

Repairs **HANDBOOK**



Contents

Important information	3	Supporting vulnerable tenants	14
Emergencies and contact numbers	4	Asbestos	14
How to report a repair	5	Looking after your home	15
The repairs process	6	Winter checks	15
Repair service standards		Insurance	15
Repairs timescales	7	Damp and condensation growth	16
How repairs are prioritised	7	Smoke detectors	16
Repair priorities	8	Communal fire safety	16
Right to repair	9	Dealing with blockages	17
Repair responsibilities	10	Leaking, burst or frozen pipes	18
If things go wrong/complaints	12	Bleeding radiators	18
Improvements and alterations	13	Our contractors	19
Adaptations for those living with disabilities	13	Handbook versions	19
Rechargeable works	14	Emergency contacts	20

Important information

Boiler checks

Important equipment	Where is it?
Mains water stopcock (to stop water flow)	
Consumer unit and trip switch (electrics)	
Gas supply tap	
Central heating boiler	
Cold water storage tank	
Hot water tank	

Gas safety check dates

Emergencies

Fire

- Dial **999**. If living in a block of flats, follow the fire action plan. If living in other property types, get everyone out if it safe to do so and do not go back for any reason
- Close all doors and windows
- Warn your neighbours if any of them might be in danger

If you smell gas

- Open the doors and windows to allow gas to escape
- Check to see if the gas has been left on unlit, or a pilot light has gone out. If so, turn the appliance off, and do not try to relight it until all smell of gas has been cleared
- If the leak cannot be stopped by turning off an appliance, or you are uncertain whether it has been stopped, turn the main gas supply off at the meter and phone the gas emergency service immediately on **0800 111 999**
- Do not turn any electrical switches on or off
- Do not use the door bell
- Do not smoke
- Do not use matches, lighters or naked

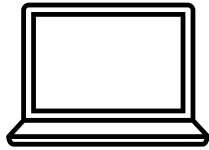
Burst or leaking pipes

- Turn the water off at the mains
- If electrics are affected, turn off the electricity at the consumer unit
- Call our repairs service on **01233 330366**

Loss of electricity

- If neighbours are also affected, contact your electricity company
- If it is just your home affected check there is enough credit on the meter and the bills are paid
- Check your consumer unit or fuse box - it will either have fuses or trip switches
- If a switch has tripped to the OFF position put them back to the ON position
- If the switch trips again, you need to identify which appliance on that circuit is causing a problem - do this by unplugging all appliances in the circuit area that is tripping and plug them back in one by one until it trips again. If the appliance is ours, report the repair
- If the problem persists call our repairs service on **01233 330366**

How to report a repair



Online

Use our webpage to report non-urgent repairs. There is a step-by-step picture guide to assist. Photographs of your issue can be uploaded

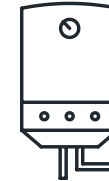
www.ashford.gov.uk/report-a-repair



Telephone

Our customer service team are available to call between 8.30am-4pm on **01233 330366**

We also provide an out of hours service on the same telephone number



Heating & Hot water

For heating and hot water repairs, please contact our contractor, Swale Heating on **0800 206 1371**

Or, via their website www.swaleheating.com



Email

General non-emergency repairs:
housing.repairs@ashford.gov.uk

For heating and hot water repairs:
enquiries@swaleheating.com



Tenants Portal

Register as a user to our Tenants Portal and report your repair directly through the app

www.ashford.gov.uk/tenants-portal



My Ashford app

Register as a user to the My Ashford app and report your repair using this portal to all council services

www.ashford.gov.uk/myashford

The repairs process

1. Before contacting us

Check to see whose responsibility the repair belongs to (see page 11)

Note down any information you will need to give us

2. Reporting

Provide as much detail of the repair as possible

Your contact details

Times/days you are available for a repair appointment

3. Job logged

The repair is recorded on our systems and is allocated to our repairs team or appropriate contractor

4. Appointment made

Appointment confirmed between you and the repairs team

More complex repairs may require a housing or technical officer to assess the works

5. Work carried out

Repairs team to attend repair

6. Work complete

Work completed and job closed

Satisfaction survey and feedback about the service

Repair timescales

How repairs are prioritised

Some repairs can be more important than others. When a problem threatens health and safety, your wellbeing, or the property itself, it will be deemed to be an emergency.

Non-emergency repairs are categorised as routine. If the problem is severely inconvenient, it will be prioritised, such as repairs set out by the Right to Repair (see page 9). Less-urgent repairs will have longer timescales.

Where maintenance can be planned in advance, you will be contacted to make arrangements for works to be carried out.

Work undertaken for emergency call outs may be limited to making safe, with further works arranged by appointment.

The following shows the expected repair response times we aim for based on category:

Repair type	Expected response time
Emergency	2 - 24 hours
Routine - Priority	Within 7 days
Routine - General	Within 28 working days
Routine - Planned	Within 90 days
Planned maintenance	Agreed in advance

Repair priorities

Below are examples of how certain repairs would be categorised and their expected response times:

<p>Emergency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe roof leaks • Burst pipes • Blocked drains • Blockage of only toilet • Loss of electrical power/light • Loss of gas • Loss of heating in cold weather when other heating unavailable 	<p>Routine Priority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partial loss of electrical power/light • Unsafe power, sockets or electrical fittings • Partial loss of water or gas supply • Taps which cannot be turned • Leaking roofs • Insecure external windows 	<p>Routine General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor problems with toilets, baths, sinks • Doors or windows sticking • Plaster repairs • Brickwork • Non-urgent internal/external repairs 	<p>Routine Planned</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearing gutters • Window/door seal replacement 	<p>Planned maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External painting • Boiler replacements • Replacing windows and doors • Bathroom/kitchen upgrades • Annual servicing of gas appliances and central heating • Inspection and testing of appliances
<p>2- 24 hours</p>	<p>Within 7 days</p>	<p>Within 28 working days</p>	<p>Within 90 days</p>	<p>Agreed in advance</p>

Right to repair

We have a legal obligation to complete some types of repair works within a certain timescale. These works are called ‘qualifying repairs’. When you report a qualifying repair, we will tell you who will do the repair and when it should be completed by. If these repairs are not completed after two requests, and you have provided full access, you may be entitled to compensation.

Repair Type	Response time (working days)
Total loss of electric power	1
Partial loss of electric power	3
Unsafe power or lighting socket, or electrical fitting	1
Total loss of water supply	1
Partial loss of water supply	3
Total/partial loss of gas supply	1
Blocked flue to open fire/boiler	1
Heating/hot water not working - 31 October - 1 May	1
Heating/hot water not working - 30 April - 1 November	3
Blocked/leaking foul drain/soil stack or toilet (if no other working toilet)	1
Toilet not flushing (if only toilet in property)	1
Blocked sink, bath or basin (in special circumstances)	3
Tap cannot be turned	3
Leak from water pipe/tank/cistern	1
Leaking roof	7
Insecure external window/door/lock	1
Loose/detached banister/hand rail	3
Rotten timber flooring/stair tread	3
Door entry phone not working	7
Mechanical extractor fan not working in kitchen/bathroom	7

Repair responsibilities

Our responsibilities and obligations

As your landlord, we have a legal duty to carry out certain repairs when these are needed. As legislation changes, the responsibility for specific repairs may also change. This means that we may have carried out certain repairs in the past, but because of changes in the law, this may change whose responsibility it is.

We are obliged to keep the structure and exterior of your home and the building in which it is situated in good repair. We also undertake to keep in good repair and proper working order installations for water, gas and electricity supply, for sanitation and for room and water heating. This includes annual gas safety and regular electrical safety inspections.

In the case of flats and maisonettes, we will take reasonable care to keep common entrances, halls, stairways, lifts, passageways, rubbish chutes and any other common parts in reasonable repair.

Our responsibilities and obligations

You are responsible for keeping your home in a reasonable condition and for attempting to solve minor problems. You are also responsible for insuring your personal belongings.

You are expected to take reasonable precautions to prevent damage to the property by fire, frost, bursting of water pipes or the blocking of drains and sinks.

You must provide access each year for the registered gas inspector's safety check visit.

We rely on you to report any faults promptly and as fully and accurately as possible. Be sure to provide access to our team or contractors at the appointed time to ensure that a repair can be undertaken.

Check the contractor's ID and confirm with them the work that needs to be done. Keep the area clear of furniture, pets or children where necessary.

Please make sure that the property is clean, tidy, reasonably decorated and that all of your unwanted belongings are cleared if you decide to move home.

Our repair responsibilities

Below is a list of some of the most common repairs the council is responsible for:

- Aids and adaptations
- Blockages not caused by residents
- Central heating
- Communal repairs
- External decoration
- External doors
- Electrical wiring
- Extractor fans
- Fences (bordering public highways/footpaths)
- Fire doors
- Floors (not floor coverings)
- Boilers
- Glazing (not broken by accident/misuse)
- Guttering
- Hot water
- Insulation
- Light switches
- Plaster finishing
- Radiators
- Roofs
- Seals/tiling around bath, basin, worktops
- Stairs
- Stopcocks
- Taps (internal)
- Toilet pan and cisterns
- Vermin, rats, birds, squirrels
- Windows (frames, sills, vents)

Your repair responsibilities

Below is a list of the main repairs that are not provided by the council:

- Blockages of internal wastes and drains
- Cookers, including installation or disconnection
- Curtain poles, rails
- Electricity and gas meters
- Fences (between properties)
- Floor coverings e.g. carpet, laminate
- Forced entry damage
- Garden maintenance
- Insects, ants, wasps, fleas, bed bugs
- Internal decoration
- Internal doors
- Items installed by/gifted to tenants
- Key replacements
- Locks
- Light bulbs, plugs, fuses
- Limescale removal
- Plug chains to baths, sinks and basins
- Smoke alarm battery replacement
- Taps (external)
- Toilet seats
- TV and telecoms equipment

If things go wrong

We aim to deliver an excellent service and home, however sometimes things can go wrong. In the first instance, please get in touch with our repairs team to discuss the issue. We will always try to put something right where we can.

However, if you are unhappy with our response or actions taken to put something right, a complaint can be raised.

The Housing Ombudsman provides useful advice on complaints and housing matters. More details can be found on their website www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk or by calling **0300 111 3000**.

Raising a complaint



Online via our website
www.ashford.gov.uk/complaints



Via our call centre telephone line on **01233 331111**



Via post to Complaints, Ashford Borough Council,
Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PL



Via email to complaints@ashford.gov.uk

Mediation

Unfortunately, sometimes landlords and tenants have disagreements. Mediation can be the quickest way to reach a resolution that works for both parties and it may be offered if you are unhappy with our service.

In certain circumstances, if we fail to meet satisfactory standards resulting in material loss or serious inconvenience, you can apply for compensation. More information regarding our complaints procedure and policy can be found online at www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-complaints-procedure

Improvements and alterations

Before you make any improvements or alterations to your home, you must contact us to obtain permission. You may also require planning permission or building control approval too.. You must also inform us if you have carried out previous home alterations without permission. An inspection may be required to decide whether there has been any damage to the property and if it still meets building standards. We have the right to charge you for any damage to the property and for the full cost of returning the property to its original standards if we decide this is appropriate.

Examples of the most common alterations are:

- Moving/removing fitted units or doors
- Modifications to central heating
- Plumbing in washing machines or other appliances
- Building patios
- Knocking down walls
- Double glazing
- Enclosing porches
- Extensions
- Installing a conservatory
- Fitting a gas fire
- Fitting different light switches

You do not need to get written consent for 'small jobs' or jobs which do not affect the landlords fixtures and fittings. If you would like any information about alterations or are unsure if you need permission for the work you are planning please contact planned.maintenance@ashford.gov.uk or call **01233 330688**

To apply for consent and for more information please visit www.ashford.gov.uk/tenant-alterations

Adaptations for those living with disabilities

If you are registered disabled, or could be, and would like to apply for adaptations to be made to your home, you will need to contact an occupational therapist who will need to support your request to ensure that any major adaptations fully meet your needs. You can contact an occupational therapist via the Kent Assessment and Enabling team on **03000 416161**.

We will consider all requests for adaptations that we receive from your occupational therapist. If you have any queries relating to adaptation work please contact us at disabled. adaptations@ashford.gov.uk

Rechargeable works

We expect that, as time passes, normal wear and tear will occur to your home. However we will charge for costs (a recharge) for repairs and maintenance if they are required because of misuse, neglect or damage, or where we undertake repairs that are not our responsibility.

If you wish to arrange for your own repair or alteration you will need our written approval before doing so. All recharge costs incur an additional 12.5% administration fee to the net cost of the repair.

Examples of recharges include:

- Clearing blocked toilets
- Changing locks due to lost keys
- Correcting any substandard or unauthorised works not carried out by us
- Cost of removal and/disposal of any possessions or rubbish left in properties when vacated after termination of the tenancy

Supporting vulnerable tenants

If you are elderly, vulnerable or have a disability and there is no other member of your household or family who can help, we may be able to assist with decorating certain rooms or maintaining your garden.

Please get in touch with your Neighbourhood Housing Officer to discuss.

Asbestos

Asbestos can sometimes be found in the exterior of buildings, interior workings of boilers/plumbing, or in other areas such as textured ceiling coatings used in the 1900s.

Where asbestos materials in a home are in good condition and unlikely to be disturbed, they do not present a risk. However, where materials are in poor condition or are disturbed or damaged, asbestos fibres can be released into the air, which, if breathed in, can cause serious lung diseases, including cancers.

If there is a concern of asbestos, the team will carry out an inspection prior to any repair works taking place.

Looking after your home

You are responsible for keeping the inside of your home in good condition. To help do this, it is best to carry out small tasks and checks to prevent future problems such as:

- Regularly wiping down windows affected by condensation. If any mould has formed clean off using a wash of diluted bleach or appropriate product
- Removing limescale from baths, sinks, shower heads and taps with descaler
- Preventing blockages in kitchen and bathroom sink waste pipes by flushing through with drain clearing products. Never pour cooking oil into sinks as it can clog pipes
- Preventing blockages in toilets by only flushing toilet paper
- Keeping outside gullies clear of leaves and other debris so that water drains away easily
- Ensuring you know where the main water stopcock is and how to turn off your electricity or gas supply in an emergency. Details are supplied at the front of this handbook, but please double-check with us if you are unsure

Winter checks

In Autumn, please check the following items and let us know if there are any problems ahead of the colder season.

- If you have an open fire has the chimney been swept? - this is normally the tenant's responsibility
- Are all of your heating controls set and your boiler and hot water working correctly?
- Are there any tiles or slates missing/broken on your roof?
- Are there any blockages or leaks from gutters or downpipes?

Insurance

We recommend that you take out contents insurance for your belongings in your home as it can cost a lot of money and take time to replace items if they are damaged or stolen.

We have teamed up with Thistle Tenant Risks who can offer a contents policy specifically for tenants. Please see our website www.ashford.gov.uk/home-contents-insurance for further information or contact your Housing Officer. Other insurance companies are also available.

Damp and condensation

Condensation occurs when there is an excessive build up of moisture in the air. Warm moist air condenses and forms water when it touches a cool surface like an external wall, window or even clothes.

If this condensation cannot dry out it could cause mould to form on walls, in cupboards and on window sills. It could also lead to mildew forming on clothes.

There are some things that help stop condensation forming:

- Produce less moisture by covering pans when cooking, dry clothes outside where possible or in a well ventilated room
- Ventilate to let the moisture out, by opening bathroom/ kitchen windows for a while, or using an extractor fan
- Keep your home warm by at least keeping a low background heat. This need not result in significantly increased heating costs
- Wipe down where moisture settles

Any damp or mould concerns can be reported using any of the methods on page 5 of this handbook or emailing damphelp@ashford.gov.uk

Smoke detectors

Smoke detectors need to be cleaned and tested regularly to make sure they will operate effectively.

Most smoke detectors can be cleaned using a soft brush adaptor on the end of a vacuum cleaner. It is important that they should remain free from dust and grease. Care should be taken not to damage any of the internal parts. Never allow a smoke detector connected to mains electricity to get wet.

Fire safety in communal areas

Fire Safety Regulations state that items should not be kept in communal areas of flats. This is due to fire risk from items that could catch alight and fuel a fire, as well as potentially preventing residents from being able to safely evacuate the building.

All items that are deemed a risk will be removed from communal areas. Tenants will be given prior notice to remove items themselves.

It is particularly important that any lithium batteries from items such as electrical scooters, bikes or mobility vehicles are not charged in communal areas due to fire risk.

Dealing with blockages

Blockages are usually caused by objects such as nappies, toys, sanitary towels or wipes. If a blockage happens as a result of these objects getting stuck, we may charge you for clearing it. You should try to unblock this yourself to avoid being recharged.

To unblock a toilet do the following:

- If the pan is already full, remove some of the water into a bucket using a scoop, for example a jug or a bowl
- Push a plunger to the bottom of the pan. Pump it up and down vigorously about 10 times. This creates a pressure vacuum, which may shift the blockage
- When the blockage has disappeared, pour water from a bucket into the pan and see if it clears
- You may need to repeat this process several times before the toilet flushes normally

If there is no improvement after a couple of tries, you should contact us.

Thoroughly wash your hands and all equipment after you have finished.

Blockages to a kitchen sink, basin or bath waste pipes are usually caused by a build-up of fat, tea leaves, food debris or hair in the waste trap. The trap is the pipework directly under the bath, basin or sink. It always holds some water, which stops air and foul smells coming back up the pipe.

To unblock a sink/basin/bath:

- Remove most of the water, so the sink is half full
- Wet a rag/some cloth and hold it tightly over the overflow opening
- Place a plunger over the plug hole and pump up and down rapidly

If the sink, basin or bath remains blocked after trying these methods the blockage may be in the soil stack or main drain. We will need to clear this so please contact us.

To stop an overflow on a toilet:

If the toilet cistern is overflowing try lifting the float to close the ball valve. If this stops the overflow, try to tie it up to keep the valve closed.

Leaking, burst or frozen pipes

If electrics get wet

DO NOT TOUCH and turn off electricity at the meter.

When pipes leak

Place a dish/bowl underneath the leak. Pull back any carpets and lay down towels to absorb any water.

When pipes burst

Turn off water at the main stopcock and any gate valves from the water tank. Switch off any water heaters. Open all the taps to drain water from the system.

When ceilings bulge

To prevent the ceiling falling down, place a bucket under the bulge and pierce a small hole to let water through.

Prevent pipes freezing

If you are going away for a few days in winter, lower the setting on your central heating room thermostat but leave the heating on.

Bleeding radiators

If the top part of a radiator is cold while the bottom is warm, there is air trapped in the system. Bleeding the radiator releases this air. **DO NOT** bleed radiators if you have a combination boiler (one with a pressure gauge or low pressure light).

Turn off your heating system and wait for the radiator to cool down. Locate the bleed valve (small square nut) at the side, insert a radiator key and turn it slowly anticlockwise until you hear a hissing sound. When water starts to trickle out, re-tighten the bleed valve. Hold a small cup underneath the valve when doing this to catch any water. **DO NOT** unscrew the valve completely.

Gas and electricity safety

Never tamper with the electricity company's fuse, meter or seals.

Ensure that you are familiar with the location of your gas mains and electrical trip switches and consumer units. Use the emergency contact details and guidance at the front and back of this handbook if an emergency occurs.

Our contractors

Most of our responsive repairs service is carried out by our in-house team, however we also use contractors to provide specialist services.

All contractors representing the council are there to provide the service as if we were carrying it out in-house. They must also show ID, be polite and courteous and do a good job.

If for any reason you are unhappy with their work, please contact the repairs team and let them know.

Repair type	Contractor
General repairs	ABC Repairs
Electrics	ABC Electrical
Heating and gas	Swale Heating
Cleaning of communal areas	Calibre Cleaning
Landscaping/grounds maintenance	Aspire Landscape Management

Handbook versions

We offer repairs handbooks in other formats such as in different languages or large print. Please get in touch with your Neighbourhood Housing Officer via email on housing@ashford.gov.uk or **01233 330688**. Or contact the Repairs team using the details for on page 5, to request a copy.

A more detailed version of the content of this handbook can be viewed and a version downloaded from our website www.ashford.gov.uk/repairs-handbook

Emergency contacts

Fire

In the event of a fire call **999**

Gas

If you smell gas call **0800 111 999**

Loss of water or loss of water supply

Call South East Water on **0333 000 0002**

Electricity lack of supply call

0800 072 7282



Published by Ashford Borough Council Jan 2024

01233 330366

www.ashford.gov.uk/report-a-repair