

Blackwood

homes | care | support

Your Handbook



Key Numbers

Contact Telephone Numbers:

For all tenancy-related enquiries Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm, call:

Blackwood on 03457 125865.

For emergency repairs out of office hours, call:

Bield Response24 on 0800 7837937.

For problems with gas central heating or hot water system:

Kingdom Gas on 0800 389 9463.

For problems with your mains water supply, call:

Scottish Water on 0845 6008855.

If you smell gas, immediately call:

National Grid UK on 0800 111 999.

Welcome

On behalf of the Board and staff, welcome to our Tenants' Handbook.

We want to provide tenants with a first class housing service. This handbook contains important information that will help you enjoy your home. It tells you what you can expect from us as a landlord. It also tells you what we expect from you as a tenant.

We have tried to make the handbook as easy to use as possible. It covers the general questions you may have about being a tenant and about our services. If there is something you need to know and it is not covered in this handbook, then please contact us. You will find details of how to contact us and other useful phone numbers on the back cover of the handbook.

We will also send you a copy of our regular newsletter, the Messenger. This keeps you up to date about things that are happening throughout the year.

We will keep this handbook updated. If you have any comments about the handbook, or have any suggestions about how we can improve our services and the information we provide, please give us your views. You can contact the Services Development (Operations) team at the number on the back cover.

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Blackwood

section 1 About the Association

- Our background
- The Association today
- Who runs the Association?
- Our staff



About Us

Our Background

Dr. Margaret Blackwood MBE (1924 – 1994), a campaigner for the rights of disabled people, formed Margaret Blackwood Housing Association in 1972.

Margaret was deeply committed to people being able to live independent lives and, following her work to improve their financial situation, set her sights on providing housing that was suitably designed for disabled people.

The Housing Association was formally registered in December 1975 with the first houses completed in Dundee in 1976. Since then, the Association has continued to develop, growing from this small development to a national organisation providing over 1500 homes in communities across Scotland.

Blackwood today

Today, Blackwood has three main aims and activities.

- We aim to provide innovative, accessible housing where people of all abilities can live in inclusive mixed communities. We want to provide housing that is better than the accepted standards.
- We aim to provide well managed and maintained housing, and we want to work in partnership with our tenants to offer choice and value for money.

- We aim to provide the best personal care and support services, supporting disabled people to make their own life choices.

We have over 1,500 properties across 29 local authority areas in Scotland, with a mix of house types suitable for all sectors of the community.

Some of these houses were built over 30 years ago. Ideas and standards have changed. So, we have a programme of planned maintenance and, in some cases, major redevelopment to modernise our housing and services.

A few of our developments have integrated 24-hour care or support services provided by the Association. Elsewhere, tenants in some developments can access tailored and flexible individual support based on assessment by the local authority social work department. For most of our tenants – disabled or not – their main need is for a home which suits their needs.

Who runs Blackwood?

Blackwood is registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator as a non-profit making, registered charity. It is also a Registered Social Landlord and is registered with the Scottish Housing Regulator which regulates and monitors how it behaves and performs.

Blackwood has a governing Board of Management of 12 people. These are unpaid people, volunteers, who are responsible for setting the strategic direction of the organisation and making sure it has the resources to achieve this. They employ the staff to manage and deliver Blackwood's services and are responsible for monitoring the quality and impact of the services provided.

The Board meets about eight times a year. It also has sub-Committees which look in detail at certain aspects of Blackwood's work – such as finance and quality of services.

The Board members have to make sure they have the right mix of skills and experience to run the organisation. When a vacancy on the Board occurs, they think about what experience or skills would be valuable and then advertise the vacancy and there is an interview process. Board members come from all walks of life, including the business, public sector and academic communities, and some who also bring experience of being a Blackwood tenant.

Our staff

We employ over 400 staff, of which around 350 provide care and support services. The staff is led by the chief executive and a team of directors covering the main areas of our work: Operations (that means housing and maintenance services for tenants and sharing owners);

Business Development (that means new house building and major works to current homes); Care and Support Services, and Corporate Services.

We have around 50 staff providing housing, maintenance and development services, mainly from our head office in Edinburgh. We also have small offices in Aberdeen and Glasgow, so that the Housing and Technical staff are closer to the developments based in north and the west of Scotland.

Blackwood

section 2 Your tenancy

- Your Tenancy Agreement
- Moving in
- Security of your tenancy
- Living in your home
- Ending your tenancy, or passing it on
- Right to buy
- Access to personal information



Your tenancy

Your Tenancy Agreement

Tenants of Blackwood will normally be given a Scottish Secure Tenancy. This is a legal document, which you and the Association sign. You should read this carefully and keep it in a safe place.

The tenancy agreement gives you important information including:

- the address of the home you will be renting and when your tenancy begins;
- the amount of rent and service charges you have to pay;
- your rights as a tenant and your responsibilities;
- the Association's rights and responsibilities as your landlord.

Moving in

It is important that you move into your home at the start of your tenancy. You are responsible for the payment of rent from the date your tenancy starts, even if you have not moved in.

If you are claiming Housing Benefits and you need more time to move, the Housing Benefit department may pay rent on both properties for up to four weeks. They will only do this in specific circumstances. You can never get Council Tax benefit for two homes.

Decorating and furnishing your home is your responsibility. However, we may give you an allowance to help you with

the decoration costs of your new home if the decoration left by the previous tenant is very poor. If you receive a means tested benefit, you may be eligible for a Community Care Grant or a Budgeting Loan from the Department of Work and Pensions.

If you would like information on Housing Benefits please speak to your local Housing Benefit office or your housing officer.

Security of your tenancy

As a tenant with a Scottish Secure Tenancy you have the right to remain in your home as long as you do not break the conditions of your tenancy agreement.

If you break any of your tenancy conditions, we will try to reach a satisfactory conclusion to the problems without taking legal action. However, as a last resort, if a serious breach of tenancy has taken place, we can take court action to evict you. A Sheriff has to be satisfied that you have breached the conditions of your tenancy, and that it is reasonable for us to take eviction action against you. You are entitled to take independent advice, for example from Citizen's Advice Bureau or a solicitor. You can defend any legal action taken against you and you may be able to get legal aid to help you to do this.

The first step in a legal process is to serve you with a Notice of Proceedings. If this happens, get in touch with your housing officer immediately to discuss the matter.

Living in your home

Once you have a tenancy, you do have to live at this address as your main home. You cannot pay for this home, but live somewhere else. In some circumstances, we may give permission for tenants to sublet their home for a short period. You can ask us for more information on our policy on subletting if this affects you.

Your Tenancy Agreement contains a lot of information about your rights and responsibilities, and the Association's rights and responsibilities. These, and other Association policies, cover the main elements of living in your home as a Blackwood tenant.

The rest of the sections in the handbook have more information about different aspects of living in your home. If you need more information on any policies or procedures affecting your home then please ask us.

Ending your tenancy, or passing it on

Section 12 explains what to do if you want to transfer to a new home or end your tenancy. Your tenancy agreement also gives you, or your family members, other rights.

You may be able to assign your tenancy: If you want to move to another home, but you would like someone else to take over your tenancy, then you have a right to ask us to assign your tenancy to someone who has lived with you for a year or more.

We do not have to agree to this, but we have to have reasonable grounds if we want to refuse permission.

- When a tenant dies, the tenancy can pass to a 'qualifying person'. This can be a partner (of either sex) or an adult son or daughter, or other household member. However, they must have lived at that address for at least six months. This right to inherit a tenancy is called a succession. A tenancy can only be passed in this way twice.

Right to buy

Blackwood is a charity. It is exempt from the 'Right to Buy' legislation and our Board has adopted a policy not to sell the houses but to keep them available for rent.

Access to personal information

You have the right to see information we keep about you. If you wish to see the contents of your file, please contact us. We will need to obtain agreement to release any information we hold about you that has been given to us by someone else. This is called third party information, for example from a doctor.

If you do wish to see your file, we will be happy to discuss the contents with you. We will photocopy any paperwork you request although we may need to make a small charge for this.

Blackwood

section 3

Rents and Service Charges

- What your rent and service charge pays for
- Ways you can pay your rent
- Claiming Housing Benefit
- Money and welfare rights advice
- What to do if you have difficulty paying and what happens if you do not pay
- Rent reviews



Rent and Service Charges

Blackwood tries to ensure that our homes and services are of a good quality and are affordable to people on low incomes. We have to cover our costs but we also want to make sure that tenants believe they get value for money. We are committed to being fair and transparent in how we set rents and service charges, and to consulting tenants if we propose major changes.

Your rent and service charge pay for different costs.

What your rent pays for

The rent we receive is one of the main forms of income available to Blackwood.

The rent you pay has to cover the following:

- housing management costs;
- the cost of day-to-day repairs and regular maintenance, such as gas heating servicing and external painting;
- the cost of major repair works under planned maintenance programmes;
- buildings insurance;
- repayments on any money we have borrowed to provide or improve your home.

What your service charge pays for

The service charges are additional to the basic rent charge. They are related to your particular property or development and can include items such as lifts,

landscaping or garden maintenance, or heating and lighting of communal areas. We calculate these on the basis that we have to cover the full cost of providing the services, including maintenance and replacement of equipment, and the costs of staff involved in providing the services.

Ways you can pay your rent and service charge

Rents and services charges are charged monthly, and are due monthly in advance. We offer several ways of paying rent. You can pay:

- by direct debit with payments taken on either the 1st or 15th of each month. If this does not suit you, please speak to your housing officer as we can be flexible;
- using an all-pay card to make payments at a Post Office or at shops which are ALL-Pay zones;
- by standing order;
- by sending a cheque to our Edinburgh office.

Direct Debit or All-Pay are the most secure methods of payment, so we recommend you use one of these.

Should you at any time wish to change your method of payment, please contact our Housing Services team.

You will receive rent statements every six months, and an annual service charge statement detailing the cost of the services.

Claiming Housing Benefit

If you are on a low income and need financial help to pay your rent, you may be able to get Housing Benefit. This is a means tested benefit that can pay for all of your rent or part of it, depending on your level of income and savings. You can claim it if you are working or not working.

If you think you may be entitled to housing benefit assistance, contact your local council and ask for a form. If you need any help with filling in the form, you can ask the Council or contact your housing officer who will be glad to help.

If you are entitled to Housing Benefit, you can opt to have this paid direct to the Association. This is an easy way to ensure your rent is paid as near its due date as possible. Even if you get Housing Benefit, remember that payment of the rent is your responsibility – not the Council's.

If your circumstances change, for example, if you start work or you receive a letter advising you of a rent increase, you must advise the council.

Money and welfare rights advice

If you would like information or advice on other housing or welfare benefits, or general money, debt or welfare rights advice you can also speak to your Housing Officer. Blackwood has agreements with named advice agencies to provide advice to our tenants, and your Housing Officer can make a direct referral for you to get advice.

Difficulty paying your rent

If you experience difficulty with paying your rent, contact your Housing Officer immediately before you start getting behind with your payments. We will try to help you if you are experiencing difficulties, for example by coming to an agreement which allows you to pay any arrears in instalments.

We can also give you advice and information on any benefits to which you may be entitled. We may also be able to put you in contact with money advisers who can help you manage your money.

What happens if you do not pay your rent

Rents are the only income we get for maintaining and managing your home. We try to make it easy for tenants to pay, and we cannot allow rent arrears to build up.

If you are unable to clear your arrears, we will try to make an arrangement with you to repay the arrears at a level which you can manage. However, if arrangements are broken, and the debt remains unpaid, we may have to take legal action to recover the debt and repossess your home.

You will not be able to keep your home if you do not pay your rent.

We will pursue former tenants for money owed and will automatically pass your details to a debt recovery agency.

Blackwood

section 4

Repairs and maintenance

- How to report a repair
- Gas heating repairs
- Our response times
- Your right to repair
- Who is responsible for what
- Repairs to newly built houses
- Gas safety checks
- Making changes to your home
- Dealing with pests
- Buildings insurance
- Additional maintenance work
- How to comment on our services



Repairs and maintenance

How to report a repair

Repairs can be reported in a number of ways. However, if you have an emergency, you need to contact us by telephone so that we can respond quickly.

- Telephone us on 03457 125865. Our offices are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. This is a lo-call number and is charged at local rates.
- E-mail us at feedback@blackwoodgroup.org.uk
- Write to us at 160 Dundee Street, Edinburgh, EH11 1DQ.
- Fax us on 0131 317 7294.
- Log a request online at the TenantZone of our website, www.blackwoodgroup.org.uk
- Speak to any member of our staff.

When you contact us remember to tell us:

- where you live;
- exactly what and where the problem is;
- when we can get access to carry out the repair;
- if you have changed your telephone number since you last contacted us.

Gas heating repairs

If you have gas central heating you should report any loss of heating or hot water direct to Kingdom Gas on Freephone 0800 3899 463. They will let you know when an engineer will attend, which will usually be within one day of you reporting the fault.

Our response times

How quickly we respond to your repair will depend on the urgency of the situation. Our repair categories and timescales are:

Type of repair		Response target	Some examples
Emergency	Puts the safety and security of you, or your home, at immediate risk.	4 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> serious flooding or water leaks; no electricity; major electrical faults; insecure window or door at ground level; blocked or overflowing toilet or drains.
Urgent	Requires prompt attention to stop a situation getting worse, or unduly inconveniences you.	3 working days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> toilet not flushing properly; some electrical or lighting problems; equipment which is necessary for daily living.
Routine	All non-essential work.	20 working days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> external repairs; repairs to common areas; internal joinery repairs.

If you have an emergency repair **when our office is closed**, call **Bield Response24 on 0800 783 7937**. They will arrange for one of our contractors to attend.

Your Right to Repair

As a tenant, you have the right for certain repairs to be carried out within a certain length of time. We will tell you when a repair falls into the Right to Repair category. If we do not carry out the repair on time you can ask another contractor from our list to do the job, and you may get compensation, up to a maximum of £100.

A Scottish Government leaflet called “Right to Repair” explains the scheme.

Who is responsible for what

Your Tenancy Agreement provides a full list of landlord and tenant obligations to repair the property. The majority of repairs are our responsibility, however there are some repairs which you are responsible for. They include:

- light bulbs, including fluorescent tubes and starters;
- lost or broken keys;
- unblocking sinks and drains caused by carelessness, for example food waste;
- all internal decoration;
- plugs and chains on sinks and bath;
- damage caused by you, your family or your visitors to our property.

If you ask us to carry out a repair which is your responsibility, we will advise you that you will be charged for the work and agree with you how payment is to be made. Once the repair is completed, we will send you an invoice and you will need to pay this.

Repairs for newly built houses

If you move into a house within 12 months of it being built the property will be in the "defects liability" period. You still report repairs to us in one of ways mentioned previously, but the builder is responsible for prioritising and attending to the repair. We would ask that you do not decorate your new home within the first 12 months. It is common for timber and plaster to shrink during this period, and, as a result, cracks may appear on walls.

Gas safety checks

An annual safety check is carried out on all our properties with gas central heating systems. If you have gas central heating, our heating contractor, currently Kingdom Gas, will call you direct to arrange an appointment to service the boiler.

You are legally obliged to let the contractor into your home to service the boiler. This is because this is vital to your safety, your family and your neighbours. Faulty appliances can produce carbon monoxide which is poisonous. Every property with gas central heating is fitted with a carbon monoxide detector.

If your detector is faulty, call Kingdom Gas direct on Freephone **0800 3899463**.

Making changes to your home

You have the right to make alterations and improvements to your home, as long as you write to us asking for permission. We will normally say yes. However, you must wait until you receive a letter from us granting permission before you start the work.

If you have made certain improvements to your home, you may have a right to receive compensation when you move out. A Scottish Government leaflet called “Right to Compensation for Improvements” explains the scheme.

Dealing with pests

In your home

You are responsible for dealing with pests such as mice, ants or wasps in your home or garden. If pests are getting into your home, you can let us know. We can arrange for any gaps and holes to be sealed, but we will not treat the pests for you.

If you are unsure about treating the pests yourself, you could contact your local council's Environmental Services department. They will give you free advice but they may charge you for treating the pests.

In communal areas

We are responsible for dealing with pests in our communal areas, such as bin stores or stairwells. Let us know of any problems with pests in these areas, and we will carry out any necessary work.

Buildings insurance

Blackwood has insurance to cover its properties. The insurance covers the buildings themselves, and any fixtures and fittings belonging to Blackwood. Our insurance does not cover any of your furniture, decoration, floor coverings or personal possessions.

We therefore strongly recommend that you take out your own contents insurance to cover these items.

Additional maintenance work

We carry out additional maintenance work to our properties on a regular basis, for example painting external windows and doors, or painting communal stairwells. We also carry out major replacement work, for example replacing windows and doors, upgrading heating systems, or replacing kitchens.

We will let you know well in advance when any of this type of work will be taking place, especially if we need access to your home. For major replacements we have a Planned Maintenance Team who will deal directly with you.

Comments about our service

If you have a comment, good or bad, about our repairs service, you can let us know using the Repair Satisfaction Card you will receive when you report your repair.

If you are unhappy with the repairs service and would like to complain, let us know and we will try to resolve the problem as quickly as possible. You can also read more about our Complaints Policy in Section 11.

Blackwood

section 5 Adaptations

- What is an adaptation?
- Who can benefit from an adaptation?
- Who funds an adaptation?
- Who should you contact about an adaptation?
- How long might you have to wait?



Adaptations

What is an adaptation?

An adaptation is an alteration to your home to make it more suitable for the needs of a disabled tenant or family member, or someone with a health or medical condition. This could mean fitting additional equipment, or altering your kitchen, bathroom or other area of your home so you can more easily carry out personal or domestic tasks independently, or to make it easier for you to get support with living in your home.

Who can benefit from an adaptation?

If you, or someone in your household, is older, disabled, or less able to manage personal and domestic tasks, then an adaptation may be of benefit.

Who pays for an adaptation?

This depends on the type of equipment and alterations required within your home. The local authority social work department or the health authority may be responsible for this and pay for it. In most cases involving a permanent alteration to the property, the Association will apply for a grant from the Scottish Government to pay for the adaptation.

Tenants are not normally charged for the work of altering or adapting their home. However, you will have to pay an additional service charge so the Association can meet the extra costs of maintaining and servicing certain equipment, for example a track and hoist, a Clos-o-Mat toilet or an automatic door. We will tell you how much this is going to be, and ask for

your agreement to the charge, before going ahead with the work. The charge will be added to your monthly service charge. In most cases, the extra charge is eligible for Housing Benefit and we will clarify this for you in advance.

Who should you contact about an adaptation?

To begin with, you need to approach your local area social work office or occupational therapist. They will assess your needs and help you to contact the appropriate organisation responsible for the adaptation required. If you receive help from a community nurse, they may be able to obtain items of equipment.

At any time, if you require further information or assistance, your housing officer can help.

How long might you have to wait?

Once you are referred, we aim to carry out your adaptation within 12 weeks. However, more complex adaptations may take a bit longer and simpler adaptations such as installing grab rails, lever taps or kick plates should usually be completed within three weeks.

The Association gets the money for adaptations from the Scottish Government. Sometimes, the amount of money available is not enough and this can mean tenants have to wait longer for the work. If this is the reason for a delay, we will tell you and give you advice about what other sources of help may be available.

Blackwood

section 6

Around and about your home

- Decorating and furnishing
- Insuring your possessions
- Pets
- Car parking
- Rubbish disposal
- Gardens
- Running a business from home
- Improving your estate



Around and about your home

Decorating and furnishing

You are responsible for decorating and furnishing your home and keeping it in a good condition. If you have moved into a brand new property, please do not decorate for the first 12 months. It is common for timber and plaster to shrink in the first 12 months and cracks can then appear on the walls. We carry out a 12-month inspection and, after any repair work that is needed is carried out, you can go ahead and decorate with your own choice of décor.

If you receive Income Support, you may be able to get a grant or loan to cover some of the costs of furnishings. If you need any advice about this, please ask your housing officer or a member of the Housing Services team.

Insuring your possessions

You are responsible for insuring the contents of your home. The Association strongly advises that you take out contents insurance to cover your possessions and valuables. Lack of insurance or inadequate insurance can cause considerable upset and financial hardship. Most contents insurance will cover you against costs that you are liable for as a tenant – for example if you cause damage to the property, or the Association's fixtures or fittings or if internal decoration is damaged.

A number of insurers have economically priced contents insurance policies for tenants. Please ask your housing officer for more information.

Pets

Tenants must ask permission to keep a pet. We will not withhold this permission unreasonably, but we will consider if it is likely to cause any issues for neighbours or for the condition of the property. This may particularly apply if you live in a block of flats, or flats with access to furnished communal areas.

If you own a pet, it is your responsibility to make sure that it does not foul the common areas or grounds or cause any deterioration or damage to the property, the communal areas or in the vicinity of the property. If you have a dog, try not to let them become a nuisance by being noisy, especially early in the morning and late at night.

There are laws to control dog nuisance and we can insist you find a new home for your pet if it is not kept under control and causes a nuisance.

Car parking

At the time of signing your tenancy agreement, you will be advised about the car parking arrangements. Generally, if you occupy a ground-floor property designed for wheelchair users, you will have a dedicated car space. For all other properties, there is communal car parking and we ask you to use the spaces considerately. You must not park caravans, trailers or lorries in communal areas without first asking our permission.

Tenants should not carry out extensive vehicle repairs or servicing either at their home or on the communal areas.

Rubbish disposal

Most of our schemes have “wheelie bins”. Please get rid of your rubbish carefully in the appropriate bin and keep the communal areas free from litter.

Rubbish collection is the responsibility of your local council, which can advise you about days for collection and recycling arrangements for your area.

Large, bulky items may be disposed of by contacting your local council. A charge may be payable for uplifting these items.

Gardens

Where there are communal gardens, the Association is responsible for the upkeep of the areas and usually employs a grounds maintenance contractor to do this. We set standards for the contractor for the communal grassed and shrubbed areas. Tenants pay a service charge for this maintenance and we work with tenants to review the standards from time to time or if there is a problem.

Some tenant groups have taken collective responsibility for the maintenance of the communal grounds around their development. We can work with tenant groups to support them with this.

If your property has a private garden, you are responsible for its maintenance. If you are unable to manage this, we may be able to arrange for the work to be carried out for you and any costs will be charged to you.

Running a business from home

Your home must only be used as a private residence. However, we may grant permission for certain business activities to be carried out from your home providing these do not cause any nuisance or require planning permission for change in the use of the premises.

Improving your estate

We have started a programme of working with tenants to improve our developments. Your housing and/or technical officer will:

- invite you to join him or her on annual, or more frequent, estate walkabouts;
- work with tenants and tenant groups to improve the estate;
- check the appearance of the area and make sure that grounds maintenance and other communal areas are being maintained to a satisfactory standard.

If you notice any damage on your estate, or experience issues such as graffiti, dumped rubbish or abandoned cars, please report these to the Maintenance Services team or to your housing officer.

Blackwood

section 7 Neighbours

- Being a good neighbour
- What is neighbourhood nuisance and anti-social behaviour?
- What you can do in the first instance
- What to do if the problem continues
- What the Association can do to help



Neighbours

Being a good neighbour

Everyone has a right to enjoy life in their own way, as long as they do not cause problems for people living nearby. Section 7 gives some guidance on some of the main areas that can cause problems between neighbours and how you can act as a good neighbour.

You are responsible for your behaviour – in your home and in your neighbourhood. You are also responsible for the behaviour of your family, other people living in your home and any visitors to your home. Please consider your neighbours.

What is neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour?

It is important to understand and accept the different lifestyles of other people. All our tenants have the right to live in their home and community free from harassment or unreasonable disturbance. However, we also recognize that anti-social behaviour can badly affect the quality of life of people involved.

Neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour can range from nuisances such as loud music and barking dogs, to illegal activity including dumping of rubbish, graffiti, harassment on the grounds of race or disability, threatening behaviour and acts of violence. In general, anti-social behaviour means behaving in a manner which causes or is likely to cause distress or alarm.

What you can do in the first instance

We encourage our tenants to talk to one another. If you are experiencing a disturbance, talk to your neighbour about the problem. It may be that they have no idea their actions are having an impact on you. If you tell them, calmly and politely, they may stop. You may need to be prepared to compromise.

It is better not to speak to the person while you are angry or upset. This can make things worse. If tempers rise, walk away.

You should always call the police if you witness criminal activity, including breach of the peace. The police have greater powers and can respond more quickly than Blackwood.

What to do if the problem continues

If the situation gets worse, or if you are afraid to make direct contact with your neighbour, contact the Housing Services team for advice. You can do this by phone, letter, or in person.

Your housing officer will contact you to discuss the details outlined in your Report Form. We may suggest you keep a diary of incidents and note down the date and time when they happened and how they affected you.

Blackwood will not investigate or deal with every neighbour issue that arises. We recognize that there are different levels of seriousness of anti-social behaviour complaints and some need dealt with more quickly than others. We will assess your complaint and tell you how we have categorized it and how we will deal with it.

What the Association can do to help

Your housing officer will carry out an investigation based on the information you provide. We will usually visit the person complained about and listen to both sides of the story. We will not divulge who has made the complaint.

Depending on the situation, we may need to work with other agencies, such as the police or community safety officers.

We may propose mediation. This is a way of getting people round a table to discuss issues and try to reach some kind of agreement about how the problem can be resolved. Blackwood can co-ordinate the involvement of a mediation service, or make a referral to one of these services. These are free, voluntary and completely confidential.

In very serious cases, we may ask the Court to grant an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) or we may seek to evict the tenant. These legal routes require a lot of evidence and do take time. They are not always the best option. Blackwood will consider these as a last resort.

We will do all we can to help you if you are experiencing problems with your neighbours. However, please always bear in mind that resolving antisocial behaviour can be difficult and takes time.

Blackwood

section 8 Care and Support

- Our partnerships with care and support providers
- The Association's Care and Support services
- Access to care and support services



Care and Support services

Working with partners

Blackwood knows that for some people, getting the right home is not enough. People also need support with different aspects of their lives – whether from family, neighbours and friends, or people paid to provide that support. We strive to design our housing and communities to make it possible for people to be supported in their own home, making their own choice about who supports them and how.

We have partnerships with several care and support agencies to help disabled people access the right combination of housing and support for their needs. These include the Leonard Cheshire Disability, Carr Gomm Scotland, The Thistle Foundation, Turning Point Scotland, Sense Scotland and others.

In some developments, this means we work with these partners and with local authority social work departments in making decisions about who should be allocated a home, and in supporting the tenants to sustain their tenancy.

Blackwood's Care and Support services

Blackwood has four registered care homes, all situated in estates, which also provide housing for tenants who may or may not have disabilities. Subject to assessed needs and available resources, sometimes staff from the care home can also provide Care at Home or Housing Support to nearby tenants.

Blackwood also offers support services, Care at Home and Housing Support, to around 300 tenants as well as to people who are not Blackwood tenants. This is linked to particular Blackwood housing developments or localities. We currently offer Care at Home and Housing Support services in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, South Ayrshire, Inverclyde, Stirling, Borders and Aberdeen.

These services are purchased by the local authority and registered with the Care Commission. They provide a range of support to people who need assistance with individual daily living tasks, working from a philosophy that support is intended to “back your life choices”. The services are provided to people who have eligible support needs, as assessed by or agreed by the local authority social work department, which pays for the service. In some developments, the local authority pays for a background general support service to be provided to all of the tenants living in a particular group of properties.

Access to care and support services

If you have unmet care and support needs, or if your circumstances have changed, first contact your local authority social work department to ask for an assessment. If you need advice or support with this, you can speak to your housing officer, who may be able to make a referral on your behalf.

If you want to find out more about the Blackwood's Care and Support services, then please contact us on **0131 317 7227**.

Blackwood

section 9

How to get involved

- Our commitment to tenant involvement
- How you can get involved
- Tenants' Groups



How to get involved

Our commitment to tenant involvement

Blackwood is committed to involving its tenants in developing, improving and setting the standards for the services it provides. We aim to:

- keep you informed about any proposed changes that might affect you;
- have a range of effective consultation methods on the services, policies and strategies that are most important to tenants;
- provide a range of ways for tenants to participate, individually or as group, informally or formally;
- provide training, support and resources to help tenant participation to happen;
- respond to the different communication preferences and needs of our tenants, for example by making information available in large print, in different languages, in Braille, or on audio CD or tape, and online on our website.

How you can get involved

You can be involved in a number of ways to help shape and improve the service we provide. You can:

- read our newsletter the Messenger, published four times a year;
- look at our website for information;
- fill in and return our 'service satisfaction' slips;
- complete our consultation questionnaires;
- find out more at tenant meetings, conferences or events;
- join one of our Tenant Opinion Panels;

- take part in a working group;
- join, or set up, a Tenants' Group or Tenants' Association;
- get nominated as a 'Service User' member of Blackwood.

Tenants' Groups

We have several different kinds of tenants' groups and panels, from informal groups to fully registered tenants' organisations. We provide support, training and grants for groups. You may want to form or join a group for lots of reasons including:

to become involved in the design of the Blackwood's new homes;

- to discuss repairs, housing services or problems with neighbours;
- to increase the sense of belonging to a community;
- to campaign on certain issues, for example for better play facilities or better housing conditions.

If you are interested in setting up or joining a tenants' association, we will be happy to help you. We can send a member of staff to meetings to offer help and advice. If you would like to find out more about tenant participation and how you can become involved, please contact your housing officer.

Blackwood

section 10 Service standards

- Service standards
- Tenant service commitments
- Helping us improve



Service standards

We are committed to delivering the best services we can. We want to develop a set of detailed and measurable service standards and plan to do this by asking for your input and ideas.

We already have core service standards for the level of service you can expect from us in some service areas. We aim to meet these and, where possible, exceed them.

We aim to provide a service that meets and responds to your specific and individual needs, while providing fair and accessible services to all our customers.

Tenant service commitments

Here we set out the standards you can expect when you contact us.

- Our staff and contractors will be friendly, polite and professional.
- We will wear or show you name badges and give our name when answering your calls.
- We will treat you with dignity and respect.
- We will be fair and impartial and not make promises we cannot keep.
- We will respond clearly and accurately to the points you have raised within 14 calendar days.

- We will have trained staff to deal with your enquiry efficiently. We will always try to resolve your queries as quickly as possible.
- We will advise you of the different ways you can access our services and recommend other organisations if we cannot help you.
- We will make our offices and services accessible for disabled people.
- When you visit our offices for an appointment, a meeting room will be available so that you can talk in private with staff. If you visit without an appointment, we will try to make a meeting room available but this may not always be possible.
- We will ask you for your preferred method of communication and try to use this.
- If you request a home visit, we will let you know which morning or afternoon we will call. If you are not at home when we call, we will leave a card to let you know who has called and when.
- We will provide important documents in other languages and formats, for example large print, audio and Braille, when requested.
- We will ensure our published contact details are up to date.
- We will ensure you know the name of your housing officer and the names of other key contacts in the office who deal with tenancy-related services.
- We will provide information about Blackwood and our services on our website.
- We will listen to all complaints and make sure that they are investigated fairly. We will respond to your complaint, or send you an update, in 10 working days.

Helping us to improve

We test how well we are doing by:

- carrying out a full Tenant Satisfaction Survey every three years;
- after you have had a service from us, asking you how well we met our standards and commitments, and;
- monitoring the feedback you give us.

We always welcome your views and comments about improving our service. If we do better than you expect, please let us know so we can pass your thanks on to our staff. If you feel we have not lived up to our standards, please let us know so that we can put things right or make changes to improve our services. You can do this by calling us on 03457 125865, speaking to your housing officer or visiting the 'feedback' page of our website.

Blackwood

section 11

Feedback and complaints

- Getting feedback
- What you can complain about
- Who can complain
- Informal resolution
- Formal investigation
- Contacting us
- Who else can help



Feedback and complaints

Getting feedback

At Blackwood we aim to provide high quality, responsive services, and we welcome your feedback and suggestions on how we can improve them. There may be times, however, when we do not provide the level or quality of service that we have promised or that you expect.

What you can complain about

You can complain about any aspect of a service that you have received or requested from us and which you are unhappy about. Examples include:

- a repair that has not been carried out on time, or not carried out properly;
- information requested that has not been provided;
- a member of staff or Association representative who has behaved in an unreasonable manner;
- a housing application that you feel has not been handled properly.

Who can complain

Anyone who receives or requests a service from us, or people who act on their behalf, can use the complaints procedure. This includes:

- tenants, sharing owners and people receiving our care and support service;
- MPs, MSPs, councillors and advice agencies;
- applicants for our Housing or for our Care and Support service.

Informal resolution

We want to resolve complaints at the first point of contact, so in the first instance you should talk to the staff member who has been dealing with the matter and is most responsible. They will aim to resolve the matter within two working days.

Formal investigation

If the problem is not resolved informally, you can make a formal complaint. You can telephone or make an appointment to see the relevant Service Manager, but we would prefer that you put your complaint in writing, advising exactly what the problem is, and how you would like to see it resolved.

There are three different stages that a complaint can go through, as shown in the following table:

Complaint Stage	Who deals with it?	Acknowledged within	Target for response
Stage 1	Service Manager	3 working days	2 weeks
Stage 2	Service Director	4 working days	2 weeks
Stage 3	Panel from Board of Management	4 working days	3 days after panel hearing

We will try to respond to your complaint within the target times shown above, however some issues may take longer to investigate. We will tell you if it is going to take a longer time to respond.

As far as possible all complaints will be treated confidentially, however it may not be possible to investigate a complaint fully or resolve it without sharing information.

We will only do this with your agreement. If you withhold agreement, it may make it more difficult for us to take action to resolve the problem.

Contacting us

To make a suggestion or complaint, contact us at: Margaret Blackwood Housing Association,

Blackwood
16 Dundee Street
Edinburgh, EH11 1DQ
Telephone: 03457 125865
Fax: 0131 317 7294
Email: feedback@blackwoodgroup.org.uk
Web: www.blackwoodgroup.org.uk

A full copy of our Complaints Policy is available on request, and is also on our website.

Who else can help

If you are still not satisfied with either the complaints process or the outcome of your complaint, you can contact one of the following organisations, depending on the nature of your complaint.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

Anyone who receives a service or has applied for housing from a housing association can make use of the services of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. However, the Ombudsman will not normally deal with complaints until Blackwood's own complaints procedure has been exhausted.

The contact details are:

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
4 Melville Street
Edinburgh EH3 7NS
Telephone: 0800 377 7330
Text: 0790 049 4372
Fax: 0800 377 7331
Email: ask@spsso.org.uk
Web: www.spsso.org.uk

The Care Inspectorate

Residents of accommodation or anyone receiving services registered with the Care Inspectorate have the right to complain to the Care Inspectorate. They will investigate complaints at any stage even if you have not used Blackwood's complaints procedure. Local contact details for the Care Inspectorate are available from our local offices.

The main contact office for the Care Inspectorate is:

The Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee DD1 4NY
Telephone: 0845 603 0890
Web: <http://www.scswis.com/>

Blackwood

section 12 Moving on

- Moving on
- Transferring to another Blackwood property
- Applying to other landlords
- Mutual exchange
- Low cost home ownership
- Ending your tenancy and moving out



Moving on

We hope that you will be happy in your home, and that it will continue to suit your needs for many years to come. However if your circumstances change and you need or want to move, we can help you to explore other options.

Transferring to another Blackwood property

If you want to move to another Blackwood home, you will need to complete a housing application form to get yourself registered on our housing list.

Contact the Housing Services team for more information about our Allocations and Transfer policy and to request an application form.

We operate a points system to determine who is most in need. Your housing officer can explain how your points have been worked out and if you are likely to qualify for a transfer.

Applying to other landlords

The Housing Services team can give you advice about the systems for applying to other landlords in the area to which you want to move.

Mutual exchange - HOMESWAP

You have the right to exchange your home with another tenant. You can exchange with another Blackwood tenant from any part of the country, or a tenant of another housing association or local authority. You must get the permission of the other landlord as well as our permission, which we can refuse in certain circumstances.

For more information about mutual exchange, contact your housing officer for advice about how to go about this, and to find out any conditions which may apply to your property.

Low cost home ownership

In most areas there are a number of Government sponsored low cost home ownership schemes, many of them run by housing associations. These include:

- shared ownership, where you part-rent, and part-buy your home;
- shared equity, where you get an interest-free 'equity' loan for part of the purchase price but do not have to pay this back until you move and sell the house or die.

You have to meet certain conditions to qualify for these schemes. Exceptions to some of the conditions are made for disabled people or families with a disabled person.

If you are interested in knowing more, contact the Housing Services team, who will direct you to locally relevant information.

Ending your tenancy and moving out

If you decide to leave your property, please contact us as soon as possible to discuss this.

You must comply with the conditions that are set out in your Tenancy Agreement.

Important points to remember are:

- you must give us 28 days written notice of your intention to leave;
- you must return all the keys;
- you must leave the property in good condition, removing all your belongings and making sure everyone moves out;
- if you leave any of your belongings behind, we will remove them and will charge you for the removal and disposal.

This booklet can be provided in larger print, as an audio CD, and in Braille. It may also be provided in languages other than English.

For your preferred option, please contact us at

Blackwood
160 Dundee Street
Edinburgh, EH11 1DQ
telephone: 03457 125865,
email: feedback@blackwoodgroup.org.uk

Contact Telephone Numbers:

For all tenancy-related enquiries Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm, call:
Blackwood on 03457 125865.

For emergency repairs out of office hours, call:
Bield Response24 on 0800 7837937.

For problems with gas central heating or hot water system:
Kingdom Gas on 0800 389 9463.

For problems with your mains water supply, call:
Scottish Water on 0845 6008855.

If you smell gas, immediately call:
National Grid UK on 0800 111 999

Head Office
Blackwood
160 Dundee Street
Edinburgh, EH11 1DQ
T: 0131 317 7227
F: 0131 317 7294

E: info@blackwoodgroup.org.uk
W: www.blackwoodgroup.org.uk

Registered Scottish Charity
No. SC007658

Blackwood is a trading name of
Blackwood Homes and Care

