

Soha has over 6,700 affordable homes in Oxfordshire and surrounding areas. We are a community-based housing association that puts tenant satisfaction at the heart of our activities. We have been a mutual organisation since October 2017, which means that residents can apply to become a member and take part in major decisions affecting the association.

We are a charity and any money we make is invested back into the association for the benefit of our tenants. Soha is managed by a board of 12 of whom four are currently Soha residents.

This booklet will tell you what to expect from us and who to contact when moving home. We have a Customer Charter which tells you the service standards you can expect from us. We may contact you to find out how you are getting along in your new home.

Anything we mention in *italics* in this leaflet may be downloaded from our website or you can contact us via the details below.

your new soha home what to expect

Before you move in, your home will have been checked to make sure that it's clean, in good condition and has services that operate correctly.

Our re-let standard was developed with Soha tenants to make sure that all homes meet an agreed minimum standard before they are re-let.

We sent you a copy of our leaflet **Your new home** with your provisional offer letter. **Your new home** is also available on our website.

We'll tell you if there are any repairs outstanding to your new home or if it is on a planned works programme; this is when we replace large items – such as the roof, kitchen,

or electrical wiring – across a number of homes at the same time. If this is the case, we'll tell you the likely timescale of any work that is due to be started.

your rent

Your rent is the charge we make for your home, as set out in your tenancy agreement. We use a Government formula to work it out. You may also have to pay extra charges for your home, for example service charges for communal cleaning or grounds maintenance. These are explained in detail in our leaflet **service charges** on our website.

how to pay direct debit

If you pay by Direct Debit, your rent will be collected monthly in 12 equal payments. Please contact our Customer Services team for a Direct Debit form.

You can set up a Direct Debit to pay on any day of the month or to set up payments online or via telephone with your bank, you'll need the following information:

Account name: **Soha Housing Limited**

Sort code: **20-00-00**

Account number: **83987574**

If you pay by online banking, the details above are the same. But for one-off payments, you'll need to quote your tenancy reference

(found on your rent statement) so we can credit your payment correctly.

allpay

Ask us for an allpay rent payment card and you'll be able to pay at any Post Office or PayPoint by cash, cheque or debit card.

rent payment card

You can also use your rent payment card to pay by phone with your debit card. Call us on **0800 014 15 45** (Freephone) number and select the option to go through to the allpay payment line. You can also pay allpay direct during Soha's out of hours times, on **0844 557 8321**.

You can pay your rent by debit card at **www.soha.co.uk/my-account** using your PC, tablet, or smartphone. To claim your online account, call our Customer Services team who will send you the information you need.

If you post a cheque to us, it should be made payable to Soha Housing Limited and sent to us at Royal Scot House. Please write your address and tenancy reference on the back. It may take up to seven working days for your bank to clear your cheque.

You can pay by cash, cheque or debit card at our cash office in Royal Scot House on Mondays from 9.00am to 4.00pm.

When there is a Bank Holiday Monday, we open the cash office on a Tuesday.

the soha housing app

Download the free app from your smartphone's app store. It's great not only for paying rent, but also reporting repairs (and seeing a repair history) and changing your personal details, for example.

There is a QR code for the app at the very end of this leaflet.

soha's tenancy support service

If you live in a Soha home and are at risk of losing your home, our support service is here to help you.

Some things residents might need help with are:

- ways to maximise your income and develop your budgeting skills.
- help looking after your health, such as registering with a GP or a specialist service.
- support with hoarding and accessing other support services
- using services to access employment, education or training.
- practical, social and emotional support.
- help to access services in the local community.

This service is not intended to replace support provided by Social Services, the NHS or any other statutory service. Soha's Tenancy Support Service has been established to provide support in housing-related matters. This does not include personal care to our tenants, which is part of a care package arranged and provided through Social Services.

settling in getting connected to gas, electricity, phone and water

You should contact the water supplier with your details, giving them at least three working days' notice. We have an agreement with an energy supplier so you will automatically become their customer for both your gas and electricity. The same tariff will be used for customers on a prepayment meter as for those paying by Direct

Debit. We will pass on your contact details and opening meter readings to the energy supplier, but your personal details will not be shared.

You can also choose your own supplier, giving them exact meter readings. If you are not confident about doing this, ask them to send someone round to read your meters. We will show you where all meters are located. If your new home already has a landline phoneline which you want to keep, you should contact your chosen phone supplier to arrange for it to be transferred to your name.

The water supply will normally be connected when you move in. Please make sure you know where the stop tap is located to be able to turn off the water supply in an emergency. You can ask your local water authority to fit a water meter, but they may charge you. Please get our written permission to fit a water meter. This is provided within your maintenance pack.

heating and hot water

Please make sure you know how the heating and hot water system works by looking at the instruction manual we give you. We want you to be warm and comfortable and keep your fuel bills down!

council tax

It's your responsibility to tell the Council that you are the new tenant. Details of your District Council are on the inside front cover of this booklet. You should contact the Council Tax department or visit their website with your name, your new address and the date you moved in. You can arrange to pay your Council Tax in monthly instalments. It's better to sort this out quickly as you could face a big bill later if you do nothing.

getting benefits

You might be paying more, or less, rent than before in your new home. This could affect how much Housing Benefit (or how much housing element of Universal Credit - see below) you get. Please sort this out quickly so you don't find yourself short of money or having to pay back large amounts.

We can give you advice, help you fill in the forms or signpost you to your local Citizens' Advice.

Please note that Housing Benefit can be backdated only the payments for the last month, so if you think you are entitled to claim because your circumstances have changed, you must tell the Housing Benefit Department immediately.

universal credit

Universal credit (UC) is a single monthly payment which replaces six existing benefits. If you're of working age, UC replaces:

- Housing benefit.
- Jobseeker's allowance.
- Income support.
- Child tax credit.
- Working tax credit.
- Income-related employment and support allowance.

There are a few differences to the UC claiming process that could leave you out of pocket if you don't get them right first time. Read about it at www.soha.co.uk/universal-credit.

home contents insurance

As your landlord, we have insured the building you live in. But it's your responsibility to insure your furnishings and belongings (contents insurance). Shop around to find the best deal for you. We have provided you with details of a home contents insurance product for social housing tenants. This may be good value for money for you. Call or email us or contact us via the Soha Housing app to get the information sent out.

doctors and dentists

You can find a local doctor or dentist by putting in your postcode on the NHS website www.nhs.uk. For medical advice by phone, call 111 which is free to call.

It is meant for non-emergency issues although they can send an ambulance to you if they feel you need one. In an emergency dial 999.

don't forget!

Don't forget to contact the people and organisations that should know you have moved. This could include your employers, benefit offices, banks and building societies, credit card companies, doctor and so on. You will also need to update the address on your TV licence. The Post Office can redirect your mail for a fee.

your tenancy

your tenancy agreement

Your tenancy agreement is a legal contract between you and Soha Housing. It sets out the terms and conditions that both of us must keep. It is an important document, so you should read it carefully and keep it safe. We want you to be happy in your home and we want to make sure that, through the tenancy conditions, we can prevent or resolve possible disputes and problems.

It's really important that you understand your tenancy agreement and what your responsibilities are. If you are a new tenant, we will have gone through the tenancy agreement and explained it to you when you signed up for your new home. If you are new to Soha Housing, you will have a Starter Tenancy.

starter tenancy

We make a special type of contract with you for the first year of your tenancy while you get used to being a Soha Housing tenant. The Starter Tenancy is a twelve-month probationary period and you can become an assured tenant (with more rights) if you have met the conditions of your Starter Tenancy agreement.

We will tell you if there are other conditions attached to your Starter Tenancy. If, as a starter tenant, you break any of these conditions, we may take action, using a formal procedure that can ultimately lead to eviction. We will always talk or write to you to sort out any problems before we take such a step.

special conditions relating to starter tenancies

The following conditions apply to your Starter Tenancy until your

tenancy is converted to an Assured Tenancy (usually after 12 months):

- You may not take in lodgers.
- You may not make improvements or alterations to your home.
- You do not have the right to compensation for improvements made to your home.
- You are not allowed to mutually exchange your home with another tenant.
- There are no rights to succession on your home. Succession is when a home is transferred to someone such as your spouse or civil partner in the event of your death.

assured or shorthold tenancies

After you have completed your 12 months of a Starter Tenancy satisfactorily, we will write to you about turning the agreement into an Assured Tenancy, which is the usual form of agreement with a landlord such as Soha and gives you further rights.

changing the agreement

We may vary the terms of your tenancy, for example, by increasing the rent. We will follow all proper legal notices. If we change any of the terms, we must serve a notice of variation and allow you time to tell us what you think about the changes.

your responsibilities as our tenant

Whatever type of tenancy you have, you are responsible for your own behaviour and also for the behaviour of your family, other people living at home or anyone visiting your home.

For example, you are breaking your tenancy conditions if you are creating a nuisance to other residents. If you are a joint tenant, you are jointly responsible for the actions of the other joint tenant.

✓ Please do:

- Pay your rent on time.
- Allow Soha staff and contractors access to your home, for example to inspect and carry out repairs, undertake gas servicing and carry out improvements. We will normally give you at least 24 hours' notice,

but we may need immediate access in an emergency. Thank you.

✗ Please don't:

- overcrowd your home by allowing other people to live in your home.
- threaten or abuse our staff or contractors physically or verbally.
- cause a nuisance to neighbours.
- keep or use illegal drugs in your home or locality. This also applies to anyone living with you or any visitors and may lead to legal action being taken against you.

breaking the agreement

If you break any conditions of the tenancy, we can take action which could mean that you could be evicted from your home. We will always try hard to reach an agreed solution before taking that kind of action but if the problem continues, we will go to Court.

transferring your tenancy by succession

If you are married or in a civil partnership, if you die, your tenancy may pass to your surviving partner, and can sometimes pass to others. You should check the Soha website, or ask us, for the succession application pack.

your responsibilities

Your Soha home must be your only or main home. It must be your permanent home and you cannot live elsewhere. If you do, you may lose your rights as an assured tenant and we may serve a notice to end your tenancy.

subletting

This means renting out parts, or all, of your home. You must not sublet your Soha home, as this will affect your rights as an assured tenant.

lodgers

Please talk to us or go to our website if you're thinking of taking a lodger. We can give you the information you need to consider before making a decision. Taking in a lodger is likely to affect any Housing Benefit (or the housing element of Universal Credit) you receive.

assigning

You may not give, transfer or sell your tenancy to anyone else without Soha's written permission.

going away

We need to know if you will be away from your home for more than four weeks. It will also be useful if you would give us a contact name and address in case of emergencies. In the winter, you should turn off and drain your water supply to prevent burst pipes and possible damage to your home.

business and trades

You should always get Soha's written permission if you are considering using your home for business or trade purposes. We judge each request on its individual circumstances, but we will not allow certain businesses.

Examples would be:

- running a business that might cause noise or nuisance to neighbours.
- running a business that might involve many people visiting your home.
- running a business that breaks planning consent or conditions.

keeping your home and garden clean and tidy

A clean and tidy home makes for a nicer place to live. This includes your responsibility for internal decorations. If where you live has communal areas, you are also responsible for making sure you keep these areas clean and tidy.

You must keep any gardens (front and rear), or garage for which you are responsible, tidy. This means you must cut your grass on a regular basis, trim hedges and bushes, remove pet mess and not keep any rubbish in your gardens. If you fail to keep your garden or garage tidy, Soha may take action against you. It's all about being a good neighbour and creating a pleasant community.

pets

You must have our written permission to keep a pet in a Soha home. If your home has a private,

enclosed garden, you may keep a cat, a dog or a small caged animal.

Wherever you live, you may keep a dog if it is registered as a service dog for a disabled person. You must properly care for your own pets and not allow them (including any that visit you) to foul gardens or common areas, cause a nuisance, create a health or safety hazard or endanger other people.

infestation

If you need pest control, you can find local firms through online directories or use the British Pest Control Association's website to find a local member. Please remember that private pest control companies will charge for their services.

South Oxfordshire District Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council no longer offer any form of pest control services but others may still do.

The British Pest Control Association also has useful advice on identifying pests and details of the most common household pests.

Please note that bees may not be moved, even by a contractor, and you should not attempt to do it yourself.

car parking, caravans and trailers

You should only park (or allow your family or guests to park) vehicles in a garage, car-port or on a suitably constructed hard-standing. If you want to create a hardstanding for a vehicle, please contact us to ask for written permission. You may not park vehicles anywhere which causes a nuisance, carry out major car repairs, or park an unroadworthy vehicle on your driveway or neighbourhood. You may not park a caravan, boat, trailer, untaxed, SORN or derelict vehicle, or any vehicle weighing over 3.5 tonnes at your home or in your neighbourhood without first getting Soha's written consent.

If you are in any doubt as to where you are allowed to park in your neighbourhood, please contact us.

car parking, caravans and trailers

You should only park (or allow your

family or guests to park) vehicles in a garage, car-port or on a suitably constructed hard-standing. If you want to create a hardstanding for a vehicle, please contact us to ask for written permission. You may not park vehicles anywhere which causes a nuisance, carry out major car repairs, or park an unroadworthy vehicle on your driveway or neighbourhood. You may not park a caravan, boat, trailer, untaxed, SORN or derelict vehicle, or any vehicle weighing over 3.5 tonnes at your home or in your neighbourhood without first getting Soha's written consent.

If you are in any doubt as to where you are allowed to park in your neighbourhood, please contact us.

high-risk materials and weapons

You must not use or store in your home (including any store, shed or garage), any petrol, paraffin, liquid petroleum, or calor gas heaters or other highly flammable materials or other hazardous chemicals, except usual household fuels (for example for lawnmowers, barbecues etc).

Weapons may only be stored in your home with Soha's written permission and if you have the appropriate legal licence.

boundaries

Fencing between houses is a tenant's responsibility. Soha will only put up a post and wire fence to mark out the location of the boundary if there is a dispute.

If you have trees/hedges forming your boundary, please don't let the trees/hedges get out of hand before you prune.

If you have children and/or pets you are responsible for providing adequate fencing to keep them safe.

If you live in a flat, Soha is responsible for the fencing around the boundary of the block, but fences between individual gardens are the responsibility of the tenants and leaseholders affected. If your fence (including hedge and/ or tree) needs replacing:

- Please get Soha's permission in writing before erecting new fencing. Ask Customer Services by

email, on the phone, or by using the Soha Housing app.

- Always discuss your plans with the neighbour affected before removing or erecting any fencing or hedges. This will help avoid a dispute later.
- If the boundary includes hedges and/or trees, contact the District Council to check if there is a preservation order on it.
- It's wise to contact the local planning department before you do the work to check whether you need permission.
- You can't insist that your neighbour puts up a fence even if the boundary is their responsibility. You can put up your own fence, but need to make sure that it is on your side of the boundary.
- If you have put up a fence along a boundary that may belong to your neighbour, that fencing becomes your responsibility to maintain. This will remain so with any new tenants who move into your property.

If you have any further queries, do please contact us.

satellite dishes

You need to ask and have received our permission in writing to install a satellite dish. We will not unreasonably refuse permission. If you live in an area controlled by a private Management Company, we may need to ask their permission as well. If you live in a flat there may be extra restrictions about dishes being installed on the block.

You will need to check with the local council if you need planning permission. The inside front cover of this booklet tells you the name of your council.

alterations and improvements

You have the right to carry out improvements and alterations, so long as you get our written permission first. Contact us for an explanatory booklet and an

application form. There may be an administration charge for processing your application.

You may also need to check building regulations or get planning permission from your local council. We may refuse permission if you have a starter tenancy or if we think the work is dangerous, unattractive, if it reduces the value of the property, or gives us a duty to repair and maintain it. If you carry out work without our written permission, we may ask you to put it back the way it was.

your neighbourhood

Soha believes that good neighbourhoods are as important as quality homes. Our Neighbourhoods Officers help to look after your local area, supported by contractors, mobile caretakers, Technical Officers, and other staff. We have service standards for our grounds maintenance work and you can contact the Soha Customer Services team to find out more. If you live in a flat, or on an estate, it's likely that Soha owns some communal areas in your block or neighbourhood.

✓ Please remember to:

- keep communal areas clean and tidy.
- keep all pets under control, making sure they don't foul communal areas.
- report any faults or repairs to communal areas to Soha, for example, communal doors, lights and door-entry systems.
- put out waste and recycling bins on collection days, not before.
- use proper bulky waste collection services (or consider donating to a charity shop or a recycling site on the internet) to dispose of large items.

✗ Please don't:

- be a nuisance to your neighbours.
- keep any dangerous substances in your home or outbuildings, such as petrol, bottled gas or welding equipment.

The Members' Forum also has an

Estates Improvement Budget for small improvements. Contact us on **01235 515 900** or **0800 014 15 45** (Freephone) for further information on how to apply for one of these grants for your community.

Our Neighbourhoods Team regularly visit estates and communal areas to check their condition. We also work with the police and local council to tackle any nuisance. We would welcome your help to keep our neighbourhoods safe, clean and green, so please let us know if there are any issues you're concerned about.

keeping you safe in your soha home

Working with tenants, we have put together the following standards for how we will deal with antisocial behaviour.

We will:

- respond to reports of urgent or serious reports of anti-social behaviour (e.g. assault, racial harassment, domestic abuse and serious harassment) within one working day
- respond to reports of antisocial behaviour in writing within five working days.
- handle information which tenants give us sensitively and confidentially.
- develop an action plan with you to tackle the problem.
- thoroughly investigate all complaints of anti-social behaviour that are reported to us, keeping you informed of progress.
- work with our partner agencies, such as the police, to prevent and deter anti-social behaviour.

what is anti-social behaviour?

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) can take many forms – it might be a problem with your neighbour which can be quickly resolved, or it might be something much more serious, such as hate-related harassment.

As a Soha Housing tenant, you are responsible for your own actions and

the behaviour of other members of your household and visitors to your home.

Types of anti-social behaviour can include:

- hate-related (harassment based on race, gender, disability status, religion, age or sexual orientation)
- verbal abuse, harassment or threats
- vandalism or damage to property
- pet or animal nuisance
- nuisance from vehicles
- drugs, substance or alcohol misuse or drug dealing
- domestic violence or abuse
- other physical violence
- litter, rubbish or fly tipping
- garden nuisance
- other criminal behaviour/crimes.

unwelcome behaviour

This is different from ASB. Some incidents may occur due to differences in lifestyles or just a lack of consideration. Examples might be:

- children playing
- inconsiderate parking
- nuisance from cats or birds.

Take a look at our leaflet **unwelcome behaviour** on the Soha website for more information and suggestions on how to handle it.

what can I do?

If you are having a problem with your neighbour, talking to them is often the simplest way to resolve things. We do rely on our customers reporting problems and incidents to us, as we cannot be in your community all the time.

You can report complaints of anti-social behaviour to Soha by:

- visiting our website **www.soha.co.uk**
- emailing **housing@soha.co.uk**
- using the Soha Housing app.
- calling Customer Services on **01235 515 900** or **0800 014 1545** (Freephone).
- writing to us. Please give us your name and address to help us deal with your report. We will also need the name and address of anyone involved and the times, dates and a full description of the incident(s).

****Always call 999 in an emergency****

feedback and complaints

At Soha we actively welcome feedback from our customers so we can improve our services. We want you to tell us when something isn't right so we can resolve the problem for you. If you would like to know more about our complaints procedure, please visit our website or contact us by email, phone or the Soha app.

membership of soha

You will be eligible to become a shareholding Member of Soha when you transfer from your Starter Tenancy to an Assured Tenancy. This is another, and more influential, way of becoming involved. It means the biggest decisions about the company's future could be made by you.

We will remind you about the opportunity to become a Member at your eight-month settling in visit with your Neighbourhood Officer.

and finally...

We hope you'll enjoy being a Soha tenant! If you choose to leave your current home, it may be because you'd like to swap your home with another social tenant elsewhere; please contact us and we can tell you how to apply for a mutual exchange. And, as you get older or your children move home, you may wish to downsize. We can help you find a smaller home that is cheaper to run.

If you'd like to be involved in shaping our services, talk to us about activities that interest you. Tenants who get involved can often earn shopping vouchers as a thank you and have associated travel and childcare costs paid.

your soha home

your district council is:

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your rental income officer/your welfare reform officer is:

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your independent living advisor is:

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your neighbourhood officer is:

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your technical officer is:

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your tenancy support officer is:

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If you'd like to register on our website please go to **www.soha.co.uk/register**

If you'd like to register for the free Soha Housing app, please use this QR code on your smartphone or search your app store for Soha Housing. You will need to have your tenancy number handy to complete the registration.