

Tenants Handbook

Contents

section

About Bristol Community Housing Foundation Valuing Diversity and Ensuring Equal Opportunity	1
Mission Statement	2
How to Contact Us	3
Foundation Staff and Who to Contact	4
Customer Service Standards	5
Moving Into Your Home	6
Your Responsibilities as a Tenant	7
Reporting Repairs	8
Service Standards for Repairs	9
Repairs Service Standard – Response Time Guidelines	10
Rechargeable Repairs	11
Care of Your Home During the First Year	12
Carrying Out Alterations to Your Home	13
Your Rent	14
Your Tenancy	15
Anti-Social Behaviour	16
Getting Involved	17
Comments and Complaints	18
Useful Telephone Numbers	19

About Bristol Community Housing Foundation

The Foundation is an independent housing association and a Registered Social Landlord with the Housing Corporation. The Housing Corporation regulates us and ensures that we provide efficient services of good value and that we are responsive to your views as tenants of the Foundation.

The Foundation was set up originally to build homes in Upper Horfield to replace the defective council properties that were affected by 'concrete cancer'. By 2008, BCHF will have over 400 homes for rent and will be developing in other parts of north Bristol (including shared ownership) as a Bristol City Council development partner.

The Board of the Foundation is the body that makes strategic business decisions and defines the policies of the Foundation. It is made up of volunteers; a balance of local authority representatives, independent members and Foundation tenants.

Anyone wishing to become a shareholder can apply to the Board. Members have a voice to raise issues and vote at the Annual General Meeting and other General Meetings.

We are a neighbourhood based housing association working with our tenants and other voluntary and statutory agencies, not just to provide good quality homes but to ensure that the communities where we work are a pleasant and popular place to live.

Valuing Diversity and Ensuring Equal Opportunity

The Foundation values the diversity of people in the community and works to promote respect and tolerance between all people irrespective of age, sex, race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religious belief or disability.

The Foundation will enquire if tenants have special requirements such as a need for translation, interpreting, the use of Braille, tapes or large print and will ensure these services are provided so there is equal access to our services.

More Than Just a Roof

Creating a Thriving Community Takes More Than Bricks and Mortar

“BCHF will be a leading, locally based, social landlord in the wider Bristol area. Using innovative solutions and involving local communities, we will specialise in the redevelopment of defective housing and the regeneration of neighbourhoods.”

We will achieve this vision by delivering our main business aims as follows:

- To be a leading independent, Bristol based, social landlord
- To specialise in replacing defective housing and regenerating neighbourhoods
- To offer residents choice about their homes, where they live and who they live near
- To build and manage a mix of rented and shared ownership housing
- To have tenants and other local people playing an active role in our management

Office Opening Hours**The office is open:**

Monday	9.00-5.00
Tuesday	9.00-5.00
Wednesday	10.00-5.00
Thursday	9.00-5.00
Friday	9.00-4.30

Appointments can be made outside of these hours

Telephone:	0117 9470501
Lo call:	0845 130 1804
Fax:	0117 969 4111
E-mail:	info@bchf.co.uk
Text message:	07980 240 554
Website:	www.bchf.co.uk

The office address is:

Bristol Community Housing Foundation Limited
400 Filton Avenue
Horfield
Bristol BS7 0LJ

Emergency Repairs line for out of hours: 0800 587 2325

Members of staff that you meet when you first go into the office will have name badges. Any staff member or contractor visiting you at home will carry identification and you should ask to see it before allowing them into your home. The Foundation expects tenants to treat its members of staff with respect at all times when they are carrying out the business of the Foundation.

Customer Services Assistant

This member of staff will usually answer the telephone and will see you when you first go into the office. He/she will answer your query or arrange for you to see another member of staff. He/she will deal with all your repair reports and arrange for a contractor to visit you and for the repair to be completed.

Office Manager

The Office Manager organises the office and ensures it runs efficiently.

Neighbourhood Housing Officers and Housing Services Manager

These staff members deal with any housing management issues including rent payments, housing benefit claims, advice about other benefits or debts, reports of antisocial behaviour, changes to your tenancy, requests for moving, support issues and resident involvement.

Neighbourhood Caretaker, Technical Services Manager

The Neighbourhood Caretaker looks after landscaped areas that are managed by BCHF. (but NOT the roads, which are looked after by the Council). He/she also does minor repairs such as lock changes and carries out weekly health and safety checks in flats.

Repairs Inspector

He/she inspects properties to check what repairs are required or to approve tenant adaptations and to check the quality of work done. He/she is also responsible for monitoring gas servicing.

Technical Services Manager

This member of staff manages the Repairs team and ensures that the Foundations properties are properly maintained to the required standard.

Clerk of Works

The clerk of works is responsible for making sure that the Foundation homes are well built.

Business Support Assistant

He/she assists the Finance Director deal with company finance and rent issues and liaises with the council's Housing Benefit section.

Finance Director

The Finance Director ensures the viability of the Foundation as a not for profit business.

Chief Executive

The Chief Executive is responsible for the smooth running and efficiency of the organisation and for managing the redevelopment of Upper Horfield and other developments and for meeting the standards required by our customers, partners and the Housing Corporation.

Service standards ensure that everyone knows the service that they can expect to receive. They also allow us to measure our performance so that we can continue to improve the services we deliver to you.

The Foundation Will:

- Treat you with respect and provide a courteous, friendly service.
- Introduce ourselves by name.
- Acknowledge all correspondence within 3 working days and give a substantive response within 8 working days.
- Answer your telephone call within 7 rings.
- See you within 10 minutes when you come into the office or arrange an appointment for you.
- Identify any special needs to ensure people have the same level of service.
- Use plain English.
- Translation into other languages, Braille or large print when requested.
- Take seriously a complaint about our services, follow procedures and inform you of the outcome.
- Admit when we have made a mistake and do our best to put it right.
- Ensure our contractors abide by our Code of Conduct.
- Provide an emergency 24 hours out of hour's service for repairs 365 days a year.
- Deliver a Tenants' newsletter to you four times a year.
- Provide information about our policies and procedures on request.
- Always show our identity badges when visiting your home.
- Report to you annually on our performance.

Protecting Your Privacy

The Data Protection Act restricts the information that the BCHF can hold about you and who it can pass it to without your permission. Personal information will only be passed to other organisations where this is essential to maintain your tenancy, for example, an emergency repair contractor or for the purposes of the prevention or detection of crime. Sensitive personal information such as health details, ethnicity and sexual orientation will only be held in a form where it can be linked to you, where you give express permission. BCHF issues a Data Protection Guide to all new tenants. This outlines the BCHF's policy for collecting, processing and protecting data that relates to its tenants. All tenants are asked to provide written consent to the Foundation to process personal data in accordance with its Data Protection Policy.

Your tenancy starts on a Monday. If you move into a new property we will normally give you the keys to your home on the Friday before your tenancy starts on the Monday. We will ring you to arrange a time for you to come to the office to collect them and to sign the Tenancy Agreement, if you have not already done so. The Tenancy Agreement sets out the terms that both you and the Foundation agree to.

Once you have moved in, we will contact you within four weeks to find out how you are settling in and if you have any problems.

PROPERTY RE-LETTING STANDARD

When you move into a BCHF home you can expect it to be safe, clean, secure, free of serious disrepair and maintained to the standard described below.

Safe

We will provide you with an up to date gas safety certificate.
Smoke alarms will be in place and in good working order.

Secure

Fully functioning windows and doors.
Locks for external doors will be changed and three keys provided.
Keys will be provided for window and cupboard locks.
Handrails will be secure.

Clean

The property will have been professionally cleaned by our contractor including the removal of mould.
The property and garden will be clear of any rubbish.

In the Kitchen

All doors and kitchen units will be in sound condition.
A lockable medicine cabinet will be provided.
A space and connection for a cooker will be provided.
At least two double electrical sockets in addition to an electric cooker point will be provided.
All plumbing and drainage will be free from leaks and in good working order.
The floor coverings in the kitchen will be hygienic, easy to clean and moisture resistant.
All stopcocks will be accessible and easy to operate.

In the Bathroom

Toilet and bathroom fittings will be clean and serviceable and in good working order.
Seals will be clean and in good condition.
All plumbing and drainage will be free from leaks and in good working order.
The floor coverings in the bathroom will be hygienic, easy to clean and moisture resistant.

Decoration

Empty properties will generally not be redecorated but all internal surfaces will be in a sound condition suitable for decoration.
Decorating packs will be given if the property is in need of redecoration.

Heating, Lighting and Ventilation

The heating and hot water system will be in good working order.

Light fittings and switches will be in good condition.

Damp and serious condensation will be minimised as far as is economically practicable.

Doors and windows will be free from excessive draught.

Carpets, Furnishings and Furniture

Carpets, furnishings and furniture will normally be removed unless you would like to keep them and agree to take full responsibility for them.

Any carpets left behind will be sprayed to eradicate fleas unless there were no pets previously in the property.

Floor Coverings

All floors in the property will be flat and suitable for coverings.

Small areas of damaged tiles will be filled with latex.

Concrete floors will have a suitable floor covering.

Externally

Fencing will be in a reasonable and safe state of repair. Where removed it will be replaced on a matching basis.

Gardens will be manageable, free from excessive growth, and lawns cut. Rubbish and ponds will be removed and the garden reinstated.

Footpaths will be in a safe condition free of trip hazards.

Where there is a shed and/or rotary drier in the garden, you will be responsible for their maintenance.

Previous Alterations

You will be asked if you would like to keep any alterations made by the previous tenant. If you do wish to keep them we will expect you to take any risks associated with this and to be responsible for their future maintenance. If you do not want these alterations we will remove them and re-instate the property to the standard described in this document.

When you view the property we will:

Provide you with a copy of this Re-Letting Standard.

Provide you with a list of repairs that are still outstanding.

When you move in we will:

Where it has proved impractical to complete all the repairs before you move in, we will provide you with an up to date list of repairs that are still outstanding and an estimate of how long they will take.

Check meter readings with you and leave you a copy of the readings.

Show you how to operate all the important features of the property such as the heating and the location of stopcocks etc.

Provide you with a list of keys supplied and ask you to sign for them.

Provide you with a welcome pack for your new home and neighbourhood.

Difficult to let properties

The Foundation may carry out additional improvements if it is considered these will enable the property to be re-let more quickly.

The Housing Services Manager will be responsible for co-ordinating the termination of tenancy, void property works and re-letting of the property.

Contents Insurance

The structure of your home is insured by the Foundation against such things as fire or flood. However, this does not include your personal belongings and furnishings such as carpets and furniture, and we advise that you should take out your own contents insurance to cover these items.

Looking After Your Garden

It is your responsibility to look after your garden. You must keep the garden clean and tidy, lawn mowed and free from rubbish including old furniture. You must not take down any fences or sheds or remove any trees.

If you are elderly or registered disabled and find it difficult to look after the garden yourself then contact the Foundation and we will try to help.

Home Zones And Parking

The new housing has been designed as a Home Zone. This means that the roads have been designed to give pedestrians and cyclists priority and to deliberately slow traffic down. Parking spaces are usually limited to one per property and you should only park in the space identified for your home. Please take care not to block routes for pedestrians or to cause obstructions for people with prams or in wheelchairs.

If you wish to report a car that is untaxed, you can call the DVLA on 0117 9692211. Please tell the Foundation or telephone the Council direct on 0117 922 3838 if you think a vehicle has been abandoned. We will notify the police to remove cars if they appear to be unroadworthy and dumped. No caravans, boats, trailers or commercial vehicles should be parked in these areas or in your driveway. Please do not park on any open spaces or landscaped areas.

Getting Rid Of Rubbish

We expect you to dispose of rubbish carefully. Please make sure that you put your rubbish in the appropriate bin on the refuse collection day. This includes placing any rubbish for recycling in the re-cycling bin. Please contact the Council on 0117 922 3838 for advice on refuse collection.

Please tell us if someone has dumped any rubbish near your home.

How do I get rid of bulky rubbish?

The Council will collect up to three items of furniture or household appliances for a charge of £15. Contact 0117 922 3838. If you receive Income Support, Pension Credit, Housing or Council Tax Benefit, you will be entitled to use this service free on one occasion every six months.

Good quality useable items may be collected by the SOFA Project free of charge at their discretion. Contact 0117 954 3567.

Keeping Pets

We expect you to look after your pets in a responsible way. They must not cause a nuisance to your neighbours for example by making a lot of noise, fouling or excessive smell. Dogs will not be allowed in flats.

Requests for repairs can be reported by telephone, e-mail, fax, text or by coming into the office.

In office hours:

Telephone: 0117 9470501

Fax: 0117 9694111

E-mail: info@bchf.co.uk

Text: 07980 240 554

Out of office hours emergencies: 0800 587 2325

Please provide the operator with as much information as possible and only use this service in an emergency where there is a serious risk in terms of health and safety, security or structural damage. If a contractor is called out unnecessarily, we will charge you for the call out.

Electricity

If you have an electrical emergency, please phone Western Power Distribution 0800 365 900.

Water

If you have a water emergency, please phone Wessex Water (Water Leakstoppers) 0800 214651. If you have a water leak, please switch the water off beneath your kitchen sink.

Gas

If you can smell gas please immediately contact **Transco, the National Gas Emergency Service**, freephone anytime on **0800 111 999**.

We will service your gas boiler annually. You must provide us with access to your home for this and we will write to you two weeks before it is due to tell you the time and date the gas engineer will visit. If the appointment is not convenient you will be able to contact them directly to arrange an alternative appointment but it is essential that you allow the Foundation's contractors access.

What To Do If Your Property Is Damaged By Crime

- Report the incident immediately to the police.
- Keep the following information and pass it to the Foundation:
 - ♦ the crime reference number given you by the police
 - ♦ the police station the incident was reported to
 - ♦ the date and time of the crime
- If your property is not secure, please report this immediately to the office. Call the emergency out of hours number if the office is closed and ask for your home to be made secure.
- If your home has been badly damaged, it may take us a couple of weeks to complete the repairs needed, as the damage will need to be assessed by our insurance company before repairs are ordered.

BCHF is committed to providing an excellent repairs service to your home. This page lists the standard of service that you can expect. Below are the things that BCHF expects from all tenants as your contribution to keeping your homes in a good state of repair.

BCHF will:

- **Offer convenience and choice in reporting repairs through:**
Visit or Telephone our office at 400 Filton Ave on 0117 947 0501
Emergency repairs, out of office hours telephone 0800 587 2325
Website bchf.co.uk or email repairs@bchf.co.uk (not for emergencies)
- **Classify the Repair priority as either:**
Emergency - we will make safe by the end of the next day
Non Emergency - we will offer an appointment within response time guidelines (as detailed overleaf)
Tenant responsibility (as detailed overleaf) – if you wish us to do the work on your behalf we will let you know how much it will cost and you will need to pay all the cost before we do the work unless it is a health and safety issue when we will offer you a choice of methods to repay the money to BCHF.
- **Take into account your vulnerability to the consequences of the faulty component when we decide the repair priority**
- **Offer a choice of appointments at the time you make the call for non emergency repairs**
Offer a choice of weekday morning, afternoon, 10-3 or early evening slots for weekdays and Saturday mornings
Send a letter containing details of the appointment and the Contractor
Send a reminder text the day before (if we have your current mobile number)
Keep that appointment in at least 96% of cases.
Give at least 24 hours notice if we need to change the appointment
- **Manage the Contractors who do the Repair Work**
Complete the job in one visit in at least 75% of cases
Keep you informed at least once a week if the work is delayed
Ensure Contractors show their ID and leave your home safe, clean and tidy and comply with our Contractors Code of Conduct
Post inspect 10% of repairs
- **Invite your Feedback and publish our performance against these standards**
Send you a questionnaire or carry out a telephone, text or email satisfaction survey.
Contact you to find out why if you say you are unhappy with the service.
Publish our performance on our website, newsletters and annual report.
- **Reply to your requests to alter or improve your home within 14 days**

Tenants will:

- Report repairs promptly, giving as much detail as possible
- Report only emergency repairs to the out of hours service.
- Cooperate in giving access to the Contractor and BCHF staff. Keep the appointment or give 24 hours notice if you need to break it.
- Report crime and vandalism to the police and obtain a crime reference number
- Pay a cost of £25 if you break two appointments. After two broken appointments BCHF will normally cancel the repair job and let you know that this has happened. Residents will need to report it again if the work still needs doing.
- Be polite to our staff and contractors
- Carry out the repairs for which you are responsible
- Pay for any work we carry out on your behalf (recharges)
- Aim to return the satisfaction forms or agree to give your feedback in a telephone survey, e-mail or text.
- Obtain written permission before carrying out any improvements or alterations to your home.
- Leave your home in good condition at the end of your tenancy

The following are Tenant Responsibility Repairs**OUTSIDE**

- Maintaining gardens including hedges and trees
- Keep garden clear of rubbish, disused cars etc
- Sheds and outbuildings
- Back garden path
- Cleaning leaves from gulley grids
- Clothes line.

The following are Tenant Responsibility Repairs - INSIDEGeneral

- Replacement of lost keys (including window lock keys) and forced entry when keys are lost (repairs may be carried out but the tenant will be charged)
- Replacement of internal door handles and locks.
- Testing and cleaning smoke detectors
- Internal decorations
- Any artex or other wall or ceiling covering applied must be done to a reasonable standard and should not create a safety hazard. Any coverings applied which are subsequently removed by BCHF for this reason will be recharged to you.
- TV aerials (except communal aerials to flats)
- Minor repairs to door catches, door bells and shelving
- Fittings installed by the tenant
- Hairline cracks in ceiling or wall plaster (although this will come under the one year defects period)
- Trimming doors when carpets fitted.
- Pests – fleas, ants and wasp nests
- Cleaning communal areas (flats only) where this has been agreed at the service charge meeting to be the tenants' responsibility
- Fitting in and plumbing in kitchen fittings ie cookers, washers, etc
- Minor repairs to kitchen unit drawers
- Replacing handles, hinges and catches
- Replacing broken or cracked glass where no Police Crime Report number is obtained
- Repairing or renewing floor covering.

Plumbing

- Replacement of sink/bath plugs and chains
- Replacement of WC seats
- Stained internal sinks, WC or baths, etc
- Blocked waste pipes where caused by tenant
- Mixer taps and showers fitted by tenants
- Works to washing machine plumbing
- Bleeding radiators
- Installing and maintaining washing machines/dishwashers
- Checking room thermostat is set at correct temperature
- Checking heat programmer is set at correct time setting
- Taking steps to stop water in taps and pipes from freezing
- Turning off water at the stop tap if a burst has occurred.

Electrical

- Light bulbs and fluorescent tubes in dwelling
- Electrical fittings installed by tenant (ie ceiling fans)
- Resetting trip switches
- Disconnecting and reconnecting cookers

To help guide how long repairs should normally take to complete, they are classified as follows. These are not specific target completion times but are meant for guidance only. BCHF will aim to get repairs completed as quickly as possible.

1. Emergency Works - Response by the end of the next day

Emergency repairs are those which are needed to avoid serious health or safety risk, serious structural damage or to ensure a home is secure.

BCHF will respond aim to respond within **four hours** but will definitely respond **by the end of the next day** to the following types of emergency:

- Total loss of electricity, water or gas supply (residents should establish if this is a neighbourhood problem and if so, contact appropriate utility)
- Severe storm damage
- Dangerous wiring and risk of electric shock
- Broken or jagged glazing
- Fire damage: to secure building
- Security: Locks etc if home is not able to be secured
- Major plumbing leaks (internal)
- Flooding
- WC not flushing if you are elderly (if it is the only WC). (All others should use buckets of water to flush)
- Escape of gas (individual case, the tenant should call TRANSCO)

2. Emergency Works - Response by the end of the next day

Other emergencies where BCHF will respond **by the end of the next day** include:

- No heating or hot water for all non-vulnerable residents between 31st October and 1st May
- No heating or hot water for elderly and vulnerable tenants
- Shower repairs for people not able to use the bath
- Loose or broken WC pan where serious leak could occur or if potentially dangerous
- Racist or offensive graffiti
- Dangerous walls, make safe
- Blocked flue to boiler
- Blocked foul drains affecting the house internally
- Toilet not flushing if no other working toilet
- Leaking from water or heating pipe, tank or cistern
- Insecure external window, door or lock
- Repairs in four hours category above where daylight essential for repairs

3. Non Emergency - Urgent Repairs

BCHF aims to complete urgent repairs within seven days. Urgent repairs are those which are thought will cause substantial discomfort to the customer and potential damage to the property.

These include:-

- No heating or hot water for all non-vulnerable residents between 1st May and 31sOctober
- Partial loss of electric or water supply
- Faults at electrical fittings
- Ball valve faults at storage tanks or WC cisterns
- Leaks in WC flush pipes, waste pipes, traps
- Blocked sink, bath or basin (where not caused by tenant)
- Tap which cannot be turned off
- Leaking roof if causing significant damage or inconvenience
- Loose or detached banister or rail
- Communal door entry phone not working
- Total loss of communal lighting
- Mechanical extractor fan in internal kitchen or bathroom not working

4. Non Emergency - Routine Repairs

Routine repairs are those which only cause minor inconvenience and have little effect on the property or the customer if the repair is not undertaken in the short term

Routine repairs will be completed with 28 calendar days and include:-

- Blocked gutters and rainwater pipes
- Cleaning or repairing gutters or downpipes
- Roof tile repairs
- Plasterwork
- Carpentry repairs
- Easing or re-fitting doors or windows
- Replacement of cracked glazed pans
- Partial loss of heat (unless vulnerable)
- Leaking overflows
- Minor plumbing leaks
- Extractor fans (if not internal rooms)
- Loss of communal lighting locally (lamp failure)
- Loss of electricity to single socket or lamp
- Shower repairs (for non-disabled and non-vulnerable tenants)
- Letter boxes/door knockers/external lights/bells
- Repairs to floors and paths that are not hazardous
- Repairs to fences and gates when lack of gate/fence constitutes a potential danger
- Kitchen units/worktops if due to fair wear and tear (otherwise re-chargeable)
- Rain penetration if not severe

5. Non Emergency Void Repairs

Some works may be carried out after the tenant has moved in. We aim to take a maximum of 28 calendar days.

- Replace internal doors
- Provide lockable bathroom cabinets
- Non emergency electrical repairs (e.g. where upgrading to new regulations)
- External works (e.g. gardens)

6. Non Emergency Planned Maintenance (will take place as part of a planned maintenance programme).

BCHF will replace major building components such as kitchens and bathrooms as part of a planned programme. We will not replace your kitchen, for example, just because it is of a certain age or indeed refuse to consider its replacement just because this time is not up. Instead, we will inspect your property at least every five years and note its condition. Then we will plan ahead to do the works according to the condition of the component and availability of funds.

Before we decide to do any planned works to replace kitchens, bathrooms or rewiring we will consult you and take into account your views about the standard and quality of replacement components and the priorities between different works. For instance we will ask you whether you think replacing your kitchen is more important than replacing your windows. We will also ask you about colour choices etc.

Examples of Planned Maintenance Work are:

- Fences/gates/path/ boundary wall repairs if not a potential danger
- External rendering
- Decorating
- Internal plastering
- Condensation alleviation works
- Defective flooring repairs if not a potential danger
- Tiling repairs
- Where window cannot be opened or fully closed and alternative ventilation is available
- Kitchens Refurbishment
- Windows and Door Replacements
- Bathrooms Refurbishment
- Radiators Replacement
- Rewiring
- Fencing Replacement and staining
- External painting and staining
- Resurfacing Drives

7. Defect repairs.

Some minor repairs that are the responsibility of the Contractor who built a new property, such as minor cracks, are dealt with at the end of the defects liability period, usually 12 months from completion.

Rechargeable Repairs

As a BCHF tenant you are responsible for the repair or replacement of any items in the property damaged due to neglect, carelessness or deliberate action caused by you or anyone else living at the property or visiting the property, other than fair wear or tear.

BCHF will aim to advise you if a reported repair is likely to be re-chargeable and the approximate value when the repair is reported. In these circumstances, you will be advised that you can carry out any repairs yourself, with BCHF's agreement. In exceptional circumstances, for example for vulnerable tenants or for Health and Safety reasons, BCHF will carry out the repair on your behalf and re-charge the cost to you. This is called a 'rechargeable repair'.

BCHF will charge you, either as a current or former tenant, in the following circumstances:-

- When work is required because of damage to BCHF's property caused by you or anyone else living at the property or visiting the property.
- When work is carried out by BCHF but responsibility for the work lies with you as the tenant according to the conditions of the tenancy agreement.
- When the repairs are required to a property prior to a letting, due to damage or unapproved alterations done by you as an outgoing tenant.
- When you fail to keep an appointment after having confirmed the date and time, and the maintenance contractor makes an abortive call which is charged to BCHF.

You will only be able to transfer to another tenancy or mutually exchange with another tenant on condition that the property and garden are in a good state of repair and no money is owed to BCHF including any rechargeable repairs.

Please also see the “**Simple Guide to Your New Home**”.

If you are moving into a new home there are several important things that we need to advise you about. BCHF has a one year warranty with the builder. This means that no alterations to the properties can be carried out within the first year or the contractor could refuse to put right any faults that occur.

This is in addition to the need to get BCHF’s permission to alter your property.

We therefore need to advise you during the first year not to:

Make any major changes to gardens e.g. levelling, new ponds. Normal planting is allowed.

Use the loft for heavy storage space or as an additional room as the roof structure and roof insulation has only been built to cope with light loads e.g. empty suitcase. The roof space is quite moist and may damage some items.

Carry out any major decoration. If you do want to make minor changes use breathable paint in light colours (see simple guide) and no wallpaper, otherwise we won’t be able to check for any faults in the wall construction and finish.

Fix heavy items to walls or ceilings e.g. book shelves, mirrors. If you want to fix pictures or blinds make sure you use the appropriate fittings. We can advise about this.

Park on grassed areas, park only on drive/parking space provided.

If in doubt about any of the above please ask BCHF’s advice. If a fault does arise because of any of the above, the contractor could refuse to do the repair. We would then have no option but to pass the charge on to you.

You have the right to alter and improve your home provided you obtain written approval from us before starting any work, as set out in your Tenancy Agreement. Examples of works that need permission are:

- Major changes to gardens e.g. levelling, new ponds, timber decking, extending the patio. (Normal planting and replacement of shrubs is allowed, but not the removal of trees).
- Changing light fittings.
- Boarding loft spaces (the roof structure and roof insulation has only been built to cope with light loads e.g. empty suitcase. The roof space is quite moist and may damage some items).
- Extensions, awnings or conservatories.
- Structural alterations.
- Use of the loft for heavy storage space or as an additional room.
- Removal, change or modification of any existing components e.g. kitchen cupboards, bathroom fittings and flooring.

Permission will usually be given but there are certain circumstances when we will refuse. These include, but are not limited to:

- When an alteration would make the building unsafe.
- When an alteration would make the house become less usable than when originally built, e.g. by knocking two rooms into one.

If permission is granted, it will be conditional upon you obtaining building regulation consent and/or planning permission from the local council, as appropriate. Any works carried out must be undertaken to a good standard and as specified by BCHF.

If you are considering carrying out an alteration to your home, please contact us and we will let you know in writing whether you can make the alteration. We may call on you to discuss your request. We will then write to you with the decision and we may specify how the work should be carried out. BCHF may then inspect the work while it is being done and when it is completed.

If you do not request permission for an alteration, we may ask you to put back your property to its original state at your own expense.

Disabled Adaptations

We are committed to enabling tenants to remain in their homes when their circumstances change, subject to affordability. If you feel you need an aid or adaptation to help you live more comfortably in your home, please contact the Housing Services Manager at BCHF with your request.

BCHF will assess and install minor adaptations such as those listed below:

- Grab rails
- Handrails
- Ramps
- Raising electrical sockets
- Door alterations
- Shower trays

For more complex cases you will need to contact Social Services to request an Occupational Therapist (tel. 0800 444 000) to visit you in your own home to assess your needs. We can advise about this and will assist by liaising with Social Services for the provision of larger adaptations.

Examples of more complex works are:

- Hoists
- Stair lifts
- Low level baths
- Wet rooms
- Alterations to kitchen units

What Does My Rent Include?

Your rent entitles you to live in your home and for BCHF to carry out its obligations as set out in the Tenancy Agreement (see page 4 of the Agreement).

Can My Rent Change?

Rents are calculated and increased annually in accordance with government regulations. Rents usually increase annually on the first Monday in April by a maximum of the retail price plus 1/2%, plus £2 per week.

You will be informed in writing about any changes to your rent at least one month in advance. Please make arrangements to increase the amount of your standing order in advance of the rent increase if you pay by this method. If you pay by direct debit, we will automatically increase the amount by the correct amount.

Paying Your Rent

Rent is due on the Monday of each week. You must make sure that your rent reaches us on time or that the council's Housing Benefit section pays your rent direct to us. If you wish to pay fortnightly or monthly, you will need to pay rent in advance so that your account remains clear for the whole period until your next rent is due.

There are a number of ways you can pay your rent:

1. By Direct Debit

You will need to contact your housing officer so we can set this up for you. You can pay either monthly or weekly. If you wish to pay monthly the direct debit can be set up for either 1st or 15th of the month, whichever is more convenient for you.

2. By Standing Order

You need to ask your bank to set this up for you. Our details are as follows:

Account Name: Bristol Community Housing Foundation Limited (Rent Account)

Account Number: 21039194 **Sort Code:** 56-00-05

3. At Our Office

You can pay by cheque at the Foundation's office. Please write your account number on the reverse. You will be given or sent a receipt.

4. Use your Allpay Payment Swipe Card

You can make payments in the Co-op, the Post Office and other shops that are part of the PayPoint network, by telephone 24 hours a day and over the internet.

i) Paying in shops.

Accepts cash only.

ii) Paying at the Post Office.

Accepts cash, debit card and cheques. Please make cheques payable to Post Office Ltd.

iii) Paying by telephone.

Call 0844 557 8321 and follow the instructions. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You will need your Allpay Payment Swipe Card and debit card. You can also call the BCHF office on 0117 9470501; press option 1.

iv) Paying by internet.

Just log onto www.allpayments.net and follow the onscreen. You will need Payment Swipe Card and debit card.

Problems Paying Your Rent

Please contact your housing officer if you get into difficulties paying your rent. We will help in any way we can, including giving you extra help to ensure you are claiming all you are entitled to and helping you to balance money coming in and expenditure.

If you cannot pay the full amount that you owe, we will want to make an arrangement with you to repay what you owe in regular manageable amounts. We may serve a Notice of Seeking Possession on you if you owe four weeks rent. This is a document that allows us to go to court to request possession of your property if we wish. We do not normally do this if you are keeping to your rent arrears agreement.

You may wish to get some independent advice from North Bristol Advice Centre (tel. 0117 951 5751) or the Citizens Advice Bureau. We may refer you to the Advice Centre if we are giving you extra help, and will follow up the help you are given there and give you further support. If you wish to contact the council's Housing Benefit section the telephone number is 0117 9037100. The Benefits Agency at Fishponds can give assistance with claiming Income Support, Incapacity Benefit or other benefits (tel. 0117 9589400).

Service Charges

Tenants pay service charges if they live in a flat or in a house which has unadopted roads or car parks, or kitchen appliances maintained by BCHF. Items covered by a service charge will always be stated at the end of your Tenancy Agreement.

Housing Benefit

If you are claiming housing benefit, we will fill out a form with you when you sign up for the tenancy. We are able to verify your original documents on behalf of the council, and can send your claim and copies of documents to the council on your behalf. The council's benefit officers calculate your entitlement and will inform you about your claim.

It is your responsibility to check the progress of your claim and let us know. If you have problems, we are happy to contact the housing benefit section on your behalf but it is important that you let us know about any change in your circumstances such as starting or finishing work, a change in a benefit or pension you receive or your household as quickly as possible, so the council's Housing Benefit section can be notified promptly.

When Can We End Your Tenancy?

We can apply to Court to end your tenancy if you have broken your Tenancy Agreement with us. This could include:

- You get seriously behind with your rent.
- Someone living in, or visiting your home causes a nuisance and behaves anti-socially.
- You let the condition of your home seriously deteriorate.
- You have been violent or threatened violence to your partner or member of your family, neighbours or Foundation staff.
- Someone living in or visiting your home is convicted of using the property for illegal purposes.
- You were given your tenancy because you deliberately gave us false information.

WE CANNOT EVICT YOU WITHOUT A COURT ORDER.

What Happens Before We Ask The Court To End Your Tenancy?

We will write to you and give you an opportunity to pay what you owe. We will ask you to sign an agreement about how you will pay off your arrears by instalments. We expect you to keep to the terms of your agreement.

If you do not do this, or you fail to make contact with us following our requests, we will serve you with a **'Notice of Seeking Possession' (NOSP)**. This informs you that we may request a court hearing and gives the grounds on which we are taking you to court.

The NOSP gives you the opportunity to comply with your tenancy conditions and if you do comply we will not continue to take you to Court. At the end of the notice period we can apply for a court hearing. You should attend the hearing where you will be given the opportunity to put your version of events to the Court. The Court will decide if we can repossess your home.

If you receive a NOSP from us you may wish to get independent advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau or North Bristol Advice Centre.

If the Foundation decides to take action about anti-social behaviour carried out by a BCHF tenant or a person they are responsible for, a number of actions can be taken. These will be both informal and formal legal remedies, to address the anti-social behaviour and protect victims. Court action may be taken.

What Happens If The Court Does End My Tenancy?

If the Court does end your tenancy, a date will be set for you to leave your home.

Can I Pass My Tenancy to Someone Else?

You may be able to pass on your tenancy to a partner or close relative when you die. This is called a 'succession'. The successor must have lived in the property for the previous 12 months and be living with you at the time of your death. There must not have been a previous succession.

In some circumstances you may wish your partner or relative to take over your tenancy. This is known as Assigning a Tenancy. If you wish to assign you must contact the Foundation to discuss it. An assignment can only be carried out with the permission of the Foundation unless a court order is made.

Joint Tenancy

If you have a joint tenancy you share the tenancy and all the rights and responsibilities of the Tenancy Agreement apply to you both equally. This means that you are both responsible for paying the rent and for any rent arrears. This is still the case if one of you moves out of the property and lives elsewhere.

Transfers and Exchanges**How Can I Transfer to Another Home?****To another social landlord**

If you wish to transfer to another social landlord, you should complete a Bristol Housing Register form. Your transfer application will be handled by Bristol City Council and your name added to the Bristol Housing Register.

To another Foundation home

If a tenant wishes to move to another Foundation property, the application form should be completed and sent to the Foundation. This will be given priority according to the Foundation's policy on transfers. Priority for available homes is usually given in date order of applying for a transfer. However, priority will be given to people whose present home causes them difficulties because of disability, overcrowding or for other reasons.

If a person is in rent arrears, they would not normally be able to transfer. If a Notice of Seeking Possession has been served and a court case is pending, the tenant would not be able to transfer. There may be cases, however, where an exception to the norm may be made.

Exchanging Your Home With Another Tenant

You are also able to exchange with another Council or housing association tenant. Both exchange partners must have permission to exchange from their landlord, but permission can only be withheld on certain grounds. It may however be made conditional on debts being paid, or the property being reinstated to a satisfactory condition. Tenants are now able to register on the www.moveuk.com website to look for swaps with other people. This website also incorporates job opportunities.

If people find it difficult to move as a transfer, they can be more proactive by trying to find an exchange partner to move to a more suitable property or area.

Moving Out Of Your Home

When you move out of your Foundation home, you must give us four weeks written notice. We will then arrange for your property to be inspected. You must ensure that:

- You move all your belongings out, including furniture and carpets unless you have agreed with the Foundation that they are to stay.
- Make sure that you do not leave anyone living in the property when you move.
- We will inspect the property and you must leave your home clean and in a good state of repair. If you have carried out any alterations without our permission we may ask you to return the property to its original state.
- You must secure the home, turning off all gas, water supplies etc.
- You must close all accounts for the home for example gas, phone bills.
- Return all keys to the Foundation. If you do not return the keys we will continue charging you rent until we receive your keys.

Can I Take Lodgers Or Sub-let My Home?

You may take in a lodger as long as this does not make your home overcrowded. Your lodger will not have the same rights as you as a tenant and will not be able to stay in the home if you move away.

If you are receiving housing benefit, taking in a lodger may affect the amount you are paid and you must inform the Council's Housing Benefit staff. Please speak to the Foundation if you are thinking about taking in a lodger and we will advise you according to your circumstances.

You must use your tenancy as your only or principal home. You cannot grant an assured sub-tenancy of any part of your home.

We know it is important to all residents that the Foundation takes a stand against anti-social behaviour. We expect all tenants to abide by the Tenancy Agreement that they signed when they chose to become a Foundation tenant. We do our best to make sure that happens.

Some behaviour may be annoying to you, but we would not regard it as serious anti-social behaviour such as children playing football in the street. In these instances, we will acknowledge your complaint but will not necessarily take action.

Anti-social behaviour is “any behaviour that causes alarm, harassment or distress to one or more other persons not of the same household”. We will take action therefore if you are suffering from any of the following problems:

- Excessive noise.
- Aggressive and threatening behaviour.
- Offensive drunkenness.
- Fouling of public areas.
- Graffiti and vandalism.
- Violence against property and people.
- Dumping of vehicles.
- Intimidation and harassment.
- Prostitution.
- Drug dealing.
- Hate behaviour targeted at people who are perceived to be different such as their race, sexuality or disability.

We ask you first to speak to your neighbours if there is a problem, unless you feel you are putting yourself in danger. If the problem is not resolved, we advise you to tell us and to contact the appropriate agency.

If it is agreed that the Foundation will take action, we will agree an action plan to follow. This may involve you in recording incidents to help in compiling evidence, or you and the Foundation working with other organisations such as the police, the Council’s noise pollution team or dog warden.

The Foundation can give practical support in terms of extra security and also involve other organisations such as SARI (Support Against Racist Incidents) if wanted by the person affected. The Foundation will also take legal action where appropriate and ensure witnesses are given support.

We will also take action against people involved in hate crime who target people who they perceive to be different. This may be whether they are targeting people on the grounds of race, gender or disability. The Foundation will respond to any incidents promptly in liaison with the police Hate Crime Unit and agencies that provide support such as SARI (Support Against Racist Incidents).

Our Commitment to Tenant Involvement

BCHF's slogan 'More Than Just a Roof' makes explicit the provision of quality services to our tenants, enabling and supporting residents to involve themselves in the work of BCHF and the creation of a sustainable neighbourhoods is its core business.

BCHF is committed to involving tenants in the way services are provided, to be accountable to them and to empower residents to build sustainable communities with networks and support for those who need it.

Opportunities for Tenants to Influence the Work of BCHF

There are a number of ways in which tenants can become involved.

Surveys and Questionnaires

Responding to a questionnaire about BCHF's services such as the way a repair has been carried out or about the design of your home will help us to understand your perspective.

Service reviews

We invite involvement of our tenants when a review is carried out about any of our services such as the repairs service or the way BCHF deals with anti-social behaviour. This ensures BCHF understands how best to make improvements in our services.

Communications group

BCHF is developing a group of tenants who will look at written communications including the website to ensure plain English is used. This group also forms part of the editorial panel for the BCHF Newsletter for tenants.

Pride of Place walkabouts

Tenants join with other residents and agencies in the area to walk around a section of the Upper Horfield neighbourhood on a monthly basis to note issues that need resolving and ensure that the appropriate organisation deals with the problem before the following month's meeting.

Network of Street Contacts

BCHF has recruited tenants as volunteer Street Contacts, a role that enables them to raise local issues with the Tenants' Committee, BCHF or any other local agency about problems arising in their area. They also act as a point of contact to ensure residents receive information of interest or benefit to them.

Tenants' Committee

Tenants volunteered to become Tenants' Committee members in the summer of 2007. They stand for one year but can be re-elected for a further year. The Committee discusses and comments on reports going to the Board of Management and co-ordinates and acts on the priorities of the wider tenant body by raising issues with BCHF staff at this meeting.

Bristol Partnership for Tenants

BCHF works with other housing associations in the Bristol Housing Partnership to provide three events a year which give tenants information and the opportunity to meet tenants of other landlords and discuss issues. Topics for the workshops are suggested by tenants.

Working with other Organisations

BCHF works closely with other neighbourhood-focused organisations such as the local community trust, the Fire Service and the Police. Residents and staff attend PACT (Police and Communities Together) meetings where the Community Beat Manager and local residents discuss and agree priorities for the neighbourhood policing team. BCHF works closely with local voluntary sector organisations to organise community events and projects for example for young people.

Becoming a Shareholder

Tenants can apply to become a voting member of the Foundation. The Board decides who can be a shareholder who are able to elect members of the Board at the AGM. All Board members are asked to become a shareholder. For an application form contact the office.

Becoming a Board member

The Board of Management makes strategic decisions, ensures BCHF is managed efficiently and is financially viable. At present there are 14 Board members with places for four tenants. All BCHF tenants are invited to nominate a tenant Board member whenever a vacancy occurs. Board members stand for three years but can remain a Board member for a maximum of three terms.

Taking Part

If you would like to find out more, please contact Community Worker Scott Jacobs-Lange, Housing Services Manager Rachel Cobb or your Neighbourhood Housing Officer.

TENANTS' EXPENSES POLICY

Tenants should not be out of pocket when attending meetings or training. This policy covers reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses.

Attending meetings

Transport will be arranged for people attending Tenants' Panel meetings or other training/networking events arranged by the Foundation where tenants request transport because they are unable to get to a meeting themselves. Tenants will be expected to share transport to minimise costs.

When attending Board meetings, tenant Board members are entitled to claim expenses in the same way as other Board members.

Training/networking events

Tenants using public transport will have the cost reimbursed; the ticket should be attached to the claim form.

People using their cars for journeys within Bristol will be reimbursed for the mileage clocked at 40p per mile.

When travelling to places outside Bristol, second class rail fare should be claimed (mileage should only be claimed if this is the cheaper option).

Carers' costs

Reimbursement of the actual cost incurred will be made, so long as this is reasonable, where a tenant cares for a child or children or an elderly or disabled person in their own home and care needs to be provided while they are out. It is the tenant's responsibility to find a suitable carer.

A receipt or note from the carer must be attached to the claim form stating their name and address and the amount charged.

Expenses will not be paid for care provided by a family member living in the same household.

Your comments are important to us. We would like to hear if you have a compliment, a complaint or a suggestion about our service. You can do this by writing to, phoning, e-mailing or visiting the Foundation's office.

We want you to tell us when we:

- Provide you with a very good service.
- Failed to do something we should have done.
- Were slow or inefficient in helping you.
- Treated you badly or impolitely.
- Provided an unsatisfactory service in any other way.

How Do I Make a Complaint?

Before you make a complaint, we encourage you to speak to the person you would normally deal with at the Foundation. Most problems can be sorted out quickly and easily in this way.

How to make a formal complaint?

Please make your complaint in writing. You can use a form which is available in our Reception or write a letter. If there is any reason why you cannot do this please tell us and we will help.

We will acknowledge your complaint within three working days of receiving it. We will aim to sort out your complaint within eight working days. If this is not possible, we will write to explain why, what we are doing to sort out the problem and how long this should take. This is stage one.

If you are not happy with our response and want to take things further you can put your case to the Chief Executive. She/he will investigate the matter and respond to you within eight working days. This is stage two.

If you are still not satisfied with our response you can put your case to an appeals panel made up of at least two members of BCHF's Board. The panel will either meet you in person or consider a written appeal if you prefer. They will let you know the outcome of the appeal within 20 working days. This is stage three and the final stage of our internal complaints procedure.

If you are still not satisfied, you may choose to take the complaint to the Ombudsman whose address is:

Independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme
Norman House
105-109 Strand
London WC2R 0AA
Tel: 020 7836 3630

Please note that you have a right to lodge complaints of discrimination in the County Court on the grounds of race, gender or sexual orientation.

Tenants also have rights under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. There is a six month limit within which complaints must be made.

Further advice may be available from a solicitor, North Bristol Advice Centre or the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Reporting Repairs

Normal Hours – BCHF Office 0117 947 0501 –
Emergency Repairs Out of Office Hours - 0800 587 2325

Gas – If you smell Gas

0800 111 999 - **National Gas Emergency Service**

Electricity – If you have an Electrical Emergency (Power Cut)

0800 365 900 – **Western Power Distribution**

Water – If you have a Water Emergency (Major Water Leak)

0800 214 651 - **Wessex Water (Water Leakstoppers)**

Reporting Anti-social Behaviour to the Police

Emergency: 999 - (if you are in danger)

Non emergency: 0845 456 7000 - (ask for the Community Beat Manager to be informed)

Reporting Excessive Noise to the Council's Noise Pollution Team

Day 0117 922 3810

Night 0117 922 2050

Reporting Stray Dogs or Fouling

0117 977 6004

Reporting Pests to the Council's Pest Control Team

0117 977 6004

Rats – free

Mice, wasps, bugs - you will have to pay unless you receive Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance or Pension Credit

Bees, pigeons or ants - you have to pay for the service

Reporting Litter or Requesting Bulky Items to Be Collected By the Council's Waste Management Team

0117 922 3838 (if you are receiving housing benefit 3 items will be collected free of charge every 6 months)

Reporting a Dumped Car

0117 945 5419 – if you think the vehicle is stolen or in a dangerous position on the highway
0117 922 3838 or www.bristol-city.gov.uk/vehicles – if you think the vehicle has been abandoned

0117 969 2211 – if the car is untaxed

Please also inform the Foundation as if the vehicle is on our land or on a road that has not yet been adopted by the City Council we have to give permission for it to be removed

Enquiring about Housing Benefit

0117 903 7100

Reporting Benefit Fraud

0500 554 535