



Tenants' Handbook

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08000 324 888

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(1603RS) and is a registered Scottish charity (SC006809)
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This document can be produced in different formats, for example larger print or audio format, and in other languages as appropriate.

If you want a copy of this handbook in a different format or language please contact customer service on 0300 123 2640 or by email at customerservice@hillcrest.org.uk

Contact us

Hillcrest Homes

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Income Management Team	0300 123 2640	customerservice@hillcrest.org.uk
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You can also keep in touch with Hillcrest Homes via our website and social media (see page 4 for full information)

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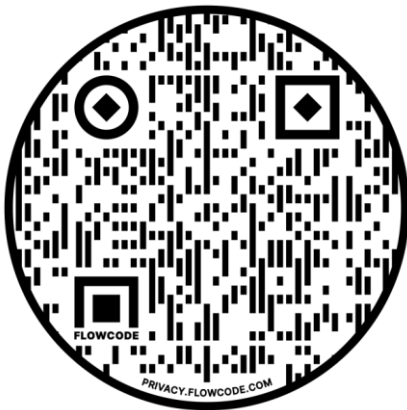
Introduction

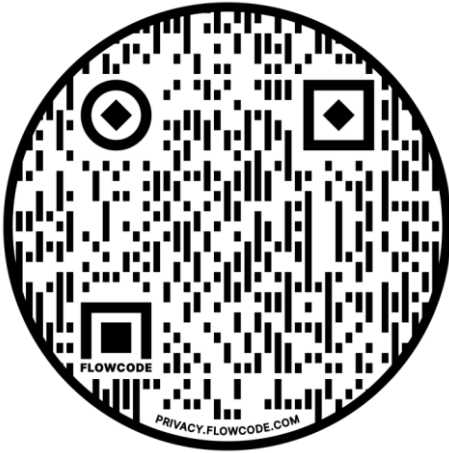
Welcome to Hillcrest Homes Tenants' Handbook.

Your Handbook provides you with information about Hillcrest Homes, our responsibilities as a landlord and the services we provide.

Hillcrest is committed to providing the best possible service for our customers. We want to improve the quality of our services and the experiences of those who are using them.

As well as your handbook, you will receive a tenants' newsletter twice a year and you can visit our website, www.hillcrest.org.uk for general information and Hillcrest Homes updates. We would also recommend you consider downloading the **MyHillcrest App** from the Apple App Store, Windows Phone store or Google Play. Below are some QR codes for Google and Apple stores





For regular updates from Hillcrest you can follow us on social media. We have a Facebook page, a Twitter feed and a YouTube channel.



Facebook

facebook.com/HillcrestScotland



Twitter

twitter.com/HillcrestScot



YouTube

www.youtube.com/c/HillcrestOrgUk

Everyone at Hillcrest wishes you well in your new home.

Equality and Diversity

We are working towards mainstreaming equalities into the services we provide to reflect the diversity of the communities we work in. We recognise our obligation towards equality in terms of service delivery and employment, as well as having specific legal duties to comply with. We will also continue to work with our partners to make sure we provide appropriate and inclusive services.

Service Standards – Putting the Customer First

Hillcrest Homes want to promote a culture of excellence and openness to encourage customers to make suggestions about services. We want to learn from any experiences where customers feel we have not met their expectations.

If you have any suggestions about how we can improve our services please let us know.

For more information about our Service Standards please contact customer service or look on the Hillcrest website.

Your tenancy

Your tenancy agreement and Your Responsibilities

The tenancy agreement you have signed is a legal document that sets out your rights and responsibilities as a tenant and our duties as a landlord.

You have security of tenure under your tenancy agreement with us. This means you cannot be evicted from your home without a court order.

When you signed your Tenancy Agreement, you agreed to keep to the terms of the agreement. These terms are meant to make sure your home is properly looked after and that all tenants can live in their homes without being disturbed by neighbours or their visitors.

We may take legal action for eviction for any breach of your conditions of tenancy, for example failing to pay rent, or behaving in an anti-social manner.

Household composition

You need to keep us informed about who lives with you. If this changes, for example if you have a new baby or if someone leaves the home, you should contact customer service or use the Myhillcrest app as and when this happens so we can update your household details.

It is also important to tell us about who lives with you, because the length of time they have lived there can impact on certain rights they might have: If you want to assign (pass on) your tenancy, become a joint tenant with another person or would like them to succeed to (take over) your tenancy in the event of your death. To qualify, the other person must have been living in your property as their only and principal home for the 12 months before application is made. **The 12 month period does not start until we have been notified and have registered the individual.**

Anyone over sixteen years old who is living in your home is considered a “Qualifying Occupier”. They have the right to be informed about any action we take against you that may result in the repossession of your home. Their rights may be considered at any court hearing, and therefore it is important that you keep us updated with the details of people living with you.

Subletting, Assignment, Joint Tenancy and Exchange of Your Tenancy

You must first get our written permission if you want to:

- take in a lodger
- add a joint tenant to the tenancy
- sublet part or all of your house
- assign the tenancy (pass on the tenancy to someone else)
- carry out a mutual exchange
- give up possession of the tenancy.

For assignments and joint tenancies, the person(s) involved must have been living with you as part of your household for 12 months and you must have notified us at the point they moved in.

To apply for our permission you must tell us in writing:

- **the details** of the proposed change (including who you want to sublet or assign or give up possession to, take as a lodger or joint tenant or exchange with and the house involved); AND
- **when** you want the subletting, lodging, assignment, giving up of possession or exchange or change in tenancy to take place

If you are subletting you must detail the amount of rent and any other payments (including a deposit) you propose to charge

To make these changes to your tenancy, the house must have been the only or principal home of the person involved for at least 12 months. It is very important that you tell us about any changes in your household as and when they happen. We can't approve these tenancy changes unless we can verify that a person has stayed with you for the period required by law and that you informed us when they moved in.

We will only refuse a request if we have reasonable grounds for doing so, for example if the exchange would lead to considerable under-occupation or overcrowding. Please call customer service for more information.

Pets

You must notify us before keeping a domestic pet. You can notify us in writing, email or by completing a notification form. Notification form could be refused for any of the following reasons-previous animal welfare complaints, current legal action against tenant, condition of the property, and previous pet permission refusal (within the last 3-6 months). Prior written acknowledgement is required for each pet. Our recommendation would be to have a maximum of two pets within your household.

Tenants can keep any of the following pets:

- Dog*
- Cat

- Domestic bird
- Rabbit
- Small rodent (e.g. hamster, guinea pig, rat, gerbil, mouse)
- Ferret
- Fish in a home aquarium
- Small reptile or amphibian in a vivarium or tank (e.g. snake, lizard, turtle)
- Insects or arachnids (kept in a terrarium or tank)

This list is not exhaustive, and we must be notified for any pets not listed. Keeping of any animals listed under the schedule to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 is not permitted under any circumstances. Permission will not be granted for livestock or captive bred Schedule 4 birds.

*Permission can be granted for dogs prohibited under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, provided they are registered on the Index of Exempted Dogs. Owners must have a Certificate of Exemption and follow [rules](#) which can be found on the Scottish Government website. You must notify us if you own an exempted dog.

For information on how to meet your pet's welfare needs, Dogs Trust have information packs with local signposting support. The animals covered in the tenant information packs are dogs, cats, small animals (*rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs and ferrets*), indoor birds, fish and reptiles (*snakes and bearded dragons*). Link info packs

The following are some of the conditions that apply:

- You are responsible for the behaviour of any pets owned by you or anyone living with you
- You must take all reasonable steps to supervise and keep such pets under control
- You must take all reasonable steps to prevent such pets causing nuisance, annoyance or danger to your neighbours. This includes fouling or noise or smell from your domestic pet. You are responsible for cleaning up dog faeces.
- You must take reasonable care to see that such pets do not foul or cause damage to the house, your neighbour's property, anything belonging to us or anything we are responsible for, such as the common parts
- You may not breed animals or offer for sale any animal in the property
- We are entitled to require removal of the pet if causing sustained nuisance or damage and these issues have not been resolved

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Breach of conditions

- If a pet causes damage in the property or to anything that Hillcrest is responsible for, you must let us know as soon as possible to discuss options.
- Where there is a breach of conditions as outlined in this policy or if a pet is believed to be causing a nuisance to anyone in the neighbourhood, we will first contact the tenant to try and resolve the situation. This may involve signposting to relevant animal charities for support.
- If no satisfactory action is taken, we will issue one formal warning to the tenant. This will specify what action is required to remedy the situation. Where the matter is not resolved satisfactorily, we can withdraw permission for the tenant to keep the pet. Where necessary, legal action may be initiated to have the pet removed from the home.

Giving up your tenancy

If you want to end your tenancy you have to give us at least 28 days' notice in writing, by letter or email. You can also use the Myhillcrest app.

Your partner, or any joint tenant, must also sign to show that they agree that the tenancy should be given up.

You should provide us with your contact details and forwarding address and confirm the date you want to leave. You will have to pay rent up to the end of the 28 day notice period even if you actually move before then. If you want to extend the date of your tenancy termination you should notify us in writing.

When you move you should return all your keys, fobs and electric meter keys. You should leave your house clean and tidy. Any repairs that are your responsibility should be completed before you move out. If they are not completed satisfactorily, you may be recharged. If you leave furniture or belongings in the property (without our prior consent) we will recharge you for disposing of these items.

You should notify the gas and electric companies that you are moving and provide final meter readings. You should also arrange to have any mail re-directed.

Your Rent

Your rent pays for your home and the services we deliver as a landlord. Your rent is documented on your tenancy agreement.

Rent is usually reviewed annually in consultation with tenants. Any changes to rent levels will most often start on 1st April to coincide with the new financial year.

When to pay rent

It is your responsibility as a tenant to ensure your rent is paid in full and on time.

You are charged rent from the date your tenancy starts, even if you don't move in on that date. Rent is then payable in advance by you on or before the first day of each rental period. If you get paid on a date other than the first of the month you should contact the Income Management Team, who manage tenants' rent accounts, to set up a payment agreement.

How to pay rent

Rent can be paid by various methods. These include:

- **Direct Debit** – This can be set up by completing a direct debit mandate or by phoning us on 0300 123 2640
- **Debit or Credit card** – Payment can be made in person at our offices during working hours, or payment can be taken 7 days a week from 7am to 10pm by phoning 0300 123 2640 and selecting option 3
- **MyHillcrest App** – You can download the app on Apple's App Store or Google's Play Store – just search for MyHillcrest and log into your Allpay account from the app
- **Cheque** – These can be sent to our offices. Please make sure your name, address and tenancy number are noted on the back of the cheque
- **Allpay Payment Card** via Post Office and Paypoint – Your card will be issued to you 7–10 working days after sign up. Take your card to an outlet and make payment with cash or debit/credit card, keeping any receipt you are given
- **Online via Allpay** at www.allpay.net – Creating an account will allow you to make payments to your rent account with a debit/credit card. Please note you will need your Allpay card for this service

Help to pay rent

If you are in receipt of benefits or on a low income and think you might need help to pay your rent, you can apply for additional benefits. The amount you get will depend on the amount of money coming into your home, your savings, your household composition and circumstances.

If you are applying for a benefit to help with your rent, you should do this as soon as possible because any award will usually only be given from the date of application or the date you move into the tenancy. Any benefit awarded will usually be paid to you as the claimant. You can ask for the paying body to make payments to us as a landlord.

The main benefits available to help cover rent are Universal Credit (this is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions) and Housing Benefit (this is administered by your Local Council). Applications for housing related benefits are usually made online and it is vital that you provide all the information required for the claim to be processed.

If you fail to do this, your claim could be cancelled and you would be responsible for paying the rent due. If your circumstances change in any way, you must inform the paying body so your claim can be re-assessed.

Difficulties paying rent

If you are having difficulties finding the money to pay your rent, you should contact the Income Management Team via our customer service number, or use the Myhillcrest App straight away. We will agree a sensible arrangement with you to pay what you owe over time.

Once you make an arrangement it is very important that you keep to it and make regular payments.

If you don't pay your rent, you could be evicted from your home.

If you need some advice about increasing your income, accessing benefits and financial services or budgeting advice please contact our Tenancy Sustainment Service via our customer service number or use the Myhillcrest App.

Being a Good Neighbour

Everyone should be able to enjoy their home. We expect all our tenants to treat their homes and neighbours with respect.

While living in our property you should ensure your home is kept to a reasonable standard. If you have responsibility for any garden or driveway you should maintain this by ensuring any grass or shrubs are cut back regularly and weeds are controlled. You should also make sure you keep any common areas clean and clear.

If you have a balcony at your property you must be mindful of your neighbours above and below and how your actions could impact on them, for example we recommend that you don't feed birds on your balcony and when cleaning your own balcony you are mindful of debris that could fall to your neighbours below.

Tenants, their household members, and any visitors must not harass or act in an anti-social manner to any person in the neighbourhood or in their home, including our staff and contractors.

In practice, anti-social behaviour covers a wide range of actions and behaviours including, but not limited to the following:

- Arson
- Pets, Dog Fouling and uncontrolled Dogs
- Unacceptable Noise
- Substance Misuse and Drug Dealing
- Hate Incidents and Crime
- Unprovoked Assault or Threats of Violence
- Verbal Abuse and Harassment
- Vandalism and Graffiti

We will treat any aspects of anti-social behavior as a breach of your tenancy agreement and this could result in further action being taken against your tenancy.

Legal action to repossess the property may be initiated where someone residing in or visiting the property has been convicted of using the property for illegal or immoral purposes, or a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment, which was committed in the property or locality.

Areas not considered as anti-social behaviour:

- Acceptable noise including:
 - General household noise
 - Minor disturbances
 - Family disputes affecting neighbours
- Pets including infrequent dog fouling
- Children playing
- Tobacco smoking
- CCTV and video doorbells
- Abandoned Vehicles
- Unsanitary conditions and hoarding (investigation would be initiated on the grounds of breach of tenancy).

For non anti-social concerns, contact will be formally logged but not investigated. Tenants will be signposted to other appropriate agencies including Police Scotland, local authorities or other agencies in the first instance.

Areas such as failure to maintain garden areas satisfactorily will be dealt with under the Organisation's Estate Management timescales and procedures and include but are not limited to:

- Dumped items and refuse disposal
- Stair cleaning or garden upkeep

Making a complaint about a neighbour

The best way to sort out any problems initially is to speak with your neighbour - they may not realise the impact they are having on you. If you need to make a complaint about a neighbor

please contact customer service or use the Myhillcrest App. Our staff will advise you how we can help with your complaint.

If further investigation is needed this will normally be passed to a Housing Officer, who will keep you updated during the course of the investigation. In some cases we will work with other agencies such as Police Scotland or the relevant Local Authority Departments.

Wherever possible we will seek to maintain the confidentiality of the complainant but depending on the issues raised it may become obvious to the alleged perpetrator who has made the complaint.

Repairs and Maintenance Service

How to report repairs

You should tell us as soon as possible if a repair needs done. Be ready to give us your address, the nature and location of the problem and when you will be available to give access for repair.

- Phone the Repairs Hotline 08000 324 888 (this is also available out of hours for emergencies only)
- E-mail us at repair@hillcresthomes.org.uk (not for urgent or emergency repairs, ideally please report urgent or emergency repairs by telephone)
- Report it through the MyHillcrest App – for *some* repairs, you will be able to select and book your preferred appointment time.

If you report your repair by phone, we will allocate your repair a priority and where possible book an appointment for the work to be carried out. When an appointment is booked, you will be sent a text message with the confirmed date and time slot.

Reporting a repair when office is closed

If you need to report an emergency repair when our offices are closed, you should phone the Repairs Hotline on 08000 324 888 and you will be directed to our out of hours service. They will arrange for a contractor to visit. The type of repairs we will do outside office hours are:

- Burst pipes/badly leaking pipes causing flooding
- Blocked toilet (if only toilet in house)
- No water
- Blocked drain causing a leak or sewage into home
- No heating
- Door or ground floor window not secure
- Broken handrail to stairs
- Serious roof leak
- No electricity or no lights
- Smoke coming from an electrical fitting
- Faulty smoke detector sounding

How long will repairs take

We have three target times that cover all repairs. When you advise us of your repair we will give you this information so that you are aware of how long the repair is expected to take.

Our target times are:

Emergency Repairs

Timescale: Within 4 Hours

These are repairs that are: to prevent serious damage to the building; are a danger to health; a risk to safety; or, a risk of serious loss or damage to the occupier's property.

Examples are: Fire damage; Flood; gas leak; break in; no heating or hot water; blocked sink, blocked toilet if only toilet in the house, total power failure.

Please note our engineers do not attend to reports of no heating after 9 pm, this will be attended to the following day.

Non-Emergency Repairs

Timescale: 10 working days.

Examples are: blocked toilet where there is another toilet in the house, broken doorbell, cupboard door, appliance repair, rotary dryer.

(Working days do not include Saturday and Sunday)

Compensation for repairs

You may be able to claim compensation if our contractor has failed to carry a repair within the period of time allocated. This takes into account the times when a contractor may visit your home and then may have to order a part to fix the repair. This work would then take longer than our original estimation.

Compensation is a fixed payment of £15.

You also have the right to have some small urgent repairs carried out within a given timescale under the **Right to Repair Scheme**. These would include repairs which would cost less than £350 to be completed.

Compensation levels can vary with this type of repair and if you need more information please contact customer service.

Who is responsible for the repair

The below table indicates who would be responsible for completing the most common repairs. However, if we identify that a repair has been caused by neglect, carelessness or wilful damage it is possible you might be recharged.

ITEM	HILLCRESTTENANT	COMMENTS
Back boiler/fire/radiator	✓	
Balconies	✓	
Banisters(internal)	✓	
Baths	✓	

Bin shelters	✓		
Brick/block work	✓		
Carbon monoxide detectors	✓		
Carports	✓		Unless installed by tenant
Ceilings	✓		
Chimney stacks/pots/cowls	✓		
Chimney Sweeping		✓	
Cisterns	✓		
Cleaning communal stairs/windows		✓	Some cleaning may be done by landlord
Clothes poles/rotary driers	✓		Ropes are tenant responsibility
Cookers (owned by you)		✓	
Communal areas to flats	✓		
Cupboards	✓		
Damage – wilful or neglect		✓	
Damp-proof course	✓		
Decoration (internal)		✓	
Door bell	✓		Unless installed by tenant
Door entry system	✓		
Door locks (including bathroom door)	✓		Unless you have lost or broken your keys
Doors internal	✓		
Driveways	✓		Unless installed by tenant
Electric central heating system	✓		
Electrical appliances & plugs		✓	
Electrical wiring, sockets & switches	✓		
External drainage	✓		
Fences & gates	✓		Unless installed by tenant
Gas central heating, water pipes, radiators,	✓		

timers, thermostats, pumps			
Glass – external	✓		
Glass to internal doors / screens	✓		
Immersion heaters	✓		
Keys & fob replacements		✓	
Kitchen fittings / worktops	✓		
Kitchen units & sink	✓		
Landing & stairs (communal or internal)	✓		
Lift / elevator repairs	✓		
Parking area (communal)	✓		
Path & steps giving access to property	✓		
Refuse chutes	✓		
Refuse / recycling / garden Waste Wheelie bin		✓	
Retaining walls	✓		
Roof coverings	✓		
Ropes for sash and cord windows	✓		
Roughcast	✓		
Satellite Dish		✓	
Shower unit	✓		Unless installed by tenant
Sink bowl and drainer	✓		
Skirting boards	✓		
Smoke detector unit	✓		
Stairs (common or internal)	✓		
Stair lighting	✓		
Steps	✓		
Taps (including washers)	✓		
TV aerials	✓		Unless installed by tenant
Vandalism – repairs	✓		
Ventilators/Extractors/Fans	✓		Unless installed by tenant

Wash Hand Basin	✓	
Waste plugs/chains to basin/bath & sink		✓
Water heating	✓	
Water supply	✓	
WC bowl/seat and lid	✓	
Window frames, cills and fitting	✓	

Cyclical maintenance and planned works

As well as completing repairs that are reported to us by tenants, we do regular maintenance work to your homes to keep them in good condition. Our cyclical maintenance programme includes work like cleaning and repairing gutters and painting external woodwork. You will be advised of any planned work taking part in your area in advance.

We will sometimes delay non-essential repairs, like fencing, and do them as a contract because it gives better value for money and means we can do more with the money available. We also carry out major repairs and renewal of fittings. This includes work like rewiring, installing or renewing central heating, renewing windows and kitchens on a planned basis. If any major repairs or improvements are planned for your home we will consult you in advance of the work being done.

Alterations, Improvements and Adaptations

You must have our permission before you alter anything. We will charge you for the cost of putting things right if you have made alterations that don't meet our requirements or cause problems for your neighbours, for example increase in noise disturbance.

If you do things properly and safely we may be able to compensate you for the cost of the improvements you have made should you decide to leave your home (receipts for work would be required).

New Build Properties

In newly built properties we would ask you not to carry out alterations or decorate any of the rooms in your home until we have carried out the End of Defects inspection, normally 12 months after you move in.

Alterations

Please note that you need to obtain permission from us to carry out the following alterations:

- Lay laminate flooring, ceramic tiles or any other fixed flooring
- Alter, improve or enlarge the property, fixtures or fittings, including work to kitchens & bathrooms
- Put up a satellite dish or television aerial
- Put up a garage, shed or other structure including fencing
- Decorate the outside of the house

This is not a full list of alterations or improvements so if you are planning to do work on your property, please log your request through the Myhillcrest app or contact our repair service first to find out if permission is required. If any alterations or improvements are carried out without our permission we are entitled to restore the house to the previous condition, the cost of which would be charged to the tenant.

Adaptations

We can provide equipment or an adaptation to your home to assist with any additional needs you or your household might have.

Adaptations Include

- Grab rails and additional bannisters
- Handrails
- Walk in Showers
- Wet Floor Shower Areas
- Ramp access outside your property
- Hoists

To consider a request for an adaptation we normally need a referral from an Occupational Therapist or a qualified expert. Please contact your local council social work department or your GP to arrange a referral. They will arrange for an Occupational Therapist to visit you, at home, where they will assess your needs.

Home safety

You should make sure to secure your windows and doors when you are not at home.

Our staff, including tradesmen, should carry identification and you should ask to see this before allowing access into your home.

Home insurance

We insure the structure of your home against damage. This is called Buildings Insurance. Buildings insurance does not cover your contents (furniture, clothes, bedding, carpets etc), personal belongings, or the decoration of your home.

We strongly encourage you to get home contents insurance to protect your belongings in case of damage as the result of an accident. Hillcrest Homes do not provide their own home contents insurance, but if you would like more information about this please contact customer service.

Gas safety

We are required by law to inspect all our gas appliances and pipe work every 12 months. If your home has a gas meter, gas fire or boiler you must let us in to service them when we request access. We will contact you in advance with an appointment for this work to be done.

Failure to provide access will result if us forcing entry to your home.

Apart from looking after your safety, this is part of your tenancy agreement, and if you do not allow us access to do this, court action may be taken against you, and you would have to pay for legal expenses.

If you have any gas appliances of your own, e.g. a gas cooker, then you should have it repaired and serviced by an approved tradesman. It is dangerous (and can be illegal) if you let an unqualified person fit, repair or service a gas appliance. If you use your own gas appliance in the house, you have a duty not to use an appliance if for any reason you suspect it may be dangerous.

If you have installed a gas appliance not provided by us, then the Hillcrest has responsibilities for parts of the associated installation and pipework but *not* for the maintenance of the actual appliance in line with manufacturer's instructions.

If you smell gas in your home, you should:

- Put out all cigarettes and other naked lights
- Switch off all gas appliances
- Turn the gas off at the mains (the main tap is usually beside your gas meter)
- Open doors and windows
- Make sure you do not turn on any lights or other electrical switches (this could cause a spark)
- Phone the National Gas Emergency Service on **0800 111 999**

Electrical Safety

All landlords (including councils and housing associations) must make sure your home is safe and fit to live in throughout your tenancy.

Hillcrest Homes will ensure that the wiring and installations in safe working order.

As a tenant, you must:

- report electrical faults as soon as you spot a problem
- allow access for repairs and safety inspections
- make sure your own appliances are safe

If your electricity goes off this can be due to a faulty appliance in your home. This is a safety feature and if you are not sure how to fix this you should call the repairs team for advice on resetting your system.

Make sure your plugs have the correct fuse in them. Although most plugs come with a 13 amp fuse many items need a lower rated fuse.

As a landlord we will:

- Carry out electrical repairs
- Inspect the fixed electrical installations in the property. For example: wiring, plug sockets, light fittings, fuse boxes, electric showers and extractor fans every five years.
- Carry out a portable appliance check for any appliances supplied by us (every 5-years at the same time as your electrical check)
- Ensure that your fire (and carbon monoxide) detectors are installed and maintained to comply with the latest building regulations

Smoke alarms & carbon monoxide (CO) detectors

Your home has a smoke detector fitted for your safety. Please make sure that you test the alarm regularly by pressing the test button on the front of the alarm - a shrill sound tells you it is in working order.

If you cannot safely reach your smoke detector to regularly test it, please contact our repair number. For safety, the smoke detector in your home is wired directly into your home's electrical supply and has a battery back-up facility in case of power cuts.

The battery back-up facility is part of the detector and cannot be changed. It is advisable to keep your alarm dust free and you should occasionally vacuum around the casing of the detector to remove any excess dust.

If a CO detector starts bleeping, please contact the repair service immediately.

Smoke alarms and CO Detectors are there for your protection and should not be removed or painted.

Water and Drainage

In case of any future need to shut off your water, you should find out where your main stopcock or tap is. If you need help to locate this please check your tenancy sign up pack as this should be noted in your sign up checklist.

You should ensure that any leaks from fittings, fixtures or washing machines are dealt with urgently, and if necessary reported immediately. If you have a leak into your property from a neighbour try to contact them to ask them to investigate, and where possible turn off the water.

If you have a blocked sink or drain please contact repairs for advice. We can arrange to have the blockage cleared. However, if the contractor tells us this is due to something you have done (such as, putting fat down the kitchen sink or sanitary items or nappies down the toilet) you will be charged for the full cost of the work.

Frost and burst pipes

There can be a risk of frozen or burst pipes during periods of heavy frost.

If you have a burst pipe, turn the stop valve clockwise to shut off water, open the taps to the bath, wash hand basin and sink to allow as much water as possible to escape.

Check the stop valves every now and again to make sure they are not jammed and turn them off when you go on holiday. If you go away in the winter, your system needs to be drained down or your heating should be left on at a low level. If in doubt, call repairs for advice.

If you have a fire

If there is a fire in your house, you should do the following:

- Close the door of the room where the fire is to stop flames from spreading
- Phone **999** and ask for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS)
- Warn other people in the building and your neighbours
- Do not go back in the house for any reason until the SFRS has said it is safe to do so
- Contact us to let us know that there has been a fire, no matter how small

Getting more help to manage your home

We are committed to improving the lives of our tenants. At Hillcrest we understand that people can need help with a range of issues, and we have a number of services that can help you to manage your tenancy.

If you think you need some extra help please contact customer service. They can provide advice, or pass your information on to a specialist service that might be able to assist you.

Financial Wellbeing Team (FWT)

This service can help tenants understand and manage all of the financial aspects of setting up and keeping a home. If you are experiencing financial difficulties or just need some advice, please contact TSS through customer service.

They offer a range of advice, including:

- Rent arrears
- Council Tax arrears
- Universal Credit
- Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction
- Pension Credits
- Disability Benefits
- Tax Credits
- Scottish Welfare Fund
- Utility debts
- Consumer debts
- Accessing furniture, white goods and carpets
- Household budgeting
- Accessing affordable credit
- Home contents insurance

They can also assist tenants with foodbank referrals if this service might be needed.

Hillcrest Energy Advice Team (HEAT)

We can offer a free service to provide advice about numerous energy matters, and this service can also speak to fuel suppliers on your behalf. If you would like some advice about making sure you are being as energy efficient as possible, please contact HEAT through customer service.

They offer a range of advice, including:

- How to best use heating and hot water systems and using the programmer. Videos on using your heating system are available on our website.
- Reducing fuel costs
- Switching energy supplier and tariff and changing payment methods
- Warm Home discounts and Winter Fuel allowances
- Fuel debt and budgeting
- Dampness, condensation and moisture control in the home
- Reducing household energy consumption and saving energy
- Local grants and advice initiatives

I want to move home

If you decide you want to move home than you can apply for alternative accommodation. There are various ways you can do this, and these can be different depending on where you live.

In most locations where Hillcrest Homes have property, a Common Housing Register is in operation.

You can also try to find someone to do a mutual exchange with; this is where you swap homes. You need permission from your landlord, and that of the other party, to carry out a mutual exchange.

You should contact customer service to speak about the housing options available to you. Alternatively you can contact the Local Council of the area where you want to live and they will tell you about choices that are available to you.

If you owe any money to Hillcrest, this will still require to be paid even when you cease to be our tenant.

Getting involved and giving feedback

Hillcrest Engagement Team

We want to make it as easy as possible for tenants to get involved in making decisions that affect them and give a range of ways they can get involved – as individuals, or in groups.

Please contact customer service to find out more about how you can take part in a way that suits you.

Compliments, Suggestions or Complaints

Your views are important to us and we always welcome feedback on our services. We are committed to providing high-quality customer services and we value and use information from our customers to help us improve.

Please tell us about any times when we have done a good job, or if you have any suggestions to improve our services to you.

You can provide feedback through email via youropinioncounts@hillcrest.org.uk ; or the Myhillcrest app; or via customer service.