



# NORTH STAR

Creating homes, building futures



## Tenants' Handbook

Published April 2016  
[www.northstarhg.co.uk](http://www.northstarhg.co.uk)

# Introduction

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

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

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



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# Section 1 - About us

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## 1.1 Who are North Star?

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

## 1.2 Our Vision and Values

### Vision

Creating homes, building futures

### What We Value

#### Collaboration

We work hard at being a good partner, employer and landlord by involving and empowering people and working with one other. We listen, learn and reflect. We place people and communities at the centre of all we do and we welcome and encourage challenge.

### Flexibility

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

### Integrity

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

### Professionalism

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

### Ambition

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

## 1.3 How to contact us

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

**Phone** 03000 11 00 11

### Call into our main offices

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

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

**Write to at** the above addresses

**Via email at** [info@northstarhg.co.uk](mailto:info@northstarhg.co.uk)

### Visiting you at your home

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



## Section 2 - Your Tenancy

- 2.1 Your tenancy
- 2.2 What are my rights?
- 2.3 What are my main responsibilities?
- 2.4 What happens if I ignore my responsibilities?
- 2.5 Anti-Social Behaviour
- 2.6 Harassment and hate crime
- 2.7 What is North Star responsible for?
- 2.8 How many people can be on a tenancy agreement?
- 2.9 What happens if my relationship breaks down?
- 2.10 Will you change my rent?
- 2.11 Am I responsible for Council Tax?
- 2.12 Ending my tenancy

### 2.1 Your tenancy

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

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

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

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

### 2.2 What are my rights?

As a tenant, you have the following rights:

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

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



## Section 2 - Your tenancy

### 2.3 What are my main responsibilities?

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

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

### 2.4 What happens if I ignore my responsibilities?

If you do not comply with the terms of your tenancy agreement, we will contact you to discuss this further. We will give you every opportunity and help and support you to resolve the issues. However, if there is no improvement, we may undertake legal action to repossess your home.

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

### 2.5 Anti-Social Behaviour

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

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

#### Examples of Anti-Social Behaviour include:

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

We hope that you will be able to sort out any problems with your neighbours by talking to each other. If this does not resolve the issue, we work with a number of agencies that will be able to assist. For more information on reporting Anti-Social Behaviour, contact our Customer Services Team on **03000 11 00 11** or speak to your housing officer.

### 2.6 Harassment and hate crime

We will not tolerate harassment or hate crime. We are committed to tackling any incidents of harassment or hate crime with other agencies in a swift and decisive manner.

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

#### Examples can include:

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

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

- Ethnic background
- Nationality
- Religion
- Sex
- Disability

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

## Section 2 - Your tenancy

### 2.7 What is North Star responsible for?

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

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

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

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

#### We are also responsible for:

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

### 2.8 How many people can be on a tenancy agreement?

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

### 2.9 What happens if my relationship breaks down?

If you have a joint tenancy and one of you wishes to move out, you must contact your housing officer. In most cases we can arrange for the tenancy to continue in one name. However, there are exceptions to this. If you are not the tenant, you need to contact your local council who will be able to provide you with advice and assistance in finding a new home.

### 2.10 Will you change my rent?

North Star may, from time to time, increase or decrease rent or any related charges. However, you will be advised at least one calendar month in advance.

### 2.11 Am I responsible for Council Tax?

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

### 2.12 Ending the tenancy

You can end your tenancy by giving four weeks written notice. For further information, contact your housing officer.

We can end your tenancy if we obtain a court order giving us possession.



## Section 3 - Moving In

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

### 3.1 When can I move in?

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

### 3.2 Quality of accommodation

When one of our properties becomes empty, we will inspect it to find out if there are any necessary repairs before it is let to someone else. Sometimes we may need to do minor repairs after you have moved in and if this is the case, we will give you information as to when the work will be carried out.

There may be some programmed work such as a new kitchen or bathroom that is due. Your housing officer will be able to provide further details.

You are responsible for certain things such as:

- Plumbing and drains for any extra appliances
- Altering doors to suit your floor coverings
- Altering kitchen units/doors to fit your appliances

If you find other repairs are required, you should report these to us. Contact our Customer Services Team on **03000 11 00 11**.

### 3.3 Energy Performance Certificate

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

### 3.4 Decoration

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

### 3.5 Insurance

You should make sure that you have contents insurance to cover your furniture and other belongings. We insure the structure and our fittings but are not responsible for your belongings. In cases of broken glazing, fires, floods, burst water tank/pipes that damage your belongings, we are not responsible. North Star have joined up with RSA to offer a low cost home contents insurance scheme. A leaflet on the scheme is in your welcome pack or contact our Customer Services Team on **03000 11 00 11** for further information.

### 3.6 Moving in checklist

Don't forget to contact the following where necessary:

- Electric and gas suppliers
- TV licensing
- Council Tax
- Housing/Council Tax Benefit Department
- Dept of Works and Pensions (DWP) / Job Centre
- Banks/building societies
- Schools
- Doctors
- Dentists
- DVLA
- Credit card companies
- Your employer
- Water company



## Section 3 - Moving In

### 3.7 How do I claim Housing Benefit?

If you are on a low income or in receipt of benefits, you will be able to claim for Housing Benefit. You will need to contact your local council's Housing Benefit section to make a claim. It is important that you make a claim as soon as you move in otherwise you will not be eligible for Housing Benefit for any weeks before they received your application and you will be liable to pay full rent.

### 3.8 Electricity and gas

It is your responsibility to contact your electricity and gas supplier.

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

Gas and electric meters are the property of the company that supplies your gas and electric. If you have any queries regarding your meter, you will need to contact your supplier direct.

### 3.9 Can I make improvements to my home?

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

### 3.10 Can I fit a satellite dish or cable TV?

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

### 3.11 Follow-up visit

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



## Section 4 - Paying your rent

- 4.1 How do I pay my rent?
- 4.2 How do I claim Housing Benefit?
- 4.3 When is rent due?
- 4.4 Rent statements
- 4.5 How much is my rent?
- 4.6 How do we set your rent?
- 4.7 Service charges
- 4.8 What happens if I cannot pay my rent?
- 4.9 What are the consequences of rent arrears?

### 4.1 How do I pay my rent?

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

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

### 4.2 How do I claim Housing Benefit?

If you are on a low income or in receipt of Housing Benefit, you may be entitled to Housing Benefit. You will need to contact your local council's Housing Benefit section. Your housing officer will be able to assist you with this. It is important that you complete and return the forms as soon as possible. You will need to provide proof of identify, income and your National Insurance number.

### 4.3 When is rent due?

Your rent is due each week. This means that you must have paid your rent by Friday (or the last working day if there is a bank holiday at the end of the week).

If you want to pay at longer intervals i.e. monthly, you should make sure that you make payments in advance.



## Section 4 - Paying your rent

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### 4.4 Rent statements

You can view your rent account by registering for our online service “Homes Online” which is available through our website or download our app from the App Store or Google Play. Search for “North Star Customer App”.

We can send a rent statement out in the post upon request.

### 4.5 How much is my rent?

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

### 4.6 How do we set your rent?

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

### 4.7 Service Charges

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

### 4.8 What happens if I cannot pay my rent?

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

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

### 4.9 What are the consequences of rent arrears?

If you do not have a clear rent account, it is unlikely that you will be able to transfer or exchange to another home.

You may have a County Court Judgement issued against you. This will affect your credit rating, which could mean you are refused credit, a mortgage or other rented accommodation in the future.

If we do have to take court action, you will be responsible for any costs incurred.

If you lose your home as a result of rent arrears, you may be seen as having made yourself intentionally homeless and the council would not have a duty to find you alternative accommodation.

## Section 5 - Repairs and improvements

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- 5.1 How can I report a repair?
- 5.2 What information do you need when I report a repair?
- 5.3 What to do in an emergency
- 5.4 Repair response times
- 5.5 Appointments
- 5.6 What happens if I live in a flat/neighbouring property that leaks into the property below/next door?
- 5.7 What happens if we do not complete the repair?
- 5.8 Repair contractors
- 5.9 Our repair responsibilities
- 5.10 Your repair responsibilities
- 5.11 Can I carry out improvements?
- 5.12 Adaptations
- 5.13 Dampness and condensation
- 5.14 Gas servicing
- 5.15 Asbestos
- 5.16 Rechargeable repairs
- 5.17 Floor coverings

### 5.1 How can I report a repair?

You can report a repair by:

- Phoning our Customer Service Team on **03000 11 00 11**. (When you call please provide us with your full details including contact numbers and full details of the repair).
- Online via our website **www.northstarhg.co.uk** and click on the Homes Online website link. Follow the on screen instruction to identify the repair and log details.
- Through our App on your mobile device (available free from the App Store and Google Play).
- In person at our offices
- In writing

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

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

- Your name and address
- A contact telephone number
- The best time to gain access to your property i.e. morning or afternoon
- As much information about the repair/fault as possible.

## Section 5 - Repairs and improvements

### 5.3 What to do in an emergency?

We provide emergency cover outside office hours, over weekends and bank holidays. If you need urgent assistance, call 03000 11 00 11 which will take you to a 24 hour emergency call centre. You can also report out of office hours emergency repairs on [oohrefairs@northstarhg.co.uk](mailto:oohrefairs@northstarhg.co.uk). This is checked regularly and is available for people who have difficulties using the telephone.

### 5.4 Repair response times

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

#### Emergency Repairs

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

- Losing all electrical power
- Blocked main drain
- Blocked toilet if only one available
- Burst pipes that cannot be contained.
- Dangerous structures
- Gas leaks
- Complete heating failure where no back up heating is available (winter months only)

- Lack of security to the property.

If there is an emergency at night or at the weekend, we will only send a contractor if the problem is so serious that it cannot wait until the next working day. This is because sending out contractors at this time is most expensive. If we send a contractor to a fault that is not an emergency, we may charge you any additional cost incurred.

#### Urgent Repairs

We will carry out urgent repairs within three working days. This type of repair may impact on your health and safety or the comfort of your home.

Examples of urgent repairs are:

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

#### Routine Repairs

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

Examples of routine repairs are:

- Indoor joinery repairs to doors, window frames, general woodwork.
- Small plumbing jobs i.e. dripping taps or overflow running.

- Gates and fencing
- Repairs to fittings such as worktops or cupboards

### 5.5 Appointments

We will offer appointments on most repairs. Emergency repairs get priority attendance. We can make appointments from Monday to Friday and our appointment times are:

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

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

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

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

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

In the event of a bad leak causing damage to another property, we will make every attempt to contact you. If we are unable to contact you, your housing officer will meet

a contractor at the property and we will gain access to your property to carry out the repair.

### 5.7 What happens if we do not complete the repair?

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

### 5.8 Repair contractors

We are committed to customer care and expect our contractors to share the same commitment. Each contractor will carry identification and you should always ask to see this.

All our contractors must follow a code of conduct and we expect our contractors to:

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

## Section 5 - Repairs and improvements

### 5.9 Our repair responsibilities

There are certain types of repairs we are responsible for, including the following:

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

For further information on what we are responsible for, see our Repairs Handbook or contact our Customer Services Team on 03000 11 00 11.

### 5.10 Your repair responsibilities

You are responsible for keeping your home in a good and clean condition and for insuring the contents of your home. You are also responsible for:

- Decoration of your home
- Maintaining the garden or yard
- Any repairs caused by neglect, deliberate damage to the property or forced entry if you get locked out
- Floor coverings

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

For further information on what you are responsible for, see our Repair Handbook or contact our Customer Services Team on 03000 11 00 11.

### 5.11 Can I carry out improvements?

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

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

### 5.12 Adaptations

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

An occupational therapist will need to call and see you so they can recommend the most appropriate alterations.

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

### 5.13 Dampness and condensation

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

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

Warm moist air condenses and forms

water when it cools, for example, when it touches a cool surface. In your home these are outside walls, mirrors, windows, wall tiles and even clothes. If this condensation cannot dry out, it will cause mould to form on walls, in cupboards, on windowsills and mildew to form on clothes. Keeping your home warm and well insulated will minimise the effects of condensation.

For further information, please read our Condensation leaflet available on our website or through our Customer Services Team on 03000 11 00 11.

### 5.14 Gas Servicing

To keep your heating system in perfect working order, and you and your home safe, we need to carry out a gas appliance service each year. It is your responsibility to allow one of our fully qualified and registered gas safe engineers reasonable access to your home to carry out this service.

If you do not allow us access for this work to be carried out, we will take legal action to get access. You will also be responsible for any costs for taking this action.

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

## Section 5 - Repairs and Improvements

### 5.15 Asbestos

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

#### What is asbestos?

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

#### You may also find asbestos in the following areas:

- Garage and shed roofs
- Linings for walls, ceilings and doors
- Flue pipes
- Eaves (part of the roof that meets or overhangs the walls of a building)
- Gutters and rainwater pipes

#### Artex and textured coatings

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

#### What are we doing about asbestos?

We have arranged for surveys to be carried out in those properties where asbestos materials might have been used. If we find asbestos in your home, we will let you know. We do not remove asbestos because, if undisturbed and in good condition, it is not a danger. If a repair or improvement work involves disturbing asbestos, we will make sure that we use contractors who are licensed to deal with asbestos.

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

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

Further information is available in our Asbestos Safety leaflet



### 5.16 Rechargeable repairs

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

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

#### Repairs that we will charge you for include:

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

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

### 5.17 Floor coverings

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

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

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

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

## Section 6 - Your neighbourhood

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- 6.1 Gardens and yards
  - 6.2 Rubbish and recycling
  - 6.3 Abandoned vehicles
  - 6.4 Dogs
  - 6.5 Rats, mice and other pests
  - 6.6 Estate inspections
- 

### 6.1 Gardens and yards

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

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

### 6.2 Rubbish and recycling

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

### 6.3 Abandoned vehicles

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

### 6.4 Dogs

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

### 6.5 Rats, mice and other pests

If you have a problem with rats, mice or other pests in your home or the nearby area, contact your local council Environmental Health Department for advice and assistance.

A charge is usually made by the local council for treating pests and vermin.

### 6.6 Estate inspections

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

We publicise dates and times of estate inspections in advance, in our newsletter and on our website. If you would like to attend an estate inspection, contact your housing officer for more information.



## Section 7 - Resident involvement

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- 7.1 Why get involved?
  - 7.2 Ways for you to get involved
  - 7.3 North Star LINK
  - 7.4 LINK Online
  - 7.5 Tenants Voice Scrutiny Panel (TVSP)
  - 7.6 Tenant advisors
  - 7.7 4U Group
  - 7.8 Estate inspections
  - 7.9 Tenant events
  - 7.10 Questionnaires, feedback forms and surveys
  - 7.11 Tenant magazine
  - 7.12 Share membership
  - 7.13 How do I get involved?
- 

### 7.1 Why get involved?

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

#### By getting involved you can:

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

### 7.2 Ways for you to get involved

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

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

#### The benefits of being involved:

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

### 7.3 North Star LINK

#### Who is LINK?

LINK is a group of North Star residents who meet with staff monthly. The group represents the views and promotes the interests of all tenants by influencing our services.

#### How much time is involved?

One meeting a month, with tea, biscuits and lunch.

### 7.4 LINK Online

#### Who is LINK Online?

LINK Online is a group of North Star residents who give their views on our services from the comfort of their own home, via the LINK Online page or via email.

#### How much time is involved?

As much time as you like! LINK Online is updated monthly.

### 7.5 Tenants Voice Scrutiny Panel (TVSP)

#### Who is TVSP?

TVSP is a group of North Star residents, who look at our services in depth to make recommendations for improvement.

#### How much time is involved

Two meetings a month, with tea, biscuits and lunch.

### 7.6 Tenant advisors

#### Who are tenant advisors

Tenant advisors test out our services and make recommendations for improvement. They take part in activities including mystery shopping, surveys, visits, work shadowing and interviews with staff and tenants.

#### How much time is involved?

Take part as much as you like! On average, tenant advisors get involved up to six times a year.

### 7.7 4U Group

#### Who are 4U?

4U are a group of residents who arrange local events and day trips for the elderly and disabled community.

#### How much time is involved?

One meeting every other month, with tea, biscuits and lunch.

## Section 7 - Resident involvement

### 7.8 Estate inspections

Residents are invited to join Housing and Maintenance officers to take part in an estate walkabout to see what needs doing (for example untidy gardens).

### 7.9 Tenant events

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

### 7.10 Questionnaires, feedback forms and surveys

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

### 7.11 Tenant magazine

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

### 7.12 Share membership

As a tenant of North Star, you can apply to become a share member. Becoming a share member with us doesn't reward you with dividends but it does mean that once a year you are invited to our Annual General Meeting (AGM) and any Special General Meetings (SGM).

At the AGM, the annual report is presented to members, which contains the financial results for the year including the auditors report and a review of the activities of North Star over the previous year. It also gives share members the right to vote on any other general business of North Star proposed by the Board and included in the notice convening the meeting.

If you are interested in becoming a share member, please speak to your housing officer or contact Beth Danby our Community Investment Officer through our Customer Services Team on 03000 11 00 11.

### 7.13 How do I get involved?

If you are interested in any of the involvement activities above, please contact Beth Danby, Community Investment Officer on:

Call           01642 796 324  
Text           07702 696 062  
Email         beth.danby@northstarhg.co.uk

Alternatively, let your Housing Officer know you are interested.



## Section 8 - Moving on

- 8.1 Transfer
- 8.2 Mutual exchanges
- 8.3 Ending your tenancy

### 8.1 Transfer

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

#### Tees Valley area

Compass Choice Based Lettings system.  
Website [www.compasscbl.co.uk](http://www.compasscbl.co.uk)

#### County Durham area

Durham Key Options.  
Website: [www.durhamkeyoptions.co.uk](http://www.durhamkeyoptions.co.uk)

#### North Yorkshire area

North Yorkshire Home Choice. Website:  
[www.northyorkshirehomechoice.org.uk](http://www.northyorkshirehomechoice.org.uk)

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

Before you can be offered a transfer, your rent must be paid up to date, your home be kept in a good condition and there must be no other breaches of your tenancy agreement.

The Choice Based Lettings schemes, will give priority to tenants who need to move due to:

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

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



### 8.2 Mutual exchanges

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

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

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

#### We may refuse permission if:

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

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



### 8.3 Ending your tenancy

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

- Contact us to get a form to end your tenancy
- Give us four weeks notice, to end on a Sunday
- Provide us with a new address and contact telephone number
- Provide us with any alarm codes for the property
- Inform your gas and electric suppliers that you are moving and give them your meter readings
- Inform the Council Tax department and the Housing Benefit department
- Arrange for all of your mail to be redirected
- Pay any outstanding rechargeable repairs or rent
- Complete any repairs, improvements or decoration you have started

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

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

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



# Section 9 - Complaints and Data Protection Act

- 9.1 Complaints
- 9.2 Data Protection Act

## 9.1 Complaints

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

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

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

- In person
- In writing to  
Endeavour House  
St Marks Court  
Thornaby  
Stockton on Tees  
TS17 6QN
- By telephone 03000 11 00 11
- By email to [complaints@northstarhg.co.uk](mailto:complaints@northstarhg.co.uk)

- Via our website [www.northstarhg.co.uk](http://www.northstarhg.co.uk) in the "Contact us" section
- Through another person, perhaps an advocate, support worker, solicitor, etc.

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

## 9.2 Data Protection Act

The Data Protection Act sets out rules for processing personal information and applies to some paper records as well as those held on computers. The Data Protection Act works in two ways. It gives you certain rights. It also says those who record and use personal information must be open about how the information is used and must follow the eight principles of "good information handling".

### These principles state that data must be:

- Fairly and lawfully processed
- Processed for limited purposes
- Adequate, relevant and not excessive
- Accurate
- Not kept for longer than is necessary
- Processed in line with your rights
- Secure
- Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection

The Data Protection Act 1988 gives individuals who are the subject of personal data a general right to access

to the personal data which relates to them. These rights, known as "subject access rights" are contained in Sections Seven, Eight and Nine of the Act. A request can be made direct to ourselves on the information we hold. Such access to records and other information about these records is known as a "subject access request". Personal data may be used in the form of either paper records or computerised records.

Any requests for information under the Data Protection Act should be made in writing to our main office. The address can be found on page 5 of this handbook.







NORTH STAR

Email: [customerservices@northstarhg.co.uk](mailto:customerservices@northstarhg.co.uk)

Phone: 03000 11 00 11

Website: [www.northstarhg.co.uk](http://www.northstarhg.co.uk)