

# Tenants' Handbook

Working  
together for  
positive change

This book gives you information about your tenancy with Oaklee Housing and the services we provide for you. Please keep this book somewhere handy.

If you need to find out something about your tenancy or about our housing service, please check in this book to find out what to do. You can look at the menu at the side of each page or go to the more detailed index on page 45. If you then want to talk to someone, please do not hesitate to contact us. See **How to contact us** on page 2.

You will have another book, the **Repairs Handbook**, which gives you information about our repairs service and tells you how to report a repair to us. Please keep these books together, along with your tenancy agreement, and put them somewhere handy for easy reference. Staff will often refer to them when talking to you about your tenancy.

Please contact Oaklee Services Centre if you would like any part of this book explained or produced on tape, on CD, or in Braille **or large print**.

如果你希望我們對此書的任何部分作出解釋或翻製成錄音磁帶、CD、盲文或大字體版，請聯繫 Oaklee 服務中心。

Cantonese

Dá mba mhaith leat míniú a fháil ar aon chuid den leabhar seo nó aon chuid den leabhar seo a fháil ar théip, ar Dhlúthdhiosca, nó i mBraille nó i gcló mór níl le déanamh ach teagmháil a dhéanamh le: Oaklee Services Centre.

Irish

如果您希望我们解释此书的任何部分或将它制成录音带、CD、盲文或大字体版，请联系 Oaklee 服务中心。

Mandarin



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This book was developed by staff and tenants working together.

## How to contact us

When you contact the Oaklee Services Centre by phone, e-mail or letter, your enquiry will be handled by one of our customer service advisors. They can call up your tenancy details on our computer. They will usually be able to deal with your enquiry immediately but if they can't they will ask a housing officer or other appropriate member of staff to contact you as soon as possible.

If you want to visit us, please always phone Oaklee Services Centre and arrange an appointment.

- **Phone the Oaklee Services Centre** ..... 01 400 2650
  - Our office hours are 9am - 5pm, Monday to Friday.
  - At weekends, on public holidays and after 5pm on weekdays, we will only deal with emergency repairs.
  - Your phone calls to us may be recorded for training or quality control purposes.
- **E-mail us:** housing repairs.....enquiries@oakleehousing.ie  
repairs .....enquiries@oakleehousing.ie
- **Complete a form on our website** ..... www.oaklee.ie
- **Write to us** ..... Oaklee Housing, 132 James Street, Dublin 8
- **Website** You can find general information about Oaklee on our website at **www.oaklee.ie**.

You can find other useful phone numbers at the back of this book on page 43.

**Your housing officer's name is** .....

.....

We expect our staff and contractors to be considerate and respectful towards you. We expect you, your family and visitors to behave in a similar way towards them.

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**About this book**

# About Oaklee Housing

We aim to be a leading provider of quality housing and support services.

## About Oaklee Housing

Oaklee Housing operates in various parts of the Republic of Ireland. It was formed in 2000 and provides homes for families and single people and also sheltered schemes for older people and supported schemes for people with specific needs.

Oaklee Housing is an Approved Housing Body, which means that we use any financial surplus to improve or expand our services and to build more homes. It has close operational links with Choice Housing Group in Northern Ireland.

A board of management is responsible for how Oaklee operates. A Chief Executive is responsible to the board for ensuring that its decisions and policies are carried out.

## How we provide services to you

### Oaklee Services Centre

The Oaklee Services Centre is your main point of contact about any matter relating to your tenancy or your home, or for general advice about your housing situation. The centre has a team of advisors who are trained to deal with most tenant enquiries.

Usually the advisor you talk to will be able to call up your details on our computer. They also have your tenancy details to hand. They should be able to give you an immediate answer but if they can't, they will arrange for a member of our housing team or a maintenance officer to contact you.



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## Repairs

If you need a repair to your home you need to contact the Oaklee Services Centre. You should have your **Repairs Handbook** with you to help you describe the problem to them clearly. They will discuss the problem with you and agree how soon someone will come to sort out the problem.

The Services Centre advisor you talk to will usually be able to place an order for the repair immediately but if we need to discuss your repair in more detail a member of our maintenance team will contact you.

We will tell you who will be carrying out the repair. Most repairs are carried out by appointed contractors but some minor repairs may be carried out by our own team of maintenance assistants. The contractor will contact you to agree when they will come to do the repair.

### Tenant Participation Officer

The Tenant Participation Officer supports the Central Tenant Forum and the existing regional forums to help them achieve their aims and objectives. The officer also works to promote and develop further tenant involvement to ensure that all groups of tenants can have their say in how Oaklee works and develops. See **Involving tenants** on page 7.

## Your Housing Officer

You and other tenants in your area have a housing officer who is responsible for:

- signing up new tenants;
- answering enquiries about rents;
- following up on missing payments (arrears);
- helping to sort out neighbour problems;
- managing special housing schemes;
- advising tenants on what to do if they want to move;
- advising tenants on their rights and responsibilities.

## Your Scheme Co-ordinator or Support Worker

If you live in a sheltered scheme you can ask your scheme co-ordinator for advice on any tenancy matters.

The scheme co-ordinator is there to help you. For more information about sheltered housing see **Extra care services** page 33.

If you live in a supported scheme you will have a support worker who will see you every day and carry out an agreed range of tasks relating to your particular needs.

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About Oaklee  
Housing

# Our service standards

We aim to be the best at everything we do. We have a continuous programme of training to make sure our staff achieve a high standard of service.

## Our aims and values

We want to provide all our customers with high quality services.

We have set out some of the standards we expect our staff to keep to when dealing with you. We have set some of these out on page 9.

We are also committed to making sure we deliver services to you in the most cost effective way. This is known as 'best value'. To achieve this we have a continuous programme of service reviews. In these reviews we:

- look critically at how we do things;
- compare our performance with other associations;
- consult with our tenants and other customers; and
- develop plans for improving the service.

## Listening to your comments

We put a very high value on tenant participation. This enables tenants to have a say in how we do things. Tenants can do this through talking to or becoming members of the Tenant Forum, which is currently being extended to tenants of Oaklee. Also, we include tenants on our service review working groups. See **Involving tenants** on page 7.

We carry out surveys from time to time to find out how well you think we are doing in different areas of our service. These surveys may be done face-to-face or over the phone, or we may send you a questionnaire by post.

In addition to the surveys we do, we are keen to hear from you at any time with suggestions or ideas about how we can improve our services. It is also useful for us to hear about what we are doing right.

## If we get it wrong

We know that there may be times when things go wrong and we do not do our best by you, our tenant. We want to know if you are not happy and want you to give us the opportunity to put things right. We also have a clear and open process for handling complaints. We recommend you follow our complaint steps to ensure that we deal with any problem efficiently and fairly. See **Complaints** on page 9.

If we have failed to provide services that you pay for through service charges, we will, under certain circumstances, arrange for you to receive some money back. See **Service charges** on page 35 for details.



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**We are committed to listening to our customers' views about the services we provide and we continually work to improve our services and systems of management.**

### **Our staff will always:**

- tell you their name when they meet or talk to you over the phone;
- be polite, fair, respectful and considerate, and deal with your enquiry efficiently and as quickly as possible;
- be trained to a high standard; and
- deal with any personal information we have about you following government data protection requirements and our confidentiality policy.

### **When visiting you, we will:**

- always carry identification;
- make sure all our contractors carry identification, are polite, tidy, courteous and consult you about when they will come to work in your home;
- give you reasonable warning if we need to change or cancel an appointment; and
- leave a calling card if we find you are not in.

### **When you visit us:**

- reception rooms will be clean, warm and tidy and have easy access;
- up-to-date leaflets, posters and information will be easily available;
- we aim to see you within five minutes of your appointment time; and
- we will use a private interview room, if you prefer.

### **Telephone calls**

- We will try to answer phone calls within eight rings.
- If we can't respond fully at the first point of contact, we will arrange for a housing officer or maintenance officer to contact you.
- When our offices are closed a recorded message will give you the office opening hours and tell you what action to take if you have an emergency.
- If the person you want to talk to is unable to take your call, we will tell you how soon they will get back to you.

### **Letters and e-mails, we will:**

- acknowledge a letter or e-mail from you within three working days and reply in full within a further ten working days (if we can't give a full reply within that time we will let you know); and
- write to you in clear jargon-free language.

### **Equality and diversity**

We will treat everyone fairly and equally, but know that everyone is different and has different needs. We welcome these differences and will do all we can to respect and encourage them. We will:

- provide information about our services in the best format for you, including in large print, on audio tape or in languages other than English; and
- arrange for an interpreter to help if you need one.

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## **Our service standards**

# Involving tenants

**Involvement is good for residents, good for landlords and good for neighbourhoods. You get to have a say about what happens to your homes and neighbourhoods and we can make sure we put your needs first.**

**We have a tenant participation officer who promotes and develops resident involvement.**

## Consulting you about our plans

By law, we must consult you about:

- any alterations we want to make to your tenancy agreement;
- any changes to how we manage our service to you (for example, repair response times or your repair responsibilities); and
- any modernisation or improvements we are planning to do to your home.

We will let you know personally about these matters and encourage you to discuss any concerns or suggestions you have with us.

The way we consult you will vary depending on what needs to be decided.

If the matter concerns you and your household, we will meet to discuss the matter with you at your home or at one of our offices, whichever is most convenient for you.

If the matter concerns the wider community, we will try to consult as many people as possible. We may send everyone an invitation to come for a discussion at an open meeting or open day, or we may send out a survey so everyone can give their opinion.

Whatever way we consult you, we will make sure that any information we give you is easy to read and understand, and that you have enough details to help you form an opinion.

We will ask you for your comments and give you enough time to consider the matter properly. We will look seriously at what you say and will let you know the final outcome.

## How tenants can get involved

### Oaklee Tenants Forum

Within Oaklee Housing Association there are regional forums that represent all tenants. Each Forum has representatives from sheltered schemes, supported schemes and other tenants who do not live in schemes. Oaklee is currently in the process of establishing mechanisms for involving tenants and gathering their views. A Tenants Forum will be set up in 2007 and a representative of the Forum will be invited on to the Board of Management.

### Service review working groups

From time to time, working groups carry out detailed reviews of different aspects of our service, for example repairs and maintenance, rent setting and the letting process. The groups are made up of staff and tenant representatives.

### Representation on the Board of Management

We are planning to have a tenant representative on the Board of Management. This person will serve on the board for a three year period and will be able to vote on all major decisions.



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Why should I get involved?

Because it benefits Oaklee tenants. By working at various levels, tenants can have their say in how we work. This means that tenants can influence what changes and improvements we make for you and the people who live in our homes in the future.

How can I get involved?

It depends on what you would like to do and how much time you can contribute. It could be just a couple of hours a month or more. It is entirely up to you. Contact the tenant participation officer and we can discuss what you might do. See **How tenants can get involved** on page 7.



What if I don't have time to get involved?

That's fine. If you do not have spare time you can still be involved by filling in survey forms, or just phoning or e-mailing us to tell us what you think about our service. We will always make sure you know what is going on by sending out letters and leaflets, producing our magazine called **Oakleaves**, and keeping our website updated.

How can we be sure that you will take account of our views?

Oaklee is currently in the process of establishing mechanisms for involving tenants and gathering their views. A Tenants Forum will be set up in 2007 and a representative of the Forum will be invited on to the Board of Management.



Will you let me know about anything that affects me personally?

Yes. We must, by law, consult you on certain matters. In addition, we are committed to keeping you informed about most other things that we do. See **Consulting you** on page 7.



What does the tenant participation officer do?

The Tenant Participation Officer supports the Central Tenant Forum and the regional forums to help them achieve their aims and objectives. The officer also works to promote and develop further tenant involvement to make sure that all groups of tenants can have their say in how Oaklee works and develops.

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# Complaints

We want to provide a high-quality service but we realise that we will not always get things right or meet your expectations. We take comments and complaints very seriously. We will discuss these with you and try hard to correct any mistakes.



Contact the Oaklee Services Centre

See page 2 for details

## What is the problem?

You may not be happy with our service because we:

- did not carry out our legal responsibilities or follow our policies;
- did something we should not have done;
- did not provide a service that we should have provided, or did not do it to a good enough standard;
- did not take certain information into account when making a decision;
- took too long to respond to a request or enquiry; or
- treated you unfairly.

In general terms, a complaint is not:

- a disagreement with a government regulation which we must follow; or
- a routine request for a service such as reporting a repair to your home or a problem with a neighbour or anti-social behaviour in your area.

## What you can expect us to do

We will look into your complaint and, if we find that we have done something wrong, we will apologise and do everything we can to put things right. We will also take action to make sure the same problem does not happen again to you or any other tenants.

## Making a complaint

We have a leaflet which sets out the steps you should follow. Here is a short outline.

### First steps

Contact Oaklee Services Centre or your scheme co-ordinator for an informal discussion about the issue you are unhappy about. We will try to sort out your problem quickly and to your satisfaction.

If it is about a repair, a member of staff will either visit your home to look at the problem or we will send someone out to carry out (or correct) the repair.

### Formal complaint or appeal

If you are not happy with the steps already taken, or you would rather refer the problem to someone else, please ask to be put through to our customer services officer. You can write a letter or send an e-mail or, if you prefer, you can phone the customer services officer who will fill in a complaints form and send you a copy.

The officer will send you a letter of acknowledgement immediately and pass your complaint to the appropriate manager. The manager will investigate the problem and get back to you with a response within 14 working days.

Most complaints are sorted out at this stage.

If, following the investigation, you are unhappy with our response, you can contact our customer services officer. The officer will again send you a letter of acknowledgement and will pass your complaint on to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive will review your complaint, the investigation and the decisions made, and will reply to you within 28 working days.

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## How can I make suggestions?

We welcome any comments and suggestions about our work, services and organisation. Please contact us. We will listen carefully to what you have to say and come to an agreement with you about what we can do about it.



## How do I make a complaint?

You can write to us, e-mail us, visit us at our office, or speak to us direct on the phone.

If your complaint is about an everyday matter, you should contact Oaklee Services Centre or your scheme co-ordinator. We expect to be able to sort out the problem quickly to your satisfaction with the minimum fuss. See **Making a complaint** on page 9.

We can sort out most problems at this stage, once we know the facts.



## What if I am not satisfied with the explanation?

There are two stages to making a complaint. Most complaints are sorted out at an early stage, but the second stage allows you to take your complaint further if you are not happy with our first response.

## Where can I get independent advice?

We encourage you to get independent support or advice on any matter that worries you. You don't have to just take our word for it. There are various organisations that you can approach to discuss matters with, for example the Citizens' Information. You can find their phone number in **Useful contacts** on page 43.



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## Complaints

# Your tenancy

**You have full security of tenure. You can stay in your home for as long as you want provided you keep to the conditions of your tenancy agreement. You cannot be made to leave your home without a court order.**

## The tenancy agreement

Your tenancy agreement is the contract between you and us. It sets out the conditions of your tenancy.

Our main responsibilities are to:

- consult you in writing on any changes we plan to make to the tenancy agreement; and
- maintain your home. See your **Repairs Handbook** for details.

Your main responsibilities are to:

- pay the rent and other charges on time;
- use the property as your only or main home;
- take care of the property, keep the inside in a good condition, and do any repairs that are your responsibility and report all other repairs to us immediately you are aware of them;
- make sure that everyone in your household or any visitors keep to the conditions of your tenancy and behave in a reasonable way in and around your home. Also, that they do not cause a nuisance, annoy neighbours, or harass or threaten anyone; and
- let us know in writing four weeks before you plan to move and, when you go, leave the property in a good condition.

**Our rights.** We have the right to:

- change your rent or other charges if we tell you 4 weeks' before we do so; and
- be let into your home to carry out inspections or repairs, to service appliances, or to carry out safety inspections, provided we give you at least 24 hours warning (unless it is an emergency).

## Breaking the conditions of your tenancy

If you break the conditions of your tenancy, we may have to make you and your family leave your home. We do not want this to happen. Your housing officer will give you advice about what to do.

You will be breaking your tenancy if you:

- do not pay your rent in full or on time;
- cause nuisance;
- harass neighbours or our staff, or behave in an anti-social way;
- damage the property; or
- make false statements to get a tenancy.

If you do not put things right, we will take legal action and you may have to give up your home. If we do this, we will follow a formal legal process.

We can only make you leave your home if a court makes the decision. Usually, the court must be sure that there are good reasons. They will consider all the circumstances before deciding.

For a full description of the process of going to court for breach of tenancy, see **Ending your tenancy** on page 37.

**Your rights.** You have the right to:

- appeal against decisions we make that you don't agree with;
- live in your home without unnecessary interruption by us or anyone working for us; and
- use your legal rights as a tenant. See **Your rights** on page 13.



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## What is the tenancy agreement?

This is the legal contract between you and us. By signing it, both you and we agree to keep to the conditions written in the agreement. See **Our rights** and **Your rights** and **The tenancy agreement** on page 11. You should take the time to read your tenancy agreement carefully.

We can only make changes to the tenancy agreement if we have been through a full consultation process with our tenants. See **Involving residents** on page 7. However, we can introduce new minor rules and regulations and change the level of rent or service charges without asking your views.



## What if I am a joint tenant?

Joint tenants are both responsible for the tenancy. This means you both have equal rights and equal responsibilities.

Each tenant is responsible for paying the full rent and other charges. If either of you break the conditions of the tenancy agreement, either tenant can be held fully responsible. See **Breaking the conditions of your tenancy** on page 11.

## What if Oaklee does not carry out its responsibilities?

Contact Oaklee Services Centre first and let them know what has happened. In most cases, problems are sorted out quickly after an informal discussion. If matters are not sorted out, you should follow our formal complaints procedure. See **Complaints** on page 9.



## What if I fail to carry out my responsibilities?

You should try to sort out the matter with us first. If you do not correct the situation or we cannot come to an agreement about what you should do, we may have to take formal action against you. This may mean that we have to make you and your family leave your home. We only do this as a final action. See **Breaking the conditions of your tenancy** on page 11 and **Rent arrears** on page 37.

## Can I stay in my home for as long as I want?

As the tenant you will have full security of tenure. This means you have the right to stay in your home for as long as you want provided you do not breach the terms of your tenancy agreement (for example, by not paying your rent or by causing nuisance to your neighbours). If we have to take action against you, we will always follow a clear process. See **Breaking the conditions of your tenancy** on page 11 and **Ending your tenancy** on page 37.

If your family breaks up, joint tenants and married partners have certain rights to stay. See **Family break-up** on page 19. When you die, partners or relatives living with you may have the right to take over the tenancy. See **Household changes** on page 17.



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## Your tenancy

# Your rights

You have both contractual and statutory rights. Your contractual rights are set out in your tenancy agreement. Your statutory rights are laid down by the government.

## Security of tenure

No tenant can be made to leave their home unless ordered by a court. Generally, before ending a tenancy a court has to be satisfied that there are specific grounds for making you leave, such as you breaching the tenancy agreement, or making false statements when you applied for the tenancy. See **Your tenancy** on page 11 and **Family break-up** on page 19.

## Access to and control of personal information

We must treat all personal information about our tenants as confidential. However, by law, we must share with certain public organisations some of the details you give us or certain information given to us about you.

You can see most information that relates to you which we keep on file or on computer. However, you must let us know a reasonable time beforehand.

If you are unhappy about any information or an expression of opinion that you have seen in your files, you can ask for it to be corrected, amended or taken out. If we disagree with your request, you can insist that we add a note about your views to the records.

## Sub-letting and taking in lodgers

You can take in lodgers provided you do not overcrowd your home. A lodger is someone who shares your home as a member of your household.

You can sub-let part of your home but only if you first get our written permission. You may not sub-let the whole of your property.

Before you move in, you must tell us the name, age and sex of any intended lodger or sub-tenant, the part of your home they will occupy, and the date they intend to move in. You must also tell us again if they move out. See **Household changes** on page 17.

## Carrying out improvements to the home

You can carry out improvements to your home provided you have our permission in writing before you start work. We can only refuse to give permission for certain reasons.

If you leave your home, you may get compensation for certain types of improvements you have carried out. See **Improvements** on page 27.



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## Exchanging tenancies

You can exchange (swap) homes with another Oaklee tenant or a tenant of a housing association or a county council. You must inform both landlords and get our permission in writing before you move. We will give permission except where there are specific reasons such as overcrowding, under-occupation, anti-social behaviour or rent arrears. See **Applying to move** on page 39.

## Consultation about changes that affect you or your home

We must consult you about any major changes we want to make to your tenancy agreement or to our housing management policies (such as repair response times or repair responsibilities) and give you 4 weeks warning of when any changes will come into effect. We must also consult you about any modernisation or improvement to your home.

We will tell you about any other plans that affect you or your home. We will also listen carefully to your views before making any final decisions. See **Involving tenants** on page 7.

## Information about our performance as your landlord

Once a year, we must publish certain information to let you know how well we are managing our services.

## Transfer of tenancy on death (or before)

When a tenant dies, the tenancy will automatically pass to any joint tenant, or it can be taken over by their partner by marriage if he or she is living in the home at the time of the death.

If there is no joint tenant or partner by marriage, then any close member of the tenant's family or a partner who has been living with the tenant may take over the tenancy, provided he or she has been living with the tenant for at least 12 months before the death.

We usually only allow such a transfer of tenancy (succession) to happen once. So, if the tenant who dies took over the tenancy when one of their relatives died, it will not automatically pass on again. However, in certain circumstances Oaklee may give a new tenancy to someone who wants to remain in the home. See **Household changes** on page 17.

When a succession takes place we may ask the successor to move to more suitable housing. They will still be given a tenancy in the new home.

You can hand on your tenancy before you die but only to someone who could have taken it over after your death. This is called an assignment. You must contact us if you want to carry out an assignment of your tenancy.

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## Your rights

# Moving in

Remember, if you have any problems relating to your tenancy or settling in, please contact Oaklee Services Centre or talk to your scheme co-ordinator.

## When you know you are moving

You will need to make the following arrangements.

- Apply **immediately** to the local council if you think you might be entitled to Rental Assistance **or** if you have been receiving Rental Assistance at a different address, you must tell them that you have moved.
- Contact the electricity, gas and phone companies to tell them that you want them to provide services to your home.
- Arrange contents insurance for your belongings. See **Home contents insurance** opposite.
- Arrange for your TV licence to be transferred.
- If you claim Social Security Benefit you need to make sure the Social Security Agency knows your new address. Check on your papers to see who you need to contact.

For advice or to discuss any problems you are having with your home or with the tenancy, please contact us. We want you to settle in easily and be happy in your home.

## Newly built or recently renovated homes

If you are the first tenant in a home that has just been built or renovated, you may find certain things need to be fixed. Do not worry if you find paintwork flaking or cracking inside. These are signs of the wall plaster drying out. It can take up to a year but you can speed it up by making sure your home is well ventilated. Also, if you see a white powder showing on the outside of the building, you just need to brush it off.

For other problems, please let us know as soon as you notice anything wrong. For the first year the work is under guarantee and we can get the original contractor to fix certain problems that relate to their work.

## Decorating and repairs

Before you move in we check the condition of the property and carry out gas and electrical safety checks and any necessary repairs and redecorating.

Once you take on the tenancy you become responsible for all painting and decorating inside your home.

For further repairs check in your **Repairs Handbook** to see whether you are responsible for getting these done. If you are not responsible, contact Oaklee Services Centre.

## Home contents insurance

Oaklee does not insure tenants' furnishings or belongings. We strongly advise you to take out your own home contents insurance. This will cover you against damage to your personal belongings, floor coverings, furniture and other contents and decorations, including damage from fire, flood, break-in, vandalism or accidents.

When choosing an insurance policy, you should make sure that it will cover broken glazing and locks in doors and windows, as these are repairs you will usually have to pay for. Your insurance should also cover certain items should they be stolen in a break-in.



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## When does my tenancy start?

The date given on your tenancy agreement is when you become the legal tenant. From that date on, you are responsible for paying rent and other charges, even if you do not move in immediately. See **The tenancy agreement** on page 11.

You are responsible for the security of your new home from the date you receive the keys from us.



## What about repairs and redecorating?

Before we let a property, we will carry out an inspection and carry out gas and electrical safety checks. We will also do any essential repairs and redecorating before you move in.

When you view the property we will tell you what repairs and decorating we are going to do and you will accept the tenancy on that basis. From then on you are responsible for decorating the inside of your home and for certain repairs. See **Decorating and repairs** on page 15 and your **Repairs Handbook**.

## Can I put in my own fittings?

You can put in fittings such as shelves and wall cupboards, as long as you do not damage or remove anything or alter our property. If you want to make alterations, you must write to us to ask our permission. You must not go ahead until we have given you permission. See **Improvements** on page 27.



## Do you have any spare keys to my home?

We will give you the keys to your home. It is your responsibility to get spare copies. If you share an entrance door or if your key is part of a suite of locks, we will give you keys or fobs at the beginning of your tenancy. If you lose or break these or you want a spare copy for a relative, we will provide the new key or fobs but we will charge you for them.

## What if I am a first-time tenant?

We want you to be happy and settled in your home. Being a tenant brings with it some new responsibilities and we understand that renting a home for the first time can be a bit overwhelming. We are happy to offer advice whenever we can.

Your **Repairs Handbook** gives some useful advice about looking after your home and carrying out simple household tasks.



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## Moving in

# Household changes

Let us know if anyone comes to live with you permanently or leaves to live somewhere else.

## Joint tenancies

A joint tenancy is when more than one person is named in the tenancy agreement.

Partners (married or unmarried) or single people wanting to share a home will usually be offered a joint tenancy at the beginning of a tenancy.

Each tenant is jointly and individually responsible for the tenancy. This means that:

- each tenant is responsible for making sure that the rent and other charges are paid in full; and
- if one tenant breaks the conditions of the agreement, the other (or others) can also be held responsible.

Each tenant has equal rights. This means that:

- any tenant can apply for Rental Assistance; and
- if one tenant dies, the other (or others) continues as the tenant.

If you want someone to become a joint tenant during your tenancy, we will normally allow this if they are a partner by marriage or someone who has been living with you for at least 12 months.

The tenancy can be ended by any one of the joint tenants by giving us four weeks' notice in writing. When this happens, the tenancy ends for the other (or others) too, even if they do not agree to ending the tenancy.

In some situations, we may give a new tenancy to the remaining tenant(s) for the same home. See **Family or relationship break-up** on page 19.

You should think carefully before giving up a sole tenancy by changing to a joint tenancy. It is not easy to change back to a sole tenancy.

## Handing on your tenancy

When a tenant dies, the tenancy will automatically pass to any joint tenant. If there is no joint tenant, a partner (married or unmarried) or an adult member of the family who was living with them when they died, and at least the 12 month period before the death, may be allowed to take over the tenancy of the home. The person taking over the tenancy is called a successor.

Usually a tenancy can only be handed on once in this way. When a tenant dies, we will talk to anyone left in the home about their housing options. If the home is not suitable for the person taking over the home, we may ask them to move to a different home, for example they do not need sheltered accommodation or the home is too big for their needs. For an explanation of what may happen in your situation, contact the Oaklee Services Centre.

You can hand on your tenancy before you die but only to someone who could have taken it over after your death. This is called an assignment. You must contact us if you want to carry out an assignment of your tenancy.

## Taking in lodgers and subletting

You can take in lodgers as long as you do not overcrowd your home. A lodger is someone who shares your home as a member of your household.

You can sublet part of your home, as long as you get our permission in writing first. If you sublet the whole of your property, you will be breaking the conditions of your tenancy agreement. See **Your tenancy** on page 11.

Before they move in you should tell us the details of anyone you want to have as a lodger or subtenant and what part of your home they will live in.



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## Who can live in my home with me?

Any members of your immediate family may share your home and you can take in lodgers as long as it does not cause overcrowding. In the letter we sent you when we offered you the tenancy we will have told you how many people are allowed to live in your home.

You can sublet part of your home (but not all of it), but first you will need to get our approval in writing. You must always continue to live in your home as your only or main home. See **Taking in lodgers and subletting** on page 17. Remember, you must include any income you receive from lodgers or subtenants in the information you give for claiming benefits or assessing tax.



## What if my household size changes?

If your family increases, or you have relatives who want to come and live with you, you should let Oaklee Services Centre know. If you need a larger home, you can apply for a transfer or look for someone to exchange homes with. See **Applying to move** on page 39.



## What if I get married or have a new partner?

If you get married or want to share your home with someone else during your tenancy with us, we may allow him or her to become a joint tenant. We will investigate their present housing situation before agreeing. See **Joint tenancies** on page 17.

## Who can take over the tenancy when I die or leave the home?

If you have a joint tenancy, it will usually remain with the other tenant or tenants. Otherwise, your husband, wife, partner or other adult member of the family may have the right to take over the tenancy if they have been living with you. See **Handing on your tenancy** on page 17.



## Can someone become a joint tenant with me?

We will usually offer a joint tenancy to partners (whether you are married or not married) or other family members at the beginning of a tenancy. This gives both partners equal rights and powers. See **Joint tenancies** on page 17.

## What if I need specialist help?

If you are having difficulties living in your home, we can help you in a number of ways. Contact the Oaklee Services Centre and discuss your needs with them. We will then look into what options are available to you in terms of services in your existing home or whether you could move to another more suitable home. See **Extra care services** on page 33.

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## Household changes

# Family or relationship break-up

Act quickly to protect your rights. Only a court has the power to force you to move out of your home.

## Your rights

- Joint tenants have equal rights to stay in the home but either one may end the tenancy. We may transfer the tenancy to the other partner.
- If you are not joint tenants, the person whose name is on the tenancy agreement has the right to ask their partner to leave the home.
- If you are not joint tenants and the person who is named as the tenant on the tenancy agreement leaves the home, the remaining partner has no automatic right to stay in the home.
- If you have children living with you, a court will normally put their interests first to make sure they do not become homeless. The court will usually give the tenancy to the parent who has the main care and responsibility for the children.
- We can only make a tenant leave his or her home if a court makes the decision and gives us a 'possession order'. Usually, the court must be sure that there are good reasons to allow us to make the tenant leave.

## Domestic violence

If you are suffering from domestic violence, contact An Garda Síochána and a solicitor. Most An Garda Síochána stations have domestic violence units with specially trained officers.

## How to get help

- Contact the Oaklee Services Centre. We can arrange for a member of staff to discuss your situation with you. The details of any conversation you have with members of the team will be kept confidential. See **Access to and control of personal information** on page 13.
  - You should also go to a specialist who can advise you about your particular situation. For example:
    - advice agencies (such as the Citizens' Information or Money Advice and Budgeting Service) about money problems;
    - your County Council's local office or their Homeless Advice Department, for advice about your housing options; or
    - a solicitor about your legal rights.
- See **Useful contacts** on page 43 for phone numbers of some of these organisations.



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**Do I have the right to stay in my home?**

This depends on whether you are named as a tenant on the tenancy agreement, whether you and your partner are married or not, and whether you have children living with you. See **Your rights** on page 13.



**Can the name or names on the tenancy agreement be changed?**

The name of a joint tenant can only be removed from a tenancy agreement if both the joint tenants agree. We will also have to agree to the change. If no agreement can be reached, only a court has the power to enforce a change of tenancy. The court will make its decision based on how long you have been together, whether you have children, and who is going to look after them.

**Who can end the tenancy?**

Any tenant named in the tenancy agreement can end the tenancy, even if it is a joint tenancy. If your partner wants to end the tenancy but you want to stay, it may be possible to get an order from a court to stop the action. However, you must do this before your partner gives us notice. You need to act quickly and get advice from a solicitor.



**Can my partner make me leave the home?**

You should not give up your rights to stay in your home without first getting legal advice. If you are joint tenants and married, you both have the same right to stay. If you cannot agree about who is going to leave, only a court can decide. If you are not married and are not the tenant, you need to get advice quickly about what you can do. Contact the Citizens' Information or a solicitor to discuss the situation. See **Useful contacts** on page 43.



**What can I do if I am the victim of domestic violence?**

If you are threatened with, or are the victim of, acts of violence from members of your household or an ex-partner, you may want help. See **Domestic violence** on page 19.



**What if I want to move out and want to pass my tenancy on to someone else?**

If you are the tenant named in the tenancy agreement, you can ask for your tenancy to be passed on to one or more people who want to stay in the home. We will look into the situation but will not necessarily agree to this. Contact your housing officer.



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## Family break-up

# Living in your home

## Your garden

Unless it is a shared or communal garden, you are responsible for:

- keeping the garden tidy and free of rubbish;
- making sure shrubs and hedges do not become a nuisance to neighbours; and
- making sure that bonfires do not affect your neighbours or cause a danger.

We are responsible for maintaining fences, boundary walls and any steps and paths that lead to your front and back doors, but not other garden paths.

You need permission to:

- put up a shed, greenhouse, decking or other structure;
- park a car or caravan in your garden;
- put up a new or different fence;
- carry out planting in an 'open plan' area;
- put in a pond or patio; or
- cut, lop or prune an existing tree, remove a tree or hedge, or plant a new tree.

## Parking

- If you want to park any kind of vehicle (including caravans, boats or trailers) in your garden, you must ask for our permission in writing.
- No tenant has a right to a particular parking space unless it is a designated space that you pay for.
- We cannot guarantee parking spaces for all tenants.
- We may get your car or vehicle removed if you park where parking is not allowed, or if it is dangerous or blocking people's way. Emergency vehicles must be able to get access to buildings at any time.
- You must not use car-parking areas to carry out major repairs to vehicles.

## Pets

- You are allowed to keep pets in your home as long as you are a responsible owner. Tenants in flats and sheltered accommodation can only keep small pets such as fish or small caged animals and birds. However, if your home is on the ground floor and has direct access to its own garden, we may allow you to keep a cat or dog but you must get our permission first.
- You must keep your pets under control at all times. If you allow your pet to cause a nuisance (such as a dog barking continually inside or outside your home), or it is causing a health hazard, we will ask you to find it a new home. If necessary, we will take legal action against you.
- You must not allow your pets to roam or foul in shared or public areas.

## Getting rid of rubbish

- Your local council will collect household waste regularly. Please recycle as much as possible. Your local council will have advice on how to do this. In some areas they will collect certain items for recycling.
- You must not mix garden waste with household waste. Please consider composting it. Otherwise, you can take it to your local household recycling centre. See **Caring for the environment** on page 44.
- Bulky items should not be left in communal areas. Your council will not collect these with household waste. We suggest you take them to your local household recycling centre or contact your council who may provide a service to collect them. They will usually charge you for this service.
- If you lose or damage your wheeled bin, you can buy a new one from Oaklee or your local council.



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Can I take in lodgers or sublet part of my home?

You can take in a lodger as long as you do not overcrowd your home and the lodger lives with you like any member of the family. If you allow someone to live separately in part of your home, this is subletting and you must have our permission to do this. You cannot sublet all of your home, and you must continue to live in it. See **Household changes** on page 17.

If you receive any money from lodgers or subtenants, this may reduce any benefits you receive. Contact the Community Welfare Officer in your local area. See **Useful contacts** on page 43.



Who is responsible for repairing fences, gardens and shared areas?

We will look after any open areas or shared gardens we own, and the boundary fences and walls around our properties. You are responsible for your own garden. See **Your garden** on page 21.



Can I keep pets?

Yes. You do not need our permission to keep pets, but you must be a responsible owner. If you live in a flat or sheltered accommodation, you can only keep certain types of pets. See **Pets** on page 21.

How do I get rid of rubbish?

Your council collects household waste regularly. Ask your neighbours which day of the week they come to your area. In apartment complexes you need to take your rubbish to the common bins. See **Getting rid of rubbish** on page 21. We encourage you to recycle as much as possible. See **Caring for the environment** on page 44. You are responsible for getting rid of bulky items.

Can I run a business from my home?

Your home is meant to be used as a home. You must not run a business from your home without our permission in writing. We will only give permission if we are sure that the business will not disturb your neighbours. Discuss your plans with us. Contact Oaklee Services Centre. We will take immediate action against anyone carrying out any criminal, illegal or immoral activity in the home, for example prostitution or drug dealing.



Can I put up a satellite dish?

You need our permission to put up a satellite dish. Discuss your plans with us. Contact Oaklee Services Centre.

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## Living in your home

# Flats and maisonettes

If you live in a flat, bedsit or maisonette, you need to treat your neighbours with extra consideration and respect. You are also responsible for helping us look after the shared areas.

## Respecting your neighbours

- Keep the sound from music systems, radios and TVs at reasonable levels.
- Use waste collection areas properly and make sure that you leave the surrounding areas tidy.
- Do not throw or drop anything from balconies or windows.

## Safety

- Keep all shared entrances, passageways, stairs and other areas with shared access free of obstructions such as bikes, toys, prams or rubbish. This is for the safety and easy access of the people living in a scheme or block, or any visitors.
- Use door-entry systems properly to keep buildings secure.
  - Make sure the entrance door locks properly behind you. Never leave it propped open.
  - Only allow someone in if you are certain that they are a genuine caller.
  - Do not let people who do not live in the block follow you in, even if they appear genuine. They should press the button for the flat they are visiting.
  - Report any faults to Oaklee Services Centre immediately.

## Shared areas and facilities

### Cleaning

We have employed cleaners or appointed contractors to clean windows, staircases, corridors, hallways and landings in shared areas. Also, the outside of windows in most blocks of flats are cleaned at regular intervals.

### Repairs

Please report any problems with lighting or repairs needed in the shared areas and facilities of the block to the Oaklee Services Centre.

### Heating

Some blocks of flats have a shared heating system. We will adjust the system depending on the weather and the time of year.

### Lifts

All our lifts are serviced and maintained by a specialist firm. You should report any problems to Oaklee Services Centre. Also, contact the Centre in an emergency or if you hear the lift alarm. If you are in sheltered accommodation, use the emergency alarm system to call for help, or contact the scheme co-ordinator.

### Shared gardens and paths

All shared gardens, footpaths and roads owned by Oaklee are maintained by our grounds maintenance contractors. The gardens are for everyone living in the building to enjoy. It is important that you, members of your household and any visitors respect other people who use the gardens and help to keep them pleasant places to be in and to look at.



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### Who is responsible for shared areas and gardens?

We are responsible for looking after any shared areas and shared gardens we own. This includes cutting grass and looking after the paths, drying areas, fencing, lighting, entry phones and lifts. It will also include removing any graffiti. Please report any repairs or other problems to Oaklee Services Centre.



You should show respect for other people who use any shared gardens and help to keep them pleasant places to be in and look at. See **Shared gardens** on page 23.

We will tell you well in advance when we are going to do any major renovation work or programmed painting to the building you live in.

It is important that no-one living in flats stores or leaves any items outside their flats or in shared areas. See **Safety** on page 23.

### Who is responsible for cleaning the shared areas?

Cleaning landings, stairs and hallways is carried out either by cleaners employed by us or contractors appointed by us. See **Cleaning** on page 23.



### Who is responsible for TV aerials and satellite dishes?

Some blocks of flats have shared television aerials and cable systems. If you are having difficulties with reception, first check with your neighbours to see whether they are also having problems. The problem may just be with your own television or with the cable provider. However, if others are also affected, contact Oaklee Services Centre.



If you want to put up a satellite dish you need permission from our maintenance team. Contact Oaklee Services Centre.

### What can be done about noise in flats?

In blocks of flats, noise can be heard more easily between floors and walls. We expect our residents to show extra consideration and respect for their neighbours. See **Respecting your neighbours** on page 23.

If there is a problem in your block of flats you should try to discuss this with the people concerned, but if the problem does not improve we will try and help. Contact Oaklee Services Centre.



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## Flats and maisonettes

# Safety in the home

## Preventing fires

- There are smoke detectors in all our properties.
- Test your detector regularly and report any faults to Oaklee Services Centre.
- Before going to bed at night or when you go out:
  - make sure all fires are out or have a fireguard in front of them; and
  - make sure you have put out all cigarettes.
- Don't dry clothes over heaters.
- Do not use chip pans. They can easily catch fire. We recommend that you use a deep fat fryer instead.
- Don't leave candles lit if no-one is in the room.

## Electrical safety

- Unplug any appliances that are not in use.
- Use the correct fuses in plugs.
- Disconnect the electricity supply to any faulty switch or socket.
- Don't touch bare wires. Turn off the electricity at the consumer unit (fuse board).
- Don't touch anything electrical if it is wet or if your hands are wet. Turn off the electricity at the consumer unit (fuse board) and don't use it again until it is dry.
- Use one appliance at a time in a socket. If necessary, use a multi-point extension lead.
- Don't carry out any electrical alterations or improvements without our permission.
- Don't put nails or fittings in a wall near a socket, switch or light fitting, or around the edge of the wall, as this is usually where electrical wires are put behind plaster.
- When using portable appliances or tools outside, make sure you use a circuit breaker device (usually fitted on your extension lead).

## Gas safety and what to do if you smell gas

- **Don't use anything electrical**, for example, door bells, switches or even your phone (not even a mobile).
- **Open** doors and windows to get rid of the gas.
- **Check** if the gas has been left on unlit or if a pilot light has gone out.
- **Turn off** the gas at the meter.
- **Don't smoke** or light a flame.
- **Call Bord Gais 1850 205050** from a phone **outside** your home. When they come, they will make the situation safe and will leave you a notice about what they have done. You then need to contact Oaklee Services Centre.
- **Do not** remove or block air vents.
- **Do not** carry out any repairs, removals or changes to gas appliances or fittings without getting advice or permission.

## Preventing carbon monoxide fumes

- Keep rooms well-ventilated and make sure vents are not blocked or closed.
- Sweep chimneys at least once a year, if used for wood or coal fires.
- Buy officially approved appliances marked with the British Standard Kitemark.
- Use Bord Gais approved gas installers to fit and service your own gas appliances.
- Check and service gas appliances regularly.
  - By law, we must carry out a gas safety check on all appliances once a year. You must allow us into your home to do this check.
  - We will service and repair all appliances we have installed.
  - You must get your own appliances serviced regularly.



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## Security suggestions

- Mark valuable items with your house number, or keep a note of serial numbers.
- When you go away, you might think of fitting a timer device to a lamp in the living room to make the house look as if someone is in. If you are going away for a long time, please let us know.
- Arrange with a neighbour to keep an eye on each other's houses.
- When you go out, check that all windows and doors are closed.
- Do not leave your keys, money or valuables where a stranger might find them or see them through a window, or reach them through the letter box.

## Door-entry systems

Door-entry systems control who comes into buildings with shared entrances. To keep your building safe:

- make sure that the entrance door always locks behind you;
- never leave the entrance door open or propped open;
- do not let people who do not live in the block follow you inside, even if they appear genuine. They should press the button for the flat they are visiting; and
- report any faults to Oaklee Services Centre immediately.

## When someone calls at your home

- If you have a door viewer, check to see who it is before opening the door.
- If you don't know the caller, ask to see their identity card and check it carefully. If you are not sure about them, ask them to stay outside while you phone the organisation they say they represent to check who they are.
- Anyone who comes to your home to carry out a repair, inspection or gas service will have an identity card with their photo on it. You should check the card carefully. Also, check that they are coming to do a repair or servicing you are expecting and that the number on their works order is the same as the job reference number we gave you when you reported your repair. This also appears in your repair acknowledgement letter. If you are at all unsure, ask them to stay outside and phone the Oaklee Services Centre.

## Explosive or flammable liquids or materials

You should not keep or use bottled gas, paraffin or petrol in your home or in a shared area. If you need to keep small quantities of these, you should make sure that you keep them outside in a safe place away from any heat and out of the sight and reach of children or where they can be found by vandals.

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**Safety in the home**

# Improvements

## Changes to your home

We allow you to put in fittings such as shelves and wall cupboards without our permission but you must not damage or remove anything that belongs to Oaklee. You may also carry out other changes or alterations to your home but you must discuss your plans with us first. You should then write to us, giving full details of what you plan to do. We will write back to you with an answer within one month.

Once you have done the changes we have agreed to, we will be responsible for any repairs. You must not start this work before we have given you our permission.

Changes you need permission for may include:

- laying floor tiles, or wood or laminate flooring;
- removing a wall or partitioning;
- installing or removing a gas supply;
- moving radiators;
- putting in your own heating system;
- installing a shower;
- changing kitchen or bathroom fittings;
- putting up a radio aerial or satellite dish;
- laying patios; and
- changing windows or doors.

If we find out that you have made changes to your home without our permission, we may ask you to change it back to its original condition. If we have to do this, we will charge you for the costs involved.

## Compensation

At the end of your tenancy you may get compensation for certain improvements you have done. We can give you a list of what kind of improvements these are.

We can only pay compensation at the end of your tenancy. The amount will be based on the original cost of the improvement and how long it has been in use.

We will not pay compensation if:

- you did not get our permission in writing before you did the work;
- we have had to evict you because you broke the tenancy conditions;
- you put in your claim for compensation too late. You must claim no later than two weeks after the end of your tenancy; or
- the amount of compensation is less than €75.00.

## Major repairs or improvements we will carry out

We put together a programme of major repairs and improvements to our properties and surrounding areas once a year. We will put the most urgent problems first and the amount we do will depend on what money we have available. We will consult you, well ahead of time, about any work we expect to do in your home (for example, double-glazing or a new heating system).

If you need to be rehoused for a short time:

- we will pay the cost of removals;
- you will pay no more than the rent you normally pay; and
- we may give you the choice of staying in the property where you have been rehoused rather than returning to the home you have left.



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Will you carry out any improvements to my home?

We may carry out major repairs and improvements as part of our strategic plan. The work we decide to do will be based on information we collect from surveys we do from time to time. See **Major repairs or improvements we will carry out** on page 27.



Can I put in my own fittings or make changes to my home?

You can put in fittings such as shelves and wall cupboards, as long as you do not damage or remove anything or alter our property. If you want to make alterations, you must write to us to ask our permission. We need full details of the work and who will carry it out. You must not go ahead until we have given you permission. You may also need to apply for planning permission and building regulations approval. We will tell you how to do this. See **Changes to your home** on page 27.

What help is there if I or a member of my household becomes disabled?

If you need to have adaptations done to your home, contact the Oaklee Services Centre to discuss what you need. We can do certain changes, such as putting in lever taps or grab rails, but for more costly or complicated changes you will have to contact your doctor or local Health Service Executive who will assess your situation and make a recommendation to us. We then advise and assist you with the process of making an application for funding. Examples of such adaptations are ramps to doors and special bathroom fittings. See **Extra care services** on page 33.



Can I be compensated for any improvements I make?

You may get compensation for certain types of improvement. We can only pay the compensation at the end of your tenancy. See **Compensation** on page 27.



When I leave my home, what do I do about any changes I have made?

If you have removed or changed any of our fixtures or fittings, you must change them back to their original condition unless we have agreed to the changes. If you have done alterations which were not carried out properly or were done without our permission, we may make you change them back or bring them up to the correct standard. If you leave without changing this we will charge you our costs for doing it after you have gone.

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**Improvements**

# Neighbours

**We expect you and your visitors to be considerate to your neighbours. This is a condition of your tenancy agreement.**

## Getting on together

We encourage our tenants to make the best of their communities and surroundings. You should consider your neighbours when you go about your everyday life and understand that people have different lifestyles. See **Being considerate** below.

We expect you to accept reasonable activities such as:

- children playing;
- use of television or music systems; and
- people getting up, leaving and returning to their home, and preparing meals at different times.

If a neighbour's activity becomes unreasonable, you should try to discuss the problem calmly and agree how the situation can be improved. See **What to do** opposite.

## Being considerate

- Make sure that you mow lawns and do housework, such as washing and vacuuming, at reasonable times.
- Keep the noise you make at reasonable levels, particularly the sound from radios, music systems and TVs.
- If you have a dog, do not leave it barking constantly in your home or outside in the garden, and clear up any mess it makes.
- Warn neighbours when you are going to do something particularly noisy such as DIY or having a party.
- Make sure your children play without disturbing other people.

## What to do

### Talk to your neighbour

When people live close together, they often do not realise that they are disturbing other people. If you are being disturbed, the first thing to do is to explain politely to the people involved that they are causing you a problem.

### Talk to us

If the problem continues, please contact us. We will treat all complaints seriously and treat all the information we receive as confidential.

So that we can help you, you need to keep a diary of the problem, including any contact with An Garda Síochána and any incident log numbers they give you. If we find your complaint is malicious or has no real basis, we will take no further action and we will make a note on your file.

In cases of extreme and continuous noise or pollution, your local council's environmental health section can take action. They deal with problems such as noise, poorly kept animals, rubbish, smoke, fumes and gases. We can tell you how to contact them.

### Talk to the local mediation service

Many problems between neighbours can be sorted out by talking through the different views and coming to an agreement. If you would like help to do this, you can ask us to refer you to a mediation service in your area. Mediation services provide independent mediators who discuss the issues with everyone involved in a professional, calm way and help them come to an agreement. They are trained to deal with a variety of situations. They will be understanding but will not take sides. We will pay for this service.



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What should I do if I am having problems with my neighbour?

We expect neighbours to be considerate and tolerant, but sometimes they do not realise they are upsetting you. See **Getting on together** on page 29. First, you should try to discuss the matter with your neighbour in a calm and friendly way. If the problem is a clash of lifestyles and personalities, it may be a good idea to get an independent mediator to help you come to an understanding. See **What to do** on page 29.



What can you do to help?

We will investigate any matters you bring to our attention. If it is an argument between neighbours, we may not take any action, but your housing officer is always happy to advise you. If a tenant, a member of their household or visitor continually causes a nuisance and we can show that they have broken the tenancy agreement, we may apply to court to make that tenant leave their home. If necessary we will work with An Garda Síochána.

Can I be rehoused?

We aim to deal with the problem rather than move you to another home. If the problem involves anti-social behaviour or harassment, we will carry out an investigation and will take prompt action. See **Anti-social behaviour** on page 31.

What can be done about noise in flats?

Flats cannot be completely soundproof. Noise can be heard easily through floors and walls. We expect neighbours to be tolerant and to show each other respect. If you are troubled by noise, you should try and discuss with your neighbour how they might change their behaviour. See **Being considerate** and **What to do** on page 29.



What if I cause nuisance to a neighbour?

If you, a member of your family or a visitor to your home cause any nuisance to neighbours, you are breaking the conditions of your tenancy agreement. If the nuisance does not stop, we will take action against you. We may even make you leave your home. See **Breaking the conditions of your tenancy** on page 11.



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## Neighbours

# Anti-social behaviour and harassment

All our tenants are responsible for the behaviour of members of their household and visitors. You are breaking the conditions of your tenancy agreement if anyone in your home causes alarm, distress or nuisance, or continually annoys anyone in the area or around your home.

## What is anti-social behaviour?

Anti-social behaviour is any behaviour or action that interferes unreasonably with the quality of life of other residents or prevents them living peacefully in their homes and surroundings. It includes nuisance, which is persistent behaviour or disturbance which causes distress to other people, such as:

- loud music;
- arguments, shouting, swearing or slamming doors;
- selling, storing or taking drugs;
- dogs barking or making a mess;
- playing ball games close to someone else's home;
- smoke or fumes from bonfires or barbecues;
- inconsiderate parking or abandoned cars;
- drunken behaviour; and
- conducting any criminal, illegal or immoral activities in or around your home.

## What is harassment?

Harassment is interfering with a person's peace, comfort or safety. It can be physical or verbal abuse or intimidation, and includes attacks on and damage to property. It can be a criminal offence if someone harasses you because of your ethnic origin, nationality, religion, political opinion, race, colour, sex, sexuality, disability or age.

### Equality and diversity

- We will act fairly in our dealings with you.
- We will act swiftly and firmly to stop any kind of discrimination.

## How we deal with anti-social behaviour

We take seriously any claim of anti-social behaviour in or around the areas where we own properties.

- We will respond promptly to any claim you make to us.
- We will carry out an investigation, collect evidence and, if necessary, take action. We will keep clear records of what action we take.
- We will support anyone who is suffering from anti-social behaviour, as well as anyone who is willing to be a witness.
- We will work with tenants and other agencies, including An Garda Síochána and councils, to stop and prevent nuisance, harassment or abuse.
- We take action to eject any tenant who is convicted of harassment (make them leave their home).

We can take a range of actions. Firstly, we would hope to solve the problem through visits and letters to the people causing the problem. This might lead to mediation meetings or setting up acceptable behaviour contracts.

We will take action if the situation doesn't improve. This could be a warning, an Exclusion Order or getting an Order for Possession to make them leave their home.



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## What action can I take?

If you are frightened because of the offensive or abusive behaviour of a neighbour or visitor towards you or a member of your family, you should get in touch with An Garda Síochána immediately. Always ask them for an incident log number. You should also contact Oaklee Services Centre. We will need a record of the problem, so you should keep a diary of events. We will investigate the problem and may be able to take action. You will need to contact a solicitor.



## What can you do to help?

The tenancy agreement covers the behaviour of tenants, other members of their household and visitors. By signing it, all our tenants have agreed to behave in a responsible way toward their neighbours. See **What is anti-social behaviour?** and **What is harassment?** on page 31. We can take legal action if one of our tenants has clearly broken the conditions of their tenancy agreement. See **The tenancy agreement** on page 11 and **How we deal with anti-social behaviour** on page 31.



## Can I be rehoused?

We would try to sort out the problem without rehousing you. However, if you are clearly being harassed, we may be able to help you move if you want to. Contact Oaklee Services Centre.



## What if I'm worried about a neighbour?

If you think a neighbour is having difficulties and needs help, we may be able to approach them and discuss their needs. Contact Oaklee Services Centre. We will treat as confidential whatever you tell us.



## What if I am worried about being secure in my home?

All our homes are fitted with standard security locks, but if you are worried about security, we are happy to discuss your concerns and give advice. Contact the Oaklee Services Centre and explain your concerns to them.

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## Anti-social behaviour and harassment

# Extra care services

We are aware that some of our tenants have particular needs. We can help in various ways.

## Help to live more easily in your home

If you or anyone living with you find some aspects of living in your home difficult because of a medical condition or disability, you can get help without necessarily having to move. This may include:

- arranging for someone to come in and help you with basic domestic or personal tasks;
- carrying out adaptations such as fitting a ramp or extra handrails, lowering worktops, fitting showers or changing taps;
- putting in specialised equipment for you to use in your home; or
- giving you advice and information.

If you would like to find out about any of these options, you should contact your local Health Service Executive.

If you need to have adaptations done to your home, contact Oaklee Services Centre to discuss what you need. We can do certain changes, such as putting in lever taps or grab rails, but for more costly or complicated changes you will have to contact your doctor or local Health Service Executive who will assess your situation and make a recommendation to us.

## Emergency alarm connection

If you do not live in a scheme that already has an alarm system, you may be able to arrange for your home to be connected to a 24-hour emergency alarm system. Oaklee does not provide such a system but if you contact Oaklee Services Centre they will tell you about organisations that provide such services. You may have to pay for the service directly but it can provide you with peace of mind knowing that you can call someone at any time if you need help.

## Alternative housing

If you feel you need to move, we have various types of special housing.

- **Lifetime homes.** These are homes specifically designed to allow for adaptations to be carried out easily, as and when they are needed.
- **Supported housing.** These are special schemes where we are able to house people with specific needs such as physical disabilities, learning difficulties or mental health needs. These homes may have special adaptations but we also provide support staff who carry out essential tasks for the residents.
- **Sheltered housing.** These are groups (schemes) of self-contained bungalows or flats which are all connected to a 24 hour emergency alarm system. Most schemes have shared laundry facilities and some also have guest rooms for visitors.

Each scheme has a co-ordinator whose duties include:

- contacting tenants regularly to check they are alright;
- responding to emergencies, giving emergency aid or calling for emergency services;
- keeping in touch with families and any support services for example, doctors, home helps and social workers; and
- encouraging tenants to arrange social activities and to make full use of the shared facilities.

This type of housing allows tenants to live independently but have on-call support from a scheme co-ordinator and an emergency alarm system. This gives them peace of mind and makes them feel secure.



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What should I do if I need some help at home?

If you are having difficulty living in your home, we can help you in a number of ways. Contact Oaklee Services Centre. We will discuss your needs, tell you what we can do or tell you who else to contact.

Can I get help if I want to stay in my own home?

Yes, there are various services to help people who have special needs to live independently in their communities. You may be able to arrange to have adaptations made to your home, or to receive specialist care services in your home. See **Help to live more easily in your home** on page 33.



What special housing is available and where?

We have different types of housing available. Where possible, we will offer you the most suitable home for your particular needs or disabilities. See **Alternative housing** on page 33. We will send you an application form and, if you need help, we can arrange for someone to go through it with you. Contact Oaklee Services Centre.



What if I feel unsafe in my home?

If you are elderly or feel vulnerable for any other reason and you do not live in a sheltered or supported scheme, you could arrange for your home to be connected to an emergency alarm system. See **Emergency alarm connection** on page 33. Contact Oaklee Services Centre to discuss your worries and to find out who provides such services in your area.

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### Extra care services

# Rent and charges

You must pay your rent on time. This is very important if you want to stay in your home.

## Rent

Your rent is the money we charge you for providing you with your home and our services to you, including repairs and maintenance.

## Service charges

Tenants (and leaseholders) pay service charges if they live in certain types of building where there are shared facilities or services. The charges cover:

- repairing and maintaining the building and shared areas inside the building;
- cleaning shared areas, including windows;
- providing lighting and heating in shared areas;
- maintaining and landscaping shared gardens; and
- insuring the building.

Service charges are based on the actual cost of delivering the service. We review them once a year and they may increase or decrease. You may inspect our financial records about service charges as long as you let us know beforehand.

## Heating or other charges

If you live in a sheltered or supported scheme you may pay a separate heating charge to us for the heating you use in your own flat.

You may pay charges for other services you receive, for example refuse collection or use of parking spaces.

## How to pay

- **Through your bank.** You could set up a standing order. We will give you a form to send to your bank and we will agree how often you will pay each month. Or, you can pay whenever you want by phoning your bank or going on-line.
- **At Oaklee head office in Dublin.** You can pay with cash or by cheque. You need to take your rent payment book with you. Your payment cannot be accepted without it.
- **By post.** Send a cheque or postal order to our head office. Never send cash. You need to allow seven days for your payment to reach us on time. See the address to send it to in **About this book** on page 2.
- **By Household Budget Scheme direct payment.** You can arrange for your rent to be taken from your Social Security Benefits and paid directly to us. You will then receive any remaining amount.

**Cheques.** Cheques or postal orders must be made out to **Oaklee Housing**. Write your name, address and rent account number on the back.



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## How much rent do I pay and how often?

The amount you must pay is shown on your rent letter that we send you every year. This is made up of your weekly rent, and for certain properties, service charges, heating charges or charges for other facilities. Your rent will be calculated in one of two ways. It will either be based on the size and type of property you live in or on your weekly income. When we give you your tenancy agreement we will let you know which way the rent for your home is calculated.

We charge you a weekly rent but you can choose to pay at different intervals (for example, every week or once a month) as long as the correct amounts are with us at the right time. There are various ways you can pay. See **How to pay** on page 35. You may be able to claim Rental Assistance which will help with your rent. See **Rental Assistance Scheme** on page 37.



## How do I keep track of my rent payments?

We will record your payments on our computer each time you pay. We send you a statement twice a year which shows what rent you have paid. You can also ask for another statement at any other time. Contact Oaklee Services Centre. You should also keep a check on payments yourself. Keep any receipts you are given and check your bank statements.



## Will my rent increase?

We review your rent every year. Our rents should be affordable to people on low incomes and will be cheaper than rents charged by private landlords. However, we must make sure that rents cover our costs. If we change your rent, this will usually apply from April. We will write to you at least 28 days before you must start paying the new amount. If your circumstances change, for example your income changes, your level of rent may also change. This change will apply as soon as it is confirmed to you.

## What if I pay my rent late or have financial difficulties?

You are breaking the conditions of your tenancy agreement if you pay your rent late. If you have money troubles, please contact us and we will tell you what to do and give you advice. See **Rent arrears** on page 37.

## What if Oaklee fails to provide a service which is covered by service charges?

If we have failed to provide you with a service, for example lighting in shared areas or laundry room facilities, for a continuous period of 7 days (48 hours for heating and hot water) we will arrange for you to have a rebate (money back) on the service charge. We will measure the period of failure of service from the time we were first told about the problem by a resident or staff member. Please be sure to tell us if a service is not working.

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## Rent and charges

# Rent arrears

**Rent arrears is the term we use for rent you have not paid us. If you do not pay your rent, you could lose your home. It is always better to pay off a small amount of what you owe with your weekly rent than pay nothing.**

## What to do

If you know you cannot pay your rent, please tell us straight away. Do not delay! We understand that anyone can have money trouble from time to time and we will do our best to help you. We will arrange for someone to give you advice or you can get independent advice from the Money Advice and Budgeting Service. See **Useful contacts** on page 43.

If you cannot pay the full amount you owe, we may make an arrangement for you to pay it off gradually. This means paying an extra amount with your weekly rent over a period of time until you have paid off all the rent you owe. You can arrange to have your rent paid directly to us through the Household Budget Scheme, see **How to pay** on page 35.

## Rental Assistance Scheme

You can apply for Rental Assistance through the local council. We can give you a form. Fill it in as quickly as possible, because you are responsible for paying the full rent until the payments start.

## Other benefits.

You may be entitled to other benefits. You can get information about these from your local office for the Department of Community and Family Affairs.

## If you don't pay

We will take legal action against you if you do not keep to a repayment agreement and you continue to be in arrears for your rent or service charges. If you make no effort to pay off your arrears we will take action to end your tenancy.

## Ending your tenancy

- We will serve you with a legal 'notice' which gives the reasons we are taking action and a date at least four weeks ahead when we can start the process of going to court. The notice will also tell you how to appeal against the action and how you can get advice.
- If we decide to go to court we will apply to the Court for a Summons. The court will also write to you giving a date when a judge will listen to your case. This is called a 'hearing'.
- At the hearing we will present our case and you will tell the judge about your situation. The judge will decide whether to grant us a 'possession order' to end your tenancy. As a result of an order:
  - you will have to pay for our court costs and the cost of any enforcement order we have to make;
  - you may have to leave your home. If this happens you may be considered to be intentionally homeless, which means another housing association or a local council does not have to rehouse you;
  - you will still have to pay your arrears even if you leave.



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## What if I have problems paying?

If you have money troubles, contact us to get advice. We will do everything we can to help you catch up. The sooner you contact us, the quicker we can sort something out. If you make no effort to contact us and you continue not to pay, we will take you to court. See **What to do** and **If you don't pay** on page 37.

You can also get independent advice on money matters from the Money Advice and Budgeting Service. See **Useful contacts** on page 43.

You may also be entitled to Rental Assistance. You need to apply through the local council.



## I think arrears shown on my account are wrong. What can I do?

Please contact us. We will check the account and give you a copy of our records. If there has been a mistake, we will put it right. If it is correct, we will explain the situation.

## What if my circumstances change?

If your circumstances change, you must tell Oaklee Services Centre immediately. For example, you may have started a new job or become unemployed, or someone else may have come to live in your home - or has left to live somewhere else. All these facts can change the amount of rent you must pay. If you don't tell us, you could face a large bill for rent arrears. Any underpayment will be added to the amount of rent you owe us.



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## Rent arrears

# Applying to move

If you want to move you can ask us to consider you for a transfer or you can look for another tenant who would like to exchange homes with you.

## Transferring to another Oaklee home

You can apply to transfer to another home owned by us if:

- you do not owe us any rent or other charges;
- your home is in good condition;
- you have lived in your present home for at least two years; and
- you have not breached your tenancy agreement or been found guilty of unacceptable behaviour.

You need to fill in an application form. If your application is successful, you will go on to our waiting list. When your application has been accepted, we will:

- visit you and assess your needs for a new home; and
- award you points based on your level of need.

You will only be considered for the type of home suitable for your size of family and the area (or areas) you have asked for. We cannot say how long it will be before you get the opportunity to move. It will depend on:

- the number of people in your area waiting to move;
- the number of homes becoming available in the area you want to move to; and
- how urgently you need to move.

Not everyone waiting to move will be offered a new home because the number of homes becoming available is low.

## Transferring to another landlord

If you want to live in an area where Oaklee does not have homes, you will need to contact the local council of that area. They will be able to tell you what housing they have or whether there are local housing associations you can apply to.

## Exchanging homes

You can exchange with another of our tenants, or with a tenant of another housing association or a local council anywhere in the country.

Before you go ahead, you must get our approval in writing. If you exchange without permission, you can be made to move back.

If the other tenant is not our tenant, they will need to get in touch with their landlord to ask permission.

Before giving approval, each landlord will:

- check that their property is in good condition;
- identify repairs that the tenants must do before leaving; and
- check whether their tenant owes any rent.

We will usually give approval, but not if:

- a property is larger than necessary, or is not big enough for the new tenant's household, or has adaptations that the new tenant does not need;
- the other landlord is a trust or association that cannot allow the exchange;
- either tenant has broken the conditions of their tenancy agreement (such as not having paid the rent); or
- either landlord is in the process of taking legal action to make their tenant leave their home.

When you exchange you are not given a new tenancy. The other tenant transfers their tenancy to you (assigns). Both tenants must accept and take responsibility for the other property in the condition in which it is left.



Contact the Oaklee Services Centre

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**Can I move to another Oaklee home?**

Yes, you can apply to move by filling in an application form and being accepted onto our waiting list. Your position on the list is based on your level of need compared to others on the list. See **Transferring to another Oaklee home** on page 39.

If you want to widen your options, you could consider exchanging homes with another tenant. See **Exchanging homes** on page 39.



**How long will I have to wait to move?**

This will depend on the type of property and area you want to move to, and your level of housing need compared to others on the waiting list. Only people with really urgent housing need are likely to get the opportunity to move.

**Can I swap homes with someone else?**

Yes. This is called a 'mutual exchange'. You can exchange with another tenant living locally or a tenant in some other part of the country. Each tenant involved needs to apply in writing to their landlord to get approval. See **Exchanging homes** on page 39.

You are responsible for finding someone to exchange with. Exchange partners are often found by word of mouth or from notices in shop windows.



**Are there special homes for people with particular needs?**

We own and manage a number of sheltered and supported housing schemes. We can advise you on how to apply for these homes. See **Extra care services** on page 33.

**How can I move to another part of the country or to a different landlord?**

You need to contact the local council for the area where you want to live. You might also consider exchanging homes with a tenant who wants to move to where you live. See **Exchanging homes** on page 39.



**What if I want to move because of a neighbour or because I feel unsafe?**

We don't want you to have to move for such a reason so we would like to help solve the situation. Please contact the Oaklee Services Centre and discuss the situation. If moving is the only solution we will try and help you with this too.

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## Applying to move

# Moving out

You need to let us know at least 4 weeks before the date you plan to leave.

You need to send a letter or e-mail to Oaklee Services Centre. All tenancies end at midday on a Monday.

## What happens when you decide to leave

We will:

- visit your home to check its condition and identify any damage you are responsible for; and
- possibly bring new tenants to view the property, by appointment, before you move out. In this way, we can keep the length of time the property is empty to a minimum.

You will:

- hand in all your door keys at our head office or to your scheme co-ordinator by 12 noon at the latest on the Monday after you move out (if you do not return the keys, you will have to pay an extra charge);
- let us know your forwarding address; and
- be completely up to date with paying your rent and other charges.

You should be aware of the following:

- we will charge you for any repairs or redecoration that you should have carried out but have failed to do, and for any damage or missing fittings;
- we will charge you for the cost of removing any rubbish you leave behind; and
- if Oaklee provided you with a wheelie bin, you should leave this behind for the next tenant.

## Moving-out checklist

Before handing in the keys, make sure that:

- ✓ the property is clean and you have wiped down all worktops, cills, kitchen units and tiled floors;
- ✓ all your furniture, carpets and belongings have been removed (including from sheds and lofts);
- ✓ no rubbish is left in the house or garden;
- ✓ you have removed any fittings (such as lights) that you have fitted, and put back our standard fittings;
- ✓ you have done any repairs or redecoration that are your responsibility (if you do not do this and we have to carry out the work, we will charge you for the cost of the work once you have left);
- ✓ you have arranged to have your cooker disconnected and removed;
- ✓ you have left behind for the next tenant any instruction leaflets for the appliances in your home, particularly the heating system;
- ✓ you have contacted the gas and electricity companies to give them your meter readings (keep a note of the meter readings to check your final bill);
- ✓ you have contacted your phone company to tell them you are moving;
- ✓ if you claim any benefits, you have told the Department of Community and Family Affairs that you are moving; and
- ✓ you have made arrangements for your post to be redirected (the post office can do this for you).



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**When do I need to tell you that I want to end my tenancy?**

If you are moving out, you must let us know in writing at least 4 weeks before the date you want to end your tenancy. The exact date your tenancy ends must be a Monday. See **What happens when you decide to leave** on page 41.

In the following weeks, you must make various arrangements and be sure you have told others that you are moving. See **Moving-out checklist** on page 41.



**What do I do with anything I don't want?**

You must remove all your furniture, personal belongings and any rubbish before your tenancy ends. We will charge you for removing anything left behind after the keys have been handed in, including rubbish. See **What happens when you decide to leave** on page 41. You can take any unwanted items or large amounts of rubbish to your local household recycling centre, or you can arrange for your local council to collect them.



**What about any changes I have made to my home?**

If you have removed any fixtures or fittings, such as light fittings, handles, kitchen units or doors, you must put them back or provide a replacement, unless we agree that this is not necessary. If you do not do this, we will charge you for getting it done on your behalf.

If you have carried out improvements to your home that we authorised, you may be able to claim some compensation. See **Improvements** on page 27.



**Where and when do I hand back my keys?**

All your keys must be labelled and returned to our head office or your scheme co-ordinator before 12 noon (midday) on the Monday your tenancy ends. If you do not hand them back on time, you may have to pay an extra charge.

**What if I still owe rent or other charges when I leave?**

If you do not pay everything you owe us, or do not have an arrangement with us about repayment, we will go to court. We may also use a debt collection agency.

**What happens if the tenant has died?**

We will allow the tenancy to continue for up to 4 weeks to allow the family to clear the property. However, rent must continue to be paid until the keys have been handed in by the executor or a member of the family.

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## Moving out

# Useful contacts

## Advice agencies

Citizens' Information .....	1890 777 121
Equality Authority .....	1890 245 545
Age Action Ireland .....	01 475 6989
Legal Aid Board .....	1890 615 200
Money Advice and Budgetting Service .....	look in your phone book for your local office number

## Emergency services

E.S.B. ....	1850 372 999
Bord Gais.....	0850 205 050
Water Service .....	call your local council
An Garda Síochána.....	999 or 112

## Your notes

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## Local County Councils

Kildare County Council .....	045 980 200
Meath County Council .....	046 909 7000
Offaly County Council.....	057 934 6800 (Tullamore)
Donegal County Council.....	074 915 3900 (Milford)
South Dublin County Council.....	01 414 9000
Dublin City Council .....	01 222 2222

## Other public organisations

Department of Community and Social Affairs (for your local Community Welfare Officer) .....	1890 202 325
Irish Council for Social Housing.....	01 661 8334 (for general advice about other landlords)
Health Service Executive.....	1850 241 850



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# Caring for the environment

## Recycle waste

Most of the rubbish we create goes into 'landfill' sites where it is buried. We can reduce this by sorting out the items that can be recycled.

- Most councils have arrangements for collecting newspapers, cans, plastic bottles and glass. They may provide bags or bins for you to put out for collection or they may have recycling points near local supermarket car parks.
- If you have a garden you can get (or make) a compost bin. You can put in soft garden waste such as lawn mowings or weeds and also any non-cooked kitchen waste: vegetable or fruit peelings, egg shells, dead flowers. You need to add scrunched up newspaper and brown cardboard, for example egg boxes. This will stop the mixture getting too wet. After about nine months you should be able to use the mixture as compost in plant pots or on your flower beds.
- If you are throwing out old clothes, books or other items, you can take them to a local charity shop, a fundraiser sale or a car boot sale. Someone else may want what you are throwing away.
- When you go shopping take your old plastic bags to reuse rather than taking new ones.
- Eight million nappies are put into landfill sites everyday. They take hundreds of years to decompose. Why not use towelling ones at home and just use the disposable ones when you are on holiday and away from home? It will save you money too.

## Save water

- If you have a garden, collect rainwater in a water butt and use this to water your plants or wash your car.
- If you have a shower, try to take showers instead of baths.
- Don't leave the tap running while you clean your teeth or wash up.
- Wait until you have a full load of washing before using your washing machine.
- If you wash your car at home, use a bucket – not a power jet or hosepipe. Most car washes at garages recycle their water.

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