

Westmeath Local Authorities

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

ACCEPT YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES



TENANT'S HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

Westmeath Local Authorities are pleased to produce a 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 at the back of the Tenant Handbook.

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

HOUSING OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO YOU

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.

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. Disabled Persons Grant

The Local Authorities may undertake structural alterations to your house to facilitate the needs of a disabled member of the household.

5. Shared Ownership Loan

The Shared Ownership scheme offers eligible applicants the option of home ownership in a number of steps. Ownership of the house is shared between the buyer and the Local Authority initially and provides for more affordable payments than a conventional mortgage.

6. 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 95% mortgage to eligible applicants over a period of 25 years to purchase the house.

7. 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 (£30,000) for the purchase of another house may be eligible to an allowance of €11,428 (£9000). This allowance is payable over 5 years directly to the lending agency who will reduce the mortgage repayments accordingly.

8. Transfer

The Local Authority may transfer a tenant by agreement to a different area. Transfers may be granted mainly in cases of overcrowding in the original dwelling or where there the dwelling is only partially occupied.

TENANCY CONDITIONS

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 when allocated a Local Authority house. This is to safeguard both the tenants and the Local authority' rights in relation to the property.

There are a number of conditions contained in this agreement, all of which are explained to the tenant before signing. Each tenant receives a copy of their tenancy 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 or responsibilities with regard to the house they occupy. The following section on Maintenance and Advice clarify some of these issues.

TENANT PARTICIPATION **IN** **ESTATE MANAGEMENT**

“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.
- 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.

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

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:

- Door to door collection by Revenue Collector
- Local Council Area Office or Cash Office
- Standing Order
- Direct Debit
- An Post
- Deductions from Social Welfare

If a tenant finds themselves in difficulty meeting rent payments they should contact their Revenue Collector or 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

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.
- 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 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 etc.
- Repairs to electrical appliances and sockets not installed by the Council.
- 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.

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 tenant's 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. Alternatively your local Revenue Collector can pass on your repair request. 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

- 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 rehoused.

ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR includes:

- 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 NEIGHBOURS

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 Siochana. All complaints will be treated with total confidentiality and investigated fully.

USEFUL ADVICE

1. Alterations to dwelling

You must get the Council's 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 reinstatement 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.

2. Insurance

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

3. 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.

4. Chimneys

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

5. 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.

6. 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
- Do not leave children alone in the house
- Do not smoke in bed
- Install a smoke alarm in the house and ensure its continued operation
- Unplug all electrical appliances at night
- Install a fire extinguisher and fire blanket

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

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. Succession of Tenancy

Following the death of a Local Authority tenant a family member of the deceased tenant may be granted succession of

tenancy of the house provided that the Local Authority is satisfied that they have been resident in the house for a reasonable period of time.

10. Further Information

Further information on Housing services are available on Westmeath County Council internet website @ www.westmeathcoco.ie

USEFULL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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	044/32201
Athlone Area	090/6442100
Athlone Town Council	090/6442100
Castlepollard Area	044/61128
Kilbeggan Area	0506/32001

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

Fire Brigade /Ambulance		999
Gardai –	Mullingar	044/48915
	Athlone	0902/92609
Hospitals –	Mullingar	044/40221
	Athlone	0902/42140
E.S.B.	Mullingar	044/48234
	Athlone	0902/72611
Dog Warden		044/43934
Citizens Advice Service		
	Mullingar	044/40700
	Athlone	0902/78851
Money Advice Bureau Service		
	Mullingar	044/40871
	Athlone	0902/76616