Brighter Places

Building better futures

Tenant Handbook

What do you want to do?

Pay my rent

Via your MyPlace account
brighterplaces.co.uk/myplace

On our website
brighterplaces.co.uk/pay-your-rent

By direct debit
Call us on 0117 942 4600 to set this up

By calling our 24 hour payment line
0330 041 6497

Report a repair

On our website
brighterplaces.co.uk/report-a-repair

Phone us
During office hours and for out-of-hours emergencies call us on 0117 942 4600

Contact my housing officer

Talk to your housing officer about your rent, tenancy and any day to day issues including anti-social behaviour. Call 0117 942 4600.

Ask for support

We offer many kinds of support and advice to help you keep your home and improve your day to day life. Your housing officer is the first person to call. They can discuss your needs and make a referral. Call 0117 942 4600.

Your tenant handbook

Please keep this handbook safe. You can use it to answer questions about your tenancy, contact the service you need and ask for support.

Get in touch if you want us to explain anything here.

Would you like this handbook in another format?

We offer large print, easy read, braille, or audio CD. A digital copy is on our accessible website.

brighterplaces.co.uk/tenant-handbook

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About us

We are Bristol's largest independent social housing landlord providing homes for more than 8,000 people.

We were established in 2021 following the merger of United Communities and Solon South West housing associations.

We help tenants as much as we can so they maintain their tenancies and keep their homes for the long term.

Everything we do is driven by our values.

Brighter Places

Building better futures

Our values

We listen to people's stories, keep open minds and take time to understand the needs of our residents and anyone who asks us for help. We treat people with respect and honesty and collaborate with partners to achieve our goals.

We trust each other and we're honest. We are open with our residents and keep the conversation going. Our supportive working community allows us to make mistakes, own them and learn from them.

We think big, work hard to achieve our goals and are always ready for the next challenge. We bring everything we've got so we can build the best communities possible.

We believe in diversity, equity, dignity and the freedom to be. Whoever you are, wherever you're from and whatever your life story, you have a place in our communities. You are valued and you belong.

Top 10 questions

Answers to the questions tenants ask us the most

I would like to move to a new Brighter Places home

See page 24 for advice on moving and home swap options

I need to report a repair

See page 16 for the repairs we do and what you are responsible for

I need to pay my rent / set up a direct debit / order a rent payment card

See page 13 for payments, balances and refunds and using your online account

I need to discuss my debt / set up a payment plan

Call your income officer:
0117 942 4600

I want to make a complaint

See page 28 for how to do this

How do I contact my housing officer?

Call us on 0117 942 4600 or email info@brighterplaces.co.uk

I am struggling and need some support

Contact your housing officer on 0117 942 4600 and they can help

I am a victim of anti-social behaviour

See page 22 for advice on ASB, types of behaviour and how to report it to us

When is my communal area going to be cleaned?

See page 12 for information, contact details and feedback on your service

I want to move out of my Brighter Places home

See page 25 for what you need to do before you leave

Moving-in checklist

Things you need to do for your new home

Utilities

- read the meters and keep a note of the readings
- tell the gas, electricity and water companies the date you moved in
- use a Gas Safe fitter to install any gas cooker

TV

- arrange a TV aerial (except communal flats)

Council tax

- tell your local council when your tenancy started so they can set up your council tax

Register to vote

- register to vote in local and national elections – you can register at **gov.uk/register-to-vote** or contact your local council

Our lettings officer can give you advice

They can explain the heating system, where to turn off the water and gas, where to find the electric fuse box and whether the electricity has a key meter.

Checks we do before you move in

Gas and electrical work and appliances we are responsible for

We make sure you have a copy of gas and electrical safety certificates or tell you how to view them.

Internal decorations

If decorations are poor, we offer vouchers for decorating materials. We agree this with you before you accept the tenancy.

Keys to your home

We provide two full sets of keys when you sign your tenancy agreement. Some locks are extra secure so only Brighter Places can order the special key.

If you lose a key, please tell us immediately as it can take up to two weeks for a special key to be delivered. We always ask you to pay for the new key in advance.

All other keys are your responsibility and you must arrange copies yourself. If you lock yourself out, you will have to arrange and pay a locksmith to let you in.

Contents insurance

Brighter Places has insurance to cover the structure of your home (the building) but not your things – called contents. We strongly advise you to get contents insurance to cover theft, loss or damage to your things. We can give you information to help you to do this or you can find out information on our website.

brighterplaces.co.uk/contents-insurance

Your tenancy

Your tenancy is the agreement between you (the tenant) and Brighter Places (the landlord)

When you accept a property from us, you sign the tenancy agreement. This means you accept the rules for living in the property. These are called terms and conditions.

As a tenant you have rights and responsibilities. You need to make sure you understand what these are or ask us about them.

The terms of the tenancy agreement do not usually change after you have signed it. Only the amount of rent and service charge you pay will change. There are clear rules about how this can happen and we will tell you about any changes to your rent and service charge in advance.

The type of tenancy you be offered will depend on the property you are moving to and your personal circumstances.

Our lettings officer or housing officer provide more information and advice about your tenancy.

Your housing officer

All Brighter Places tenants have a housing officer. This is the first person to contact if you have any questions about your tenancy agreement, your home or your neighbourhood.

You will meet your housing officer after you have moved in to your new home. They will arrange a time to visit you in the first six weeks. This is to check that you are OK and to answer your questions.

You can speak to your housing officer about things such as rubbish that is dumped outside and gardening on your estate or to report anti-social behaviour to them.

You can also tell them if you are struggling and would like some support. This might be about money, something you need in your home, another worry or your mental health, for example.

Call 0117 942 4600 to speak to your housing officer

Your responsibilities

These are the main rules of your tenancy agreement that you must keep to

The property is your only home

If you move somewhere else and do not tell us, or if let the property to someone else, you have broken the tenancy agreement and acted illegally. If this happens, we will take legal action.

It is OK to have a friend to stay. If you want them to live as a lodger you must contact your housing officer first to ask for permission.

See information on page 9

You must pay your rent, service charge and bills

You must keep up to date with your rent and household bills. If you are struggling, contact your income officer or call our office.

Do not damage your property

You must look after everything that is in your home when you move in. These are called fixtures and fittings. They include things like heating, electrics, gas fittings, doors, windows and any other part of the property or the outside space. You must not damage or remove any gas or electricity meters in your home.

Tell us if you are going away for more than four weeks

This is written in the tenancy agreement.

Keep your property tidy

You are responsible for getting rid of all your rubbish, including old furniture or other large things you do not want. You may need to drive them to your local council recycling centre or ask the council to collect them. The recycling centre is free for household waste. The local council will charge to collect things.

Show respect to neighbours and their visitors

There are limits on how much noise neighbours are allowed to make and how they can behave. The rules protect you and your neighbours. If you feel upset by something a neighbour is doing, please let us know.

Read about anti-social behaviour. See page 22

Report all repairs to us

This is important. As your landlord we must keep your home safe and in a good condition. You must allow us to come into your home when we need to do repairs and health and safety inspections and to carry out other services.

You must also allow us access if we need to reach neighbouring properties through your home – for example to put up scaffolding to do repair works.

Some repairs are your responsibility. See page 16

Why we might think you are not keeping to your tenancy agreement

We try to support tenants so they can stay in their homes if they want to. However, if you break the terms of your tenancy agreement we can apply to the court to ask you to leave or to get access if we need to. This might be for various reasons, for example:

- you are behind with your rent
- you don't let us in to carry out our legal duties such as gas safety inspections and some serious repairs
- you have been violent or threatened violence to your partner, a family member, a neighbour or one of our staff or contractors

Contact your housing officer if you need support with your tenancy. See page 7

Joint tenants

Joint tenants have equal responsibility for the tenancy agreement. This is important. You are both responsible for the rent and any rent arrears even if one or both of your move out of the property to live somewhere else.

If another person has been living at the property as their only or principal home for 12 months you have the right to request a joint tenancy. The other person will need to provide proof that they have been living at the property for at least 12 months.

If a joint tenant dies the other joint tenant can take over the tenancy. Please contact your housing officer for advice.

If you want to end your tenancy, talk to us first.

What to do if you do not understand the tenancy agreement

If English is not your first language, we can get an interpreter in your language so you understand. We can also arrange other formats such as large print, easy read, different coloured paper or braille.

Can I take in a lodger?

We must agree in writing before a lodger moves in. If we say no, it will be for a good reason, such as if the property is too small and it would become overcrowded.

It is your responsibility to make sure your lodger lives within the terms or your tenancy agreement and leaves when the tenancy ends.

Can I sublet the property?

You cannot sublet the whole property or hand the tenancy on to anyone else. This is tenancy fraud and is illegal. If you are aware of anyone else doing this, you can tell us privately and in confidence.

Let us know if you change your contact details

If your email, contact number or household members change, please let us know. Contact us on info@brighterplaces.co.uk

Can I make changes to my home?

You can do minor decorating, such as painting internal walls, without asking us. However, please check with us before you do any home improvements. We will be reasonable and we will always agree or disagree in writing. We may ask to see plans for what you want to do and we must make sure all works are safe. We may also check that the work is being done by a qualified tradesperson.

Find out what you can do without asking and what you need to ask about. See page 16

Keep communal hallways and shared spaces clear

This is for health and safety reasons. We inspect all communal areas to make sure they are clear.

You must not keep any of your things or bags of rubbish in communal areas. You also cannot put pictures on walls or add plant pots to communal spaces.

We take a zero tolerance approach to any items kept in communal areas. We will remove your things and charge you for each item we remove.

Tips for storing electric bikes and scooters

brighterplaces.co.uk/electric-bikes-and-scooters-fire-safety

How to be a good neighbour

A good neighbour is

- considerate – they respect the rights and privacy of other people
- tolerant – they understand that different people have different ways of doing things and that is okay
- responsible – for how they act and the way their family, visitors and pets behave
- law abiding – they are responsible and do not carry out illegal activity

If you have a problem with a neighbour

Try to sort things out together. Talk things over if there is a problem. This keeps things informal and is often the best way to improve things. Your neighbour may not know how their actions affect you. It can be enough to just explain how their behaviour is upsetting you. Listen to their point of view and try to come to an agreement that works for everyone.

Find out how to report anti-social behaviour. See page 22

Communal gardens

If you have a communal garden, remove any children's toys at the end of the day. This includes trampolines and paddling pools. If you don't remove them, we will remove them for health and safety reasons.

Rules on pets

You must have our written permission to get a pet or to get another pet. We will always be reasonable. Some properties do not allow tenants to keep pets so you must always check with us first.

Customer care

We will work hard to give you excellent service. We have agreed with tenants what this means. Our customer care standards are listed below

We will treat you and your home with respect

- We will be honest about what we can and cannot do and we will do what we say
- We will take personal responsibility for dealing with your query
- We will make it easy for you to complain if we get things wrong
- If we cannot help with your query, we will do our best to find the right service for you

We will keep your data safe

- We will ask for and hold correct information about you
- We will keep your information private and safe, as the law says
- We will listen hard and record carefully what you tell us

What our staff and contractors will do when we visit your home

- We will arrange a time, whenever possible
- We will show identification and tell you the reason for the visit
- If you are not there at the time agreed, we will leave a card to tell you how you to arrange a new time
- We will give you up-to-date, clear information about your home, your tenancy, what we are doing to sort out the problem and how well we are performing

We will communicate in a way that suits you

- This can be by phone, letter, email, on our website, on social media and on other digital channels
- If you need a translation into English, we will provide an interpreter
- We will give you emergency contacts for when our office is closed
- We will put our office opening times on our reception, on our website and in our magazine

When you write to us

- We will confirm this in 3 working days and respond to you in 5 working days

When you phone us

- We aim to answer your call within 5 minutes
- The person who answers will tell you their name and job title at the start
- We will confirm your identity
- We will offer to call you back if we need to place you on hold

When you visit our office

- We will offer to meet in a private area if this is needed
- We will provide a meeting area that is accessible, comfortable and welcoming
- We will see you on time if you have an appointment
- If you do not have an appointment, we will aim to see you within 15 minutes

Your rent and service charge

How we set your rent each year

Brighter Places is a not for profit organisation. We exist to provide affordable homes and support local communities and we aim to provide good value for money for the rent and other charges that you pay.

Who sets the rent

As a social housing provider we set our annual rent in accordance with government and regulatory requirements.

Rents for most tenants are reviewed annually following consultation with our resident engagement panel and our Board. The rent for some tenants includes a service charge for shared or communal facilities they use. We will let you know in writing about any change to your rent.

What your rent pays for

Rent is our main income and is used to pay for all the services we provide. This includes repairs, regular maintenance, improvements to your home, housing services such as advice, managing anti-social behaviour and support to help you manage your tenancy.

Any money left over is used to improve services, support tenants and the community where you live, improve existing homes and create new homes.

Trouble paying the rent?

Contact us and we can help.
Call 0117 924 4600
brighterplaces.co.uk/pay-your-rent

Talk to us about your service charge

You can discuss your service charge with us at any time. You can also find answers to common questions on our website.
Email: engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk

brighterplaces.co.uk/rent-and-service-charges

About the service charge

If you live in a shared block or estate you may pay a service charge for services we provide to maintain your block and look after the shared areas around your home. The service charge is a separate payment to your rent.

Grounds maintenance and cleaning

The service charge covers services such as cleaning shared hallway, stairs and rubbish chutes, maintaining lifts plus gardening and outdoor maintenance. These services are carried out by contractors on our behalf.

Each year we agree your service charge

If you pay a service charge, we write to you in January or February. We set out the service charge cost for the year ahead and ask for your feedback by letter, email, phone or online meeting. The new service charge begins in April.

Each year the service charge figures are checked by an external accountant, called an auditor. We also listen to tenant suggestions for keeping costs down. If you are not happy about the service charge, you can challenge it. When we write to your each year we will tell you how to do this.

How to pay your rent

Direct debit

brighterplaces.co.uk/direct-debit

This is a flexible, safe, simple, direct way to make rent and service charge payments from your account. It takes a few minutes to set up. You can use the form on our website, call us on 0117 942 4600 or ask for a form to be sent in the post.

MyPlace

brighterplaces.co.uk/myplace

MyPlace is your Brighter Places online account that offers 24 hours access to pay your rent and lets you see your balance at any time. It is quick and easy to register for your MyPlace account – you need your seven digit tenancy number.

- convenient – make payments whenever you want and use it to message us too
- secure – it's your own account with a private login
- control – you can see and update your personal details and send us requests

Allpay

allpay.net

Call 0330 041 6497

Allpay is a flexible way to pay rent used by many tenants. You use the payment reference number on your rent card and pay online or by phone 24 hours a day 7 days a week. You can also pay at the post office, at a shop with a PayPoint sign or even get an app on your smartphone.

When do I pay my rent?

Your tenancy agreement tells you how often you need to pay your rent. The easiest way to pay is by direct debit from your bank account on a set day each month.

brighterplaces.co.uk/pay-your-rent

What to do if you are in financial difficulty

If you cannot pay your rent, get in touch immediately so we can understand your position and offer you support. This is a confidential service.

brighterplaces.co.uk/pay-your-rent

Call 0117 924 4600

Emergency repairs

What is an emergency?

An emergency includes a gas leak, no water, total power failure, fire, sudden serious damage, burst internal pipes or a broken lock on the only access door to your home.

If you smell gas

Call the National Gas line immediately 0800 111 999

If you have no electricity

- first check to see if your neighbours have lost their supply – if not, the problem could be with your own trip switches in your fuse box
- check your trip switches are all in the ON position – if your trip switch has switched OFF, turn off all your electrical appliances
- try to reset the trip switch to the ON position – the supply may come back on
- then switch on the appliances one at a time – this may show you what is causing the problem
- if the trip switch is still ON and you can find no reason, call Western Power on

0800 365 900

If you have a water leak

Turn the water off at the stopcock – this is often under the kitchen sink or behind a small metal lid in the front garden. Then call us on 0117 942 4600.

Other emergencies
Call 0117 942 4600
We respond within 24 hours

- unsafe electrical socket or other electrical fitting
- no heating and/or hot water (1 October to 1 April)
- immersion heater not working (if this is your only hot water)
- main door locks broken (only if there is no other access to your home)
- severe roof leak
- blocked toilet or drain with sewage overflowing
- minor water leak that is out of control and will probably cause damage e.g. if it runs onto electrics
- blocked toilet or drain with sewage overflowing
- burst water pipe that is out of control

If we respond to an emergency call-out and the situation in your home is not an emergency, we may recharge for our time.

If you cannot switch off the water, call your water supplier emergency line

Bristol	Bristol Water	0345 702 3797
S. Glos	Bristol Water	0345 702 3797
	Severn Trent	0800 783 4444
Swindon	Thames Water	0800 316 9800

Non-emergency repairs

How to report a repair

See below

Repairs we charge you for

Page 16

Repairs you must do

Page 16

How we manage repairs

Most repairs are done by our repairs partner. Their tradespeople will always carry ID cards.

There are many types of non-emergency repair. We look at all non-emergency repair requests carefully and consider how they affect the tenant and the property to help us decide which ones have to be done before others.

When you report a non-emergency repair we aim to give you a date for the repair within 24 hours and complete the repair within 28 days.

How to report a repair

Use our website form

brighterplaces.co.uk/
report-a-repair

Email us

info@brighterplaces.co.uk

Use your MyPlace account

brighterplaces.co.uk/myplace

Call us during office hours

When the office is closed, call this number and listen to the message. It tells you what to do.

0117 942 4600 and choose option 1

Our office hours

Monday	8.30am – 5pm
Tuesday	8.30am – 5pm
Wednesday	10.30am – 5pm
Thursday	8.30am – 5pm
Friday	8.30am – 4.30pm

Repairs you must do and pay for

General

This includes replacing keys for doors and window locks, filling small holes, gaps and cracks, repairs to flooring, doorbells and fixings for mirrors, shelves, curtain tracks and towel rails.

We will replace and recharge for any broken glass or other damage you cause.

Plumbing

Including blocked sinks and waste pipes, fitting washing machines and dishwashers, adding sealant around sinks, showers, baths and toilets

Electrical

This includes repairs such as fitting light bulbs, your own electrical appliances and plugs and resetting the trip switch if the electricity goes off.

Outside

This includes repairs to sheds and decking, maintaining your garden and fence repairs (unless there is a public space on the other side).

Repairs we charge you for

If you, your family, your visitors or your pets cause damage to your home, you are responsible for the cost of the repair. We recharge this to you if we have to do the repair to keep your home safe.

You are responsible for accidents, misuse, neglect and poor DIY jobs. We also charge for safety checks and if we need to take legal steps to get into your home.

Check with us first

Check with us about all the repairs you are responsible for or find them here:

brighterplaces.co.uk/ your responsibilities

What to do if you want to make changes to your home

You have the right to make reasonable changes and improve your home and garden. However you must not make any structural changes to the building or loft, take down walls or install new walls.

You need our written approval before making some changes.

Please contact your housing officer before you make any changes. They will tell you if you need our permission to go ahead.

All works must be done by a qualified contractor to a good standard set by us in writing. Any electrical or gas works will need a test certificate. We may also come and inspect the work while it is being done and when it is finished.

We may take legal action against your tenancy if the work is substantial and does not have our permission. We can ask you to put things back as they were and you will have to pay the cost.

Criminal damage

If someone damages your property as a crime report it to the policy straight away.

- if it is serious damage, call 999, otherwise call 111 – the Police will give you a crime reference number
- keep a note of the crime reference number, the date and time of the crime – we may need to see it before doing any repairs
- if your home is not secure, report it to us immediately call the emergency out-of-hours number if our office is closed

Planned works and improvements

We carry our regular planned work to look after all tenant homes. This is called cyclical maintenance. For example, we aim to redecorate the outside every seven years.

Sometimes we carry out large projects to improve many homes at once. We will always tell you in good time what we plan to do and when and we will communicate with you during the work.

Our customer service team can tell you what work is planned for your home and when you can expect it to be done. If you think work is needed, you can tell us or show us photos and we will discuss this with you.

Net zero carbon

We are improving the energy performance of many of our homes. This work includes things like loft and wall insulation, energy efficient heating systems and new windows and doors. In 2022 we set a target for all homes to reach Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating C by 2030 and to net zero by 2050. For many homes this will be a big improvement.

Home insurance

We insure your home structure against things like fire and flood. We do not insure your personal items, carpets or furnishings, including damage caused by building leaks. We strongly advise you to get **contents insurance** for this. We recommend the National Housing Federation insurance.

Find out about insurance on our website.

brighterplaces.co.uk/contents-insurance

Safety checks

By law we must carry out regular checks to keep your home safe

You must let us in to your home to do these checks. We send our contractors or our own staff, they will carry identification.

We try hard to arrange a time that suits you. Please let us know if you need to change an appointment or if we need to make any reasonable adjustments for you.

If we cannot arrange a time with you or you refuse to let us in we can take legal steps to access your home to carry out the work. We will charge you the legal costs which can be up to £1,000.

How our contractors will behave

When we carry out a safety check or a repair, our contractors will treat you and your home with respect.

Our contractors will always carry ID cards with them. They will only enter your home if an adult is there, wear overshoes if you ask them and ask permission to use your facilities.

How we expect you to behave

We expect you to keep your appointment and allow access to your home. Please be considerate to contractors and have enough credit on your meter so we can complete the safety checks.

Please give us at least 48 hours notice if you need to change the appointment.

Essential safety checks

Every year

- heating (gas boiler or heat pump, check and service)
- smoke, heat and carbon detectors (we usually do this when we check your heating. In some properties we check every six months)
- fire doors (for buildings more than 11 metres tall)
- stairlifts
- hoists
- PAT testing (if we provide white goods)
- cylinders (for some hot water and energy renewable systems)
- ground source heat pumps

Every six months

- through-the-floor lift

Every five years

- electrical testing

Extra checks we may need to do

- tree surveys (at some properties and blocks)
- asbestos
- shared water system e.g. for legionella bacteria
- damp or mould
- serious damage
- ventilation
- solar panels
- EV chargers
- fire risk assessments
- car park gates
- lifts

Fire safety

We carry out regular fire safety checks and fire alarm tests in all blocks

The fire action notice in your block tells you what to do if a fire breaks out. It is your responsibility to avoid fire risk in your home.

What you must do

- test your smoke alarm once a month – replace the batteries if you need to
- let us know if your smoke alarm isn't working
- never smoke in bed
- always keep a close eye on your cooking
- keep all appliances and combustible materials such as tea towels and kitchen roll away from the cooker
- never leave burning candles unattended
- don't overload electrical extension leads
- don't charge e-bike batteries overnight

brighterplaces.co.uk/staying-safe-at-home

Never try to tackle a fire yourself – if a fire starts in your home, call 999

Plan ahead

- make sure everyone living in the home knows where door and window keys are
- plan two escape routes and keep them clear
- familiarise yourself with the fire procedure for your block

If fire happens

- stay calm and act quickly – tell everyone to get out
- don't take valuables with you
- close all doors behind you to stop the fire spreading

If you can't get out

- call 999 immediately
- stay in a room far away from the fire
- if you can't use a phone, open a window and shout for help
- put towels or bedding around the bottom of the door to reduce the smoke getting in

Damp, condensation and mould

If you have any concerns about damp, condensation or mould in your home, we are here to help. Preventing and treating damp and mould is a priority for us and we take resident concerns very seriously.

The most common cause of damp and mould is condensation. This is caused by everyday things like cooking, bathing and washing which add moisture to the air. Small amounts of condensation are not usually a problem. There are tips on our website on how to reduce excess condensation.

If you have damp and mould report it to us in the same way your report a repair or call us on 0117 942 4600. See page 15

More information

brighterplaces.co.uk/damp-condensation-and-mould

Support to enjoy your life

Perhaps you are finding it hard to keep your home, to manage your tenancy or progress in your career

We offer many kinds of support and advice to help tenants enjoy their homes and improve their life. We call this tenancy sustainment.

Your housing officer is the first person to call. They will discuss your needs and can make a referral. Call 0117 942 4600.

Helping you to stay independent

We can support you to adapt your home if you find it difficult to move around or use the facilities.

Once you contact us, we will reply within five working days and tell you who will look after your request. They will keep you informed of progress.

We will make sure you have your say about what is needed. For small things like grab rails or lever taps, we aim to do the work within 28 days. We can also help you to get an assessment for support.

For larger things like a stair lift or wet room we cover half the cost and we can help you access a grant for the other half.

If you are not sure about what help is available, talk to our customer service team on 0117 942 4600

Different kinds of support we can offer

We focus on support to improve the health and general wellbeing of Brighter Places tenants.

Our service is free and confidential. The support comes from Brighter Places and from external agencies we can refer you to.

You might need a small amount of support when you are in difficulty or support that is spread over a longer time. Here are some of the things we can help with.

Money and household goods

- financial checks and support to maximise income
- support to apply for benefits or to appeal a case
- one-off food shopping and energy vouchers if you are in financial hardship
- applying for Discretionary Housing Payments
- support to get household goods
- support to resettle after moving
- advice on energy, home insurance or setting up a bank account

Mental and physical health

- help to access local services and advice, such as getting a GP or dentist
- mental health and wellbeing support
- support with domestic abuse
- adapting your home for your physical health needs

What to do if you are in financial difficulty

If you need to discuss money worries or cannot pay your rent, get in touch with your income officer so we can understand your position and offer you support.

Call 0117 924 4600

If you want to feel better about your work life, we offer all kinds of support for careers, training and coaching.

Keep an eye on our jobs pages for careers with Brighter Places.

brighterplaces.co.uk/careers

Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

What is ASB?

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) is a general term that covers many things that people can do to upset other people. According to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, ASB is behaviour which causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more people who are not in the same household.

What is NOT ASB?

Sometimes people report problems that we cannot act on. This limits what we can do. We may offer conflict resolution or involve other agencies to try to improve things.

Things we will not take action against

- one-off parties
- people who are rude or give you a funny look
- cats that roam or foul
- normal household noise such as your vacuum cleaner, washing machine or another appliance, or the occasional door slam
- children playing
- children running inside flats
- inconsiderate parking

How we deal with ASB

Brighter Places is fully committed to tackling ASB. We use whatever we can to help us resolve problems. We want anyone who is suffering from racial or other harassment, or any other form of ASB, to tell us straight away. We deal with complaints in confidence where necessary and we offer support to victims.

We encourage you to try to first solve the problem yourself.

Speak to your housing officer in confidence and they will support you

In an emergency call the police on 999

Conflict resolution

If you try to sort things and this does not work or you feel unable to do this, tell us. We will often seek the help of a professional mediator. This is one of the most effective ways to resolve a dispute. Mediation (also called conflict resolution) is voluntary and it gives all parties a chance to express their views.

How to report ASB

You can phone us, send an email or write to us at the address on the back page or use our website. Contact our customer services team who are trained in ASB issues. Make sure you have the details of what has happened and any other useful information.

Can I remain anonymous?

Yes. When you report anti-social behaviour, we will ask for your name and contact details, but you have the right to remain anonymous. We will be led by you and ask your permission to do things. However, we cannot act without evidence, so we may ask you to record details of the behaviour, how long it lasts and who is doing it.

We can provide you with diary sheets to help you do this. We may ask you to complete a witness statement and come to court if we need to take legal action.

How we prioritise what you report to us

Low level ASB

- excessive noise
- vandalism or criminal damage
- pet nuisance
- drug misuse (smoking cannabis)
- loitering and causing nuisance
- garden nuisance
- fly tipping or rubbish
- making false claims about another person
- verbal abuse which is none threatening

High level ASB

- criminal behaviour
- threatening behaviour
- serious drug dealing
- hate crime
- physical violence
- cannabis farming
- domestic abuse
- illegal weapons
- serious sexual offences
- cuckooing

Hate crime

Behaviour that targets someone because of their age, disability, ethnicity or race, gender, gender identity, religion, belief or sexual orientation is a hate crime.

If you experience this or see someone else suffering it, report it to us in confidence and we will work with you to stop it. The police and different support agencies also work with us to tackle hate crime.

We work with SARI (Stand Against Racism and Inequality) who provide free and confidential support for anyone who is victim of hate crime in the Avon and Somerset area.

Looking out for your neighbours

Everyone has the right to feel safe in their home and to live their life free from harm and abuse. Here is what to do if you notice something that does not feel right

- if you think someone is in immediate danger, call 999
- if there is no immediate danger, contact the social services team at your local council
- read the information about safeguarding on our website

brighterplaces.co.uk/safeguarding

Domestic abuse

You must not behave in an abusive way towards any person who is allowed to live with you, especially if this stops them from living in peace.

Domestic abuse can affect women or men and those in same-sex relationships and you do not have to accept it as a normal part of a relationship. It could be a single incident or repeated incidents. Usually it is a pattern of behaviour by one of the following:

- a current or ex-partner, even if they do not live there
- a family member or someone else in the household

You are at risk of losing your tenancy if you are physically or mentally abusive to anyone, whether they live in a Brighter Places home or not. You can also lose your tenancy if you have a court order to leave your home temporarily or permanently because of behaviour towards someone at home.

Moving home

There are various ways you can move – here we explain the different options and what you need to do

Mutual exchange via Homeswapper

You may be able to exchange your home with another social housing tenant if they want to swap. This is called mutual exchange.

You cannot move if you owe rent or are not meeting the terms of your tenancy agreement.

Talk to your housing officer before moving or looking to swap your property. If you don't have written permission from your landlord before you move you could lose your home.

You can find out more on the Homeswapper website:
homeswapper.co.uk

We also have advice on our website:
brighterplaces.co.uk/swap-your-home

Moving to another Brighter Places property

If we offer you a new tenancy with us, we talk to you about the property and make sure that you can afford to move in and pay the rent. We ask for four weeks rent in advance for each new tenancy.

If you are working, we help you to set up a rent and/or service charge payments.

If you are claiming Universal Credit or Housing Benefit, we can give you advice on how to change your claim so you can pay your new rent.

How we advertise empty Brighter Places homes

We advertise empty homes in your area with your local council.

We have formal arrangements with each local council so we can offer reasonable preference to Brighter Places tenants for some relets. This is made clear on the advert.

You want to transfer to another social housing provider

Each local council has their own policy. You need to contact the local council and speak to their housing options team. The policy is usually available online and/or by post if you ask for it. This explains the rules about who has priority for moving.

Bristol	bristol.gov.uk	0117 922 2200
S.Glos	southglos.gov.uk	01454 868 005
Swindon	swindon.gov.uk	01793 445 503
Forest of Dean	fdean.gov.uk	01594 810 000

What to do if you want to end your tenancy with us

You need to complete and sign a notice to quit and send this to our office. We can send the form to you. Your housing officer can give you advice.

You must give four week's notice to end your tenancy. You can leave before this but the rent must be paid for the full four weeks.

If you have a joint tenancy both tenants must sign the notice to quit. If both tenants cannot sign the notice to quit, please ask your housing officer for advice.

What happens when you give us notice to quit

We will contact you and arrange to see you at your home to discuss:

- how you must leave your property so you do not get extra costs
- what repairs you need to complete before you leave
- any costs there will be from damage by yourself, your family or your visitors

We ask you to keep energy meters in credit and pass on meter keys to us.

On the last day of your tenancy, we can come to meet you so that you can hand over your keys and we can do a last check together.

We may need you to move out for a while

Your housing officer will talk to you about this.

We usually do repairs while you live in your home. sometimes we need you to move to temporary accommodation such as bed and breakfast or Airbnb so we can carry out essential work. This is called a decant.

It is usually so we can complete important works or adapt your home for a disability. It could also be for a serious problem like a fire or flood.

If the move is permanent, we will make a home loss payment. This is very unusual and we will always explain the reasons.

brighterplaces.co.uk/moving-out

Owning your own home

There are two ways you can buy a home with Brighter Places: Right to Acquire and Shared Ownership

Right to Acquire

You may be able to buy your current home outright at a discount depending on the property and tenancy. This is called Right to Acquire.

You cannot part-buy your home through Right to Acquire.

brighterplaces.co.uk/right-to-acquire

Shared Ownership

Shared Ownership is a great way to get your foot on the property ladder. It enables you to buy a share in a home, usually between 25% and 75% of the value of the property, and pay discounted rent to Brighter Places on the part you don't own. All our Shared Ownership properties are marketed our Shared Ownership website.

We also have a specialist sales team to support tenants with:

- Right to Acquire
- Shared Ownership (new build homes and resales)
- staircasing (buying more of your shared ownership home)
- permission requests and lease extensions

You can see all our Shared Ownership properties on our Shared Ownership website:

bphomes.co.uk

Call 0117 942 4600 or email: sales@brighterplaces.co.uk

Have your say

We want all tenants to share ideas, give us feedback and get involved in how we do things

How you can get involved

Connected voices

Our tenant network is where ideas are shared and events take shape. We offer support to tenants who come forward and want to get involved or start a tenant network. As a tenant you are a member of this network and can get in touch at any time.

Engagement panel

This group of tenants take a close look at all our services and policies, representing you at the highest level and reporting back from each meeting. We call this scrutiny.

The engagement panel's role is to:

- monitor customer service performance
- shape future services
- review and help us develop policies and plans
- co-design and support wider tenant engagement

Customer Experience Committee

Three tenants are part of this committee. They work with the Brighter Places Board and our staff to make sure tenant feedback is heard. They tell us what it's like to live in a Brighter Places home and what we could do better.

Get in touch any time

Call 0117 942 4600 and ask for resident engagement

Email: engagement@brighterplaces.co.uk

Engagement panel blog

Reports from the panel are shared in the tenant blog on our website, on our news pages, in Brighter News magazine and via our regular e-news.

Observe a meeting

As a tenant you are welcome to come along to an engagement panel meeting as an observer. The panel meets every four weeks and meeting dates are posted online or available via the contact details above.

Tenant surveys

We run regular tenant surveys – on paper and online – to give you the opportunity to share views, ask for information and say how you like us to communicate with you.

We value your feedback

We value all feedback within our teams and use this to help us improve our services.

How to give feedback. See page 28

Customer feedback and complaints

If we have made a mistake, we would like to put things right – here we explain how to give us feedback and make a formal complaint

You can give us your feedback or make a complaint by phone, email, social media, letter, via our website or in person.

Compliments and comments

We welcome all feedback, positive and negative and ask tenants to get in touch when things work well and when things do not work well.

If you are not happy about something we have done or not done, tell us as soon as possible. We will always try to sort things out with you. We also have a formal complaints procedure.

What happens when you get in touch

When you give us feedback this is logged and shared with the relevant staff. We aim to acknowledge your feedback within five working days.

If you are not happy with our reply or we cannot resolve things within this time, we can begin our complaints process. You can start a formal complaint at any time.

Your complaint may involve more than one of our services or be about someone working on our behalf.

What you can complain about

These are some examples:

- delays in answering when you get in touch
- if we fail to provide a service
- if you are not happy with the standard of our service
- if we don't do things the way we say we will
- our attitude or the way we treat you

How to give feedback or make a complaint

Email:
feedback@brighterplaces.co.uk

Call 0117 942 4600

Use the form on our website:
brighterplaces.co.uk/
feedback and complaints

Our complaints procedure

Stage 1: complaint (10 working days)

As soon as the matter is logged as a formal complaint, we will do the following.

- acknowledge your complaint
- make sure we understand your complaint and clarify anything we are unsure about
- tell you which manager will oversee your complaint
- resolve your complaint quickly and fairly and write to you to explain what we have done or will do to put things right
- if new issues are raised during Stage 1, the manager will try to consider these (if relevant) in their investigation and response. If this would cause a long delay, the new issue will be logged as a new complaint
- we may extend the complaint time with your agreement

If you are not happy with the Stage 1 outcome you can tell us you want the complaint to go to Stage 2.

We will write to you once your complaint has been closed to ask how satisfied you are with how well you think we handled the complaint

Stage 2: complaint escalation (20 working days)

Your complaint will be passed to a Director who will arrange a review. They will respond to you in writing within 20 working days.

If you do not agree with the response you get from our Stage 2 investigation, then you can ask the housing ombudsman to look at your case.

If we do not accept a complaint, we explain why and you have the right to challenge this decision with the housing ombudsman.

Housing ombudsman

You have the right to contact the housing ombudsman service (HOS) at any stage of the feedback process to seek impartial advice.

Call: 0300 111 3000

Visit: www.housingombudsman.org.uk/contact-us

Write to: Housing Ombudsman Service PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston PR2 0ET

Note: the HOS does not accept new case enquiries sent by email

How we protect your data

The information we hold about you and how we keep it safe

The UK GDPR (Jan 2020) and Data Protection Action 2018 give you more control over who owns and uses your personal data.

Here we set out what information we hold about you and how we manage it by law. Most of the data we hold comes from your tenancy agreement or information you have shared with us.

We may contact you from time to time to check the information we hold on you is correct. You can also contact us at any time to update the personal information we hold. See the details below.

What data do we hold?

We may hold the following types of data about you.

Personal data
This relates to data that may identify you. It includes your name, address, age, contact details and information on other people in your household.

Sensitive data – called special category data
This includes information such as ethnicity, religion, health details and sexual orientation.

Tenancy data
This helps us to provide a service to you, such as information about your rent payments, repairs history, complaints and anti-social behaviour.

Why we hold personal data and how we use it

We hold enough personal information to help us deliver a great service to you and to be able to contact you and to assist you with a range of tenancy issues or signpost you to other support if needed.

Here are some of the things we use it for:

- to deliver our services
- to ask for your feedback and keep you up to date
- to communicate in ways you choose, such as by email, letter and our magazine
- to answer queries or deal with complaints
- to protect our colleagues and contractors
- other reasons that are required by law

How we store your data

We use a secure digital housing system to manage our services and store your information.

We may also store your data in other software (e.g. Microsoft). All these have the appropriate level of physical and electronic protection to keep your information safe.

For more information please see our privacy notices:

brighterplaces.co.uk/privacy-notices-and-gdpr

Who sees your data

Relevant staff in Brighter Places have access to your information to provide a specific service to you or to carry out their job role.

Other people have access to some of your data, such as our contractors who provide a service to you on our behalf. They only see what is needed for the service they deliver.

For legal reasons we may share your personal data, for example, if we get a formal request by the Police. We may also ask your consent to share your personal data, for example if you want a family member to act on your behalf or to get additional support for an agency.

Your rights

By law you have the right to access the data we hold about you. You can ask us. This is called a subject access request (SAR).

Usually we will provide this information but there may be some data we cannot share – for example, if it contains personal information about another person.

When you request a copy of your data, we may contact you and ask for more information about your request. The data will be supplied to you within one month, or this may be extended to two months.

Get the latest tenant news, opportunities and policy updates on our website:

brighterplaces.co.uk

Get in touch

Brighter Places
Building better futures

By phone
0117 942 4600

Monday 8.30am – 5pm
Tuesday 8.30am – 5pm
Wednesday 10.30am – 5pm
Thursday 8.30am – 5pm
Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm

By email
info@brighterplaces.co.uk

Office address
Eden House
10 Eastgate Office Park
Bristol BS5 6XX

Join us on social media

wearebrighterplaces

brighterplaces _

wearebrighterplaces

If you need a translation, we can get one for you

यदि अँग्रेज़ी आप की पहली भाषा नहीं है और आप को अनुवाद की आवश्यकता है तो यह हम आपको प्रदान कर सकते हैं

Jeżeli język angielski mie jest Twoim językiem ojczystym i wyamagasz tłumaczenia, możemy to zapewnić.

ਜੇਕਰ ਇੰਗਲਿਸ਼ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਅਤੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜ਼ਰੂਰਤ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਲਈ ਅਸੀਂ ਇਸਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਾਂ ।

Heke îngilîzî zimanê we yê yekem nîne û pêwîstîya we bi wergêr heye, em dikarin yekî ji we ri bibînin.

ইংরেজী আপনার মাতৃভাষা না হলে এবং আপনার কোন অনুবাদের প্রয়োজন হলে আমরা তা প্রদান করতে সক্ষম।

Haddii Ingiriisku aanu ahayn afkaaga kowaad oo aad u boadan tahay turjjumaad, annagaa kuu samayn karra.

如果英文不是您的第一語言，而您需要翻譯的話，我們可以爲您安排。

Nëse anglishta nuk është ghuja amtare dhe keni nevojë per një përthim, ne mund t'ua sigurojmë atë.

اگر انگریزی آپ کی پہلی زبان نہیں ہے اور آپ کو ترجمہ کی ضرورت ہے تو ہم آپ کے لئے فراہم کر سکتے ہیں۔

Se o inglês não é a sua língua materna e precisa de uma tradução, nós podemos obtê-la.

જો તમારી પહેલી ભાષા અંગ્રેજી ન હોય અને તમને ભાષાંતરની જરૂર હોય તો અમે તમને તે આપી શકીએ છીએ.

Nếu quí vị không thao Anh văn va cần bản dich, chúng tôi sẽ glúp quí vị một bản.

Would you like this handbook in another format?

We offer large print, easy read, braille or audio CD.
There is a digital copy on our accessible website.

The information in this handbook was correct as of May 2024. Some details may change.
Check our website and the QR codes in the handbook for the latest information.