

Looking after your Home

You can make a lot of difference to how well your home works for you, and avoid extra costs by being aware of the following.

Improving your Home

If you want to carry out changes to your home please check with our office as to whether it is something you will need permission for. You do not usually need permission for decorating, putting carpets down or putting up pictures or mirrors. Any changes to the fixtures you will need to ask for permission first. Contact the Housing team.

Kitchen and Bathroom sinks

Unblocking a sink or bath waste is your responsibility.

Never pour fats down the kitchen sink as these go solid when they cool and block the pipes and drains. Always let the fat cool down and once it's solid put it in a container or a plastic bag and put it in the bin.

There are many products available from supermarkets and DIY stores that you pour down the plughole to clear blockages. You can help prevent your sink, bath or shower from blocking by buying strainers that fit over the sink hole to catch any hair or food particles.
Resetting your trip switch

If your lights or power go off, it means your trip switches are working properly. You can find out what caused the problem and sort it out quite easily.

Modern electric circuits are fitted with circuit breakers called trip switches. If there's a problem with your electrics, a switch is tripped and the circuit is broken.

All of the fuses or trip switches are found in the consumer unit or fuse box. Some consumer units have buttons rather than switches.

A trip switch or button usually operates because:

- there are too many appliances on a circuit and it's overloaded
- an appliance is faulty or hasn't been used properly, for example a kettle has been over-filled or a toaster not cleaned
- water has leaked into a circuit
- a light bulb has blown
- there's a problem with your immersion heater
- Always have a torch handy in case you have a power cut
- If there's a problem with one of your electrical appliances, leave it unplugged and get a qualified electrician or service engineer to check it.
- If there's a problem with your wall or ceiling light, keep it switched off (put some tape over the switch) and let us know straight away.

Make sure your hands are dry when you touch electrical fittings.

To reset a trip:

This advice is only for modern consumer units.

- Open the cover on the consumer unit so that you can get to the trip switches/buttons.
- Check which switches/buttons have tripped to the OFF position and which rooms (circuits) have problems.
- Put these switches/buttons back to the ON position.
- If the trip goes again, it's probably being caused by a problem with one of your appliances or lights. You need to find out which circuit it is and which appliance on that circuit is causing the problem:

Check all the rooms and check which set of lights or sockets is not working.

- Unplug all appliances on that problem circuit and switch off the immersion heater.
- Switch the 'tripped' switch to the ON position (press in if it's a button).
- Plug in the appliances or switch on each light one at a time until the trip goes again. Don't use adaptors or multiplug extensions when testing appliances.

Mould and damp

What is condensation?

It starts as moisture from cooking, washing or drying clothes indoors on radiators. The moist air condenses on cool surfaces such as walls, mirrors, wall tiles and windows, and even some clothes.

When the moist air is warm it rises and often ends up on ceilings and in upstairs rooms. It's then that mould starts forming.

If mould starts:

- Wipe the mould off immediately with water. Do not use washing up liquid.
- Apply a mild bleach solution to the wall or use a recommended product available from a DIY store.

Trying to stop condensation:

- Condensation can start in any home. You can do things to stop it happening.
- Close kitchen and bathroom doors to stop steam going into other colder rooms.
- Open kitchen and bathroom windows when cooking or washing to let the steam out, or use an extractor fan if you have one put in.
- Open some windows in all the rooms in your home for a while each day, this will allow for a change of air.
- Wipe down surfaces where moisture settles to stop mould forming.
- If you use a tumble drier, vent it directly to the outside.
- Use window trickle vents where these are provided.
- Do not block, take away or cover air vents.
- Do not switch off automatic kitchen or bathroom extractor fans.
- Do not use bottled gas or paraffin heaters – these produce a lot of moisture and your tenancy agreement says that you are not allowed to use these.
- Do not use your cooker to heat your home.

How to produce less moisture:

- Dry clothes outdoors whenever possible, otherwise use well ventilated rooms.
- Cover pans when cooking.
- Vent any tumble driers to the outside
- Keep your house warm:
- Take steps to stop heat loss in your home.
- Keep low background heat.

Fire Safety

You can take steps to stop fires from happening in your home.

- If you have a smoke detector put in and it beeps now and then, it's because the battery has run down. It's important that you change the battery so the smoke detector will work all the time.
- If we haven't put in a smoke detector, you need to get one yourself.
- Don't overload electrical sockets.
- Make sure electrical items have a safety mark when you buy them and keep them in good working order.
- If you live in a block with covered communal areas DO NOT leave any items in the common areas.
- Make sure cigarettes are put out properly, use a proper ashtray and don't smoke in bed.
- Make sure small children can't reach or see any matches.
- Don't use candles near curtains or other things that would catch fire, and make sure they are put out properly.
- If you are cooking food, never leave it alone or overfill chip pans, and don't throw water on a chip-pan fire.
- Plan a way to get out of your home with your family and make sure everyone knows where the exit will be in case of a fire.
- Close all doors at night.
- Don't leave appliances like washing machines or dishwashers running when you go to bed.

If the smoke alarm goes off

- Take your family to where it's easy to escape in case there's a fire.
- Check all rooms for signs of smoke.
- Feel around each door before opening it. If there's any sign of heat, smoke or noise, don't open the door.

If a fire has started

- Don't try to put it out yourself. Smoke and fumes can kill in minutes.
- Get everyone out of the house and call the fire service on 999, unless you live in a scheme where there is a 'stay put' procedure.
- Don't go back for any reason.

If there's no sign of smoke or a fire

Something may have made the alarm go off by mistake and you probably need to reset it. This can happen if:

- A heater or clothes drier is too near it.
- Someone smokes a cigarette or pipe near it.
- A spray is used nearby.
- There's too much steam or fumes from cooking, such as roasting meat or burnt toast.
- There are strong draughts from nearby doors and windows.
- Some insects have flown close to the alarm.
- The back-up battery (if any) is low.

If you can't find out why the alarm has gone off, contact our office. Never disconnect the alarm. This will put you and your family at risk.

To reset the smoke alarm

- If it has a HUSH button, press the button. The alarm will stop for 10 seconds but it then beeps every 40 seconds. If the problem doesn't clear after 10 minutes, the alarm will keep going.
- If there is no HUSH button, turn off the electricity supply at the consumer unit for at least 15 minutes. Then switch the electricity back on.

To test your alarm

- Press and hold the test button for a few seconds. The alarm should sound.
- If the alarm doesn't sound, try cleaning it and test again.
- If the alarm still doesn't sound, contact our repairs contractor.

To clean your alarm

- Use the nozzle of your vacuum cleaner to get rid of any dust from the vents.