

Reporting your repairs

This booklet can be made available in
large print, on tape, in Braille
and in other languages

HELP US TO HELP YOU

We are constantly looking at ways to improve our services to you, the customer.

Like you, we are concerned about the quality of repairs, whether they represent value for money and the speed with which they are completed.

You can help us to give you a speedy and efficient response by giving as much information as possible, including access arrangements, when you report a repair. If the correct job can be identified when you report the repair, an inspection by ourselves may not be required and, importantly, should mean that your repair will be completed more speedily. Reducing the number of inspections before a job is done helps keep costs down. It also gives us more time to check the quality of work on completion.

When you report a repair, or ask somebody else to report it for you, please give as much information as possible. We need to know:

- Your full address.
- A telephone number where you can be contacted.
- Times when there will be somebody at home to allow us to carry out an inspection or carry out the repair. This must be an adult.
- As much information about the repair as possible.

When reporting a repair you will be sent a written confirmation of your request, this will advise you who the contractor will be and the expected target date for the works.

Please refer the separate guide: "Reporting your repairs – before you contact us". The guide has been designed to help you identify the work you would like us to carry out. It looks at the different types of repair, and gives important hints on what you need to know when reporting a repair.

It is impossible to cover all areas, but we would welcome any suggestions you may have in improving these repair guides.

Please read the repairs guides and keep them in a safe place for future use.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Throughout the guide, you will find questions on where to find stopcocks, fuse boxes, consumer units, etc, in your home. It will be useful for you to know the location of these items in advance. Make a note of where these items are in your property. Fill this table in now for your future reference.

ITEM LOCATION

Mains water stop valve inside your home
Central heating boiler
Electricity consumer unit/fuse box
Gas tap/meter
Water stopcock
Hot water cylinder

OTHER NOTES

--

COMPLAINTS

We are committed to providing a high standard of service to our customers.

However, if you think that we have failed to provide a satisfactory service, you should make use of our Comments, Compliments or Complaints procedure, which is designed to resolve your issues quickly.

This is explained in a leaflet, which can be obtained from the housing office, or, can be found at our website www.lancaster.gov.uk.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR REPAIRS

Your responsibilities

You are responsible for keeping your home in a reasonable condition and for attempting to solve minor problems, and for insuring the contents of your home.

You are expected to take reasonable precautions to prevent damage to the property by fire, frost, the bursting of water pipes or the blocking of drains and sinks. We rely on you to report any faults promptly and to provide access to our contractors to ensure that the repair can be undertaken within our agreed timescales.

Repairing any fittings, extensions, alterations and so on that you make or fit will remain as your responsibility unless the council indicates otherwise in writing. In some cases the council will be willing to carry out repairs which you are responsible for and charge you the cost.

Finally, remember that someone else will be moving into your home if you ever decide to leave. Please make sure that the property is clean, tidy, reasonably decorated and that all your unwanted belongings have been cleared, including any in the roof space.

Our responsibilities

We must 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 the supply of water, gas and electricity, for sanitation and for room and water heating.

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.

If you have applied to buy your home, we will not carry out improvement work or planned yearly maintenance. This will include things like outside painting. We will take the overall condition of your home into account when we value the property.

Please refer to the chart for further details on specific repairs.

Who is responsible for what?

This lists the repair that the council will do and the ones that tenants are responsible for. Do not hesitate to ring the housing office if you are unsure about a repair.

	Lancaster City Council	Tenant	Leaseholder
1. OUTSIDE YOUR HOME			
Roof			
Roof structure, covering and chimney guttering, rainwater pipes and fascias	✓		
External walls			
External walls and rendering	✓		
Foundations	✓		
Windows			
Window frames, external sills	✓		
Glazing	✓		
Window catches and handles	✓		✓
Window vents	✓		
Doors			
Outside doors, frames and other boards (such as fascia boards)	✓		
Replacement or additional door keys		✓	✓
Door entry systems	✓		
Replacement or additional communal entrance keys		✓	✓
Door numbers and letter plates	✓		✓
Pipes and drains			
Soil and vent pipes	✓		
Drains, gully surrounds and gully grids	✓		
Drain blockage if pipework not faulty		✓	✓
Gardens and boundaries			
Communal gardens	✓		
Gardens		✓	✓
Front, side and rear gates, including ironmongery	✓		
Paths, steps and other means of access, if owned by Lancaster City Council	✓		
Communal washing lines and poles	✓		
Washing lines and poles		✓	✓
Dustbins and household rubbish removals		✓	✓
Garages and outbuildings			
Garages and outbuildings if owned by Lancaster City Council	✓		

Gaining entry

Gaining entry after loss of keys	✓	✓
----------------------------------	---	---

Fencing

Boundary – repair damaged if owned by Lancaster City Council	✓	
Dividing – repair/provision of new	✓	✓

Communal areas

Communal lifts and stairs, rubbish chutes and communal TV aerials	✓	
---	---	--

2. INSIDE YOUR HOME

Doors

Internal doors,	✓	✓
Internal door handles and carpet strips		✓

Walls and ceilings

Internal walls	✓	✓
Plaster work, plaster air vents	✓	✓

Floors

Concrete floors (not including floor tiles)	✓	✓
Total replacement of vinyl floor tiles in wet areas (bathroom and kitchen) only	✓	✓
In all other areas vinyl floor tiles will be partially replaced. Every effort will be made to match existing tiles, but complete matches cannot be guaranteed.	✓	✓

Staircase

Staircase, banisters and handrails	✓	✓
------------------------------------	---	---

Bathroom

Bath panels	✓	✓
Wooden airing cupboard panels, door frames and shelving	✓	✓
Internal pipework boxing, but only if originally fitted by Lancaster City Council	✓	✓

Kitchen

Kitchen cupboards	✓	✓
Cupboard drawers	✓	✓
Cupboard door catches, handles and hinges, drawer handles	✓	✓
Worktops	✓	✓

Electrical items

Electrical wiring, sockets and light fittings	✓	✓
Wired-in smoke alarms	✓	✓
Electrical consumer unit (fuse box)	✓	✓
Electric storage heaters	✓	✓
Electric meter and supply of electricity (Tenant and Utility company)		✓
Immersion heaters	✓	✓
Disconnection and reconnection of cookers, unless owned by Lancaster City Council		✓

Extractor fans	✓	✓
----------------	---	---

Plumbing

Water service pipes, overflow pipes and water tanks	✓	✓
Plumbing in of washing machines		✓
Taps, stop taps	✓	✓
Shower trays (only if fitted by Lancaster City Council)	✓	✓
Electric shower units (only if fitted by Lancaster City Council)	✓	✓
Toilet flushing systems	✓	✓
Toilet seats	✓	✓
Plugs and chains		✓
Bath, wash hand basin and toilet (only if fitted by Lancaster City Council)	✓	✓
Seal to bath and sink unit and one row of splashback tiles	✓	✓
Bleeding of radiators		✓
Unblocking sink and bath wastepipes		✓

Gas

Gas pipework	✓	✓
Supply of gas and gas meter (tenant and utility company)		✓
Gas fires (only if fitted by Lancaster City Council)	✓	✓
Radiators, valves, time clocks and thermostats	✓	✓
Disconnection and reconnection of cookers (Has to be done by Corgi registered plumber)		✓

3. DELIBERATE DAMAGE

Any deliberate damage is the responsibility of the tenant - rechargeable	✓	✓
--	---	---

HOW TO REPORT REPAIRS

All repairs can be reported to the housing office at 38 Cable Street, Lancaster by:



online at www.lancaster.gov.uk



councilhousing@lancaster.gov.uk



01524 582929

If the repair is very straightforward, or an emergency, an order for the repair will be raised directly. All requests for a repair will be acknowledged in writing, and we will notify you in writing of all repairs that are ordered including a target date for the completion of the repair.

There will be occasions when an Inspector will have to call to assess the nature and extent of the repair required. For non-emergency repairs the Inspector will call within 10 working days. If you are not in, an appointment card will be left to enable you to arrange a suitable time for the Inspector to call back.

WHAT CAN YOU DO IF THE OFFICES ARE CLOSED?

Where a very urgent emergency happens when the offices are closed, repairs will be carried out to make safe the problem. If there are further repairs required these will be carried out within published timescales.

We operate an out of office hours emergency repairs service that you can phone when the offices are closed who will give you help over the phone and also arrange for the emergency contractor to visit if necessary.

We treat repairs as emergencies if they are necessary to avoid danger or risk to the health of the occupants, or serious damage to the property.



01524 67099 for out of office hours emergency repairs

INSURANCE

Have you insured your furniture and house contents?

Fire flood, accidents • they are financial disasters. Spend a few minutes just totting up the replacement value of your goods. You will have a shock! Some people STILL have no household insurance.

The council insures the structure and fittings but NOT your belongings. If a pipe or water tank bursts, due to frost damage for example, the council is NOT normally responsible for your contents.

Although tenants are responsible for the decorative condition of their home, the council does have a responsibility for making good decorations, if damage arises from a structural defect or if the damage arises where the council has acted negligently in responding to a repair request. Damage caused for reasons such as a leaking pipe, break-in or furniture fire will not be covered by the council.

We strongly advise you to insure the contents of your home and your personal possessions against fire, theft, flooding and accidental breakages.

Although it is up to you to decide whether or not to insure your belongings, if you are not insured and a fire, flood or theft, etc. does occur, you could lose everything and we will not be able to give any financial help or compensation

If you already have an insurance policy, check it, so that you know exactly what you are insured for. Make sure it includes a liability clause covering accidental damage for items which the council charge you for, if we have to repair them. Also, check that the contents of your home are insured to their full value - you may find it difficult to make a claim if they are not.

Insurance companies will be pleased to give you pamphlets and information without any obligation. Many companies will now let you spread your payments over weekly or monthly instalments.

We see sadness and loss too often, through people not having adequate insurance.

Please don't let it happen to you.

WHAT IS AN EMERGENCY?

Emergency work includes:

- Blocked toilets where the premises contain only one toilet
- Blocked or leaking drains (but not blocked sinks)
- Serious storm, accident or flood damage to rooms
- Dangerous structures
- Serious electrical faults
- Regaining entry where a tenant is accidentally locked out. However, a charge is likely to be made in this instance
- No mains water supply
- A loss of heating during very cold weather only for elderly people living alone and families with a child under the age of 12 months. If you feel your circumstances require immediate attention we may be able to view your repair as an emergency

IF YOU SMELL GAS

Gas escapes are serious and require immediate attention by you as the occupier. If you can smell gas, follow these simple steps:

TURN OFF THE GAS SUPPLY

The main gas on/off lever can be found next to your gas meter. You should locate this immediately, if you don't know where it is, and also let some other family members know where it is before you have a problem.


OPEN WINDOWS AND DOORS

This will allow any gas which has built up in the house to disperse.

DO NOT TURN ON OR OFF ANY LIGHTS/SOCKETS OR LIGHT ANY MATCHES

When light switches, etc., are used, it can often generate sparks which could be enough to ignite any escaped gas in the air.

**YOU SHOULD TELEPHONE
NATIONAL GRID'S GAS EMERGENCY SERVICE IMMEDIATELY**

 **0800 111 999**

**Calls to this number are free
You can call this number anytime, day or night**

BURST OR LEAKING PIPE

Turn the water off at the mains.

If electrics are affected, turn off the electricity at the consumer unit.

Call our repairs service, If our office is closed, use the emergency number.



01524 67099 for out of office hours emergency repairs

LOSS OF ELECTRICITY

If the problem persists after following the advice in the section Loss of Electric Light or Power call our repairs service. If our office is closed, use the emergency number

If neighbours are also affected, call your electricity company (see under ELECTRICITY in the phone book), otherwise, see the section for advice on Loss of Electric Light or Power

FIRE

Should you have a fire  999

Get everyone out and do not go back for any reason.

Close all doors and windows.

Warn your neighbours if any of them might be in danger.

HOW QUICKLY WILL THE REPAIR BE DONE?

The time taken depends on the sort of repair you need. We have three different categories, ranging from emergencies where there could be a danger to life, to non-urgent repairs like cleaning out gutters:

1. Emergency work to be carried out within 24 hours
2. Urgent work to be completed within 7 days
3. Non-urgent work to be completed within 4 weeks

In some circumstances, usually for elderly or disabled people, we will try to come and see you sooner.

Once we have identified the work required, we will determine in which category the particular repair work will be registered. The council's contractors will then complete the work within the timescale given for the job.

If any of our contractors do not comply with the scheme, then please let us know as soon as the job exceeds its priority period. That way we can try to ensure that such cases are kept to an absolute minimum.

CATEGORY 1: Emergency work to be carried out within 24 hours

(Immediately where there is danger to life or limb or serious damage to property)

Gas leak or supply failure

Electricity supply failure or dangerous fault

Water supply failure (burst pipe or tank)

Blocked or totally unusable WC (if only one in dwelling)

Breakdown of dwelling security (door, lock or serious window fault)

Drain blocked with serious leak of sewage

Heating system breakdown in winter (aged, disabled, young baby in household, or other special needs).

CATEGORY 2: To be carried out within 7 days

Blocked drain, sewer, waste or gulley

Leaking soil pipe or drain

Broken WC pan

Defective ball valve to water storage tank or WC cistern

Defective WC cone joint

Water penetration or leaks

Repair or patch roof if leaking

Defective immersion heater

Staircase lighting (In flats • if total failure)

Heating system and/or hot water supply

Reglazing of communal areas

Defective cooker panel, socket outlet, switch, lampholder. etc (where no immediate danger is involved).

CATEGORY 3: To be carried out within 4 weeks

Blocked or broken gutters and down pipes
Refix chimney pot or cowl
Refix or renew roof tile or slate
Repair or ease external and internal doors
Repair or ease windows, frames or fittings
Replace rotten flooring
Replace or repair bath, basin, sink, waste, fittings or brackets
Replace WC seat
Replace hot water cylinder
Replace fireplace, surround or fittings
Repair bath panel
Repair to window sill
Remedy selective plastering
Remedy faulty stopcock
Glazing repairs
Joinery repairs not specified elsewhere, e.g. kitchen fittings.

NOTE: We will exercise discretion for certain tenants (e.g. Infirm, disabled or nursing mothers) whose circumstances may require more urgent repairs.

Planned Maintenance - Some reported repairs may be held over until they can be included in the programme of planned maintenance, e.g. replacement of windows, external doors, rewiring, renewal areas of roof, etc

APPOINTMENTS

When you report a repair or when the repair needs an inspection you will be given a job reference number and date with Morning/AM or Afternoon/PM stipulated on it.

Times for appointments are:

- Morning/AM - between 8:00am and 12 noon
- Afternoon/PM - between 12:30pm and 4:30pm

In some circumstances they might be able to be more specific e.g. not school runs.

We will always try to make an appointment to carry out your repairs except:

- Emergencies - these will be done the same day that you reported the repair
- Repairs to external parts of the building
- Repairs to communal entrances and corridors

Once an appointment has been made it is important that you are in when the contractor calls. Our contractors will only attend when there is an adult at home. If, for whatever reason, you miss an appointment then your job will be cancelled, and you will have to contact the housing office to have the works reissued.

If you need to change the time of an appointment please contact us on 01524 582929.

You will be contacted by telephone if the operative or inspector cannot make the agreed times and a new appointment will be arranged when convenient.

All contractors carry identification cards and you are strongly advised to ask to see these BEFORE allowing any workmen into your home. If you are in any doubt whatsoever don't let them in. Contact the housing office who will be able to confirm whether they are genuine or not. Additionally if you have the works order number you can ask the workman to quote this.

Where contractors are unable to complete a repair at the first visit they will make a convenient appointment to return and complete the job.

YOUR RIGHT REPAIR?

The Right to Repair scheme ensures that small urgent repairs known as 'qualifying repairs', which might affect your health, safety or security, are carried out quickly and easily. Not all repairs 'qualify' under the scheme.

The scheme allows you to contact contractors direct to get a qualifying repair done if the council's contractor fails to carry out the repair within the timescales. Right to Repair jobs are flagged within our system and are given priority by our contractors. For more information on the Right to Repair contact the housing office. A repair only qualifies if the cost of carrying out the work is less than £250.

Qualifying Repair	Working Days
Unsafe power or lighting socket, or electrical fitting.	1
Total loss of water supply	1
Total or partial loss of gas supply	1
Blocked flue to open fire or boiler	1
Total or partial loss of space or water heating between 31st October and 1st May	1
Blocked or leaking foul drain, soil stack, or (where there is no other working toilet in the dwelling house toilet pan)	1
Toilet not flushing (where there is no other working toilet in the dwelling-house)	1
Leaking from water or heating pipe, tank or cistern	1
Insecure external window, door or lock	1
Total loss of electric power	1
Partial loss of electric power	3
Partial loss of water supply	3
Total or partial loss of space or water heating between 30th April and 1st November	3
Blocked sink, bath or basin	3
Tap which cannot be turned	3
Loose or detached banister or handrail	3
Rotten timber flooring or stair tread	3
Door entry phone not working	7
Leaking roof	7
Mechanical extractor fan in internal kitchen or bathroom not working	7

If the state of repair of your home is very poor, and your health or well-being is suffering you can, as a last resort, take the council to Court. You must give three weeks' notice in writing that you are doing this, to give the council a final chance to do the repairs. The Magistrate can order the council to do the repairs, and even levy a fine. This is called the "statutory nuisance procedure. However, be warned, if you lose the case you may have to pay the council's legal costs, so take appropriate legal advice before commencing such an action.

OUR STANDARDS

Anyone working on behalf of the council in your home must:

- ✓ Display their identity card before entering your home.
- ✓ Take care of your property and belongings and protect them from damage, dust and paint.
- ✓ Be polite and treat you with respect
- ✓ Keep your home safe and secure at all times
- ✓ Make sure materials and tools do not cause danger
- ✓ Clear rubbish created by the repair from inside your home and garden at the end of each working day
- ✓ Repair any damage caused by their work in your home
- ✓ Warn you of any likely noise or disturbance they will make and keep it to a minimum
- ✓ Keep you informed about how work is progressing

They are not allowed to:

- X Smoke or play radios in or around your home
- X Be in your home with children under 16 without an adult member of the family or friend present
- X Receive gifts from tenants
- X Keep keys to your home
- X Use your phone without your consent or use mobile phones during their work, unless it is about the work they are doing.

These requirements are part of a Code of Conduct.

PROTECT YOUR POSSESSIONS

Some of the repairs we carry out can cause disruption to your home. You are advised to move any belongings away from the work area, particularly if they are breakable.

When working in your home, all contractors are required to use dustsheets within the work area to offer some protection to your floor coverings.

If the work involves moving or lifting carpets away from the work area, you are reminded that this is your responsibility. Please make sure you do this before the workmen arrive. If you are elderly or infirm, the contractor will move heavy or awkward items for you. Whilst they will take every care not to damage your property the contractor cannot take responsibility for any damage that might arise.

If you have young children, please make sure that they are kept away from the work area at all times. The workmen may be using materials or tools, which can be harmful or dangerous.

INSPECTION OF FINISHED WORKS

Every repair acknowledgement card comes with a satisfaction slip - please return it.

We do carry out some inspection of works after it has been done to ensure the work has been done properly and to your satisfaction. It would be impossible to inspect every single job, so a percentage of jobs are inspected at random. We inspect 10% of all repairs afterwards to check the job has been done correctly.

For all of these inspections we will make a convenient appointment with you and you may also be asked to answer a customer questionnaire.

CHARGEABLE REPAIRS

Certain works may be charged to you for example if:

- The repair is needed because of damage through your negligence or neglect. This also applies if any member of your household, a visitor or any other person at your home causes damage
- You fit any type of installation or fixed appliance requiring repair that we did not give you our written agreement to install
- Having obtained prior permission and agreed to maintain, the installation was poorly fitted by you or someone employed by you to do it

- You must take reasonable care of your home and report any repairs or faults to the council; straight away. If you have applied to buy your home then we will only carry out the basic repairs the law asks us to do
- Once you have bought your own home you are responsible for all repairs inside if you own a flat or maisonette and all repairs inside and out if you have bought a house
- You are responsible for any alterations you made or you agree to take on as a part of a 'mutual exchange' prior to the exchange

The cost of carrying out a repair together with any associated administrative costs and VAT shall be recovered from you if the repair, or the need for the repair, is considered by us to be your responsibility.

We will always aim to advise of the cost at the time of reporting the chargeable repair, and give you the option of appointing your own contractor or carrying out a repair yourself, which must be carried out to a satisfactory standard.

What is a chargeable repair?

- Replacing locks/keys and door frames (due to force of entry) due to loss or theft of keys
- Any reinstatement work following flood, fire or other similar substantive damage where such damage was caused by the actions or omissions of the tenant or other member of the household
- Any damage deemed to be the result of vandalism from within the household
- Any unauthorised installation which has to be made good
- Vandalism or criminal damage – unless you can quote a police crime number

ALTERATIONS TO YOUR HOME

Your right to improve

You may carry out most repairs and improvements to your home, as long as you get written permission from the council before carrying out the work. This will usually be given very quickly, although it may be necessary for an Inspector to call and discuss the proposed work with you beforehand. The council will not put up your rent simply because you decide to carry out changes and improvements to your home.

Work affecting your home may also need planning permission and building regulation approval before work starts. For example, always check with the housing office before making any commitment to erect a Satellite TV dish. Obviously you have to pay for the work yourself and it must be done to a proper

standard. We may also need to inspect it when the job is completed, so please let us know at the appropriate time.

Replacing existing fixtures and fittings, like baths, toilets and central heating will normally cause the new items to become the council's property. Providing written approval was obtained from the housing office prior to you replacing any existing fixture or fitting, and the work being carried out to the council's satisfaction, the council will normally take responsibility for maintaining them after any guarantee period has expired.

Some examples of alterations:

- Forming car run-ins
- Erecting a garage/car port
- Erecting a garden hut or greenhouse
- Altering windows or doors
- Installing central heating
- Installing a new kitchen/bathroom
- Removing internal walls
- Fitting a satellite dish or TV aerial

The council will not accept responsibility for repairs which are necessary because of faulty fittings, sub-standard workmanship or defective materials, so always ensure you employ a firm with a good reputation. The council has powers to force works to be done to remedy any unauthorised work – so be sure about it before you start doing any work!

If we require you to reinstate the dwelling to its original condition when you leave, we will tell you when we give you permission to do the alteration. If you wish to take any of the fittings you have added with you, you must ensure that the original ones or suitable alternatives are replaced and that any damage is repaired. If the council has to carry out reinstatement work, you will be charged for the costs involved.

GAS SERVICING

We have a legal obligation to get a GAS SAFE registered engineer to inspect and service gas appliances and pipes every 12 months. This will ensure that the systems are working correctly and that your home is safe.

This servicing arrangement is a legal requirement and you **MUST** allow our contractor access to carry out this work. Faulty gas appliances can give off

poisonous fumes that cannot be seen or smelt so the regular maintenance of the gas appliances and pipework is very important.

Our contractor will always write to you to arrange a convenient time and, in some circumstances, may also be able to offer an evening or weekend call. If you fail to respond to these requests we will commence legal proceedings to gain access to your home. This may result in you paying some of the costs.

Once the service is complete you will be asked to sign a copy of the of the 'Landlords record' by the contractor this shows when the service was completed, any works that are needed and when the next service is due. A copy of this record will then be sent to you in the post.

A copy of the landlord's records will always be left in empty properties for incoming tenants.

ASBESTOS

We have a clear policy on dealing with any building materials that contain asbestos in our flats or houses.

You are not at risk from asbestos material where it is fully sealed by paint and other surface treatments. If it is necessary to remove asbestos material from your home you and your family and premises will be fully protected while the work is in progress.

Most asbestos is not dangerous if it remains undamaged and undisturbed, however if at any time you suspect that any building materials, panels for example, may contain asbestos, please ring the housing office.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY ADVICE

Energy efficiency is important when heating your home to make sure that you get the best from your heating system but also important that all your heat doesn't escape because of poor insulation.

We operate a number of schemes, which improve the energy efficiency in your home and reduce cost of your fuel bills. You can save money by calling for free advice on all aspects of fuel use including:

- Using your heating system effectively
- Advice on reducing your heating bills and payment methods
- Insulating and draught proofing your home

Ring the housing office and speak to your Estate Manager for more information and advice on how you could save energy and money.

SMOKE DETECTORS

The smoke detectors fitted in your home will give early warning of a fire by detecting smoke particles and make a high-pitched alarm noise.

Where the council has fitted the smoke detector these are ones that work off of mains electricity [mains powered detectors have a back up battery should the power fail for any reason].

The council's contractor will make a visit once a year to check that your smoke detector is working correctly.

Where you have fitted your own battery-powered smoke detector it is your responsibility to replace run down batteries, and you should clean your smoke alarm(s) at least once a year to keep the sensor clean and free from dust.

VANDALISM AND CRIMINAL DAMAGE

Please tell us quickly if you know of any vandalism, criminal damage, or offensive graffiti.

Do not assume that someone else will report it. We will prosecute vandals when there is a witness, to discourage others, and save rent money being used to repair vandalised areas. We need your help to combat vandals.

USEFUL HINTS

Looking after your home

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

- Wipe down on a regular basis all windows affected by condensation and if any mould has formed clean it off using a wash of diluted bleach, or a proprietary product available from all DIY stores. See the section of this booklet on Condensation.
- Limescale can be removed from baths, sinks, shower heads, and taps with a descaler available from all DIY stores.
- Blockages in kitchen sink waste pipes can be prevented by flushing through using washing soda and hot water.
- Outside gullies should be kept clear of leaves and other debris so that water drains away easily.
- Make sure you know where the main Stopcock is, and how to turn it off. Also, be sure to know how to turn off your electricity and gas supply in an emergency. If you do not, ask any of our staff or contractors when they next visit you.

In the Autumn you should check the following list of items and notify us of any problems. We can then repair them before they get worse and cause you any inconvenience:

- If you use an open fire have you swept the chimney? This is normally your responsibility.
- Are all your heating controls set correctly?
- Are there any tiles or slates missing or broken on your roof?
- Are there any leaks from gutters and downpipes?

Condensation

Condensation occurs when there is an excessive build up of moisture in the air, but people create additional moisture in their homes by:

- Cooking or boiling water
- Taking baths or showers
- Using paraffin or bottled gas heaters
- Drying clothes indoors

Warm moist air condenses and forms water when it cools: for example when it touches a cool surface. In your home these are outside walls, mirrors, windows, wall tiles and even on clothes.

If this condensation cannot dry out it will cause mould to form on walls, in cupboards and on window sills, and mildew to form on clothes, especially leather goods.

There are four things you can do to stop condensation forming:

- Produce less moisture by covering pans and turning down the heat when boiling, switching off boiling kettles, and drying clothes outside or in a well ventilated room, and not using paraffin or bottled gas heaters.
- Ventilation to let the moisture out, by opening a bathroom or kitchen window for a while to let the steam escape, or using an extractor fan; and by opening windows for a while each day to change the air in your house.
- Keeping 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.

Leaking, burst or frozen pipes

When pipes leak

Place a dish or bowl underneath the leak. Pull back any carpets and lay down newspapers or towels to absorb any dampness.

When pipes burst

Turn off the water at the main stop tap, and any gate valves from the water tank, and switch off any water heaters. Open all taps to drain water from the system.

Can it be isolated?

Some items of equipment may have their own isolation valve (either a gate valve, or a service valve). If not, you may be able to isolate the fault by just turning off a gate valve on a pipe coming out of the cold water tank. This will leave you with some services, even though it might only be cold water at the kitchen tap. You could temporarily flush toilets using a bucket of cold water.

If electric fittings get wet

DO NOT TOUCH and turn electricity off at the meter

When ceilings bulge

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

When pipes freeze

Turn off the water at the main stop tap and open the cold taps. It is best to leave the pipes frozen but you may try to thaw the pipe using hot water bottles or a hair dryer.

Take great care and **DO NOT USE A BLOW LAMP**. Take care to thaw from one end of the frozen section and not from the middle. Conserve hot water until the pipes are thawed.

General information

Know where your main stop tap is and check that it turns easily and is able to shut off the water supply. It is usually where the water pipe enters the house or near the kitchen sink.

Get to know where the gate valves for the hot and cold water tanks are.

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

Bleeding a radiator

When to do it

If the top part of a radiator is cold, this is because air is trapped in the system. Bleeding the radiator releases this air and allows hot water to fill the whole system.

Do not bleed if

Do not bleed the radiators if you have a Combination Boiler: this type of boiler will have either a pressure gauge or a low pressure light on the front or underside of the boiler, and you will probably not have a hot water cylinder.

Before bleeding

If the whole radiator is cold, check that the radiator valve is open. If more than one radiator is cold, the whole heating system will need to be checked by a plumber.

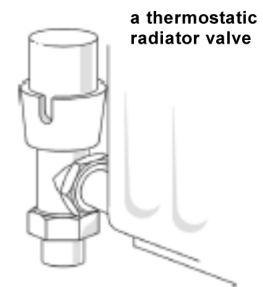
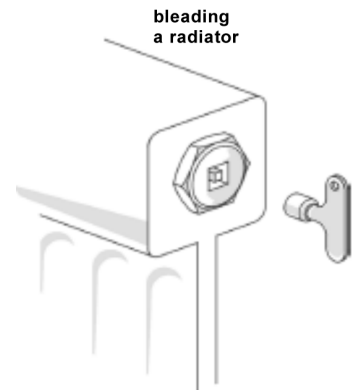
Turn off the heating system before bleeding, otherwise the pump might draw more air into the system.

You will need a special radiator key, available from most DIY and hardware shops. You will also need a rag or cloth and a bucket or bowl.

How to bleed

The bleed valve is the small square nut at the top end of the radiator. Place the key over the valve and hold the cloth around it to catch any water. Gently turn the key anti-clockwise until you hear a hiss - this is the air being released.

When water starts to come through, turn the key back clockwise to shut the valve off. DO NOT unscrew the valve completely as the plug will come right out.



Loss of electric light or power

Fuse or trip switch

Check your consumer unit or fuse box: it will either have fuses or trip switches (see diagrams). Modern electric circuits are fitted with a circuit breaker fuse system: if a fault develops, a switch is tripped and the circuit is broken. Older ones have fuse holders and when the fuse is blown it must either be replaced or rewired using special fuse wire of the correct amperage. Only replace a fuse if you are confident you can do it safely, and have a replacement of the same amperage. If in doubt contact us or a qualified electrician.

Setting a trip switch

Open the cover on the consumer unit to expose the trip switches. The Consumer Unit is usually next to the electricity meter. Check which switches have tripped to the OFF position and put them back to the ON position. For more detail, refer to any handbook supplied.

If tripping occurs again

It is probably being caused by a faulty appliance. You need to identify which circuit is affected and which appliance on that circuit is causing a problem.

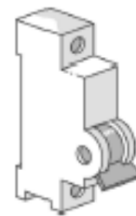
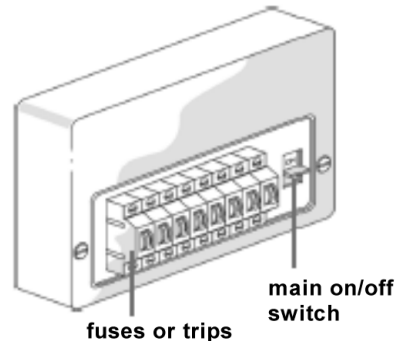
Which appliance is faulty?

Go around the house noting which set of lights or sockets are not working. Unplug all appliances on that problem circuit and switch off the immersion heater. Switch the tripped switch to the ON position and plug in the appliances one by one until the trip goes again. Leave that appliance unplugged. If one of our appliances is at fault, report the repair. If it is your appliance you will need to get it fixed yourself by a qualified electrician or a service engineer.

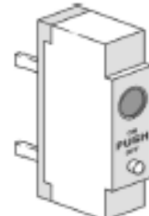
What causes it to trip or blow a fuse?

- An overloaded circuit
- Too many appliances being used at the same time
- A faulty or misused appliance
- Overfilled kettles
- Unclean toasters
- Cooker rings worn out or cracked

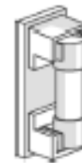
Electical Consumer Unit



trip switch



**micro
circuit
breaker**



cartridge fuse



rewirable fuse

- Faulty immersion heaters
- Faulty connections on leads to appliances, e.g. hi-fi, TV, etc
- Light bulbs blowing

Plugs

The socket outlets in your home will take square pin plugs. The plug which you require will have a fuse inside it. We do not supply plugs and you will have to obtain them yourself. To find out the correct type of fuse to fit in a plug, check the rating plate on the appliance.

Do not overload plug sockets by using multiple plug adaptors.

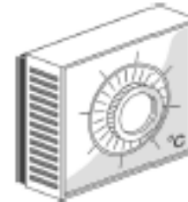
Controlling your central heating system

How to set a digital timer

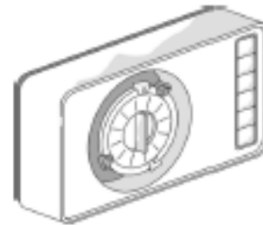
Check the clock is showing the correct time. If not, put the timer switch to 'clock' and adjust the time using the 'forward' and 'reverse' buttons. Reset the timer switch to 'auto'. Set the 'heating' and 'hot water' switches to come on at once, twice, or stay on all the time, as you require. During freezing spells, keep the heating on all the time and turn the thermostat down during the night and if you are out all day.



digital programmer



room thermostat



clock programmer

How to set a clock timer

Turn the clock until it is showing the correct time. Decide when you want the heating to come on and go off and set the pins or arrows for those times (see below for how to change pins and arrows). Set the timer switch to 'timer' or 'auto' as appropriate to the unit. During freezing spells, keep the heating on all the time and turn the thermostat down during the night if you are out all day.

How to control the temperature

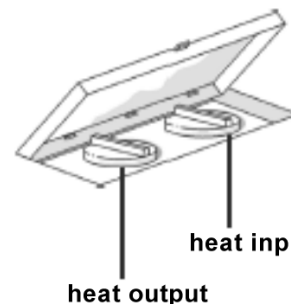
To set the thermostat turn the dial so that the arrow or marker is against the temperature setting you want. A comfortable temperature is between 18C and 22C.

Changing pins on a timeclock

Push them in against any time you want the heating to come on. Pull them out against any time when you want the heating to go off.

Changing arrows on timeclock

Slide the 'on' arrows (usually red) around the clock to the times when you want the heating to come on. Slide the 'off' arrows (usually blue) around to the times when you want the heating to go off.



storage heater control

Clearing a blocked waste pipe

Clearing a sink or bath blockage

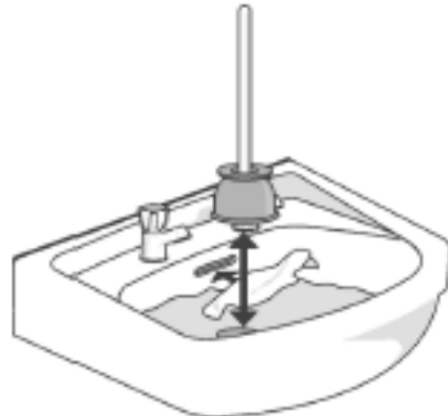
Bale out most of the water using a suitable container. Hold a rag firmly over the overflow opening, and place a plunger over the drain hole. Pump the plunger up and down rapidly. Plungers can be obtained from most DIY shops. After clearing the blockage, it is advisable to clean out the trap.

Cleaning out a waste trap

First bale out any excess water from the bath, basin, or sink using a jug or bowl. Place a bowl underneath the trap and unscrew the joints to remove the trap. Clean thoroughly and replace the trap, checking that the seal are in place and that all joints are screwed up tightly.

If more than one fitting is blocked

The problem may be in the soil stack or main drain. This will need to be cleared by one of our contractors. Blockages are usually caused by the build-up of fat, tea leaves, hair, etc. It is advisable to clean wastes with hot water and soda crystals.



clearing a blocked waste pipe

Clearing a blocked WC

Clearing blockages

If the pan is already full, remove some of the water into a suitable container using a jug or bowl. Push the toilet brush or plunger to the bottom of the pan and pump up and down vigorously about 10 times. This creates a vacuum and pressure which may shift the blockage. Check by flushing the toilet to see whether the blockage has gone. You may need to repeat the process several times before the toilet flushes normally. Do not use plungers with a metal disk, as these may chip or crack the toilet bowl.



clearing a blocked WC

Avoiding blockages

Air fresheners that attach to the rim of the toilet pan should be fastened securely to ensure they do not fall in and cause a blockage. Blockages are usually caused by unusual objects: nappies, toys, sanitary towels, air fresheners, etc. If such a blockage occurs as a result of one or several of these objects becoming lodged, you may be charged for clearing the blockage.

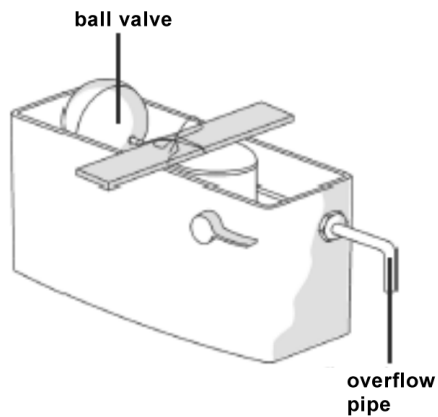
Overflows

To stop an overflow

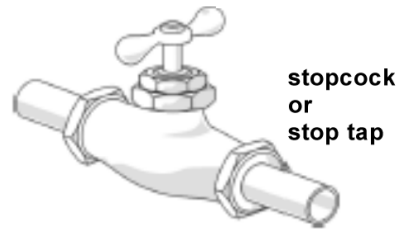
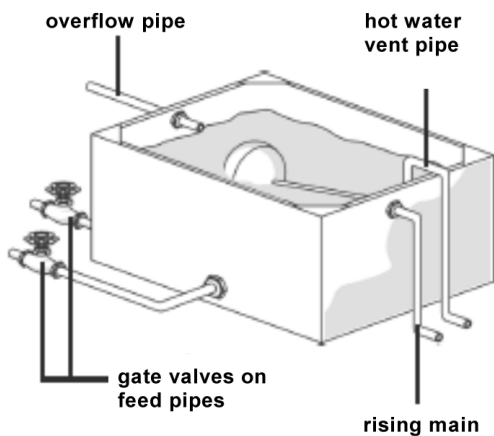
If the toilet cistern is overflowing try lifting the float to close the ball valve: if this stops the overflow, try to tie it up, using a piece of wood and some string, as in the diagram.

You can do the same with a cold water storage tank as a temporary measure.

Typical Toilet Cistern showing float tied up



Cold Water Storage Tank



stopcock
or
stop tap



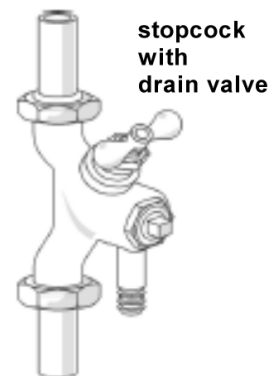
gate valve



service valve



draincock



stopcock
with
drain valve

Contact Information

Health and Housing Services Council Housing

Postal address:

PO Box 4, Town Hall, LANCASTER, LA1 1QR

Office:

38 Cable Street, LANCASTER, LA1 1HH

Telephone:

01524 582929

Email:

councilhousing@lancaster.gov.uk

Web site:

www.lancaster.gov.uk

Our office hours are 9.00 am to 5.00 pm weekdays
(10.00 am to 5.00 pm Wednesdays)

When the office is closed, if there is an emergency,
ring the Council's Emergency Call Centre,
which is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The number to call is: 01524 67099

Calls may be recorded to help improve
our standard of service and accuracy of information

