

1.1 Introduction

About this handbook

This handbook tells you about your tenancy or licence and about your landlord, United Welsh Housing Association. You can also use this folder to file your tenancy agreement and letters about your home.

If you have any questions about this handbook, please telephone a Customer Service Advisor on 029 2085 8100.

The Welsh Assembly Government's Guarantee for Housing Association Residents also tells you what you can expect from us. United Welsh will give you a copy.

About United Welsh Housing Association

United Welsh has two offices. Our head office is in Caerphilly (opposite the castle). We also have a smaller office in Cardiff (on the corner next to Butetown police station). You are welcome to call at either of our offices. The address and contact details are:

Ty Cennydd
Castle Street
Caerphilly
CF83 1NZ
Tel: 029 2085 8100
Fax: 029 2085 8110

Walters Buildings
Clarence Road
Cardiff
CF10 5UU
Tel: 029 2085 8193
Fax: 029 2089 5500

**Or our Freephone number:
0800 2940195**

**E- mail tellmemore@uwha.co.uk
Website www.uwha.co.uk**

United Welsh Housing Association is an Industrial and Provident Society with charitable rules. We do not trade to make a profit. A voluntary Board of Management controls what we do. The Welsh Assembly Government regulates our work.

UWHA is one of the largest providers of social housing in Wales managing over 3,500 properties.

Our vision is to be the organisation of first choice. We want to be the organisation people choose to work with to provide housing and related services.

This vision applies to our general housing (over 3,000 homes) as well as our supported housing (over 500 tenants and licensees)

We provide general housing mainly in Cardiff, Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent, with smaller numbers of homes in Monmouth, Torfaen, Vale of Glamorgan and Swansea.

We have supported housing in Rhondda Cynon Taf, Neath/Port Talbot, Bridgend, Newport and Merthyr, as well as the areas listed above.

1.2 How we decide who gets a home

If you want or need to move out of your home, you will need to apply to be on our waiting list. The way we allocate our homes is through our Select-a-Home scheme.

Once you have joined our applicant list you will be sent a leaflet every two weeks identifying homes that are available.

If you see a home which suits your families needs, you should return the coupon.

We offer the home to the person who has been waiting longest, or someone who needs an urgent move.

If you want to know more about how Select-a-Home works, please ask us.

1.3 Moving into your new home

When you move into your new home, there are a number of things you should do:

Tell everybody who needs to know your new address, for example:

- ▶ Your friends and family.
- ▶ Electricity, gas and water suppliers.
- ▶ If you are claiming Welfare Benefits, the Benefits Agency, the Housing Benefit Department of the Local Authority and the Council Tax Department. If you delay making a claim for Housing Benefit you will have to make any missed rent payments yourself.
- ▶ Your doctor, dentist, bank and children's school/s.
- ▶ You also need to know where the gas meter, electricity fuse box and the stopcocks are so that if there is an emergency you will know how to turn off the supply. If you do not know, ask your Housing Officer or Maintenance Officer.
- ▶ Make sure you know how to use the heating and hot water systems. If you have any problems please ask your Maintenance Officer.

1.4 Keys

The Association does not keep spare keys to your home. If you lose your keys it is up to you to replace them. You will have to pay for any damage caused by forcing entry to your home or for the locks to be changed. We recommend that you leave a spare key with a relative or trusted friend.

1.5 Gardens

United Welsh is responsible for boundary walls and fencing. Tenants are responsible for any other work in the garden.

Please remember to check whether a plant is suitable for your garden before planting it. Some plants, for example leylandi trees, can grow very quickly and block out light, damage buildings and boundary walls. These types of plants should not be planted in your garden.

1.6 Rent

When you sign a tenancy or licence agreement you agree to pay rent to live in your home.

Your rent pays for:

- Fixing things that are broken
- Decorating the outside of your home
- Checking that things in your home, like the heating and fire alarms, are working properly
- Mortgage repayments (if United Welsh had to borrow money to buy or build your home)

- Building insurance (this covers the structure of the building but does not cover your personal belongings)

As the tenant or licensee you are responsible for making sure the rent is paid. If you claim housing benefit, it is still your responsibility to make sure that the rent is paid by housing benefit.

If you require assistance, we can advise you on how to pay rent and how to claim housing benefit.

1.7 How your rent is set

Your rent is made up of the net rent charged by United Welsh together with any service charges. United Welsh reviews its net rent once a year in April. We set the rent to cover our costs. The rent will be different depending on the size of your home and where it is.

United Welsh will give you four weeks notice in writing if there is any change in the rent. If you are an assured or a secure tenant and feel that the rent is unreasonable you have the right to appeal to an independent rent assessment committee, which will decide whether the new rent is in line with rents on similar homes in your area.

1.8 Service charges

Your rent may include a charge for services such as grass cutting, communal lighting etc. United Welsh will give you a breakdown showing what is included in the service charge and what each item costs.

If United Welsh proposes to change the service being provided, we would consult you first. We will also consult you regularly about the standard of services you receive.

1.9 Insurance

We insure the structure of the building. This does not cover your own belongings. See section 3 of this handbook for more information.

1.10 Right to information

You have the right to information from us about:

- the terms of your tenancy
- our responsibility for repairs
- our policies and procedures on
 - tenant involvement
 - housing allocations
 - transfers

This handbook tells you about these, but if you want to know more, please contact us.

1.11 The right to see information about you

If you want to see information about you on file you need to give us a day's notice. You can then come into the office to see your file. If you want to take copies of anything in your file you can do this at the office but we may ask you to pay for the copies.

1.12 Confidentiality

The information we keep on file about you is confidential.

We will give information about you sometimes, for example:

- We will give your name, address and tenancy start and end dates to Housing Benefit departments, the benefits agency or the Council Tax department
- We will give information to the Police if they are investigating a serious crime

- We will give information even to Social Services if there is a serious risk to someone else, a child for example.

We will not give information about you to building societies, other landlords, gas, electric or water suppliers, debt collectors, relatives, friends or other tenants unless you tell us that we can.

1.13 Customer care charter

We have a customer care policy and charter which was written by tenants and staff of United Welsh.

It tells you what you can expect from us and what you can do if you are not happy with our service. We want to get things right first time. If we don't, we promise to learn from our mistake and improve services as a result.

Our Staff

You can expect United Welsh staff to:

- ▶ Listen to you and be polite
- ▶ Understand your needs and be honest about how United Welsh can help
- ▶ Be well informed and trained in their duties
- ▶ Carry an identity card showing their name and photo

Our Offices

You can expect United Welsh offices to be:

- ▶ Clean, warm and friendly
- ▶ Accessible for people using wheelchairs and with prams and pushchairs

You can expect United Welsh's offices to have:

- ▶ Information about our work and how to get involved
- ▶ Photos of officers

When you telephone us

We will aim to:

- ▶ Answer your call within 6 rings
- ▶ Answer your call by an officer telling you their name and department
- ▶ Have someone else speak to you if the person you want isn't there

When you write to or e-mail us

We will aim to:

- ▶ Reply within 10 working days
- ▶ Tell you we have received your letter within 5 working days if we can't give you a full answer straight away
- ▶ Write back to you using plain language

When you report a repair

We will aim to:

- ▶ Get to an emergency within 3 hours and do the work within 24 hours
- ▶ Do urgent repairs within 3 to 7 days
- ▶ Do repairs that are not urgent within 14 to 28 days
- ▶ Do repairs when it is convenient for you. You can arrange an appointment by phoning the contractor (the telephone number is on the repairs slip)
- ▶ Ask you how satisfied you were with the work

We also aim to:

- › Consult you about major repairs or improvements
- › Give you the choice of colours and fittings where possible

When you apply for housing

We will aim to:

- › Put your details on our waiting list within 10 working days
- › Regularly tell you about our houses and flats to rent
- › Tell you about other places you can apply for housing or get advice

When a house or flat becomes empty

We will aim to:

- › Give the keys to the new tenant no more than 7 days after any repairs have been done.
- › Make sure that empty homes don't cause problems for neighbours

Collecting your rent:

We will aim to:

- › Send you a rent statement once every 3 months
- › Give you a chance to make an agreement to clear rent arrears before taking further action

- › Be firm in dealing with arrears so that we have the income to provide services to all our tenants
- › Tell you about benefits and debt advice

Getting involved

We will aim to:

- › Fund and support your tenants' association or tenants' panel as long as it meets certain standards, for example, anyone can join.
- › Fund and support Voice4Tenants

Telling you about our services

We will aim to:

- › Send you a newsletter every 3 months which tenants help to write
- › Send you an annual report telling you about our progress in the year

Communicating in your own language

We will aim to speak or write to you in your own language by using translation services and interpreters

1.14 Comments, complaints and compliments

We want to know what you think about our services and we welcome your comments. It helps us to see where we need to make changes, or when we are getting something right.

If you are not happy with our service please let us know so that we can listen to you and decide if we need to change things.

What type of complaint is it?

A complaint about the way we provide a service:

This may be because we have made a mistake or not done something that we should have done, for example you asked us to visit you and we haven't done so.

A complaint about the kind of services we provide or don't provide:

This sort of complaint is usually about our policies. For example, you might think we should start to provide a service that we don't provide now. We want to hear your views, but these complaints are not as simple to deal with as the first kind.

A complaint about our staff:

We work hard to support our staff so that they can give you a good service. We take this type of complaint very seriously and investigate all allegations. We try to see both sides of these complaints and find a way forward.

How do I comment or complain?

Let us know as soon as possible what has gone wrong. If you know who is dealing with your case, speak or write to them. If not, please speak to one of our Customer Service Advisors and they will be able to help you.

How will United Welsh respond?

Usually the member of staff most directly responsible will deal with your complaint. If your complaint is about a member of staff, a manager will deal with it.

We will try to resolve your complaint straight away. If we can't we will log it and investigate. We will usually respond within 10 working days. If we need longer to investigate, we will tell you this and how long you may need to wait.

We train our staff to deal with complaints professionally. If we have made a mistake we will put things right and apologise. We will also try not to repeat the same mistakes.

Will your comments or complaints make a difference?

We log all comments, complaints and compliments and managers check progress every week. Departmental directors check every month to see if there are any complaints about our policies that we need to tell the Board of Management about.

Everything you tell us helps us to make decisions about where to target our energies and how to improve our services to you.

What to do if you are still not satisfied?

You can e mail or write to a departmental director or the Chief Executive. They will investigate and tell you the result.

If you are still not happy you can complain to the Board. This is our last chance to hear your complaint and deal with it. The Board will not consider your complaint unless officers of the association have already tried to deal with it.

If you are not happy with the Board's decision, you have the right to complain to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. You can get further details and a complaint form from our offices or by contacting the Ombudsman direct at:

**1, Fford yr Hen Gae
Pencoed
CF35 5LJ
Tel: 01656 641150
Fax: 01656 641199**