

Tenants' Handbook



Introduction

Thank you for choosing North Star as your landlord. We hope you will be very happy in your new home.

These pages provide useful information and advice to help you make the most of your new tenancy. They aim to help you settle into your new home and answer many questions that you may have throughout your tenancy with us. As well as outlining your conditions, these pages contain information on your rights and responsibilities as a tenant and our rights and responsibilities as a landlord.

Please read these pages as they are your guide to the housing service.



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Section 1 - About us

- 1.1 Who are North Star?
- 1.2 Our Vision and Values
- 1.3 How to contact us

1.1 Who are North Star?

North Star are a registered social landlord, who own and manage over 3,000 properties across the Tees Valley and County Durham. We are a “not for profit” organisation whose purpose is to provide affordable housing. We are also committed to investing in our communities and continuing to develop new homes to meet housing need.

1.2 Our Vision and Values

Creative

We create environments to enable people, places and communities to thrive. We believe many things are possible and that our energy brings about exciting change.

Connected

We are connected to the world we live in. Therefore, we are relevant, informed and knowledgeable. We develop strong relationships that are based on integrity and trust.

Courageous

We challenge ourselves and others. We experiment, innovate and we dare to be different.

Flexibility

We provide local, personal and responsive services and individual services where needed. We encourage people to think creatively and imaginatively.

Integrity

We never promise what we cannot deliver and we work in an open and transparent way. We are committed to providing an equality of opportunity, we treat everyone with respect and we value people’s differences. We own up when things do not go right and work hard at finding solutions.

Professionalism

We aim to deliver excellence in all we do. We are committed to working ethically and do all we can to help with environmental issues. We deliver value for money and ensure staff are highly trained and developed.

Ambition

Known as an organisation that “punches above its weight”, we are courageous, enthusiastic and innovative. We are committed to growth and delivering bespoke solutions even when it’s not the easy option. We are involved in challenging work that benefits communities.



1.3 How to contact us

If you need to contact us about any aspect of your home or tenancy, or our services, you can do one of the following:

My North Star

Access through our website and sign in to the service - www.mynorthstar.online

Phone **03000 11 00 11**

Write to the addresses to the right

Via email at info@northstarhg.co.uk

Visiting you at your home

We can arrange an appointment to visit you at your home to discuss your enquiry.

Call into our main offices

Endeavour House
St Marks Court
Thornaby
Stockton on Tees
TS17 6QN

Open - 9am till 5pm

14A Redwell Court
Harmire Enterprise Park
Harmire Road
Barnard Castle
County Durham
DL12 8BN

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

Section 2 – Your tenancy

2.1 Your tenancy

2.2 What are my rights?

2.3 What are my main responsibilities?

2.4 What happens if I ignore my responsibilities?

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2.7 What is North Star responsible for?

2.8 How many people can be on a tenancy agreement?

2.9 What happens if my relationship breaks down?

2.10 Will you change my rent?

2.11 Am I responsible for Council Tax?

2.12 Ending my tenancy

2.1 Your tenancy

When you move into a North Star property, you are required to sign a tenancy agreement between you (as tenant) and us (as landlord) setting out the things that we both agree to do. It is a legally binding contract and states what legal rights and responsibilities we both have.

All new tenants are signed up on a Starter Tenancy. This is an Assured Shorthold Tenancy which will run initially for 12 months. As long as there has not been a breach of tenancy conditions within the first 12 months of this tenancy, it will automatically convert into an Assured Tenancy.

When you have been renting your home for more than 12 months, your tenancy will be an Assured Tenancy. This type of tenancy agreement was introduced by the Housing Act (1988). As an assured tenant you have security of tenure and cannot lose your home unless the Association obtains a Possession Order from the County Court. The Association can only apply for a Possession Order if one of the grounds specified in the Housing Act (1988) applies.

If your circumstances change in respect of your household or your tenancy, you must contact and inform the Association immediately.



2.2 What are my rights?

As a tenant, you have the following rights:

	Starter Tenant (Assured Shorthold Tenancy)	Assured Tenancy
Right to repair	Yes	Yes
Right to succession	No	Yes
Right to exchange	No	Yes
Right to be consulted on changes to your tenancy agreement	Yes	Yes
Right to acquire (in certain circumstances)	No	Yes
Right to terminate	Yes	Yes
Right to make improvements	No	Yes

The above are subject to certain conditions, please refer to your tenancy agreement.

Section 2 – Your tenancy

2.3 What are your main responsibilities?

- **Rent** - Your rent is due in advance each week
- **Use of premises** – You must only use the property for residential purposes and as the tenant’s only or principal home
- **Responsibility for others** – You are responsible for any persons living in or visiting the property and they must not cause a nuisance or annoyance to other neighbours and the public at large i.e. abusive behaviour, playing loud music etc.
- **Repairs** – You must report to North Star, any repair or defect for which North Star are responsible as soon as you become aware something may be wrong
- **Access to property** – You must allow our employees, contractors and people acting on our instructions access to the property
- **Alterations** – You must obtain written permission from North Star prior to carrying out any alterations on your property. Typically, future maintenance of any alterations will be your responsibility
- **Pets** – You must keep under control any animals kept at the property. Written permission must be obtained from North Star before keeping any animals where there are communal areas i.e. flats

- **External** – It is your responsibility to keep any yard or garden in a clean and tidy condition
- **Internal decoration** – The interior of the property must be kept in a good and clean condition and you are responsible for the decoration of all internal parts of the property

Illegal activity at your home (drugs etc.) will put your tenancy at risk.

- **Illegal Activity** – As part of your tenancy you agree not to be involved with illegal activity related to crime, drugs etc. in your home. Activity of this kind will put your tenancy at risk

2.4 What happens if I ignore my responsibilities?

If you do not comply with the terms of your tenancy agreement, we will contact you to discuss this further. We will give you every opportunity and help and support you to resolve the issues.

However, if there is no improvement, we may undertake legal action to repossess your home.

North Star can only end the tenancy by obtaining a court order for possession of the Premises on one of the grounds listed in Schedule 2 of the Housing Act (1988).

2.5 Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-Social Behaviour is behaviour by one person or group of people that unreasonably interferes with the quality of life of someone else.

We know that most tenants are thoughtful and do not want to cause a nuisance to those living nearby. As the tenant, you are responsible for the behaviour of everyone living or visiting your home.

Examples of Anti-Social Behaviour include:

- Noise such as television, music systems, loud parties, shouting, etc.
- Dumping rubbish
- Dogs barking at unreasonable hours
- Doing DIY at unreasonable hours
- Sounding car horns, slamming car doors particularly at unreasonable hours
- Creating graffiti
- Aggressive and threatening language and behaviour

We hope that you will be able to sort out any problems with your neighbours by talking to each other. If this does not resolve the issue, we work with a number of agencies that will be able to assist.

For more information on reporting Anti-Social Behaviour, log into My North Star or contact our Customer Services Team on **03000 11 00 11** or speak to your housing officer.

2.6 Harassment and hate crime

We, together with other agencies, are committed to tackling any incidents of harassment or hate crime, in a swift and decisive manner.

Harassment is an offence committed against a person or property to intimidate people.

Examples can include:

- Name calling
- Threats to people’s homes or property
- Abusive letters or graffiti
- Arson or attempted arson
- Physical attacks

Hate crime is a specific type of harassment committed against a person or property because of their:

- Ethnic background
- Nationality
- Religion
- Gender
- Disability
- LGBT + status

If we have evidence that a tenant is responsible for any incidents of harassment or hate crime, we will take action that may result in them losing their home.

Section 2 – Your tenancy

2.7 What are North Star responsible for?

We are responsible for the structure and exterior of the property including:

- Drains, gutters and external pipes
- The roof
- Outside walls, outside doors, windowsills, window catches, sash cords and window frames including necessary external painting and decorating
- Chimneys, chimney stacks and flues but not including sweeping
- Pathways, steps or other means of access
- Plasterwork
- Garage and stores
- Boundary walls and fences

We will repair and keep in working order the following amenities where provided:

- Installation for the supply of water, gas, electricity and for sanitation and rubbish disposal
- Installation for space heating and water heating
- Lift service and other communal amenities

We are also responsible for:

- **Right to Consultation** – We will consult with you before making any changes in matters of housing management or maintenance which are likely to have a substantial effect on the tenant
- **Right to Information** – We will give you information on the way we manage our properties
- Insuring your home (you are responsible for insuring the contents of the property)
- Giving you at least four weeks' notice of any changes in rent or related charges

2.8 How many people can be on a tenancy agreement?

Tenancies are usually in one or two names. For further information, contact your housing officer.

2.9 What happens if my relationship breaks down?

If you have a joint tenancy and one of you wishes to move out, you must contact your housing officer. In most cases we can arrange for the tenancy to continue in one name. However, there are exceptions to this. If you're the person giving up your share of the tenancy, you need to contact your local council who will be able to provide you with advice and assistance in finding a new home.

2.10 What to do when we change your rent

When there has been a change to your rent, it is important that you report this to Universal Credit. Use the Report a Change facility of your online journal, so that your housing costs can be amended. If you are claiming Housing Benefit this will happen automatically.

2.11 Am I responsible for Council Tax?

You are responsible for Council Tax and it is your responsibility to notify the Council of any changes that may affect your Council Tax or any benefit received for Council Tax.

2.12 Ending the tenancy

You can end your tenancy by giving four weeks' written notice. For further information, contact your housing officer. We can end your tenancy if we obtain a court order giving us possession.



Section 3 – Moving in

- 3.1 When can I move in?
- 3.2 Quality of accommodation
- 3.3 Energy Performance Certificate
- 3.4 Decoration
- 3.5 Insurance
- 3.6 Moving in checklist
- 3.7 How do I claim Housing Benefit?
- 3.8 Electricity and gas
- 3.9 Can I make improvements to my home?
- 3.10 Can I fit a satellite dish or cable TV?
- 3.11 Follow up visit

3.1 When can I move in?

Your housing officer will contact you and agree a date for your new tenancy to start. Your tenancy will always start on a Monday and you will be responsible for paying the rent from the date your tenancy starts.

3.2 Quality of accommodation

When one of our properties becomes empty, we will inspect it to find out if there are any necessary repairs before it is let to someone else. Sometimes we may need to do minor repairs after you have moved in and if this is the case, we will give you information as to when the work will be carried out. There may be some programmed work such as a new kitchen or bathroom that is due. Your housing officer will be able to provide further details.

You are responsible for certain things such as:

- Plumbing and drains for any extra appliances

- Altering doors to suit your floor coverings
- Altering kitchen units/doors to fit your appliances

If you find that other repairs are required, you should report these to us through My North Star. You can access this through the North Star website. Alternatively you can contact our Customer Services Team on **03000 11 00 11**.

3.3 Energy Performance Certificate

We must give you a copy of the Energy Performance Certificate for the property that you are moving into. This certificate shows how energy efficient the property is and gives information on the cost of running a property and how to save money.

3.4 Decoration

The decoration of the property is your responsibility. If however, the property needs decorating because the existing decoration is damaged or dirty, we will arrange for you to receive a decoration allowance as a contribution towards any

costs incurred. For further information, contact your housing officer.

3.5 Insurance

You should make sure that you have contents insurance to cover your furniture and other belongings. We insure the structure and our fittings but are not responsible for your belongings. In cases of broken glazing, fires, floods, burst water tank/pipes that damage your belongings, we are not responsible. Contact our Customer Services Team on **03000 11 00 11** for further information.

3.6 Moving in checklist

Don't forget to contact the following where necessary:

- Electricity and gas suppliers
- TV licensing
- Council Tax

- Housing/Council Tax Benefit Department
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)/Job Centre
- Banks/building societies
- Schools
- Doctors
- Dentists
- DVLA
- Credit card companies
- Your employer
- Water company
- Family
- Postal Service



Section 3 – Moving in

3.7 How can I claim help to cover my rent?

Housing Benefit and Universal Credit provide help towards rent for people on low incomes.

You can now only apply for Housing Benefit if you and any partner:

- have reached pension age
- live in supported or exempt accommodation
- are entitled to a Severe Disability Premium in your current benefit

To make a claim for Housing Benefit you need to contact your local council. Generally claims are made online but can also be requested by telephone.

If you do not fall into any of the above categories you need to claim Universal Credit for help towards your rent payments. Claims for Universal Credit need to be made online at www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit

If you are entitled to help with your rent your Universal Credit payment will include a Housing Costs Element. How much is included will depend on the level of your rent, how many bedrooms you have and who lives in your home.

It is your responsibility to make sure that you use this money to pay your rent and to ensure your monthly rent is paid in full even if the Housing Element of your Universal Credit does not cover the full rent.

Universal Credit payments are paid directly into your bank account and would normally be paid on the same date each month. It usually takes about five weeks for you to receive your first Universal Credit payment. If you have previously received Housing Benefit, the main difference is that Universal Credit will be paid directly to you rather than your landlord.

It is important to make new claims as soon as you move in. Otherwise you will not be eligible for help towards your housing costs for the time before you made your claim. Note that, you will still be liable to pay the full rent for your home.

3.8 Electricity and gas

It is your responsibility to contact your electricity and gas supplier. It is unlikely that the property you are moving into will have gas or electricity on. Once you have been connected, we will arrange for the relevant safety checks to be carried out. This must be done before you move in.

Gas and electricity meters are the property of the company that supplies

your gas and electricity. If you have any queries regarding your meters, you will need to contact your supplier directly.

3.9 Can I make improvements to my home?

If you want to make any improvements or alterations to the property, you will need to obtain written permission from North Star. Future maintenance of any improvements or alterations will typically be your responsibility.

3.10 Can I fit a satellite dish or cable TV?

You will need written permission from North Star to fit a satellite dish or cable TV.

3.11 Follow-up visit

Your housing officer will arrange to come and see you within six weeks of you moving into your new home. If you need any help or information before then, contact us through My North Star, contact your housing officer or our Customer Services Team on **03000 11 00 11**.



Section 4 - Paying your rent



4.1 How do I pay my rent?

4.2 Already claiming Universal Credit?

4.3 When is rent due?

4.4 Rent statements

4.5 How much is my rent?

4.6 How do we set your rent?

4.7 Service charges

4.8 What happens if I cannot pay my rent?

4.9 What are the consequences of rent arrears?

4.1 How do I pay my rent?

- Paypoint outlets – at the start of your tenancy, you will be sent an Allpay Swipe Card. You can take your plastic card and money to any outlet that displays the Paypoint signs. Outlets include shops/garages and post offices. There is no charge for this and many are open 24 hours a day
- By direct debit
- By standing order
- Online via Allpay through the link provided on My North Star
- By debit card in person at our Head Office or over the phone through our Customer Services Team
- By cheque at our Head Office
- With cash at our Head Office

My North Star

Access through our website and sign in to the service www.mynorthstar.online

For further information on paying your rent, contact our Customer Services Team on **03000 11 00 11**.

4.2 Already claiming Universal Credit?

If you are already claiming Universal Credit when you move into a North Star tenancy, it is important that you advise Universal Credit of the change in your housing situation using the Report a Change facility of your online journal. You will need to provide details of the date you took the tenancy, the date you moved in and details of rent and service charges.

Changes of Circumstances

If you have any changes in your circumstances, including who is living with you, or changes in your income you must inform Housing Benefit and Department for Work and Pensions. You can contact our Welfare Benefits Officers if you need any assistance in this area.

4.3 When is rent due?

Your rent is due each week. This means that you must have paid your rent by Friday (or the last working day if there is a bank holiday at the end of the week). If you want to pay at longer intervals i.e. monthly, you should make sure that you make payments in advance.

4.4 Rent statements

You can view your rent account by registering for My North Star, which you can access through our website and set up your account today. The service allows you to control most aspects of your rent online.

4.5 How much is my rent?

You will be issued with a breakdown of rent and service charges (see 4.7 below) when you sign your tenancy agreement.

4.6 How do we set your rent?

We set our rents in line with government policy which requires all housing association and local authorities to set their rents in this way. We review the rents each year and we will tell you about any change in the rent for your home. We will give you at least one month's notice of any changes.

4.7 Service Charges

If you have a tenancy where we provide extra services such as cleaning, provision of laundry facilities, gardening, etc. your rent will include a service charge. We review service charges each year and they are based on the costs for the past 12 months. We will tell you about any changes and will give you at least one month's notice of any changes.

4.8 What happens if I cannot pay my rent?

If you are unable to pay your rent, you must contact your housing officer immediately. Your housing officer can refer you to our Welfare Benefits Officer who can provide advice and assistance to ensure you are claiming all the benefits you are entitled to and also to make an affordable and realistic payment plan to repay any arrears.

The money we receive from rent pays for services, improvements and repairs. If rent is not paid, it affects our ability to provide services. We will take action against tenants who do not pay their rent or make an agreement to do so with us.

4.9 What are the consequences of rent arrears?

If you do not have a clear rent account, it is unlikely that you will be able to transfer or exchange to another home. You may have a County Court Judgement issued against you. This will affect your credit rating, which could mean you are refused credit, a mortgage or other rented accommodation in the future.

If we do have to take court action, you will be responsible for any costs incurred. If you lose your home as a result of rent arrears, you may be seen as having made yourself intentionally homeless and the council would not have a duty to find you alternative accommodation.

Section 5 - Repairs and improvements

5.1 How can I report a repair?

5.2 What information do you need when I report a repair?

5.3 What to do in an emergency

5.4 Repair response times

5.5 Appointments

5.6 What happens if I live in a flat/ neighbouring property that leaks into the property below/next door?

5.7 What happens if we do not complete the repair?

5.8 Repair contractors

5.9 Our repair responsibilities

5.10 Your repair responsibilities

5.11 Can I carry out improvements?

5.12 Adaptations

5.13 Dampness and condensation

5.14 Gas servicing

5.15 Asbestos

5.16 Rechargeable repairs

5.17 Floor coverings

5.1 How can I report a repair?

You can report a repair by:

- My North Star - Offering you more choice in how to contact us. Available 24/7 at a time to suit you. Simple, quick and free to use. Compatible with any device – smartphone, desktop, laptop, tablet
- Phoning our Customer Services Team on **03000 11 00 11**
- In person at our Head Office or by appointment
- In writing

5.2 What information do you need when I report a repair?

If you need to report a repair, you should tell us:

- Your name and address
- A contact telephone number
- The best time to gain access to your

property i.e. morning or afternoon

- As much information about the repair/fault as possible

5.3 What to do about an emergency repair?

We provide emergency cover outside office hours, over weekends and bank holidays. If you have an urgent repair, call **03000 11 00 11** which will take you to a 24 hour emergency repair call centre.

5.4 Repair response times

Some repairs are more urgent than others. We give each repair a priority. However, in exceptional circumstances i.e. a vulnerable tenant who may be particularly inconvenienced, we may give a repair a higher priority than usual.

Emergency Repairs

These are repairs that affect your health and safety. We will make them safe or, where possible, complete the repair within 24 hours or sooner depending on the nature of the repair. Examples of emergency repairs are:

- Losing all electrical power
- Blocked main drain
- Blocked toilet if only one available
- Dangerous structures that are at risk of collapse
- Gas leaks
- Complete heating failure where no back up heating is available (winter months only)

To report an emergency repair call us on: **03000 11 00 11**.

If you call outside of office hours, you will be redirected to our Out of Hours Service and you will need to select the appropriate option.

We will carry out emergency repairs to your property within 24 hours of you reporting them.

Urgent Repairs

We will carry out urgent repairs within three working days. Urgent repairs are those that are necessary to keep you healthy, safe and comfortable in your home.

Examples of urgent repairs are:

- Loss of hot water or heating supply that has no back up
- Toilet not flushing (where there is only one toilet available)
- Water leaks that can't be contained
- Leaking roof

Routine Repairs

These are non urgent repairs that we will complete within 20 working days. These are generally jobs that can be left without causing serious inconvenience to you or risk further damage to your home.

Examples of routine repairs are:

- Indoor joinery repairs to doors, window frames, general woodwork
- Small plumbing jobs i.e. dripping taps or overflow running
- Gates and fencing
- Repairs to fittings such as worktops or cupboards

5.5 Appointments

We will offer appointments on most repairs which can be booked through My North Star. Emergency repairs get priority attendance. We can make appointments from Monday to Saturday and our appointment times are:

- All day - between 8am and 5pm
- Morning - between 8am and 12 noon

Section 5 - Repairs and improvements

- Afternoon - between 12 noon and 5pm

There are a limited number of evening and weekend appointments for routine jobs:

- Tuesday & Thursday evenings - between 5pm and 8pm
- Saturday mornings - between 8am and 12 noon

If we are not able to keep the appointment, we will phone you if we have a contact telephone number.

If you cannot keep the appointment, please let us know in good time. If we attend an appointment that you have made, are not in and have not cancelled, you may be charged for the cost.

If you are not at home when the contractor calls, they will leave a card. It is then your responsibility to arrange another appointment or we will cancel the repair.

5.6 What happens if I live in a flat and have caused a leak to the flat below or next door?

In the event of a leak causing damage to another property, we will make every attempt to contact you. If we are unable to contact you, our employee will meet with a contractor at the property and we will gain access to your property to carry out the repair.

5.7 What happens if we need to re-attend?

If we need to do another repair to finish the job or need additional parts, the contractor will let you know before they leave. This is often the case with emergency repairs where the priority is to make safe and secure.

5.8 Repair contractors

We are committed to customer care and expect our contractors to share the same commitment. Each contractor will carry identification and you should always ask to see this. All our contractors must follow a code of conduct and we expect our contractors to:

- Be polite and courteous
- Behave in a professional manner at all times
- Agree to a suitable appointment
- Aim to complete the repair first time if parts are readily available
- Respond positively to tenant complaints
- Be respectful of you and your home
- Not to smoke in or around your home
- Comply with confidentiality guidelines
- Complete the job to a high standard
- Comply with safe working practices

5.9 Our repair responsibilities

There are certain types of repairs we are responsible for:

- Maintaining the structure of your home, including drains and external pipes
- The roof
- Repairing and maintaining installations for the supply of gas, electricity, water and sanitation. This includes basins, sinks, baths and toilets. Installations for heating rooms and water
- Any repairs in communal/shared areas
- Paths, steps or other means of access
- Integral garage and stores
- Boundary walls and fences
- External woodwork

For further information on what we are responsible for, see our Repairs Handbook, log into My North Star or contact our Customer Services Team on **03000 11 00 11**.

5.10 Your repair responsibilities

You are responsible for keeping your home in good, clean condition and for insuring its contents. You are also responsible for:

- Decoration of your home
- Maintaining the garden or yard
- Any repairs caused by neglect, deliberate or accidental damage to

the property and forced entry if you get locked out

- Floor coverings
- Glazing (irrespective of how this may have been damaged)
- Taking reasonable precautions to prevent damage to the property by fire, frost, burst water pipes or blocked drains
- Clearing any blockages in sinks or basins that you have caused
- Batteries for hard wired appliances
- Fitting of any appliances supplied or alterations carried out by yourself including TV aerials, washing machines, tumble dryers, dishwashers, cookers and adaptations to fit appliances or carpets
- Light bulbs
- Replacing keys and locks if you lose the key or lock yourself out
- Toilet seats
- Clothes posts
- Chimney sweeps

For further information on what we are responsible for, see our Repairs Handbook, log into My North Star or contact our Customer Services Team on **03000 11 00 11**.



Section 5 - Repairs and improvements

5.11 Can I carry out improvements?

You may carry out improvements or alterations to your home. You must however, get written permission before you start any work. You should provide details of plans and drawings where appropriate and full details of what you want to do. We need to make sure that the work you carry out will not damage your home or affect your neighbours.

Whilst you remain the tenant you will be responsible for the repairs and maintenance of these items. If we do not give you permission for a particular improvement or alteration, we will write to you giving details. You will be breaching your tenancy agreement if you continue with work if you have not got permission. You will also be responsible for the cost of putting the property back to its original condition.

5.12 Adaptations

If you have problems moving around or coping in your home, we can help by adapting your home to better suit your needs. We can provide handrails, special taps, over bath showers, level access showers, etc. We will work closely with social services as they may also be able to provide grant funding for any adaptations.

An occupational therapist will need to call and see you so they can recommend

the most appropriate alterations. In some cases it may be better for you to move to more suitable accommodation, and if so, we will visit you and discuss this with you.

5.13 Dampness and condensation

Condensation happens when there is too much moisture in the air. There is always moisture in the air but extra can be caused by:

- Cooking or boiling water
- Baths and showers
- Drying clothes indoors

Warm moist air condenses and forms water when it cools, for example, when it touches a cool surface. In your home these are outside walls, mirrors, windows, wall tiles and even clothes. If this condensation cannot dry out, it will cause mould to grow on walls, in cupboards, on windowsills and mildew to grow on clothes.

Keeping your home warm and well insulated will minimise the effects of condensation. For further information, please read our Condensation leaflet available on our website or through our Customer Services Team on **03000 11 00 11**.

5.14 Gas servicing

To keep your heating system in perfect working order and you and your home safe, we need to carry out a gas appliance service each year. It is your responsibility to allow our fully qualified and registered gas safety engineers reasonable access to your home to carry out this service. If you do not allow us access for this work to be carried out, we will take legal action to get access. You will also be responsible for all costs these actions may incur.

If you smell gas or fumes, phone TRANSCO, the gas emergency number on **0800 111 999**.

5.15 Asbestos

Many people worry about asbestos but, we have a rigorous policy which manages any asbestos containing materials in our properties.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral that has been used in a range of building materials to make them more rigid and fire resistant. Asbestos is found in many products around the home such as behind gas fires or used in oven door seals, ironing boards and oven gloves.

You may also find asbestos in the following areas:

- Garage and shed roofs
- Linings for walls, ceilings and doors
- Flue pipes

- Eaves (part of the roof that meets or overhangs the walls of a building)
- Gutters and rainwater pipes

Artex and textured coatings

The use of textured coatings was high throughout the 1970s and 1980s so it's possible your home has a textured coating containing asbestos. Asbestos is safe if not damaged, or coated with a sealant such as paint. Do not sand, drill, break off or attempt any work on textured coatings unless you have had written permission to do so, as this could release fibres into the air. If the Artex is damaged, contact us.

What are we doing about asbestos?

We have arranged for surveys to be carried out in those properties where asbestos materials might have been used. If we find asbestos in your home, we will let you know. If a repair or improvement work involves disturbing asbestos, we will make sure that we use contractors who are licensed to deal with asbestos.

What should I do if I think there is asbestos in my home?

- Do not try to remove or tamper with it
- Do not sand, drill or saw the material
- Contact us for advice

Further information is available in our Asbestos Safety leaflet.

Section 5 - Repairs and improvements

5.16 Chargeable repairs

We want to ensure that we are clear and consistent with tenants about repairs we are responsible for, and what repairs tenants are responsible for.

The repairs and maintenance service provided is funded from rents paid by all our tenants. To be fair and consistent to all, we will charge those individuals who neglect their homes or cause wilful damage.

Chargeable repairs include:

- When we carry out work that is your responsibility e.g. replacing lost keys
- When we undertake additional work at an extra cost e.g. additional fencing
- When we carry out work that is your responsibility and has been caused by your negligence or accidental damage
- When we are unable to gain access to carry out a repair on an agreed day

We will always tell you about any charge before we carry out the work and try to give you a rough estimate of the cost. For emergency repairs, you will receive the bill after completion. For other types of work, we may ask for payment before the work is undertaken.

5.17 Floor coverings

When you sign for the property there may be floor coverings that have been “gifted” to you and you have accepted responsibility for.

When repairs or planned maintenance work are carried out to your property it may be necessary for the floor coverings to be lifted to allow us access to pipework and wiring prior to the work being completed.

Our contractors will, where possible, take up, or protect and relay your floor coverings, with the exception of laminated flooring. Laminated flooring must be removed and re-laid by you. If laminated flooring cannot be lifted, we will not accept responsibility for any damage.

Before you decide to fit laminated flooring, we ask you to contact your Property Services Surveyor who will check and let you know whether any major work is planned to your home. If the floor has to be lifted/disturbed to carry out repair work, it will be your responsibility to arrange to pay for this. If you are not able to do this yourself, we may be able to assist you but there will be a charge for this service.



Section 6 – Your neighbourhood

6.1 Gardens and yards

6.2 Rubbish and recycling

6.3 Abandoned vehicles

6.4 Dogs

6.5 Rats, mice and other pests

6.6 Estate inspections

6.7 Community investment



6.1 Gardens and yards

You are responsible for the upkeep of your garden or yard. Gardens and yards should be kept free from rubbish. Untidy and overgrown gardens can spoil the appearance of an estate. We will regularly inspect our estates and contact tenants who don't maintain their gardens. If you fail to take action, we may do the work and charge you for it.

If you live in sheltered accommodation, we will maintain any open plan gardens or areas.

6.2 Rubbish and recycling

The local council is responsible for the collection of household rubbish and recycling. Different councils have different arrangements. For further information for your area, contact your local council.

6.3 Abandoned vehicles

The local council is responsible for removing any abandoned vehicles from the highway or nearby areas. For further information, contact your local council.

6.4 Dogs

You are responsible for keeping your dogs under control and not allowing them to roam. Action will be taken against any tenant who fails to keep their dog under control. Many local councils have dog warden services that can remove stray dogs. For further information, contact your local council.

6.5 Rats, mice and other pests

If you have a problem with rats, mice or other pests in your home or the nearby area, contact your local council's pest control department.

6.6 Estate inspections

We will regularly inspect our estates to make sure the properties and areas are kept to a standard that has been agreed by our tenants and partners.

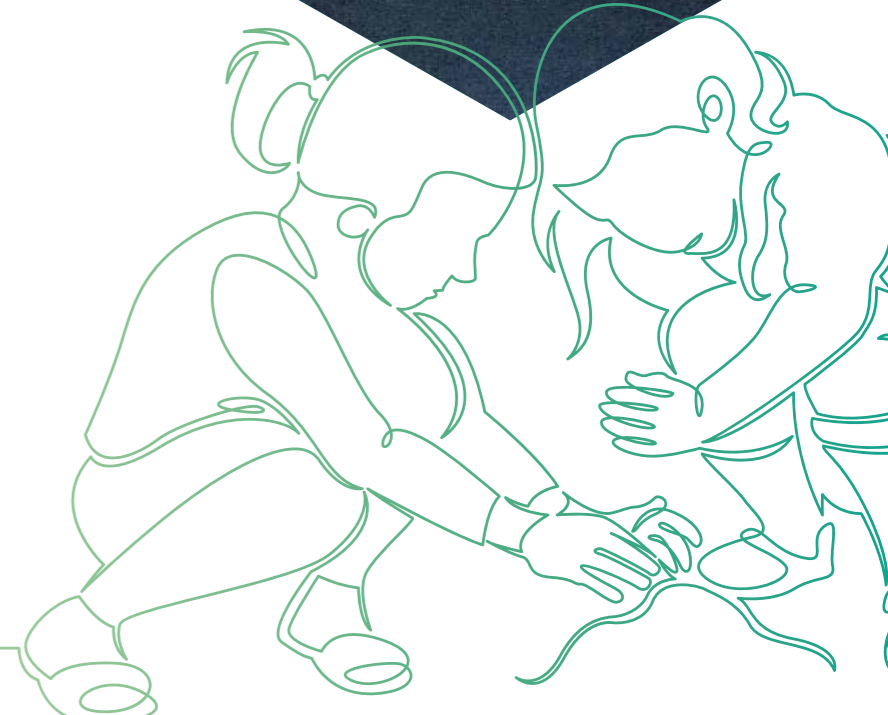
Estate inspections will be done on an ad hoc basis. If you would like to arrange an estate inspection, contact your housing officer for more information.

6.7 Community investment

North Star are committed to improving and developing the communities we operate in. We support a number of projects and deliver a wide range of initiatives ranging from breakfast clubs, after school groups, sport, recreational activities, employment and training programmes.

We have allocated funds to deliver and support projects that can benefit residents living in areas where we manage properties. We are always looking for ideas and feedback that can help us unlock the potential of these communities, transform lives and create a sense of belonging.

If you have an idea, are part of a charity or community group looking for funding or would like more information please contact the Communities Team on **01642 796265** or email **communities@northstarhg.co.uk**



Section 7 – Resident involvement

7.1 Why get involved?

7.2 Ways for you to get involved

7.3 Tenant events

7.4 Questionnaires, feedback forms and surveys

7.5 Tenant magazine

7.6 How do I get involved?

7.1 Why get involved?

North Star believe it is essential to involve residents and communities in shaping our services.

By getting involved you can:

- Make your area a better place to live
- Have a say in decision making that affects your housing service
- Give us a better understanding of your needs
- Give us your views about our services
- Help us to provide a better quality service
- Develop your own skills and knowledge

7.2 Ways for you to get involved

You can take an active role in influencing decisions that affect you and the community you live in.

We understand that everyone has different priorities, and some people may be able to give more time than others. This is why we have a number of ways you can get involved.

The benefits of being involved:

- Develop new skills and abilities
- Make your voice heard
- Meet new people
- Help improve North Star's services for everyone
- Free trips to conferences and training
- Get to know us better
- Free events, including a Christmas party

7.3 Tenant events

Keep a look out for your invitations to tenant events each year. This is a great way to meet the staff and find out about the services your landlord provides. You can also give us feedback on ways to improve.

7.4 Questionnaires, feedback forms and surveys

We want to give everyone the opportunity to have their say – so throughout the year, we contact customers with questionnaires, feedback forms and surveys.



7.5 Tenant magazine

We produce two magazines a year (summer and winter) to let you know how we are doing and about things that might be of interest to you.

7.6 How do I get involved?

To find out how you can get involved in a way that suits you contact the Communities Team;

Call **01642 796 324**

Text **07702 696 062**

Email

residentinvolvement@northstarhg.co.uk

Alternatively, let your housing officer know you are interested.



Section 8 - Moving on

8.1 Transfer

8.2 Mutual exchanges

8.3 Ending your tenancy

8.1 Transfer

You can apply for a transfer through your local Choice Based Lettings scheme; these are:

Tees Valley area

Compass Choice Based Lettings.
www.compasscbl.co.uk

County Durham area

Durham Key Options.
www.durhamkeyoptions.co.uk

North Yorkshire area

North Yorkshire Home Choice. Website:
www.northyorkshirehomechoice.org.uk

You will need to complete an online application to be included in the scheme and you are then able to bid (express an interest) for the properties you are interested in.

Before you can be offered a transfer, you must be up to date with your rent, your home be kept in a good condition and there must be no breaches of your tenancy agreement. The Choice Based Lettings schemes will give priority to tenants who need to move due to:

- Property being unsuitable (too small or too big)
- Medical reasons
- Receiving or providing support
- Other special circumstances

Further information can be found on their websites or ask your housing officer for advice.

8.2 Mutual exchanges

A mutual exchange is where you find another tenant to swap homes with. The tenant could be a North Star tenant, a council tenant or another housing association tenant.

Using your local Choice Based Lettings Scheme e.g. Compass, Durham Key Options, you can advertise your home for a mutual exchange and view details of properties of other tenants wishing to exchange. If you find someone to swap with, you need to apply through Choice Based Lettings. Arrange for your housing officer to visit you. You must have written permission, and that of any other landlord, before you exchange.

We will not be able to give you permission if the person you want to exchange with does not meet the criteria of our lettings policy.

We may refuse permission if:

- The property you or your exchange partner has is either too large or too small
- You have a Notice of Seeking Possession or a Possession Order served on you
- You have outstanding rent arrears or tenant responsibility repairs
- The property you wish to exchange with has been specially adapted for people with disabilities and you do not have need for these adaptations

For further information on mutual exchanges, contact your housing officer.

8.3 Ending your tenancy

If you need to end your tenancy, you must do the following:

- Contact us to get a form to end your tenancy
- Give us 28 days' notice, to end on a Sunday
- Provide us with your new address and contact telephone number
- Provide us with any alarm codes for the property
- Inform your gas and electricity suppliers that you are moving and give them your meter readings

- Inform the Council Tax and the Housing Benefit departments
- Arrange for all of your mail to be redirected
- Pay any outstanding chargeable repairs or rent
- Complete any repairs, improvements or decoration you have started

You must leave the property and garden/yard in a good, clean and tidy condition, having removed all of your belongings. If we have to remove anything, clean your property, award decoration allowances, tidy your yard/garden or carry out any repairs that were your responsibility, we will charge you.

Keys must be returned by noon on the Monday following the day that your tenancy ends (or the next working day if there is a bank holiday at the beginning of the week) and your rent must be paid up to this date. If you do not return the keys, we will continue to charge you rent until you do so or until we change the locks. You will be charged for this.

For further information on ending your tenancy, contact your housing officer.



Section 9 – Complaints and Data Protection Act

9.1 Complaints

9.1 Complaints

We aim to provide a high-quality service that meet your needs and expectations. However, we know that at times we do not get things right first time.

Customers generally accept that on occasions things go wrong, but expect that something will be done to put them right. North Star are an organisation that highly values complaints and comments, learns from them and uses them to improve services.

We want to make it as easy as possible for customers to comment or make a complaint about our services and we will accept them in any of the following ways:

- In person
- In writing to
North Star HG
Endeavour House
St Marks Court
Thornaby
Stockton on Tees
TS17 6QN
- By telephone **03000 11 00 11**
- By email to
complaints@northstarhg.co.uk

9.2 GDPR

- Via our website
www.northstarhg.co.uk
in the “Contact us” section
- Through another person, perhaps an advocate, support worker, solicitor, etc.

We will try and resolve your complaint immediately. However, if we cannot do this, we will contact you within two working days of receiving your complaint to let you know who is dealing with it and if needed, get more information. We aim to investigate your complaint and give you a full written response within 10 working days. If we are unable to do this within 10 working days, we will write to you and let you know.

9.2 Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

Processing of your personal information will be undertaken in accordance with the principles of the UK Data Protection Act 2018 (the Act) and the EU General Data Protection Regulation (the Regulation).

Access to personal information is restricted to authorised individuals on a strictly need to know basis. We will treat your personal information fairly and lawfully.



In line with your rights under the Data Protection Act 2018 we will ensure that information is:

- Processed for limited purposes
- Kept up to date, accurate, relevant and not excessive
- Not kept longer than is necessary
- Kept secure

We are committed to keeping your personal details up to date and we encourage you to inform us about any changes needed to ensure your details are accurate.

To help us to ensure confidentiality of your personal information we may ask you security questions to confirm your identity when you call us and as may be necessary when we call you. Anyone calling on your behalf may also be subject to security questions to ensure we're taking adequate steps to protect your personal information.

We will not discuss your personal information with anyone other than you, unless you have given us prior written authorisation to do so. However, there may be times when we will share relevant information about you with third parties. A good example would be where we need

to pass your details on to our contractors in order to carry out a repair.

When sharing personal information, this will be done on a strictly need to know basis and we will comply with all aspects of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations.

If you are one of our tenants then under the Data Protection Act you are granted certain rights in respect of the information we hold about you. These rights are known as “subject access rights”. The most commonly right used is the right for you to obtain a copy of the information we hold about you. Such a request is known as a “Data Subject Access Request”.

You can also find much more information about how we manage your personal data and your rights as a data subject by reading our privacy statement. This can be found on our website at **www.northstarhg.co.uk/privacy-statement/**

Any requests for information under the Data Protection Act can be made directly via email at **DPO@northstarhg.co.uk** or by contacting us at our main office.

The address and other contact details can be found on **page 5** of this handbook.



North Star

North Star bring together the skills, resources and values of Endeavour, Teesdale and Darlington Housing Associations.

We are a strong organisation with a clear vision of what we want to achieve for the people who live in our region – creating homes, building futures.

GET IN TOUCH

 customer.services@northstarhg.co.uk

 www.northstarhg.co.uk

 @northstarhg

 /NorthStarHG

 northstar_hg

 03000 11 00 11

Access Services Online

www.mynorthstar.online

Visit / Write:

Endeavour House, St Marks Court, Thornaby,
Stockton-on-Tees, TS17 6QN

14a Redwell Court, Harmire Enterprise Park, Harmire Road,
Barnard Castle, County Durham, DL12 8BN

Please note that all calls to our Customer Services Team are monitored and recorded.

Please note our Teesdale office in Barnard Castle is by appointment only.