



Information on owning,
buying or selling a home



Owning your own home

Whether you already own your home or are thinking about doing so for the first time, this guide can help you understand your rights as a homeowner.

Freehold and leasehold

If you own your property, then you're probably either a freeholder or a leaseholder. But what are the differences?

Am I a freeholder?

If you own a house, then you're probably a freeholder. This means there's no time limit on your rights to your home. You can stay there for as long as you want, assuming you stick to the terms of your mortgage – if you have one. You may still need consent for things like major building works.

Good to know



It's possible to have a 'share of the freehold' if you own a flat. However, you'll still own your individual flat on a leasehold basis.

Am I a leaseholder?

You're likely to be a leaseholder if you own:

- a flat in a block of flats
- a former council or housing association property
- a retirement property
- privately owned sheltered housing.

As a leaseholder, your rights to your home last for a set period of time – this is however long the lease is. If you sell the property, the next owner will take over these rights for the remainder of the lease. You can pay to extend the lease after you've owned the property for two years – sometimes this can be done when you buy the property. When buying a property, you should always check how long is left on the lease.



Next steps

See the Leasehold Advisory Service website for more information about your rights as a leaseholder (page 15).

Your lease

If you're a leaseholder, the person who owns the freehold is effectively your landlord and retains some control over the property. For example, you might not be able to keep pets or do certain works to the property. Your rights and obligations will be set out in your lease agreement. This should also outline any costs you're expected to pay, such as:

- ground rent – this is paid to the freeholder and can be from £50 up to £300 or more. However, the rules relating to ground rent are changing, so some people will no longer have to pay. For more information, see our factsheet **Buying retirement housing**.
- service charge – this is a contribution to any services paid for by the landlord, such as the cleaning of communal areas or building insurance.

Ground rent can increase over time, so make sure you know what's charged initially and how this might increase in future before signing a lease.

Also check what services are provided, what you're likely to have to pay each year, and how this might be affected by any major works the landlord has planned.

The landlord can only charge for a specific service if the lease says so, and you may be able to claim benefits or get help from the local council to meet costs.

Before signing a lease, seek independent legal advice and be sure to check the terms of 'forfeiture' – your landlord's ability to terminate the lease early.

Other ownership options

While freehold and leasehold are the most common types of ownership, there are other ways to own (or part own) a property. You could:

- **buy through shared ownership.** This scheme is available to both first-time buyers and those with a household income of less than £80,000 (£90,000 in London) who are unable to afford the deposit or mortgage payments required to buy the whole property. You buy part of the property and pay rent on the remainder – but you might still be responsible for all internal repairs.
- **buy a park home (mobile home).** Mobile homes are single storey houses that can be moved around and installed on park home ‘sites’. You typically buy the property and rent the land it stands on, known as your ‘pitch’. But before you buy, you should check that the site has a residential licence allowing you to live there year round.
- **commonhold.** Commonhold is an alternative to leasehold, which allows you to own your property freehold while having a stake in how the building or estate is run. It’s rare, but is being encouraged for the future.

Next steps



For more information about park homes, see our factsheet **Park homes**.

Visit www.helptobuy.gov.uk for more information on shared ownership.

Buying or selling a home

Even if you've done it in the past, buying or selling a home can be daunting. This section outlines things to consider and some of the practicalities of moving.

Things to think about when buying

Buying a property is a big commitment and it's important the place is right for you. So before buying, you should think about your needs, what you want at this stage of your life and what's right for you now and in the future.

We've put a list together of some of the things to think about before buying – some may seem obvious, but they're worth thinking about:

- Can you afford to buy and run the property?
- Does the type of home you're considering meet your needs?
- If your needs change, would the property still be suitable?
- Will you need to move again in the future?
- Have you explored other options that might work better for you?

Next steps



For more information on the options available to you, see our guide **Housing options**.

Moving because your needs have changed

It might be that your needs or the needs of your partner have changed and where you live is just no longer suitable. It might be that you're worried you'll need to sell your home to pay for care. But that's not necessarily the case. The value of your home won't be taken into account when working out what, if anything, you'll need to contribute towards costs if:

- you're getting help at home, rather than in a care home, or
- you move into a care home permanently, but your partner (or another qualifying relative) is still living in the property.

You might also want to think about housing that offers some level of care or support as an alternative to a care home. As well as sheltered or retirement housing – which may offer support like an alarm system or regular visits from staff, in some areas there's extra care housing – which offers personal care like help with washing and dressing as well as support. You can rent or buy both these options.

It might be that you don't really want to move. There's more information about ways you can stay living at home for as long as possible on pages 10-14.

Next steps



For more information about moving into and paying for a care home see our guide **Care homes**. For other options, see our guide **Housing options**.



The cost of moving

When you move, there are quite a few fees and costs you'll need to think about.

You'll probably have to pay estate agent's fees, legal fees and more general moving costs.

If you're going to buy a leasehold property, you'll also need to consider the cost of ground rent and the service charge.

You'll also need to think about stamp duty. The amount of stamp duty you'll pay will depend on the price of the property and when you buy it, but it can really add up.

Rates of stamp duty increase as the price of the property increases, so always check before purchasing.

The practicalities of moving

You may be thinking about staying where you are, even if it's no longer suitable, just to avoid the stress of moving. But there's help available to make the practicalities of the move easier for you.

- Contact your local Age UK. Your local Age UK might be able to help you find reliable companies in your area or even run a handy person scheme. A handy person could help with odd jobs around the house either before you move or when you move in somewhere new.
- Visit **www.housingcare.org** for more information about home services in your area, such as help with repairs and relocation.
- Ask people you know. Have any friends or family moved recently? Did they use a particular estate or letting agent or solicitor?

Next steps

MoneyHelper has advice on how to estimate the cost of moving (page 15).

You can find the contact details of your local Age UK on our website at **www.ageuk.org.uk** or by calling the Age UK Advice Line on **0800 169 65 65**.

If you want to stay put

There are ways you can stay living at home for as long as possible, whether it's adaptations to make your home more suitable for you or help with the running costs.

If things become more difficult at home

It might be that your needs have changed and you aren't able to do the things you could before. Maybe the housework's become harder to do or you're struggling to prepare meals, use the bathroom or get up the stairs.

This doesn't necessarily mean it's time to move. Contact your local council and ask for a care needs assessment. This is where the council assess your needs to decide whether you're eligible for a package of care services. If you are, they look at your finances to decide what contribution, if any, you need to make to the cost. This doesn't include the value of your home if you'll still be living there.

Next steps

For more information about care needs assessments, see our factsheet **Finding help at home**.



Cost of adapting your home

Adaptations, sometimes very simple ones, can make such a difference and help you stay living at home for longer.

If you're eligible for help following a care needs assessment, then the council may decide the best way to meet your needs is to give you equipment or carry out adaptations to your home. They should do this for free if the adaptations would cost less than £1,000, for example a grab rail at your front door or in your bathroom.

For larger adaptations, like installing a stairlift or converting a bathroom to a wet room, there's a grant called the Disabilities Facilities Grant (DFG) to help you pay. You don't need to be eligible for care from the council to apply, although it's means-tested and there are certain other conditions you need to meet. This can cover the costs of adaptations up to £30,000, although top-ups are sometimes available.

Next steps



For more information about DFGs and other loans, grants and services your local council may provide, see our factsheet **Home improvements and repairs**.

Help with other costs and repairs

The cost of living can really add up, but there are ways you can save money around the house. There's also support available if things go wrong and you need help with repairs.

Energy costs

Making small changes such as using energy-efficient lightbulbs or your thermostat's timer can really help to keep costs down.

Switching to a better energy deal can save you money, however it depends on what deals are available and so you may not always be able to save money. You should always get independent advice before you switch.

You might be able to get help with the costs of larger energy efficiency measures, such as insulation or getting central heating for the first time through the government's Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme.

You should also make sure your boiler is serviced regularly. This should be done every year (ideally before winter) by a Gas Safe registered engineer. It's also a good idea to get boiler cover or home emergency cover too, so you know the costs are covered if something goes wrong.

You should make sure you're claiming all the benefits you're entitled to, including specific energy-related benefits such as the Warm Home Discount and Winter Fuel Payments.

Next steps



For more information about staying on top of your bills see our guide **Save energy, pay less**. Visit www.ageuk.org.uk/benefits-check to check what money you could be entitled to.

Getting help with repairs

If anything else goes wrong, your local council might run a 'housing renewal assistance scheme' that can help with repairs. You may also be able to get grants, loans, help with labour, discounted materials or even temporary accommodation.

We've all had issues with the boiler at some point. But getting it regularly serviced by a Gas Safe registered engineer can really help avoid any issues.

If you do have issues with your boiler and don't have boiler or home emergency cover, you may be able to get help with a boiler repair or replacement through housing renewal assistance, or through the government Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme. There are also various energy supplier trusts and funds that offer help with heating emergencies.

The help you get might be provided by a third party, such as a Home Improvement Agency. The help might be unconditional, or be subject to certain conditions such repaying all, or part of, a loan or contributions towards the costs. Loans may be provided as part of an equity release-style scheme.

Next steps



For more information about Home Improvement Agencies and services your local council may provide, see our factsheet **Home improvements and repairs**.



Releasing money from your home

One option that could help you stay put is equity release. This is where you release funds tied up in your property, either as a lump sum or on an ongoing basis.

But taking out equity release is a significant decision. There are pros and cons to consider. It can sometimes cause more problems than it solves. You should make sure you consider the options in our guide **Housing options** first, and get independent advice from a fully qualified and experienced equity release adviser to help work out if it's the right option for you.

Next steps

For more information about equity release, see our factsheet **Equity release**.

Useful organisations

Age UK

We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and website.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm.

www.ageuk.org.uk

In Wales, contact Age Cymru Advice: **0300 303 44 98**

www.agecymru.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI: **0808 808 7575**

www.ageni.org

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland: **0800 124 4222**

www.agescotland.org.uk

Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE)

Provides advice to residential leaseholders.

Tel: **020 7832 2500**

www.lease-advice.org

MoneyHelper

Offers tips on everyday money management.

Tel: **0800 138 7777**

www.moneyhelper.org.uk

This information guide has been prepared by Age UK and contains general advice only, it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action. Neither Age UK nor any of its subsidiary companies or charities accepts responsibility to ensure any information is up to date and accurate. Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age UK or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.

What should I do now?

You may want to read some of our relevant information guides and factsheets, such as:

- **Housing options**
- **Save energy, pay less**

You can order any of our guides or factsheets by giving our Advice Line a ring for free on **0800 169 65 65** (8am-7pm, 365 days a year).

Our friendly advisers are there to help answer any questions.

All of our publications are available in large print and audio formats.

There's plenty of really useful information on our website, too. Visit www.ageuk.org.uk/housing to get started.

If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the below box, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.



0800 169 65 65
www.ageuk.org.uk



Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). Registered address: Age UK, 7th Floor, One America Square, 17 Crosswall, London EC3N 2LB. Age UK and its subsidiary companies and charities form the Age UK Group, dedicated to helping more people love later life. ID204807 11/22