

Housing Services



TENANCY HANDBOOK

Combating Homelessness, Creating Opportunities, Promoting Change

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Welcome

Welcome to your new home. The information in this handbook will help you enjoy your new home.

This handbook includes important information about your tenancy and other useful topics.

Keep this handbook in a safe place so you can refer to it when you need it. **We hope that you will enjoy living in your new home.**



For more information about our services

Please contact **BHT Housing Services** on **01323 340018**. Further contact details can be found at the back of the handbook.

About BHT

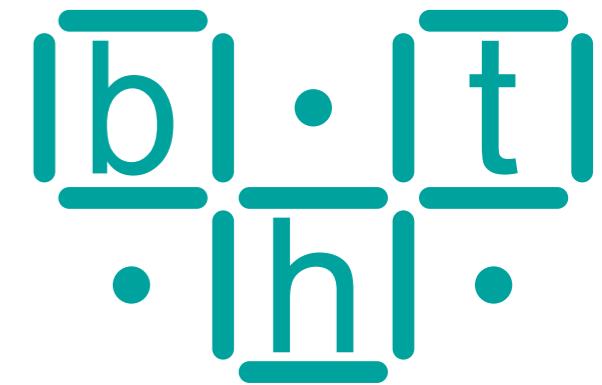
Brighton Housing Trust (BHT) was founded in 1968 and provides a variety of local services across Brighton, Eastbourne and Hastings, including Housing.

Housing Services Team

The Housing Services Team deal with everything related to your tenancy and your home.

The Housing Services team covers Brighton, Eastbourne and Hastings and consists of:

- ✓ a Housing Services Manager
- ✓ a Housing Officer for each area
- ✓ two Income Recovery Officers
- ✓ a Surveyor
- ✓ a Repairs Administrator
- ✓ an Office Administrator
- ✓ two Handypeople
- ✓ a Tenant Involvement Liaison Officer



**Combating Homelessness
Creating Opportunities**

Your Tenancy Agreement

When you move into your property you will sign and be given a copy of your tenancy agreement. This is a legal contract between yourself and BHT (your landlord) and should be kept in a safe place.

BHT offer different tenancies depending on the kind of accommodation you are living in. The type of tenancy you have will be written at the top or the front page of the tenancy agreement.

If you lose your tenancy agreement or are unsure what type of tenancy you have, please contact your Housing Officer for more information.



Assured Tenancy (AT)

BHT are only able to issue assured tenancies for our properties that are within our Community Housing stock (Brighton and Hastings only)

An assured tenancy broadly means that you can stay in your home as long as you want, providing you keep to the terms of your tenancy agreement.

Assured tenants have certain rights under the Housing Act 1988. One of the most important rights is that you cannot be evicted from your home without a court order. Before this happens, we must have served you with an appropriate notice of seeking possession (also called a Section 8 notice or NOSP) and given you the reasons for serving it.

BHT would need to have a good reason for seeking to end your tenancy and the reasons are limited to those allowed by law.

Some examples are:

- ✓ your rent is not being paid
- ✓ you, your household or your guests are causing a nuisance or harassing other people
- ✓ you are not living in the property
- ✓ you are using your home for illegal or immoral purposes
- ✓ you are damaging or abusing your home or not looking after it responsibly

Fixed Term Tenancies

Some tenants have a fixed term tenancy for a minimum period that includes a probationary tenancy of up to 18 months.

This is reviewed in year five and can be extended.

We cannot end your tenancy unless:

1. Your rent is not being paid
2. You are not living at the property
3. You break the terms of your tenancy

Any of the Grounds for possession of the Housing Act 1988 apply, including Ground 8, the mandatory ground for rent arrears.

Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST)

Generally, you will have an AST if you live in a property that BHT lease from a private landlord.

Your tenancy will have a fixed term of 26 weeks (six months). After the fixed term your tenancy will continue as a weekly periodic tenancy until you or BHT decide to end it.

If BHT decides to end your tenancy we must do so by serving you with the appropriate notice requiring possession, which is often called a Section 21 notice. This will give you two months' notice of the end of your tenancy and cannot end before the end of your fixed term.

However, if you break the terms of your tenancy agreement BHT can seek to end your tenancy before the fixed term has ended by serving you with a notice seeking possession (Section 8).



Moving In

Moving into a new home can be a very stressful time. This section of the handbook gives you some information about arrangements you need to think about when you move into a new home.

It is important that you update the relevant services when moving to avoid losing money or putting your personal security at risk.

Who should I inform about my new address?

You should change your address details with the following:

- ✓ your bank, building society or post office
- ✓ the JobCentre Plus or Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- ✓ your employer
- ✓ your doctor and dentist
- ✓ any other services you use such as support workers, probation officers etc.



How do I get my electricity and gas connected?

Unless your gas and electricity is included in your rent, you are responsible for these charges and for arranging their connection. You will need to call the current gas and electricity companies and register yourself as the new tenant.

If BHT are contacted by a utilities company about unpaid bills we will pass over your name and tenancy start date so that they can contact you directly.

On the day you move in you should take a reading of both the gas and electricity meters and provide this to your supplier. If you are unsure of how to take a meter reading, please contact your Housing Officer for advice.

If you do not know who the supplier is, you can find out by contacting the following companies:

Electricity - UK power networks on **0845 601 5467**

Gas – Meter point reference line on **0870 608 1524**



You will need to know the full address and postcode of your new property before calling.

If you have a prepaid meter (key or card) which is in debt when you move into the property, you should ask the current supplier to clear this.

If your home has gas heating, you will also need to contact our contractor to get your boiler working on the day you move in. Their contact details can be found in the back of this handbook.

If you would like to compare gas and electricity prices and supplier tariffs for your home then Home Energy Switch provides a free, impartial and accredited energy comparison service.

Please go to the following website for more information - www.nhf.think-switch.co.uk

What about my water supply?

If there is a water meter at the property you will need to take a meter reading on the day you move in and provide this to your supplier.

In some areas we collect your water charges as part of your rent and pay the water company directly. You can check your tenancy agreement to see if this applies to you.

In all other cases you should contact the water company when you move in to have the supply put into your name.

The contact details for water suppliers can be found in the back of this handbook.

Who do I contact about Council Tax?

You are responsible for paying Council Tax and you must contact your local council to tell them your new address and who is living in your household.

If you have a low income, are unemployed or live alone, you may be eligible for a discount or support with paying the Council Tax.



Moving In *continued...*

Do I need contents insurance?

It is important that you have insurance otherwise your belongings are at risk.

If there is a fire, flood, storm damage or burglary, we will repair any damage to the property but will not meet the cost of replacing any of your furniture or belongings that are damaged or stolen.

There are many insurance providers and we advise you to contact various providers to get a quote for cover that is suitable for your needs and value for money.



Can I get help with buying furniture?

If you need to get some furniture for your new home but are finding it too expensive, there are organisations and some charity shops that sell low cost, good quality second hand furniture.

You may also be eligible to apply for a grant from your local authority or another charitable organisation for help.

Please contact your Housing Officer for further information.



Living in Your Home

How can I be a good neighbour?

A good neighbour should be reasonably tolerant and understanding of the different lifestyles and cultures of others:

- ✓ keep the noise down, especially late at night and early in the morning
- ✓ let your neighbours know if you are planning a party or doing noisy DIY
- ✓ if you have children, make sure they do not cause a nuisance when playing outside
- ✓ make sure your visitors come and go quietly without annoying neighbours

Remember that your tenancy agreement makes you responsible for all members of your household and your visitors.

Noise

Noise travels easily between homes, particularly within blocks of flats.

Please limit the noise you create from things such as your washing machine, television or stereo particularly during unsociable hours (early in the morning and late at night).

You will be breaking the terms of your tenancy agreement if you carry out any activity that causes a genuine nuisance to your neighbours.

Anti-social Behaviour and Harassment (ASB)

ASB is defined as 'Behaviour by a person which causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as the person'. (Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003 & Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011).

Anyone can be a victim of ASB, regardless of age, race or gender.

Anti-social behaviour can include serious criminal incidents or general nuisance such as:

- ✓ drug dealing
- ✓ racial and homophobic harassment and abuse
- ✓ graffiti, pet noise or dog fouling

As a BHT tenant you must make sure that you, your household and any of your visitors do not cause nuisance or annoyance to your neighbours. Your tenancy agreement explains your responsibilities further.

For more information, please see our [ASB leaflet](#) which will explain what to do if you experience ASB from your neighbours.



Living in Your Home *continued...*

Laminate Flooring

You will need to ask permission from BHT before you make any changes or improvements to your home.

We do not recommend laying laminate flooring if you live in a flat, because of the noise that this can create for other residents living in the flats nearby.

We recommend instead that you lay suitable carpets and underlay.



Smoking

Since 2007, it has been illegal to smoke in enclosed public spaces.

This includes shared areas inside blocks of flats. We have displayed signs inside all of our blocks of flats.

Rubbish

Please get rid of rubbish as soon as you can. Do not leave it in shared hallways or stairwells as this can cause health and safety risks, including people tripping and the risk of rubbish catching fire.

If you have any large items of rubbish you should take them to your local council Recycling Centre or contact your local council to arrange for them to collect it.

If any items of rubbish are left out in the shared areas of blocks of flats or outside our properties, we will remove the items and recharge tenants for the cost of this.



Recycling

For information about recycling you can contact your Local Council Offices.

All locations have public recycling centres such as in car parks or supermarket parking areas.

Brighton on **01273 292929** or check their website **brighton-hove.gov.uk**

Hastings on **01424 451066** or check their website on **hastings.gov.uk**

Eastbourne on **01323 410000** or check their website on **eastbourne.gov.uk**

You can also check **east.sussex.gov.uk** for more information about general recycling in Eastbourne and Hastings



Can I keep a pet?

If you are thinking of getting a pet, please check your tenancy agreement first.

It will tell you if you need to get permission from us. Most of our properties do not permit pets. If you have an assured shorthold tenancy agreement, you are not allowed to have any pets.

If you are given permission to keep a pet, you must keep them under control and clear up after them.

If you have a pet that causes a nuisance, you will not be allowed to keep it in the property.



Where can I park?

Parking can cause neighbourhood problems so please be considerate and follow this advice:

1. Only park on the street or in proper parking spaces, not on grassed areas or verges.
2. Lots of areas have street-parking restrictions. You may need to contact your local council for a parking permit.
3. If you have a severe problem walking, you may qualify for the Blue Badge Scheme. Contact your local council for details.



Can I put up an aerial or satellite dish?

If you live in a block of flats you may have a shared aerial that you and other residents pay for through the service charge.

If you wish to put up an aerial or satellite dish you must contact us (and your local council, if necessary) for permission first. We may not be able to give you permission because of local planning laws.

If you live in a leased property, we will have to ask the landlord for permission and they may not allow this.

If you put up a satellite dish without getting permission first, we may ask you to remove it.



Repairs

How do I report a repair?

To help us provide an efficient repairs service, please could you:

- ✓ report any problems as soon as possible
- ✓ give us as much detail as you can about the problem
- ✓ ensure we have the correct contact details for you
- ✓ tell us when you are available for an appointment

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

- ✓ online **MyTenancy** (BHT's online platform – please contact us for a login)
- ✓ by email **repairs@bht.org.uk**
- ✓ by telephone **01323 340018**
- ✓ in writing **BHT Housing Service, Suite 14, Highlight House, St Leonards Road, Eastbourne, BN21 3UH**

We will always deal with your repair request with respect and expect you to be respectful towards our staff and contractors. When we have raised your repair, we will send you a paper copy of the repair order.

We will also send you a satisfaction questionnaire with a pre-paid envelope which we would ask you to complete and return within two working days of the repair being completed. By returning the questionnaire you will be entered into a monthly prize draw.

For more information, please see our leaflet about repairs.



Condensation

Most of the complaints we receive about dampness turn out to be the result of condensation.

This is caused when moisture carried by warm air reaches a cold surface and turns back into water. You can limit the amount of condensation in your home by doing the following:

- ✓ try to keep your home warm enough to avoid having cold surfaces that water vapor can gather on
- ✓ not blocking up any vents or airbricks
- ✓ leaving gaps between your furniture and the walls
- ✓ trying to reduce the amount of water in the air by:
 - ✓ keeping lids on saucepans when cooking
 - ✓ opening windows every day
 - ✓ closing doors to prevent water vapor travelling to colder areas of your home

For more information, please see our leaflet called [Managing Condensation](#)



Moving Home

Homemove

The first step would be to register with your local authority as a homeseeker.

In Sussex, the local authorities and housing associations generally advertise the available properties on **Sussex Homemove** at www.homemove.org.uk

Sussex Homemove is an example of a **choice-based lettings** (CBL) scheme. CBL schemes allow tenants and new housing applicants to bid for properties they are interested in. Any available council or housing association properties are usually advertised on the website.

If you want to move to another area, please contact the local authority of the area directly.

Mutual Exchanges

A mutual exchange is when you swap your home with another tenant. You can swap your home with someone outside the area.

If you have an assured tenancy or are a fixed term tenant you have the right to carry out a mutual exchange.

You can exchange with either:

- ✓ another BHT tenant
- ✓ a tenant from another housing association
- ✓ a local authority tenant

This can be a good option for tenants wanting to move who do not have very high priority on their local council waiting list.

Both tenants who want to swap must have our approval. You will normally only be able to swap your home if your rent is up to date and your home is in good order.

There are different options for you to find someone you wish to swap homes with. There is a national website called Home Swapper (www.homeswapper.co.uk) for tenants across the country who wants to do an exchange. You can also look at other internet services, adverts in local shops, newspapers or libraries.

If you move through a mutual exchange, you are responsible for checking the condition of your new home. You must ensure the property is at a standard that you are happy to move into and live in.

Please contact your Housing Officer for more information.



Paying Your Rent

Your rent is the weekly charge for your home. In some cases the rent might include a service charge for communal services such as cleaning, lighting corridors and providing services such as communal TV aerials.

There may also be a charge for your utilities such as water rates or electricity. This is generally if you live in a shared house or one of the BHT leased properties.

Your tenancy agreement will outline the rent you pay. The rent and service charges change annually and we will write to you with at least one month's notice before the rent is increased or decreased. You are also sent a rent statement every quarter which outlines the amount you are required to pay.

If you do not know what you need to pay, please contact our Income Recovery Officers or your Housing Officer.

How do I pay my rent?

You can pay your rent in one of the following ways:

- 1. Direct Debit** — we expect you to pay by this method: our Housing Officer or Income Recovery Officer can sign you up immediately.
- 2. Allpay** — a payment card that enables you to pay your rent at any PayPoint local to you.
- 3. Standing Order** — we can give you a form or help you fill out your bank's forms. Please contact us for your payment reference number.
- 4. Bank Transfer** — if you have a chip and pin card you can pay over the counter at your bank with your payment reference number. You can also pay through telephone or internet banking.

Please note: all payments are weekly, and must be made in advance.

Please see the Rents Leaflet for more information or contact your Income Recovery Officer.



Welfare Benefits

There have been many changes to welfare benefits recently, and more are expected.

If this affects you, let us know and ask us for more information if you have any questions. We are here to help.

We run many workshops on welfare benefits – please ask us for details.



Housing Benefit

Housing Benefit claims can only be backdated up to one month.

This makes it even more important to let the Housing Benefit Office know immediately of any change to your income or general circumstances.

Universal Credit

Your rent will be paid directly to you rather than to BHT.

However, we can advise you on how to ask for payment to be made directly to BHT.

Working Age Benefits

Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA), Employment Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support (IS) and Housing Benefit will not increase until at least 2020.

It also includes the Local Housing Allowance.

If you need help with budgeting, contact your Income Recovery or Housing Officer.

Household Benefit Cap

The government has reduced this from 2016.

Check with us for details if you are unsure if this affects you.

For further information about this, contact your Income Recovery Officer.

Tenant Involvement

We welcome your involvement in improving our services to you.

A tenant editorial panel works in partnership with staff to produce our monthly newsletter and other publications.

Would you be interested in:

- ✓ working with your local Housing Officer by becoming an estate inspector: for example checking cleaning, gardening and repairs?
- ✓ entering or being involved in an annual garden competition for keen gardeners?

Interested in becoming involved?

Email info@bht.org.uk or call your local Housing Officer.

Moving Out

How do I end my tenancy?

You must tell us you are moving out to save yourself money. We require four weeks' notice in writing (we can help you with this), starting on a Monday (unless you have a Fixed Term Tenancy), that you intend to move out.



Your Housing Officer will visit your property and carry out an inspection prior to you moving out. They will discuss any repairs that you need to carry out before you leave.

Before the end of your tenancy, you should ensure that all rent and service charges are up to date and provide a forwarding address for mail. Please return your keys to us no later than 12noon on the day your tenancy ends. If you don't, you will be responsible for paying the rent until you do. You should leave the property secure, clean and must remove any personal belongings.

If BHT has to clean up, clear your belongings or do lots of repairs after you have left, you will be charged for this. Please do not abandon your tenancy without giving us the keys, even if you have not given four weeks' notice in writing. This will save you any costs incurred for gaining entry and rent during the Notice to Quit period for abandoning your home We will pursue these costs.

Who else do I tell that I'm moving out?

As with moving in, you will need to inform any agencies or services you use that your address will be changing.

You will also need to take meter readings on the day you move out and give these to your utility providers.

Complaints & Compensation

How do I make a complaint?

We aim to give you the best possible service but we know that mistakes and misunderstandings do happen sometimes.

When things don't work the way they should, we aim to investigate and resolve complaints quickly, effectively and where possible, to your satisfaction.

Firstly, talk to us and we will try to sort things out straight away. If you are unhappy with the outcome, you can use our complaints procedure.

Our complaints procedure has two stages:

Stage 1 – The complaint goes to the Senior Manager of the particular area.

Stage 2 – The complaint goes to the Chief Executive or Director of Services.

At each stage, if you are dissatisfied with our response, you can go to the next stage of the complaint procedure.

If you have discussed your complaint informally with us and you are dissatisfied with the outcome you may choose to make a formal complaint. You can make a formal complaint in one of the following ways:

- ✓ by completing a **Complaints Form** – Your Housing Officer can provide you with a copy of this or help you complete it
- ✓ by telephone – please call **01323 340018** or your Housing Officer directly
- ✓ by email – **info@bht.org.uk**
- ✓ Through **MyTenancy** – BHT's online platform: please contact us for a login
- ✓ in person – at any of our **Housing Services offices** in Brighton, Eastbourne or Hastings

For further information about making a complaint, please see our leaflet called **Complaints**.

How do I make a claim for compensation?

On occasions, BHT will consider paying compensation to residents when BHT is at fault and when it is deemed appropriate to make a financial payment as part of putting matters right.

Any claim for Compensation must be put in writing to BHT which can be sent to your local office in Brighton, Eastbourne or Hastings. Or you prefer to, you can give it to your Housing Officer.

All claims made must be able to provide invoices, receipts or any other evidence of monies paid out by yourself.

If you are considering making a claim for compensation and would like further information then please contact us and we can send out a copy of BHT's Compensation Policy.

Useful Contacts

Police non-emergency number	101
UK power networks (to find out who your electricity supplier is)	0845 6015467
Jobcentre plus (new benefit claims)	0800 055 6688
Existing claims (JSA, ESA, IS)	0345 608 8545
Universal credit	0345 600 0723
BHT Housing Services	01323 340018
Robert Heath (Gas Contractor)	0800 030 4435
Out of Hours emergency repairs (such as burst pipes or power failure)	01273 555499

Brighton

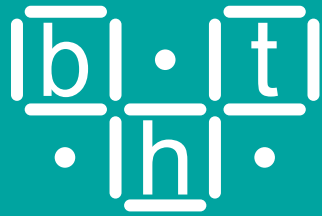
Brighton and Hove City Council switchboard	01273 290000
BHCC Benefits	01273 292000
BHCC Refuse & Recycling	01273 292929
BHCC Council tax	01273 291291
Brighton Homemove team	01273 294400
Housing Options	01273 294400
Brighton CAB	01273 223951
Moneyworks Advice line	0800 988 7037
Brighton safe in the city team (to report ASB and hate crimes)	01273 292735
Furniture Now	01273 487377
Whitehawk Inn	01273 682 222

Eastbourne

Eastbourne Borough Council	01323 410000
Housing Benefit	01323 410000
Furniture Now	01323 638000
Eastbourne Refuse Collection/Cleansing	01323 410000
Jobcentre plus Eastbourne	0345 604 3719
Eastbourne CAB (Advice line)	03444 111 444
Eastbourne CAB (Administration)	01323 413480
Eastbourne Homemove team	01323 415 397

Hastings

Hastings Borough Council general enquiries	01424 451066
Hastings Homemove	0845 274 1100
Hastings Housing Advice	01424 451100
Benefits	01424 451080
Council Tax	01424 451081
Hastings Environmental Protection (reporting noise nuisance)	01424 451079
Refuse and Recycling	01424 451077
Hastings CAB	03444 111 444



BHT Housing Services TENANCY HANDBOOK FEBRUARY 2016

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