

Tenancy and Estate Management



Tenants Handbook



This leaflet covers a range of issues connected with living in your home. It aims to explain our policies and procedures and offer practical advice.

Security

The following simple precautions will help to minimise your chances of being burgled:

- always lock all doors and windows at night and when you leave your home
- never leave keys under mats or hanging on a string behind your letter box
- always check the identity of callers before you let them in to your home - ask to see some proof of identity. If in doubt, do not let anyone in and call the Police
- if you are away from home for a few days, ensure you cancel regular deliveries such as papers and milk
- if you live in a block of flats or a sheltered housing scheme with a security door-entry system, ensure that the door closes behind you and never prop it open.

Pets

You must not keep any animal at your home which is unsuitable for your property. If in doubt, please contact your Housing Management Officer. You must not keep a dog or cat in a flat with a shared entrance without our written permission. Please contact your Housing Management Officer by telephoning 01268 882200 if you wish to keep a dog or cat in such a property.

Please ensure that pets are kept under control and do not cause a nuisance or annoyance to your neighbours. If you allow this to happen, you may be asked to find your pet another home as you will be breaching the terms of your tenancy.

Running a Business From Home

You cannot run a business from home without obtaining written permission from us.

We will not object to you running a small business from home as long as it does not breach the terms of your Tenancy Agreement i.e. it should not be illegal or immoral and should not cause a disturbance or nuisance to neighbours.

Under no circumstances will we allow a vehicle repair or vehicle breaking business to be run from any of our properties.

Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour or anything that causes harm or aggression towards others will not be tolerated. Castle Point Borough Council is committed to tackling ASB and working with victims, perpetrators and partners, including the Police, to achieve this.

The Tenancy Agreement outlines behavior known as anti-social behaviour (ASB) that is unacceptable to you, your family or invited visitors.

Examples of ASB include:

- not looking after your garden
- using or allowing the property to be used for any immoral or illegal purposes, including using or supplying illegal drugs or substances, counterfeit goods and weapons
- causing nuisance or annoyance to your neighbours by, for example, playing loud music, arguing and slamming doors, unreasonable dog barking and fouling, offensive drunkenness and dumping rubbish
- harassing other neighbours or any other person in the community by, for example, using or threatening to use violence, using insulting words or behaviour, causing damage or threatening to damage another person's home or belongings, writing threatening, insulting or abusive graffiti
- harassing someone because of their race, colour, ethnic origin, religious or political beliefs
- harassing someone because of their sex, sexuality, age or disability
- behaving in an aggressive way towards our employees, members or contractors.

This list is not exhaustive and it is important to remember that ASB can impact upon an individual, a family, the community and the town as a whole. It can make life unbearable and create an environment where serious crime can take hold.

If you experience any of the above problems, please contact your Housing Management Officer.

What to Do If You are Having Problems with Your Neighbours

Try talking to your neighbour first. They may not realise that their behaviour is impacting on you. If the problem persists, we can offer a mediation service to help resolve the issues. We will try to help you to resolve the problem, however, ultimately, we will apply to the County Court for an Order for Possession or for an injunction to stop the anti-social behaviour. We will need your help in recording the issues you are facing and your Housing Management Officer will advise you on how to proceed.

If you have any complaints regarding the behaviour of your neighbours, you should put these in writing to your Housing Management Officer.

Being a Caring Neighbour

Disagreements between neighbours, for example about noise or boundaries are one of the most common reports we receive. Before involving us, we ask you to be considerate and try to sort out the problem between yourselves. We also want our residents to understand that people have different lifestyles. However, if you, a member of your household or a visitor act in an antisocial way and cause a nuisance, you are breaking the terms of your Tenancy Agreement.

If You Need Help

If the matter involves one of our tenants or leaseholders, we will be able to give you help and advice. We are not able to manage noise and disturbance from residents who are not our tenants but you can seek advice from Castle Point Borough Council's Environmental Health Team.

For serious cases of anti-social behaviour, we will work with other local organisations such as Environmental Health, Social Services and the Police. Often talking about the problem is the best way to settle a disagreement.

A Helpful Guide to Avoid Causing a Nuisance to Others

- don't carry out loud work at night including repairs
- inform your neighbours if you intend to have a party
- do not play your TV, radio, hi-fi or musical instruments loudly, especially at night
- if you have a dog or other pets, keep them under control
- be aware of where your children are playing, who is supervising them and what they are doing
- talk to your children and visitors if their behaviour is likely to cause a nuisance to other people
- dispose of rubbish and waste in an appropriate manner.

Types of ASB Incidents

- ASB resulting in actual or threatened violence, or incidents where there is a likelihood of serious injury
- Any racist incident or act (Castle Point defines a racist act as any incident perceived to be racist by the victim or another person)
- ASB that is intended to frighten, intimidate or harm; cause damage to property or is targeted. This includes verbal abuse in person or by phone, children/young people intimidating residents, threatening/abusive letters and offensive material placed through letterboxes or graffiti
- ASB that is caused by thoughtlessness and is a breach of the Tenancy Agreement which includes: unintentional damage to property, running a business from home, illegal or immoral use of a property or communal area including drinking or partaking of illegal substances in communal areas, carrying out vehicle repairs and abandoned vehicles.

If you are experiencing ASB you should tell us or report it to the Police, depending on how serious it is. We will give you advice about what we can do to support you, and help you sort out the issues.

Here are some things we can do to help:

- visit the perpetrator in their home or interview them at the Council Offices
- refer your case to mediation services
- advise and assist victims in gathering evidence
- issue warnings to the perpetrators
- work closely with a range of partners to provide the most appropriate solution
- provide the victim with extra security measures
- provide victim and witness support throughout the process
- consider alternative approaches to preventing ASB
- consider using all approaches in the enforcement of ASB.

Any action we take will be with your agreement. If the behaviour does not breach the Tenancy Agreement and Castle Point Borough Council does not have powers to act, we will give you advice about who else may be able to help you. We must give the person reasonable opportunity to discuss the problem, and time to change or stop the behaviour. This helps if we consider legal action at a later stage.

For legal action to be taken it is imperative that as much quality evidence is collated as possible as we will rely on this as evidence in Court. You will be asked to complete incident logs for each incident you, or any household members or visitors witness. You can obtain incident logs from Housing Services.

Harassment

Harassment is any type of behaviour that stops an individual from having the 'quiet enjoyment' of their home. It is caused by prejudice against some members of society (for example, racial harassment, sexual harassment, and harassment on the grounds of sexuality or disability, this also includes domestic violence).

We are committed to tackling any harassment of our tenants and their households.

We will:

- deal with harassment quickly and sensitively
- work with other agencies including the Police, other Council departments and Local Community Groups
- take firm action against people who harass our tenants
- support people suffering harassment or domestic violence
- transfer tenants suffering serious harassment or domestic violence when it is appropriate and where there is no other alternative.

We give support that is tailored to the needs of the victims of harassment, which can include:

- installing extra security in the home, such as the Sanctuary Scheme
- referrals for panic alarms linked directly to the Police
- putting people in touch with appropriate support agencies.

Communal Areas and Play Areas

A communal area is any shared entrance, hall, stairway, driveway, garden, parking or play area where no resident has exclusive rights or ownership. If you live in a flat, you may share an entrance, hall or stairway with other residents.

If you live on an estate, you may share other areas such as gardens and play areas.

We are responsible for the cleaning and ground maintenance of these areas and the cost of this is collected through your rent. **If you notice any particular problems, please contact Housing Services by telephoning 01268 882200.**

Where you share communal areas in blocks of flats with other residents, please ensure that they are kept free from any obstruction such as prams, bikes, rubbish as they may create a health and safety risk.

Gardens, Trees and Fences

Under the terms of your Tenancy Agreement, you are responsible for keeping your garden (if you have one) in a neat, tidy and clean condition. It's your responsibility to trim shrubs and trees so they don't cause a nuisance, hazard or damage. If you want to remove trees please obtain permission from Housing Services on 01268 882200. You are responsible for maintaining and replacing fences between the gardens of council properties. If you are unsure about your responsibility please contact Housing Services by telephone 01268 882200.

Refuse Disposal

Please ensure that you dispose of household refuse carefully in accordance with the local collection. Do not accumulate rubbish in gardens or communal areas of blocks of flats. Information about household collections is provided directly to you and also available on our website.

Refuse that is not disposed of or presented for collection correctly may be treated as fly tipping for which you could face up to five years in prison and/or a fine.

If you have bulky items of household refuse, please check the web site www.castlepoint.gov.uk/recycling for a list of items that we can collect. For more information please call 01268 882200 or e.mail Bulkywaste@castlepoint.gov.uk Collection is free for senior citizens although there is a charge for other people.

Parking

Roadworthy and taxed vehicles should be parked in designated parking areas i.e. within the boundaries of your property, garages or off-street parking lay-by's. Vehicles should not be parked on landscape areas or communal grounds outside block of flats. Caravans, boats and business vehicles over 1 ton should not be parked at your home.

Do not double park or obstruct other road users in any way, particularly emergency services vehicles which require access all the time.

Abandoned Vehicles

Abandoned vehicles are an eyesore and create obstructions which are potentially very dangerous. Where we believe a vehicle has been abandoned or left untaxed, we will take steps to find out who the owner is and have it removed. The owners of the vehicle will be recharged for the cost of removal.

If you have a vehicle that needs disposing of, please find details of local car breakers and make appropriate arrangements.

Pest Control

Council Pest Control Officers deal with harmful pests in homes and businesses.

The Pest Control Officer will visit by appointment to carry out the most effective treatment for various household pests. The types of pests treated are rodents (rats and mice) and insects such as fleas and bedbugs. **Please note that they do not carry out any treatment for squirrels, foxes, wasps or pigeons.**

Some treatments are free, but there is a charge for most. For more information on the charges or to use our Pest Control Service, please contact Environmental Health Services on 01268 882200 or visit the website at www.castlepoint.gov.uk/environmentalhealth

Tenancy Support

Castle Point Borough Council provides Tenancy Support Service in partnership with an external partner called Family Mosaic. Family Mosaic is one of the largest housing groups in the UK and its Thames Gateway Floating Support services cover Castle Point, Basildon, Rochford and Rayleigh.

Our Tenancy Support Scheme is available for anyone who is a tenant of Castle Point Borough Council and has difficulty managing his or her tenancy for any of the following reasons:

- you have trouble keeping your home secure. For example, if you have felt obliged or pressured into letting people into your home that you don't want there
- you need help dealing with neighbourhood disputes
- you need help budgeting, paying your rent or claiming benefits
- you have difficulty in contacting social services, the doctor, or similar professional help
- you have difficulties socialising or undertaking household chores.

The scheme is also available to other people who live in your home.

How to Get Help

If you need our help, or want to request help for someone you know, contact Housing Services. If you live in sheltered accommodation, speak to your Sheltered Housing Officer. With your agreement, we can then pass your details on to Family Mosaic and they will assess your case. Family Mosaic will arrange for an advisor to come and talk to you about any problem you are facing and will agree a support package with you.

You can refer yourself, or a friend or relative can do this on your behalf. Self-referral forms are available by telephoning Family Mosaic on 01268 498500. Ask for the Gateway Coordinator.

The Tenancy Support scheme is available for most people, but in particular:

- those with learning difficulties
- people with mental health problems
- older people (including those with mental health problems)
- children leaving care
- people with drug or alcohol problems
- people fleeing domestic violence
- vulnerable young people
- refugees.

Garages

There are limited numbers of garages available to rent in the Borough by our tenants, leaseholders and residents. In some areas there is a waiting list for garages. If a garage is not available immediately to rent in the area you want, we will hold your application on a waiting list. Please contact Housing Services if you would like to apply to rent a garage.

How Much Does a Garage Cost to Rent?

Our garage rental costs are very competitive and are reviewed each year. For information on current costs, please contact Housing Services.

When renting a garage, you will be asked to sign a Tenancy Agreement that sets out the way in which you can use your garage.

Some of the things you are not allowed to do when renting a garage include:

- using the garage for storage
- storing hazardous substances
- running a business from a garage.

Ending a Garage Tenancy

If you want to give up your garage, you must give Housing Services one week's notice. The notice period ends on a Sunday. You should return the keys to Housing Services at the Council Office in Kiln Road by 10am on Monday.

Is there a reason why you might not be able to rent a garage?

You will not be able to rent a garage from us if you owe rent arrears on your current home, or if you still owe money on a previous tenancy you have had with the Council.

When renting a garage the area around the garage should be kept clear to allow other people access to their garages at all times. Garages are designed to safely store motor vehicles but we cannot guarantee that a garage will be weatherproof. It is the responsibility of the person renting the garage to arrange for insurance against theft or damage.

How to contact us

Housing Services 01268 882200
(Housing Hot Key Press 0)

Housing Repairs 01268 882326

Housing Repairs (out of hours) . . 01268 758357

Housing Rents 01268 882481