

Your Local Offer for Tenancy Services

Introduction

This leaflet explains the how North Lincolnshire Homes will deliver tenancy services to customers so that you know what to expect from these services. It also sets out the service standards that we must meet, explains how these are monitored and what happens if we don't meet the standards.

Finding a new home

We aim to let homes fairly, giving everyone the opportunity to find the right home and giving priority to those in most need of housing. We are members of the Homechoicelincs choice based lettings scheme along with Shoreline Housing Association and Longhurst & Havelock Housing Association. This scheme enables customers to apply for available homes throughout North and North East Lincolnshire and all the landlords involved follow the same lettings policy. This makes sure that everyone is treated in the same way no matter where they want to live or which landlord they prefer.

You can apply for housing through the Homechoicelincs scheme by filling in an application form online or in any of the participating landlords' offices. Your application will be assessed and placed into one of four priority bands (categories) depending upon your circumstances and housing need. Existing tenants who are overcrowded, people who are homeless and people with medical problems get extra priority under the scheme.

Available homes are advertised each week on the website, on digital tv and in the offices of the participating landlords. You can bid for any property that you are interested in and make as many bids as you like each week. When all the bids have been received, each property will be matched to the most suitable bidder and they will be offered the property.

We advertise the outcome of all lettings on the website, on digital tv and in the offices of the participating landlords.

Under-occupiers incentive scheme

We may offer incentives to tenants in larger homes to encourage them to move to a smaller home. Please contact us for further information.

Managing empty homes

We aim to repair and let empty homes within 28 days unless major improvement work is needed or there is no demand for the property. Whilst properties are empty, we will make sure that they are kept safe, tidy and secure and we will make sure that every home meets our Quality Lettable Standard before being offered to a prospective tenant.

Rent and service charges

We set our rents following the Governments rent setting policy which ensures that they remain affordable and compare with other social landlords in the area. Rents are reviewed once a year in April and increases are calculated using the Government's rent setting formula. This means that increases are limited to no more than the rate of inflation plus

0.5% plus no more than £2.17 per week until 2012. The Government's policy says that after 2012, rents will increase by the rate of inflation plus 0.5% each year.

Some tenants pay for extra services such as lighting and cleaning of communal areas, communal heating or a support service. Any service charge costs are set out in your Tenancy Agreement.

We send each tenant a rent statement four times a year so that you can keep track of your rent account and payments to us.

There are many ways that you can pay your rent to us including by direct debit, by swipe card at any Post Office or Paypoint outlet by credit or debit card over the telephone and over the internet.

Rent arrears

If you have difficulty in paying your rent, please contact us for help and advice as soon as possible. If you fall behind with your rent payments, we will contact you to find out what the problem is and make an agreement with you to repay the arrears. If you ignore the problem or don't stick to an agreement to repay the arrears, we will take action that could ultimately mean the loss of your home.

Housing benefit and other help

You may be able to get help with paying your rent if you are entitled to Housing Benefit. We can provide advice and help you to claim Housing and other benefits. We can also help you get debt counselling and access to bank accounts and affordable credit.

Please contact us for further information.

Your tenancy agreement

Your tenancy agreement is the legal document that sets out your rights and responsibilities as a tenant. It tells you what you must do, such as paying the rent, looking after your home and not causing a nuisance to other people. It also explains what we must do such as carrying out repairs that are our responsibility.

Tenant Reward Scheme

Tenants who have clear rent account, no other tenancy breaches and who look after their homes can apply to be members of the Tenant Reward Scheme. Every three months we hold a prize draw where members have chance to win one of 10 prizes of £125.

Assignment and succession

Tenants have the right to pass on their tenancy to a partner or close family member if they die or under some other circumstances. The rules are explained in your tenancy agreement and you can contact us for further advice. We will respond to applications to take over or pass on tenancies within 20 days.

Mutual exchange

Assured tenants have the right to apply to exchange their tenancy with another tenant. You can advertise for an exchange in local press, in shops or online. But you must get our written permission to exchange before you move. We will respond to mutual exchange applications within 28 days.

Tenancy Support

We provide specialist support for older people and young tenants who are managing a home for the first time. Support can include helping people apply for benefits, set and manage a budget, get help to look after their home and garden and to be able to look after themselves.

Home insurance

We have teamed up with Allianz Insurance plc to offer low cost home insurance to tenants and leaseholders.

How residents have been involved in developing the service.

A wide range of residents and stakeholders have been involved in developing tenancy services including setting the service standards that we work to. Delegates at the tenant conference gave feedback on how well they thought that NLH performed against the TSA's regulatory requirements and suggested ways of improving the service. Focus groups of residents helped to review rent statements and to develop the choice based lettings and tenant incentive schemes. We have also looked at information gathered through satisfaction surveys, complaints and other feedback, and consulted with tenant groups including Community Voice.

Service Standards – we will:

- Advertise available homes through Homechoicelincs every week
- Repair and let empty homes within 28 days
- Make sure all empty homes are brought up to our Quality Lettable Standard
- Visit new tenants within the first 6 weeks to make sure everything is going well
- Send every tenant a rent statement 4 times a year
- Offer a low cost home contents insurance scheme to tenants and leaseholders
- Respond to applications to take over or pass on tenancies within 20 days
- Respond to mutual exchange applications within 28 days

How the service standards are monitored, reported on and scrutinised by tenants

We monitor our progress in meeting the service standards by checking our records lettings, empty homes and tenancy change applications. We also ask our Tenant Inspectors to carry out reality checks and mystery shopping, and look at complaints and feedback we receive from customers.

Every 3 months we publish a newsletter to customers that tells them how we are performing against each service standard. We also provide reports to the Board, the Resident Scrutiny Panel and Community Voice. These reports are published on our website and printed copies are available on request.

The Resident Scrutiny Panel can decide to carry out an investigation into any service area and will provide their findings and recommendations directly to the Board.

What happens if the standards are not met?

If we do not meet our service standards, the Board will make sure that an action plan is implemented to improve performance and will closely oversee progress. If you think that we have not met our service standards in your case, please tell us so that we can put things right.

How the service will be reviewed in future

We will carry out a comprehensive review of our Tenancy Management and Anti-social behaviour services by March 2011. The findings from the review may change the way in which we provide the service. You could be involved in the review by filling in a survey, attending a focus group or giving your views about draft documents. Please contact us if you would like to find out more.

Jargon buster/key terms

Tenant Services Authority	The organisation that regulates social housing providers in England on behalf of the Government
Local Offer	An explanation of the service that customers can expect to receive
Service Standard	A measurable target that the service must meet

Further Information

You can find further information about this service by contacting us, looking on our website or reading the following leaflets:

- Homechoicelincs – your guide
- Paying rent and other charges
- Claiming Housing Benefit
- Your Tenancy Agreement explained
- Starter Tenancies
- Supporting you in your home
- Mutual exchange
- Quality lettable standards

Contact information

North Lincolnshire Homes Limited

Meridian House, Normanby Road, Scunthorpe, North Lincolnshire, DN15 8QZ

Customer Centre

15 – 19 Cole Street, Scunthorpe, North Lincolnshire, DN15 6QY

Opening hours: Monday, Tuesday and Thursday – 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., Wednesday – 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., Friday 9.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. and Saturday 9.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

Contact Centre

Telephone 01724 279900

Freephone 0800 0326363

Opening hours Monday to Friday - 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m.

Or call into to one of our Housing Advice Sessions:

Barton Local Link: every Monday (09.30am to 12.00pm, 1.00pm to 4.00pm)

Winterton Local Link: every Tuesday (2.00pm to 5.00pm)

Epworth Local Link: every Wednesday (09.30am to 12.30pm) and Friday (2.00pm to 4.00pm)

Crowle Local Link: every Wednesday (2.00pm to 3.30pm) and Friday (09.30am to 12.30pm)

Brigg Local Link: every Thursday (09.30am to 12.00pm, 1.00pm to 4.00pm)

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