

# Housing News

Winter 2023

The magazine for Ealing Council tenants

Homes



Neighbourhoods



Opportunities



## Managing damp and condensation

Find out how to deal with condensation in your home this winter – and what we can do to tackle the more serious cases of damp and mould. Details are on page four.



# Take care this winter

Councillor Steve Donnelly is Ealing Council's lead member for an inclusive economy



**This time of year can always be difficult for some people, with cold weather, shorter days and viruses circulating, but we know that this year, winter is a real challenge for people because of the cost-of-living crisis.**

Across the country, hard up households are feeling the pinch, and we know locally that many families are not turning on their heating because they are understandably worried about the cost. But help is at hand. We've put together a comprehensive list of ways you can get support with essentials, which you can find at [www.ealing.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.ealing.gov.uk/costofliving). Don't suffer in silence – ask for help if you need it.

One of the ways the cost-of-living crisis is affecting our tenants is condensation. If you don't keep your home evenly heated, it will be far more prone to moisture building up, which in turn can quickly lead to mould developing. Go to page four to find out more.

No one should be shivering at home this winter. If you are struggling, make sure you speak to one of our financial inclusion officers, who can help to ensure you're receiving all of the benefits and support that you're entitled to. You can make an appointment by speaking to your neighbourhood housing officer.

To help minimise household energy costs, we have funded a series of warm, safe locations around the borough where you will be welcomed during the daytime. Ranging from churches to libraries and community centres to cultural

groups, the venues are providing food and drinks as well as activities for people who attend. Even if it's just a warm cuppa and neighbourly chat once a week, it can make a real difference to people who might otherwise be alone and fearful of mounting heating bills. You can find a full list of the venues at [www.ealing.gov.uk/warmspaces](http://www.ealing.gov.uk/warmspaces).

At this time of year, colds, flu and COVID-19 spread rapidly, and flu in particular is currently putting a real strain on the NHS. If you have been offered a flu vaccine or COVID-19 booster, it is important to book in as soon as possible. For the full list of people eligible for vaccines and boosters and how to book, please visit the NHS website.

As well as taking up the vaccines, there are other ways we can help relieve the pressure on the NHS. Using 111 online can quickly direct you to the right service for your medical needs. You can find out more about 111 on page 10. And to make sure you don't run out of medication during cold weather or over the holidays, you should order and collect repeat prescriptions before they run-out and keep a well-stocked medicine cabinet.

Finally, the most important thing we can all do is look out for one another. When it's cold and icy some people find it more difficult to get out for essential tasks like doing their food shopping or picking up a prescription and may even find it difficult to keep warm. Please check in with any friends, relatives and neighbours who may be more vulnerable. On page 10 you can find out what you can do if you're concerned about someone.



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## Changes to our allocations policy

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We have recently made some changes to our allocations policy which could affect people who are on the council's housing register, including a new priority for armed forces personnel.



These changes - the first updates to our allocations policy for more than 10 years - will allow us to focus our resources on the households and families most in need. As well as introducing a priority group for armed forces personnel, families who foster or adopt children will also be given priority.

Overall, the changes will mean that our housing register – the “waiting list” for a council home - will get much shorter, as those with no realistic hope of ever becoming a council

tenant will be removed. There are currently more than 13,000 households on the register, with the vast majority in the lower two priority bands - Band C and Band D. With only around 500 homes becoming available to let each year, there are simply not enough socially rented homes in the borough for everyone who wants one.

We will reduce the number of priority bands from four to three by removing Band D. Being placed in Band D generally creates an unrealistic expectation for many applicants that they will somehow be made an offer of social housing, when that is not the case. The majority of applicants in Band D and some applicants in Band C would be removed from the housing register. Those households are currently deemed to be adequately housed, although they are still eligible for advice about other housing options from us.

All households due to be removed from the housing register would first be reassessed against the criteria in the new policy, to check whether their circumstances have changed or if they should be placed in one of the new priority groups. If they qualify, they will be moved into the appropriate band.

Find out more by speaking to your neighbourhood housing officer.

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## Free laptops to help bridge digital divide

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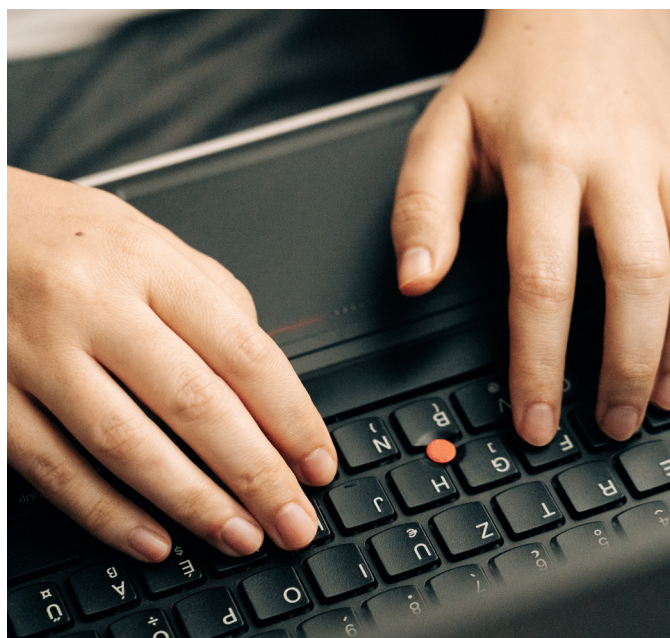
A new Ealing Council programme aims to provide almost 1,000 free laptops to some of the borough's most disadvantaged residents.

A hundred devices have already been distributed through Ealing & Hounslow Voluntary and Community Services (EHCVS), and around 900 are expected to be given out by the end of the year.

The Re-Klaim IT Ealing project takes old, surplus laptops donated by the council and refurbishes them. They are then distributed to eligible recipients who have been referred by various agencies such as Ealing Foodbank or other local support services.

It is aimed at helping the borough's most vulnerable residents, including care leavers, the disabled and people receiving benefits. Recipients receive training in basic IT skills, and help with things like setting up email, online prescription renewals or CV development websites – whatever is most suited to their individual needs.

If you think you might qualify for a free laptop, talk to your support workers or foodbank.





# Dealing with condensation in your home

Many households around the country have concerns about condensation at this time of year, but the shocking case of two-year-old Awaab Ishak, who died because of prolonged exposure to mould in his home in Rochdale, has rightly resulted in a renewed focus on what landlords like us are doing about damp, mould, and condensation.

None of our tenants should be living in a cold, damp home, and we are determined to provide all the help and support we can. Your safety and wellbeing are our top priority, and we want to make sure that we deal with any concerns you have relating to damp and/or mould in your home quickly and comprehensively.

We have established a specialist team to lead our response to damp and mould issues and a fund of £1 million per year has been created to provide targeted financial support.

We are investing extensively in our homes to ensure they are as safe, secure and sustainable as possible. While we do this work, there are some things you and your family can do to manage everyday condensation in your homes, and we are working to ensure that we tackle any more serious problems as quickly and thoroughly as possible. Below is some detail on condensation and what you can do about it, while on the next page you'll find more information about damp and mould.

## Why condensation occurs – and why it happens more now

Nearly all homes in this country will develop condensation during colder months.

There is always some moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. If air gets cold, it cannot hold all the moisture produced by everyday activities and some of this moisture appears as tiny droplets of water, most noticeably on windows on a cold morning. This is condensation. It can also be seen on bathroom mirrors when you have a bath or shower, and on cold surfaces such as tiles or cold walls, particularly behind furniture where air cannot circulate. Unless removed, the moisture can quickly lead to mould forming in the room.

Condensation occurs in cold weather, even when the weather is dry. But there is more to this problem than just the cold. Since many British homes were built, there have been some fundamental changes to the way we live our lives, and in many cases, homes are ill-equipped to handle what we now ask them to do.

As a society, we have become accustomed to living at higher temperatures. 18 degrees used to be the norm for most people, but on average, we now heat our homes to 19-21 degrees. This means there is extra heat to condense once the heating goes off at night.

Homes were built with ventilation measures like airbricks but now that preventing heat loss is becoming more important, they are often covered up and filled in – at the cost of good ventilation.

We cook differently now than we did in the past, using ovens less and hobs more – which produce far more water vapour.



And tumble dryers have become common. They may feel like they are generating warm air while they're in use, but actually the air they produce is so damp that it gets cold very quickly once the cycle stops.

The biggest change, however, is us. By breathing, humans produce more water vapour than anything else in the average home, and nowadays we collectively spend far more time indoors than we did in the past. With better home entertainment options, we are now less likely to go out in the evening, while children play outside less than they did in the past. The ability to work from home, longer life spans, and the increase in people with mobility issues have all increased the amount of time we spend inside. The more time we're in, the less of a chance the house has to breathe.

A combination of good ventilation and consistent low-level heating is the best way to prevent condensation.





## Get help with heating costs

In cold weather, the best way to keep rooms warm enough to avoid condensation is to keep low background heating on all day, between 18°C - 21°C, even when there is no one at home.

However, with most of us currently trying to limit our energy use because of rising costs, there is obviously a risk that mould could become even more challenging. There is no reason why anyone should be cold at home this winter. If you have control over how your home is heated and are concerned that you cannot afford the energy, speak to one of our financial inclusion officers, who can help to ensure

you're receiving all of the benefits and support that you're entitled to. You can make an appointment by speaking to your neighbourhood housing officer.

There are other ways you can get help during the cost-of-living crisis too.

Find out more at [www.ealing.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.ealing.gov.uk/costofliving).

## Keep your home ventilated

Ventilation can help to reduce condensation by removing moist air from your home and replacing it with drier air from outside.

Help to reduce condensation that has built up overnight by 'cross ventilating' your home - opening a small window downstairs and a small one upstairs, on opposite sides of your home. At the same time, open the interior room doors. This will allow drier air to circulate throughout your home. Cross-ventilation should be carried out for ten minutes each day.

Be careful not to over-ventilate your home when it is cold, as it will cause the temperature inside to drop and make condensation more likely. It will also increase your heating costs.

### Try these ideas to help ventilate your home:

- Ventilate your kitchen when cooking or washing up. A window slightly open is as good as one open.
- Use an extractor fan in your kitchen and bathroom if possible - they are cheap to run and very effective.
- Use trickle ventilators if fitted. Never tape over vents.
- It's important that air can circulate properly around your home. Make sure there is space around the back of furniture, especially if the items are placed against walls.
- Always ventilate the room while you use a tumble dryer. It should be vented to the outside if possible.
- Close the bathroom door before showering and open a window afterwards



# Tell us if you have damp or a serious mould

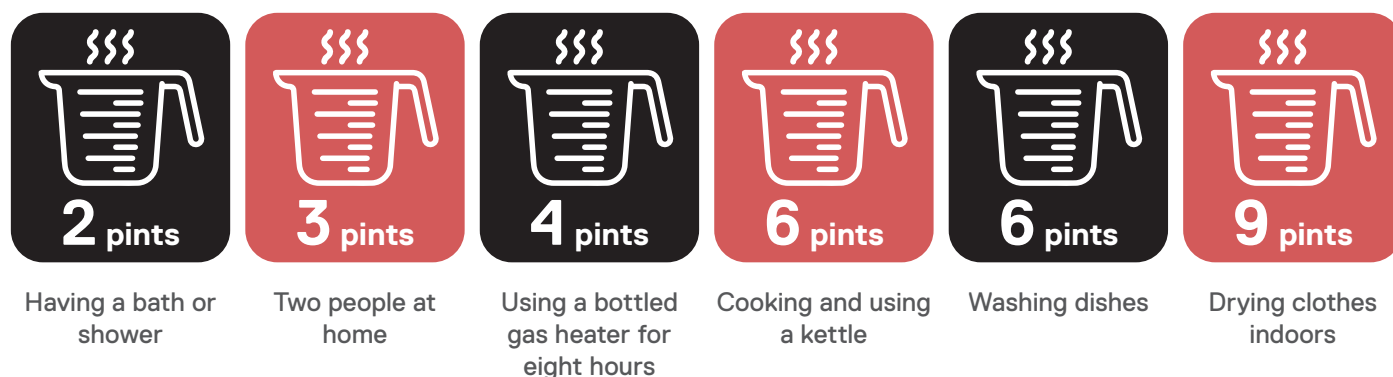
## Top tips for tackling condensation

There are some other simple measures you can take to tackle condensation.



- Wipe down surfaces with a dry cloth when condensation appears. Make sure you wring out the cloth rather than leaving it on a radiator, as the water will re-vapourise and could end up as condensation again.
- Keep your curtains open during the day.
- Use lids on saucepans and turn the heat down once the contents are boiling.
- Hang wet washing outside whenever you can. If you dry clothes inside, do so in a room with the window ajar and the door closed, using a heated airer, but not the radiator.
- Do not use bottled gas or paraffin heaters in your home - they produce a lot of water vapour when the fuel is burned.
- Keep kitchen and bathroom doors closed to prevent moisture escaping into the rest of your home.

How much water vapour do you create in a day?



## Mould

Mould spores are all around us, both inside and outside of the home, but because they are so small, we do not normally see them.

The mould spores become noticeable when they start to grow and multiply on surfaces. Mould spores like the damp environment caused by condensation. Mould appears as a cloud of little black dots. As well as being unsightly, it can cause health problems, so it's best to remove it as soon as it appears.

If a small amount of mould appears in your home, there are lots of cleaning products available to clear it. This usually involves spraying a bleach-based solution onto the affected area, leaving it for a short time and then wiping clean. Always follow the safety instructions.



If you have a more serious problem with mould, please tell us as soon as possible using the contact details opposite so that we can help. Over the last year we have been reviewing our damp and mould processes and procedures and are already making a number of significant improvements. A major programme to tackle the most problematic cases is now being rolled out.





There are a few different types of damp that can affect homes. If you think you have one of these problems in your home, let us know as soon as possible so that we can help resolve it quickly.

### Damp from faulty plumbing

Leaks from water and waste pipes in the home are fairly common, especially from bathrooms and kitchens. This damp will occur all the time whatever the outside weather conditions, and could be coming from either your home or your neighbour's. You will see an area or patch of damp that feels and looks wet. You will not normally see black mould growth with damp from faulty plumbing because the chemicals in the water prevent it growing.

### Rising damp

Rising damp is the name given to the process of water in the ground entering a property by travelling up through the pores in brickwork. It is usually caused by a broken or missing damp proof course - a horizontal membrane built into

the walls of a house at low level. Rising damp only affects basements/cellars and ground floor rooms. It will usually rise to between 30cm to 60 cm up the wall and leaves a brown 'tide' mark caused by salts from the ground. Black mould does not normally develop with rising damp because the salts prevent it growing.

### Penetrating damp

Penetrating damp is caused by water passing through the external walls or roof of a house because of a problem with the repair of the building, such as missing roof tiles, damaged pointing to brickwork, or cracked render. It is only found on external walls and sometimes on ceilings if there is damage to the roof. Penetrating damp is most noticeable after heavy rainfall or snow. You will see an area or patch of damp that feels and looks wet.

## How we can help

Please don't suffer in silence if you have a problem with any aspect of condensation, damp or mould. Get in touch on [dampandmould@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:dampandmould@ealing.gov.uk) as soon as you can so that we can help.

We'll visit you at your home to survey the areas of concern, and we'll talk to you about your needs and

some potential solutions. For example, we may be able to adapt your home to make it easier for it to ventilate, with extractors in multiple rooms and/or permanent dehumidifiers.

You can find more information about damp, mould and condensation at [www.ealing.gov.uk/condensation-mould](http://www.ealing.gov.uk/condensation-mould).



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# Your safety

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## Beware of TikTok homemade heaters

Firefighters have warned people not to follow a TikTok trend for building makeshift heaters from tealights and pots following a series of flat fires.

The fire had been caused by tealights being used to heat terracotta pots – a method described in instructional videos have become popular on social media over recent months

Content creators have claimed the homemade devices are a cheap way to heat homes. But experts have criticised their effectiveness, while the London Fire Brigade has strongly warned against their use.

Heat released from the base of the tea lights can weaken the terracotta plates they are placed on, causing the homemade heater to collapse and melted wax to ignite.

Residents are also being reminded about the dangers of leaving candles unattended, following a number of fires at council homes involving them. If using candles, be extra vigilant and never leave them unattended. Keep candles out of reach of children and pets, and away from loose clothing, curtains and other furnishings that can catch fire.



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## New fire detection systems

We're now working on a major upgrade of fire detection systems in our homes.

The multi-million-pound project will see us install smoke alarms, heat detectors and carbon monoxide detectors in all inhabited council properties.

The alarms - hardwired into the mains electric from the nearest light fitting but with a 10-year battery backup too – are a substantial upgrade on our current systems and are designed to keep you as safe as possible.

There is no maintenance required by you other than to regularly test that the detector works. A good habit to get into is testing them at the same time as putting your clocks back and forward in the spring and autumn. The contractor who installs the detectors will explain how they work and show you how to test them.

While the installations are taking place, we will also run electrical safety checks in your home, which we are legally obliged to do every five years to ensure the property's electrics are safe. You might think that your electrics work fine, your kettle does its job and that's all there is to it, but these tests will help to provide us with assurance that everything is working properly.



We have appointed contractors to manage the programme of detector installations and safety checks. When your turn comes, they will send you an introductory letter explaining what works will be carried out and when. The letter will ask you to call the contractor to make an appointment for the works to be carried out.

In total, the contractors will need to be in your home for about a day. The overall project is expected to be completed by August 2023.





## Electric heaters: know the risks

Electric heaters can be a great way to keep warm – especially if you only want to warm up one room. However, they should be used with care.

Over the past five years, more than 800 fires in London were caused by electrical heaters. Tragically, a third of electrical fires that resulted in a fatality involved heaters.

Fires involving heaters seem to have a particularly high fatality rate. This might be because of the circumstances they start in.

Fires typically start when bedding, blankets or clothes are placed too close to heaters. People with mobility issues are especially at risk of tripping or falling onto a heater – placing them at a safe distance is all the more important.

Some kinds of heater also present a carbon monoxide risk which can be fatal. It can make you drowsy and less able to escape. That's why it's so important to always fit a carbon monoxide alarm in rooms with solid fuel, gas or paraffin heaters. You can find out more about our plans to upgrade your carbon monoxide alarms in the article opposite.

Here are our top tips for staying safe when using heaters.

- Make sure heaters are well maintained and in good working order.
- Never install, repair or service appliances yourself. Make sure anyone who does is registered and properly qualified to do so.
- Don't take risks with old heaters – if it's electrical and getting older, get it tested by a qualified electrician or buy a new one.
- Where appropriate, secure heaters against a wall to stop them falling over.
- Always sit at least one metre away from a heater as it could set light to your clothes or chair.
- Before attempting to move your heater, turn it off and allow it to cool first.
- Keep heaters well away from clothes, curtains and furniture and never use them for drying clothes.



## Fire risk from paraffin-based creams

**Some emollient creams used to treat skin conditions like eczema pose a major fire risk and should be used carefully.**

You might use emollient creams to help manage dry skin conditions such as eczema or psoriasis. The creams soak into fabrics including bedding and clothing, which can easily ignite if they come into contact with naked flames, cigarettes or any other heat sources. The products are flammable because they contain paraffin.

Unfortunately, serious incidents caused by paraffin-based creams are not uncommon and have caused fatalities, but you can reduce the risk.

Always read the label to work out if the cream is flammable. If it is, do not smoke, or go near any other naked flames after applying the cream. Make sure you wash your clothing and bedding regularly and cover any skin which has cream on it so the cream does not soak into fabric.



## Keep an eye on vulnerable neighbours



We're asking all residents to look out for elderly or vulnerable neighbours, particularly while the days are cold and the nights get darker earlier.

Winter can be a difficult time for some people, with isolation increasing as they are less able to get out and about. We are asking our residents to be good neighbours and look out for others at this time – especially for those who don't have family nearby or regular visitors.



Little things can make all the difference, like asking them if they need any shopping, or taking their bin out for them if it's snowy or icy. Severe weather can strike quickly and catch people out, but by thinking of others, we can prevent them from going hungry or even getting hurt.

Here's how you can play your part in making your community more prepared:

- Identify neighbours who may need an extra helping hand if severe weather strikes.
- Check in with them regularly.
- Offer to help with grocery shopping or other essential tasks.
- Clear ice or snow from pathways.

If you're happy to help, take a few minutes today to knock on their door (during daylight hours), to say hello and find out how you could offer support. If they are happy to, swap numbers so that you can get in touch easily.

It's also important that you get in touch with us if you are worried about a neighbour so that we can check on them. If you're at all worried about the welfare of a vulnerable person, it's much better to say something than do nothing. Please call **020 8825 8000** to speak to our team.

Always call 999 in an emergency.

## When to dial 111



What would you do if you needed medical treatment or advice quickly but without it being an emergency, and you couldn't wait for an appointment to see your doctor?

NHS 111 is there for exactly these situations – to make sure that medical help and advice is always available, 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

111 can help in lots of situations, whether you don't have a GP, are not sure whether to go to hospital, or just need reassurance on what to do next. You'll be connected to a trained advisor who will ask questions to find out what help you need.

If someone's life is at risk or if they are seriously injured or critically ill, you should always call 999.

Visit [www.nhs.uk/111](https://www.nhs.uk/111) for more information.





# Recycle your food waste



Chucking food leftovers in the rubbish bin comes with a huge cost. Not just to our wallets, but to our environment, too.

Around 70% of the six million tonnes of food we throw away in the UK each year could have been eaten or reused. Not only does that cost an average family with children £60 a month, but the wasted leftovers can also have a big impact on climate change.

If someone throws food waste in a rubbish bin, it ends up in landfill, where it creates harmful and polluting greenhouse gases as it rots.

Any leftovers you cannot use can be recycled using the council’s weekly collection service. In 2021-22, Ealing residents recycled 7,600 tonnes of food waste.

Not only has this saved money and cut carbon emissions, but there is a third and, to many, unexpected benefit: Helping to create power for homes. The food waste we collect is

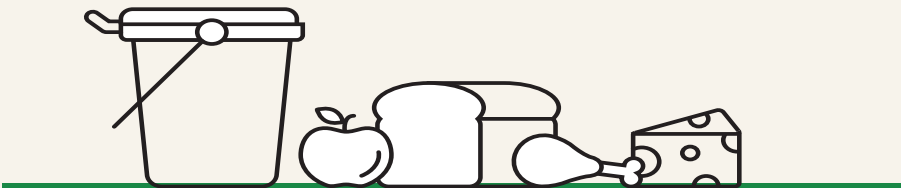
taken to a special processing site where it is broken down, creating electricity and fertiliser in the process.

Recycling is simple. Just stick your leftovers, scrapings, tea bags, peelings and unwrapped, out-of-date stuff into your kitchen caddy bin, preferably lined with a compostable bag (easy to get from supermarkets). Once it is full, take the bag from the caddy and, if you live in a house, put it out in your green food waste bin ready for your kerbside collection day each week.

If you live in a flat, take it down to the communal food waste bin and tip it in for recycling.

If you do not have a food waste bin, you can order one at [www.ealing.gov.uk/recycling](http://www.ealing.gov.uk/recycling)

## FOOD RECYCLING



### YES PLEASE



Fish, meat and bones



Leftovers and plate scrapings



Bread, rice and pasta



Fruit and veg peelings



Teabags and coffee grounds

### NO THANKS



Packaging of any kind



Liquids such as milk or oil



Plastic bags



Nappies



Pet waste

# Contributing to Housing News



If you have a subject you would like to see featured in Housing News, we'd love to hear from you.



If there's something happening in your community which you'd like your fellow tenants to know about, let us know and we'll do our best to help. We're also interested in any feedback or comments you have about how we could improve your magazine.

You can do this by emailing: [residentengagement@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:residentengagement@ealing.gov.uk), with "Housing News" in the email title bar.

## Working together with mutual respect



We strive to provide you with the best service possible and treat all our residents with courtesy and respect.

Whether we meet you face-to-face in our hubs, on the phone, or in your home, we ask that you treat our staff with the same respect they show you.

We take any form of staff abuse very seriously and will not tolerate verbal abuse, physical assault, threats, or intimidation towards our staff. All incidents of this kind will be reported and investigated, and we will take action against those found responsible.

Our staff are here to help you. Please help us to maintain a mutually respectful and welcoming environment for everyone.



## Useful contacts

### Tenancy management and paying your rent

Please contact your local housing hub:

Acton

Phone: 020 8825 5387 option 1

Email: [actonhousinghub@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:actonhousinghub@ealing.gov.uk)

Ealing

Phone: 020 8825 5387 option 2

Email: [ealinghousinghub@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:ealinghousinghub@ealing.gov.uk)

Greenford

Phone: 020 8825 5387 option 3

Email: [greenfordhousinghub@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:greenfordhousinghub@ealing.gov.uk)

Hanwell

Phone: 020 8825 5387 option 4

Email: [hanwellhousinghub@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:hanwellhousinghub@ealing.gov.uk)

Northolt

Phone: 020 8825 5387 option 5

Email: [northolthousinghub@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:northolthousinghub@ealing.gov.uk)

Southall

Phone: 020 8825 5387 option 6

Email: [southallhousinghub@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:southallhousinghub@ealing.gov.uk)

### Repairs and maintenance

Phone: 0800 181744 from a landline  
or 020 8825 5682 from a mobile

### Safer communities (anti-social behaviour)

Phone: 020 8825 5994

For noise nuisance: 020 8825 8111

Email: [safercommunities@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:safercommunities@ealing.gov.uk)

### Home ownership

Right To Buy enquiries:

Phone: 020 8825 5583

Email: [homeownership@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:homeownership@ealing.gov.uk)

### Caretaking services

Phone: 020 8825 8593

Email: [caretaking@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:caretaking@ealing.gov.uk)

### Compliments, complaints and suggestions

Phone: 020 8825 8855

Email: [regenhousingcomplaints@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:regenhousingcomplaints@ealing.gov.uk)

