion of works will be agreed with the tenant. Most repairs should be completed first time but there may be cases where a repair will need to be inspected by a Council Technical Officer beforehand to obtain a scope of works. Examples of these types of repairs are ground works, specialist works and structural repairs.

3. Appointments

The Council offers an appointment system for all routine repairs which includes appointment slots and Saturday and evening repairs to maximise choice for tenants. (See the Tenant's Handbook for further information).

4. Repair Priorities

Every repair reported to the Council is given a priority rating. This indicates the urgency of the repair and the timescales it will be completed in. The priority categories are shown in Appendix A.

Times for certain repairs are set using the Government's Right to Repair Regulations 1994.

5. Reporting Repairs

Repairs can be reported by telephone, text, in person, via email and on line (See Appendix D for details).

6. Chargeable Repairs

Where wilful damage or neglect of the Council's property by a tenant, their family or a visitor results in the Council having to replace or repair items, the tenant will be charged the full cost of the repair. **This sum will need to be paid in full to the Council before any repairs are undertaken, unless there are exceptional circumstances.**

The following are examples of work where a charge could be made. The list is not exhaustive.

- The property is not left in an acceptable state when a tenant leaves. For example substantially damaged or missing fixtures and fittings.
- Replacing broken glass (unless a crime number has been provided)
- Forced entry into a property and/or changing the locks (unless a crime number has been provided)
- Clearing of rubbish from a property or from council land where it can be shown as belonging to a current or former tenant
- Sending a contractor to carry out a repair where that repair could have easily been resolved by the tenant over the phone.

If a chargeable repair is carried out during the out of hours service and it cannot be paid by the tenant until the next day, an invoice will be raised and a 15% administration charge will be added to the total amount payable.

7. Right to Repair

Tenants may be entitled to claim compensation if a repair is on the list of qualifying repairs which the law states have to be completed within certain timescales and those timescales are not met.

Qualifying repairs, up to a value of £250, are urgent works that can affect health, safety or security.

Urgent qualifying repairs are normally fixed within 48 Hours.

(See Appendix A for further information).

8. Gas Safety and Maintenance

The Council appoints a Gas Safe registered contractor to maintain and service all gas appliances within the Council's own housing stock. A three star contract provides fully comprehensive cover for boilers and systems and includes an annual service and gas inspection.

The Council has a statutory duty under the provisions of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 to carry out safety checks on a 12-month cycle. Tenants are legally required to allow access into their homes for these works to be carried out. **Failure to allow access may result in court action.**

9. Empty Properties and Lettings

The Council maintains and lets properties to certain minimum standards of condition (see Appendix B for further details on general and property standards).

Repairs after moving into a property

In some cases, repair works may not have been fully completed at the time a property is let. In such cases, any outstanding repairs that are required will be completed within an agreed timescale.

Follow up visits

A member of the Council's Housing Team will contact new tenants to make a follow up visit once the tenancy has started to ensure that tenants have settled into the accommodation and to resolve any outstanding issues and obtain feedback on the standard of the property.

10. Improvements and Alterations

Tenants on secure and flexible tenancies can carry out improvements to their home, but only secure tenants may be compensated for any improvements made (see Tenancy Policy 2013).

A statutory 'Right to Compensation' came into effect on 1st April 1994 and the 'Secure Tenants of Local Authorities (Compensation for Improvements) Regulations 1994' applies to improvements carried out by secure tenants after this date.

All tenants must contact the Council first to ask for an 'Alteration Request Form' for permission to carry out alterations before any works take place. Failure to obtain the Council's permission to carry out works may result in tenants paying for the cost to rectify works or asked to return the property to its original condition.

Some improvements may also need planning permission or building regulations approval from the Council and the tenant is responsible for obtaining these. Any permission given by the Housing Officer for planned works is not planning or building regulations permission and this may still need to be sought.

Any value that is added to the property as a result of major improvements will be excluded from the price paid if tenants exercise the Right to Buy and buy their home.

If tenants go ahead with works after permission has been refused, they will be breaking the conditions of their Tenancy Agreement which may result in court action.

Secure tenant's right to compensation for improvements

Tenants with secure (lifetime) tenancies may be able to claim compensation for certain improvements that have been made when the tenancy ends. The right to compensation for improvements applies to improvements if they were started on or after 1 April 1994.

The compensation is calculated to take into account wear, tear and depreciation. Tenants can claim compensation for the cost of materials (but not appliances such as cookers or fridges) and labour costs (but not their own labour). Internal decoration (such as painting or wallpapering) does not qualify for compensation. Compensation cannot be claimed for professional fees (such as architects), or the cost of any relevant planning permission or consent under Building Regulations.

All claims must be made not more than 28 days before or 14 days after a tenancy ends.

11. Vulnerable Persons

The Council aims to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to access and benefit from its services, but realises that for some tenants who are vulnerable, barriers may exist which may prevent participation.

The Council aims to prioritise non-emergency repairs for elderly and vulnerable tenants wherever possible (for example heating and hot water) where the nature of the repair could risk the health or well-being of that person or household.

12. Disabled Adaptations

The Council will maintain any adaptation of fixed equipment providing that it is still required to meet the needs of the disabled household member for whom it was provided. This only applies to equipment supplied by the Council.

Semi-portable equipment supplied by the Council will be removed where it is no longer required but structural alterations will remain and will be maintained as part of the property. Where a repair is required to a minor or semi-portable adaptation that is no longer required by a household member, the adaptation will be removed.

Recommendations for any new adaptations are made to Dartford Borough Council by the Occupational Therapy Bureau and decisions are made in accordance with the Council's Disabled Adaptation's Policy.

13. Asbestos

In common with most other authorities and private sector landlords, Dartford Borough Council owns properties which may contain asbestos.

The Council carries out asbestos surveys on all of its residential housing stock. In addition to the above, asbestos surveys to all of the communal and common areas of

low rise properties have been completed. The asbestos surveys were carried out by an independent asbestos consultant in line with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 (CAR 2012) & HSG 264 Asbestos: The Survey Guide.

All asbestos removal works are carried out by a fully licensed asbestos company in accordance with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 (CAR 2012).

Asbestos containing materials (ACM's) pose no risk unless they are damaged or disturbed in such a way that asbestos fibres become airborne.

If there is any reason to suspect that there is any damaged asbestos in a property the Housing Repairs team should be contacted immediately on 01322 343800.

14. Tenant Involvement

Dartford Borough Council's Residents' Forum works in partnership with the Council to monitor and improve the delivery of housing services. The Forum attends monthly contract monitoring meetings and acts as a consultative body for various aspects of the Council's services.

15. Contractors Code of Conduct

All of the Council's contractors are required to abide by this code of conduct. (See Appendix C for details).

16. Equality and Diversity

The Council recognises that there are groups in society who are discriminated against and aims to make sure that all of the people it serves have equal access to the Council's facilities and services.

The Council also recognises the diversity of the people that live and work in the Borough and aims to achieve equality of opportunity in all of our activities, including the delivery of services to the community.

17. Complaints

The Council operates a formal corporate complaints procedure, the details of which can be found at www.dartford.gov.uk.

18. Communal Repairs

The Council will undertake a rigorous repairs regime of all of its communal areas and estates. In undertaking repairs to communal areas, the Council will use its best endeavours to ensure that best value is achieved in maintaining these areas. This may involve some works being packaged and dealt with on a Planned Maintenance basis. All repairs which are identified as being required to avoid causing or likely to cause a health and safety problem will be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

The Council will carry out regular estate inspections and ensure that any repairs needed are raised on relevant priorities for that type of repair.

19. Chaperone Scheme

The Council operates a female Chaperone Scheme which enables tenants to have a free chaperone to attend and oversee repair works if required. Call the repairs team on 01322 343800 for more information.

20. Out of Hours

The Council operates an emergency out of office hours service on 0845 634 1212 which is provided between 5.15pm on a normal working day and 8.00 am the next working day. The service is provided 24 hours a day at weekends and during public holidays.

The out of hours service has two fundamental aims:

- a) The making safe of services and securing properties
- b) The re-commissioning of those essential services where practically possible, dependant on the availability of resources, with a particular emphasis on prioritising heating repairs for elderly and vulnerable tenants

In some situations it may only be possible to attend and make the problem safe and the repair will need to be completed during normal working hours.

Where a call is received which does not meet the criteria for an out of hour's emergency visit, tenants will be advised that they will be contacted the next working day in order that a repair can be logged and an appointment agreed.

21. Leaseholders

The Council is the landlord of the block and estate for leasehold properties and is responsible for keeping the structure of the building, the common parts of the block and any external communal areas in a good state of repair.

Leaseholders have the right to be consulted about contracts (qualifying long term agreements), and certain works and/or major repairs (qualifying works), for which the leaseholder will be charged a proportionate amount.

If a leaseholder sub-lets a property they should inform the Council of this as it is legal requirement to ensure the gas equipment within the property receives an annual safety check (see Section 8).

22. Performance Monitoring

To help achieve the Council's aim of ensuring continuous improvement in the services it provides and to ensure that it meets all statutory obligations, the Council will put in place systems and processes which will allow it to monitor and evaluate performance.

The Council will regularly monitor service standards and the performance of its contractor and appropriate action will be taken if the service works are not performed to the required standard.

APPENDIX A

REPAIRS CATEGORIES

Repair Category	Priority Category	Target Response Time	Examples
Emergency Repair	P1	Within 2 hours	Fire damage; severe water leaks; a total loss of water, unsafe gas or electricity; a gas leak in the home; a total loss of heating and hot water sometime between November and March; blocked toilet or drain (when only one WC in the property); making a property safe after a break-in; gaining access after tenant has lost keys; jetting drains
Urgent Repairs	P2	Within 48 hours	A partial loss of water or electricity supply; a complete loss of heating and hot water sometime between April and October; a partial loss of heating and hot water at any time of year; minor plumbing leaks; a partly blocked sink; a blocked bath or basin; running overflows; leaking hot taps when boiler fired up
Urgent Repairs	P3	Within 5 working days	Communal lighting (only one or two lights affected). Minor repairs to external doors and window frames; minor plastering; running overflows in the spring and summer months
Routine Repairs	P4	Within 10 working days	Small renewals, i.e. WC pans, cisterns and taps
Routine Repairs	P5	Within 20 working days	Loose or broken gutters, cracked windows, dripping cold taps and reglazes
Routine Repairs	P6	Within 40 working days	Renewals i.e. kitchens, badly fitting doors and windows; rewiring; replacement gutters and down pipes; replacement paths and fences

APPENDIX B

List of General and Property Standards

In general:

- The property will be clean, tidy and secure
- The property will be structurally sound, weather tight and in a safe condition
- Gullies will be cleared and repaired where required
- Windows and doors will be secured and handles will work properly. Keys will be provided where applicable
- New locks will be fitted to the front and back doors
- Communal door keys/fobs will be provided
- Fences will be in sound condition around boundary lines
- Sheds will be cleared and keys provided

In the property:

- Safety checks on the electricity and gas will be carried out
- Interior of the property will be cleaned to a basic level
- The property will have full central heating
- Balustrades, handrails and stairs will be left secure
- Plasterwork will be in sound condition
- All pipework will be left sound and free from leaks
- Polystyrene tiles will be removed
- All flooring will be safe and in a fair condition

Decoration:

The condition of the decoration will vary by property. The Council may provide decorating vouchers (dependent upon the condition of the existing decoration) to contribute toward the cost.

The Kitchen:

- The property will have a cooker point and a gas bayonet fitting
- Cupboards will be cleaned and in serviceable condition

- Units will be installed if there is less than one wall unit and one floor unit
- Where possible, space will be available for a fridge/freezer and a washing machine with plumbing and drainage. Due to space restrictions, standard white goods may not be suitable and the tenant may have to use slim line appliances
- Four double sockets with a minimum of two located above worktop height will be provided

The Bathroom:

- All fittings will be left clean and in a fair condition
- The toilet will be cleaned and de-scaled and there will be a new toilet seat
- Tiling and grouting will be left clean and sound
- Seals around the bath and sink will be left clean and in a fair condition

APPENDIX C

Contractor's Code of Conduct

Identification

All operatives must be of smart appearance and wear an identification card which shows their name and photograph and the name and telephone number of the contractor they work for.

Access

All appointments made between the customer and the contractor must be kept. Operatives must ensure that they adhere to the arrangements that have been made and that they are punctual.

Formal on-site arrangements

The customer must remain on site at all times when the operative is present in the home. Operatives must ensure that they are never left alone with minors. Operatives must not seek to obtain private work from their customers.

Protection of property

Operatives must treat the homes of customers with respect and ensure that suitable protection is arranged for the customer's property and that delicate or valuable items are removed from the work area.

Disruption

Operatives must ensure there is minimum disruption to the customer and that work is limited to one room at a time if at all possible.

Damage to property

any damage to customer's property resulting from negligence of operatives must be compensated for by the contractor.

Services

Electric and gas supplies may only be used with the resident's permission and satisfactory payment, where appropriate, must be made to the customer prior to use. Reconnection and testing of the customer's services such as water, gas and electricity are to be undertaken at the end of each day.

Health and Safety

The site must be kept safe at all times. Fire exits, lifts staircases, corridors and doorways must be kept clear and not blocked by the contractor's tools or materials.

Site clearance

On completion of work, the site must be cleared of all debris, dust, waste materials and tidied at the end of each day.

Absolute respect

Operatives must be polite and courteous to the customer at all times. Racist or sexist remarks or innuendos will result in the operative being removed from the site immediately.

All contractors are required to deal with customers promptly and show patience, understanding and sensitivity at all times.

APPENDIX D

List of Council and Tenant Repair Responsibilities

	Council's responsibility	Tenant's responsibility
Bath Panels	√	
Baths, hand basins and toilets	√	
Bath seals and three rows of splashback tiles	√	
Bathroom - repairing cracks or chips in sinks, bath below water line	√	
Bleeding the radiators	√	
Blocked sinks, basins, baths & WC's	√	
Concrete floors (not including floor tiles)	√	
Cupboards drawers	√	
Cupboard door catches, handles and hinges, and drawer handles	√	
Deliberate damage that you, or people living with you, have caused		√
Disconnecting and reconnecting cookers unless part of the Planned Works Programme		√
Doors (communal only)	√	
Door entry systems	√	
Doors - Internal doors, door furniture and carpet strips		√
Door frames	√	
Doors -external doors	√	
Drainage (except private sewers and lateral drains which are the responsibility of the water companies)	√	
Electrical consumer unit (fuse box)	√	
Extractor fans	√	
Electric storage heaters	√	
Electrics - standard electrical wiring, sockets and light fittings	√	
Fencing - to match existing if previous fence is Council owned. Where no fencing exists, the boundary will be marked using 1.2m high on concrete posts for back and front boundary and the same for back garden side boundary incorporating 2 no. 1.8m gossip fence. For rear side fences adjacent to public roads or footpaths, 1.8m high close board fencing on concrete posts will be used	√	

Fireplaces and fire surrounds (if specified by a Gas Fitter, in poor condition which is likely to be a hazard to the tenant or household or the old back boiler has been removed)	√	
Floor Tiles unless confirmed as containing asbestos. Vinyl sheeting unless fitted as part of the Decent Homes Programme or as part of a disabled adaptation.		√
Foundations	√	
Garages and outbuildings (Council owned)	√	
Gardens (communal only)	√	
Garden ponds		√
Gas fires (Council owned)	√	
Gas meter and the gas supply		√
Gas pipework inside the home	√	
Gas servicing (yearly landlord safety checks)	√	
Gates (communal only)	√	
Gate posts	√	
Glazing (unless a crime number has been provided)		√
Guttering and downpipes	√	
Hard standings unless provided as part of the Disabled Adaptations Programme		√
Hot water cylinder jackets		√
Immersion Heaters	√	
Internal decorations unless part of the OAP Internal Decorations Programme		√
Keys - additional or replacement to home		√
Keys - additional or replacement to shared doors		√
Letterbox	√	
Lighting to communal areas	√	
Locks - additional security		√
Locks - replacement if a crime number is provided	√	
Overflows	√	
Paths & steps	√	
Pest control - prevention & eradication (communal areas only)	√	
Plasterwork	√	
Plumbing in of kitchen appliances		√
Radiators - including valves, timers and thermostats	√	
Roofs	√	
Security - spy holes and security chains		√
Sheds (brick built)	√	

Sheds (wooden)		√
Shed locks unless a crime number has been provided		√
Shower, rails, shower hose & shower head	√	
Shower curtains unless part of the Disabled Adaptations Programme (maximum of two new curtains including initial one)		√
Shower trays	√	
Shower units - electric	√	
Sink plugs and chains		√
Smoke alarms - mains operated	√	
Smoke Alarm testing and battery replacement		√
Soil and vent pipes	√	
Splashbacks and tiling - up to four courses using 150mm white glazed standard tiles	√	
Staircase. Bannisters and handrails	√	
Structure walls inside the home	√	
Structure and covering of the roof, the chimney, gutters, drainpipes and their clips, and wood or plastic boards on the outside of the building	√	
Taps and stopcocks	√	
Toilet cisterns and pans	√	
Toilet seats - unless disabled		√
TV Aerials (communal only)	√	
Walls - outside walls and rendering	√	
Washing lines - communal only	√	
Washing line posts (make safe only)	√	
Water pipes, overflow pipes and water tanks	√	
Water tank jackets		√
Window catches and handles	√	
Window frames and outside window sills	√	
Window vents	√	
Worktops	√	

APPENDIX E

HOW TO CONTACT US

If you need to report a repair or fault in your property then contact customer services immediately to prevent any serious damage occurring.

You can report a repair in any of the following ways:

- Telephone 01322 343800 during office hours – Monday-Thursday 8:45am to 5:15pm, Friday 8.45am to 4:45pm
- Emergency repairs out of office hours 0845 6341212
- Text on 07881 668706, e.g. text REPAIR, CHASE or RENT followed by your surname, first line of your address, when you are available and details of the services you require. For example:

REPAIR Mrs Smith 65 Tintagel Manor in all day Tuesdays blocked toilet

- On line via www.dartford.gov.uk/housing (on line help and on line repairs service)
- Write to Housing services. Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent DA1 1DR
- Personal visit to the above address (opposite the railway station)