

Southdown

Tenant Handbook

2025



Telephone
01273 405800



Email
housing@southdown.org



Website
www.southdown.org

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As a tenant of Southdown, I believe that **the tenant handbook is an essential document** that provides not only key information but also details about policies and procedures from our landlord that all clients need to be aware of where possible.

It helps explain what Southdown expect of us as tenants, and what we as tenants should expect from Southdown as our landlord.”

- Southdown tenant



Your Housing Officer is





Your Housing Assistant is





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Your Tenant Handbook

This handbook contains important information about your rights and responsibilities as a tenant and what you can expect from us. It provides guidance, contact details and where to find further information such as policies. If you need a copy in another language or format such as large print, braille, EasyRead or any other way, please get in touch.



About Southdown

Since 1972, we've been in Sussex, making a positive difference to the lives of people with mental health challenges, learning disabilities, and those facing homelessness.

As the largest not-for-profit care, support, and housing provider in Sussex, we support over 10,000 people each year over 60 different services.

We believe that no one should feel alone or without support. By understanding each person's unique experiences, strengths, and potential, we support them to take meaningful steps towards a better life.

To find out more about Southdown, go to: www.southdown.org/about-us or scan the QR code opposite using a smartphone camera or designated QR code scanner app.



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I was referred to Southdown Supported Accommodation services and happily rehoused in 2024. During the period I also made use of services at Southdown's excellent Recovery College engaging in workshops and classes which centred on mental health which enabled me to gain insights into problems I was having, but more importantly enabled me to meet other individuals who were struggling with similar issues.

- Southdown tenant

How to contact us

Our opening hours are: Monday to Thursday 9am-5pm, and Fridays 9am-4.30pm.



Call us on: 01273 405800



Email us at: housing@southdown.org



Visit our website at: www.southdown.org

Reporting a repair

Where we are responsible for repairs, you can report it by contacting our Property Services team.



Call us on: 01273 898744



Email us at: property.services@southdown.org

In the event of an emergency this phone number is also available out of hours every day. Any calls made outside of our working hours will be answered by our out of hours call centre team. An urgent order will be raised if you have an emergency repair that can't wait. All other repairs will be reported to us the next working day.



Major emergencies

A major emergency is classed as a serious fire, flood or major structural issue. Our out of hours call centre will coordinate a management response from us if necessary.

For more information about repairs, turn to page 7.

Working together charter

We both have responsibilities in keeping your home a safe place to live. In this section, we will outline the ways we work together.



Relationships: We will treat you with fairness and respect in everything we do. We will work together with you as an individual and our relationship with you will be based on choice, honesty, and transparency.



Communication: We will provide timely, clear, easy-to-understand information about important matters, including your Southdown home and local community, the services we offer, how we're working to solve problems, how we are run, and our performance.



Voice and influence: We value your opinions and will use your feedback to influence decisions. We want you to feel heard on matters that are important to you, and you can share your feedback without worry. We will learn from your feedback and keep you informed of the impact it has made.



Accountability: We will work with you to review, scrutinise, and hold us accountable for the decisions that affect your services, and Southdown home.



Quality: You can expect your services, and Southdown home to be of good quality, well-maintained, safe, and well-managed.



Equality, diversity, and inclusion: We are committed to being inclusive and creating a sense of belonging and will support you to find ways to engage with us. We will make sure to hear from people from all backgrounds and experiences, recognising their strengths and potential. We will reach out to underrepresented groups through targeted communications and consultations.



When things go wrong: If something goes wrong, you will have simple ways to raise concerns, make complaints, and get help. We will be responsive and offer support and advice when needed.

Our charter reflects our commitments to the National Housing Federation's Together with Tenants Charter, the CQC's Quality Statements, the Regulator for Social Housing's Consumer Standards, Southdown's Beacon framework and working in a psychologically informed way.





Tenancy agreement

We guided you through your tenancy agreement when you signed it. It is a legal document that outlines your rights and responsibilities as a tenant. We recommend keeping this handbook and your agreement in a safe place.

You are legally responsible for keeping to the terms of the agreement that you signed.

As you settle into your new home, if you would like to be involved in helping us be the best landlord we can be, please get in touch. You can read more about this in the Share your feedback section on page 14.

Annual visits

We want you to feel safe and happy at home - and our annual visits play an important part in this. Every year you will get a visit from a member of your housing team. It's one way we can make sure your home remains safe and is in good condition. It is also an opportunity to discuss any issues you have and find out how we can support you.

Adaptations

We will seek to identify adaptation needs during home and annual tenant visits. We will ask you if you have a disability that makes it difficult for you to manage everyday tasks and live safely. If a need is identified, we will explore potential solutions with you and follow the appropriate referral route. You can also request an adaptation by contacting us by phone, email, or in person.

Property inspections

We conduct Stock Condition Surveys every five years. A Stock Condition Survey is an inspection of the inside and outside of your home. These help us to assess the age and condition of each property, so we can plan possible future maintenance. We carry out these surveys to comply with the Government's 'Decent Homes Standard'. You will be notified of inspection dates.



Setting up your utilities

We can support you with setting up your utilities. We recommend that a meter reading be taken for gas and electricity when moving in so that you only pay for what you use.

If you're unsure of anything, contact our Housing team



Call us on: 01273 405800



Email us at: housing@southdown.org

Pictured below: Some of Southdown's Housing team





Repairs and compliance

We are committed to providing housing that is in a good state of repair. As some of our properties are leased from other landlords, we may not be responsible for the repair service. If repairs are not our responsibility, we will have provided you with the contact details you need in your sign-up pack.

To report a repair, contact our Property Services team



Call us on: 01273 898744



Email us at: property.services@southdown.org

If you are reporting the repair by email, please try and include a photo of the issue. We will log your issue and arrange for one of our approved contractors to contact you to arrange for the repair work to be carried out. For more complicated jobs we may arrange a visit first to look at the problem.

The phone number above is available 24/7 in the event of an emergency or urgent repair. Any calls made outside of our working hours will be answered by our out of hours call centre team. An urgent order will be raised if you have an emergency repair that can't wait. All other repairs will be reported to us the next working day.

Pictured below: Some of Southdown's Property Services team



Our repair responsibilities

Where we are fully responsible for repairs, we will keep the following in good repair and proper working order:

- The structure and exterior of your home.
- The installations supplied by us for plumbing, heating, sanitation, gas, water and electricity.
- Any common entrances, halls, stairways, lifts, entry phones.
- Any furniture or fittings provided by us.

If you experience a power cut, burst gas or water mains you will need to contact your energy provider. There are notes pages at the end of this handbook where you can make a note of your providers and their contact details.

Repair timescales

When we receive your call, we will log your repair request and allocate a priority category of either Emergency, Urgent or Routine. This defines the target response time for the repair you have reported.

- **Emergency repairs (completion target: 24 hours)**
Any repair which is required to avoid an immediate danger to the safety of people or to prevent serious damage to the building, for example; blocked drains, loss of electrical power, gas leaks etc.
- **Urgent repairs (completion target: 5 working days)**
Repairs which affect the comfort of tenants or which are necessary for the re-letting of the property, for example; minor electrical faults, faulty communal TV aerial.
- **Routine repairs (completion target: 20 working days)**
These are all other repairs which do not fall into the Emergency or Urgent categories.



Your repair responsibilities

- Repairs or re-decoration due to misuse, neglect or damage by you or your visitors.
- Repairs to any equipment or belongings.
- Replacement of lost keys (unless stolen and a crime reference is provided).
- Keeping your home reasonably clean, tidy and in a good decorative order.
- Keeping the garden tidy, where there is one.
- Reporting repairs and allowing us access to carry out the maintenance work.
- Replacing toilet seats, plugs on appliances, light bulbs, fuses, sink and bath plugs, batteries for smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.
- Regular testing of smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.
- Ensuring all fire doors within your property are not damaged.
- Clearing blocked sinks and toilets.
- Cleaning, descaling and disinfecting all shower heads and taps regularly.

This list is for guidance only and you can speak to us if you have any queries.

Recharges

We may charge you for the cost of repairs, replacements or clearance work that are identified as your responsibility.

Examples include:

- Repairs due to misuse (for example, non-flushable items blocking toilets and drains)
- Missed appointments with contractors
- Replacement keys
- Damage caused by you or your visitors
- Property clearances
- Unauthorised alterations to your property

Access for repairs and compliance checks

- It is your responsibility to provide access to contractors and make reasonable efforts to keep the work area clear of obstructions. If you are not available for an arranged appointment, you must give at least 24 hours' notice by contacting the contractor or Property Services to reschedule.
- There are several property compliance checks that we need to carry out and we will write to you with appointment details, giving sufficient notice.
- Please let us know if you are going to be away from the property for more than two weeks. We may need to gain access to your accommodation without your permission in an emergency.

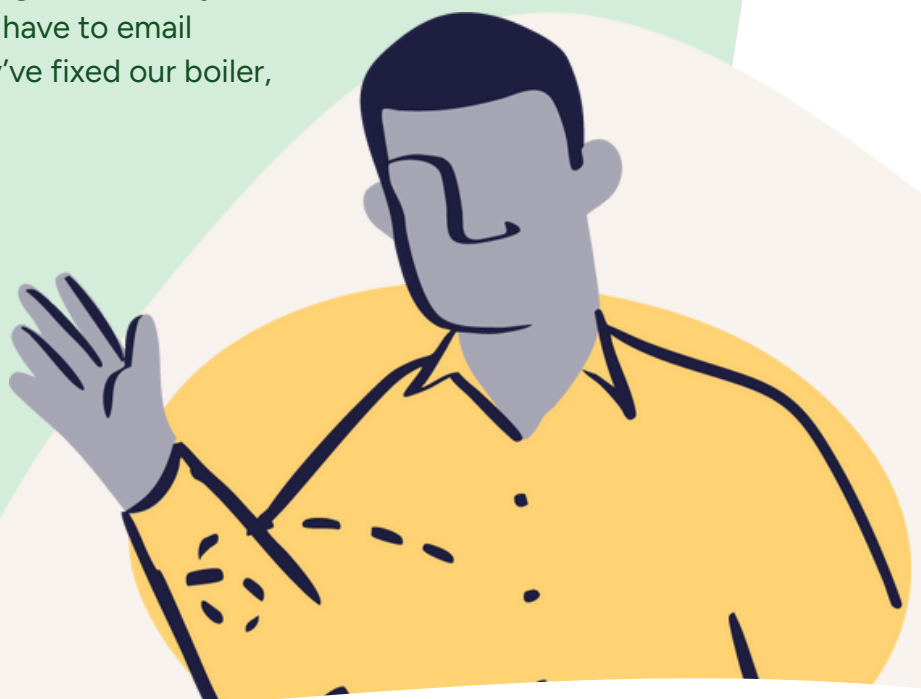
Making changes to your home

You will need to ask permission for any plans to carry out any type of improvement or alteration to your home. You will need to tell us details of the work you want to be carried out and we can support you to do this.

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I have had a good 16 years living at Southdown. I like the way Southdown do repairs; if there's anything broken, they'll come and fix it, we just have to email Property Services. They've fixed our boiler, and our radiators.

- Southdown tenant





Money matters

Paying your rent

You must pay your rent when it is due, not only because it is a requirement of your tenancy agreement, but because it allows us to deliver good quality housing and services.

You will have been sent a rent payment card, with information on how to use it, when your tenancy started. You can also make payments by direct debit or standing order.

You will receive a rent statement four times a year, but you can ask for your balance at any time by contacting us to request a statement.

What your rent pays for

Your rent pays for the management and maintenance of your home. You may also pay service charges to meet the costs of any utility bills, furnishings, equipment and services provided by us as your landlord.

We review rents and service charges each year, with changes usually taking effect in early April. We will give you at least four weeks' notice of any changes. If you are receiving Universal Credit for your housing costs you will need to notify Universal Credit each April of your new rent amount. Let us know if you need support to do this.

Difficulty paying your rent?

Please don't worry alone – we are here to help you get back on track, so don't hesitate to get in touch with us. We can work with you to set up a repayment plan and put you in touch with our Financial Inclusion Officer for support. It is important to keep your rent payments up to date to avoid legal action.

Universal Credit

If you have been told that you need to apply for Universal Credit, please contact our Housing Team.



Call us on: 01273 405800



Email us at: housing@southdown.org

They will refer you to our Financial Inclusion Officer who can support you with the process.





Getting involved

Southdown's Client and Tenant Involvement Lead, Rebecca, runs many of the involvement activities Southdown offers; she will make sure that your voice is heard across the organisation.

Southdown offer a range of activities to get involved in such as:

- Completing surveys.
- Being part of new worker interviews.
- Reviewing documents, policies, and procedures.
- Scrutiny and assembly panels.
- Shaping services and organisational projects.
- Sharing pictures of your achievements in the Tenant Newsletter.
- Providing quotes for stories and reports.

We like our activities to be led by tenants (and clients in our other services), as you know what you need from us better than anyone else. We will provide support, guidance, and the resources needed to develop any activities that reflect your priorities and interests.

Feel free to contact Rebecca and let her know what types of activities or topics you would like to be involved in.

To get involved, contact Rebecca



Email Rebecca at: CT@southdown.org



Call Rebecca on: 07458 146991





Share your feedback

As you settle into your new home, if you would like to be involved in helping us be the best landlord we can be, please get in touch with us. We'd love to hear from you and understand how we can best support you. Your feedback is very helpful to us; it helps us understand what we are doing well and any improvements we can make in the future.

There are several ways you can provide feedback, such as:

- Telling us your comments, compliments, and complaints directly.
- Responding to various satisfaction surveys and texts.
- Joining in with Client and Tenant Involvement activities.

You can speak to any Southdown worker to share your ideas for improving the services we provide and pass on your comments, compliments, and complaints.



Complaints

We understand that there are times when you might be unhappy with the service you have received. It is important to us to know when you're not satisfied so that we can work out a way to resolve any concerns you have. Raising a complaint will not affect your tenancy or the services we provide to you.

We know that making a complaint can be daunting, but we are here to help. Your complaint will be treated in strictest confidence and only discussed with people who need to know. You will not be treated differently for raising a complaint. Like all feedback, we take complaints as an opportunity to learn and develop our services.

How to raise a complaint

You can speak to our Housing or Property Services teams, or use one of the following options:



Call us on: 01273 405800



Email us at: info@southdown.org



Feedback form at: www.southdown.org/feedback-contacts



Write to us at: Southdown, 2 Bell Lane, Lewes, BN7 1JU

You can also contact the Housing Ombudsman for advice at any time. Their website is: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk. Or you can write to them at: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET, or call them on 0300 111 3000.

Consultation

We consult with tenants where a change is proposed that substantially affects the management and maintenance of their home. Tenant's views will be taken into account before any final decisions are made. The results of the consultation and the decisions that follow will be reported to any tenants who are affected.



Feeling safe and comfortable in your home and neighbourhood

Everyone has the right to feel safe and comfortable in their own home. Sometimes we need to work together to keep our environment secure and welcoming for everyone. Continue reading to explore what behaviours can be damaging to ourselves and our communities.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

Examples of anti-social behaviour include:

- Intimidation and harassment.
- Aggressive and threatening language and behaviour.
- Using housing accommodation to sell drugs, or for other unlawful purposes.
- Noise nuisance.
- Actual violence against people and property (including domestic violence).
- Hate behaviour that targets members of identified groups because of their perceived differences.
- Uncontrolled pets.
- Criminal damage (including graffiti and vandalism).

We aim to provide an environment that is safe and free from harassment, nuisance, and illegal behaviour to our tenants and the wider community. We will not tolerate anti-social behaviour against or from our tenants or others. All reports of this are taken seriously, logged, and investigated.

You can find out more about how we manage anti-social behaviour by viewing our policy and procedure on our website or requesting a copy from us.



If you feel concerned or threatened, please speak to the Housing team. We will ask you to fill out diary sheets or discuss alternative ways for you to log the dates, times, duration, and how the incident(s) have made you feel. **Call 999 for your local police station if an incident is so serious that you are in immediate danger.**

Hate crime

A hate crime is any criminal act that someone believes is driven by hostility or prejudice against a person's disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

We take all reports of harassment very seriously and won't allow discrimination of any kind. We will do everything we can to support any tenant affected by hate crime and treat you with compassion and sensitivity. For more information, please ask for a copy of our Hate Crime leaflet.



Domestic abuse

We are committed to responding to disclosures and incidents of domestic abuse in a responsive, victim-centred and supportive manner.

Any disclosure of domestic abuse will always be treated as a high priority. We will always work with victims and be guided by their wishes and act where we have the power to do so.

Domestic abuse can include a wide range of behaviours. It can include threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, emotional or psychological abuse - not just physical acts of violence.



If you are concerned that another tenant is the victim or perpetrator of domestic abuse or hate crime you should report your concerns to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 200 0247 (24 hours a day).

Safeguarding

We believe that everyone has the right to live in safety. We recognise the negative and potentially long-lasting impact abuse and neglect can have on our tenants. A key part of our role is working to help ensure our tenants are safe – particularly those unable to protect themselves from neglect or abuse.

We work in partnership with other agencies to help prevent abuse and neglect, raise concerns and make safeguarding work as effectively as possible.

Please inform the Housing team if you have any concerns for the safety and wellbeing for yourself or your neighbours.



Property safety

Property safety checks

We are legally required to inspect gas appliances, electrical equipment, fire alarms, and water quality. You'll be notified in advance, and it's important for your safety that these checks take place. Records of these checks are available for you to review by contacting us.

We have a legal duty to complete compliance tests and checks. You are responsible for providing access for us to be able to do this. We will always write to you to let you know in advance when we require access. If you would like to see our testing schedule or inspection certificates, please contact our Property Services team.



Call us on: 01273 898744



Email us at: property.services@southdown.org



Electrical

We test the fixed electrical wiring in your home every five years. To keep everyone safe, please:

- Ensure your electrical appliances are in good condition. Check for damage to cords, plugs, and sockets. Dispose of damaged appliances and report any issues with appliances provided by us (e.g., fridge) to Property Services.
- Do not leave phones, tablets, or laptops plugged in overnight or when you leave home. Unplug items like the TV when not in use.
- Always use the charger that came with your device. Avoid cheap, counterfeit chargers and ensure devices are on hard surfaces while charging.
- Laptops should only be used on hard surfaces to avoid overheating.
- Avoid overloading sockets and never plug one extension lead into another. Use one plug per socket for high-powered appliances like washing machines.
- Keep flammable items away from portable heaters, don't dry clothes on them, and always unplug them when not in use.

Mobility scooters and e-scooters

You should not charge electric scooters or mobility scooters inside the property. If it's absolutely necessary, please contact our Housing Team and we will discuss your situation with our Health and Safety team. Ensure the vehicle is placed where it won't block escape routes in case of fire.



Call us on: 01273 405800



Email us at: housing@southdown.org

In the event of a fire in your flat or bedroom

Familiarise yourself with the Fire Action Notice displayed in your building. If a fire occurs, alert others in your flat, make sure everyone evacuates, and close your front door behind you. Leave the building immediately. Stay outside, call 999, and ask for the Fire Service.

For more information about fire safety, please ask for a copy of our Tenant Fire Safety Info and Advice leaflet.



Evacuation

You will have a Person-Centred Fire Risk Assessment (PCFRA) in place, which we review annually. In staffed buildings, we also carry out Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs), which staff will review with you. Please inform us if your circumstances change, even temporarily, as we may need to update your fire safety plan. You can also request a free Home Fire Safety Visit from your local fire service.

Keeping communal areas clear

Communal staircases and corridors must remain clear of items like prams, bicycles, plant pots, mats, and rubbish, as they can block evacuation routes and fuel the spread of fire. We may remove and dispose of items left in these areas, but we will give you notice so you have time to store them elsewhere.



Top tips

Before you go to bed, ensure you're safe from fire by:

- Closing internal doors.
- Turning off or unplugging unnecessary electrical devices.
- Checking that oven, hobs, washing machines, dryers, and portable heaters are off.
- Extinguishing cigarettes, candles, incense, and oil burners safely.
- Clearing your escape route of obstacles.

Insurance

We or your head landlord insure the structure of your home, but you're responsible for insuring the contents. We strongly recommend arranging insurance. For help finding insurance, please contact our Housing team.



Call us on: 01273 405800



Email us at: housing@southdown.org

Your security

To keep your home safe and secure:

- Always lock doors and windows when you leave, even for a few minutes.
- Never leave cash or valuables out in the open.
- Don't let unknown people in; always ask for ID.
- Never hide a key outside; thieves know the hiding spots.
- When going out in the evening, close curtains and leave a light on in a room (not the hall).

Callers you do not know

- If you have a door chain and spy hole, use them to identify callers, or use your intercom if available.
- Always ask for ID from unknown visitors and keep them outside while you check.
- Our staff and contractors carry ID cards with a photo and organisation name.
- If suspicious, call the organisation to verify and contact the police if needed.



Damp, mould and condensation

Damp and mould

Damp and mould can be harmful to your health, particularly if you are vulnerable owing to age or a health condition. You should report any cases of damp and mould to us as soon as you notice them.

Please let us know when you report the issue if you are over 65, have asthma or any other health conditions related to your lungs or have a compromised immune system (for example if you are undergoing treatment for cancer). This will help us to understand the severity of the issue.

Condensation

A certain amount of condensation is to be expected in every home; however, it can become a problem if the moisture builds up and leads to mould growth. You can help to prevent condensation in your home by taking some simple steps:

- Wipe down windows and sills when there is condensation on them. Remember not to dry the cloth on a radiator afterwards as this simply puts the moisture back into the room.
- Ventilate your home where possible by opening the windows for a small amount of time each day. This is especially important in the kitchen whilst cooking and in the bathroom after a bath or shower to help the excess moisture escape.
- Use extractor fans in the kitchen and bathroom if you have them. Keep bathroom and kitchen doors closed until any excess moisture has been transferred outside through open windows or ventilation systems.
- Keep lids on pots and pans whilst cooking to keep the moisture contained.
- Try to keep your home at a constant temperature of around 15 degrees or higher, especially at night.
- Dry your clothes outside where possible.
- Where possible, leave a small gap between your furniture and the walls to allow better air circulation.



Other tenancy matters

Pets

For many people, a pet is a source of happiness and support and is considered to be a beloved family member. We want to ensure that your pets have the best life they can and that the place in which you live is able to support their health and wellbeing. You will need our permission before you get a pet so that we can make sure the area is safe and suitable. We may also need to seek permission from a head landlord where we are not the direct owner of your building.

Please do not get a pet until permission has been granted. You can ask for a copy of the Pet Contract from us or view it on our website.

Smoking

Smoking in communal areas is not allowed under the National Smoke-Free Legislation. Smoking can also be a breach of your tenancy if it causes a risk to health and safety or if it causes your property to fall into an unacceptable condition. If you have any queries or concerns about smoking in your home, get in touch with us and we'll be happy to support.





Ending your tenancy

Wanting to move

We understand you may not stay with us forever. Here you can find out more about what happens should you want to end your tenancy. For full details, please check your Tenancy Agreement, or feel free to ask us any questions you might have.

Transfers

A transfer request from a tenant is where they no longer wish to remain in their current property but do want and need to continue to receive accommodation-based support.

Transfers are discretionary and may be offered when:

- You need a greater level of support than we can provide.
- You want to move to be near friends, family, college, or work.
- Your property is no longer suitable for your needs.
- Reasonable attempts to resolve neighbour disputes have been unsuccessful.

If you need an emergency transfer due to risk of harm or property damage, the Local Authority has a duty to provide emergency temporary accommodation. We can support you to be assessed by them for emergency or temporary housing.

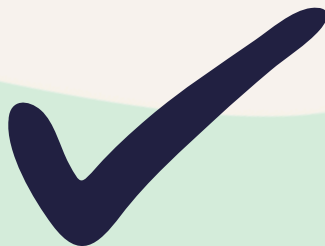
Giving notice

To ensure a smooth end of tenancy, review your tenancy agreement, provide 28 days' notice, leave the property in good condition, and ensure all rent, recharges, and bills are paid. Please refer to your tenancy agreement for more details.

Use our end of tenancy checklist below to make sure you haven't missed anything.

Checklist

- Give us at least four full weeks' notice in writing. Ask us to send you a Termination of Tenancy form to fill out and return to us.
- Allow us access to inspect your home before your tenancy ends.
- Ensure your keys (including meter keys) are returned.
- Ensure the property is left in a good and clean condition and cleared of all your belongings and rubbish.
- Ensure you have made arrangements to clear any rent arrears or recharges that you owe us.





Your notes

Confidentiality and Data Protection

We are committed to making sure that any personal information you provide remains confidential to you and will only be disclosed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Your personal information will only be looked at and used to help make sure we give you an effective service. More information about how we store and use your data is available on our website, at www.southdown.org



Southdown, 2 Bell Lane, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1JU

Southdown is an exempt charity registered with the regulator of social housing (L1829). Southdown is also a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 (20755R).



www.southdown.org