

Welcome

Handbook for Solon residents

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Tell us how you want this information

Please tell us if you would like this handbook in a different way, for example, in your first language, Braille or large print, or on audio tape or computer disc. Call **0117 924 4071** or email us at **solon@solonswha.co.uk**

POLISH

Jeżeli język angielski nie jest Twoim językiem ojczystym i wymagasz tłumaczenia, możemy to zapewnić.

PORTUGUESE

Se o Inglês não é a sua língua materna e precisa de uma tradução, nós podemos obtê-la.

PUNJABI

ਜੇਕਰ ਇੰਗਲਿਸ਼ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਅਤੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਬਾਰਾ ਸੋਚਣ ਦੀ ਜ਼ਰੂਰਤ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਲਈ ਅਸੀਂ ਇਸਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਾਂ।

SOMALI

Haddii Ingiriisku aanu ahayn afkaaga kowaad oo aad u baahan tahay turjumaad, annagaa kuu samayn karra.

URDU

اگر انگریزی آپ کی پہلی زبان نہیں ہے اور آپ کو ترجمہ کی ضرورت ہے تو ہم آپ کے لئے فراہم کر سکتے ہیں۔

VIETNAMESE

Nếu quý vị không thạo Anh văn và cần bản dịch, chúng tôi sẽ giúp quý vị một bản.

ALBANIAN

Nëse anglishtja nuk është gjuha juaj amtare dhe keni nevojë për një përkthim, ne mund t'ua sigurojmë atë.

BENGALI

ইংরেজী আপনার মাতৃভাষা না হলে এবং আপনার কোন অনুবাদের প্রয়োজন হলে আমরা তা প্রদান করতে সক্ষম।

CHINESE

如果英文不是您的第一語言，而您需要翻譯的話，我們可以為您安排。

GUJARATI

જો તમારી પહેલી ભાષા અંગ્રેજી ન હોય અને તમને ભાષાંતરની જરૂર હોય તો અમે તમને તે આપી શકીએ છીએ.

HINDI

यदि अँग्रेज़ी आप की पहली भाषा नहीं है और आप को अनुवाद की आवश्यकता है तो यह हम आपको प्रदान कर सकते हैं

KURDISH

Heke îngilîzî zimanê we ye yekem nîne û pêwîstîya we bi wergêr heye, em dikarin yekî ji we re bibînin

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1 About this handbook

This handbook has information and advice about your home and your tenancy. It explains the rights and responsibilities of Solon residents and tells you how Solon will work with you to give you the best possible service.

Please keep this handbook safe. You may need it to answer a question about your home, to contact Solon or to find out about how we work.

This handbook is not part of your tenancy agreement, which is the legal document that covers your tenancy. However, it is designed to be a safe place to keep your tenancy document and other important information from Solon.

The information here is produced with the help of Solon residents and is updated from time to time.

All the latest information from Solon is available on our website www.solonswha.co.uk or in leaflets at the Solon office. You can ask for any information to be sent to you.



2 Moving in

→ Tenancy and keys

Solon arranges for you to sign your tenancy agreement and get the keys to your new home. Your tenancy starts on a Monday. Once the tenancy agreement is signed, we will give you the keys and you can move in.

We will also give you details of the gas, electricity and water suppliers so you can set up your own accounts.

Each Solon resident has a Housing Officer who will answer any questions you may have during your tenancy. You can phone your Housing Officer on their direct line or call the Solon office.

Your Housing Officer will contact you 6 weeks after you move in to find out how you are settling in. They will also check that you are happy that the property was left clean, free of rubbish and without problems.



Check your new home

Solon will give you a leaflet about the condition of your property when you move in. Please use this leaflet to check that your new home meets the required standard. If you are unsure about anything about your home, please tell Solon.

My readings

Gas meter

Date:

.....

Electricity meter

Date:

.....

Water meter

Date:

.....

→ What to do and who to tell

- Take a meter reading for your gas, electricity and water services (if you have a water meter). Contact each supplier to have the accounts put into your name. You can also compare gas and electricity supplier costs – see the **Useful contacts** section.
- If you claim any state benefits or allowances, give Jobcentre Plus your new address.
- Redirect your post (at the Post Office) and give your change of address to your GP, your children's schools (where necessary) and the council.
- If you claim any tax credits, give HM Revenue & Customs your address.
- Arrange to have a TV aerial fitted if there is not one for your property.
- Contact TV Licensing to arrange to transfer your licence or to get a licence for your new address.
- Make sure that any gas cooker or other gas appliance is fitted by a Gas Safe registered engineer.
- We recommend that you buy house contents insurance to protect your belongings against loss, theft or damage. Solon insures the building structure of your home but not your personal things. We can explain what you need to do.

→ What Solon will do before you move in

Up-to-date safety certificates

We will carry out safety checks and make sure that the property meets current regulations for electricity (IEE) and gas (Gas Safe). We will give you electricity, gas and energy performance certificates to show that these checks are up to date.

Clean and free of rubbish

We will make sure that the property is clean and free of rubbish and that it reaches the Solon standard for

reletting. We will give you a leaflet so you can check that we have prepared your home to this standard.

Reasonable decoration

We will make sure that your new home is in a reasonable state of decoration. We will discuss and agree this with you when you view the property. We can also supply vouchers to help you buy materials if your home does need some decorating.

Our letting standards

Read the full list of jobs Solon must do before it relets a home:

www.solonswha.co.uk



3 Keys

Solon will give you two sets of front door keys at the start of your tenancy.

Most Solon homes have Best locks for extra security. Only Solon can order new keys for these locks.

If you lose a key or need another one, please let us know immediately as it can take up to 2 weeks for a new key to arrive.

We ask you to pay for any extra keys when you order them.

If you have been given a key that is not Best, you will need to arrange to cut your own keys.

If you are not sure whether you have Best keys or not, contact Solon to find out.





→ What happens if you lock yourself out

If your keys are not Best keys and you lock yourself out, you will need to contact a locksmith to help you get into your home. You will have to pay the cost.

If your keys are Best keys and you lock yourself out, you cannot call a locksmith. Instead you must call Solon and we can help you to gain access to the property.

Solon and our contractor will only give access to the property if we have permission from the resident who is named on the tenancy agreement.

For Best locks during office hours (9am–5pm Monday–Friday) there is a small call-out charge. Or you can come to the Solon office and buy a Best key.

For Best locks outside office hours you will need to call the Solon out-of-hours emergency line and our contractor will let you in. Solon will charge you for this call-out. The cost is about the same as a locksmith normally charges.

Give a key to a friend or neighbour

We recommend that you leave a spare key with someone you can trust who lives nearby. This will save you the cost of a call-out if you forget your key or lock yourself out.

4 Your tenancy agreement

→ What is a tenancy agreement?

This is the contract between you (the tenant or joint tenant) and Solon (your landlord) that you sign when you accept the property.

If you want your partner, or another person, to be included on your tenancy, you may be able to sign up as joint residents. This gives equal rights and responsibilities for the rent and for all other terms and conditions of the tenancy.

After you have signed the tenancy agreement, the terms and conditions of the agreement can only be changed with the agreement

of the tenant (except for the amount of the rent and the service charge).

The information here is intended to help you understand the tenancy agreement. It explains the main responsibilities and rights for you and your landlord. These are set out in the agreement.

Many of the responsibilities and rights depend on certain conditions, which are too detailed to include here. If you want to ask any questions or to get any more information, contact your Housing Officer.

→ Types of tenancy

Starter Tenancy

All new tenants begin with a Starter Tenancy. This usually lasts for 12 months. During this time, we will help you to understand and keep to the conditions of your tenancy agreement.

At the end of 12 months, provided we have not taken steps to end your tenancy, your tenancy will automatically become a permanent Assured Tenancy.

In some cases Solon may decide to extend the 12-month period of the Starter Tenancy. If you do not keep to your agreement during this time, we can take legal action to end the tenancy.

The tenancy agreement sets out your rights and responsibilities. Contact your Housing Officer if you have any questions.

→ Types of tenancy

Assured Shorthold Tenancy

This is a short-term tenancy for a period of 6 months to begin with. Solon can end this tenancy if we give the required notice. An Assured Shorthold Tenancy is usually given to people in temporary accommodation.

Secure Tenancy

(A housing association tenancy granted before 15 January 1989)

A Secure Tenancy is regulated by the Rents Act 1977 and works within the fair rent system. This is administered by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA). When setting rent, Solon considers the age, character and location of a property and the

state of repair. Rents can be re-registered with the VOA every two years to keep them up to date, or earlier if there is a significant change to the property. A joint application by landlord and tenant to change the rent can be made at any time.

Assured Tenancy

(A housing association tenancy granted after 15 January 1989)

An Assured Tenancy gives you the right to live in your home for as long as you need, provided that you keep to the terms of your tenancy agreement. It also gives you other rights – see page 13. Most Solon residents will eventually have an Assured Tenancy.



→ Assured Tenancy – common questions

Do I have ‘security of tenure’ with my Assured Tenancy?

Yes. Security of tenure means that you have the right to occupy your home. The tenancy can only be ended by your landlord if you break one or more of the conditions in your tenancy agreement or if you no longer occupy the property as your only or main home. In some circumstances a landlord can try to end a tenancy (e.g. because of anti-social behaviour by the tenant).

To end a tenancy, a landlord has to follow the correct legal procedure. A landlord must tell the tenant that they intend to end the tenancy and the reasons why they want to do so. Only a court can give a landlord the right to end an Assured Tenancy.

Can I take over someone else’s Assured Tenancy?

Yes you can and this is called ‘succession’. You have the right to succeed once if you have an Assured Tenancy. This normally happens when a tenant dies and a member of the tenant’s family asks to take over the tenancy. This may happen but only if there has not already been a succession.

If more than one person qualifies to take over the tenancy and they cannot agree who should become the tenant, Solon will decide who the new tenant will be. To qualify to take over the tenancy by succession, a person must be the spouse of the deceased tenant and must be living with the tenant at the time of his or her death.

If you have an Assured Tenancy and you are not sure about your rights, contact your Housing Officer.

Solon may consider granting succession to a member of the family (aged 18 or more) who has been living with the tenant for at least 12 months at the time of their death.

Can I give my Assured Tenancy to someone else?

This is called 'assigning your tenancy'. You are allowed to do this in certain circumstances, as follows:

- where a court decides that the tenancy must go from one spouse to the other as part of a divorce
- where Schedule 1 of the Children Act 1989 applies
- where the assignment is made to someone who would have had the legal right to succession (see page 14) if the tenant had died immediately before the assignment took place
- where the assignment is made by 'mutual exchange'. See the chapter on **Moving on** in the **Living in your home** section of this handbook.

Can I buy my home if I have an Assured Tenancy?

Having an Assured Tenancy means that you do not qualify for the Right to Buy scheme, which is for council homes. However, for some housing association properties there is a scheme called Right to Acquire. This depends on certain conditions, such as the location of the property, whether or not your home was built using grant money from the government and, if it was, when that grant money was given. There are other rules too.

For details of the Right to Acquire scheme, please contact your Housing Officer or visit our website: www.solonswha.co.uk

→ Responsibilities and rights

The tenancy agreement is a contract which sets out the duties of the landlord (Solon) and the tenant (you). It explains your rights and responsibilities as a Solon resident. It includes information about your rent and service charge (if you have one) and lists the legal grounds on which Solon could seek to end the tenancy.

As the landlord Solon must:

- allow you to live peacefully in your home
- keep the property in a good state of repair
- keep the exterior and any communal areas in a good state of decoration
- provide you with a housing management service
- make Solon policies and procedures accessible to you when you request them.

As a resident you must:

- pay the rent and service charge on time
- use the premises as your main home without causing nuisance or annoying others
- keep your home clean and in a good state of decoration
- not allow the property to become overcrowded
- report promptly any repairs for which Solon is responsible and give Solon access to carry out the work
- give Solon at least 4 weeks' notice, in writing, when you wish to end your tenancy.

You also have the right to:

- make improvements or alterations to your home – you must ask Solon first
- be consulted by Solon on changes to the tenancy agreement or substantial changes to our management or maintenance policies
- exchange your home by ‘mutual assignment’ with another social housing resident (see the **Living in your home** section of this handbook)
- pass on your tenancy after your death to a qualifying family member
- receive compensation if we fail to repair your home, in line with conditions published by Solon
- complain to the Independent Housing Ombudsman if you have gone through the Solon complaints procedure and are not satisfied.



What do you have to do?

Your tenancy agreement gives you information on your rights and responsibilities. If you are not sure what you have to do, your Housing Officer will explain.

5 About Solon

Solon is a charitable housing association set up in 1974 to provide good-quality, affordable rented housing.

We provide more than 1,200 homes, mainly in Bristol and South Gloucestershire. We work with local councils and other housing associations to build more homes. Solon is regulated by the Tenant Services Authority, the independent regulator in England.

→ Our aims

Provide high-quality, affordable homes for different needs

We work to provide good, affordable housing for a variety of housing and social needs. We aim to provide excellent customer care, to give customer satisfaction and to work closely with our residents to improve all our services.

Promote and celebrate diversity

We value the diversity of the people in our communities. We work to promote respect and tolerance between all people irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious belief or disability.

→ Our aims

Ensure equality for all residents

We are committed to giving services that are fair and accessible to all residents. We take positive steps to help reduce any effects of unfair discrimination and disadvantage to an absolute minimum. We actively promote equality to ensure that equal opportunity is central to all our activities.



Solon Service Standard

We work with residents to agree our standards for customer service. Details are given in the **Customer Care Service Standard**, which you can get from the Solon office and on our website. It explains the service we provide and what we expect of you to help us deliver excellent customer care.

For more information call **0117 924 4071**

→ How Solon is managed

Solon has a Board of Management made up of 12 volunteers. The Board has 9 independent members who are chosen for their expertise and experience (in areas such as housing and finance). The Board also has 3 resident members who are elected by the residents.

As well as the Board, Solon has a permanent team of staff based at our office. They take care of the day-to-day running of the housing association and all our services.

The Board makes decisions and helps define the policies for the way Solon operates. Board members meet every 3 months to discuss matters. The Solon chief executive

and staff managers report to each Board meeting about how well Solon is doing.

Board members are easy to talk to and happy to discuss their work. You can contact them via the Solon office number.

Residents are strongly encouraged to get involved with the running and administration of Solon. New resident volunteers are always welcome.

Board members change from time to time. We use our newsletter and website to let you know when new members join or people leave and when there are tenant vacancies.



Your voice on the Board

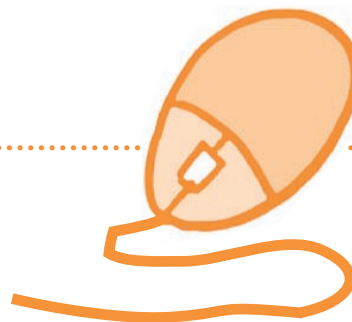
Solon has 3 Board members who are residents. If you want to raise any matter with the Board of Management, contact Solon and we will put you in touch with a Board member.



Find out about the Solon Board

Read the Board of Management pages:

www.solonswha.co.uk





Out-of-hours contact

If you need to contact Solon when the office is shut, for example to ask for an emergency repair, please ring the main Solon number for information: 0117 924 4071. The message will give you another number to call.

6 Contact us

**Office opening hours are
Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm**

Our office is in the centre of Bristol, near Cabot Circus. Our reception is wheelchair accessible and we have installed hearing loops.

When you come into the office, the first member of staff that you will see is usually the receptionist. They will answer your question or arrange for you to see another member of staff who can help you.



Solon South West Housing Association

1 Newfoundland Court
St Paul Street
Bristol BS2 8AN

Telephone 0117 924 4071

(voicemail when office is closed)

Fax 0117 924 8816

Email solon@solonswha.co.uk

Website www.solonswha.co.uk

Maintenance 0117 916 7777

Emergency repairs

Office hours **0117 916 7777**

Out of hours **0117 924 4071**

(message gives contact number)

Face-to-face visits

Come to our office or call us to arrange a home visit (translation and interpretation services available)

Have your say 0117 916 7768

Resident involvement and communication, meetings, resident newsletter

