

# My Homes Plus

Many of our retirement living communities celebrated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. If you took part in festivities, we hope you had as much fun as Gladys, Lyndsey and Betty.



Repairs, maintenance and safety - handy pull-out guide inside!

News • Updates • Advice



Homes Plus

Issue one 2022

# Welcome

**You will notice something different about this special issue of your newsletter. It is still packed with news, information and advice from your landlord. As usual, you will find great stories about inspiring customers, along with opportunities for you to get involved by sharing your views or even coming to work for us.**

What has changed, is the newsletter's name.

Last year we launched Homes Plus, our new name for landlord services in Staffordshire and Shropshire.

When we consulted with you about becoming one landlord, Homes Plus, we said that we would be able to make some savings as a result. This newsletter is a great example of how we are doing that. Instead of publishing three different titles, we are printing one My Homes Plus newsletter so that you receive the same news wherever you live.

Of course, we are making even more savings to invest in services for customers by sharing this newsletter digitally with those of you who have told us you prefer to hear from us by email. You can find out more about receiving digital news from us on the next page.

In this issue you will find details of organisations and groups, including the Best Kept Village competition, which have benefitted from grants

from the Homes Plus My Community Fund. There is advice about how you can apply for funding, too.

You can read about customer Kerry, who has been shortlisted for a national award. You might remember that Kerry is one of our Local Heroes. If you have a great neighbour like Kerry, you can find out how to nominate your own Local Hero.

We share news of some of the fabulous Jubilee celebrations that took place in our communities and you can discover how we are working hard to keep you safe at home.

Like all of you, I have been deeply concerned by the continuing conflict in Ukraine. I wanted to end by saying that our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Ukraine and by assuring you that we are doing all we can to help those looking for homes here in Staffordshire and Shropshire and to support all those communities who have welcomed families into a place of safety.



**Les Clarke**

Executive director of housing and care

## Support for Ukraine

**We have been contacted by customers asking how they can support Ukrainians fleeing the war in their country.**

Like you, we have been deeply moved by the plight of millions of Ukrainians who are being forced to flee their homes, so we want to support customers who may wish to offer accommodation in their home.

### Homes for Ukraine scheme

The government launched a Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme in March to enable people to

volunteer accommodation, for a minimum of six months, to provide a route to safety for Ukrainians and their immediate family members.

We can support customers who want to offer a room in their home through this scheme and will approve applications where possible. As a first step, you need to let us know that you would like to volunteer, so we can check that your tenancy agreement will allow this.

You can find out how you can do this, along with advice on things that you may need to consider, on our website – [www.homesplus.co.uk/about-us/news](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/about-us/news)

The government also has a useful frequently asked questions section available on their website – [www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-scheme-frequently-asked-questions](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-scheme-frequently-asked-questions)





Kerry is pictured receiving a beautiful bouquet of flowers from our chief executive, chair and neighbourhood team colleagues.

## Good neighbour Kerry shortlisted for top award

**We are very pleased to share some wonderful news about Homes Plus customer Kerry, who has been unveiled as one of the finalists for the Tenant of the Year title in the prestigious Housing Heroes Awards.**

Announcing the shortlist, the organisers said:

“Housing organisations house millions of inspirational and innovative people. This award recognises tenants who have gone the extra mile to help others and to contribute to their communities.”

Kerry, who is already one of the Homes Plus Local Heroes, grew up in the South Staffordshire village she continues to call home and her roles as a school crossing patrol warden or ‘lollipop lady’, dinner lady and community litter-picker have ensured that she is a popular figure in the neighbourhood.

Quick to spot residents in need of support and encouragement, she helped to establish a forum connecting young mums who felt lonely and in need of advice. Recognising that families can find it difficult to make ends meet, she has also created a channel for neighbours to share

money-saving tips, something which is proving even more valuable during the cost of living crisis.

Kerry ensured a thriving sense of community while neighbours were kept apart, devising socially-distanced activities for children and maintaining contact with elderly residents at risk of isolation.

Director of housing at Homes Plus, Sam Allcott, said:

“Local people call Kerry a tower of strength and tell us that she brings a little happiness everywhere she goes. We know her as a great neighbour and an outstanding example of the hugely positive impact and value that social housing tenants can bring to communities. We are delighted that she has been named one of the finalists for this top award.”

We love to hear about neighbours like Kerry. Tell us about your own Local Hero using this form [www.homesplus.co.uk/local-hero](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/local-hero). We read all your great comments and surprise some of your nominees with chocolates and a ‘thank you’ from Homes Plus.

## Do you have an email address?

**By signing-up to receive your Homes Plus updates by email, you will be helping us to protect the environment, reduce our carbon footprint and make cost savings. Savings which can be used to make improvements to existing properties and build even more new, energy efficient homes.**

To get involved you simply need to call our customer services team on **0800 048 8955** to let them know your email address and we will send you:

- A **monthly customer e-bulletin** full of interesting updates and top tips for managing your tenancy.
- A digital copy of your **My Homes Plus newsletter**.
- **Important news** about signing-up to **new initiatives and online services** to make it easier for you to manage your tenancy.

We have already started to calculate our carbon footprint, develop our strategy and kick off our journey to help meet the government’s target of net zero emissions by 2050. Printing fewer copies of our newsletter will help us to meet this target.

Thank you for your support.





## Paying your rent

Most customers find that the easiest way to pay their rent is by Direct Debit. It is convenient and gives you the peace of mind that your rent will be paid on time.

### How do I set up a Direct Debit?

You can find a Direct Debit form in the welcome pack you received at the start of your tenancy or in the documents area on our website. You can also call our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**, to set up a Direct Debit over the phone.

### How is my Direct Debit calculated?

The weekly rent charged for your home is multiplied by the number of payable rent weeks in the year. This gives the annual rent payable for the property, which is then divided by your chosen Direct Debit frequency (see table below).

### How often will the Direct Debit be taken from my bank?

Depending how you choose to pay your rent, your Direct Debit will be taken on a weekly, 2-weekly, 4-weekly, or monthly basis. The number of payments made is outlined below:

Payment frequency	Number of DD payments made in a year
Weekly	52
2-weekly	26
4-weekly	13
Monthly	12

### Can I choose a regular monthly payment date to suit my circumstances?

Yes, you can choose what day of the month your regular rent payment is made.

### Can I alter how often I pay my Direct Debit?

Unfortunately, only the payment frequencies highlighted above can be applied to your rent account.

## There's a reason for the plus in Homes Plus

**Help and advice are part of our Plus services.**

As well as being a trusted provider of homes and care services, we're here to do more for our customers, offering free and confidential Plus services like employment and money advice.

If you are struggling to manage your money with the recent increase in the cost of living or looking to get back into work, please talk to us.

Our expert advisors offer confidential, practical and helpful advice free of charge, including:

- **Money advice**
- **Benefits advice**
- **Employment, training and volunteering advice**

Simply complete our online referral form at [www.homesplus.co.uk/plus-services](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/plus-services) or call us on **0800 048 8955** and we will be in touch.

### To help you now, the team has shared some top energy saving advice tips.



Eliminating draughts in your home by:

- Closing the curtains
- Placing draught excluders by your doors

could save you around **£30 a year**.



Turning your washing cycle temperature down from 40 to 30 degrees could save you around **£13 a year**.



Turning your thermostat down by just one degree could save you around **£65 a year**.



Fitting a water saving shower head could save you around **£35 a year**.



Filling and boiling your kettle with just the water you need could save you around **£8 a year**.

# Securing a brighter future

**Thanks to the support and guidance received from our Plus services team, customer Bradley started to feel a real sense of purpose and is looking forward to a brighter future.**

**Tina Jones**, Building Better Opportunities (BBO) officer at Homes Plus explained: "After leaving care, Bradley found himself unemployed and in need of some structure to his life. He was also keen to seek out new opportunities but reluctant to return to education as he had not had a particularly positive experience at school.

"After talking things through, we worked together to create a new CV and, taking into consideration his reluctance to undertake formal training, we recommended a 12-week course with the Prince's Trust."

Offered to people who are unemployed and aged between 16 and 25, the course emphasises the importance of being part of a team, encouraging participants to work together to help others by organising a community project.

Students can gain qualifications in first aid, food hygiene and health and safety awareness while building up their self-confidence.

"I signed up for the Prince's Trust programme and as the weeks went on, I started to feel a real sense of purpose," Bradley said.

"My final presentation to the group made me feel valued and gave me a voice. Seeing the course through until the end and securing a qualification also gave me the confidence I needed to believe in my abilities and what I had to offer."

The training course provided a springboard that enabled Bradley to apply for job opportunities and helped him to successfully secure a Kickstart placement with a local company.

***"...as the weeks went on, I started to feel a real sense of purpose."***

# Talk to Plus

The Kickstart Scheme was launched by the government to provide funding to employers offering new job roles for 16-24 year olds, who are in receipt of benefits, to try and prevent young people facing long term unemployment. Meanwhile Building Better Opportunities, an initiative delivered locally by the Plus services team, is a jointly funded project by The National Lottery Community Fund and European Social Fund to help those who experience multiple barriers, to move closer to employment.

Tina added: "Bradley's story really does illustrate how Homes Plus is much more than a social landlord and is committed to making a positive difference to homes, lives and communities. When I last spoke to Bradley he was talking about his dreams and aspirations for the future, which was so good to hear and such a difference to the young person I first spoke to!"



**Tina Jones**



# A leading employer and a great place to work

As one of the area's leading employers, it is important that we provide the best possible career opportunities for local people. With skilled and dedicated teams, we can deliver even better services for customers.

We are proud that we already employ 64 of our own customers and you can find details of current vacancies on our website [www.housingplusgroup.co.uk/careers](http://www.housingplusgroup.co.uk/careers).

If you are considering joining us, meet some of those who are already developing their careers.



**Liam's story**

**Trainee electrician Liam left school at 16 and was combining a college course with part-time jobs in a supermarket and sandwich shop when he was offered an electrical apprenticeship with Property Plus:**

"This was a chance to work for a big company, to earn while I learned and really prove myself," he remembers.

"I gained the technical skills in college but learned how to apply them in a domestic setting, alongside some incredibly experienced electricians. They have been really great teachers and feel like my second family."

**Income assistant Heather and colleague David both completed their Level 3 Certificate in Housing Practice, having successfully maintained their learning throughout all the challenges of the pandemic.**

"Although I've worked in housing for a long time, I'm not from a housing background," said Heather. "I wanted to take the qualification to help me develop in my role."

"It meant a lot that the Group had invested in us. It was a brilliant opportunity and a fantastic learning experience," added David.



**Heather and David's story**



**Emma's story**

**Apprenticeships provide great career development opportunities, taking you from the first steps in your chosen career right through to postgraduate qualifications. Emma joined us eight years ago. She is studying for a BSc Building Surveying Degree Apprenticeship at the University of Wolverhampton.**

"It's hard work combining my job with a degree, but I have already been able to develop in my career. In 2020 I completed my training to become an asset surveyor and the following month I was promoted to senior building inspector. Now I manage technical inspectors in my team, looking after 6,000 homes in our growing property portfolio.

"My role has changed as my ambition has grown."



Get your career moving. Check out all our latest vacancies at [www.housingplusgroup.co.uk/careers](http://www.housingplusgroup.co.uk/careers)

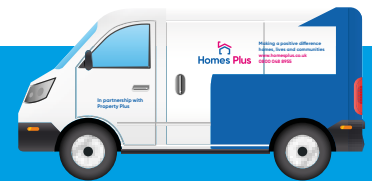
# My

# repairs, maintenance and safety guide

**This handy, pull-out guide tells you all you need to know about our repairs and maintenance service, along with important advice about how you can help us keep you and your family safe.**

Each year we spend around £30 million repairing, maintaining and improving our homes. This work is carried out by Property Plus, who were recently named Contractor of the Year in the UK Housing Awards.

These are the sector's most influential awards, which celebrate the UK's top housing services and are presented jointly by the Chartered Institute of Housing and Inside Housing.



## Repairs and maintenance

### Looking after your home

**Looking after your home is a joint responsibility between you and Homes Plus. We are responsible for most, but not all, repairs.**

It's your responsibility to take care of your home, report repairs as soon as possible and allow us access to your home to undertake the work. Our responsibilities are those repairs that are set out in your tenancy agreement.

Below is a quick reference guide outlining your responsibilities and the repairs we are responsible for, as your landlord.



#### Your responsibility

- ✓ **Condensation**
- ✓ **Blocked sink, bath, shower or toilet**
- ✓ **Replacement toilet seat**
- ✓ **Lost key**
- ✓ **New bulb for lighting inside your home or for your security lighting**
- ✓ **Cracked/smashed windows**
- ✓ **Fixtures and fittings (e.g. curtain rails)**
- ✓ **Minor cracks to plaster inside your home**
- ✓ **Replacing a blown fuse**
- ✓ **Decorating the inside of your home**

#### Our responsibility

- ✓ **Lighting in communal entrance or landing**
- ✓ **Blocked guttering\***
- ✓ **Window won't close or open**
- ✓ **Broken shower (if we fitted it)**
- ✓ **Leaking roof**
- ✓ **Loss of power**
- ✓ **Problem with your hot water or heating**
- ✓ **External maintenance including soffits and fascias and uneven pathways\***
- ✓ **Repairing tap or kitchen unit**
- ✓ **Misted glass in windows\***
- ✓ **Damaged electrical socket**

*\*Undertaken as part of the 5 yearly MOT programme. Please contact us if blocked guttering is causing water to enter your home.*

## Repairing your home

An **emergency repair** is a problem that represents an immediate risk to safety, security or health, such as:

- No heating or hot water
- Major damage to the structure of your home
- An uncontrollable water leak
- A gas leak or dangerous electrical fault
- An unsecure front door or window causing a security issue

All other types of repairs are classed as **non-emergency** repairs.

### Repair timescales

We know that timely repairs are the most important part of our service. All repair requests are categorised to be completed quickly and efficiently within our general and heating repair timescales.

### General repairs

**Emergency repairs - within 4 hours**  
(Immediate risk to safety, security or health)

#### Non-emergency repairs

Less than one hour to complete  
– within 24 hours (Monday – Friday)

All other routine repairs  
– within 17 days

#### Major works - 60 days

Major works where the cost is more than £500 or will take longer than a day to complete e.g. rebuilding a brick wall

### Heating repairs

All heating and hot water repairs are carried out by our contractor, Phoenix Gas, within the agreed timescales outlined below.

#### Emergency repairs - made safe within 6 hours

*No heating or hot water, uncontrollable water leak, report of gas leak.*

If you smell gas, you should immediately call the **National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999** who will tell you what to do. Further details can be found on page seven.

An engineer will attend within six hours to make safe and fix the problem. If this is not possible, alternative heating will be provided until the issue can be resolved within the timescales listed below:

#### Repaired within 5 days

*Gas combi boiler*

#### Repaired within 10 days

*Fire back boiler, solid or oil fuel appliances and solar thermal systems.*

#### Non-urgent repairs - 15 days

*E.g. room thermostat, radiator valve or dripping radiator repair.*

### Reporting a repair

**Emergency repairs** can be reported 24/7 to our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**.

**Non-emergency routine repairs** can be reported using our online website form – **[www.homesplus.co.uk/request-a-repair](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/request-a-repair)** or by calling our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**.



## Counting the cost of missed appointments

Each year thousands of pounds are lost due to customers missing pre-arranged repairs appointments. This money could have been spent on providing



**18 new kitchens**

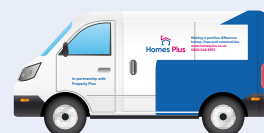
or



**25 new bathrooms**

You can help us cut this cost by always letting us know if you can no longer make an appointment.

Simply call us on **0800 048 8955** beforehand so we can change our visit to a time that suits you and offer your appointment to another customer who is waiting for a repair.





## Improving your home

**Each year we spend more than £16 million carrying out home improvements.** This includes fitting new bathrooms, kitchens and doors, along with replacing old heating systems with new energy efficient boilers. Rewiring properties and carrying out home MOTs are also part of our planned improvement works.

Work to replace kitchens, bathrooms, boilers and external doors is based on the age of these components within your home, as shown below:



**Kitchen** - 20 years old



**Bathroom** - 30 years old



**Boiler** - 15 years old



**External doors** - 30 years old

If your fixtures do not fit the above age criteria, they will continue to be repaired until they are old enough for replacement and our team is next working in your area.

When your kitchen, bathroom, boiler or external doors are due for replacement there is no need to call us. We will contact you well before our teams are working in your area.

## Home MOT programme

Our MOT programme makes sure that every home within a neighbourhood has an MOT every five years to tackle minor external repairs and decorative work.

An extensive schedule of work is undertaken during a home MOT, including:

- Gutter cleaning and repair
- Front and back door cleaning
- Soffit and fascia minor repairs and decorating
- Path and slab re-levelling to front and rear
- Fencing repairs
- External window and door paintwork
- Window handles, hinges and closure repairs
- Broken or misted window glass repair
- Damp proof course and bridging repairs, where needed

## Access to your home

While we understand that having improvements carried out in your home may cause disruption, it's really important that you let us undertake this work as we cannot guarantee that we will be able to continue to source and repair old parts. This could lead to your home having mismatched replacement parts and it taking us much longer to complete repairs.

## Aids and adaptations

We understand the importance of your independence and will do all that we can to help customers stay in their own homes for as long as possible.

If you have a disability or specific need that prevents you from living independently, you can apply for an adaptation to be made to your home.

To find out more visit [www.homesplus.co.uk/aids-and-adaptations](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/aids-and-adaptations) or call our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**.



# Cutting condensation and giving mould the brush off



## Condensation is a nuisance, but it can be avoided and the good news is that it is very rare for it to indicate any kind of building defect.

Condensation is particularly common in rooms like kitchens and bathrooms. It happens when warm, moist air reaches cold surfaces like windows or walls.

If severe condensation is ignored, it can become a major problem in your home.

In a property of two people, approximately **23 pints of moisture** can be added per day, through breathing, showers, baths, boiling kettles, cooking and washing dishes.

### Fortunately there are some easy steps you can take to cut condensation:

- ▶ Keep your home warm to avoid cold surfaces. Condensation is worse in buildings which are constantly heating and cooling.
- ▶ Place lids on saucepans when cooking, to reduce steam in the kitchen.
- ▶ Try not to dry clothes on radiators or racks indoors. If you have to do this, use the bathroom. Open a window to allow air to circulate and close the door to that room.
- ▶ If you use a tumble dryer, make sure it is vented to an open window or through an outside wall to stop moisture spreading through your home. If your dryer has a built-in condenser, make sure that the filter is cleaned and cleared regularly.
- ▶ When you are cooking or bathing, use an extractor fan or open a window and keep the door closed. Keep the extractor fan on or the window open for about 20 minutes after you have finished (with the door closed).
- ▶ Leave trickle vents (the slotted vents in your window frames) open when rooms are occupied - even in the winter when your heating is on. These vents provide constant ventilation which removes water vapour.
- ▶ Don't use paraffin or Calor gas heaters.
- ▶ Leave a gap between your wall and the back of free-standing furniture like wardrobes or cupboards. Try not to overfill cupboards, wardrobes and drawers so that air can circulate around the contents.
- ▶ When condensation appears, wipe it away and ventilate the area.
- ▶ Use moisture traps, available from most DIY stores, in affected rooms for a big reduction in condensation.

## Have I got damp or is it condensation?

Is the problem on north-facing walls, in the corner of a room, in cupboards, behind furniture or under work surfaces?

This is usually the result of condensation, where there is little air movement

Can you see water droplets on windows or water pooling on window sills?

This is condensation

Can you see mould looking like black spots along the edges of your skirting or ceilings?

This is condensation

Is there a clearly defined damp stain?

This might be penetrating damp or a water leak – you need to report this to us

Can you see a 'tidemark' on ground floor room walls, extending to around 900-1000mm above the floor surface?

This is uncommon. You need to report this to us

If you notice mould in your home, you should treat it straight away to stop it from spreading and causing damage. You can do this by sterilising the affected area with a suitable fungicidal wash (available from most DIY stores), following the manufacturer's instructions.



### Positive ventilation units

To help you manage condensation we install positive input ventilation equipment to homes when we fit a new kitchen or bathroom. This equipment continually operates to force moist air out of the home before it has the opportunity to condense on surfaces.



### Are you covered?

**What would you do if you lost everything because of a fire or flood in your home?**

As your landlord, it's our responsibility to insure the building in which you live. Buildings insurance covers the cost of repairing damage to a property's structure, as well as replacing things like pipes, cables and drains.

**This insurance does not include your personal possessions.**

It's your responsibility to arrange home contents insurance, which can cost just a few pounds a week, to cover the cost of replacing your belongings in the event of accidental damage, fire, flooding or theft.



Please visit [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) for further guidance.



## Looking after communal grounds

**The maintenance of communal grounds, such as the gardens around our retirement living schemes, is carried out by the Property Plus grounds maintenance team.**

The team has a clear service standard for their work, so you know what to expect.

**Grass** will be cut every ten working days, working out at between 14 and 16 visits each year.



In a new, greener approach, the team is cutting and dropping – this is called ‘grasscycling.’ Box collections will take place twice a year.

Grasscycling:

- Saves time and money by eliminating the collection and removal of grass cuttings for 90% of the cuts undertaken throughout the year.
- Encourages healthier grass and releases nutrients into the soil.
- Provides a natural source of fertiliser and helps the soil to retain water.
- Saves energy by conserving the fuel that is required to take cuttings to landfill/composting sites, helping us to reduce our carbon footprint.
- Saves valuable landfill/composting space. Research also shows that the decomposition of grass cuttings may substantially enhance soil microbial activity and that significant amounts of nutrients, mainly nitrogen, can be returned to the soil by grasscycling, reducing fertilizer use.

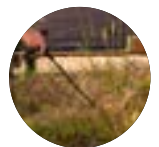
**Hedges** in communal areas will be trimmed twice a year. The first cut will take place during August and the second during the winter. Due to the Wildlife & Country Act 1981, we are unable to cut hedges until August, due to the nesting season. If a road junction is being obstructed or a pathway is impassable because of an overgrown hedge, we can do a sight line cut - the height will not be reduced until August.



**Paths and hardstanding** will be swept clear of grass, leaves and litter after every cut. Hardstanding spaces like washing drying areas will be kept clear of moss, sprayed annually and litter-picked each month.



**Spraying** of weeds is carried out during dry weather in as many areas as possible. We cannot undertake this work when it's raining as it will not be successful.



Strimming and weed spraying cannot be carried out at the same time as it will be ineffective. Weeds should start to die off 7-10 working days after being treated so should not need strimming.

### Reporting issues

You can let us know if you have any concerns about our grounds maintenance service by completing our online form – [www.homesplus.co.uk/gardening-services](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/gardening-services) or by calling our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**.

### Timescales

The schedule below highlights when the work is planned to be completed throughout the year.

	Mar - May	June - Sept	Oct - Nov	Dec - Feb
Grass				
Hedges				
Shrubs				
Hardstanding				

## Safety checks

As your landlord we have important legal duties and obligations. Most of these responsibilities involve safeguarding you, your home and family.

By law, we must carry out a range of safety inspections and it's an important condition of your tenancy that you give us access to your home to carry out this vital work.

### Our essential safety checks include:

- Gas servicing and repairs
- Electrical installation checks and associated repairs
- Solid fuel and oil central heating servicing and repairs
- Managing asbestos
- Solar PV roof panel inspections
- Un-vented cylinders checks
- Fire door safety checks
- Stairlifts and hoists
- Water hygiene
- Fire risk assessments – communal areas and retirement living schemes only

## Gas servicing and repairs

Every year more than 30 people in the UK are killed because of faulty gas fires or appliances in the home. You can't see, smell or taste carbon monoxide but it can kill within minutes.

To keep you safe, every 12 months we undertake a safety check and service any gas appliances in your home to make sure that they are safe.

We also check that appliances are working efficiently, which can help to reduce your energy bills.

This work is carried out by Phoenix Gas Services, our Gas Safe Registered contractor.

## Report it!

If you think you need a gas safety check and service and have not received an appointment from Phoenix, please call our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**.

### Gas safety tips

- 🔥 Never attempt any DIY with gas
- 🔥 Make sure you know where to find your gas meter and how to turn off the gas in an emergency
- 🔥 Never block-up air ventilation points and ensure that the gas flue is always kept clear
- 🔥 Never cover gas appliances
- 🔥 Don't use a gas appliance if you have any doubt that it is not working properly
- 🔥 Report any problems or repairs to our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**

## What should I do if I smell gas?



### DO:

- Call the National Gas Emergency Service immediately on **0800 111 999** who will tell you what to do
- Turn off your gas supply at the meter
- Open your doors and windows
- Keep people away from the area

### DO NOT:

- Turn electrical switches on or off or do anything else that could create an electrical spark
- Smoke
- Use naked flames and put out any that are present

You can find out more on the Cadent website – [www.cadentgas.com](http://www.cadentgas.com)



## DIY and home improvements

**Before making any improvements or alterations to your home it is essential that you obtain written permission from Homes Plus, and any other approvals required, before any work is started.**

It's vital to ensure that the work you want to complete is safe to undertake and will not lead to faulty or sub-standard work, which could put your safety at risk.

Requests for permission need to be made using our online form, which can be found on our website – [www.homesplus.co.uk/diy-and-home-improvements](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/diy-and-home-improvements)

## Electrical testing

**An electrical inspection is carried out every five years, to make sure that any electrical installations in your home are safe for you and your family.**

Our contractors will need clear access to your fuse board and most of your electrical sockets/outlets during the inspection, which takes around two hours to complete.

### Report it!

If you think your home needs an electrical inspection, please call our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**.

### Electrical safety tips

- ⚡ Never attempt any DIY with electricity
- ⚡ Only approved permission requests for electrical alterations can be undertaken by registered and insured electricians
- ⚡ Report any electrical fault or defect to our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**
- ⚡ Only buy reputable goods that meet safety standards, such as CE marked goods



## Meter tampering - report it!

**Every year around 280 people die as a result of meter tampering.**

If you are concerned that an electric or gas meter may have been tampered with to bypass the payment meter in one of our homes or buildings, please urgently report it to our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**. This type of tampering is extremely dangerous and can have disastrous consequences.

You can also report it anonymously to Stay Energy Safe by completing a form on their website – [www.stayenergysafe.co.uk](http://www.stayenergysafe.co.uk) or by calling them on **0800 023 2777**.



# Fire safety in your home

**Did you know that you can contact your local fire and rescue service to get advice on:**

- Fire safety in your home
- Preventing common fires
- Making a fire escape plan
- Electrical safety

You can also book a home visit so that they can make you aware of any potential hazards within your home and offer general fire safety advice.

Below we have also shared some fire safety tips.



## Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service

**Visit:** [www.staffordshirefire.gov.uk](http://www.staffordshirefire.gov.uk)

**Call:** 0800 0241 999

## Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

**Visit:** [www.shropshirefire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk)

**Call:** 01743 260200

## Cut the risk of fire in your home



Stay in the kitchen when cooking, especially if you're cooking with fat.



Never leave children unattended, while they are preparing meals.



Keep electrical appliances clean and in good working order to prevent them triggering a fire.



Use plugs safely – too many in one socket can start a fire.



Always use the charger that came with your phone or tablet. If you need to buy a replacement, choose a branded, genuine product.



Don't leave items continuously on charge, particularly overnight.



When you finish a cigarette, make sure you put it right out – take special care when putting out cigarettes on balconies – just because you are outside, it doesn't mean a fire can't start.



Put candles in a holder and keep them away from things that may burn – never leave them burning when you're not in the room.



A lot of fires start at night – do some checks before you go to bed.



Data source – [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

# Fire safety in apartment buildings

**Nothing is more important to us than the safety of our customers. As a responsible landlord we have an extensive ongoing programme in place to check our buildings and carry out any work required, to ensure that we comply with government regulations and guidance.**

Following the Grenfell tragedy, the government commissioned an Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety. This led to the introduction of a new Building Safety Bill, which received Royal Assent to become an Act of Parliament in May 2022.

## What is covered in this new Building Safety Act?

- The Act particularly focuses on high-risk buildings where the spread of fire or structural defects could lead to the loss of life.
- High-risk buildings are defined by their height and use. This means that all buildings that are at least 18 metres in height or have at least seven storeys, with a minimum of two residential homes, are specifically covered under the new regulations. Care homes are also included.
- A key aspect of this new legislation is resident engagement which will be overseen by a new Building Safety Regulator within the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

## What will it mean for me?

In practical terms, these new government regulations and guidelines have been developed to ensure your safety in the event of a fire in your building.

The new Building Safety Regulator will oversee the safe design, construction and occupation of high-risk buildings so that residents are safe and feel safe. It will be independent and give expert

advice to residents and local regulators, landlords, building owners and the construction industry.

Setting out a stronger role for residents, the Regulator aims to ensure that residents' voices are properly heard and listened to. Residents will also be entitled to receive core information about their building's safety, with the right to request more details.

## What are you doing to ensure the safety of customers living in high-rise buildings?

In line with our safety-first approach, we are appointing Building safety managers for each of our 500+ complex buildings. These managers will be responsible for ensuring the safety of the buildings they manage and its residents.

They will actively engage with residents, encouraging them to get involved and raise any safety concerns they may have, and keep them informed about building safety in an open and transparent way. This information will be available online soon – [www.homesplus.co.uk/HUKYS](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/HUKYS)

**By working together you can help us to keep you safe.**

## Further details

Although the Building Safety Bill is now an Act of Parliament, the final phase of the regime is expected to come into force within the next twelve to eighteen months, so please look out for further updates on our website –

[www.homesplus.co.uk/HUKYS](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/HUKYS), in our customer e-bulletins and in the next edition of this newsletter.



## Fire compartmentation

**Fire compartmentation is the division of a building into smaller subsections using fire-resistant construction materials.** Its purpose is to slow down and contain the spread of fire and smoke.

### Why is it important?

- It saves lives!
- It creates more time for people to evacuate a building by slowing the spread of fire and smoke.
- It provides customers with a safer way to leave a building by preventing exits being blocked.
- It protects firefighters as it makes containing and stopping a fire much easier for them.
- It reduces the risk of fire damage to your property. For example, instead of a fire spreading to the entire building, this fire safety method can limit the damage to small subsections of a building.
- It protects specific rooms or areas in a building. For instance, a laundry room, where there is higher risk of a fire starting, would be made into a separate building compartment.

### How do you maintain the compartmentation of buildings?

- We check the adequacy of fire compartmentation during **fire risk assessments**. If further work is required, this is carried out.
- We ask any contractors working on our behalf to complete a Permit to Work, which ensures their work will not compromise the compartmentation of the building.

### What can I do to help?

- **Do not wedge open your fire doors** as they play a key role in fire compartmentation. If a fire door is wedged open, the whole building will be exposed to the risk of a fire spreading. Even if the rest of the building has measures in place, when fire doors are open the fire will be able to spread.

- **Drilling holes** - it takes seconds for a fire to spread through a hole just the size of a pen nib, so it's vitally important that you do not drill through a compartmentation wall or ceiling. You should also not allow a third-party contractor to do this, without our prior written permission, as any damage caused by drilling must be repaired, and any gaps or holes filled.

### Seeking our permission

If you or your appointed contractor are planning to undertake work that requires any of your ceilings or walls to be drilled, you must seek our prior permission.

Requests for permission need to be made using our online form, which can be found on our website – [www.homesplus.co.uk/diy-and-home-improvements](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/diy-and-home-improvements)

### Report it!

If you have any concerns that the compartmentation of your home or building may have been damaged, please report this to our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**.

## Fire door checks

**We check all fire doors in apartment blocks every six months.**

If your home is in one of these buildings, then please be aware that your doors – including the entrance to your apartment and any store – will be included in this inspection programme.





## Fire safety in communal areas

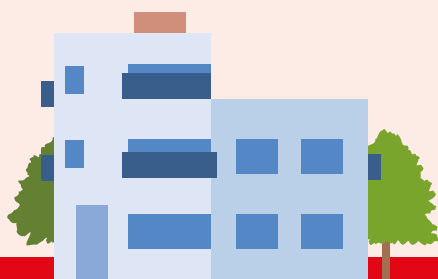
**Keeping our communal areas safe is a priority for us and for our customers.** A fire in a communal area could spread between homes. It could make it more difficult for the emergency services to reach you and might prevent you from leaving the building in an emergency.

Communal areas are places in your building that other people share, like landings, entrance lobbies, corridors, meter cupboards, lifts and open walkways.

If you live in a building that includes communal areas or your home has a balcony, you must ensure that you don't keep or store anything in these spaces that could, in the event of a fire:

- Stop you escaping quickly
- Prevent emergency services reaching you or your neighbours
- Give off toxic smoke or gas when burning
- Explode in high temperatures – such as non-safety glass in picture frames or ornaments
- Cause fire to spread more quickly

We carry out regular safety inspections in apartment blocks. All objects found in communal areas, which may present a fire hazard, will be removed. To find out more please visit our website – [www.homesplus.co.uk/communal-areas](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/communal-areas)



### Top fire safety tips to keep you, your family and neighbours safe

#### Fire doors

Fire doors form part of the fire protection of your building. No alteration or replacement of doors should be made without our written consent. Please do not interfere with or remove any door closing mechanism and never prop open a fire door.



#### Communal cupboards

Cupboards in communal areas must not be used to store any combustible items such as tumble dryers and electrical appliances or other flammable materials, for example, large amounts of cardboard.



#### Barbecues, fuel containers, gas bottles and motorcycles

These pose a significant fire risk and their storage or use are prohibited in apartment blocks or communal areas.



#### Rubbish

Discarded rubbish can be highly flammable. It is a breach of your tenancy to dump rubbish. If rubbish is discarded by you or your visitors, you will be charged for its removal.



#### Mobility scooters

These must be stored and charged in your own apartment, not in communal areas.



#### Smoking

Do not smoke in communal areas. This includes the use of e-cigarettes.



## Contacting Homes Plus



Call **0800 048 8955**



Follow [www.facebook.com/MyHomesPlus](http://www.facebook.com/MyHomesPlus)



Visit [www.homesplus.co.uk](http://www.homesplus.co.uk)



Book an appointment to visit one of our offices by calling **0800 048 8955**

**We are continuing to keep COVID-secure working practices in place.** We believe that this is the safest decision for our customers, staff, and communities. Please visit [www.homesplus.co.uk](http://www.homesplus.co.uk) to find out more.

# Community safety

**The safety and wellbeing of our customers is always our top priority.**

We understand that Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) can have a significant impact on people's mental health and sense of security, as well as harming the local community.

Our dedicated community safety team works closely with our neighbourhood officers, local councils, police and other agencies to ensure that reports of ASB are acted on quickly, to try and reduce incidents of ASB and improve neighbourhood safety.

**During the last 12 months, the team has successfully secured:**

- **Six** ASB evictions
- **Three** ASB possession orders
- **Thirteen** ASB injunctions
- **Four** Section 21 proceedings to end a tenancy

**Four** actions taken for breaching a court injunction or undertaking. This resulted in one customer receiving a four-month prison sentence, one being given a suspended prison sentence and two customers voluntarily ending their tenancies.

They also work with our property team to gain access to homes where essential gas safety checks and electrical inspections are urgently required.

The team successfully gained entry to **1,242** of these homes and obtained **twenty-four** injunctions for properties where access could not be obtained. In the majority of these court cases the customers were ordered to pay the £1,000 case legal fees.

## How to report ASB

If you experience ASB, you can report it 24/7 on our website - [www.homesplus.co.uk/report-asb](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/report-asb). You can also read more about what is - and isn't - classed as ASB, get advice on dealing with issues and find details of other organisations who can offer help and guidance.

Please remember that if you are in immediate danger, you should always call the police on **999**.

## How to make a complaint or give feedback

**We welcome your feedback as we are committed to giving an excellent service to our customers.**

We know that sometimes things go wrong or the service you receive falls short of your expectations. When this happens, we want to hear from you so we can put it right and improve our services to prevent similar problems from happening again.

You can view a copy of our complaints policy and process on our website – [www.homesplus.co.uk/make-a-complaint](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/make-a-complaint) or request a copy from our complaints team by calling **0800 048 8955**.

**You can make a complaint by:**

Completing our online website form at [www.homesplus.co.uk/make-a-complaint](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/make-a-complaint)

Calling our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**

Emailing [feedback@housingplusgroup.co.uk](mailto:feedback@housingplusgroup.co.uk)

Contacting us on Facebook –

[www.facebook.com/MyHomesPlus](https://www.facebook.com/MyHomesPlus)

Writing to **Customer complaints and feedback team, Housing Plus Group, Acton Court, Acton Gate, Stafford, ST18 9AP**

If you live in one of our retirement living communities, you can speak to your retirement living officer for further help and guidance.

## Housing Ombudsman

As a social housing landlord we are members of the Housing Ombudsman scheme and are committed to complying with their complaint handling code.

Visit [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk) to find out more and to access the hub area for residents, where you can read other residents' experiences.

## Care Quality Commission (CQC)

If your complaint relates to a regulatory issue, you can visit the CQC website - [www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk) to find out more.

# Making a positive difference in communities near you

**As part of our promise to make a positive difference to homes, lives and communities, Homes Plus supports a wide range of projects run by voluntary groups and organisations in Staffordshire and Shropshire.**

The Homes Plus My Community fund provides financial help for grassroots and community projects. If you have an idea that will benefit your neighbourhood, or you are involved with a great project in your area, we could provide the funding to help you succeed.



Rotary Club organisers and guests are pictured with our head of neighbourhoods.

## Donation brings back the sound of music

**Musical workshops helping older people to reconnect with their neighbours, have been boosted by sponsorship from the Homes Plus My Community fund.**

Residents in up to 55 retirement living communities in Staffordshire and Shropshire will benefit from the funding for popular sing-along sessions led by a professional entertainer.

Jo Smith, Operational manager responsible for customer engagement and support at Care Plus, explained:

“Social distancing left many people feeling very isolated. It was particularly hard for older people living on their own, who can find it difficult to reconnect with others. Support from the Homes Plus My Community Fund means they can enjoy all the benefits of singing and getting together with friends.”

## Bringing people together for Jubilee fun

**The Rotary Club of Stafford Knot asked for help from the Homes Plus My Community Fund to bring people together to celebrate the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee.**

The community organisation hosted a wonderful lunch to mark the occasion, inviting older people from the area as their special guests.

We joined with other local companies to help cover the costs of the event, ensuring that it was accessible to everyone. The happy group enjoyed a fabulous meal and a lot of laughter before raising their glasses in a toast to the Queen.

We were delighted to drop-in on the lunch to take some pictures.





If these great projects have inspired you to do something amazing in your neighbourhood, we want to hear about your idea. You can apply for sponsorship from the Homes Plus My Community Fund online at [www.homesplus.co.uk/the-my-community-fund](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/the-my-community-fund)

## Help for a community hub in Shropshire

**In lockdown, residents of an estate in Harlescott decided to transform a disused building into a new community hub.**

Nadine is one of the women behind the ambitious project, together with Homes Plus customers Leanne and Amy.

“We rolled-up our sleeves and got busy cleaning, painting and doing as much of the work as we could, ourselves. It’s been a massive project but we’ve had a lot of support from the community and it is incredibly rewarding to see the transformation,” Nadine said.

The building didn’t have a boiler, which meant that there was no heating or hot water. We used to bring kettles from home, so that we could mop



Local residents are pictured with our neighbourhood team colleagues.

the floor and wore our coats indoors while we were working,” remembers Nadine.

Homes Plus stepped in to provide a new boiler, through our My Community Fund.

There is already a lot going on at the new centre, with a busy calendar of activities, from boxercise classes to food share, arts and crafts and family days.

Importantly, everyone finds a warm welcome, thanks to the new boiler.

## Backing for Staffordshire villages

**When Homes Plus was asked to support the Best Kept Village Community Competition in Staffordshire, we were delighted to help.**

A Homes Plus My Community Fund donation is helping organisers run the annual contest and provide prizes for beautiful villages.

The competition encourages residents to improve the areas where they live and has a strong focus on nature and the environment. Participants told us how it helped bring neighbourhoods together and we know that people of all ages enjoy taking part. So of course, it was something we wanted to support.

**We are looking forward to seeing the entries, later in the summer.**



Our head of neighbourhoods, Kevin Davies is pictured with Jo Cooper, business development officer at the Community Foundation.

**My Voice offers you a range of opportunities to share feedback on our services, influence the decisions that are made about your home and improve the way that we work.**

Customers' views are regularly sought through a range of measures including surveys, complaints and feedback, along with our customer-led Scrutiny Group.

### Scrutiny Group update

Our Scrutiny Group customers have been busy working on a range of significant projects over the last few months, including:

- Reviewing our proposed new **lettings policy**, giving detailed feedback on how the policy could be made more customer friendly and outlining everything that should be included from a customers' point of view.
- Evaluating our updated **complaints policy** to make sure it aligns with the latest Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code. The Scrutiny Group has also worked with our complaints manager to look at the reasons why complaints are extended, and review feedback provided by the audit committee, who are responsible for making sure that our internal review procedures are in place. This has led to the complaints information being updated and reworded, to make it more customer friendly and to reflect the needs of our customers.
- Actively working with our **tackling stigma group** to agree that if we genuinely want to tackle the stigma of living in social housing, it needs to start from within Homes Plus. Our people development team is creating new colleague empathy training and has updated our corporate induction programme to include a dedicated section on the importance of treating customers with respect.
- Examining how **tenant satisfaction feedback** is presented to ensure that it is customer friendly and easy to understand.

### Volunteer to get involved

**Involved customers are at the heart of Homes Plus. They ensure that customers' views are taken into account in the way that we are run and the work that we do. By working together as a team, we can change things for the better.**

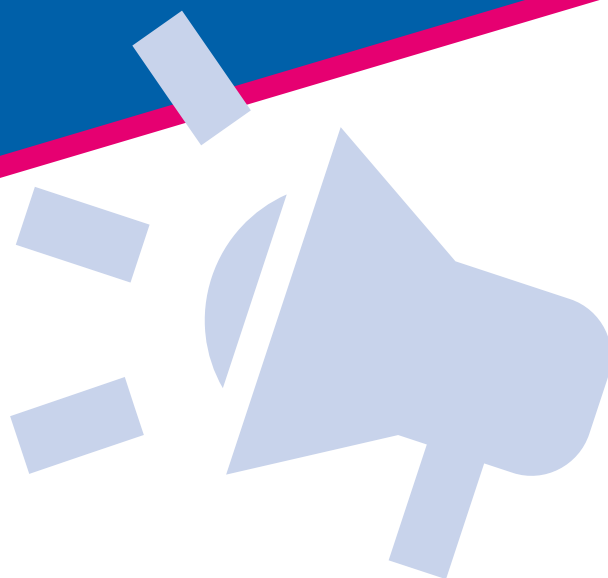
There are lots of ways that you can get involved and make a real difference. Even if you can only spare a small amount of time, we'd love to hear from you. We offer full training and support so that you can take part and develop new skills.

If you want your voice to be heard, why not take that first step and get in touch with us today by:

**Completing our online website form** – [www.homesplus.co.uk/my-voice](http://www.homesplus.co.uk/my-voice)

**Emailing the customer voice team** – [MyVoice@housingplusgroup.co.uk](mailto:MyVoice@housingplusgroup.co.uk)

**Calling the customer voice team** - 0800 048 8955



**You said**

**We did**

**We regularly review customer satisfaction feedback so that we can detect areas where we need to improve. Below are some of the changes that have been made as a result of your feedback.**

## Lettings

**You said**

That customers are not given enough time to decide on the home being offered to them.

We are developing new processes to inform customers of decision deadlines, with confirmation in writing - either by text message or email.

**We are doing**

**You said**

That colleagues are not always helpful and are slow to let customers know when the keys to their new home are going to be ready for collection.

We are developing new processes to inform customers about the progress of an empty property weekly, rather than fortnightly.

**We are doing**

**You said**

That you are not happy with the housing application banding you have been given.

We are working with our involved customers to review and update our Lettings Policy to ensure that it is written in a plain, easy to read language, which makes sense to customers. An at-a-glance key facts sheet to accompany the new policy is being developed.

**We are doing**

We are also introducing a new housing appeals application process within this policy, to offer customers an alternative way of appealing rather than through our formal complaints process.

## Neighbourhoods

**You said**

That we do not provide help with trees that are causing problems within customers' gardens.

We are developing a new process for managing problem trees in a customer's garden, where they pose a risk to the property and/or the people living at the property.

**We are doing**

## Repairs and maintenance

**You said**

That we need to improve communication around repairs and maintenance at your home.

We have introduced a new repairs appointment card which will be left with a customer if any follow-on work is needed to complete the repair. This appointment card will reassure customers that a return visit has been booked and explain why we were unable to complete the repair during the first visit.

**We did**

**You said**

That complaint responses for property repairs were not meeting agreed timescale targets if a property inspection was required.

Property Plus, who delivers the repairs and maintenance services to our customers, has appointed a dedicated complaints inspector to speed up the inspection process for repair complaints.

**We did**





**As a responsible landlord, the safety of our customers is our priority.**

We want to make sure that you know how to get help and advice if you're worried about a possible safeguarding problem in your neighbourhood.

Safeguarding means protecting the rights of an adult or child to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. Abuse and neglect can take place at home or in a public place and can take a lot of

different forms, including domestic and sexual abuse, physical, psychological and discriminatory abuse, human trafficking and slavery.

It's often difficult to identify abuse or neglect but if you have any concerns, always Speak Up. You can report a safeguarding concern to your local council:

[www.staffordshire.gov.uk](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk)

Tel: 0345 604 2719

[www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk)

Tel: 0345 678 9021

[www.telford.gov.uk](http://www.telford.gov.uk)

Tel: 01952 385385



## Useful contact numbers

**General property, heating and hot water repairs, rent payment, debt advice and fault reporting**  
**0800 048 8955**

(Homes Plus customer services)

**Gas servicing**  
**01782 564448**

(Phoenix Gas Services)

**Gas leaks**  
**0800 111 999**

(National Gas Emergency Service)

**Health and sickness help and advice**

**111** (NHS Direct)

**Police 101** (non-emergency)

**Personal concerns, worries and troubles**

**116 123** (Samaritans)

### Councils

**South Staffordshire District Council** 01902 696000

**Stafford Borough Council** 01785 619000

**Shropshire Council** 0345 678 9000

**Telford and Wrekin Council** 01952 380000

### MPs

**Lucy Allan MP**

Telford - 020 7219 4815  
lucy.allan.mp@parliament.uk

**Theo Clarke MP**

Stafford - 020 7219 3000  
theo.clarke.mp@parliament.uk

**Daniel Kawczynski MP**

Shrewsbury & Atcham  
020 7219 6249  
daniel.kawczynski.mp@parliament.uk

**Amanda Milling MP**

Cannock Chase - 020 7219 8356  
amanda.milling.mp@parliament.uk

**Helen Morgan MP**

North Shropshire - 020 7219 6104  
helen.morgan.mp@parliament.uk

**Mark Pritchard MP**

The Wrekin - 020 7219 8494  
pritchardm@parliament.uk

**Gavin Williamson MP**

South Staffordshire  
020 7219 7245  
gavin.williamson.mp@parliament.uk

## Contacting Homes Plus

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