

1. Moving In



Welcome to St Martins!

We hope you will be happy in your new home.

St Martin of Tours is a housing association that works with people who need help and/or support to live more independently. This is commonly known as supported housing. People normally live in accommodation managed or owned by us for up to two years. This handbook is to help you with information that you may need during that time.

If you would like any of the information in this handbook explained in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact your key worker. If you would like a copy of any policy or procedure that we use, please ask us.

If you need this handbook or any other document we produce to be translated into other languages or formats, e.g. Braille, audio tape, please let your key worker know.

Useful addresses and numbers:

Head office

318-320 St Paul's Road,
London N1 2LF
T: 020 7704 3820 F: 020 7704 3832

Englefield Road Office

21 Englefield Road, London N1 4JX
T: 020 7704 3820 F: 020 7249 6930

For any emergency, out of office hours, please call: 0845 757 3842

Your key worker is your main contact at St Martins. S/he will explain your tenancy/licence agreement and the detail of the services you will receive. They will also explain how to use the equipment in your new home, such as the washing machine, the heating controls etc.

We provide the basic furniture you will need. They are listed in the 'furniture inventory' that is attached to your tenancy/licence agreement. Please make sure you check the list carefully and raise any questions with your key worker. You may also be provided with a set of bedding and a starter set of pots and pans in some of our services. You may be able to bring some of your personal furniture but this will depend on the type of home you are moving into.

Your tenancy/licence agreement

The tenancy or licence agreement you sign when you move in sets out both your rights and your responsibilities. It is always very important that you read these agreements carefully, as it is a legal contract between you and your landlord.

If there is anything in the agreement you do not understand, ask for it to be explained before you sign it.

Your tenancy or licence agreement sets out:

- The terms on which you occupy the accommodation
- Your rights as a tenant
- St Martins' responsibilities as a landlord.

Your rights

Your agreement or licence gives you certain rights. Here are some of them.



Your privacy

Your home is private and you have the right to peacefully occupy it without interference. Our staff will not enter without your consent, outside of the reasons detailed in your tenancy or licence agreement. Please read your agreement.

Repairs and maintenance: You have the right to have repairs completed and maintenance services delivered within a reasonable timescale. Please remember to report maintenance problems as soon as possible.

Involvement in decision-making: You have the right to be consulted about any changes that will substantially affect you, regarding housing and maintenance. You have a right to be involved in the wider community around you (friends, family, community, etc.).

Information: You have the right to certain information from St Martins:

- About the terms of your tenancy or licence
- About our responsibility to do repairs
- About our policies and procedures.

Your responsibilities

As well as rights, being a tenant also gives you responsibilities. These are set out in your tenancy/licence agreement. You should look carefully at your agreement and if there is anything you do not understand, please ask your key worker.

Paying your rent: It is your responsibility to make sure that your rent and service charges are paid even if you are receiving Housing Benefit. Your key worker will help explain how to pay your rent and service charges, and can also help you to claim

housing benefit. If you get into arrears, you could be at risk of losing your home. If you have any problems paying your rent, or your circumstances change, please speak to your key worker as soon as possible.

Behaviour in and around your home:

It is your responsibility to ensure that you, and anybody visiting you, behave responsibly both in and around your property. For example, this means not causing a nuisance, disturbance or damage.

In your home

You may need to share parts of the building with others. These common parts may include the kitchen, living room, bathroom, hallways, stairs and garden. At some properties, we employ cleaning staff to do this for you, but you are still expected to take reasonable care of these areas yourself. If there is no cleaner provided, cleaning is your responsibility.

If you have your own TV, you must buy your own TV licence.

When disposing of rubbish, please think of your neighbours! Make sure it is put outside, in the correct area in sealed bags or in the bins. Your key worker will explain where this is. Do not leave rubbish in communal hallways or in the garden.

If you have large items (e.g. furniture) to get rid of, contact your local council's refuse department as some of them provide a special collection service.

Normally, you are NOT allowed to keep pets. Please speak to your key worker before you consider getting a pet.



Services at St Martins

Support services: Our main aim is to work with you towards moving on to an independent home of your own. It is part of your key workers job to:

- Write a plan with you about what you want to achieve and agree how we can help you to get there
- To help you look for advice and support that we cannot directly help you with
- Give you advice about managing your home
- Advise you about managing money, bills or debts which might include claiming welfare benefits
- Supporting you to reach goals that you may have (for example, helping you to access training or employment)
- Help you access other services in the community such as legal advice, health care, leisure, cultural or religious facilities
- Help you to choose from the different housing options that you may have in the future and to move on successfully
- Give advice or support on personal issues or guidance on how to tackle a problem
- Help you to consider your options for moving on and to settle into your new home, when the time comes.

Working together: As part of the support you receive, you will have a named worker who will meet with you regularly. You will agree together an individual support or action plan. This will be based on an assessment of your needs and the outcomes that you want to achieve.

You and your key worker will work together on your plan. It will be reviewed

regularly with your key worker but you may also ask for a review at any time. If you do not agree with anything in your plan or assessment of your needs, you have the right to have this recorded in your plan or assessment. You have a right to receive a copy of the plan if you wish. You also have the right to appeal any decisions made about your support or in your assessment.

If you are still not happy with any part of your support service, please tell us. You might wish to contact your key worker, to write to us or to complain. Please see our complaints information booklet to help you to do this.

Your key worker is also your main point of contact on all matters to do with your housing. This includes, paying your rent or any problems you may have living in your home.

Protection from abuse: You have the right to receive a service from us without fear of abuse or harassment. All of our workers are supervised and monitored. We do our best to try and prevent abuse happening. We have procedures in place that cover how staff should behave and everyone who works with us has been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau.

Here are some examples of what could be called abusive:

- Physical, sexual or verbally abusive attack or inappropriate behaviour
- Mishandling of your money
- Opening or reading your mail
- Setting rules that infringe your human rights to privacy or freedom (this is called institutional abuse)



- Psychological abuse or neglect.

We take allegations of abuse very seriously. You should never be afraid of any person who is working for us. If this happens or you suspect this is happening for any reason, please contact our head office and ask to speak to one of the senior managers. We will listen to you sympathetically and where necessary, take immediate action to protect you. We have a procedure for dealing with abuse. Please ask for a copy of this at anytime.

To contact your key worker

Your key worker will visit you at periods agreed with you. However, if you would like to contact them outside of these appointments or agreed meetings, please contact them:

At the office: All key workers have an office base. Please ask your key worker for office opening hours and useful contact details.

There are other services that can help you out of hours. Your key worker will be able to help you find out this information.

Please use this space to insert any useful phone numbers:

Useful Numbers

In case of an emergency: In a real emergency or crisis always call **999**

**In case of an emergency:
In the event of a serious
accident, fire, death,
flood, act of violence –
Call 999 first.**

**For all other emergencies,
you can also call:
St Martins' Emergency Line:
0845 757 3842
NHS DIRECT: 08 45 46 47**

Benefits

If you are unemployed and receiving certain welfare benefits (e.g. Job Seekers Allowance or Sickness Benefit) you may be entitled to Housing Benefit. Your key worker will help you apply.

If you are receiving Housing Benefit, you will need to renew your claim regularly. The Housing Benefit Office will send you a new form every 6-12 months; you must complete and return it so that you continue to get Housing Benefit.

Rents and service charge

We have a Board of Management that sets your rents and service charges. Your rent and service charge is in your Agreement. Rent levels are normally increased once a year and we will write and give you one month's advance notice of this increase.

We are regulated by The Housing Corporation.

Your rent and service charge covers the costs of running your home. Included in the overall payment is the service charge. **You may be responsible for paying some of this even if you are on housing benefit.**

The service charge covers items such as gas, electricity and water rates. It is based on the actual cost to St Martins of providing these services to you.

There are a number of ways that you can pay:

- By CASH to your key worker
- BY CHEQUE or POSTAL ORDER by post or in person
- By STANDING ORDER paid directly from your bank account to St Martins on a regular basis
- By BANK GIRO CREDIT if available. Please ask your key worker how to set up this facility.

If paying by cheque or postal order, please make them payable to 'St Martin of Tours'.

If paying directly to a key worker or another member of staff, **please remember to obtain a receipt of payment.**

You will be sent a rent statement regularly, which you can check against your receipts. If you think there might have been a mistake, or if you have a query, please contact your key worker.

Rent Arrears

If you fall behind with your rent, your key worker will contact you. You should pay the amount due as soon as possible. If you cannot pay your arrears in one go, your key worker will meet with you to discuss a

Repayment Agreement. If you do not keep to this agreement you could lose your home.

Legal action

If you are in serious rent arrears and if you have not made or have broken an agreement to pay your arrears by instalments, St Martins may take legal action to evict you. The action we will take is outlined below. You should note that at every stage of the process you could prevent further action being taken by making an agreement to pay your arrears and by keeping to it.

If we do proceed with legal action you could end up losing your home.

It is your responsibility to pay your rent when it is due. Failure to pay your rent will be managed according to the organisation's Rent Arrears Policy. Below is an outline of the Rent Arrears Policy. If you wish to have a copy of the more detailed policy please speak to your key worker.

Arrears action

Up to 2 weeks

Send first reminder letter.

Request payment or for resident to make contact to discuss any problems.

3-4 weeks

Send second letter asking for payment/ arrange visit or appointment to discuss arrears. Set up agreement/action to pay.

5-6 weeks

Send third warning letter in line with second letter sent. Visit/Office interview.

7 weeks

Send letter giving 7 days Notice of Seeking Possession.



8 weeks

Notice of Seeking Possession to be served.
Send accompanying letter.

Data protection & confidentiality

Information about you and your tenancy or licence agreement is contained in a personal file, which is kept in a secure place. The file contains your original application for housing, your tenancy or licence agreement and copies of correspondence to and from you. It also contains letters that we may have received from outside agencies, individuals or organisations, as well as your assessment and support plans.

Personal and sensitive information about residents is kept confidential. You may examine your file at our Head Office at a time arranged with your key worker. We do not have the right to show you third party information without the consent of that person. For instance, a letter from a GP is information that belongs to the GP. We can help you to ask for permission to see this type of information, if you wish.

You have the right to receive your mail unopened.

The computer system records the details of rent accounts and names and addresses of residents. Rent accounts, names and addresses are administered through the Finance and Administration departments.

Under the Data Protection Act 1984, St Martins is prevented from disclosing computerised information to unauthorised third parties. Legally it allows us to keep the information as long as we use it in the correct way.

St Martins will not normally pass on any information about residents to other individuals or organisations without prior consent of the resident concerned.

Exceptions to this are:

- Where St Martins is referring you to another organisation or service for re-housing, training or support and the information is needed by that organisation or service and you have given your explicit consent.
- Where you have given your explicit consent for us to share information
- Where we are required to give the information by law
- If you are under eighteen years of age and we believe that you are at risk of significant harm
- If we consider that information about you is in the substantial public interest, for instance, that it would harm someone else if we did not disclose information that you have given us.

A copy of St Martins' Confidentiality Policy and Child Protection Policy are available from your key worker.

2. Community Living



Introduction

St Martins recognises that antisocial behaviour has a serious impact on the quality of life of service users and the local community. St Martins will not tolerate antisocial behaviour.

Expectations

What is expected of you:

- Respect the rights of your neighbours and the local community.

What you can expect from us:

- Treat everyone fairly
- Monitor and review all cases of harassment
- Work with police, local authorities and other agencies to promote community safety
- Respond to and investigate all complaints about nuisance and harassment
- Aim to resolve any problems.

What is meant by nuisance and harassment

Any kind of harassment by tenants, family/friends of tenants, neighbours, visitors, contractors or members of staff will not be tolerated.

Nuisance and Antisocial Behaviour: This is when a person or their visitor causes annoyance to or disturbs others. Some nuisance, such as noise, can be dealt with by the Local Authority. Some, particularly violence, could also be a criminal offence. Serious forms of nuisance may include:

- Physical abuse
- Repeated verbal abuse

- Repeated and deliberate disturbance by noise
- Littering/obstruction of common areas.

Harassment: This is when a person or a group of people are troubled or tormented deliberately and persistently causing their peace and comfort to be disrupted. Harassment is actually a criminal offence, and you may wish to report it to the police. People often harass others because of their race, sex, sexuality, disability, age, mental illness or appearance. Attacks on property can also be termed harassment.

Some examples of harassment could be:

- Racist or sexist graffiti
- Abusive language, insults or threats.
- Property being damaged or vandalised regularly
- Attempted arson
- Persistent obscene, racist or abusive telephone calls or letters
- Physical assault or threats of violence.
- Unwanted or unwelcome sexual comments, or actions.

Taking action

If you are suffering from nuisance or harassment, please do not suffer in silence. Inform your key worker as soon as possible.

Talking to the other person can often solve the problem. You might want your keyworker to help you do this. People often aren't aware of the problems they are causing.

However, in more serious cases of harassment or threats, or if talking has not worked, more formal action may be



necessary. Talk to your key worker for further help and advice.

Proof is essential when dealing with a complaint. If you think someone is causing nuisance, or is harassing you, it is important to keep a record, such as a diary, as early as possible. This may be useful as evidence if action needs to be taken.

You do not have to put up with any form of harassment. We are here to support you and aim to resolve situations like this. We will do all we can to help. There are a variety of solutions, so the earlier you talk to your keyworker, the better.

For further information please refer to the *'Making a Complaint'* booklet in this handbook. Also, to the following documents, which are available on request from your key worker:

- Antisocial Behaviour Policy
- Harassment Policy
- Complaints Procedure.



3. Maintenance and Repairs



Introduction

St Martin of Tours Housing Association is committed to providing and maintaining high quality accommodation for all of its tenants. The following information is about the service that you can expect to receive from the Maintenance Department and to assist you when reporting repairs.

Please note, St Martins may not be your landlord. We manage some housing for other landlords and this might effect how your repairs are dealt with. Please ask your Key Worker or the Maintenance Department for advice.

Our responsibilities

We are responsible for keeping the following in good repair:

- The roof, external walls, outside doors and windows, including any external painting
- Gutters, rainwater pipes and drains
- Basins, sinks, bath, toilets, flushing systems, internal water services, pipes, taps and waste pipes
- Electric wiring, associated fixtures and fittings, light bulbs concealed within bulk heads, fluorescent tubes
- Internal gas supplies, where the Association is responsible for paying the gas provider, heating and hot water systems, radiators and fixed heating appliances
- Communal entrances and door entry systems and redecoration of communal hallways
- Internal walls, ceilings, joinery, doors, handles, window catches, internal decorating as part of a planned cyclical

maintenance programme, every five to seven years.

Your responsibilities

You are responsible for:

- Keeping your accommodation in reasonable condition, i.e. the cleaning of cookers, fridges, and other fixtures and fittings
- Ensuring adequate use of heating and ventilation to keep the property free from condensation
- Taking all reasonable precautions to prevent damage to the property by fire, frost, the bursting of pipes or the blocking of drains
- Attempting to clear blocked sink and waste pipes with a plunger, replacing plugs and chains on sinks, basins and baths, replacing toilet seats
- Replacing electrical plugs, ordinary light bulbs, domestic fuses, and the resetting of trip switches
- Testing battery operated smoke alarms regularly and reporting any malfunction to the Maintenance Department immediately. Please do not remove the batteries from these alarms
- Not carrying out any alteration to the property including the installation of satellite dishes, without the written consent of the Association.
- Providing reasonable access for our contractors to carry out repairs
- Insurance of your own belongings.

Please note that deliberate damage to the property, by either yourself or your visitors will be charged for.



Contacting the maintenance department

Office Hours

9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

Freephone telephone number

0800 085 1508

E-mail:

maintenance@stmartinoftours.org.uk

Contacting the out of hours maintenance emergency service

Hours

5pm to 9am Mon-Fri; Weekends;

Bank Holidays.

Telephone number

0845 757 3842

How to report repairs

Tenants are required to report repairs to the Association as soon as possible. You can report a repair by one of the following methods:

- Contacting the Maintenance Department
- Contacting your Key Worker or a staff member on site.

Please give as much information as possible about the repair to the person you are speaking to. This will help to ensure you receive a prompt, effective and efficient service.

Once your repair is reported

For most repairs (except for emergencies) you will receive a letter from us giving you the name and telephone number of the contractor. They will make an appointment with you for one of their staff to call.

The letter will also list:

- The job number
- The response time (this is the time in which the job must be completed).

Some larger repairs may need to be inspected by us before we book a contractor. You will be informed by your Key Worker or the Maintenance Department if this is necessary.

Response times

This is the level of service that you can normally expect from us. This list will also help you when reporting a repair:

Emergency repairs

An emergency repair is one that we aim to complete within 24 hours. In some cases this may mean making the item safe and returning at a later date to complete any outstanding work. An emergency repair is where there is an immediate risk of damage to the property, or major inconvenience to you.

Examples may be:

- Dangerous electrical faults
- Complete electrical failure where St Martins is responsible for providing the supply. **Please remember to check your key meter is charged**
- Major leaks or bursts. **Please remember to turn off the water supply**
- Blocked toilet where there is no other toilet available
- Blocked drains
- Dangerous structures
- Boarding up where security is at risk
- Total loss of heating (in heating season 1st October - 31st March).

Urgent repairs

An urgent repair is one that we aim to complete within seven days.

Examples may be:

- Follow up work initially categorised as an emergency
- Blocked toilet where there is another toilet available
- Most electrical faults and plumbing
- Heating/hot water outside heating season (ie. 1st April - 30th September)

Routine repairs

Examples may be:

- A dripping tap
- Minor tiling
- Minor carpentry
- Minor electrical problems

Non-urgent repairs

A non-urgent repair is one we aim to complete within 90 days.

Examples may be:

- Repairs requiring a technical inspection by a contractor
- Repairs that need to be sent out to tender – ie. the work offered to different contractors to get the best person for the job.

The contractors code of conduct

We require our contractors to ensure that works are carried out with the minimum of disruption to your home. Our contractors should:

- Introduce themselves to you and show proof of identity
- Be appropriately dressed
- Not be judgmental of any tenant

- Explain the nature, purpose and duration of the job and any likely disruption
- Complete the work on consecutive days or at the convenience of the tenant if the job cannot be completed the same day
- Refrain from playing radios, or smoking, and use of inappropriate behaviour or language eg. swearing, personal comments
- Ensure the safety of the tenant's home, visitors and other workers, including the safe storage of materials and equipment
- Protect the property and contents from dust, paint and other damage during works
- Keep the property secure
- Restore services such as gas, water, domestic hot water, electricity and heating (or provide temporary heating) at the end of each working day
- Clear rubbish from inside and outside the accommodation daily and remove from the property on completion of the works
- Comply with all relevant health and safety legislation
- Arrange to do the work during reasonable hours ie. between 8am and 5pm, Mon to Fri.

Quality control and complaints

We aim to inspect the majority of completed repairs and will instruct the contractor to complete any unfinished items or put right any poor quality work.



Alternatively you can request an inspection of completed repair work if you think it is of unacceptable quality by telephoning the Maintenance Department on freephone 0800 085 1508.

You can help us to achieve the highest standards by completing the Tenants Repair Satisfaction Slip – you will find this with the letter sent we sent to you containing information regarding your repair.

If you are not happy with how any problems are dealt with, please refer to the Complaints Procedure available from your Key Worker.

Planned maintenance

We will carry out a detailed survey of all our properties every five to seven years. This allows us to correctly prioritise those works, which are required and include them in our planned maintenance programmes. We will consult you if these affect you substantially or if we are able to offer you a choice.

Examples of such works are:

- External repainting
- Joinery repairs prior to external painting
- The servicing of gas appliances and central heating annually.

St Martins will contact you in advance to advise you of any planned work. They will give details of the contractor, and sometimes the appointment date and time as well. If a date and time is not given, the contractor will call you to arrange this.

Do not forget to ask for identification before allowing callers in to your home

We will make every reasonable effort to consult with tenants before carrying out planned or cyclical maintenance. Wherever possible we will give tenants a choice regarding colour schemes.

Health and safety

In some services staff will regularly check for basic Health and Safety problems eg. loose wires, uneven floors etc. **Please still report any problems you see**, as a general problem may be a Health and Safety issue. If in doubt, speak to your Key Worker.

Fire safety

In the event of discovering a fire you should:

1. Raise the alarm
 - By breaking glass and setting off the fire alarm (where one is available) and/or
 - By shouting **Fire Fire Fire**
2. **Get out of the building.** Try to make sure others have left too, but do not put yourself at risk.
3. Telephone the emergency services by dialing 999 from any phone. Ask for the Fire Service. When connected to Fire Service give them your name and the address where the fire is. Do not replace the receiver until this information has been correctly acknowledged.
4. Do not return to the building until the fire brigade tell you to do so. **Get out and stay out!!**

4. Getting Involved



What is user involvement?

'It's the involvement of Service Users (You) in the management, design and delivery of services'

The overall aim is to involve you, the service user. This could be individually or collectively. Service users have the right to be consulted in many aspects of St Martin of Tours business to Board level.

Our commitment

- To improve service user involvement across the organisation
- To treat all service users with respect and dignity
- To respect diversity within the organisation
- To involve service users in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of services through listening to your suggestions and opinions, etc
- To involve service users in our work, where possible
- To support the service user involvement groups to ensure that it progresses
- To involve service users in policy decision-making processes
- We will make a clear commitment to equal opportunities in all information published both internally and externally
- Our goal is to support all service users in having a say in their housing association.

Ways of getting involved

User Involvement monthly meetings

- Go along to the monthly open User Involvement meetings that service users from other projects attend. These are open for any service users.

- Find out what other service users are experiencing
- Contribute to suggestions on specific matters
- Raise your own opinions and points of view in relation to services provided to you by St Martin's or anything you believe is relevant
- Get involved in 'working groups' to create new service users newsletter, service user website, or indeed any ideas you have to promote the User Involvement Programme.

In user involvement meetings, service users have raised issues relating to maintenance problems, health & safety issues, and shared what's happening at their projects such as in-house training, trips, etc.

Other ways you can get involved

Become a member of the Forum Group

The Forum Group will be a new and more formal style group made up of service users and supported by staff. The main function of the group will be to encourage wider involvement of other service users and with the support of staff, to eventually take control of the Forum business. An important task will be to provide a focused and effective voice for St Martin of Tours service users. The Forum Group will consult service users in the main meetings when dealing with organisation business such as policy changes, service delivery, publications, interview panels, and accommodation issues, etc.

The Forum will then feedback and discuss with St Martins management. Anyone who is interested in being part of the



Forum can speak to his or her keyworker or to any other staff member.

What will the Forum Group do?

It will:

- Promote the User Involvement Programme to encourage participation of all service users living within St Martin of Tours
- Monitor the quality and delivery of the organisation's services to you
- Be the voice for all service users to the organisation
- Be involved in decision-making processes including suggesting policy changes where relevant
- Be involved in how the organisation can improve its properties by participating in various panels
- Participate in and help organise events such as conferences and Annual General Meetings, etc, including your own in-house activities: create working groups for trips
- Nominate 2 service users to sit on the Board of Management, which meets to manage and monitor the organisation's business
- Be involved in the Maintenance Contractors Panel, to ensure that potential new contractors provide a professional and quality service to your properties
- Meet on a monthly basis and include a membership of approx. 6-8 service users plus support staff.

So get involved, have a say and be part of change!

What's in it for me?

- You can include this experience on your C.V. You would be involved in creating and developing new programmes or projects either organisationally or within your own projects
- You will be participating in consultations to do with the hiring of potential new staff members and contractors, be part of working groups to discuss changes to policy. You can include voluntary work as part of a team in a formal style
- You can state that you were part of a service review group
- You can also include your commitment and time spent participating in the User Involvement Programme
- You will be recognised for your input in any publications (internally or externally). You can be part of a working group set up to organise and participate in public events such as staff conferences, recruitment fairs, Annual General Meetings and possibly be nominated to become a Board member
- You may be able to participate in training and fundraising for the User Involvement Programme
- Out of pocket expenses will be paid, e.g. travel, lunch.

5. Complaints



How to make a complaint

So that residents know how to make a complaint, St Martins has a Residents Complaint and Grievance Procedure – a copy of which is available from any member of staff. We have also made a 'picture version' of the complaints procedure, which you will find overleaf.

If you want to make a complaint about anything and feel that you cannot manage to do so yourself, you can ask a member of staff to help you.

We are committed to ensuring that service users are provided with a high quality service. Complaints are an important way of ensuring that standards are maintained. We also want you to feel confident that we take any complaints made very seriously.

We will investigate and aim to resolve any complaints you may have about:

- Other service users
- Staff members
- The quality of services
- Contractors acting on behalf of St Martins.

Each complaint is dealt with individually, fairly and in the strictest of confidence.

We monitor all complaints regularly and aim to investigate and respond within the response times detailed in the following steps 1-3.

Step 1 – Informal resolution

If you have a complaint, the first step is to speak to your key worker. S/he will attempt to resolve problems informally.

Your key worker will help you to work out any grievances you may have in an

effective manner, aiming to resolve the matter without the need to take it further.

However, if you feel that after speaking to your key worker that the matter cannot be resolved or that informal action has failed, you can make a formal complaint.

Step 2 – Formal resolution

If you decide to proceed with a formal complaint you can do so by ringing, writing or making an appointment to see the Project Manager (or their deputies if the Project Manager is away). If they are not available, the Service Manager will deal with the complaint. The procedure is as follows:

- You must make your formal complaint within 21 working days (10 working days for short stay projects) of the incident
- The manager will enter the complaint in the complaints register and acknowledge receipt
- One copy of the complaint will be kept on the register, one copy entered into the complaints file, one copy sent to you and one put in your file. The Operations Director will be kept informed at all stages of the process.

The manager must investigate the complaint within 21 days (10 days for short stay projects) of receipt of the complaint. A written response will be given to you. If you are not happy with the response they should make an appeal to the Operations Director or the Chief Executive.



Step 3 – Appeals

Appeal procedure

Appeals must normally be made in writing. In exceptional circumstances, such as the fact that the complainant is unable to write, appeals may be made by telephone or by a representative on their behalf in writing. All appeals must be attached to the complaint in the register and in the service user's file.

An appeal will normally be made to the Operations Director. If the Operations Director has carried out the initial investigation the appeal will be made to the Chief Executive and if the Chief Executive has carried out the initial investigation then the appeal will be made to the Chair or Deputy Chair of the Board of Management.

Any appeal must set out reasons why the initial decision was incorrect. If no reasons are provided the person hearing the appeal can decide not to take the matter further. The complainant should be informed of this in writing. If an appeal is heard the person hearing the appeal should inform the complainant of this in writing and arrange to meet with them. All appeals must be responded to within 21 days.

The person hearing the appeal should also meet with the person who carried out the initial investigation. If it is considered appropriate the person hearing the appeal may arrange a joint meeting but this is at their discretion. The complainant is entitled to be accompanied by a representative of their choice. Full written notes of all meetings should be kept. The complainant must receive a letter stating whether the appeal has been successful and outlining what action is to be taken within 28 days of

the start of the appeal procedure. The letter must state how to take the complaint forward if the complainant is not happy with the response.

Appeals to the Board of Management

Appeals from the decision of the Chief Executive or Operations Director must be made to the Chair of the Board of Management. If the decision has been taken by the Chair of the Board of Management then the complainant can request that the matter be raised at a Board of Management meeting. The Board of Management will consider the matter and the Chair will write to the complainant stating what has been decided and giving information about taking the matter further.

If the issue is not urgent it will be considered at the next meeting in the committee cycle. If it is urgent a special meeting will be arranged.

Step 4 – If you are still not satisfied

If you have made a complaint and disagree with St Martins' final decision, you can pass the complaint on to:

Independent Housing Ombudsman

Norman House, 105-109 The Strand
London, WC2R 0AA

Tel: 020 7839 3630

Fax: 020 7836 3900

Action

If your complaint is supported and upheld, we will ensure that effective action is taken.

St Martin of Tours service user complaints procedure



6. Equal Opportunities



Our commitment

St Martin of Tours aims to be an Equal Opportunities Housing Association

Our Equal Opportunities Policy applies to:

- All service users
- Staff
- Members of the Board of Management Committee and other Committees
- Where applicable to contractors or other agents or agencies involved with the Association.

We recognise that certain groups and individuals in society are discriminated against and we are taking positive steps to implement an Equal Opportunities Policy. It monitors equal treatment in relation to:

- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Marital status
- Race
- Colour
- Ethnic/national origin
- Religion
- Disability
- Age.

We will not tolerate any harassment or intimidation of our staff or service users by any person or group.

We seek to identify and remove any discrimination in our policy and practice.

We aim to treat all service users fairly and with respect.

Access

Unfortunately, at present we do not have wheelchair access at all of our sites, but

we can arrange to see you at a more accessible venue or offer assistance where possible.

Staff

St Martins expects its staff to understand the Equal Opportunities policy, and its implications in relation to the work they do. They should be sensitive to issues of diversity and aware of their responsibilities.

Service users

St Martins is taking positive steps to enable all service users to participate in our work and in its decision-making. Please see our leaflet on *'Getting involved'* for further information.

If you need any assistance in order to observe your religious or cultural customs, e.g. a private prayer place or help with finding local places of worship, please ask your key worker.

Our policy

For further information on St Martins Equal Opportunities please refer to our Equal Opportunities Policy, available from your key worker. This policy is reviewed regularly to ensure it is up to date with any changes in law.

7. Moving On



Most of our properties provide temporary accommodation. At some point you will need to think about moving on.

The first step is to talk to your key worker. S/he will talk with you about your reasons for wanting to move and will help you choose the most appropriate option. S/he will then help you with all the stages of moving. There are a number of options for you to consider when deciding to move on. You may be able to:

1. Move to privately rented accommodation
2. Be nominated to the Local Authority
3. Move to another organisation
4. Transfer to another St Martins property

1) Privately Rented Accommodation

One option is to rent accommodation from a private landlord. Your key worker can help you look into this option.

2) Local Authority

St Martins are given a small number of nominations by some Local Authorities. Please ask your key worker for further information if you are interested in this option.

3) Other housing associations

When you are ready to leave St Martins and live independently you may not want to become a council tenant, or there may not be any nominations available to you. In this case you may wish to apply to another housing association. Your key worker can help you with a list of housing associations in the area you are interested

in and will support you in all the stages of the process.

4) Internal Transfers

You may be able to move to another property managed by St Martins. Your key worker can supply you with information about this. However, you need to bear in mind that vacancies do not happen very often, and some properties can only accept people with specific needs.

Other move on options

If you want to move out and have an idea that is not listed above, speak to your key worker and we will do everything we can to help you.

Viewing your new home

You should always go with your key worker to view any accommodation you are planning to move to. Your key worker will know whether you can appeal against an unsuitable home offered by a local authority or housing association. Your key worker will also ensure that essential repairs are done before you move in and s/he will do their best to negotiate a change in your tenancy or licence start date so that it suits your needs.

Getting ready to move

There are various grants that you may be eligible for and your key worker will help you to access these funds in order to help you set up home. Your key worker will also be able to help advise you in finding furniture in your local area.

Leaving your old place

You should agree the date you are going



to leave with your worker. You should return your keys on that day and you should ensure that you leave your room in good condition. Please tell your key worker about any repairs needed to your old home before you move out. This will help us to be able to give it to someone else who needs it as quickly as possible.

It is a good idea to inform anyone who writes to you or visits you that you are moving and pass on your new address. You must tell the gas, electricity, telephone and TV cable suppliers, as well as the council tax office your moving out date.

Settling into your new home

Your worker will help you get the essential supplies (gas, electric, water) connected to your new home, and will discuss budgeting options with you. They will also support you with new benefit claims. S/he can also help you set up a support network in your area before you move, for example: doctor, daycentre, or whatever else you may need.

During the first six months in your new home, your key worker will still be contactable for advice that s/he can offer you to help settle in.

