



# Really Useful Tenancy Guide

Getting the best from Twin Valley Homes  
plus lots more really useful information  
for a trouble free tenancy.



**Customer Service Centre**

**Tel: 0300 555 5560**

## Welcome to Twin Valley Homes

A member of the Together Housing Group

This is your guide to what we hope will be a happy tenancy with us. It tells you about the benefits of being a Twin Valley Homes tenant and explains your rights and your responsibilities.

### We will:

- Repair your home if it needs it
- Tell you about home improvements we are planning to do
- Offer you advice on rents, benefits and entitlements
- Help you tackle any neighbour problems
- Treat you with courtesy and respect.

### In return, we expect you to:

- Treat us with courtesy and respect
- Pay your rent, or ensure you claim housing benefit to help pay your rent
- Keep your home and garden in good condition
- Be a good neighbour.

# Contact Information

## Head Office Address

### Twin Valley Homes

Prospect House, Wharf Street  
Blackburn, Lancashire, BB1 1JD

## Customer Service Centre

**TEL: 0300 555 5560**

## Website

[www.twinvalleyhomes.com](http://www.twinvalleyhomes.com)

## Emails

GENERAL ENQUIRIES	<a href="mailto:info@twinvalleyhomes.com">info@twinvalleyhomes.com</a>
REPORTING REPAIRS	<a href="mailto:repairs@twinvalleyhomes.com">repairs@twinvalleyhomes.com</a>
REPORTING ASB	<a href="mailto:asb@twinvalleyhomes.com">asb@twinvalleyhomes.com</a>
RENT ENQUIRIES	<a href="mailto:rents@twinvalleyhomes.com">rents@twinvalleyhomes.com</a>
ESTATE SERVICES	<a href="mailto:esa@twinvalleyhomes.com">esa@twinvalleyhomes.com</a>

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## Important note about keys to your home

Sorry, we don't keep spare keys! Please keep a note of your key numbers and make sure that you have a spare key - you will have to pay for any additional ones. On some schemes, there are special security keys and you will need a letter from us before anyone will cut one for you. You will need to replace lost keys or pay for lock changes, so leave a spare set with a relative if you can.

## One Call For All

Our Customer Service Centre is waiting to take your call. Make a note of our telephone number which you will find on the front cover of this booklet. Whatever your query, it's just the one number you need to remember!

To make sure your call is handled quickly and efficiently you will be asked to make a selection as shown below:

- **Press 1**  
Rent/payment enquiries
- **Press 2**  
Repairs/gas servicing
- **Press 3**  
Lettings/find a home
- **Press 4**  
Anything else

The telephone number can be used to report emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year.

Our Customer Service Advisors aim to answer your call as quickly as possible, however, if you find yourself in a queue, you can press '0' to use the "ring back" option.

**To use the ring back option** – press "0" when prompted – your place in the queue will be kept and we will call you back. (Please note this won't work if you withhold your number).

Our 0300 number costs the same as a normal call. Whatever tariff you're on, the cost of an 0300 number is the same as calling a normal phone number.

If your calls are free, it's free. If you've got free inclusive calls, then calling 0300 won't cost you. This works on mobiles too. If you have inclusive minutes on your mobile the 0300 number will be included within that.

Some mobile phones cannot make 0300 calls. You can alter this by changing your phone settings (speak to your phone provider if you are unsure how to do this).

Our highly trained Customer Service Advisors will look to deal with your enquiry personally in full, however if they are not able to do this, they will put you through to the right person to resolve your query.

By calling one number you can get lots of help and advice on a variety of matters.

continued...

## **Here are some of the things you can talk to us about:**

- Make enquiries on your rent balance/history and make rent payments.
- Report a repair.
- Report anti social behaviour.
- Make enquiries about adaptations for your home.
- Apply and place a bid for a property.
- Make changes to or terminate your tenancy.
- Advise us of any concerns or compliments you may have about the services you receive.

In order to make sure your confidential information is protected and to make certain we are speaking to the right person we will ask you security questions, to confirm your identity.

All calls to the Customer Service Centre are recorded to help with training and improving services for you.

## **We will be:**

- Courteous.
- Ready to help.
- Open and honest.

## **We will give you:**

- Time to discuss things properly.
- Clear and accurate information.
- The name of the member of staff responsible for dealing with your query.

## **In return you should:**

- Be polite to our staff.
- Pay your rent on time.
- Let our technicians into your home to do repairs and carry out gas and electrical safety checks.
- Keep your home and garden in good condition.
- Respect your neighbours and the environment.
- Avoid causing a nuisance to other tenants.
- Give four weeks' notice when you move.
- Return your house keys.

## **When you contact us, we will:**

- Issue staff with an identity pass/card that will be worn or shown on request.
- Keep appointments we have made or let you know in advance if we need to rearrange.

- Wherever possible, try to deal with your enquiry at reception counters within two minutes.

## **When you phone, we will:**

- Answer your phone call as quickly as possible.
- Tell you the name of the person who is dealing with your query.
- Take a message where appropriate and get the right person to phone you back.

## **When you write or email, we will:**

- Acknowledge, and reply to your query.
- Acknowledge more complicated queries and follow up with a full response later.

## **Our offices will:**

- Be clean and tidy.
- Have disabled access to services where possible.
- Provide rooms where you can discuss issues with us in private.
- Provide information about our services.

We will monitor our standards of service through independent mystery shopping surveys and feedback from local tenants' organisations.

# Rent And Other Charges

## Paying your rent and other charges

When you accept a tenancy with us, you agree to pay a charge for your home.

You will be asked to pay one weeks' rent, and if required, provide evidence of full Housing Benefit entitlement before you are given the keys to your home.

Where required, you will receive a swipe payment card through the post within one week of your tenancy starting.

Remember, your rent is payable from the day your tenancy starts, not from the date you actually move into your home. Some people are entitled to receive Housing Benefit to pay part or all of their rent. Even if you are entitled to Housing Benefit, you are still responsible for paying the rent.

To ensure your claim is processed quickly, it is essential that all necessary information is submitted at the time you make your claim. Our Income Team will give you advice on how to do this.

The Income Management Team monitor rent accounts weekly.

They use a computerised system that can instantly spot when a payment has been missed or is for less than the required amount. Missed payments will not go unnoticed.

## Where can I pay my rent or other charges?

You must pay your rent on a regular basis to be agreed with the Rent Income Team. This could be weekly, fortnightly or monthly.

### There are many easy ways to pay:

- By direct debit or standing order.  
We will give you a Direct Debit form at sign up. This is the easiest way to pay.
- By phone, call Allpay on: Tel: **0844 557 8321**.
- Via the internet at: **[www.allpayments.net](http://www.allpayments.net)**.
- At the Post Office using your swipe card.
- At local outlets that display the Paypoint sign.
- By credit or debit card. Call the Customer Service Centre to pay by card over the phone.
- By Cheque.

## **I am having problems with my Housing Benefit claim. What should I do?**

It is your responsibility to apply for and sort out Housing Benefit.

We can offer advice, but you must sort out benefit problems with the Housing Benefit Team at the Council and make sure your rent is paid on time.

We can help, but you must tell us when you cannot pay your rent. A team of staff are here to help you if you have trouble paying; it's always best to let us know.

## **I can't keep up with my rent, or have fallen behind. What should I do?**

Don't ignore the problem. Rent is a payment you must make or you will lose your home. Try and sort it out by seeking professional guidance.

Contact the Customer Service Centre and let them know how you intend to reduce your debt.

Don't fall into the debt trap. It could lead to:

- Having to attend court to explain why you haven't paid your rent.
- A Court Order (CCJ) requiring you to pay.
- A bill for legal fees.
- Having difficulty getting credit, another tenancy or mortgage.
- Losing your home

The Customer Service Centre can also provide you with details of other agencies that can help.

**You should make the following arrangements as soon as you know what date your tenancy will start:**

- Put the gas and electric in your name and arrange to be connected as soon as possible. Take meter readings to give the company. (See page 14 for help with finding the best deal from an energy provider.)

Once you have organised your supply, ring the Customer Service Centre to arrange for the gas to be commissioned by us. Please note, this can take up to 48 hours.

- You will need to contact the Post Office to re-direct mail to your new home.
- Unless we have advised you that your water rates are included in your rent, you also need to let the water company and local Council know when you are moving in, as you are responsible for your own water charges and Council tax payments.
- You must make arrangements for a qualified electrician or Gas Safe registered plumber to install your cooker.
- Make the other occupancy arrangements you need such as connecting your telephone and buying your TV licence.

## Paying your rent

**Paying your rent is your top priority.**

So you can pay your rent, we will give you a Direct Debit form at sign up. If required, you will also receive a swipe payment card through the post within a week of your tenancy starting.

Remember, your rent is payable from the day your tenancy starts and not from the date you actually move into your home. If you qualify for Housing Benefit, you are still responsible for paying the rent, even while the Housing Benefit department, in the Council, set-up your claim.

If you think you are entitled to Housing Benefit, you will need to make a new claim. You are responsible for making the claim and providing the right information to the Council. Our Income Team will give you advice on how to do this.

**Remember:** We are not part of the Council and they will not share information with us.

## Stop tap, fuses and trip switches

Find out where these are. The stop tap for the water is usually under the kitchen sink.

## Insurance

We strongly recommend you take up home contents insurance. For more details contact the Customer Service Centre.

## Moving in checklist

Have you made all your moving in arrangements?

### Use this checklist to help:

Gas Supplier	<input type="checkbox"/>
Electricity Supplier	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Council (Council Tax)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Water Supplier	<input type="checkbox"/>
Post Office (Re-direct mail)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone Supplier	<input type="checkbox"/>
TV Licence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home Contents Insurance	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Running your home:

If this is the first time you are setting up a home, ensure you consider budgeting for:

- Furniture
- Carpets
- Curtains
- White goods e.g. fridge
- Cooker
- Beds and bedding
- Towels
- Kettle, pans, cups, plates, dishes, cutlery
- Television

## Where can I get help to do my garden?

We do not maintain gardens for tenants. However, we may be able to put you in contact with someone who can carry out some work at reduced rate.

Some community groups offer tool hire facilities. Contact the Customer Service Centre for advice.

## Energy Angels

Energy Angels are our energy partners who ensure that you are correctly set up for your energy bills by finding out who supplies your energy, telling them that you have moved in and making sure that you are not paying too much for your energy bills.

This is a free service.

Your Neighbourhood Officer may have already put you in touch with Energy Angels but if you have not yet spoken to Energy Angels, please call now to avoid paying too much for your energy:

**Tel: 01902 585503**

Or if you prefer, Energy Angels will call you back:

**Text: 07815 915171**

**Email:** [energy@money-angels.com](mailto:energy@money-angels.com)

Please ensure that you include your name, correct telephone number and ideal time to call you back. If you are using Facebook or Twitter please use the message option for your privacy and security.

## Help with Energy Charges

If you have arrears with gas or electric, you may be able to apply to an Energy Trust. These can sometimes offer funds for other essential household items.

You can contact:

### **British Gas Energy Trust**

Tel: 01733 421060

[www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk](http://www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk)

### **EDF Energy Trust**

Tel: 01733 421060

[www.edfenergytrust.org.uk](http://www.edfenergytrust.org.uk)

### **Npower Energy Fund**

Tel: 01733 421060

[www.npowerenergyfund.com](http://www.npowerenergyfund.com)

## Home Heat Helpline

If you have another gas or electric supplier or you want general advice, contact Home Heat Helpline.

Tel: 0800 33 66 99

[www.homeheathelpline.org.uk](http://www.homeheathelpline.org.uk)

## Help with water charges

If you have difficulties paying your water charges and fall behind, you may be able to apply for support from your water provider. They often have lower payment rates for some people and grants to help pay off any arrears.

## TV Licence

You are responsible for buying a TV Licence if you own and watch a television.

You can spread the cost over a year by paying weekly or monthly.

Tel: 0300 790 6131  
[www.tvlicensing.co.uk](http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk)

## Useful contacts

**National Grid - Gas Leaks:**  
**0800 111999**

Call this number if you smell gas.

# Repairs & Gas Safety Inspections

## Repairs – getting it right first time

If something in your home needs a repair, contact the Customer Service Centre.

**You can help us by giving as much information as possible, for example:**

- What is it that you need repairing?
- Where is it? (i.e. front, back, upstairs, downstairs)
- How did it happen?

By giving us as much information as you can means we will send the right technician, with the right materials and right tools to carry out your repair right first time..

When you report your repair you will be offered a mutually agreed appointment time.

Please be in when you say you will, and if you can't keep your appointment - please tell us!

## How long will it take?

Some repairs are more urgent than others, so we will carry out:

- **Emergency Repairs:** 24 hours (aiming to attend within 2 hours) to complete/make safe.
- **Scheduled Repairs** other than an emergency within 28 calendar days.

## You need to:

- Keep your home in good, general condition.
- Keep your garden neat and tidy (if you have one).
- Decorate the inside of your home.
- Repair any damage done by you or your visitors, family or neighbours.
- Replace lost keys or pay for lock changes.
- Provide access for annual inspection of the gas equipment in your home.

## Asbestos

Asbestos is a very common building material and it is not usually necessary for it to be removed whilst it remains in good condition.

Where it remains undamaged in buildings, it will not be harmful to the occupants. We have a policy in line with the Health and Safety Executive's recommendations to leave asbestos in position unless it is in an unsatisfactory condition or likely to be subject to frequent disturbance.

If you have any concerns, please ask us for an advice leaflet.

## Gas Safety Inspections

We have a legal duty to ensure that a gas safety check is carried out at least once every 12 months.

The safety check is very important to ensure the gas appliances in your home are safe and in good working order.

We have an appointment system offering various time slots for your convenience.

## What you can do to help us:

- Never use a gas appliance if you suspect it isn't working properly (if we installed it, please report it straight away).
- Never block/cover air vents/bricks or cover an appliance, but do maintain adequate ventilation at all times.
- If you have a pre payment meter please ensure you have credit available to enable us to carry out a gas service.
- Always use a qualified Gas Safe registered engineer to repair, install or service your gas appliances.
- If you wish to install your own gas appliance(s) please submit your written request to your Neighbourhood Officer prior to installation.
- If you are not going to be in when we call, please contact the Customer Service Centre to re-arrange your appointment.
- Please make sure we have your correct details. i.e. your up to date mobile phone number.
- Please ensure your home is safe for us to work in, i.e. pets are kept safe, gas appliances accessible, and children under 18 are not left alone in the house.

If you continue to fail to allow us access to complete the annual gas safety check, we will take the appropriate action against you.

### **What you must do if you smell gas or suspect a gas leak**

- TURN OFF the gas at your meter.
- OPEN all windows and doors.
- PUT OUT all naked flames (do not smoke).
- DO NOT use/touch electrical appliances or switches.
- CALL National Grid on **0800 111 999** before contacting us.
- Leave the property if necessary.

### **Carbon Monoxide – What to look out for / danger signs**

- Yellow or brown staining or soot deposits on or around appliances.
- Yellow flames rather than blue.
- Increased condensation inside windows.
- Pilot lights often blow out.

**Legionnaires' disease is a type of pneumonia caused by bacteria which can be found in ponds, hot and cold water systems e.g. showers and the water in air conditioning and refrigeration systems. Legionnaires' disease is caught by breathing in water droplets from air conditioning, spa baths or water systems such as showers that have been infected with Legionella bacteria.**

Together Housing is committed to ensuring the Health & Safety of its customers at all times. To avoid Legionnaires' disease, follow these simple procedures.

- Store the hot water at between 50oC 60oC. Legionella bacteria does not like temperatures that exceed 45oC.
- The bacteria cannot breed in water cisterns where the water is used regularly. If your property is empty for over a week i.e. when you have been on holiday then you should run the hot water for ten minutes, this will turn over the water in the storage cistern (this does not apply to dwellings with combination boilers).
- If your shower has not been used at least once in any seven day period, you should flush out the

hose and head at arm's length on the hottest setting available. Making as little spray as possible for two minutes. This will clear any stagnant water from the hose and head.

- Clean any shower heads every month or sooner, should there be visible contamination to the shower head. This will maintain the good hygiene of the shower. The showerhead is a source of spray, making it the most likely appliance in a house that a person can potentially inhale water droplets containing Legionella bacteria. The showerhead can be cleaned with any good proprietary cleaner (available from most supermarkets).
- You should also soak the showerhead and flexible hose in a disinfectant solution every 3 months to make sure any build up of bacteria is eradicated. This will ensure the most efficient operation of your shower and also make sure the water you are showering in is clean and will reduce the risk of antibacterial contamination.
- Avoid stagnation within the water systems, open garden hose taps weekly, ensure all taps are used weekly for at least two minutes.

By following these simple procedures, it drastically reduces the risk from Legionella bacteria within a domestic dwelling.

Together Housing Group recommends that the temperature of bath and shower water is always tested before use. In the case of babies, children and older people the carer should do this. This is most easily done by immersing an elbow into the water. The elbow is more sensitive than the hand.

Together Housing Group will not recommend a water temperature for bathing as it is not practical to take a thermometer to the bath and devices which change colour cannot be relied upon.

# Home Improvements

## **Our home improvement team will:**

- Tell you what work is going to be done four weeks before we start in your area, unless we get your permission to start earlier.
- Give you the name of your Tenant Liaison Officer who will be available to assist you during the improvement works to your home.
- Give you a choice wherever possible about improvements carried out to your home, for example, the colour and layout of new kitchens.

## **Our contractors/technicians will:**

- Give five working days' notice before they start work, unless you give your permission for them to start earlier.
- Work between 8am and 5pm Monday to Friday.
- Always wear identification.
- Provide dust sheets where necessary and clear away rubbish every day.
- Provide you with a 24 hour telephone number for emergencies outside normal working hours.

## **Smoking Ban**

The smoking ban not only affects all communal, public and workplaces in England, it also affects contractors in your home and drivers of company vehicles.

Your home is legally classed as a workplace whenever you invite a contractor or any member of our staff into it.

We will refrain from smoking while we are in your home. In return, we politely ask that you show us the same courtesy. If you want to smoke, have a care for our teams and light up in another room.

## First things first

Unless you are suffering from serious acts of violence or harassment, for most cases of anti-social behaviour you should first try and speak to your neighbour to resolve things amicably at an early stage.

Many problems only arise because people have not talked or considered each other's point of view. Sometimes, a neighbour just needs reminding that their behaviour is upsetting you.

If the other person is unreasonable, just walk away. Do not get involved in an argument or retaliate in any way.

## Letting us know

If the problem is continuing, or you are unable to talk to your neighbour for any reason, for example in serious harassment cases, you should contact the Customer Service Centre.

It is also important to start keeping a record of incidents as and when they occur. This will be very useful later on.

Once you have reported the problem to us, we will contact you to discuss the problem in greater detail.

Once we have talked to you and found out what is happening and how you are affected, we may contact other people, including the person or people causing the problem and other agencies i.e. Police and Local Authorities, in order to establish the facts.

## We can then take the following steps:

- Warn the tenant that their behaviour is not acceptable.
- Involve other agencies such as Social Services, Environmental Health or the Police.
- Refer you to a local Mediation Service – a confidential service for neighbours in conflict. They may be able to find a solution which you and your neighbours are happy with.
- Take out court injunctions against the person(s) causing the problem in serious cases.
- In serious cases of violence and harassment, we may agree to move you as a matter of priority.
- Offer help and reassurance.

## Why do we involve residents?

We are committed to delivering homes and services that residents can be proud of. We do this by listening to our tenants and residents and taking action, when necessary, to improve.

We support many community groups, tenants and residents associations and neighbourhood watch groups in local communities. Your local Neighbourhood Officer will be able to tell you if there are any groups operating where you live. Your Neighbourhood Officer can also work with the Resident Involvement Officer to help you set up a new local group if this is something you would like to do.

We have formal methods of involvement and consultation that focus on the services you receive from specific service teams. These groups monitor the quality and satisfaction of services, as well as ensuring we are achieving value for money.

We also have opportunities for you to scrutinise the services we deliver.

You can see up close how our services are delivered, how we compare to other organisations and then make evidence based recommendations to improve the services. If you have a bit more time to spare then scrutiny may be for you.

We have a dedicated team of Scrutiny Advisors to help train and support you in this work.

For more information about ways you can get involved please contact the Customer Service Centre and ask for the Resident Involvement or Scrutiny Officer.

# How To Give Feedback

## How to let us know about our services

We try to get things right first time, but to do this we need your help.

We positively welcome and value compliments, complaints and comments and will use them to help improve our services.

## Compliments

We receive lots of compliments and it tells us what we're doing right.

We use this as valuable feedback to create a consistent level of service.

## Complaints

Everybody learns by their mistakes and we're no different. And if we fail to meet our service standards, all we ask is the chance to put it right.

Just let us know why you feel we have not delivered the service you expected and what we could do to resolve this.

## Comments

When we're looking to improve our service – we call in the experts. If you have a suggestion or a bright idea that could help us to help you, then let us know.

Satisfaction surveys are also a great way to learn from you. Independent people may call you on our behalf so please spare a few minutes to take part.

Our Compliments, Complaints and Comments procedure and Service Standard are available on our website and printed versions are free upon request. They will help guide you through the process.

## How do I complain if I am unhappy with the service I have received?

We always encourage customers to solve complaints directly with staff members as we are committed to providing a service to be proud of. Should you need to contact us, please contact the Customer Service Centre.

## Confidentiality

We will treat what you tell us in strict confidence, but it may still not be possible for you to remain anonymous. This is because unless there are a number of complainants, your neighbour may guess who made the complaint.

In most cases, we will need to interview the person you are complaining about. You can ask us not to do this, however we may not be able to take the case any further.

If you are worried about reprisals, you can discuss these concerns with us when we speak with you.

## Legal action

A vast majority of cases are resolved prior to any legal action. However, if the anti-social behaviour is continuing, and we have witnesses willing to go to court to give evidence, we will begin legal proceedings against the people involved.

## Tackling anti-social behaviour

We will not tolerate anti-social behaviour and will take legal action if necessary against troublemakers.

A copy of our Summary of Policies and Procedures on Anti-Social Behaviour are available free of charge upon request.

## What can we do about nuisance neighbours

Nuisance and anti-social behaviour can disrupt the lives of many people.

Specialist staff are employed to investigate complaints of nuisance.

### They can:

- Provide advice on what we can do (liaise with other agencies such as the Police or Environmental Health, work with support agencies, seek injunctions, start legal proceedings to evict) and what it cannot do (immediately evict tenants without evidence or going to court).
- Provide advice on whether the problem is more the responsibility of another agency e.g. the Police, and who to contact.
- Provide support and protection to victims and witnesses where necessary.
- Contact the Customer Service Centre for more information.



## Jobs within The Together Housing Group

The Together Housing Group is made up of seven partner companies who joined so that they can share skills and expertise in order to improve services and value to our customers.

If you are seeking employment or thinking of a change of career, why not think about working for us.

Jobs with us are advertised as and when vacancies arise in the local paper, at Job Centre Plus and on our website.

### Benefits of working for us:-

- Trade Union recognition
- A comprehensive pension scheme
- A voluntary reduced hours scheme
- A job share scheme.
- Flexi-time – you can make adjustments to your working day to fit in with other demands on your time
- A range of lifestyle and healthcare packages including free health care cash plan and optional extra packages through voluntary personal contributions
- Special leave – to deal with things such as jury service, or with unforeseen events
- An up-to-date performance assessment process
- Study leave and financial help towards appropriate qualifications
- Payment of professional fees where appropriate
- A no smoking policy
- Free referral to Occupational Health specialists
- Free telephone counselling service
- Reduced rate gym membership
- Free internet access in your own time.

[www.togetherhousing.co.uk](http://www.togetherhousing.co.uk)