



# ADVICE NOTE

## GOOD NEIGHBOURS IN FLATS

Top tips for harmonious leasehold living



**Note:**

As the leading trade body for residential leasehold management, ARMA is also an important resource for leaseholders. Our Advice Notes cover a range of topics on the leasehold system to help leaseholders understand their rights and responsibilities and ultimately get the most out of living in their flat.

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## AT A GLANCE

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Living in a leasehold flat is a bit different from living in a freehold home.

The close proximity of neighbours means that there are extra considerations to take on board. You'll also be sharing certain communal spaces and facilities, so it's important to be aware of how your actions could affect others living in your building.

If you're moving from a house to a flat, it may be a culture shock at first, so we've put together some tips on how to be a good neighbour. As you'll see, little bit of respect and consideration for your fellow leaseholders can go a long way...

ALWAYS MAKE SURE THE MAIN DOOR TO YOUR BLOCK IS LOCKED. DON'T LET ANYONE IN THROUGH A DOOR ENTRY SYSTEM OR A LOCKED COMMUNAL ENTRY DOOR IF YOU DON'T KNOW THEM.

## GOOD NEIGHBOURS IN FLATS

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### Water leaks

Water leaks are the most common cause of damage and insurance claims in blocks of flats. If you're going away for more than 48 hours, it's a good idea to turn off the water at the stopcock in your flat.

Your managing agent may ask you for the contact details of an emergency key holder just in case there's a leak whilst you are away. It's also wise to make sure a neighbour or your managing agent knows how to contact you if there's a problem.

### Fire safety

Don't store petrol, calor gas or paraffin heaters in your flat or on your balcony as this can be a major fire risk. You should also avoid lighting barbecues on your balcony or roof. Notwithstanding the fire risk, think of the smoke that could blow into a neighbour's flat.

The communal meter cupboards and any other communal areas should not be used for storing your personal possessions; this can also cause a major fire risk.

### Fire evacuations

Never block landings, hallways and other communal areas with bicycles, prams, toys or rubbish sacks. This can be dangerous if there's a fire and people need to make a quick exit. Even when there's not a fire, someone could trip over the items you have left out.

### Refuse

Make sure you put your rubbish in the refuse bins or chutes provided. Don't dump large items for others to dispose of; ring your local council instead. Ensure you comply with any recycling arrangements.

### Security

Always make sure the main door to your block is locked. Don't let anyone in through a door entry system or a locked communal entry door if you don't know them.

### Pets

There will usually be restrictions in your lease about pets and normally you will need to get permission from the landlord or management company. Always a good idea to check before you move in, or if you are thinking of getting a pet.

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### Satellite dishes and cable TV

Most leases don't allow leaseholders to fit their own satellite dishes. Ask your agent whether a communal dish is possible in your block. Cable TV for a block will need cables to be routed through communal areas so you will need to ask for permission.

### Insurance

The building will be insured by your landlord but you should insure your own contents. Check if your insurance covers water leaks from your flat damaging the contents of your neighbour's, because you will be liable.

If you're going away for more than 30 days and your flat will be left empty, please let the agent know — normally they will have to inform the insurers. If you don't, it's unlikely that any claim for damage to your flat whilst you were away will be allowed.

### Gas servicing

If you have a gas boiler in your flat, get it serviced annually by a Gas Safe registered engineer. If there's a problem it won't just affect you — it could affect the entire building

### Loft space

Don't assume that you own or have the right of access to any loft space over your flat. Ask your managing agent first.

### Alterations and improvements

If you want to make any alterations or improvements to your flat, most leases will require the landlord's permission, except for minor changes. Make sure you get this permission, otherwise it could lead to complications and delays if you decide to sell your flat.

### Noise

Noise is the number one cause of disputes between neighbours. Try to be sensitive and let your neighbours know if there will be unusual noise from DIY or workmen in your flat, or if you are planning a party. (See our advice note 'Noisy Neighbours' for more advice on this)

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**Wooden and ceramic tile floors**

These cause the most misery for leaseholders because they transmit sound so easily. Carpets and/or rugs are the most sensitive choice in any flat and, in fact, are likely to be required by your lease anyway. Alternatively there are some effective sound insulation treatments available.

**Subletting**

If you want to sublet your flat, you will normally need permission from your landlord first. In any case, you should provide your landlord and your managing agent with contact details for you or your letting agent, along with the name and contact details of the tenant and a copy of your tenancy agreement.

Remember you are responsible for your tenant's behaviour so make sure they are aware of what's expected in your block, particularly under the terms of your lease.

**Get involved**

If your block is run by a Residents' Management Company then you can help by getting involved. Volunteers for directors are always wanted.

**Disputes**

If you have a problem with a neighbour over noise or other anti-social behaviour, try and solve it between yourselves before taking more drastic action. Get to know your neighbours so you have a basis to resolve things if problems do arise later. See our advice note on 'Anti-Social Behaviour' for more advice on this.

**Meter readings**

Make sure you have accurate meter readings when you buy and sell your flat.

**Electrical safety**

If the wiring in your flat is more than 10 years old, you should have it tested by a qualified electrician. A lot of fires are caused by electrical faults.



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### **Parking**

If your block has allocated parking spaces, make sure you park in your space, not in a neighbour's. Let your visitors know the rules about parking before they visit so they don't upset anyone else living there.

### **Service charges**

You should always pay your service charges on time. This helps maintain the cash flow needed to provide the services and repairs that you and your neighbours want.

#### **Note:**

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this ARMA Advisory Note, it must be emphasised that because the Association has no control over the precise circumstances in which it will be used, the Association, its officers, employees and members can accept no liability arising out of its use, whether by members of the Association or otherwise.

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