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Home Improvement Policy

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1 Introduction: the purpose of this policy

- 1.1 Our residents can make certain improvements and alterations to their home at their own expense in line with relevant legal and regulatory requirements, their tenancy agreement and this policy.
- 1.2 This policy sets out a standardised process for dealing with requests from residents for alterations and improvements both inside and outside of the home to ensure that all requests are treated fairly and consistently.
- 1.3 The purpose of the policy is to
 - Set out our approach to granting permission for residents' alterations and improvements.
 - Ensure there are clear guidelines for staff and residents.
 - Ensure alterations and improvements are carried out appropriately, in line with health and safety requirements.

2 Policy statement

- 2.1 We will work with residents who may wish to make alterations and improvements to their home. Residents will be treated fairly, and we will clearly explain the process for requesting permission, as well as providing advice and guidance about how any improvement should be completed.
- 2.2 We will not unreasonably withhold permission and if we are not able to approve a request, we will clearly explain in writing our reasons why.
- 2.3 The policy aims to balance the rights of residents to personalise and make reasonable improvements to their homes, with the need to maintain safety and compliance with regulations and tenancy agreements.
- 2.4 We consider improvements to be changes to, removals or replacements of any of the existing buildings fixtures, grounds or garden.
- 2.5 Requests for disabled adaptations in residents' homes are not considered as home improvements and are managed under our aids and adaptations policy.
- 2.6 Requests to install broadband and replacing utilities meters are not considered as home improvements, but residents will still need to contact us for permission.

3 Requesting an improvement

- 3.1 Some minor improvements such as internal decoration and putting up hooks and wall fittings for picture frames, mirrors, shelves and curtain rails can be carried out without our permission. Where our permission is needed, residents must make a home improvement request by using the form on our website. We will respond within ten

working days. If a resident is unable to submit an online form, they can contact us to discuss alternative ways to submit their request.

- 3.2 Residents must complete the work within six months of the date of the permission being granted. Residents will need to tell us when the work has been completed. If it is not completed within six months, residents will need to reapply for permission.
- 3.3 Residents may follow a different process if they are in extra care, supported housing or living in one of our Kent Excellent Homes for All (KEHFA) schemes. Residents should discuss their request with their scheme manager or supported housing officer who will manage their request in line with their tenancy agreement.
- 3.4 Shared owners and leaseholders can make improvements in line with appendix 1 and 2. For any other improvements, they will need to submit a request via our website. Where permission is needed for more involved works, we may need to issue a Licence for Alterations and charge a fee.
- 3.5 If residents are dissatisfied with the outcome of their improvement request, they will need to follow our complaints process.

4 Type of improvements

- 4.1 Examples of improvements and alterations covered by this policy are listed in the following appendices:
 - Appendix 1: Improvements that do not require permission from us
 - Appendix 2: Improvements that do not require permission from us, but have specific conditions that must be followed
 - Appendix 3: Improvements that require permission from us in all cases.
 - Appendix 4: Improvements that will not be granted permission.
- 4.2 If residents wish to make an improvement that is not listed in any of the appendices, they will need to contact us for advice before undertaking any works.
- 4.3 The following conditions apply for all home improvements:
 - The work is carried out in a professional manner and meets all relevant building standards and controls.
 - A qualified contractor/installer must be used to carry out improvements in line with our appendices 1-3.
 - Where asbestos is present in a property, a qualified contractor must be used to carry out all improvements where there is a risk that asbestos could be disturbed
 - Residents are responsible for the cost of any repairs needed to their home because of poor workmanship, or problems caused by this improvement.

- If we require the improvement to be temporarily removed to allow access to complete any work, it will be down to the resident to move and reinstate it at their cost.
- All improvement works are carried out to the resident's home only and do not affect any other property, use other property's walls as support, or impact on their boundaries in any way.
- The improvement and work must not interfere with or undermine any fire protection and compartmentation within the resident's home.
- We will not be held responsible for any claims or damages resulting from a resident's (or their contractor) neglect, omission or error.
- If the resident's home is a new-build and still within the defects period, they will need to check with us and the developer that there are no objections to their improvement.

4.4 A full list of our general workmanship conditions and guidelines can be found in appendix 5.

5 Exclusions

5.1 We will consider each home improvement request on a case-by-case basis, but may not grant permission for a home improvement request if:

- a resident's rent account is in arrears. Residents may need to clear these arrears before we consider their request.
- there are any other outstanding arrears (e.g. former tenancy arrears, court costs or rechargeable repair accounts). Residents may need to clear these arrears before we consider their request
- there is an outstanding case under investigation for a breach of the tenancy conditions.
- the improvement or alteration is considered to make the home unsafe.
- the home is newly built and still within defects liability period or under warranty.
- the works will cause enduring disturbance to neighbours, such as laminate flooring in an above ground floor flat.
- it's a request for any of the improvements or alterations listed in appendix 4.

6 Retrospective permission

6.1 If the requirements of the policy are met, we may issue retrospective permission when required where we discover improvements that have been completed without our permission.

- 6.2 Where permission is not given, we will inform the resident of the remedial work that is required to achieve permission and a timescale in which to complete it. If we are unable to give retrospective permission, we will ask the resident to remove the improvement and return the property to how it was at their own cost. If the resident doesn't remove the improvement, we may remove it ourselves and recharge the resident for the costs.

7 Repair responsibilities

- 7.1 We will only carry out repairs or maintenance for home improvements in line with the responsibilities set out in our Maintaining Your Home policy. Certain improvements also require an inspection and/or a certificate to be sent to us before we can take on repair responsibilities. See appendix 3.
- 7.2 Where we have carried out an inspection, we will only take on the repair responsibilities once we are satisfied with the quality of the home improvement and agreed the work meets the required standards.
- 7.3 Where residents have carried out improvements to our standard fixtures and fitted parts to a higher specification, for example in bathrooms or kitchens, we may not be able to repair. If we need to make a replacement, we will not replace it like-for-like but fit our standard parts. It will be the resident's responsibility to replace it like-for-like.
- 7.4 Where we are not responsible for the repair and maintenance of an improvement, we may carry out repairs to it in an emergency, where failure to maintain an improvement would put the resident or others at risk or where not repairing the improvement would cause damage to our property.

8 Rechargeable repairs

- 8.1 Residents may be recharged where we need to carry out repairs because of poor-quality improvement works.
- 8.2 Where a home improvement does not meet our standards or conditions (as set out in our appendices) the resident will be required to carry out further work within a specified timescale to meet the necessary standards. If the residents don't carry out the work or still fail to meet our standards, the resident will have to return the property to its original condition, or we will complete the works to the required standard and recharge the resident for the costs.
- 8.3 If we are not responsible for the repair, we may recharge the resident if we need to carry out an emergency repair of an improvement.

9 Moving out

- 9.1 When a resident moves out of their home, they will need to check with us whether they can leave the improvement, or if they are required to carry out any reinstatement work before they leave. If they leave the property without carrying out any requested reinstatement work or fail to contact us, we will charge the resident for any work we need to complete.

- 9.2 We may consider offering compensation for home improvements carried out by residents on a secure tenancy when moving out of the property.

10 Mutual exchange

- 10.1 Incoming residents agree to accept the condition of the property they are moving into.
- 10.2 We will only carry out repairs to improvements carried out by the former resident in line with our maintaining your home policy. For example, repairs to our standard fixtures and fitted parts in bathrooms and kitchens.
- 10.3 For any other improvements made by the former resident, the resident moving in will take on the repair responsibility as well as any gifted items. For example, garden sheds, floor coverings and fencing.
- 10.4 Any structural alterations made to the property will require our permission before approval for the exchange can be given.

11 Responsibilities

Landlord responsibilities

- The head of strategic asset management has the overall responsibility of this policy.
- The customer service team and the property and asset management team will process most home improvement requests via our website and will be responsible for ensuring that requests are responded to within ten working days and for letting the resident know the outcome.
- Our surveyors from the property and asset management team will carry out inspections of home improvements when required.
- Housing management staff will be responsible for managing requests from residents living in extra care, supported housing or in one of our Kent Excellent Homes for All (KEHFA) schemes.
- A member of the housing team will discuss with residents who are moving out whether the residents can leave the improvement, or if they are required to carry out any reinstatement work before they leave
- We will be fair and consistent in considering requests made by residents to carry out alterations and improvements to their homes.

Resident responsibilities

- Residents' responsibilities are set out in their tenancy agreement. Residents must seek permission for improvements where needed before carrying out works and not begin work until they have received written permission from us.

- Residents must ensure that permitted work is undertaken by a qualified person and provide us with any certificates of completion or other certification, as detailed in the permission letter from us and in appendix 1 to 3.
- Residents must provide full details of what they are planning to do before starting any work for improvements where our permission is required. They also need to check if local planning permission is needed.
- Residents who complete home improvements without following the policy must seek retrospective permission.
- Residents must give us access to inspect during or on completion of the improvement, on request.

12 Regulation

- 12.1 We will provide a safe home environment for our residents and will comply with all relevant legislation when processing home improvements requests.
- 12.2 It is our legal obligation to ensure all homes meet the Decent Homes Standard, we will ensure all home improvement requests meet our obligations under this regulation.
- 12.3 All social housing landlords must achieve energy performance certificate C energy efficient homes by 2030 and Net Zero Carbon by 2050, we will ensure that all home improvement requests meet our obligations to achieve this target.
- 12.4 This policy will be reviewed and adapted as required and in accordance with legislation and guidance.

13 Recording and reporting

- 13.1 For improvements where permission is required, the details will be recorded on our housing management system.
- 13.2 For improvements where permission isn't required, we will add the details to our housing management system following the next stock condition survey where we have identified improvements.
- 13.3 We aim to respond to requests within ten working days of submission of all relevant documents required.
- 13.4 Home improvement request cases will be monitored and tracked via our housing management system.

14 Consultation

- 14.1 As part of the development of this policy, our resident involvement team has consulted with residents. As part of this, residents shared their feedback on its content via a focus group. The outputs of that review were considered to shape the policy before publication.

15 Communication

- 15.1 This policy will be published on our intranet and on our website in a dedicated home improvement area. We will provide a copy on request.
- 15.2 We will provide information about any changes to the policy via our website, social media, and written communication such as Neighbourhood News.

16 Appendices

- Appendix 1: Improvements that do not require permission from us
- Appendix 2: Improvements that do not require permission from us, but have specific conditions that must be followed
- Appendix 3: Improvements that require permission from us in all cases
- Appendix 4: Improvements that will not be granted permission
- Appendix 5: General workmanship conditions and guidelines

17 Related policies and supporting documents

- 17.1 This policy should be used in conjunction with other relevant West Kent policies which include:
- Maintaining your home policy
 - West Kent home standard
 - Recharge policy
 - Mutual exchange policy
 - Aids and adaptation policy
 - Pets policy