

# HARLOW RESIDENTS' Newsletter

citizens  
advice

Harlow

June 2021

## Welcome

Welcome to our newsletter for Harlow residents which we will publish on a monthly basis. With each issue we will keep you updated on the type of services available to you at Citizens Advice Harlow and how you can access them. In this edition we are focusing on **repairs in private rented housing**.

### REPAIRS

**"I've been living in my privately rented flat for years. I generally have a good relationship with my landlord but I just can't get them to carry out various repairs that have built up. How can I get them to act - and what exactly do they have to do?"**

The law states that your landlord must provide accommodation that is safe, healthy and free from things that could cause serious harm.

You don't say exactly what repairs are needed. If you have problems such as electrical wiring that you think might be faulty, or there's damp, or an infestation of pests, the landlord has a legal obligation to put things right.

Landlords are also responsible for the maintenance of the general structure, and fittings such as

boilers and radiators; basins, baths and toilets; and the drains.

The first step is to contact your landlord again, in writing. Include photographs of the problems. Keep a record of all communications and evidence relating to the disrepair.

If that doesn't prompt any action, our housing advisers at Citizens Advice can help with your next steps. These could include contacting your local council (who will have dedicated officers for dealing with disrepair in private rented properties) or asking for a visit by the environmental health team.

**Tenants can take their landlords to court to force them to carry out repairs. However, it's worth getting some advice and thinking carefully before embarking on this route.**

### BILLS

**"My energy bill really shot up last month. I don't feel like I've been using any more heating or electricity than usual, so I'm worried I'm being overcharged. I've tried to contact my energy supplier for support, but no one ever seems to answer the phone or respond to my emails. I've waited on hold for nearly an hour several times before giving up. What should I do?"**

It's normal for your energy bills to change depending on the time of year and how much gas and electricity you're using. But if your bills seem strangely high, then it's important to investigate why.

Firstly, check your meter is working properly and your usage has definitely not gone up, even accidentally. Also check what heaters

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you have and whether you're using them correctly. Night storage radiators and immersion heaters in particular can cause very high bills if used incorrectly.

There are a few things worth looking into. It could be that your bill is an estimate, in which case you need to give your supplier a new meter reading. If it's not an estimate, check your last meter reading to see if it matches the one on your bill. If you still don't have an answer, your supplier might have raised their prices. In any case, you're doing the right thing to contact them.

Customer service varies between suppliers and unfortunately, we hear of many bad experiences similar to yours. We also know the problem has worsened during the pandemic. If you're struggling to get through to them, you could make a formal complaint. We offer advice on how to do this and things to consider first.

We publish a comparison table every three months which rates suppliers' customer service, based on things like telephone wait time, email response time and the accuracy of their bills. Have a look for yours to see how they fare against others. If they're low on the list, consider switching to a different one.

**You will find all this information and more at:**  
[www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply/)  
or call Citizens Advice Harlow for an Energy appointment.

### Struggling with rent payments?

The temporary ban on evictions ended on the 31st of May. From the 1st of June until at least the

end of September, in most cases, landlords will only have to give four months' notice of possession instead of the six months required since the start of the pandemic. It's vital that anyone struggling with rent payments gets help now rather than waiting for your landlord to take possession action.

Here are some of our top tips if you're struggling with your rent payments:

### Energy Bills

Saving money on your energy bills might free up some money to help pay towards your rent. Our website provides tips on making your home more energy efficient, switching utility providers and information of extra support you may be entitled to, potentially bringing down your monthly energy costs

### Reduce your outgoings

One way to stretch household finances is to shop around for the best deals on your mobile phone and broadband (depending on the details of your price plan), and on utilities, such as electricity. Installing a water meter can also sometimes bring savings.

It's worth checking your insurances and subscriptions - cancel any you don't need and shop around for the others. It's normally cheaper if you don't leave it until just before the renewal date.

If your children are school age there may be help available with uniforms, technology and free school meals. Our website has more details.

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk/family/education/school-education/help-with-school-costs/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/family/education/school-education/help-with-school-costs/)

If you are struggling with debt repayments, we might be able to help you with structuring

a plan to repay your debts, help with budgeting or getting unpaid debts written off.

To consider further ways of managing your money, you can work out where you are spending your money at: Work out your budget (EWS).

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/budgeting/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/budgeting/)

### Speak to your landlord

If you're able to pay off some of the arrears, your landlord may agree to a payment plan, enabling you to pay smaller amounts. Eviction is often a last resort. If you've lost your job or seen your income cut, your landlord might be willing to accept reduced payments for a period of time or work out a manageable payment plan. The payment plan should be written down and signed by the landlord.

Be clear and realistic with your landlord about your circumstances and your budget. If they don't agree a plan, or if you feel unable to negotiate alone, contact Citizens Advice.

### Increase your income

You may be eligible for help with your rent through Universal Credit or Housing Benefit.

If you are claiming benefits but you don't receive enough to cover the rent, you may be eligible for Discretionary Housing Payments.

If you are on a low income, you may be entitled to help towards paying your Council Tax.

If you have a mortgage you may be eligible for help towards your monthly payments.

A fall in income may mean you're eligible for benefits, especially if you're a parent or carer. The Turn 2 Us benefits checker is very useful.

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