



PENTLAND
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Tenant Handbook

Pentland Housing Association
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1.1 Pentland Housing Association Ltd - An Introduction

Welcome to the Pentland Housing Association Ltd (PHA Ltd) handbook which we hope you will find useful. As a valued tenant of PHA Ltd we hope that you enjoy living in and looking after your home. In this handbook we have put together some information which will help you to do this. The handbook includes information on such matters as rent, housing allocations and transfers, repairs, and your rights and responsibilities along with helpful advice and information.

1.2 About Pentland Housing Association Ltd

In 1992 the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority decided to sell 350 houses and flats which they owned on the Pennyland and Mount Vernon estates in Thurso. Tenants and residents of the estates formed a steering group to investigate whether the purchase of the stock was a viable proposition. In January 1994 the purchase was completed and members from the steering group became the first Management Committee of PHA Ltd.

We are a charitable company registered with the Register of Friendly Societies and with the Scottish Housing Regulator a government agency which inspects and regulates social housing, and makes sure that they are performing effectively and in accordance with Government policy.

We aim to provide a high standard of accommodation at affordable rents for people in housing need. Our area of activity is within Caithness and our future plans will include many new developments within the county. The money for this work will come partly from grants from the Scottish Government, with the balance being borrowed from banks and building societies.

Tenants have a right to Membership of PHA Ltd which is also open to anyone who is concerned about improving housing. The cost of membership is £1.00 for a non-returnable share. In turn Members have the right to vote for new Board Members and put forward issues for discussion at the Annual General Meeting. Members therefore play a very active role in the decision making process. If you wish to become a Member please ask for an application form from the office.

1.3 The Office

The Association's address is:

37/39 Traill Street
THURSO
Caithness
KW14 8EG

Tel: - 01847 892507

Fax: - 01847 893221

Emergency Number – 07802 930 685

E-Mail- pha@pentlandhousing.co.uk

The office is open from 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday.

1.4 The Board of Directors

PHA Ltd is controlled by a Board of Directors composed of volunteers, including tenants, residents and other individuals who are interested in providing housing for people in need. They give their services free of charge and meet once a month to discuss the work, future policies and proposals of PHA Ltd.

The Board has delegated some of their activities to Committees and working groups. These groups discuss issues in detail and make recommendations for action to the Board. These include the Finance and Audit Committee and the Health and Safety Working Group.

1.5 The Staff

Staff Members are as detailed in Appendix 1.

1.6 Consultation with Tenants

PHA Ltd believes that involving you as a tenant is a very important part of delivering effective, good-quality housing. We believe that when you feel involved you are more satisfied with your housing. We are keen that the decisions we make reflect your priorities and that you have the opportunity to be involved either on your own or as part of a group.

We are committed to involving you in the work of the housing service. Since the formation of the Association, tenants have been represented as equal partners. There are tenants on the Board of the Association and we want to encourage more tenants to play a part in managing the Association. You should be able to have a say in issues that affect your homes and environment in a way that suits you. You should also be able to comment on how your housing services are performing and suggest what improvements you would like to see. We believe that successful tenant involvement leads to better decision-making that reflects local needs and leads to more stable communities. This booklet outlines the range of ways you can get involved in housing and says how you can get more information.

The Associations' tenant participation strategy outlines what we want to achieve in this area and sets out the principles that we believe are important in developing an effective tenant and resident involvement service. You can get a copy of the tenant participation strategy from our office or on-line at www.pentlandhousing.co.uk.

The tenant participation strategy outlines how we are using existing good practice, general principles and innovative ideas to improve our services for you, the tenant.

Tenants have the right to information about the terms of their tenancy and about our repairing obligations (including repairs response times); housing management policies (including those relating to allocations and transfers); rent and service charge policy and complaints policy. Information about these policies and copies of them can be obtained from the office.

All tenants are encouraged to become members of the Association, which enables them to raise issues and vote at our Annual General Meeting and to stand for election to our Board of Directors. Membership of the Board provides direct input into the formulation, approval and monitoring of detailed policies.

PHA Ltd issues a Newsletter quarterly to its tenants and members, copies of which are also available from the office. The Newsletter provides information on a range of topics including the results of consultations and surveys carried out, details of future consultations, general information on activities or issues of interest, changes in policy or staff, and articles or letters submitted by tenants, residents and members. In addition, we will publish an Annual Report each autumn, showing how we have performed during the previous financial year.

1.7 Tenants Associations

We will give support and encouragement to tenants wishing to form a Tenants Association and to those who wish to be involved individually, and have set up a separate budget to pay for any costs recognising that such associations and individuals can be an effective means of expressing tenant's opinions and of helping tenants and PHA Ltd to consult. Members of staff will be happy to attend tenants meetings when invited.

Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) is the only housing agency in Scotland which works for both landlords and tenants, providing independent expertise and development for tenant/community groups in initiatives with landlords and other outside agencies. Membership is open to tenant groups and individuals. They will be able to advise you of any questions you may have about tenant participation if you wish to speak to someone independent of PHA Ltd. Details can be found at the back of the handbook.

1.8 Personal Information

You can get access to any personal information that is held by PHA Ltd that relates to you. This is in addition to the rights given to all individuals under the Data Protection Act 1984.

You have the right to see and obtain copies of your housing application form, tenancy agreement and any other information supplied by you about yourself or your family.

You do not have the right to see any information held by us about sub-tenants, lodgers or other non-family members.

In addition, we will not give information which is likely in our view, to result in serious harm to you or any other person, or where it is likely to result in the identity of another person being disclosed, or where the information comes from a health professional who refused to allow access to that information, or information held for the purpose of prevention or detection of crime or where claims of legal privilege can be maintained.

PHA Ltd may make a charge to cover the administration costs of providing you with the information requested.

Should you wish to see personal information held by us, please speak to your Property Services Officer.

1.9 Complaints

PHA Ltd has a comprehensive complaints policy, copies of which are available from the office. All complaints made about any aspect of our work will be investigated thoroughly with a view to resolving any problems and ensuring the highest possible standard of service.

If you have a complaint about a decision or action by PHA Ltd please telephone or write to us. If you are still dissatisfied with the result, you should write to the Chairperson. If appropriate, he or she will discuss the matter with the Board of Directors before replying. If you are still not satisfied, you may wish to discuss the matter with your local councillor, Citizens' Advice Bureau, solicitor or the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. A copy of the complaints policy and a leaflet explaining the complaints process is available from our office.

1.10 Non-Discrimination

We operate an Equalities policy and seek to avoid direct or indirect acts of discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, religion, age or disability. The policy is available on our website or upon request.

1.11 Allocations Policy

PHA Ltd allocates all of its houses with the Common Housing Register which it shares with the Highland Council and the other Housing Associations that operate in the Highlands. This means that applicants only need to fill in a single application form to be considered for housing by all of these landlords.

All applicants are prioritised for housing on the basis of their housing need.

1.12 Transfers and Exchanges

We will try to assist tenants who wish to transfer from one of our properties to another. Applications for transfers are also prioritised through the Common Housing Register and so if you wish to be transferred to another property then you will need to complete an application for housing. These can be obtained from the office.

If you wish to apply for an exchange of property with another tenant you should in the first instance speak to a member of staff who will provide you with further advice.

1.13 Homeswapper

PHA Ltd participates in the Homeswapper scheme which provides assistance in finding accommodation should you wish to move to another area in the UK. Please contact the Property Services staff who can provide you with details of the scheme. Information is also available on the website www.homeswapper.co.uk.

1.14 Low Cost Home Ownership

PHA provides a number of schemes which can help you buy your first home.

A RHOG may help you if you live in Caithness and you wish to own your home. The grant is available to people on low or modest incomes and is means tested, applicable only if the total household income is insufficient to build or purchase a suitable property without grant assistance. The grant paid will be the minimum necessary to enable a house to be built or bought, however the grant will not normally exceed 29% of the approved total costs.

PHA Ltd also provide a number of Shared Equity properties, known as LIFT(Low Cost Initiative For First Time Buyers). These are houses where the purchaser buys a share of the property. The remaining share is owned by the Association until such time as the purchasers wish to increase their share of the property. This scheme is aimed at those who can obtain a mortgage but not enough to buy a house on the open market. Properties are advertised in the local press as they become available usually as part of a new build scheme. Further information can be obtained from the office.

Grants for low cost home ownership are aimed at local people in employment who are first time buyers. If you have previously owned your own home you may still be eligible if you meet the other qualifying criteria. However, any capital gain from the sale of any previous property will be taken into account when deciding whether you are eligible.

2.1 The Acts Affecting Your Rights and Responsibilities

Under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 from 30 September 2002, all new tenancies granted by social landlords must be a Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement (SSTA). This section explains the rights created by the Act and those granted by the tenancy agreement.

2.2 Your Tenancy

Security of Tenure

An SSTA is a contractual tenancy which runs from month to month. SSTA tenants of PHA Ltd have a statutory right to a written tenancy agreement, security of tenure, spouse's succession to a tenancy and to have repairs carried out. Additional contractual rights are granted in the tenancy agreement and PHA Ltd will have made these clear to you when you moved in. If you have any doubts, check your agreement or ask us to advise you.

If you have had a tenancy with PHA Ltd since before 1989 then you have the right to have your rent assessed by a Rent Officer. In this case your rent would be reviewed every 3 years instead of annually being signed to an SST does affect these rights.

Right to Protection from Eviction

You cannot be removed from your home without a Court Order. Our policy is only to seek repossession as a last resort and then only for a serious breach of the conditions of the tenancy.

Before we can apply for a Court Order we have to serve you with a Notice of Seeking Possession which states that we intend to commence proceedings in court to obtain the order. This Notice will set out the reason(s) for taking you to court, and the earliest day this action against you may start.

Prior to this Notice being served, we will have written to you, and normally discussed the matter very fully with you to try to avoid court action.

There are several grounds on which we can take a tenant to court and these are detailed in your tenancy agreement.

Right to Take In a Lodger

You can take in a lodger only with our permission and you must inform us of the name, age and gender of the lodger so that we can carry out our legal duty to make sure your home is not overcrowded. You must also tell us what rent you will be charging. A lodger is usually someone who "lives with the family" and does not have exclusive use of part of the property. You may provide some services, like laundry, or some meals. Prior to granting consent, you must issue your lodger with written details of an agreement which has to have been approved by PHA Ltd.

Right to Sub-let Part Of Your Home

You must obtain our written permission before you sub-let. We will not withhold permission if the request is reasonable, but will refuse if sub-letting makes your home overcrowded, or if the rent is excessive, or if the property is shortly to have work done on it which will affect the accommodation of the sub-tenant.

You must inform us in writing of the name, age and gender of the sub-tenant. The person to whom you may sub-let is called the sub-tenant, and they will have their own room and will look after themselves entirely. They may have use of your kitchen and bathroom, but it is unlikely that you will be giving them meals. You must provide your sub-tenant with written details of your agreement which have previously been approved by us.

Remember that you can only ever sub-let part of your home; if you sub-let the whole of it, you lose your right to security of tenure, except under very special circumstances. These would apply in some divorce cases or where you sub-let to a certain member of your family - one who would be your successor if you died (see section on succession in your tenancy agreement).

Joint Tenancies

On the death of the tenant, the law allows only a tenant's spouse or partner to succeed to the tenancy. PHA Ltd's SSTA enables other members of a tenant's family to succeed to the tenancy. The rules for succession are detailed in your tenancy agreement.

If you think you have a right to succeed or any questions on this matter you should contact the Associations staff or Citizens Advice Bureau.

Right to Make Improvements

You have the right to make improvements to your home, but you must ask our permission in writing before you carry out any work. Consent for internal improvements such as changing the heating system, renewing windows, replacing kitchen fitments or replacing a shower will not be withheld unreasonably, although we may make it subject to certain conditions. Many external improvements such as the building of extensions, porches, outhouses and sheds may also require building warrants and planning permission which are obtained from the Highland Council.

2.3 Overcrowding

A house is overcrowded where the accommodation falls below the following standards:

Each member of the household should have their own single bedroom, except where the household consists of:

- a couple in a double bedroom
- 2 children under 16 years of age and of the same sex provided there is no more than 4 years difference in their ages.

If your household is overcrowded contact our offices for advice on transfers or exchanges.

2.4 Variation of Tenancy Conditions

Should PHA Ltd wish to change the tenancy terms in any way we will write to and consult with you and all other affected tenants first. Any such proposed changes in tenancy terms will not apply unless both you and PHA Ltd agree to them. If we both agree to the terms these will be recorded either by drawing up a new tenancy agreement or by amending the existing tenancy agreement. In terms of changes to the rent level we will consult with you on any increases and take account of any comments that you may have in relation to the increase that we have proposed.

2.5 Relationship Breakdown

If your relationship with other members of your household has broken down and you need somewhere else to live, you should contact PHA Ltd or the Highland Council's Housing Department about your situation as the Council may be able to help with the re-housing.

If there are children involved we would prefer that the tenancy goes to the partner who has custody of the children. PHA Ltd or one of our partners within the Common Housing Register will try and re-house the other partner and separated childless couples but this may not always be possible.

The Citizens Advice Bureau may be able to offer confidential advice. Details can be found at the back of the handbook.

2.6 Ending the Tenancy

If you wish to end your tenancy, you must give at least 4 weeks' notice to PHA Ltd in writing. This gives us time to find a new tenant for the property. You are expected to leave the house clean, empty and in a reasonable state of repair. Any broken fixtures or fittings must be replaced or repaired before you leave. In the winter ensure that all the hot and cold water systems are drained down before you leave the property. You should also inform your electricity, gas and telephone companies that you are leaving so that services can be disconnected and meter readings taken to ensure you receive accurate final bills. If paying rent by Standing Order you should also notify your bank to cancel payments but you need do nothing if you pay by Direct Debit as this can be dealt with by our Finance Department provided you advise PHA Ltd of the date you are moving out. When the tenancy ends the keys must be returned to PHA Ltd or you may be charged further rent. Further information on your obligations regarding leaving a property are detailed in Appendix 2.

2.7 Assigning Your Tenancy

To assign your tenancy means to hand it over to someone else. You may only do this with the written consent of PHA Ltd which will not be unreasonably withheld.

3.1 Rent

The rent for your home includes a basic rent for your dwelling and may include an additional sum for services provided in connection with it. The rent is payable monthly, in advance, on the first day of each month. You may also request a statement of your rent account at any time.

3.2 How Your Rent Is Set

The rent payable under the SSTA is reviewed in accordance with our Rent Setting Policy, a copy of which can be collected at the office. The level of rent payable depends upon the type of dwelling.

So that we are able to pay for future maintenance and repairs we must also take account of the costs of this maintenance and repair. At the same time these factors must be set against the need to keep the rent at a level affordable to those in low paid employment.

Any improvements made by you are not taken into account by us when reviewing the rent except where we have both agreed otherwise, e.g. you have installed a central heating system and we have agreed to maintain it.

The rent (if not entitled to a registered rent) and service charges are reviewed every twelve months and we will apply this rent increase on the first day of April. A full written statement of any changes made on review of the rent payable will be available and you will be given one months notice of any change.

You will be consulted each year on the proposed rent increase.

If your rent is reviewed by a Rent Officer it will be reviewed every 3 years or other period established by changes in the law. The rent setting service as provided by the Rent Officer is an independent service which reviews registered rents nationwide to assess that the levels are fair. At review time all affected tenants will be invited to attend a meeting held by the Rent Officer. It is possible to appeal against the rent set by the Rent Officer, and details of how to do this are made available at the time.

3.3 Service Charge

If you have a tenancy where services are provided by us, your rent will include a service charge which represents the cost of providing these services. This charge is reviewed annually and if any variation to the service provided by us becomes necessary, we will consult with you on the proposed changes first.

Service charges for communal area costs etc are eligible for inclusion in the calculation for Housing Benefit. If you have difficulty in preparing a claim for Housing Benefit where service charges are included in your rent please contact your Property Services Officer.

3.4 How to Pay Your Rent

As part of our service to tenants we provide as many methods of paying rent as possible. These are:-

Standing Order

Forms are available from the office to arrange for rent payments to be made directly from your bank account each week or month. You will be asked to complete a new form each time the rent changes.

Direct Debit

Forms are available from the office to arrange for rent payments to be made directly from your bank account each month. You only need to complete this form once provided your bank details remain the same.

Office Payments

You can pay your rent at the office weekly, fortnightly or monthly; whichever is the most convenient to you. We accept payment by cash, cheque or debit card.

Housing Benefit Direct

If you are in receipt of full or partial Housing Benefit, arrangements can be made for this to be paid direct to PHA Ltd. Forms are available from the office.

Other Direct Payments

If you receive a UKAEA Pension, you can have your rent deducted from your pension for payment direct to PHA Ltd. Forms are available from the office, and we will notify both them and you of any changes in the deductions.

3.5 Help with Paying Rent and Housing Benefit

You may be entitled to Housing Benefit to help with the payment of your rent. This is a Government scheme run by the Highland Council. An application form can be obtained from PHA Ltd or the Council Offices. Enquiries are best directed to the Housing Benefit section of the Council's Finance Department in Thurso or Wick but we will be happy to help you fill in the forms.

3.6 Difficulty in Paying Rent

If you have, or are likely to have, difficulty in paying your rent, please contact a Property Services Officer immediately. PHA Ltd is always happy to come to some arrangement with you to spread the load of any arrears but it is important that you let us know as soon as possible if you are having difficulty paying your rent, as PHA Ltd will not accept persistent arrears. Should a suitable arrangement not be made PHA Ltd may ultimately commence proceedings to regain possession of our property

3.7 Rent Arrears Policy

Rent arrears will be dealt with promptly and consistently. The Property Services staff will endeavour to ensure that tenants are getting all the benefits that they are entitled to, and will, in addition try to reach acceptable agreements with tenants for paying off arrears. We will be firm in our approach to rent arrears and will be prepared to take legal action against tenants including, where appropriate, proceeding with Orders for repossession of the property.

A copy of PHA Ltd's full Rent Arrears Policy can be obtained on request at the office.

When you first fall into arrears a reminder letter will be sent fortnightly. If you cannot clear the debt in the next few days you should speak to the Property Services staff about the problem and come to an agreement.

If the problem has not been resolved and the arrears have increased to 1 month the Property Services staff will visit to advise you of possible solutions. You will be advised in writing of any agreement reached and the next steps which could be taken by PHA Ltd.

If no satisfactory arrangement has been made by 3 months to make payment of rent and arrears, a Notice of Intention to Raise Proceedings for the repossession of your property will be served. You will also receive information as to where you can seek advice e.g. the Citizens Advice Bureau or a Solicitor.

After The Notice of Intention to Raise Proceedings for Possession has been issued there is a period of 28 days before it becomes effective. It is then effective for 6 months during which time the Association can raise an action in the Sheriff Court for either repayment of the debt or repossession of the property. This Notice of Intention will be put on hold if you make an agreement to pay the debt. Provided you keep to the payments that you agreed no further legal action will be taken.

If you do not keep to the payments PHA Ltd will take further legal action through the Court to request a Possession Order for eviction from your home. This final step has to be approved by the Board of Directors and it is not a decision that is taken likely.

3.8 Difficulty in Paying Other Bills

Council Tax

You are quite separately liable for payment of Council Tax or any other burden levied by the Highland Council. If PHA Ltd becomes liable to pay the standard Council Tax during the period of tenancy we will recoup the sum charged from you.

Council Tax Rebate

If you are entitled to Housing Benefit you will probably also be eligible for a Council Tax rebate from the Council. Forms are available at PHA Ltd or the Council Offices on request.

Electricity or Gas

If an electricity or gas bill arrives and you cannot afford to pay, contact your electricity or gas company immediately as you may be able to arrange to pay off the amount in regular instalments. Many utility companies offer a range of payment schemes to help you pay your bills more easily. These can include:-

Budget Account

Paying an agreed amount each month by direct debit on a budget basis, to even out the cost over the year.

Weekly Account

Arranging to pay what you like each week towards your next bill, and to pay the balance each quarter.

Meter

It may be possible to have a prepayment card meter for your electricity supply installed if it is safe and practical to do so. This is often the easiest way to control your electricity usage but it is more expensive than paying by budget or weekly accounts.

Other Bills

If you have difficulty in paying other bills you should seek advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau, who will be able to give you expert advice on how best to resolve the problem. You should always speak to the Citizens Advice Bureau or the company you owe money to before the problem becomes too great.

4 REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE. WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT?

4.1 Legal Obligations

PHA Ltd has legal obligations, to maintain your property in a fit and safe state for you to live in. PHA Ltd also has an obligation to keep its buildings in a satisfactory state of repair, including external decoration.

To meet these obligations PHA Ltd:

Imposes conditions in the tenancy agreement to reduce unreasonable wear and tear.

Implements a policy of repairs and maintenance to keep its properties in a fit state of repair.

PHA Ltd sets itself timescales to carry out different priorities of repair. These are shown in paragraph 4.4 of this handbook.

If we do not meet these timescales tenants have the right to arrange to have them carried out themselves. This is called the Right to Repair scheme. The scheme covers certain repairs up to the value of £350.00 and these repairs are called “qualifying repairs”. There is a leaflet available in the office which explains the scheme further. Please contact the office for further information.

4.2 Whose Responsibility Is It?

The following table shows who is responsible for each type of repair.:

ITEM	PHA	TENANT	EXCEPTIONS
Back Boiler for Heating	✓ <input type="checkbox"/>		
Bannisters	✓		
Baths	✓		
Exterior Blocked Drains & Pipes	✓		if caused by misuse
Brick/Block Work	✓		
Carbon Monoxide Detectors	✓		tenants own
Ceilings	✓		
Central Heating System Controls	✓		tenants own
Chimney Stacks, Pots & Cows	✓		
Chimney Sweeping		✓	
Cisterns	✓		
Communal Doors	✓		
Clotheslines		✓	communal flats
Clothes Pole/Dryer	✓		
Communal Flat Areas	✓		
Cupboards		✓	
Damp Proof Course	✓		
Decoration (external)	✓		
Decoration (internal)		✓	
Door Bell		✓	owned by PHA
Door Ironmongery	✓		
Door locks	✓		keys lost by tenant
Doors	✓		
Downpipes (rain & soil)	✓		
Drainage	✓		

ITEM	PHA	TENANT	EXCEPTIONS
Driveway	✓		
Drying Areas	✓		
Electric Wires & Sockets	✓		
Electric Heating	✓		
Electric Plugs		✓	
Entry Systems	✓		
Estate Footpaths, grassed areas & walls	✓		not owned by PHA
Extract Fans & Controls	✓		
Fascias & Soffits	✓		
Fences between gardens	✓		
Fire Baskets & Grates	✓		
Fire - electric/gas/solid fuel	✓		tenants own
Fire Surrounds	✓		
Floor Boards	✓		
Floor Coverings		✓	
Fuse Boxes	✓		
Fuses to plugs		✓	
Garages	✓		
Gardens		✓	
Gates	✓		
Glass to internal screen doors		✓	
Greenhouses		✓	
Guttering	✓		
Kitchen Fittings/Units	✓		tenants own
Light Bulbs		✓	
Lighting Pendants, Roses, Switches	✓		
Loft Hatches	✓		
Loft Insulation	✓		
Outside Lights		✓	owned by PHA
Overflow Pipes	✓		

ITEM	PHA	TENANT	EXCEPTIONS
Parking Areas (communal)	✓		not owned by PHA
Paths & steps to entrance doors	✓		
Paths & steps (cleaning)		✓	
Plaster/plaster board	✓		if caused by misuse
Porches	✓		
Pumps	✓		
Radiators	✓		tenants own
Roof Tiles	✓		
Rough Cast	✓		
Satellite Dishes		✓	
Showers		✓	owned by PHA
Smoke detectors	✓		tenants own
Stairs	✓		
Tap washers		✓	elderly or infirm
Taps	✓		
TV Aerials		✓	owned by PHA
Ventilators	✓		
Wash hand basins & sinks	✓		
Waste plugs/chains		✓	
Water heating	✓		tenants own
Water supply & tanks	✓		
WC	✓		
WC Seats		✓	
Windows (glass, frame, hinges)	✓		
Windows (lubrication & cleaning)		✓	
White appliances		✓	owned by PHA
Wilful/accidental neglect/damage		✓	see section 4.2.1

Neglect

If any items are damaged by you or your family or guests, because you have misused them or not looked after them properly, then you will be liable for the cost of the repair or replacement and any administrative costs incurred.

4.3 Classification of Maintenance Work

Replacement (Planned) - Planned replacement is when a programme of work is arranged to replace the same item on a number of properties when that item has come to the end of its functional life. An example of this might be the replacement of kitchens or roofs.

Cyclical maintenance - Means works of repairs or maintenance undertaken at specific intervals. Cyclical maintenance is essentially preventative or protective. This might include the servicing of central heating appliances or smoke alarms for example.

Improvement (Major Repairs) - Improvement is the alteration of, or addition to, the property. This can include the provision of new features or the replacement of a component with a significantly higher standard component for example, an electric central heating system being replaced by a gas central heating system.

Defect (Early Planned) - An unpredictable or premature component failure.

Day-to-day repairs and maintenance - Describes those repairs which cannot be left to the next programmed cycle of planned maintenance without posing a threat to either safety, health or security of the tenant, deterioration of the building or landlord's repair obligations. This covers typically the kind of things that are damaged through fair wear and tear.

4.4 Priorities and Response Times

PHA Ltd divides repairs into 4 different categories:

Emergency Repairs - to be completed/made safe within 8 hours

Repairs where there is a risk to someone's health or safety, or if your home is insecure, or if there is damage that is worsening rapidly. Examples include:

- Leaking water tanks and boilers.
- Heating failure in cold weather.
- Securing a property after a break-in.

Urgent Repairs - to be completed within 2 working days

Repairs that require prompt action but where there is no immediate risk to the health and safety of the tenant or their household. Examples include:

- Structural repairs, e.g. leaking roof.
- Repairing water heaters, boilers and central heating systems.
- Plumbing repairs and electrical work

Routine Repairs - to be completed within 10 working days

Repairs where a delay of more than one week will not substantially inconvenience you or where the repair job will take some time to complete. Examples include:

- Repairs to extractor ventilation systems.
- Roof repairs, leaking gutters and rain water pipes.
- Replacement of baths, kitchen units, sinks, wash basins, defective ball valves in cisterns and water storage tanks etc, where material availability allows.

Re-let Repairs - undertaken within 5 working days and include minor repairs carried out before properties are re-let.

4.5 Recharge Repairs at end of tenancy

When you vacate a property an inspection is carried out by staff. If they find the property does not meet the standards expected for a property to be re-let quickly and the responsibility for the damage or neglect is yours, you will be charged in full for the cost of the works that need to be done. Small Claims court action will be taken if you do not come to a suitable arrangement to pay for the cost of these repairs within a reasonable timescale.

4.6 Reporting Defects/Faults

General

Repairs can be reported between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Remember, you should let us know as soon as possible about any repairs that need to be done. We can then put things right quickly before the damage gets any worse.

When reporting repairs you should give:

- Your name, address and telephone number.
- A clear description of the repair that is required with as much detail as you can.
- The days and times when someone will be at home or where a key is available - this information is essential.

Emergency Repairs

For emergencies outside normal hours (that is before 9 in the morning and after 5 at night), weekends and public or other local holidays), you can telephone **07802 930 685** and any emergency reported will be dealt with immediately by a member of staff.

This service must only be used for genuine emergencies. Abuse of the emergency service could mean that our ability to respond to a genuine emergency is impaired and call-out costs can be higher during evenings, weekends and holidays. If the emergency service is abused by requesting work which is not a genuine emergency, we may recover from you the cost of doing the work. Please see paragraph 4.4 for what constitutes an emergency repair.

4.7 Cold Weather

During cold weather you should take care to ensure that water pipes do not freeze. In the event that you are to be away from the property, for even a short period, you should inform us. Depending on the weather conditions and the length of time you will be away we may request you to make sure that the internal water supply has been turned off and pipes, tanks etc are drained.

4.8 Rechargeable Works

If you carry out alterations to your home in such a way as that we need to carry out work to repair or modify them, you will be charged the cost of this work and any administration costs incurred. If you find you have difficulty in paying these charges please discuss the matter with our staff.

It is therefore important that you seek our permission for any modifications that you carry out. In this way we can explain to you how we expect the work to be carried out. Where repairs are requested and subsequent events show the damage was either caused by the tenant or that it was not PHA Ltd's responsibility tenants may be recharged.

4.9 Access

We have the right to have access to your home to carry out essential repairs. We will endeavour to give you 24 hours notice of access being required for routine inspection and maintenance. Where we need to gain access to carry out necessary work and this has been unreasonably withheld, we will write to you giving at least 7 days notice of our intended next call and will make forced entry if necessary. In the case of an emergency, your co-operation will be expected for emergency access. If you are unable to provide access immediately, the Association will gain entry using force if necessary and will repair any damage caused. Depending on the individual circumstances we may recover the cost of these works from you.

4.10 Common Areas on Mount Vernon & Pennyland Estate

It is general policy to ensure that all roads and pavements on the Mount Vernon and Pennyland estates are adopted by the Council. PHA Ltd is responsible for cleaning and maintaining to a safe standard all unadopted areas, which are usually access roads and paths to garage sites, etc. Unadopted areas will be inspected fortnightly in Summer/monthly in Winter and tidied and maintained as necessary.

All grassed and landscaped areas which have not been adopted by the Council and do not form part of a private garden are maintained by PHA Ltd. During the summer months the grass will be cut on average once a fortnight, and trees and shrubs will be pruned as appropriate. Litter will also be removed as part of the grass cutting contract and weeds in public areas, including garage sites, will be sprayed periodically during the growing season.

All play areas have been adopted by the Council, who are responsible for the safety and maintenance of all play equipment provided as well as the condition of the ground, its fencing etc.

4.11 Aids & Adaptations

If you are having difficulty living in your home and think PHA may be able to help you make the necessary alterations to improve your quality of life please contact our offices and ask to speak to someone about adaptations. They will arrange for an assessment of need to be carried out and ensure that the works required are carried out quickly and to a high standard.

5.1 The Dwelling

The dwelling is let to you on condition that you occupy it as a private dwelling and your only or principal home. You should advise us of who will be living in the property with you and any changes in the household.

Abandonment

If we have reasonable grounds for believing that you are no longer occupying the premises as your home and that you have abandoned the tenancy (as Section 6.4 of your SSTA), we will serve a Notice on you -

- Advising you that we believe the premises to be unoccupied and that you do not intend to occupy it as your home.
- Requesting you to inform us, in writing, within one month, that you do intend to occupy the premises as your home.
- Informing you that, if at the end of that month, it appears that you do not intend to occupy the premises, you will be served with another notice. You have a right to make application to the Sheriff against repossession for a period of 6 months from the service of this notice. If you do not your tenancy will be deemed as terminated.
- You will be recharged any costs incurred by PHA in taking this action against you.

5.2 Improving Your Home

The Right to Improve Your Home

You have the right to make improvements to your home, but you must ask our permission first.

We will consider each application on its merits: alterations that would make your home less safe or would reduce its value will not be given consent.

Improvement, in this case, means any alterations or additions to your home, and includes -

- Any additions or alterations to PHA's fixtures and fittings, or to do with the services provided e.g. putting in a new kitchen sink.
- Carrying out external decoration, alterations or extensions.

We cannot unreasonably refuse you permission to make improvements, but may make certain conditions, for example that work is carried out to a proper standard. Failure to apply for consent or comply with the decision will be treated as a breach of your obligations under your tenancy.

Rents after Improvement

The rent you pay cannot be increased on account of any improvements you make unless PHA Ltd becomes responsible for them.

Planning and Building Regulation Consents

You will be responsible for obtaining any necessary building regulations and planning consents for work you propose and paying any charges that are made. The Highland Council will advise you whether the proposed work requires permission and can provide you with application forms. In conservation areas particularly you must ensure that you have planning permission to make alterations to exterior parts of your home.

Compensation

At the end of your tenancy, you may remove the alteration only with the prior written consent of PHA Ltd and subject to the dwelling being reinstated to its former condition. In the event of this consent not being given PHA Ltd may, in line with its Compensation Policy and under the terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, compensate you for any major approved alterations. The type of work which would apply for compensation are those which are of real benefit to us for example the upgrading and extension of worn out kitchen units. A full list can be found in our Compensation Policy which can be obtained on request at the office. There is also a leaflet available from our office which explains the policy. However, any alterations made without the prior written consent of PHA Ltd will not qualify for compensation.

5.3 Flats - Care Of Common Parts

Tenants and residents of flats have a responsibility to sweep and clean all common areas, including the entrances, landings and staircases, bin store areas and common stores, at least on a weekly basis or as required. Should any of these responsibilities not be carried out PHA Ltd may carry out the work and recover costs incurred from the tenants or residents. Where your block of flats have signed up to a service agreement covering 2 weekly cleaning by a contractor this will not apply.

5.4 Flats – Laminate/Wooden Flooring

You are asked to seek permission if you wish to lay laminate/wooden flooring in upper floor flats. This is because it can be a noise nuisance for those living in the flats above or below you. If it is found that you have laid this type of flooring without permission and it is causing a nuisance you will be asked to remove it at your own cost.

5.5 Insurance

People are free to decide whether or not to insure their home contents. Some decide not to do so, thinking that the risks are worth taking. However, fires, floods and thefts may occur, which result in heavy personal losses and in such circumstances neither PHA Ltd nor any other agency have any obligation to give financial assistance or compensation. You are therefore urged to insure the contents of your home and your internal decorations against all contingencies including landlord's fixtures & fittings where the tenant has been negligent.

Insurance does not need to be expensive and any good insurance company would be glad to give a free quotation. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations offers insurance to tenants under its own insurance scheme. Please contact the office if you require further information.

PHA Ltd maintains comprehensive building insurance but this covers only the structure and the fixtures of your home. You might be liable to replace certain fittings, such as a basin, if you damaged them, and so you would be well advised to include this in your household insurance.

5.6 Keys

Make sure you have a spare key and that it is kept in a safe place. Should you have to break windows or force open your doors because you have lost your key the cost of repairing the damage will be charged to you.

5.7 Pets

If you live in a house the SSTA allows you to keep one domestic pet but if you wish to keep more than one you must seek our permission in writing. If you live in a property such as a flat that does not have its own self contained garden you may only keep a domestic pet if you have received our permission in writing. If you are allowed to keep a pet you are obliged to keep it under supervision and control and to ensure it does not cause a nuisance.

Pets which would normally be classed as agricultural, including sheep, goats and fowl are not allowed under any circumstances.

5.8 Business In or From Your Home

Permission will be granted to run a business from home which are considered not to be likely to cause a nuisance to neighbouring properties, subject to :-

- the business activities being solely confined to administrative or similar duties within the house;
- no stock being held in the house;
- no machinery or other equipment which might cause a noise or other nuisance being used within the house;
- no personal visits to the house being made by clients of the business;
- no other conditions of tenancy being broken as a direct or indirect result of running the business from the house;
- no planning or other requirements or laws being broken as a result of running the business from home.

5.9 Household Rubbish

Each household is supplied with a black/green wheelie bin for general household refuse by the Highland Council a brown bin (if requested) for bio-degradable garden refuse only and a blue box for waste paper items and cans (rinsed). These will be uplifted on alternate weeks and should be set out on the morning of collection advised by the Highland Council from time to time in the local press. Care should be taken to ensure the bins are kept clean with the lid always closed, and that they are returned to a safe place within the boundary of the property as soon as possible after collection. If you have larger items to be uplifted you should call the Highland Council service points for advice.

5.10 You and Your Neighbours

Harassment and Nuisance

You must neither commit nor allow members of your household or people visiting your home to commit any form of harassment on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status or disability which may interfere with the peace and comfort of, or cause offence to, any other neighbours or members of their household. Please refer to section 3 of your SSTA for further information.

Definitions

Anti-Social Behaviour - Anti-social behaviour can be defined as anything which interferes with a person's peaceful enjoyment of their home and its surrounding area. It forms a wide continuum of disturbing behaviour from minor problems with dogs, children, untidy gardens and lifestyle clashes through to serious noise problems, violent and criminal behaviour, racial harassment, intimidation and drug dealing.

Harassment - Harassment can be defined as deliberate interference with the peace, comfort or safety of any person on the grounds of race, colour, religion, sex, sexual preference, disability, ill health or age and it includes incidents of graffiti, damage to property, abuse, threats and physical attacks. It is targeted, is often persistent and about the victim. It involves motive and intent. There is not necessarily any proximity, it can happen anywhere and the perpetrator may be unknown.

Hate Crime - Hate crime is taken to mean any crime where the perpetrators prejudice against an identifiable group of people is a factor in determining who is victimised.

Neighbour Dispute - Neighbour disputes can be accidental or caused by carelessness and inconsiderateness. They are often about lifestyle clashes or age clashes. They can be one-off and may not escalate. They involve proximity, residence and parties who know who is causing the dispute.

PHA Ltd will do all we can to ensure that our tenants and residents are able to have quiet enjoyment of their homes. This can be made impossible by nuisance and harassment caused by neighbours, other members of public in the area, and unlawful activities.

Where we are made aware of any form of nuisance or harassment perpetrated by or inflicted on our tenants we will investigate it thoroughly and take whatever action we can to stop it.

If this fails and the nuisance or harassment is being caused by our tenants, their family or visitors, we will assess the severity of the nuisance, and where appropriate will report the situation to the police or other authorities for further action. If all else fails, we will take action under the terms of the SSTA, which may ultimately result in the tenant that is causing the nuisance losing their home.

Where the nuisance or harassment is being caused by other residents or members of the public to our tenants, we will involve the police and other authorities as appropriate, and will support our tenants in court action against the perpetrators where we are able to supply relevant evidence.

If you experience threats or physical violence from neighbours or other people or if you have personal property deliberately damaged by a neighbour or another person you should advise the police straight away. If you experience damage to your property caused by another person's negligence you should make a claim against the other person or on his/her household insurance policy. If you have your own insurance, the claim should first be made to your own insurance company. Advice can be sought from the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Noise

Noise from neighbours can be a real nuisance, and particularly so in flats where it is often impossible to provide total sound proofing. It is therefore important to make every effort to keep noise to a minimum, particularly late at night or early in the morning.

If your neighbours habitually cause a noise nuisance, you should attempt to talk over the problem with them but only if you feel comfortable in doing this. However, if things do not get better advise PHA Ltd in writing and we will deal with it as a harassment and nuisance matter.

Parking

There are garage sites all over the Pennyland and Mount Vernon estates in Thurso and we often have vacant garages for let. Please contact the Property Services Section if you wish to apply for one. Lorries, large vans, caravans, boats, trailers or other large vehicles, particularly if they are to remain immobile for any length of time should not be parked on any estate roads. They may however be parked, with permission, on designated sites. Information on these is available at the office. Other schemes have been provided with off road parking areas and you are encouraged to utilise them as much as possible. Again you should ask permission if you wish to park a lorry, large van, caravan, boat, trailer or other large vehicle.

We do not allow you to park on any grassed areas. If you do so and cause damage to any underground services or the lawn itself you will be liable for the cost of repairs. However, if you wish to create a driveway, hard standing or garage to provide off street parking we will normally give permission which must be in writing. However, you must have planning permission from the Council's Planning Department to cross over the pathway and show that you intend to carry out the work in accordance with their recommendations. Contact details can be found at the back of the handbook.

Vehicle Repairs

Carrying out routine minor vehicle maintenance in rented garages or on the estate generally is acceptable provided it does not cause annoyance to neighbours. Do not discard oil or petrol down drains or gullies and when changing oil do not allow it to foul roadways or paths.

Vehicle Abandonment

If you are aware that any vehicle has been abandoned (i.e. if it does not have a current tax disc) on garage sites or any other area managed by the Association please advise the Technical Department. If abandoned vehicles are not moved or claimed by the owner, arrangements will be made for the vehicle to be removed. The owner will be charged for the cost of removal.

5.11 Gardens

PHA Ltd maintains the areas around flats.

In dwellings with private gardens, you are responsible for the upkeep of this area, and are expected to keep gardens tidy. The condition of gardens is checked as part of the regular inspection of the estates, and where the condition is detrimental to the general appearance of the estate, we will take action to ensure that the work is carried either by you or by ourselves in which case we will recharge you for the work.

On the Pennyland and Mount Vernon estates walls and fences are not permitted in or around front gardens. Tenants and owner occupiers consultation has indicated the continued preference for open planned estates.

5.12 Condensation

If you find patches of mould on walls, furnishings or clothes, condensation may be the cause.

Why You Get Condensation?

Air can only hold a certain amount of water vapour. If it is cooled by contact with a cold surface (such as a mirror, window or a wall), the vapour will turn into droplets of water - condensation. So the warmer you keep your home, the less likely you are to get condensation.

When It Is a Problem?

Every home gets condensation at some time, usually when lots of moisture and steam are being produced (for example, at bath times, or when kettles are boiled). It is quite normal to find your bedroom windows misted up in the morning after a cold night. There is nothing much you can do to stop this but if your home has black patches appearing on walls or if your windows never seem free from condensation then you may have a problem and it is worth speaking to our Property Services Department for advice.

What You Can Do About It?

Heating

You will get less condensation if you keep your home warm most of the time. Insulation will help you to do this, but with fuel the price it is, try to remember the following:

- Get your heating checked regularly so that it works efficiently.
- Try to leave some background heat on through the day in cold weather. Houses take a long time to warm up and it may cost you more if you try to heat it up quickly in the evening.

Ventilation

The more moisture produced in your home, the greater the chances are of condensation unless there is adequate ventilation. Nobody likes draughts, but some ventilation is essential, particularly when you have gas or solid fuel heating systems. **Never block up vents associated with heating systems.** You should not block up chimneys completely, leave a hole for ventilation. If you do fit draught stripping to windows you should leave a space for air to get through.

Bottled Gas and Paraffin Heaters

Generally we discourage this type of heating within the home. This is because it produces a great deal of condensation and can be a fire risk. If you do wish to use these kinds of heaters you will need to allow extra ventilation. (On the safety of using bottled gas and paraffin heaters, see section 6 of this handbook on Safety and Security).

Remember!!!!

How you use your home affects the amount of condensation you get, so bear in mind the following:

- Don't allow kettles and pans to boil longer than necessary, and put lids on them.
- Drying clothes indoors, particularly on radiators, can increase condensation unless you open a window to allow the air to circulate.
- If you have a tumble dryer which is not vented to the outside, you will need to allow more ventilation when you use it.
- If you have extractor fans, use them.
- Don't overfill cupboards and wardrobes, and always make sure that some air can circulate freely.

- When running a bath partly fill with cold water first then add the hot water to aid the reduction of condensation. Open a window if you can or make sure that the extractor fan is turned on.
- Avoid the use of paraffin or bottled gas heaters.

Mould Growth

If you have black mould growth on your walls the chances are that it is the result of condensation. You can get rid of mould by washing down the affected surfaces with bleach, then washing them again after a day or 2 with water to remove the dead mould. Also, you can buy special paints which may help to prevent mould. However the only permanent cure is to reduce the amount of condensation and to increase ventilation.

How You Know If Your Home is Damp

Condensation is usually found on north-facing walls and in corners, in cupboards, and under work-surfaces - in fact, wherever there is little air movement. Damp however is a very different kind of problem and can be found anywhere in the property where water is present above the damp course. If you are not sure what is causing the damp in your home, start by checking pipes and overflows and under sinks to see if there is a problem. Are any tiles missing from the roof or are there cracks in gutters or rainwater pipes. If there is a tide mark that appears around 1 metre up the wall then damp may be the problem due to the damp course not working effectively.

The problems and causes of damp are very different to those of condensation. If you suspect your home may be damp you should report this to the Association as soon as possible.

If you live in a new or recently modernised dwelling, don't forget that it may not have dried out after building work. It usually takes 9 to 18 months for this to happen and you may need to use more heat during that time.

5.13 Frost Precautions and Burst Pipes

Serious damage can be done if water freezes in your home's pipes and cisterns during cold weather. Often the consequences only become apparent when the thaw comes and the pipe bursts.

When a cold spell is likely:

- Find out where your stop tap is and how to turn it off.
- Try to keep your house as warm as you can day and night and never leave a tap dripping. If very low temperatures occur you should open up the hatch to the loft even though your cold water tank and pipes should be insulated.

If you are going away for more than one or 2 days when the weather is likely to be very cold you should:

- Make sure any fires with back boilers are out.

- Drain off all the water from the hot and cold systems by turning off the stop-tap and then turning on all sink taps until the water stops running (but don't leave until the water has drained off in case the waste pipes are frozen and the water will not drain away).
- Switch off the immersion heater.
- Flush the cistern to empty it and put salt in the lavatory pan to stop the water freezing.

When you come back:

- Turn the stop tap on again and make sure there is an adequate flow of water from all your taps before turning them off and putting on your fire or immersion. This will ensure there is no air lock in your pipes, as this can be dangerous, particularly in the hot water system.

If you do get frozen up:

- Turn the water off at the stop tap.
- Open all the sink and bath taps.
- Put out any fires with back boilers and switch off the immersion.
- Phone PHA Ltd.

If you have a burst pipe:

- Turn the water off immediately at the stop tap.

- Turn on all the sink and bath taps to drain the water as quickly as possible.
- Switch off electricity if water is in contact with fittings or wiring.
- Put out any fires with back boilers and switch off the immersion.
- If you are in a flat, warn your neighbours below.
- Find out where the water is coming from.
- Phone PHA Ltd.

Do your best to make a temporary repair but call a plumber immediately. If the burst is a pulled joint, try to put the pipe back into the joint and tie tightly with a rag. If the pipe is split or has a hole, try to find a piece of plasticine, soft soap, or other similar substance, and bind this to the burst with a rag, bandage or tape. Place a container underneath to catch any leaks. You may then turn the water on again for your needs, making sure that you turn it off again if your temporary repair is not satisfactory. Always turn it off again at night, or if you are going out.

If the water has been leaking through an electric light ceiling rose or switch **Do Not Switch On. Inform PHA Ltd at once.**

Remember

- It is your home and you are responsible for it whether or not you are at home and you may have to pay for damage done by frost.
- You should have insurance for your household contents. In an accident such as frost damage it can mean financial disaster not to have it. It is not expensive to have insurance cover and a selection of competitive insurance companies are listed in the Yellow Pages.

5.14 Knowing Your Heating System

PHA Ltd has several types of central heating system at present and there might be slight variations from property to property. If in doubt contact PHA Ltd. All homes should already have a set of working instructions for their heating system. If you do not, or have mislaid yours please contact the Property Services Department for a copy.

6.1 Emergencies

Emergencies can happen at any time and to anyone. Make sure that you can cope with them. Make a note **NOW** of the telephone numbers and other information that can be of help and write them down here in the spaces provided.

Police, Fire, Ambulance **999**

Pentland Housing Association Ltd. 01847 892 507

Emergency Number 07802 930 685

Gas Company

Electricity Company

Take a note of where these are:-

Water supply stop valve

Gas meter and pilot light

Electricity Consumer Unit

Central Heating Controls

Fire escape plan

Fire Extinguishers

6.2 Fire Prevention

Most fires are the result of carelessness or lack of thought. Fires can be prevented by taking simple precautions.

Do's

- Before going to bed, inspect the house for all possible causes of fire. Empty ashtrays into a fire proof container. Switch off and pull out all electric plugs. If you have a coal fire, put a guard in front of it. Close all internal doors (to help prevent fire spreading.)
- Keep leads to portable appliances as short as possible and replace the flex if it starts to fray.
- No matter what type of fire you have, keep a guard in front of it whenever you leave the room or if there are children about.
- If you have a solid fuel fire, clean the chimney and flues regularly.
- Keep matches and anything which can start a fire out of reach of children.

- Do not store inflammable liquid (for example, paraffin, methylated spirits, turpentine) inside your home. If you must keep some, store it in a metal container and keep as little as possible. Never keep petrol in your home.
- PHA Ltd discourages the use of paraffin and bottled gas heaters on the grounds of safety and because they generate excess moisture. If you feel that you must use one, make sure that it is in good condition and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Keep it well away from draughts and fix it to the floor or wall, especially if there are children, elderly people or animals around.
- If a fire occurs involving bottled gas, warn everyone in the area to evacuate, dial **999** and tell the fire brigade that there is a fire with bottled gas involved.
- Look around your house today and put right anything you identify as a fire risk. **Tomorrow may be too late.**
- Some fires result from vandalism. If you see vandalism or the potential for vandalism, report it to the police.

Dont's

- Don't leave the kitchen when there is heat under a pan with any kind of fat in it - especially a chip pan, the results can be fatal. Always use a lid. If a chip pan does go on fire, try to smother it with a damp towel, turn off the heat and don't move it for half an hour. If you can't control it, close the kitchen door and follow the fire procedures.
- Don't dry or air clothes near fires or cookers.
- Don't dim down a light by hanging a cloth over the shade.
- Don't position a portable heater near curtains.
- Remember, in bed you are warm and relaxed and it is very easy to doze off, so don't smoke in bed.
- Don't overload electrical power points. Avoid the use of multi-sockets and adaptors and ensure every plug top is fitted with the correct size of fuse. An electrician will advise you.
- Don't use electrical appliances with faulty flexes or plugs.
- Don't prop open, tamper with or remove self-closing doors. They are necessary fire checks and required by the building regulations for your safety.
- Don't clutter escape routes. Make sure that stairs and passages to front and back doors are kept clear.

- Don't use polystyrene tiles and wall coverings as they are potentially dangerous. While they will not themselves cause a fire, in the event of a fire the burning droplets can spread the flames and produce thick poisonous fumes.
- Don't leave any electronic items that are being re-charged unattended and don't leave them on over night.

If a fire does occur:

- Close doors and windows **ONLY IF IT IS SAFE TO DO SO** to prevent the spread of heat and toxic fumes.
- Warn others in the building and **GET OUT**.
- Call the emergency services on **999**, using your own telephone **only** if it is safe to do so. Otherwise call from a neighbours telephone or call box giving the exact location of fire and your location.
- **NEVER USE WATER ON A FIRE INVOLVING ELECTRICAL APPARATUS, FAT, OIL OR SPIRIT.** Instead switch off the power supply if a heater or an oven is involved, and smother with a fire blanket or equivalent.
- A person whose clothing catches fire should be rolled in a rug, blanket or overcoat.

- If the source of the fire is confined e.g. in a waste paper basket and you feel confident - tackle the danger quickly by either smothering the flame with a blanket or towel or by dousing with water.

6.3 Gas Safety

If you smell gas:

- Put out cigarettes; do not use matches or a naked flame
- Do not use electrical switches
- Open all doors and windows, leave them open to get rid of the gas
- Check to see if a gas tap has been left on by mistake or if a pilot light has been blown out
- Check to see if the gas smell is coming from your own or someone else's home. If you think there is a gas leak, turn off the whole supply
- Call your gas supplier

6.4 Electricity Safety

- Switch off appliances not in use, particularly TVs, and remove the mains plug from the socket before going to bed or going away.

- Use good quality plugs made to British Standard, make sure your plugs are wired correctly and that no bare wires can be seen. The colour coding of electrical wires is Brown - Live, Blue - Neutral, Green and Yellow - Earth. **If in doubt ask a qualified electrician to check them for you.**
- Never run wires under carpets as they can be damaged by people walking on them.
- Never touch switches or electrical appliances with wet hands and never take an electrical appliance into the bathroom. Many accidents are caused by electricity shorting on to damp or wet floors.
- Storage heaters, immersion heaters and cookers cannot be unplugged. If they go wrong, switch them off at their main control and the fuse box, then contact PHA Ltd. If the fault is with your own cooker rather than the supply, you will be responsible for payment.
- Never dry clothing on electric heaters.

6.5 General Safety

Other precautions can avoid accidents:

- Never leave children alone in the home unattended.
- Keep medicines and chemicals in a secure place where young children cannot reach.

- Make sure that pan handles don't project at the part of the cooker where they can be reached by young children.

6.6 Security

Day To Day

- Always lock doors and fasten windows when you go out, even during the daytime. Remember - most burglaries are by opportunists; more thieves break in through windows than doors; more thefts occur during daylight hours.
- Never leave keys in a "secret" hiding place - under the mat or inside the letter box. Thieves know all the hiding places. Leave a key with a trusted neighbour.
- Keep garages and sheds locked. They often contain useful tools.
- Always chain and padlock ladders or keep them in locked sheds.
- If you are out in the evening, leave a light on in a room (not the hall) and draw the curtains.
- Fit a door chain or a peephole for added security.
- You and your neighbours may like to consult your local crime prevention officer. The police can advise on neighbourhood watch schemes and other ways of protecting your home.

When You Go Away

Don't make it obvious that you are away from home. Cancel milk and papers. Make arrangements beforehand. Don't leave notes which tell passers-by that you are away. If you are going away for more than a few days, ask a friend or relative to keep an eye on your property.

Callers

Always ask callers to prove their identity. Ask to see their identity card. Don't be fooled by a uniform. If you are suspicious, don't let them in. Then call the police.

Checklist

Keep a checklist. Note the serial numbers of items of domestic equipment. List other items with as many details as possible, including such distinguishing features as number, hallmarks or imperfections. Thieves often try to dispose of goods in an area some distance away, so if you have a photograph or sketch which police can show to dealers, trade publications and other forces, you will have a better chance of getting your property back. You can take the photographs yourself - they do not need to be professional. Ultra-violet marker pens can mark your property invisibly until put under ultra-violet light. This helps identification if property is recovered. Just use your postcode, plus the number of your house.

7.1 Electrical

Consumer Control Unit

Your property will have a Consumer Control Unit (CCU), usually fitted close to the electricity meter. Instead of fuses the consumer control unit is fitted with Miniature Circuit Breakers (MCBs) and a Residual Circuit Device (RCD).

MCBs do not require to be rewired like fuses; all you have to do is reset the MCB switch to the on position. The circuit which each MCB controls is marked on the CCU.

RCD's are installed for safety and will reduce the risk of electric shock from faulty equipment and damage to your appliances. When a fault is detected by an RCD all the electricity is automatically switched off to the MCBs associated with it. If an RCD switches off it indicates a fault. Remember it could prevent you being electrocuted, it could prevent an electrical fire and it could prevent further damage to your appliances if they develop faults.

IF THE CCU FAILS FREQUENTLY, CONTACT PHA Ltd

If all lights and sockets have failed, then an investigation by a qualified electrician will be required - **CONTACT PHA Ltd**. You should **NEVER TAMPER** with the CCU.

Changing a Plug

Check the colour code of electrical wires.

Brown or Red = LIVE

Blue or Black = NEUTRAL

Green/Yellow or Green = EARTH

Unscrew the plug top and check the fuse is correct for the appliance.

Strip approx 50mm of the outer plastic insulation of the wire, taking care not to cut through the inner coloured wires, or your fingers!

Cut the wires to the correct length so that the end of each can be screwed into its correct terminal and the outer insulation cover can be held in place by the cable grip.

Strip as short a length of each coloured insulation as possible so that the bare end of each wire is not visible after the screws have been tightened.

Twist each wire to avoid loose strands.

Pass the wires through the centre grip and screw tight each in its correct terminal.

Tighten the cable grip and replace the plug top.

7.2 Mending a Faulty Cistern

If the water tank or W.C cistern starts to overflow, the ball valve in the tank or the cistern may be at fault and this can easily be checked. However, do take care in loft areas.

Gently depress the ball and allow it to rise again, taking care not to bend the arm.

Repeat a few times. This may clear the particles wedged behind the valve worker, and solve the problem.

If this does not stop the dripping, please inform us at once. Meanwhile, control the overflow at night by turning off the stop tap.

7.3 Maintaining Grates and Fire Baskets

Solid fuel fires should be riddled regularly and the ashes disposed of safely.

The level of ash should not be allowed to reach the underside of the grate, as this permanently damages the grate.

7.4 Caring For Fittings

Floor Coverings

Floor coverings should not be stuck to the floor boards because if the floor has to be lifted for repairs, the covering will probably be damaged.

Before laying foam backed carpeting or vinyl covering, care should be taken to lay paper between the covering and the floor boards to help prevent the covering become stuck to the floor boards.

The Bath and Sink

The bath and sink should be cleaned after use with mild detergent. Abrasive cleaners, lavatory cleaners, and bleaches should never be used. The bath should not be allowed to come into contact with organic solvents such as dry cleaning agents, nail varnish remover, after shave and paint stripper.

Kitchen Fittings

Spillage, especially around sinks, should be mopped up as soon as possible. Contact with water may cause damage and disfiguration to the fittings.

Try not to lean on the doors of floor units and don't allow children to swing on them as this may damage the hinges.

Kitchen worktops and other plastic laminate surfaces should be kept clean by using water and mild detergent. Persistent marks can be removed by using a mild abrasive cleaner. On no account should harsh cleaning agents be used which may damage surfaces.

Spray-on furniture polish should not be used on plastic, laminate surfaces such as kitchen worktops.

Oven-hot dishes and pans should not be placed directly onto worktop surfaces as this will cause permanent damage.

Work tops should never be used as a cutting or chopping surface as this will cause permanent damage instead, use a cutting board.

7.5 Power Failure

In the event of a power failure you should follow the steps below:-

- Make sure that it is a power failure and not a problem in the home. If your neighbours' lights and street lights are on please check your fuses, or RCD's.
- Keep a torch and a spare set of batteries in an easily accessible place.
- Keep matches and candles in an easily accessible place.
- If your power is still off when you go to bed, make sure you switch off all electrical appliances that were on at the time of the failure, such as your cooker and immersion heater and extinguish candles.
- If the weather is cold wrap up warm; remember lots of thin layers of clothing are better than one thick layer.

8 USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Alcoholics Anonymous

24 Hour Helpline 0800 9177 650

Caithness Deaf Care

Telford House, Williamson St, Wick 01955 606170
9 Riverside Place, Thurso 01847 895636

Caithness Mental Health Support Group

The Haven, Bankhead, Wick 01955 606171
Stepping Stones, Riverside Road, Thurso 01847 895636

Caithness Voluntary Group

Telford House, Williamson St, Wick 01955 603453

Citizens Advice Bureau

1A Beach Court , Thurso 01847 894243
123 High St, Wick 01955 605989

Crossroads Care Attendant Scheme

Scrabster Business Centre,
Scrabster, Thurso 01847 895483

CRUISE Bereavement Care

0808 808 1677
www.cruisescotland.org.uk

Employment Services

Government Building Girnigoe Street,
Wick 01847 864000

Gas – Emergency

0800 111 999

Highland Council

Service Point, Rotterdam Street, Thurso 01349 886606

Service Point, Market Square, Wick 01349 886606

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Tollemache House, High St, Thurso 01847 896115

Environmental Health 01349 886606

Housing Benefit 0800 393811

Area Planning Department 01349 886606

Social Services - Thurso 01847 893835

Social Services – Wick 01955 605040

Caithness Rural Transport 01955 605588

Council Tax 0800 393811

Hydro Electric - Emergency 0800 300 999

North of Scotland Water Authority - Emergency

Cairngorm House, Beechwood Park

North, Inverness 01463 245400

AEA Pensions Administration

Ormlie Lodge, Brownhill Road, Thurso 01847 893165

Pentland Housing Association Ltd - Emergency

07802 930 685

Pentland Housing Association Ltd

37/39 Traill St, Thurso

01847 892507

pha@pentlandhousing.co.uk

February 2020

Thurso Police Station	
Olrig Street, Thurso	(or 101)
Wick Police Station	
Bankhead Road, Wick	(or 101)
Thurso Post Office	
Co-op, Meadow Lane, Thurso	0345 611 2970
Post Office Sorting Office	
Sinclair Street, Thurso	0843 258 2152
Rent Officer Service	
132 Seagate, Dundee	01382 228931
Samaritans	
7 Riverside Place, Thurso	01847 895656
Scottish Water – Help Line	0800 0778778
Sheriff Clerks Office	
Sheriff Court House, Bridge St, Wick	01955 602846
Tenant Participation Advisory Service	
74/78 Saltmarket Street, Glasgow	0141 552 3633
Victim Support Scotland	
www.victimsupportsco.ork.uk	0800 160 1985