

# Southdown



## Tenant Handbook



## Welcome to Southdown!

I am delighted to welcome you to your new tenancy with Southdown Housing Association.

We want you to be happy in your new home and have the right amount of support you need. The tenant handbook will help you to understand your tenancy and tells you all the things Southdown will do and what you need to do as a tenant.

To provide you with a good service, we need you to pay your rent and service charges on time, take responsibility for your tenancy and work to get on with your neighbours within the community where you live.

We value what you have to say about the way we provide services for you and we welcome any suggestions you may have for improvements. If you want to get more involved, ask your Southdown worker about opportunities for involvement.

I hope you find this handbook helpful. If you need any more information about your tenancy, do speak to your Housing Officer.

On behalf of Southdown I wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neil Blanchard".

**Neil Blanchard**  
Chief Executive

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### How to use this Handbook

This handbook has been compiled to assist you with living in the accommodation provided for you by Southdown Housing Association.

You should refer to it periodically to remind you of both your own and Southdown's responsibility.

Your handbook should contain the following leaflets (if these are missing speak to your Housing Officer / Support Worker who can arrange replacements).

- Complaints, Feedback and Compliments
- Ombudsman Leaflet
- Fire Safety
- Anti-social Behaviour
- Recognising and Dealing with Abuse

The plastic wallets in the back of the handbook can be used to store such documents as:

- Tenancy Agreement
- Correspondence from Southdown
- Rent Statements

# Southdown

## Southdown Housing Association



*“Everyone, no matter what their life experience, background or challenges should have the opportunity to lead their life to the full.”*

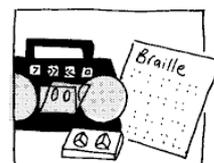
**Southdown Housing Association** is a not-for-profit housing and support organisation which has been in existence since 1972.

The Association is managed by a committee of local people representing the business community, professional care services and financial management services. Southdown Housing Association Ltd is a registered society under Co-operative and Community Benefit Society Act 2014.

The Association is registered as a Registered Provider with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and provides services in accordance with the guides and codes issued by them. This means that we are expected to continuously improve and provide value for money. We regularly review our services, listening to tenants' needs and wishes.

### Accessibility

If you require this handbook to be in another language or a different format your Housing Officer will discuss this with you and we will try to accommodate your needs.



### Rights and Responsibilities

What are my rights as a tenant of Southdown Housing Association?

- You have the right to privacy and respect for the way you live, as long as it does not interfere with the rights of others.
- The right not to be evicted without a court order.
- The right to safe and well-maintained housing and for repairs to be carried out within the timescale set by the organisation.
- The right to be safe and free from harassment.
- The right to be given information about your rent and other housing management issues.



#### In return we ask you:

- To pay your rent.
- To keep your home, including a garden where appropriate, in good condition.
- To be considerate to your neighbours and to not commit any form of nuisance or harassment.
- To take responsibility for your visitors.
- To report repairs promptly and give access to contractors as required.
- To take responsibility for your house keys and arrange for a spare set to be kept by a named and trusted key holder.
- Not to take in lodgers and not to sub-let your home or any part of it.
- Not to let anyone else move in with you without our permission.

Your Tenancy Agreement lists all your rights and responsibilities and sets out the type of tenancy you have. We suggest that you keep your Tenancy Agreement in this file. It is a legal document, please read it carefully.

## Getting involved and having your say

Tenants are at the heart of everything that we do at Southdown. We believe that you should be consulted so your views, knowledge and experience can have a real influence on the decisions we make as an organisation.



We also want to make sure that there are a variety of ways for our tenants to be continually involved in providing feedback to improve the service we deliver.

### Why involve tenants?

Tenants depend on the services Southdown provides so we believe they should be given the opportunity to shape those services and feel a valued part of the organisation.

### How can you be involved?

We have developed an Involvement Strategy that encourages Tenants to get involved in a number of different ways ranging from simply giving feedback to your Support Worker, to joining one of the local consultation meetings. Your Housing Officer or your Support Officer will be able to tell you more about all the different opportunities there are for you to get involved.

What you do - how much or how little - is up to you and if you'd rather not be involved at all, that's fine too. We just want to give you the opportunity to have your say and to be involved if you choose to do so.

If you have any questions, or would like to know more about getting involved, please contact;

The Involvement Coordinator, on 01273 405800 or email them at [info@southdownhousing.org](mailto:info@southdownhousing.org)

### The Housing Management Service

Each tenant has a Housing Officer who will:

- Sign you up to your new tenancy and explain it to you.
- Help you fill in any Housing Benefit claim forms.
- Monitor any Housing Benefit claims and keep an eye on your rent account in order to offer you help and advice if you have any problems.
- Offer you help and advice if you are being disturbed by Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Make sure that any communal areas of your building are well maintained.
- Give you help and advice when you are ready to move on.
- Help you understand your Tenancy Agreement and Southdown's policies and procedures.



**If you need to talk to your Housing Officer  
please contact our main office in Lewes on 01273 405800.**

### Can Southdown make me leave if I don't want to?

Southdown will always try to work with tenants to keep them in their homes. However, there may be some circumstances where we would ask a court to evict you.

The most common reasons for this are:

- Rent arrears
- Anti-social behaviour
- Refusal to move on from a short term service.

You can find out more about Southdown's policies on eviction by contacting your Housing Officer.

The eviction procedure is always the last resort. We will do everything we can to try and resolve a difficult situation before taking this step.

## Rent



It is important that you pay your rent, as Southdown needs it to provide services and maintain properties.

Your Tenancy Agreement is a contract between you and Southdown. You have agreed to pay rent in exchange for housing. If you do not pay your rent you will be in breach of this contract and you could eventually lose your housing.

### How do I pay my rent?

When you move in, your Housing Officer will discuss with you the best way to pay your rent. This can be weekly, monthly, by standing order, cash, cheque or postal order or directly paid to Southdown from the Housing Benefit office.

We prefer any payments not paid by Housing Benefit to be paid automatically by standing order. Your payment will be logged into the computer system at the head office in Lewes and you are able to request a statement of your rent at any time. We provide quarterly rent statements. Please check these when they arrive.

Southdown has also introduced Rent Payment Cards which allow payments to your rent account to be made at Post Offices and shops displaying the PayPoint logo. If you would like the option of paying by Rent Payment card please speak to your Housing Officer or Support Worker.

### Will Housing Benefit cover my rent?

You may be entitled to Housing Benefit if you are on a low income. You can ask Southdown staff for advice and they can assist you in dealing with the Housing Benefit office. If you are entitled to Housing Benefit, certain elements of your rent may be eligible for Housing Benefit where other parts are not. Only service charges that you have to pay to occupy your home will be regarded as eligible by Housing Benefit. Examples of charges that cannot be paid by Housing Benefit are charges for:

- meals or groceries
- personal laundry (but not a service charge for the use of laundry facilities)
- cleaning of rooms and windows (other than communal areas)
- transport
- leisure items like recreation facilities (but payments for children's play areas are allowed)
- television rental and licence fee (but the cost of television and radio relay may be allowed).

## **What if I fall behind with my rent?**

It is very easy to fall behind with your rent and very difficult to catch up if you do. It is always best to pay your rent on time.

If you do find that you have problems in paying you should inform your Housing Officer as soon as possible so that they can agree a way with you for you to repay the debt, you will be asked to sign an Arrears Agreement if this happens. You should then pay the agreed amount every week until the debt is cleared.

If you fall behind with your rent but do not contact Southdown staff they will contact you. They will write to you informing you what your arrears are and ask you to contact them.

If no effort is made to repay the rent, Notice will be served and then legal action will be taken to recover the money that you owe. If you still do not pay this could lead to eviction. Southdown would have to go to court for permission to evict you. Southdown would only use this as a last resort and will always try to come to an agreement to prevent eviction.

## **How can I stop legal action once it has started?**

- Pay the rent that you owe as soon as possible.
- Contact your Housing Officer.
- Sign an agreement to repay your arrears through regular affordable payments.
- Keep to this agreement by paying your rent plus the agreed arrears amount.

## Repairs and Maintenance

Southdown is committed to making sure that our tenants live in housing that is in the best possible state of repair.



***Southdown is not always responsible for the repair service for its tenants as we sometimes lease properties on a tenant's behalf from other landlords. Your Housing Officer will ensure that you have all the relevant information you need to report a repair if it isn't Southdown's responsibility.***

### **If Southdown is responsible for doing the repairs, how do I report a repair to them?**

As a tenant of Southdown you are responsible for reporting to us any repairs that we need to deal with. You can do this by phoning or emailing the Southdown Repair service.

You will find **Out of Hours Maintenance and Direct Reporting Fact Sheets** included in your tenancy pack, these will highlight all the relevant numbers for you, should you need to report a repair.



When reporting a repair it is helpful if you can give as much information as possible:

- What the problem is.
- Where is it? (which room or floor).
- What you think might have caused it; if you know.

After you have reported the repair to us we will talk to a repairs contractor who will get in touch with you to arrange a time to come and visit you at your property to sort the problem out within normal working hours.

## What are Southdown's responsibilities?

In properties where we are fully responsible for repairs, we are responsible for keeping the following in good repair and proper working order:

- The structure and exterior of your home.
- The installations supplied by us for space heating, water heating and sanitation and supply of gas, water and electricity, with the exception of power cuts and burst gas/water mains.
- Any common entrances, halls, stairways, lifts, entry phones.
- Any furniture or fittings provided by the Association.

If Southdown is not responsible for these repairs, we will endeavour to ensure that the responsible landlord adheres to the above.

## What are your responsibilities?

- Repairs due to misuse, neglect or damage by you or your visitors. Anything that belongs to you.
- Replacement of lost keys.
- Keeping your home reasonably clean and tidy and keeping your home in good decorative order and using any equipment provided in a sensible manner.
- Keeping the garden tidy where there is one.
- Reporting repairs and allowing us access to carry out repairs and maintenance work.
- Replacing toilet seats, plugs on appliances, electrical bulbs and fuses, sink and bath plugs, and smoke alarm batteries.
- Clearing blocked sinks and toilets.

**This list is for example only and should not be treated as a complete list.**

You can be charged with wilful damage, misuse or neglect that causes damage. In cases of criminal damage, we reserve the right to inform the police.

## How long will I have to wait for a repair?

For all the properties where we are responsible for repairs, we aim to achieve the following targets. Where we are not responsible for repairs, we will try to ensure that landlords meet their own targets.

### **PRIORITY 1 – Emergency Repairs**

Any repair which is required to avoid an immediate danger to the safety of people OR which is required to prevent serious damage to the building.

Some examples of an EMERGENCY REPAIR would be:

- Blocked drains
- Total loss of electrical power
- Burst pipes
- Door/Window repairs where security is at risk
- Dangerous structures
- Gas Leaks
- Total loss of heating
- Blocked toilets if you are unable to clear them yourself

**Emergency repairs will be responded to within 24 hours.**

### **PRIORITY 2 – Urgent Repairs**

Repairs which affect the comfort of the tenants or which are necessary for the re-letting of the property.

Examples of urgent repairs would be:

- Blocked sinks if you are unable to clear them yourself
- Faulty communal TV aerial
- Minor electrical faults
- Partial failure of heating and hot water systems
- Minor plumbing leaks

**We aim to complete these within 7 working days.**

### **PRIORITY 3 – Routine Repairs**

Routine repairs are all other repairs that do not fall into the emergency or urgent categories. We aim to complete these within 28 working days. However, in certain circumstances it may be more cost-effective to group some non urgent repairs together. In these cases we will keep you informed of the date of the repairs.

## **Safety Checks**

We have a legal responsibility to inspect all gas and portable electrical appliances provided by Southdown each year. We also need to carry out other checks such as water quality. We will give you notice of when these checks will take place. It is important for your own safety and that of others in the building that you keep these appointments.

Southdown keeps records of safety checks and you have the right to inspect these records. Speak to your Housing Officer if you want to do this.

## **Access**

It is your responsibility to be present so that contractors can gain access to undertake repairs. When you have agreed to wait in for a contractor, you must wait during the hours that they have told you they will be there. If you do not wait during the agreed time you will be charged for the missed appointment.

Normally a contractor will tell you whether they can come in the morning (usually 8am – 1pm) or afternoon (1pm – 6pm), or whether you will need to wait in all day.

If for any reason you cannot wait in, you should either contact the relevant contractor to make a new appointment or contact the Property Services Department to let them know that you need to cancel.

Southdown staff will not wait for contractors on your behalf.

## **Furniture**

Most of Southdown's property is unfurnished, but even where we provide furnished accommodation; you can bring your own furniture if you wish.

## **Consultation**

You will be consulted on any major changes to the property where you live. This will include decoration, where Southdown is responsible.

## **Compensation**

In some circumstances where Southdown fails to carry out repairs in good time or if your personal belongings are damaged, or you have to move out temporarily or permanently because of major repairs to your home, you will be compensated. The compensation policy gives you more details about this and is available on request.

The logo for Southdown, featuring the word "Southdown" in a white, handwritten-style font. The letters "o" and "d" are connected. A thick green horizontal bar is positioned directly beneath the text.

## **Recharges**

If tenants cause damage to their home then Southdown will charge the tenants for the cost of the repair.

If tenants cause sinks, drains or toilets to become blocked, and we are required to send out a contractor to sort the problem out, we reserve the right to recharge the tenant for the costs we have incurred.

If tenants agree to wait in for a contractor and then do not, then Southdown will consider charging the tenant for the cost of calling out the contractor again.

## **What to do if I am locked out**

Southdown does not keep spare copies of tenant's keys. Southdown advises tenants to leave a copy of their keys with someone they trust who can then help in these circumstances.

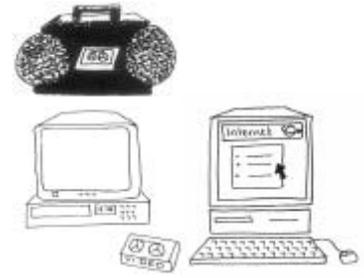
If all else fails, then you will need to arrange for a locksmith to come and change your lock.

## Living in your home

### Insurance

The main structure of your home is insured by us or the Head Landlord, but it is up to you to insure the contents – and we strongly advise that you do so. If there is a fire or flood, or someone else causes damage to your home, it will cost a lot of money to repair or replace your belongings.

Look for a comprehensive household contents policy that includes ‘tenant’s liability’. This means that you would be covered if, for example, somebody claimed against you if you left a tap running and flooded your neighbour’s home.



We will offer information and assistance with the above, but will be unable to give you any financial assistance or compensation if you lose anything due to not being insured. The decision to take out insurance is yours.

### Your security



It is important to keep your home secure and safe to protect yourself and other tenants (if your accommodation has shared facilities or entrances). A burglar can be in and out of your home in a minute. Help protect yourself by taking a few simple precautions:

- Always lock your door and fasten all your windows when you go out, even if it is only for a few minutes. Most burglaries happen during the day time and more thieves break in through windows than through doors.
- Never leave cash or valuables lying around.
- Never leave a key ‘hidden’ outside – thieves know all the hiding places.
- When you go out in the evening, close the curtains and leave a light on in a room (not the hall).
- When you go on holiday or away from your home for a period of time, remember to cancel all deliveries as a build-up of milk or papers is an invitation to thieves. Make these arrangements personally or by letter – don’t leave a note that a thief could read!

## Callers you don't know:

- If you have a door chain and spy hole, use them to help you to identify callers. Use your intercom system if you have one.
- If it is someone you don't know – always ask for proof of identity. Keep them waiting outside until you are satisfied. Southdown staff always carry identification cards that they can show you.
- Public service employees, and our Contractors, are required to show an identity card. Examine it carefully as fake cards can be used. The card should include a photograph of the holder and the name of the organisation. Don't be taken in by people who claim they have left their card behind.
- If you are at all suspicious, phone the organisation they say they are from to check and phone the police if necessary. Don't worry if it turns out to be a false alarm.



## Being a good neighbour

Getting along with neighbours comes down to common sense and consideration. No one living in or visiting your home should behave in such a way that causes nuisance or distress to your neighbours.

Different types of nuisance may include:

- Playing your music, radio or TV loud enough to cause annoyance. Be considerate to your neighbours.
- Having loud arguments that disturb the neighbours.
- Harassment.
- Obstructing communal areas.
- Not disposing of rubbish appropriately
- If you have a garden, not maintaining it.
- Not complying with estate or block rules eg around parking, abandoned cars



## Harassment and anti-social behaviour

We take any form of harassment very seriously and won't tolerate harassment for any reason.

### What is harassment?

Harassment can be verbal abuse, threatening behaviour, graffiti, damage to property and physical assault. It is different from other incidents of nuisance because it is based on prejudices against race, colour, disability including mental health issues, gender or sexuality.

### Some examples of harassment might be:

- Actual violence or threats of violence that may be verbal or physical.
- Attacks on property or people.
- Insulting and offensive graffiti which is racist, sexist or generally offensive or insulting to minority groups.
- Insulting and offensive remarks which are racist, sexist or generally offensive or insulting to minority groups.
- Unwanted or unwelcome sexual remarks and comments.
- Abusive language.
- Racist attacks of any nature.

Anyone who feels that he or she has been a victim of this kind of harassment should report the incident to us at once. We will listen sympathetically, investigate the claim and offer support and practical advice.

We will take action against anyone who is identified as a harasser. If it is a criminal matter, however, the police may decide to take action against that person. A copy of Southdown's Harassment and Nuisance Policy is available for you to see upon request.

## Adult Protection

Many of the tenants living in Southdown's properties are defined as Vulnerable Adults who warrant by law an additional level of protection from abuse and exploitation. At Southdown we want all tenants and staff to take seriously their responsibility for adult protection.

Abuse can take many forms but typically falls under the categories of financial, physical, sexual and psychological abuse.



Where people are assessed as needing a service and that service is not properly provided, an additional form of abuse called neglect can also exist.

As a tenant of Southdown you may witness the abuse of another person or experience abuse yourself.

**It is always important to report any behaviour  
that you think might be abusive.**

If you see or experience abuse you must report it to your Southdown Worker. Alternatively, you may want to report any allegations to your local Social Services Adult Protection department.

If the person you think is being abusive is a staff member, report your concerns to the Area Manager at your local area office.

***Help us to help all our tenants and report your concerns about abusive behaviour.***

## Anti-Social Behaviour

Southdown believes that all its tenants have the right to peacefully enjoy their home and environment. Firm and prompt action will be taken against tenants or anyone else who is causing a nuisance or disrupting the lives of those around them through their anti-social behaviour.

### What is anti-social behaviour?

Anti-social behaviour covers a wide range of things and some examples might be:

- Noise – this may be from televisions, music and noisy children / neighbours.
- Harassment.
- Certain car parking.
- Overgrown gardens.
- Problems caused by animals.
- Abandoned cars.
- Obstructing communal areas.
- Vandalism and graffiti.
- Dumped rubbish.
- Not complying with estate or block rules.

### What can you do if you are experiencing anti-social behaviour?

Speak to the people involved who are causing the problem, if you can. They may not be aware that they are disturbing you.

If you cannot solve the problem peacefully yourself then you should speak to your Housing Officer. You may be asked to keep a diary of events. In some situations the local police or the environmental health department may need to be informed.

## Illegal activities

If Southdown becomes aware of illegal activities by either its own tenants or by others within the locality, a decision will need to be made as to the appropriate action to take.

For minor offences possible actions may include: a warning letter to the tenant stating that they are placing their tenancy at risk and offering the tenant support to address the issue.

For serious illegal activities Southdown will have a duty to inform the relevant authorities and may initiate eviction proceedings. Such incidents, where Southdown holds an absolute duty to inform relevant authorities, include:

- Suspected or witnessed child/adult abuse.
- Suspected or witnessed drug dealing from a Southdown property.
- Suspected or witnessed use of a Southdown property for an illegal activity

## Unacceptable Behaviour

Southdown also takes the protection of its staff very seriously. If we feel that your behaviour towards our staff is unacceptable we will tell you that it is and ask you to stop. In some cases we may take the decision to restrict the way that we have contact with you or even involve the police. The details of how we manage unacceptable behaviour are in our Unacceptable Behaviour Policy, which is available on request.

Some examples of unacceptable behaviour towards staff are:

- Swearing or shouting.
- Making threats.
- Being rude and derogatory about their work.
- Any kind of physical assault.

We do not tolerate harassment of our staff at any time. Harassment of staff working for and on behalf of Southdown is both a civil and a criminal wrong. It infringes the right of staff to be respected while they work, jeopardises their security and privacy, subjects them to degrading treatment and prevents them from providing you with the right support.

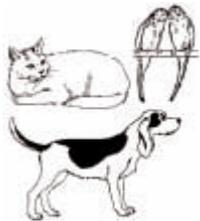
**If you or your visitors harass Southdown staff, or cause a nuisance to other people in your neighbourhood, then proceedings for eviction may be taken against you.**

### The upkeep of your home

You must always inform us of any repairs needed.

You are expected to keep your home and garden clean and tidy, to look after any equipment provided and to keep your home in good decoration.

You are expected to comply with any health and safety advice given by the Association and not to carry out any activities that may endanger the health and safety of others.



### Pets (to include animals, fish, birds, reptiles and insects)

**YOU MUST NOT GET ANY PET UNTIL PERMISSION IS GRANTED.**

Southdown operates a 'no pets' policy unless specific permission is sought and obtained, including head landlord where required.

If you are given permission you will be asked to sign a Pet Owning Contract. You will have to supply the name, address and phone numbers of two people who would be able to care for your pet if you were no longer able to do so. Please remember that you are responsible for any damage caused by your pet, including infestations, plus medical and vet's expenses.

Permission may be withdrawn if your pet causes a nuisance – this includes the following:

- **Roaming and unattended pets** – if this is brought to the attention of the Association, the local animal warden will be contacted. You will be issued with a written warning and if you fail to comply then permission to keep a pet will be withdrawn.
- **Fouling by pets** – it is the responsibility of the tenant to clear up after his or her pet. Persistent failure to do so will result in permission to own a pet being withdrawn.
- **Proven excessive noise** – if it is brought to our attention, you will be asked to seek advice from the vet. If the noise continues, you may no longer be able to keep that pet.
- **Neglect** – If Southdown feels that you may be neglecting your pet then the appropriate agency, such as the RSPCA, will be contacted. If the reason for neglect is illness, advice concerning appropriate assistance or temporary re-homing will be offered. In clear cases of lack of responsibility, permission to keep a pet will be withdrawn.

**If you continue to keep a pet after Southdown has withdrawn permission, this will be a breach of your tenancy agreement and may result in legal action.**

- **Damage to Southdown property** – all furniture, fixtures, carpets and curtains provided by the Association must be maintained in reasonable condition. It is your responsibility to rectify any damage or soiling caused by your pet. Failure to do so could result in permission to keep a pet being withdrawn.
- **Aggression** – you are advised to insure your pets for third party cover and to be fully aware of dangerous animal legislation. If your pet is persistently aggressive to people and/or other animals, you will be asked to seek advice from the vet. If this is not done and the aggression continues, then permission to keep a pet will be withdrawn.

**In some circumstances – for example if you have a boisterous dog – you may be asked to put your pet in another room during your support visit.**

## **Smoking**

Smoking is a serious cause of health problems, both for smokers and for those breathing other people's smoke.

Southdown does not permit smoking by staff in its buildings or vehicles.

Under no circumstances should a member of staff or contractor request permission to smoke in the home of a tenant.

We ask tenants not to smoke when a Southdown worker or contractor is visiting them. We recognise that this is the tenant's own home, but ask that they consider the health of workers who need to visit them at home.

## **Alcohol and Drugs**

Workers will not stay if you are drinking or taking drugs when they visit you, or you display behaviour consistent with consumption of drugs or alcohol. Anti-social behaviour arising out of your consumption of alcohol or drugs may lead to legal action.

***Staff may report any evidence of drug-taking to the police.***

**Southdown**

**your pet in another room during your support visit.**

## **Fairness and Diversity**

- Southdown recognises that some people in society are disadvantaged due to discrimination e.g. against their colour, race, nationality, age ethnic origins, religion, gender, mental health, disability or sexuality. We believe that this is wrong and are committed to providing equality for all tenants.
- Allocation of housing is based on your housing and support needs.
- All tenants will be treated equally and without discrimination in the delivery of services.
- All cases of racial or other harassment will be taken seriously and dealt with through our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy. We will take action against people who commit persistent harassment.

A copy of Southdown's Equal Opportunities Policy is available for you to see upon request. Our policy is in accordance with the Homes and Communities Agency's policy which states that housing associations must show a commitment to equal opportunities in all that they do and must work towards the elimination of discrimination. (In order to ensure that we are providing a service for a diverse range of tenants, we will carry out regular monitoring in this area.)

Southdown has Diversity and Race Equality Action Plans which describe how we are working to provide a better service to all.

## **Privacy and Access**

Tenants have a right to privacy and security and all our policies relating to access respect these rights. There are certain circumstances when people working on behalf of the Association need to come into your home:

- Staff will need to gain access to communal areas to test fire alarms, empty pay phones, carry out Health and Safety checks etc.
- Staff will hold keys for communal areas. In the event of, for example, a life threatening situation, we would use the emergency services or a locksmith to gain access to your property.
- You will need to give us access to carry out repairs, post inspections, maintenance and safety inspections, eg. gas safety checks. We will give you a minimum of 24 hours notice but, wherever possible, up to two weeks notice depending on the



- If you are away on holiday or away from the property for a period of time, we will only gain access to your accommodation in an emergency. Routine repairs and inspections will remain on hold until you return. We would be grateful if you could inform us if you intend to be away from the property for more than two weeks.



## **Confidentiality**

Southdown has a Confidentiality Policy that tries to make sure that any information you give to the us remains confidential to you. The purpose of this policy is to uphold the right of all tenants to confidentiality.

## **What legal right to privacy do I have?**

Information about you is covered by the Data Protection Act 1998. This gives guidelines about how information is collected, stored and disclosed so that your privacy and confidentiality are protected. All staff have to comply with the Data Protection Act and the Confidentiality Policy. If a tenant feels that a member of staff has breached this policy, then they have a right to make a formal complaint.

## **What information is kept about me?**

Southdown will have a housing file on each tenant.

Your housing file will contain the following information:

1. Your on-call information.
2. Incident record sheets.
3. General correspondence.
4. Rent and Housing Benefit information.
5. Housing management issues such as repairs and tenancy issues.
6. Your Tenancy Agreement.

## **Can I see my file?**

You have the right to see any information that we have written about you. You can do this by making an appointment with your Housing Officer. If you disagree with anything that has been written about you we will either remove it from your file or record your disagreement.

We are not allowed to give you access to information from a third person without permission from that person.

## **Who else can have information about me?**

Information about you will remain within the Housing Team who may discuss relevant matters with your support staff where necessary to ensure your safety and well being.

Information about you will not be passed on to other agencies or people without your written permission unless we believe that you or others are at risk and it is in your best interests to do so. Some examples might be:

- Where there is serious concern for your health and well-being. In the event of an emergency.
- There is suspicion that illegal activity is taking place.
- In the case of eviction or other legal proceedings, it may be necessary to share personal relevant information with the court.

## Duration of Tenancies and Moving On

Southdown manages a range of supported accommodation projects, many of which have specific aims and objectives that link the duration of tenancy to an individual's ongoing support needs.

On some schemes, where we have been leased properties from a general needs landlord; when a tenant no longer requires Southdown support, they can remain in the property but the tenancy reverts from Southdown to the Head Landlord.

On other schemes, where Southdown own the property or have a long lease with another landlord, tenants will be required to move on to alternative general needs or private rented sector accommodation when they no longer need support from Southdown.

***You will be given information about this before you sign your tenancy and your Housing Officer is available to explain the conditions that apply to the accommodation you are occupying.***

## Transfers

Sometimes people are unhappy with the accommodation they are currently living in. This may be because:

- They are living in a long term scheme and no longer need the level of support provided.
- They need a greater level of support than can be provided at their current home.
- They want to be near friends, family, college or work.
- The property is no longer suitable for their physical or emotional needs.
- Harassment.

Southdown has a limited supply of housing so transfers within our stock are quite limited. Despite this there are different transfer arrangements available depending on your circumstances and you should discuss the situation with your Housing Officer.

A transfer will not be possible if:

- You have rent arrears.
- You have a history of anti-social behaviour.

### **What must I do when I vacate my property?**

- You must ensure that you clear the property of all your belongings immediately. Any possessions remaining at the property after you have left or been evicted are considered by Southdown not to be required by you and will be disposed of. You may be charged for the cost of disposal. Southdown does not sell possessions and will merely dispose of them. Southdown is not able to store any possessions for you and will have to clear the property as quickly as possible for a new tenant.
- You must make sure that the property is clean and in good condition when you leave.
- You must return all the keys (including meter keys) that you hold for the property.
- You must ensure that you give Southdown your new address so that we can forward any mail to you.
- You must make sure that you have made arrangements to clear any debts that you have with Southdown.

# Southdown



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