

Chapter 22: Information we hold about you

Data protection

We hold personal information about our clients and employees. We hold the information for a number of reasons, but mainly to make sure that we provide people with efficient and effective services. All the information we hold is protected under the Data Protection Act 1998.

The Data Protection Act 1998

The Data Protection Act is the legal framework that makes sure personal information is used fairly and legally. The act protects people's privacy and rights.

This means that we must treat the personal information that you give to us confidentially and we will not normally pass it to anyone outside the organisation.

Some information that you give us may be sensitive, for example, medical details or information about income and household circumstances. We often need this information to decide how to provide housing services.

We will explain what information we need, how we will use this information and who it will be available to. We will ask your permission if we need to give it to anyone else. Only in exceptional circumstances will we pass details on without your permission.

Access to information we hold about you

The Data Protection Act gives you the right to see any personal information that we hold about you. This applies to manual records, such as your house file, as well as records we hold electronically on our computer systems.

In certain limited circumstances, we may withhold information from you. These include if:

- releasing the information would be likely to cause serious harm or unnecessary stress to the physical or mental health of the person who wants the information;

- releasing the information might interfere with preventing and detecting crime; or
- the information relates to another person who has not given permission for it to be released.

If you think that the information we have is not correct, you can ask us to correct it.

- If we agree that it is not correct, we will correct it and send you a letter confirming what we have done.
- If we do not agree, we will send you a letter giving our reasons for our decision. You have the right to complain or to ask the data protection officer to review the decision.

If you have any concerns about the way we process information, or would like to see the information we hold about you, write to:

The Data Protection Officer

Level 3

River Park House

225 High Road

Wood Green N22 8HQ.

We may need to ask you for information to check your identity and to find the information you want. If you authorise someone to make a request on your behalf, you must do this in writing.

To protect your privacy when you visit your local housing office or Customer Services Centre to speak to housing staff, you can have an interview in a private room. If you complain to us, it will not affect your right to complain to the office of the **Information Commissioner**, or to apply to the court for an order.

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire SK9 5AF

Tenant audit system

We introduced a 'tenant audit' system to help prevent people living in council property illegally, and fraudulent applications for housing.

The system means that everyone who is applying for housing for the first time must have their photograph taken. We will store photographs in our computer system so that we can have an extra way of confirming your identity. We will strictly keep to all our responsibilities under the Data Protection Act 1998 (see the section above on 'data protection').

The Freedom of Information Act 2000

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives you the right to see non-personal information we hold (for example, our plans for major improvement programmes). There are some circumstances when we do not have to give you the information. For example, if giving you the information would affect a criminal investigation.

If you want information, you should apply in writing to any Customer Services Centre. We will aim to respond within **20 working days**.