

Tenant's Handbook

How to contact us

Introduction

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This chapter tells you about how to contact us (including online), getting your views, our customer service, how we manage complaints, our arbitration service, and how we manage information.

Contact us online

You can contact us via our website at www.southwark.gov.uk

Using the website gives you instant access to the council allowing you to make payments for council services such as rent, council tax, parking and so on, using secure online services. You can also report issues or apply for services online.

In fact, most information is available on the website.

As well as information, most standard forms can be found on the website and all tenants can now pay their rent through the website.

Many customers have also signed up for a personalised *MySouthwark* online account, which gives access to lots of information and services.

You can get your own account by going to www.southwark.gov.uk/mysouthwark. You can also connect via social media with Twitter and Facebook.

Many tenants have access to the internet and email in their homes and there are internet cafes and easy to use computers in most of Southwark's libraries.

You can also get online access to council services at the MySouthwark Service Point, where staff will help you.

We recognise that people want to have easy ways to get information and communicate with us and we are making it as easy as possible for tenants to get information and use services. Let us know if you have further online requirements.

Contact us by telephone, post or in person

By telephone

The number for housing enquiries is 020 7525 2600, available from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

The number for repairs enquiries is 0800 952 4444, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

When you contact us we will:

- Be polite
- Identify ourselves so you know who you are talking to

We aim to answer 80 per cent of calls within 2 minutes and will do our best to deal with your enquiry at the first contact.

By post

You can write to us at:

Southwark Council
Housing and Modernisation
PO Box 64529
London SE1P 5LX

In person

MySouthwark Service Point is open between 9am and 5pm on weekdays, is an appointment service for anyone visiting, living or working in Southwark. Staff can deal with general enquiries about housing and council services, as well as council tax and housing benefit. We provide advice and information; try to help you resolve any problems you may have and put you in touch with the right service if you need additional help

The MySouthwark Service Point provides:

- A free phone line to all council services
- A wide range of leaflets, forms and information
- Free access to the council's website via public access computers
- Immediate telephone interpreting
- Information about a wide range of council services
- Access to your MySouthwark account
- Information about choice based lettings

To make an appointment to speak to a customer service advisor in person you can visit the My Southwark - Peckham Service point at:

122 Peckham Hill Street
Peckham
SE15 5JR

Useful council contacts

General enquiries	020 7525 2600
Repairs	0800 952 4444
Gas problems/safety	0800 952 4444
Tenancy fraud investigations team	020 7525 4686
Complaints	020 7525 0042
Housing options	020 7525 5950
Rubbish collection	020 7525 2000
Estate/street cleaning	020 7525 2000
Parking services	0800 138 9081
Estate parking	020 7525 3587
Rent enquiries	020 7525 2600
Council tax and benefits	020 7525 1880
Emergency housing (out of hours service)	020 7525 5000
Noise and antisocial behaviour service	020 7525 5777

Other useful contacts

Gas emergency (National grid)	0800 111 999
Electricity emergency (UKPower Networks)	0800 028 0247
Thames Water	0800 714 614
Victim Support Southwark	0845 303 0900
Southwark Advocacy and Support Service (SASS)	020 7593 1290

Getting your views

We strive to provide a fair and efficient service and we welcome customer feedback that will help us to improve services.

We also carry out surveys from time to time to find out how well you think we are doing. We may carry out these surveys by talking to you on the phone or by emailing or posting you a questionnaire. Sometimes we will ask independent researchers to talk to you face to face. We use the information from these surveys to improve our services.

Equality and Diversity

Tenants in Southwark speak many different languages and have different backgrounds and needs. We believe that this diversity in our local population is one of our greatest strengths and we try to provide services that meet everyone's needs.

We are committed to making sure that no housing applicant, job applicant, tenant, contractor, tenant representative or employee receives less favourable treatment than another because of their religious or political beliefs, race or ethnic background, gender or gender reassignment, sex or sexual orientation, disability, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, or age.

We act quickly and firmly against any form of discrimination, as required by law. We promote equality of opportunity and aim to provide services,

policies and procedures that meet the needs of everyone in our community.

Information about you

From time to time we ask you to tell us about yourself after you have used one of our services. This is usually a short form that asks you about personal information (i.e. your age, sex, ethnic background, what languages you speak and, sometimes, whether you have a disability or any religious belief). This information helps us to understand our customers, find out who lives in our communities and plan services that better meet your needs. Your information is used solely by the council for the specific purposes outlined. We do not share the information with any other organisation and we protect your data under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulations.

We check our performance to make sure we are treating our customers fairly and do this through regular monitoring and reviews.

Customer Care

You can give us feedback via our website www.southwark.gov.uk

We are committed to providing you with consistently high quality services. We aim to give you information on the level of service you can expect from us and we involve tenants in developing our standards.

We measure what we do against set standards and targets using various methods, which include surveys and quality checks. We update you in a number of ways, including articles in our Southwark Life Housing News magazine.

If you do not think we are meeting our standards please let us know. If you receive particularly good service we would also like to hear from you because we use your feedback to help improve services. You can tell us what you think by writing to us at:

FREEPOST
RSCE- TGHU-CUZB
Southwark Council
160 Tooley Street
London SE1 2QH

Compliments, Comments and Complaints

You can contact us via email for compliments, complaints or comments at:
complaints@southwark.gov.uk

We are committed to providing high quality services to our customers, but we recognise that there may be times when things go wrong. If you are not getting the level of service that you expect we want you to tell us about it so that we can try to put it right.

You can make a compliment, comment or complaint about the housing service in the following ways:

- Email complaints@southwark.gov.uk
- Telephone 020 7525 0042
- By letter
- In person

By letter

Customer Resolution Team
Southwark Council
P O Box 64529
London SE1P 5LX

In person

You can make a complaint in person at our Peckham My Southwark Service point.

We operate a two stage complaints process which gives the customer the right to have their complaint reviewed at a more senior level should they remain dissatisfied.

We aim to acknowledge 100 per cent of complaints within three working days.

When making your complaint please tell us as much as you can about your problem, including what went wrong, when it happened, who you dealt with, and how you would like the matter resolved.

You can also find full details of how to complain on our website and from leaflets available from our customer contact point.

If you have made a complaint and want to find out the next steps to take, please visit our website www.southwark.gov.uk

The complaints process

a) Complaint stage – your initial complaint about the service you are unhappy with

Your complaint will be acknowledged within three working days, fully investigated by the business unit and you will receive a response within 15 working days.

We hope that you will be satisfied with our response to your complaint, but if you remain unhappy you can take the matter further.

b) Review stage – complain direct to the Customer Resolution Team who will investigate independently

If you are unhappy with the complaint response you received, you can contact the Customer Resolution Team with a summary of your dissatisfaction with the response you received.

The team will investigate how your complaint was dealt with at the initial stage.

Your complaint will be acknowledged within three working days and the team has up to 25 working days to respond to you. In some cases this may take longer and, if so, you will be informed if there are any delays in investigating your complaint.

This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

Taking matters further

If you are unhappy with the way we have handled your complaint upon completion of the stage two investigation, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman.

The Housing Ombudsman considers complaints made about local authorities in their role as landlords. You will need to contact an MP or local councillor in order to progress your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman or wait eight weeks after you receive our response.

This is a free, independent service that investigates complaints against councils. You can complain to the ombudsman at any time but they will only usually investigate if you have already been through our own complaints procedure.

Access to information

Information about all our services is available via www.southwark.gov.uk

When discussing housing matters with you, we often need to ask for personal details about you and members of your family. We also may need to discuss personal family matters that affect your housing situation.

We will treat the information you give us in confidence. However, we may need to share some important details you give us with other public organisations (for example, the Benefits Agency or

HM Revenue and Customs). We will tell you what information we are likely to pass on.

You must let us know in advance if you want to see information that is kept on our housing file about you, your household or the property (including any application which you have made for rehousing and documents in our possession relating to the block and estate where the property is situated) except the following information:

- Personal information that identifies other people who have not agreed to the disclosure of their personal data and where, on balance, it appears wrong to provide it unless it is reasonable in all the circumstances to disclose the information without their agreement, for example medical information and casework reports from social workers and welfare officers, complaints from other tenants and neighbours or comments by housing staff
- Personal information the disclosure of which might cause serious harm to you or some other individual for example another member of your household
- Personal information the disclosure of which would or would be likely to prejudice an investigation into the behaviour or activities of the tenant for example if the investigation is likely to involve the police; if it may lead to the creation of an Antisocial Behaviour Order; or if it is in connection with eviction proceedings
- Personal information the disclosure of which might prejudice the prevention and detection of crime, the prosecution or apprehension of offenders or the assessment or collection of any tax or duty
- The information we are able to give you will be provided on payment of a fee of £10 and your request will be dealt with promptly and in any case within 30 days

If we fail to provide the information within 30 days you have the right to refer the matter to us under the Customer Resolution Team. If the matter is not resolved you will be advised of your right of appeal to the Information Commissioner.

If you believe that any of the factual information held about you is inaccurate you are entitled to request it be corrected or erased. You should explain what information you consider to be inaccurate and, if appropriate, provide a written statement of the correct information to us. This written statement should be annexed to the file. We will consider your request within 28 days of receipt of the same. Should we fail to respond to you within that 28

days timescale you may refer the dispute to us under the Customer Resolution Team Complaints Procedure.

If we agree to correct or erase part of your personal information you will be informed what changes have been made. If we believe the information is correct and are unable to agree the changes that have been requested we will again inform you. Where we do not agree to the changes you may refer the dispute to us under the Complaints Procedure. If however the matter is not resolved then you will be advised of your right of appeal to the Information Commissioner.

