



WESTMEATH LOCAL AUTHORITIES
Údaraís Áitiúla Condae na hIarmhí



Know Your Rights...Accept Your Responsibilities!

Bíodh fhios agat ar do cheartanna...Glac ar do fhreagra

Tenant's Handbook

Lámhleabhar na dtionóntaí



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KNOW YOUR RIGHTS...ACCEPT YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES!

This project is co-funded by the Local Authority National Partnership Advisory Group.



INTRODUCTION

Réamhrá

Westmeath Local Authorities are pleased to produce a revised Tenant Handbook as part of the Council's commitment to continually improve the delivery of services to its Customers.

This Handbook is an important element in the channel of information between the Council and its tenants and should be kept in a safe place for future reference.

In addition to the Handbook there is a range of leaflets, circulars and public information notices available from all Westmeath Local Authority offices and online at

www.westmeathcoco.ie or www.athlone.ie/udc/

We hope it will be of assistance in our endeavour to improve co-operation between the Councils and their tenants.



Ashdale Residents Association Meeting, Athlone



HOUSING OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO YOU

Rogha tithe atá ar fáil dhuit

Introduction

As a tenant you have various options to choose from if you wish to become a homeowner or to improve the property you currently occupy. The options are briefly outlined below and further details on each option are available from your Local Authority office.

Tenant Purchase Scheme

If you have been a tenant of a Local Authority house for at least one year you may apply to purchase the property from the Local Authority. The purchase price will be based on the market value of the property less discounts based on number of years you have been in the house. Applicants are required to obtain a mortgage either privately or from the Local Authority to purchase the property.

Loans for House Purchase or Home Improvement

A Local Authority may also advance a loan to allow eligible applicants buy a home outright over 25 years. Alternatively, loans of varying amounts may be advanced for home improvements over varying periods.

Extension Scheme for Local Authority Houses

A Local Authority may extend a rented Local Authority house where there is overcrowding or potential overcrowding in the house and where funding for the work is available.

Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability

The Local Authorities may undertake structural alterations to your house to facilitate the special needs of a disabled member of the household. Application form and further information may be obtained at your local area office.



Affordable Housing

Local Authority tenants may be eligible to purchase a house under the Affordable Housing scheme depending on their level of income. Under this scheme the Local Authority provides houses for sale at a discount from the market value. The Local Authority provides a 97% mortgage to eligible applicants over a period of 25 years to purchase the house.



Tenant receiving advice from Housing Office Mullingar

Mortgage Allowance Scheme

A Local Authority tenant who surrenders the house they occupy to the Local Authority and who enters into a mortgage of at least €38,092 for the purchase or construction of a private or affordable house may be eligible for an allowance of €11,428. This allowance is payable over 5 years directly to the lending agency who will reduce the mortgage repayments accordingly.

Transfer

The Local Authority may transfer a tenant by agreement to a different area. Transfers will be considered in cases of overcrowding in the original dwelling, where the dwelling is under occupied, or on certified medical grounds. A tenant must be in occupation of the dwelling in question for a period of at least 2 years before consideration will be given to a transfer request.



TENANCY CONDITIONS

Bail Tionóntacht

The tenancy of a Local Authority house brings with it certain obligations and responsibilities on both the parts of the Local Authority and the tenant. Every tenant is required to sign a Tenancy Agreement or Licence Agreement when allocated a Local Authority house. This is to safeguard both the tenants and the Local Authority's rights in relation to the property.

There are a number of conditions contained in the agreement, all of which are explained to the tenant before signing. Each tenant receives a copy of their tenancy or licence agreement within a week of having signed it and this should be kept for reference purposes.

The agreement contains a number of conditions relating to the tenants obligations and responsibilities with regard to the house they occupy. The following section on Maintenance and Advice clarifies some of these issues.

All tenants must complete pre-tenancy training before signing a tenancy or licence agreement. Refusal to participate in this training will result in the withdrawal of the offer of tenancy by the Local Authority.



Tenant painting house at Dalton Park, Mullingar



TENANT PARTICIPATION IN ESTATE MANAGEMENT

Páirt an tionónta i mbainistíocht an eastát

"MAKE THE DECISIONS THAT AFFECT YOU"

- The Council acknowledges that when you are allocated a house you and your family become members of the community in which you live.
- The Council encourages you and your neighbours to become actively involved in your estate.
- To assist both new and already established estates the Council will arrange training to assist in the setting up of an Active Residents Association.



Coilin Búí, Moate

- Through this training, RESIDENTS identify issues that relate to them on the estate and become more involved in the decision making with the Council, making their area a more desirable place to live.
- Housing Estates with an Active Residents Association will generally look tidy and well kept, be litter free and be a more pleasant place to live.
- Some estates will have community facilities which are provided mainly for the use of the residents of the estate. Tenants are encouraged to get involved in the management and use of these facilities which can provide great benefit to a community.

YES. IT IS YOUR ESTATE. YOU DECIDE.

For further information contact the Housing Section of your Local Authority, Housing Liaison Officer or your Revenue Collector.



LOCAL AUTHORITY RENTS

Cíosanna Tithe

Every tenant of a Local Authority house is obliged to pay a rent to the Local Authority. This rent is calculated in accordance with the Local Authority's Differential Rent Scheme which is updated every year to reflect the rising costs of maintenance of houses. A formula is used that takes into account the principal earners income and also that of any subsidiary earner(s) in the household. The tenant also receives an allowance based on the number of children in the household. Any tenant whose income changes either up or down during the year is obliged to inform the Local Authority of the change.

Rent may be paid to the Local Authority by the following means:

- Local Council Area Office or Cash Office.
- Standing Order.
- An Post.
- Deductions from Social Welfare.



If a tenant finds themselves in difficulty meeting rent payments they should contact the main Housing Office where arrangements can be made to agree a payment schedule to overcome what is more often than not a temporary problem. Advice is also available from the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) on how to overcome and handle difficulties with meeting payments.

It is not the wish of the Local Authority to evict any tenant for non-payment of rent but the power to do so is available in cases where repeated efforts to solve an arrears problem are ignored.



HOUSING MAINTENANCE

Bainistíocht na Tithe

In the case of a new tenant the Council will make every effort to put the dwelling into a fully habitable condition. Where the dwelling is old it must be appreciated that it cannot be renovated to an 'as new' state. Special consideration will be given to the problems of elderly tenants and to exceptional cases of hardship.

In order to retain the dwelling in a habitable condition repairs and maintenance are necessary. Responsibility for these repairs and maintenance are shared by the tenant and the Council as set out in the terms of the tenancy agreement.

Repairs for which the Tenants are responsible:

All tenants are responsible with regard to the up-keep and maintenance of their Council house. The following are the main types of repair that are the responsibility of the tenant under their Tenancy Agreement:

- Repair of broken glass.
- Decoration including both internal and external painting.
- Protection of external doors, windows and other woodwork (which require painting at 3 year intervals).
- Damage caused by negligence or vandalism.
- Cleaning blockages from private drains, toilets, sinks and gutters, etc.
- Cleaning of chimneys. It is recommended that chimneys are cleaned at least twice per year.
- Repair and replacement of wall tiles, floor tiles shower tiles and fireplace tiles.
- Internal joinery such as skirting boards, internal doors and frames, door handles, locks.
- Draught proofing of doors and windows.
- Maintenance and replacement of fire grates and fire fronts.
- Maintenance and replacement of solid fuel cookers and other heating appliances.
- Replacement of fuses and light bulbs.
- Repair of leaking or dripping taps.



- Repair of internal plaster cracks.
- Cleaning and maintenance of septic tanks.
- Maintenance and repair/replacement of kitchen units, cupboards, locks, handles, etc.
- Maintenance of bathroom suite incl. W.C., Bath and Handbasin .
- Maintenance of gardens, fences, boundary walls, gates and fuel sheds.
- Grass maintenance in front and rear gardens and road verge in front of property.
- Any damage caused as a result of erection of T.V. aerials/satellite dishes etc.
- Repairs to electrical appliances and sockets not installed by the Council.
- Damage arising from other than fair wear and tear is deemed the tenants own responsibility. The tenant will be required to pay the costs of repair and replacement.
- Damage caused by tenants to electrical wiring or plumbing by the tenant, i.e. changing the heating pipes to install central heating or putting in new sockets, etc.
- Maintenance of smoke alarms.
- Repairs arising from condensation damage.
- Ventilation covers.

Notes: In the case of electrical or plumbing repairs this work should only be undertaken by a Qualified Contractor. For major items of repair (such as replacement of solid fuel cookers) for which the tenant is responsible the Council may provide a Home Improvement Loan to assist the tenant.

Repairs for which the Council is responsible:

The Councils Housing Maintenance Section is responsible for the following types of structural repairs to rented dwellings:

- Roofs (including tiles/slates, ridge cappings, and barges).
- External portion of chimneys and cappings.
- Replacement of Fascias and Soffits.
- External walls of dwelling house including plastering, rendering, and blockwork /brickwork.



- Windows (excl. glass) and sashes.
- External doors and frames to house.
- Fire damage repairs (excl. redecoration).
- Electrical wiring, sockets and light switch repairs resulting from reasonable wear and tear.
- Plumbing repairs to boilers, hot water cylinders and water storage tanks.
- Emergency repairs required to make the house safe.

Notes: The Local Authority will not be responsible for the repair of any of the above items where:

- a) Damage has been caused by tenant.
- b) Unapproved alterations have been carried out by the Tenant.
- c) Neglect or failure of the tenant to properly maintain.

In the case of Elderly or disabled tenants, or severe hardship cases the Housing Officer may use his/her discretion to carry out repairs deemed essential.

Repair Procedure

It is the Council's aim to respond to maintenance requests depending on the category of repair. In the interest of providing an improved housing maintenance service, repairs are categorised as follows, with the appropriate response time:

- **Emergency**

These are repairs where there is a possibility of injury to occupant of house or the general public. Examples of these are Smoking fuseboard, Faulty sockets, etc. These repairs are generally completed within 24 hours.

- **Urgent**

These include situations where there is a risk to the Councils and/or the tenants property. Examples of these are Leaking pipes, Leaking roof, etc. These repairs are generally completed within 7 days.



- **Routine**

These are repairs where there is no risk of injury or risk to property.

Examples of these are Plastering repairs, repair of downpipes and gutters, etc. These repairs are undertaken as finance and resources allow.

- **Cyclical/Preventative**

These are repairs to preserve the condition of the house and prevent deterioration.

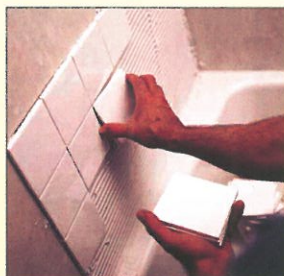
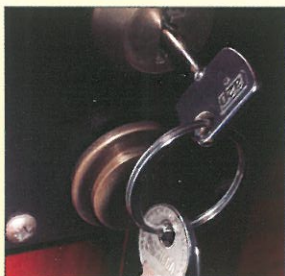
Examples of these are Replacement of doors and windows, Electrical rewiring, etc. These repairs are undertaken on an annual rolling programme based on priority of repair work required.

Requests for Repairs:

If you have any queries about maintenance, you should contact the local Council Area Office for which the Telephone Numbers are given at the back of this booklet.

If your request is valid, it will be logged and categorised as set out above. You will be given an indication of when we expect to undertake the repairs.

While every effort will be made deal with your request in some cases it may not be possible to stick to the original arrangement.





ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Iompár Anta-Sóisialta

- We want you to enjoy living in your home. We recognise your right to enjoy living as you choose, as long as this does not adversely affect other tenants and neighbours. We ask that all tenants and their families are considerate towards their neighbours and help to create a caring community. The Council will endeavour to promote harmony on all estates and try to deal with any problems.
- All tenants are responsible for their behaviour and the behaviour of their children.
- The Council has adopted a very strong position where acts of anti social behaviour are proven. OFFENDING TENANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES WILL HAVE THEIR HOMES REPOSSESSED. Tenants evicted will be regarded as having made themselves homeless and will not be re-housed.

ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR includes but is not restricted to:

- Use of the property for any criminal, immoral or illegal purpose such as selling or using drugs, storing or handling of stolen goods.
- Threatening or violent behaviour to anyone in the house or in the local area.
- Threatening or violent behaviour to any employee of the Council.
- Excessively loud noise.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR?

Do not assume the Council already knows about it. Put your complaint in writing, giving full details of the nature of the complaint, including dates and times of incidents, and forward it to both the Housing Section of the Council and the Garda Síochána. All complaints will be treated with total confidentiality and investigated fully.



The following powers are available to the Council in dealing with anti-social behaviour, and our approach to engaging each is to be reviewed as part of this process -

- Excluding Order – where a tenant wishes to have another occupier who is engaged in anti-social behaviour excluded from the dwelling. The Local Authority may also make the application.
- Refusal or deferral of housing applicants for accommodation on the grounds of good estate management having obtained information from other local authorities, state agencies e.g. Gardaí, Health Boards on persons it believes are or have been engaged in anti-social behaviour.
- Refusal to sell a dwelling under the Tenant Purchase Scheme on grounds of good estate management.
- Where there is no tenant and a dwelling is occupied by a person or persons engaged in anti-social behaviour, they may be removed by the Gardaí.
- Notice to Quit - Eviction of whole household.

Further information relating to Anti-Social Behaviour is included in a booklet located at the back of this document.





HOUSING WELFARE SERVICE

Seirbhís Leasa Tithe

What is a Housing Welfare Officer?

Housing Welfare Officers are social workers, employed by Local Authorities nationwide, who work with individuals, families, groups and communities.

Your local Housing Welfare Officer will assist you on issues such as:

- Housing and tenancy matters.
- Rent and arrears.
- Child and family matters.
- Marital and domestic issues.
- Addiction.
- Young people and education.
- Your neighbourhood and community.
- Needs of the elderly.
- Vulnerable and reclusive people.
- Mental health problems.

This service is a confidential, private and interpersonal relationship between you and the Housing Welfare Officer, who will act on your behalf.



Housing Welfare client Mullingar with Housing Welfare Officer



USEFUL ADVICE

Comhairligh Úsáideach

Alterations to dwelling

You must get the Councils agreement before carrying out any alterations or improvements to your dwelling. Any such construction will become the property of the Council and is not removable upon termination of tenancy. In the case of unauthorised alterations the Council may require full re-instatement to the original condition. Approved alterations which add to the property value will be considered in the valuation process if the tenant subsequently avails of the Tenant Purchase Scheme.

Insurance

The Local Authority insure the building for fire damage. As a tenant you are strongly advised to insure the contents of your dwelling.

Electrical Safety

It is important to exercise care in the use of electrical appliances and not to overload sockets, etc. Damaged or defective sockets on switches should be reported to the Council immediately. Under no circumstances should tenants tamper with or attempt repair or alter electrical systems.

Chimneys

Chimneys should be cleaned at least twice per year to reduce risk of chimney fires. In the event of a chimney fire call the fire brigade immediately and report the incident to Council.

Pets

You may keep domestic pets such as cats or certain breeds of dogs as long as they don't become a nuisance to your neighbours. In the case of apartments tenants are strongly advised not to keep pets. You are prohibited from keeping horses, pigs, poultry or any non domestic pets or birds.



Fire

The occurrence of a fire can have serious consequence to life or property and tenants should minimise such a risk. Practical measures to reduce such a hazard include –

- Secure fire guards to open fires.
- Keep matches and lighters out of the reach of children.
- **NEVER** smoke in bed.
- Unplug all non-essential electrical appliances at night.
- Install a fire extinguisher and fire blanket.

In the event of a fire vacate house immediately and call the fire brigade.

House Security

Gardai statistics indicate that most house break-ins are carried out on the spur of the moment. There are a few simple steps that you can take to prevent a break-in.

- Always close your windows and lock the doors when you go out even if it's only for a few minutes.
- Never leave tools or ladders lying around in the garden.
- Don't leave keys on a string behind the letterbox, hidden under the doormat or in secret places. Thieves usually find them!
- If you go out at nighttime consider leaving a light on inside that can be spotted from the outside, usually landing or hallway.
- If you are on holidays, tell a neighbour that you will be away, cancel all deliveries.
- Never leave valuables lying around where they can be seen through a window.
- Consider installing a wired house alarm.

Thieves try to gain entry posing as officials or workmen. Never let a stranger into your home unless you are sure of his/her identity. If you are not satisfied to a person's identity do not allow them to enter the house.



Litter

It is the responsibility of the tenant to keep the dwelling and its environs clean and free from litter and all other waste at all times. Refuse collection and recycling services should be availed of by the tenant. Spot checks are carried out in relation to this matter by Community Wardens on an on-going basis.

Vehicles

It is forbidden to park any caravans, mobile homes, etc on the property or on adjacent communal areas. Also any illegal or unroadworthy vehicle should not be retained by the tenant on the property or on adjacent roadway or on communal areas.

Succession of Tenancy

Following the death of a Local Authority tenant, a family member of the deceased tenant may be given consideration to the granting of succession of tenancy of the house provided that the Local Authority is satisfied that they have been resident in the house for a period of at least 12 months and have been declared for rent purposes.

Further Information

Further information on Housing services are available on Westmeath County Council internet website @ www.westmeathcoco.ie or on Athlone town Council website @ www.athlone.ie/udc/





USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Uimhir Guthán Úsáideach



Housing Maintenance Offices:

The County is divided into five Areas for the purpose of housing maintenance.
Requests for repairs should be directed as follows:-

Area Office	Telephone No.
Mullingar Area	044/9332201
Athlone Area	090/6442100
Athlone Town Council	090/6442100
Coole Area	044/9361128
Kilbeggan Area	05793/32001

In cases of Emergency Repairs please consult your Telephone Directory
for Council Emergency Telephone Numbers.

FIRE BRIGADE / AMBULANCE		999
GARDAI	Mullingar	044/9348915
	Athlone	090/6492609
HOSPITALS	Mullingar	044/9340221
	Athlone	090/6442140
E.S.B.	Mullingar	044/9348234
	Athlone	090/6472611
DOG WARDEN		044/9343934
CITIZENS ADVICE SERVICE	Mullingar	044/9340700
	Athlone	090/6478851
MONEY ADVICE BUREAU SERVICE	Mullingar	044/9340871
	Athlone	090/6476616
CHILDLINE – FREEPHONE		1800 666666





