



# Welcome to your **new home**





# Contents

**01**

Moving in



Home improvements

**15**

**02**

Getting set up



Adaptations

**16**

**03**

Paying your rent



Community engagement

**17**

**05**

Benefits and Financial support



Ending your tenancy

**19**

**07**

Rights and Responsibilities



Feedback

**21**

**09**

Access and Conduct guidelines



Useful contacts

**22**

**11**

Living in your neighbourhood



Your notes

**23**

Residents should note that the information contained within this handbook is supported by the Gravesham Borough Council's policies.

# Moving in

Now that you have your keys, you can start to set up your new home.

It's also important to note down your tenancy reference number. This will be used in a lot of our communication to you and it's needed for rent payments.

**My rent account number:**

## Keep your keys safe!



We do not hold spare keys and lock changes are tenants' responsibility!



## Be safe and secure

You should not let anyone into your home unless you are satisfied, they are who they say they are. All Gravesham Borough Council staff and contractors employed by us carry identification.



# Getting set up



## Don't risk it — protect what matters!

Household contents insurance is your responsibility as a tenant. Make sure your belongings are covered against theft, fire, and damage.

Make sure you take meter readings for gas, electricity and, where installed, water meters as soon as you are given the keys to the property. Then get in touch with key organisations to set up your accounts for:

- Gas
- Electric
- Water
- Council tax
- Internet/phone
- TV Licence

If you have gas central heating or a gas fire, these works are carried out by Sureserve. Appointments can be made by contacting Sureserve on 01795 509651.



You may find it useful to visit our website for more information  
[www.gravesham.gov.uk](http://www.gravesham.gov.uk)

# Paying your rent

Paying your rent is important. Your rent is due weekly in advance. If you prefer to pay monthly, you must pay in advance to avoid rent arrears.

A letter containing your tenancy bar code should arrive within a week of your tenancy starting, and this shows the full rent due for the property.

Your bar code is a unique identifier for your tenancy and will enable you to make payments to the account.

*Rent helps us take care of your home.  
Thank you for paying on time!*





# Ways to pay

We have several different options for you to pay your rent. The easiest option is to set up a direct debit, that way you can forget about having to do it manually each month as it will happen automatically. However, we know this isn't possible for everyone, so here are all the ways you can pay.

## Direct Debit



Paying your bill by Direct Debit is quick, easy, safe and secure. It means you sign up once and you don't have to worry about it again. You can sign up using our online form at [www.gravesham.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholders/rent](http://www.gravesham.gov.uk/council-tenants-leaseholders/rent) and select "Set up Direct Debit".



## E-payments

You can pay your rent online using a credit or debit card. E-payments can be made via [www.gravesham.gov.uk/payonline](http://www.gravesham.gov.uk/payonline).



## Bank Transfer

Account number 54599860  
Sort code 30-93-60  
Please quote your rent account number in the reference field.



## By Phone

Our automated telephone number 01474 337 788.



## Post Office & PayPoint

Take your rent bar code to any PayPoint outlet or Post Office.



## Standing Order

Account number 54599860  
Sort code 30-93-60  
Please quote your rent account number in the reference field.

# Benefits & Financial support



## Housing Benefit & Universal credit

The purpose of housing benefit and Universal Credit is to help people on low incomes pay their rent. When calculating any entitlement your income, capital and family circumstances will be considered.

To pay housing benefit all of these conditions must be satisfied:

- A valid claim has been made.
- You must be responsible for paying rent for your home.
- You are living in your home.
- Your capital does not exceed £16,000.

If eligible for help, you can claim benefits for housing. You can find out more information regarding benefits via our website [www.gravesham.gov.uk](http://www.gravesham.gov.uk)

You can apply for Universal Credit online via Universal Credit. How to claim - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))





# Help with your finances

If you are struggling to pay your rent, here are some options to consider:

- Pay your rent by another method if this helps you make regular payments, for example, set up a direct debit, arrange for direct payment from your benefits or Universal Credit.
- Obtain money advice from Citizens Advice Bureau. Details of this service are below.
- Contact us on 01474 337000 as we will be able to offer help, support and advice. We will work with you to come to a suitable arrangement.



## Debt counselling

We can refer you to debt counselling services. They can help with:

- Dealing with rent and council tax arrears.
- Sorting out other debts.
- Making sure you are getting all the benefits you are entitled to.
- Court procedures if you are threatened with court action.

The Citizens Advice Bureau can be contacted on 0808 278 7810, available Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm.

National Debtline is a debt advice charity run by Money Advice Trust who can give you free debt advice. They can be contacted on 0808 808 4000 or online at [www.nationaldebtline.org.uk](http://www.nationaldebtline.org.uk)

# Rights & Responsibilities



## Your responsibilities

You must carry out your responsibilities as set out in your tenancy agreement, including:

- Pay your rent.
- Keep the property in a clean and tidy condition.
- Not cause annoyance to your neighbours.
- Not behave in an anti-social manner.
- Tell us of any changes in your circumstances that may affect your tenancy.
- Let us know if you will be away from your home for a period of longer than one month.
- Obtain our permission in writing if you would like to:
  - Sublet part of your home.
  - Make alterations to your home.
  - Exchange your home with another tenant.
  - Alter or create access for vehicles (dropped kerbs, driveways, double gates etc).



## Our responsibilities

- Carry out all our obligations set out in the tenancy agreement.
- Tell you your rights and obligations as a tenant.
- Keep you informed of issues that affect your tenancy.
- Deal with any request to change your tenancy.
- Take appropriate action against anyone who breaks their tenancy agreement.



# Your rights

Your tenancy agreement has a full list of all the rights of your tenancy. It explains what you must do and what we must do as your landlord.

The table below explains the differences between the rights of secure tenants and those of Introductory tenants.

Tenancy Right	Secure tenants	Introductory tenants
Right to succession (Inheriting a tenancy)	Yes	Yes
Right to a repair	Yes	Yes
Right to carry out improvements	Yes - following prior approval from the council	No
Right to be consulted on housing management issues	Yes	Yes
Right to take in lodgers	Yes - following prior approval from the council	No
Right to sub-let part of your home (charging someone to live in part of your home)	Yes - following prior approval from the council	No
Right to exchange	Yes	No
Right to buy	Yes	Not during the intro period. Introductory period counts towards future discount.

# Access & Conduct guidelines



## Access to your home

We have the right to enter our properties at all reasonable hours and we will endeavour to obtain agreement with you. We will usually give 24hrs written notice, but immediate access may be required in an emergency. This applies to Gravesham Borough Council staff or other authorised people, such as our contractors. You must let us in if we ask you to.

If necessary, we can arrange to force entry to carry out an emergency repair or safety check and we will recover the cost of doing this from you. You must report repairs that need doing immediately and allow us access to your home quickly when we ask.

We need access (not limited to):

- For gas safety inspections.
- For electrical safety checks.
- To check the condition of a home or those next to it.
- To repair, alter or improve the home or those next to it. This includes electrical wiring, gas and water pipes or drainage and heating systems.
- To check fire detection devices and the condition of front fire doors (where appropriate).
- New tenant visits
- Safeguarding

**If we have to force entry to a home, we will leave it secure.  
If we force entry because of your negligence, for example, if you  
overfill your bath and flood the property below, we will charge the  
cost to you.**





# Sustaining your tenancy

There are some circumstances which put your tenancy at risk:

- Anti-social behaviour or criminal activity.
- If you do not cooperate with our efforts to put breaches right.
- You do not maintain your rent payments in accordance with your tenancy agreement.

It is important to discuss any concerns with your Neighbourhood Officer to avoid the risk of losing your home.



## Zero tolerance

Gravesham Borough Council has a zero-tolerance attitude towards the abuse of any staff or contractors by residents and their visitors. Where such behaviour occurs, the Council may limit access to the repairs service, except in the case of some emergency works.

All tenants and their visitors are expected to treat all staff with respect and dignity. This means that they must refrain from behaving in a way that is aggressive, threatening, abusive, or insulting. Nor must they engage in any behaviour, intentional or otherwise, that constitutes harassment or discrimination.

Gravesham Borough Council will take reasonable measures to protect staff from such behaviour where appropriate, including action for tenancy breaches.

The Council also expects its own workforce and contractors working on our behalf, to comply with the council's code of conduct at all times.

# Living in your Neighbourhood



## Vehicles

Minor repairs to your own private vehicle are permitted, but general vehicle repairs are not allowed outside homes or in the neighbourhood.

Any untaxed or non-roadworthy vehicles (including cars, caravans, bikes, boats, scooters, horse vehicles, vans, and lorries) abandoned on council property will be reported to DVLA. These may be removed and disposed of at the owner's expense.

Keeping untaxed or unroadworthy vehicles in your garden breaches tenancy conditions and will result in action being taken.

**If you believe a vehicle is abandoned on council-owned land you can report it via our website.**



## Gardens

You are responsible for maintaining any garden included in your tenancy.

During regular estate inspections, we check garden conditions. If yours needs attention, your Neighbourhood Officer will request improvements. Failure to comply may lead to enforcement action.

If you're struggling to maintain your garden, contact your Neighbourhood Officer to discuss available options.



## Keeping pets

If you wish to keep a pet, please check the terms of your tenancy agreement, or speak to your Neighbourhood Officer before you get one.

If you own a dog, you must sign a responsible dog owner's agreement.

Pets must not cause a nuisance or annoyance to neighbours, and any such incidents may be a breach of your tenancy conditions. We will take action to remedy the breach, which may include having to find another home for your pet.

**We may not always give permission and we may revoke permission in certain circumstances.**



## Rubbish collection & Recycling service

Gravesham provide a regular bin and recycling collection service. Most residents have wheelie bins, but some may need to use sacks. Damaged or stolen wheelie bins are not automatically replaced.

You should put your wheelie bins or black and clear sacks out for collection at the front edge of your property by 7am on the morning of collection. You should not put bins or sacks out the previous night as this may block pavements, or animals may pull sacks open.

For further information regarding our refuse and recycling services, including bin collection days, ordering bins and sacks, and garden waste, visit our Bin information page on our website.



# Communal areas

Some schemes have communal areas and it is important that you consider the way these are used.

This means, for example, that you should not use stairwells, shared landings, estate paths, shared gardens, or parking areas for:



Using drugs or taking part in any other illegal activity.



Smoking in internal communal areas.



Gathering in groups and intimidating other residents.



Riding motorbikes, quadbikes, scooters or electric scooters.



Carrying out motor vehicle repairs (excluding maintenance carried out and completed within one day).



Playing loud music.



Letting off fireworks.



Dumping rubbish and unwanted furniture/bulk items.



Having a barbecue.



Personal belongings



Dog fouling.



Prams & pushchairs



Shared areas can form part of a fire escape route, so it is very important that you do not block these areas in any way, including using them for storage.

If you are in a block and you have a communal door entry system, you should help to keep everyone safe by:

- Not letting anyone into the building that you do not know.
- Not letting visitors in on behalf of other residents.
- Not asking neighbours to let visitors in for you.
- Not wedging doors open or over-riding the door's locking system.
- Report faults with the door entry systems and locks as soon as you become aware, to enable us to fix problems.

# Home improvements



## Your improvements & alterations

All residents with a secured tenancy have the right to carry out minor alterations and improvements to their homes, but you must gain permission before doing so, either inside or outside of your home. This must be requested in writing, setting out clearly what your intentions are, and you will receive a written response either allowing or denying you permission to proceed.

Some alterations also require applications for planning permission and/or building control approval, which can involve additional costs which you will also be responsible for. You have to apply separately to the relevant authorities for these permissions.

If you do carry out work without permission, we have the legal right to make you put the property back to how it was prior to your alterations.



### REMEMBER

**Always get permission – if you're not sure, ask.**

# Adaptations



## Aids & Adaptations

Adaptations are available for Gravesham Borough Council tenants, their partner, or an immediate family member who lives with them permanently and has a long-term impairment that significantly affects their ability to:

- Carry out normal day-day activities in and around their home
- Access essential facilities within their home



Minor adaptation requests for items such as grab rails, hand rails and lever taps can be requested by emailing [housing.repairs@gravesham.gov.uk](mailto:housing.repairs@gravesham.gov.uk) or calling us on 01474 337777.



Major adaptations such as lifting equipment and wet rooms must be recommended by an Occupational Therapist (OT). Referrals or recommendations can be sent to the above contact details.

Major adaptations (e.g. wet rooms, lifting equipment) must be recommended by an Occupational Therapist (OT). Referrals or recommendations can be sent to the above contact details.

Adaptations for children will only be carried out at the property that is their main home.

To begin the process, contact your Neighbourhood Officer, who will discuss your situation, arrange an initial visit, and support you with a referral to the OT Service if needed.

Once the OT Service receives your referral, they will usually call to complete an initial screening. If required, they will arrange a home visit to assess what adaptations are necessary and appropriate. They will then send a written recommendation to the Council for consideration.

# Community Engagement

Tenant and leaseholder engagement is how we work with those who live in our accommodation to help shape, influence and improve the services we provide and how they are delivered.

Getting involved can help you to:

- Have a say on issues affecting you, your home or your neighbourhood.
- Make a real difference in those areas of interest or concern that you feel most passionately about such as reducing anti-social behaviour or our housing repairs service.
- Further your knowledge of the services you should expect to receive.
- Meet new people from across the borough and develop a range of useful transferable skills.
- Encourage positive, meaningful two-way communication between the council and other tenants and leaseholders and engender greater mutual respect.



## Increased face-to-face engagement

The Housing team are visiting estates monthly in the Housing Hub to engage and deal with any tenants' concerns. More information can be found here: [www.gravesham.gov.uk/events/event/122/housing-hub](http://www.gravesham.gov.uk/events/event/122/housing-hub)





## Get online

As a valued GBC tenant there is no need to wait on the telephone or research our website to resolve your issues!



Your new digital hub for active participation in local decision-making. This platform provides a space for our tenants to engage directly with the projects and decisions that shape your community



Our digital platform enables self-service for our tenants. You can keep your details up to date, pay your rent and report a repair.



## Keep up to date with news

It is important that you also stay informed of key changes or activities that are taking place. Don't miss out in joining our Tenant Engagement Housing page that can be found on GoVocal – Register now!

<https://gravesham.govocal.com/en-GB/pages/housing>



## Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Panel

A new Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Panel has been set up and if you are interested to form part of this then you should express your interest to the Tenant Engagement Team.

# Ending your tenancy



## How to end your tenancy

The tenancy agreement you signed when you were given the keys to the property is a legal contract and to end the tenancy you must make sure you carry out all steps before moving out.

We have compiled a checklist of all the steps you need to take.

**When you hand your home back to the Council, it must be in an acceptable state of repair and in good decorative condition.**

**Any property that is not handed back in an acceptable standard will be brought to an acceptable standard by the Council before being re-let, but the costs of doing so will be recharged to the outgoing customer.**



# Checklist

- ☐ Complete a tenancy termination form which can be obtained from your Neighbourhood Officer.
- ☐ Give us four weeks' notice in writing which must end on a Monday, for the address given on your tenancy agreement (or any subsequent address of the landlord for the purposes of Section 48 of the Landlord & Tenant Act 1987).
- ☐ Give us a forwarding address.
- ☐ Allow us access to your property to check the condition of your home and to ensure that no unauthorised work or damage has been carried out.
- ☐ Carry out any works that are identified which are your responsibility. If you fail to do this, you will be re-charged for our costs in making good.
- ☐ Remove all your possessions and any unwanted items from the home (including your loft space), garden and garage. Tenants must leave the property in a good state of repair and in a clean and tidy condition. If you fail to do this, you will be re-charged for our costs incurred in clearing any rubbish including any vehicles left in your garden.
- ☐ Leave no-one in occupation.
- ☐ Leave internal decoration in good condition. Leave the premises clean and tidy. If you leave anything at the property, you will be charged.
- ☐ Notify water, gas and electricity companies.
- ☐ Return all keys to us, including any shed and garage keys.
- ☐ Clear the rent account. If there are any rent arrears you will still be responsible for payment, and we will take action to recover these.
- ☐ Reinstate any council fixtures and fittings and make good any damage.
- ☐ Inform Council Tax that you are leaving and give them your new address.
- ☐ Notify Housing Benefit or Universal Credit that you have moved if you are in receipt of these.

# Feedback



## Complaints

We welcome your feedback and use it to improve the services we provide.

If something has gone wrong with your home or our services, please let us know so we can put things right. We'll try to resolve your issue when you first contact us.

If you're not happy with the outcome of a complaint you can have the issue reviewed by a senior manager.

Our website details thing you ned to know if you wish to pursue a complaint:  
[www.gravesham.gov.uk/contact-us/make-official-complaint](http://www.gravesham.gov.uk/contact-us/make-official-complaint)



## Compliments

Sometimes we'll do things that you're really pleased with, we like to be told about these so that we can praise the staff member or team involved and give the right recognition.

Let us know by filling in an online form at  
[www.gravesham.gov.uk/contact-us/compliments](http://www.gravesham.gov.uk/contact-us/compliments)

# Useful contacts

## Shout mental health support

Free, confidential and 24/7 text messaging service for anyone in the UK who needs support.

**Phone: 0800 107 0160**

**Text the word Kent to 85258**

## Victim support

Support and information for anyone affected by crime. Helpline free, open 24/7.

**Phone: 0808 168 9111**

**[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)**

## Change Grow Live

Drug and alcohol advice, treatment and support.

**Phone: 0300 128 1113**

**[www.changegrowlive.org](http://www.changegrowlive.org)**

## Choices

Formerly North Kent Womens' Aid. Providing help to people experiencing domestic abuse.

**Phone: 0800 917 9948**

## Oasis Domestic Abuse Service

For people affected by domestic abuse.

Helpline free, open 24/7.

**Phone: 0808 2000 0247**

**[www.oasisdaservice.org](http://www.oasisdaservice.org)**

## Citizens Advice

Help & advice with a range of issues, including housing, legal, and debt advice.

**Phone: 0808 278 7810**

**[www.citizensadvicenwk.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvicenwk.org.uk)**

## Foodbank

Providing emergency food and support to local people in crisis.

**Phone: 01474 559555**

**[www.gravesham.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.gravesham.foodbank.org.uk)**

## Fuel bill support

Providing financial support and practical advice on paying for energy.

**Phone: 0300 1237 597**

**[www.fuelbankfoundation.org](http://www.fuelbankfoundation.org)**



# Notes

My postcode .....

Neighbourhood Officer's name .....

Rubbish collection day .....

Utility	Meter reading	Supplier
Gas		
Electric		
Water		

Fuse box location.....

Stop cock location .....

Things to do list

Date completed

- ☐ Check heating & hot water .....
- ☐ Check smoke detectors .....
- ☐ Get contents insurance .....
- ☐ Update doctors surgery .....
- ☐ Update or sign up to a dentist .....
- ☐ Update Council Tax .....
- ☐ Update DWP (if you're in receipt of benefits) .....
- ☐ Update anything registered with your previous address .....
- ☐ Update electoral roll .....

For office use

- ☐ Signed up to GoVocal
- ☐ Signed up for Digital platform

If no, give a reason .....

- ☐ Completed Vulnerability assessment

Officer signature

Tenant signature

Date

.....





**Gravesham**  
Borough Council

