

Tenant Handbook

A Guide to Your Residency



FOCUS
Ireland

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Welcome to Focus Housing

DEAR TENANT

Focus Housing is delighted to welcome you to your new home. Moving into a new home is exciting but it can also be stressful. We hope this handbook will help you to settle in. We also have a team of housing staff you can speak to if you need support.

We look forward to you being part of our community and hope that it contributes to your quality of life.

USING THE HANDBOOK

The different sections help you to easily find the information you are looking for.

The question and answer format allows you to get the information you need quickly.

The final section has a list of contact agencies, addresses and telephone numbers, including emergency services.

There is also space for you to add your own list of contacts for your personal use. We recommend you add emergency contact numbers to this section.

We advise that you read this handbook when you get it and to keep it in a safe and easily accessible place so you can refer to it when necessary.

Part 1

About Focus Ireland

Focus Housing Association is part of Focus Ireland. Focus Ireland was set up in 1985 by Sister Stanislaus Kennedy. We are a non-profit voluntary organisation, providing services for people affected by homelessness and social and affordable rented accommodation to those on low incomes. We opened our first housing project in Dublin in 1992. Today we provide supported housing throughout the Republic of Ireland.

We are an approved housing body with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and a member of the Irish Council for Social Housing. We use different ways of funding to provide homes. These include fundraising, private finance and capital grants and loans from the department.

The Focus Ireland support service receives funding from local authorities and other statutory bodies. It also gets donations from the public to help provide services.

Focus Housing Association has a voluntary Board of Management. The board has a wide range of experience in providing, managing and maintaining housing. An executive team reports regularly to the Board of Management about the organisation's operation. We are signed up to the Voluntary Regulation Code for Approved Housing Bodies. We are also regulated under the Charities Governance Code.

Focus Ireland is guided by the Equal Status Act 2000 to 2004. This means that no person or group applying for housing or living in our supported housing can be treated differently to another person or group of people because of:

- Gender
- Marital status, single, married, divorced etc.
- Family status
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Membership of Travelling Community
- Receiving Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)

OUR VISION

Focus Ireland believes that everyone has a right to a place they can call home.

OUR MISSION

We are driven by the belief that homelessness is wrong.

It is wrong because it is a failure of society, which creates victims out of people and robs them of their potential. It is wrong because it can be prevented. It can be solved but it is allowed to continue and so undermines society.

We need to challenge our society to think and act differently. We are committed to challenging everything about homelessness: the causes, failures, people's perceptions and how it is tackled.

And we challenge ourselves in how we give resources to prevent people from becoming homeless and to help them find and keep a home.

Homelessness is wrong and we have to make that felt in everything we do and say.



OUR VALUES

Values inform our actions and practice. They help us check that our attitudes and behaviour are in line with the organisation's ethos. Values make clear what is expected of both leaders and employees in the organisation.

For every employee, Focus Ireland's values are reflected in our work practice, documents and our relationships with each other, as well as with customers and tenants, volunteers, partners, donors and funders and the public.

Our customers' needs dictate Focus Ireland's models of service provision. Therefore, the quality of services delivery is as important as the services we provide. These values underpin our behaviour and attitudes in providing a service to all stakeholders.

Our three central values are **Respect, Safety and Quality**. These form the core of our other values of **Accessibility, Partnership, Integration, Advocacy, Empowerment and Stewardship** —>

Respect is about treating individuals equally and professionally. Respect includes justice, fairness, equality and dignity. It upholds the human rights and diversity of all stakeholders. Respect demands honesty and clarity in our dealings with each other, our customers and our stakeholders.

Safety is about providing an environment in which all stakeholders feel safe and secure and welcomed in Focus Ireland. Employees are responsible for ensuring their safety and the safety of others. Safety is achieved by having regard for the environment of all stakeholders and by dealing professionally with people who feel vulnerable or are behaving in unsafe ways.

Quality is about making sure we provide customer-driven services. These should be professional and appropriate, and address customer needs. We provide a high standard of quality services using our knowledge of best practice, research and policy and customer feedback. We measure our standards internally and externally so that they comply with the law and with regulations.

Accessibility is about giving access to services to all customers in a practical and transparent way. We aim for clarity, simplicity and minimal bureaucracy in our services. We try to be flexible with our services to match the changing needs of customers and tenants. We accept the need for review and change over time. We are committed to consultation so that all stakeholders' opinions are heard.

Partnership is about partnering and cooperating with customers and with other organisations, both voluntary and statutory, to achieve our goal of preventing people from becoming homeless, remaining homeless or returning to being homeless. Partnering inside and outside the organisation increases Focus Ireland's ability to deliver quality services. We recognise the contribution of different parties to a shared agenda, with shared benefits and responsibilities.

Integration is about providing the right resources and responses to help our customers' integration into society.

Advocacy is about representing customers to make sure that the right services and housing are provided. We do this by networking and partnering with voluntary, statutory and community organisations. Integration is about meeting our ultimate goal: That our customers will be fully integrated into society so that they can lead independent and fulfilling lives.

“We provide a high standard of quality services using our knowledge of best practice, research and policy and customer feedback.”

Empowerment is about helping customers and employees take the initiative and make positive and informed choices. We are committed to helping customers manage their lives so they can build new relationships, their self-esteem and confidence. We want our customers to make independent decisions and decrease their dependence on other people and organisations.

Stewardship is about making sure that we as employees are accountable and transparent in our activities. We have quality procedures, policies and governance systems in place for all parts of our work. This ensures that resources are used in the right way for customers. We have to answer individually and organisationally to all stakeholders. We are committed to behaving honestly and transparently in all our dealings and to achieving a high standard of work.

Part 2

About the Support Service

The key role of Focus Ireland and Focus Housing is: Providing housing and support services to our customers.

FOCUS HOUSING

- Provides housing to our tenants
- Manages the tenancies and maintains the properties

Focus Ireland supports tenants in managing their homes and tenancies.

A team of staff looks after the day-to-day running of the housing you live in. You will have regular contact with your Housing Support Worker and your Property Management Officer.

WHAT IS THE SUPPORT SERVICE?

Focus Ireland has Housing Support Workers who work with tenants, supporting them in managing and keeping their tenancy. Focus Ireland's support staff provide a range of services to help customers settle into, maintain their new homes and become part of a community.

WHAT SORT OF WORK DOES THE SUPPORT SERVICE DO?

The type of support varies depending on your needs. It can be very specific to you. The support work includes:

- Settlement planning and support
- Tenancy sustainment
- Support in getting mental health services
- Improving independent living skills
- Sourcing education, employment and training
- Receiving statutory and community services
- Parenting support
- Identifying services to help you settle into your community

You, as the tenant, are central to identifying your needs and creating your own support plan. We help you with this. Your Housing Support Worker works closely with you to make sure your move to your new home is a success. Your Support Worker links in with you, by agreement, while you are settling in and discusses any issues that arise as a result.

“You, as the tenant, are central to identifying your needs and creating your own support plan.”

By law, Focus Ireland staff must make sure that children living in or visiting our housing are safe. If we are concerned about the safety and welfare of your children or children visiting your home, we will talk to you about it. If you have concerns about a child, you may also ask for support from staff. We will work with you and your children to deal with these concerns. We may also make a report to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and work with a social worker to deal with any concerns we have. We have a leaflet with information on our responsibilities for child safeguarding. This will be given to you as part of your settling in. Please don't hesitate to ask your support worker if you are unsure about any of the information in it.

DO I HAVE TO ENGAGE WITH THE FOCUS IRELAND SUPPORT SERVICE?

We ask that all of our customers in our accommodation use our services team. The service is tailored to each customer's needs.

There may be times when you find it difficult to manage or face a crisis. We will help you to cope and to keep your home in those difficult times.

However, you are always responsible for looking after yourself and for the care of any children in your household.



Part 3

Your Tenancy Agreement

WHAT IS THE RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES BOARD?

The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) is a statutory body which operates a national tenancy registration system. It helps to resolve tenant-landlord disputes and gives policy advice to the government on the rented sector.

When you move into a Focus Housing Association property, you are no longer on the local authority housing waiting list. Your Focus tenancy is registered with the RTB. You must give Focus Housing Association the details of your tenancy to register with the RTB. Registering tenancies with the RTB gives housing associations and their tenants access to dispute resolution services, such as mediation and adjudication.

The RTB also provides security of tenure and the correct notice period for ending a tenancy.

Tenants must sign a tenancy agreement when allocated a Focus Housing Association home. Your tenancy agreement is a legally binding contract between you and Focus Housing Association. The Agreement gives details of each party's rights and responsibilities. The tenancy's conditions are fully explained to you when you sign your tenancy agreement. A copy of this signed document is on file in the Focus Housing Association office. Please ensure you keep your copy in a safe place.

WHAT ARE MY MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES AS A FOCUS HOUSING ASSOCIATION TENANT?

- You are responsible for the full rent amount. The rent must be paid weekly, on time and in full.
- Your Focus Housing Association house or apartment must be your main home – you must live in the dwelling full-time.
- You must give Focus Housing Association the correct notice if you wish to give up your tenancy.
- You cannot give the tenancy of your dwelling to anyone else.
- You cannot use your house, outbuildings or garden for a business.
- You must keep your home and any garden or balcony area in good condition, inform Focus Housing Association when repairs are needed and allow access for repairs to be carried out.
- You must keep common areas clean and clear of litter, dirt and rubbish.
- You must not cause any damage or harm to the property or any nuisance or disturbance to others.
- You must not use the premises for illegal purposes, including using or having drugs.
- You are responsible for everybody's behaviour in your household and for visitors to your home, even if you did not invite them.
- You are responsible for insuring your own contents, including any dishwashers, washing machines, furniture and personal belongings.
- You must pay the bills for electricity, gas, waste and water services used on the property.
- You are responsible for disposing of your waste correctly.

These and other responsibilities are covered in more detail in this handbook.

“Your Focus Housing Association house or apartment must be your main home.”



WHAT ARE FOCUS HOUSING ASSOCIATION'S RESPONSIBILITIES TO TENANTS?

Our responsibilities are to:

- Support you to manage your tenancy and keep your home
- Maintain our properties to a high standard
- Carry out any repairs to the property which are our responsibility
- Send tenants regular rent statements
- Undertake regular property inspections
- Register your tenancy with the Residential Tenancies Board

CAN OTHER PEOPLE COME TO LIVE WITH ME?

- You cannot take in lodgers or sub-let.
- You must get written permission from Focus Housing Association to have somebody move into your household. Permission may be refused. If it is granted, it may affect how much rent you pay. You are responsible for the behaviour of anyone who moves into your home. Their behaviour can affect your tenancy.

CAN MY PARTNER BECOME A JOINT TENANT?

- You should apply in writing if you wish your partner to become a joint tenant. A successful application is based on the property's suitability and other factors. If it is successful, you will sign a new tenancy agreement with your partner. You will both then have equal rights to the property. This means that if you split up, both of you will have the right to remain in the property. Focus Housing Association will not be able to intervene in any dispute.
- You will be both responsible for keeping to the tenancy agreement's conditions. If only one of you breaks those conditions, both of you will be at risk of losing your home.

CAN I TRANSFER TO ANOTHER PROPERTY?

You can apply to transfer to another property after two years. In this situation, you apply to the local authority to be put on their housing transfer list. However, you will probably be on their list for some time.

You can apply for a transfer if:

- Your current housing is unsuitable for your needs because of a change in your situation
- You have not broken your tenancy agreement's conditions
- Your rent is up to date
- You have looked after your property and it is in good condition

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY TENANCY IF I DIE?

If you die and you have a joint tenant they can continue with the tenancy. This also applies to your partner if they have permission to live in and have lived in the dwelling for more than one year. Their housing need and a good tenancy record are taken into account in this situation.

Children over the age of 18 who are part of your household will be allowed to stay in the property or will be given a more suitable property if:

- They were part of your household when you were given the tenancy and are still living in the property with our knowledge
- They are assessed as having a housing need by the local authority

Children under the age of 18 cannot legally be given a tenancy. When a parent or parents die, children will usually come under the care of a guardian and be housed with them. If a guardian has a housing need, Focus Housing Association will advocate strongly for the tenancy to be given to them.

AM I RESPONSIBLE FOR THE UPKEEP OF BOTH THE INSIDE AND THE OUTSIDE OF THE HOUSE/APARTMENT?**Yes. You are responsible for:**

- The upkeep and decoration of the inside of your home
- The outside of your home, including gardens, patios and balconies and keeping clean common areas including stairs, hallways and lifts
- Caring for your home and gardens

CAN I MAKE ALTERATIONS TO MY HOUSE/APARTMENT?

- You must get Focus Housing Association's permission in writing before beginning any improvements, alterations or additions to your home.
- Focus Housing Association will give consent subject to you applying for and receiving planning permission if necessary and using approved contractors.
- All structural changes become the property of Focus Housing Association. As such, they cannot be removed by you when your tenancy ends.
- You may not put up a satellite dish.

CAN I KEEP A PET?

Generally, apartments are not suitable for pets and most management companies do not allow them. Tenants in houses can keep certain pets, such as a cat or dog, after getting written permission from staff. Before getting a pet, you must:

- Get written permission from a Focus Housing Association staff member. This is because your housing may not be suitable for a pet.

Note that if a pet causes harm or distress to another tenant or member of the community, you must deal with this. That might include re-homing your pet.

Certain animals will not be allowed as pets. They include dangerous dog species, as defined by the Control of Dogs Regulations 1998. These are:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| • American Pit Bull Terrier | • German Shepherd |
| • Staffordshire Bull Terrier | • Rhodesian Ridgeback |
| • English Pit Bull Terrier | • Rottweiler |
| • Bull Mastiff | • Japanese Akita or the |
| • Doberman Pinscher | Japanese Tosa |

Or any cross breeds of these.

Also prohibited are horses, ponies, livestock, poultry and poisonous animals.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I BREAK MY TENANCY AGREEMENT?

If you break your agreement, we will address this quickly. We will offer you support in dealing with any issues that may have led you to break your agreement. We may issue a warning depending on the situation.

If you continue to break your agreement, we will issue you with a Notice of Termination. This means you would have to leave your home within 28 days.

However, if you or members of your household or visitors to your home or estate engage in criminal or anti-social behaviour, your tenancy will be at immediate risk. Anti-social behaviour is covered in greater detail in Section 5.

HOW DO I END MY TENANCY?

To end your tenancy, you must inform Focus Housing Association in writing at least 28 days before you wish to leave.

Your notice should be posted or handed into: Focus Housing Association, 9 – 12 High Street, Dublin 8. Please make sure the following conditions are met:

- You must date and sign the written notice.
- You must provide a forwarding address.
- In the case of a joint tenancy with, for example, a spouse or partner, they must give written notice at the same time.
- If one of the joint tenants wants to stay in the house and continue with the tenancy, you must advise your Focus Housing Association Property Management Officer. Depending on the property's size, this may require the local authority's agreement. A new tenancy agreement may have to be signed.
- Focus Housing Association will inspect the condition of your home before the tenancy ends. We will inform you of any work that you must carry out before leaving. If this work is not done, the Association will charge you for the cost of doing it.

- At the end of your tenancy, the property must be left in good condition and the keys returned to the Focus Housing Association's office. It is possible to extend your notice if you need to. However, you must agree that with us as soon as you know that you need a longer period of notice.

ABANDONING YOUR PROPERTY

If you are absent from your home for more than six weeks and have not let staff know, we will consider that you have abandoned the property.

We will make every effort to contact you during this time. But if we cannot make contact, we will issue you with a Notice of Termination. This is also made clear in your tenancy agreement.

If you still have not made contact with us by the time the Notice has expired, we will arrange for the property to be cleared and any possessions remaining will be disposed of.

In some special circumstances, we may be willing to allow you to be absent from your home for up to three months. Your absence cannot be longer than three months and there are some conditions attached:

- You must discuss the reasons for your absence with your Property Management Officer and receive permission in writing.
- If you cannot pay your rent while you are away, you must make a written Rent Arrears Repayment Agreement agreeing to pay extra rent when you return until the arrears are cleared.

“To end your tenancy, you must inform Focus Housing Association in writing at least 28 days before you wish to leave.”

Part 4

Rent

HOW IS MY RENT CALCULATED?

The rent for your home is set depending on the funding scheme under which the property was purchased. You as the tenant are responsible for paying the rent.

Your rent will be based on one of the following:

1. CAPITAL LOAN AND SUBSIDY SCHEME

The rent under this scheme is based on your household's income. This is known as differential rent. It means that you pay an affordable amount that does not cause financial difficulty. You are expected to provide full details of your household income. This includes information on all household members over the age of 18 living at home. You must provide Focus Housing with copies of proof of income, such as social welfare receipts, payslips, P45s or P60s.

2. CAPITAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME

Focus Housing customers living in properties funded by the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) pay an economic rent. This covers the costs of providing and managing the property. Tenants may qualify for Supplementary Welfare Assistance to help with the rent. But those in full-time employment are not eligible for Supplementary Welfare Assistance.

3. LEASED AND MANAGED PROPERTIES

Focus Housing often manages properties for local authorities and other landlords. Tenants pay a differential rent (calculated according to your income) based on the local authority differential rent scheme.

4. RENT REVIEWS

Your rent amount is reviewed annually. You must provide all the information requested so that your rent can be assessed correctly. Your Housing Support Worker will assist you with this.



5. SERVICE CHARGES

Focus Housing do not charge service charges. But some local authorities may add a small weekly charge to some of the properties we lease from them. We may, however, charge for items such as:

- Waste disposal
- Communal gardening
- Communal cleaning
- Window cleaning
- Electricity or gas

This will be a small contribution on top of the rent.

Door keys and fobs for getting into apartment blocks and car parks are separate to service charges, You will be given door keys and fobs when you move in. If you lose these, you will be charged for replacements. We advise you to leave a spare key with a trusted friend or family member.

WHEN DO I PAY MY RENT?

Rent is charged on a weekly basis. Rent is charged in advance on the Monday of each week. There are several ways to pay your rent:

1. An Post Household Budget Scheme

If you receive your social welfare payment at the post office, you must sign up to Household Budget. This will take your rent at source each week and forward it to Focus Housing Association directly.

2. Standing Order

You can set up a weekly Standing Order and pay your rent through your bank account directly to Focus Housing.

3. Electronic Transfer

You can pay your rent by electronic transfer using online banking.

4. Rent Card

You may receive a Focus Housing Association rent card. This allows you to pay your rent in any post office or where there is a pay-point terminal.

Your rent payment method is agreed when you sign your tenancy.



WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T PAY MY RENT?

If you do not pay your rent, you will be breaking your tenancy agreement. Therefore, it is important that you pay your rent each week.

If you are in financial difficulty, speak to your Property Management Officer or Housing Support Worker as soon as possible. They will help you to begin making regular rent payments again and come to an agreement to pay back what you owe. If you break this agreement, you risk losing your home.

“If you are in financial difficulty, speak to your Property Management Officer or Housing Support Worker as soon as possible.”

WHAT IF MY CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE?

Contact your Property Management Officer or Housing Support Worker for advice and assistance when:

- Your income changes through getting or losing a job
- A person living in your household becomes employed
- A person in your household moves out
- A person in your household starts claiming a Social Welfare payment
- A household member dies
- A child is born in your household

WILL FOCUS HOUSING END MY TENANCY FOR NOT PAYING MY RENT?

Yes. You are in danger of losing your tenancy if you do not pay your rent and do not agree a repayment plan with your Property Management Officer.

Part 5

Anti-Social Behaviour

WHAT IS ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR?

Anti-social behaviour is behaviour that seriously affects other people or causes a nuisance. It can have a big impact on others and is not tolerated by Focus Housing.

Serious anti-social behaviour is criminal behaviour or behaviour that could cause fear, danger, injury damage or loss to others.

Examples of serious anti-social behaviour are:

- Selling, supplying or having drugs
- Using Focus Housing Association housing for illegal purposes
- Harassing people on the grounds of race, religion, belonging to an ethnic group, disability or sexual orientation
- Using aggressive or threatening behaviour
- Being violent to people or property
- Having uncontrolled animals

Nuisance behaviour is behaviour that interferes with or inconveniences other people in the area.

Examples of nuisance behaviour are:

- Noise, such as loud music, dogs barking, alarms ringing
- Trespassing or loitering outside properties
- Uncared for gardens, litter, dog fouling
- One-off disturbances, such as an argument

Remember, if incidents such as these happen often, they will be considered serious.

Note that if you lose your tenancy for anti-social behaviour or any other breach of your tenancy agreement, you may have made yourself 'intentionally homeless'. This may affect your application for re-housing.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM AFFECTED BY ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR?

You should speak to your support worker or your Property Management Officer if you are affected by anti-social behaviour. They will help you to make a complaint. We will follow up that complaint quickly and fairly, as outlined in our complaints policy.

We will ask that you give us as much information as possible. If the behaviour is criminal, we expect you to report the matter to the Gardaí.

The information the support worker or Property Manager Officer will want will include:

- Exactly what happened
- When and where it happened
- The names and addresses of the people involved
- If and when it was reported to the Gardaí
- The name of the Garda who came to the scene

Matters reported to us are treated in confidence. But we will always inform the relevant authorities if there are criminal acts or child safeguarding concerns.

WHAT IF I AM INVOLVED IN ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR?

If you, a member of your household or your visitors are involved in anti-social behaviour, we will bring up this with you immediately. We will contact the Gardaí if there is a criminal issue.

If we believe there are child safeguarding issues, we will report the matter to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

If it is proved that you have broken your tenancy agreement through anti-social behaviour, we will begin our Formal Warning procedure.

Staff members will help you to deal with the situation. But if the behaviour continues, a Notice of Termination will be issued.

If the behaviour is especially serious, the law allows for a seven-day Notice of Termination to be issued, with no warning.

WHAT IF THE COMPLAINT IS UNTRUE?

If we find that a complaint is deliberately untrue, it is considered as a malicious complaint. Malicious complaints are taken very seriously and will be treated as anti-social behaviour as they impact on a tenant's life.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is a crime which can be fatal. Please approach a Focus Ireland staff member if you fear for your safety or that of your children. We will do everything to support you. Tenants who engage in domestic violence may lose their tenancies.

DEALING WITH DISPUTES

Getting along with your neighbours is your responsibility and is very important. We expect our tenants to be considerate and tolerant of their neighbours. This is especially important in apartment blocks.

Tenants must be mindful of their neighbours when playing music, listening to the television and making noise in hallways and common areas.

In any community, disputes happen. But we expect our tenants to deal with them quickly and appropriately. Usually, we will not become involved. However, if we think the problem can be dealt with through mediation, we may refer you to a mediation service.

Part 6

Maintenance and Repairs

WHO ORGANISES DECORATION AND FURNITURE?

When you move into your home, it will be decorated to a good standard. From then on, it will be your responsibility to redecorate it.

Some of our properties are furnished depending on how we acquired them. If your dwelling is furnished or part-furnished, the repair and replacement of them become your responsibility.

If the property is not furnished, your support worker will help you with an application for an Exceptional Needs Payment for furnishing and flooring to the Community Welfare Officer.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR REPAIRS?

We or a Property Management Company will take care of the upkeep and repair of communal areas, including hallways, stairs, lifts and lighting.

Focus Housing Association is responsible for:

- Repairs to the structure of the building
- Drains, gutters and external pipes
- Major electrical, sanitation and plumbing issues

However, you are responsible for paying for the repair if damage is caused to the property by you, a household member or visitor.

In general, you are responsible for:

- Decorating the inside of the property
- Bathroom and kitchen fittings
- Repairing broken glass in windows or doors
- Having enough credit on your gas/electricity account so that appliances work and the property is heated
- Carrying out minor repairs caused by normal wear and tear
- Ensuring an approved contractor fixes gas or electrical appliances
- Keeping any gardens, hedges, fences and gates in good repair and free from litter
- Keeping drains, sinks and gutters clear and free from litter. It is important that you do not put fat, grease, nappies or wipes down toilets or sinks
- Repairing any damage inside or outside of the property caused by you, a member of the household or a visitor to the property
- If you live in an apartment block, keeping all common areas clean and free from litter and spillages
- Replacing light bulbs

HOW DO I REQUEST A REPAIR?

You can contact your Property Management Officer in writing or by phone. If you are having difficulties with this, your support worker will help you.

If the repair you request is your responsibility, we will let you know. If you cannot afford the repair, we can carry out the works and agree an affordable weekly repayment plan with you.

Either a contractor or a relevant member of staff will contact you to arrange when to call to carry out the repair. If you make an appointment and then are not there to let the contractor in, we will charge you the call-out fee.



HOW LONG WILL A REPAIR TAKE?

It depends on the type of repair. When you request a repair that is our responsibility, it will be one of the following:

Emergency: We will respond within 24 hours.

An emergency repair is one involving immediate risk to life or property, for example:

- A major leak
- Unsafe power supply
- A fire

Note that central heating not working is not an emergency unless the weather is exceptionally cold. You should have a safe alternative heater, such as oil-filled radiators, available.

Urgent: We will respond within five working days for repairs such as:

- Central heating not working
- Partial loss of electricity or water supply
- A faulty carbon monoxide alarm
- A broken toilet but there is another toilet in the property

Routine: We will respond within 40 working days for a repair such as:

- Guttering needing to be repaired

WHAT OTHER MAINTENANCE WORK DO YOU DO?

We carry out health and safety property checks on all our properties at least once a year. Staff will discuss any concerns from these checks with you.

Where possible, we will make an appointment with you to carry out any inspections or maintenance works. However, if we are concerned about your welfare or there is a maintenance emergency, we will require immediate entry to the property and may enter to deal with the emergency.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I NEED AIDS OR ADAPTATIONS?

If your home needs to be adapted because of your physical needs, a staff member will work with you to discuss your needs with the local community health services. The HSE may provide aids and adaptations after making an assessment. If necessary, we will help you make an application to the local authority for an adaptation grant.

If it is not possible to make the property fit your needs, we will work with you to find more suitable housing.

“We carry out health and safety property checks on all our properties at least once a year.”

Part 7

Safety in Your Home

It is important for your health to keep your home warm and dry and to prevent mould growth caused by condensation.

WHAT IS CONDENSATION?

Condensation occurs when air gets cold and it cannot hold all the moisture produced by everyday activities. This moisture will appear as tiny droplets of water. This is condensation. It can be seen on windows, mirrors and cold surfaces, such as tiles, walls and ceilings.

WHAT PROBLEMS CAN CONDENSATION CAUSE?

Dampness caused by condensation can lead to mould growth on window frames, walls, ceilings, furniture and even clothes.

WHERE DOES IT OCCUR?

Typically, it is found in places where there is little air movement, such as:

- In corners
- Behind large pieces of furniture
- On soft furnishings
- In and behind wardrobes
- Around windows
- On walls

WHY DOES CONDENSATION OCCUR?

Condensation occurs when too much moisture is being produced and is trapped in a dwelling.

Everyday activities add extra moisture to the air inside our homes every day. For example:

- 2 people (just breathing) = 3 pints
- A bath or a shower = 2 pints
- Drying clothes indoors = 6 pints
- Cooking and use of a kettle = 3 pints
- Washing dishes = 1 pint

The total moisture produced in 1 day for just 2 people = 15 pints

HOW CAN I REDUCE MOISTURE?

- Don't dry washing on radiators or heaters. Use a tumble dryer if you have one or hang it in the bathroom with the door closed, the window open and the extractor fan on.
- Cook with the pot lids on and turn the heat down once the water has boiled. Only use the minimum amount of water for cooking.
- Use the cooker extractor.
- When filling the bath, run the cold water first then add the hot. This reduces steam by 90%.
- Never turn bathroom extractor fans off by the isolator switch.

HOW CAN VENTILATION HELP REDUCE CONDENSATION?

Ventilation dramatically helps to reduce condensation by removing moist air and replacing it with drier air.

- Reduce condensation by cross-ventilating your home – opening windows slightly on opposite sides of the dwelling. At the same time, open interior doors, where possible, to allow drier air to flow through the property.
- Ventilate the kitchen when cooking or washing up. Use the cooker extractor hood or extractor fan.
- Open curtains during the day to allow air to the windows and frames.

- Ventilate the bedroom by leaving a window open at night (if possible).
- Never close any vents, including trickle vents on windows.
- Do not overfill wardrobes and cupboards as it restricts air circulation.
- Leave a small gap between large pieces of furniture and walls.

HOW CAN I USE TEMPERATURE TO REDUCE CONDENSATION?

Warm air can hold more moisture than cooler air. Heating one room to a high level and leaving other rooms cold makes condensation worse in the unheated rooms. This means that it is better to have a medium level of heat throughout the dwelling. Reduce condensation by:

- Keeping the heating on low all day in cold weather. It is also more economical than having the heating on full for several short periods throughout the day.
- If you don't heat every room, keep the doors of unheated rooms open to allow some heat into them and air to circulate.

WHAT DO I DO IF CONDENSATION DOES OCCUR?

- Open the curtains and wipe dry your windows and windowsills every morning.
- Wipe dry any surfaces in the kitchen or bathroom that have become wet.
- Wring out the cloth into the sink. Don't dry the cloth on a radiator. If you do, the water vapour will go straight back into the air.

WHAT DO I DO IF THERE IS MOULD GROWTH?

You must limit the amount of condensation you are creating to stop mould appearing. To remove mould:

- Wipe down or spray walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash or very diluted bleach. Fungicidal treatments are available in DIY stores. Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully. You may need to strip wall and ceiling paper from the affected areas

- Wash affected clothes and shampoo carpets
- Re-decorate with a good quality fungicidal paint

Remember! The only lasting cure for mould is to reduce the amount of condensation you are creating by:

- Reducing steam and moisture
- Ventilating the dwelling effectively
- Using the heating properly

FIRE SAFETY

Our properties are fitted with smoke or heat detectors. It is important that you check these regularly. If the alarm starts beeping when there is no smoke or heat present, you must change the battery.

Never cover these alarms or tamper with them in any way. You should only remove an existing battery when you are replacing it with a new one.

Our properties have fire blankets and fire extinguishers. You will be shown how to use these when you move in.

Never leave a chip pan, frying pan or deep fat fryer unattended.

Never tamper with door closers. Never wedge doors open.

If you live in an apartment block, make sure that you know the escape route. The evacuation procedures are shown and exit signs are clearly marked.

In an apartment block, the escape route in the case of fire is the stairwells and main landings. Never leave rubbish or other items in hallways or under stairwells.

In the event of fire, leave the property immediately and call the fire brigade.

Never use a lift in the event of a fire.



SECURITY

You are given keys when you move into the property. It is your responsibility to get more keys cut and to pay for replacement keys and locks. If you change locks, you must give copies of the new keys to Focus Housing Association.

We recommend that you give a set of keys to someone you trust so that if you lose your keys you will not be locked out.

If you live in an apartment block, you may be given fobs. Again, you should keep these safe as you will be charged for replacements.

Tenants in apartment blocks should never let anybody who is not their visitor into the block or complex and should never wedge doors open.

It is important for the safety of tenants and their neighbours that we know exactly who is living in our properties. This is why we insist that you give us full details of everyone living with you.

Part 8

Tenant Involvement

We are committed to letting you know about our service and listening to your views on the service we provide.

Your views as a tenant are important to us. We provide many opportunities for you to give your thoughts and opinions. You can give your views by:

- Speaking directly to a staff member
- Responding to surveys
- Attending any tenant meetings
- Setting up or participating in a tenants' association
- Attending customer involvement events
- Emailing using the customer involvement email address: ci@focusireland.ie

When we have information that we need to share with you, we aim to make it clear and understandable and that you get it as quickly as possible.

If you need a larger print size or have literacy or other communication issues, please let a staff member know. We will then arrange a method that works for you.

In general, we will communicate with you by:

- Phone or face-to-face
- Leaving a message on your phone
- Writing to you at your home
- E-mailing where you have an e-mail address
- Giving you minutes from the tenant meetings
- Putting a general notice on a notice board
- Calling to your home to inform you of emergency works when necessary

RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

If you are interested in becoming involved with a residents' association, a staff member can give you information on what is going on in your area. However, not all Focus Housing Association housing services have residents' associations.

WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO BE INVOLVED AT ALL?

That is okay. Once you keep to your tenancy agreement and are happy with the service we provide, we will let you get on with your day-to-day life.



Part 9

Complaints and Appeals

Focus Ireland/Focus Housing Association works to improve the service we provide to customers. If you believe that we have not given you the best possible service, then tell us about it. Your complaint gives us the information we need to improve our services.

You can make an informal complaint:

- In person
- By phone
- By e-mail to help@focusireland.ie or
- In writing

If you want to make a formal complaint, ask a staff member for a copy of the complaints form or download it from our website.

COMPLAINT STAGES:

Informal Complaints – please speak to a staff member about your complaint – they may be able to sort it out immediately.

Formal Complaints – Making a formal complaint is a four stage process. See next page.

STAGE 1:

HOW DO I MAKE A FORMAL COMPLAINT?

You can make a formal complaint by:

- Filling in the complaints form or asking someone to do this with you
- Sending your complaint within 3 months of the issue arising

A Project Leader or someone of a similar level will deal with it:

- You will hear back within 7 working days. If it's going to take longer, we will tell you.
- If you are unhappy with the outcome, you can explain why and ask for the complaint to be dealt with at Stage 2.

STAGE 2:

WHAT SHOULD I DO TO BRING MY COMPLAINT TO STAGE 2?

You should:

- Explain the reasons you are unhappy with the outcome of the complaint
- Make sure you do this within 4 weeks of hearing the outcome of your complaint

A Service Manager or someone of a similar level will deal with the Stage 2 complaint. They will:

- Let you know they received your complaint within 3 working days
- Decide if an investigation is necessary

INVESTIGATION

How is an investigation carried out?

- The Service Manager will ask the investigation team to look into the complaint.
- An investigation team which does not work in the area you are complaining about will examine it.
- The investigation team will try to find a solution to the complaint within 14 working days.
- If you are unhappy with the outcome, you can ask for the complaint to be dealt with at Stage 3 of the process.

STAGE 3: WHAT SHOULD I DO TO BRING MY COMPLAINT TO STAGE 3?

You should:

- Request a review of your complaint, stating the reasons you are not satisfied, and ask for it to be forwarded to Stage 3
- Make sure you do this within 4 weeks of hearing the outcome of your complaint

The Director of Services or the Director of Property will deal with the complaint. You will get a receipt of your complaint within 3 working days and will get a response within 20 working days.

What can I do if I'm unhappy with the outcome? You can look for a review of your complaint from an external organisation – Stage 4 of the complaints procedure.

STAGE 4: HOW DO I PROCEED TO STAGE 4 OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS?

- You can speak to a staff member about asking for a review of your complaint from an external body.
- The external body which will investigate will depend on what your complaint is about. Examples of such organisations are the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive; Tusla, the Child and Family Agency; the Ombudsman for Children and the Residential Tenancies Board.

WHAT CAN FOCUS IRELAND DO IF MY COMPLAINT IS UPHELD?

If your complaint is upheld, Focus Ireland will ensure there is an outcome from your complaint. This can include:

- An explanation for the action or incident that caused the complaint
- An apology for any hurt, hardship or inconvenience caused

- Action taken to address the problem
- Admission of fault
- A change of decision
- Recommendations to change the policy or procedure

APPEAL AGAINST A NOTICE OF TERMINATION

If you have been given a Notice of Termination you may dispute the Notice in the RTB and also, in certain circumstances, appeal this decision to the Focus Housing Association Appeals Panel.

To make an appeal, you must write to the Manager within 7 days of being given the Notice of Termination.

The Appeal will only be heard if you have evidence of one of the following grounds:

- There has been a change in your personal situation.
- Something important was affecting your ability to keep your tenancy that you hadn't told us about at the time we gave you the notice.
- You believe that we did not follow the correct procedure when we gave you the notice.

A staff member is available to help you with this appeal procedure.

We are committed to openly and honestly hearing and addressing real appeals by you. Where we think there are grounds for hearing an appeal, we may contact you to meet with staff who will listen to your case. If we do this, you can bring someone with you to the meeting.

Within 7 days of meeting you, staff will make a decision on whether the Notice of Termination is going to be followed through or whether you can continue your tenancy. We will contact you within 7 working days to let you know the decision. If your appeal is upheld, you may have to agree to some new conditions if the tenancy is to continue.

Part 10

Useful Contacts

Head Office Dublin

Focus Housing
Association
9–12 High St
Christchurch
Dublin 8
P: 01 881 5900

Limerick

Parnell Place
Parnell St
Limerick
P: 061 317 199

Waterford

Grange Cohan
St John's Park
Waterford
P: 051 879 807

Kilkenny

Unit 2 St Johns Gate
Castlecomer Road
Kilkenny
P: 056 779 4565

Sligo

69 John St
Sligo Town
Sligo
P: 071 914 9974

Cork

26–27 South Mall
Cork City
P: 021 427 3646

All Offices Email: help@focusireland.ie

SERVICE	CONTACT NUMBER	HOURS
Local Focus Housing Association Office		
Property Management Officer		
Housing Support Worker		
Out of Hours		
Electricity Supplier		
Gas Supplier		
Refuse Services		
Broadband Services		
Dept. of Employment Affairs and Social Protection		
Garda Confidential Line		
Local services		
Community Welfare Office		
GP		
Post Office		
Chemist		
Tusla/Social Work Dept.		
Insurance Company		
Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS)		

FOCUS
Ireland

Focus Housing Association

9–12 High St

Christchurch

Dublin 8

P: 01 881 5900

E: help@focusireland.ie