



## INNISFREE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

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Home Improvement Policy

# HOME IMPROVEMENT POLICY

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Innisfree Housing Association (Innisfree) is committed to providing good quality homes and keeping our stock in good repair. We operate a planned maintenance programme which allows for the replacement of building components, fixtures, and fittings, as they reach the end of their economic life.
- 1.2 However, we recognise that tenants may wish to make improvements and alterations to their homes in advance of our planned maintenance programme, and we will permit all reasonable requests to do so.
- 1.3 We must be fully informed of all proposed improvements, and written permission must be given before any improvements work can go ahead.
- 1.4 This Policy is intended to give guidance to tenants who may be considering home improvements. It is not intended to prevent tenants from personalising their homes, which is actively encouraged.

## 2. POLICY AIMS

- 2.1 The aims of this Policy are to ensure that:
  - We give tenants permission to carry out improvements within their homes in line with legal and regulatory guidelines
  - Assured and Secure tenants are given the same rights - we are unable to grant permission to residents living in rooms in our shared houses, or licensees.
  - All Innisfree tenants are treated in a fair and equitable way
- 2.2 Innisfree will consider all improvement requests in line with the consumer standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing. Decisions will take into account our obligations around safety, quality, engagement, and fairness.

## 3. WHAT IS AN IMPROVEMENT?

- 3.1 An improvement is any alteration or addition to Innisfree's property, fixtures, and fittings or in connection with the provision of services to the property.

3.2 Examples of an improvement include (but are not limited to):

- Fitting a TV aerial or satellite dish
- Installation of cat or dog flaps
- Fitting new flooring
- Fitting a bathroom or kitchen
- Decorating the external parts of the property

3.3 Specific examples of alterations that we will not allow tenants to carry out include:

- Layout change, i.e., addition or movement of walls
- Change of use of rooms, i.e., relocating the kitchen or bathroom
- Installing spotlights in a building which was not already designed for them
- Installation of extensions, conservatories, or lean-to structures
- Replacement of complete window sets or external doors
- Replacement or removal of internal fire doors
- Installation of security bars of windows or doors due to restriction of escape in a fire
- Removal of chimney breasts
- Installation of gas fires

3.4 As a general rule tenants will not be allowed to remove Innisfree fixtures that are an essential feature, structure, or installation (e.g., wiring and pipework).

3.5 Minor electrical installations may be considered (such as single light or socket installations). The works must be undertaken by a suitably qualified contractor and have certificates provided.

## 4. HARD FLOORING

4.1 Removing carpet and replacing it with wood or laminate flooring significantly increases the noise experienced by tenants living in neighbouring properties. Everyday noises such as children or pets running and playing, moving furniture, or domestic tasks such as hoovering can be amplified to an unacceptable level. This can create distress and tension between neighbours, and lead to disputes.

- 4.2 Noise nuisance and transference can be minimised if an appropriate flooring system is laid that includes an effective sound insulating layer, and if the resident is mindful of their impact their lifestyle can have on their neighbours.
- 4.3 Tenants must receive written permission from Innisfree before installing hard flooring. We will not usually grant permission unless the following conditions are **ALL** met:
- Tenant lives in a property where none of the rooms are situated above residential space belonging to someone else; **OR** tenant lives on the lowest floor of a block;
  - Tenant agrees to purchase sound insulation pads as part of the installation to sit beneath the hard flooring. Acoustical sound insulation is recommended and widely available across the UK;
  - There is no history of poor sound insulation between the home in question and neighbouring properties;
  - There is no history of complaints of noise nuisance or noise transference concerning the property in question;
  - Other characteristics of the building such as underfloor heating do not make the proposed floor covering unsuitable;
  - Tenant accepts that they are responsible for removing the flooring when necessary so that Innisfree can fulfil our repairing obligations, and that Innisfree will not be responsible for any damage or costs associated with this;
  - Tenant agrees to remove the flooring entirely when leaving the property
- 4.4 Hard flooring requested for health reasons will be assessed on a case-by-case basis after appropriate evidence has been provided.
- 4.5 If we grant permission to fit hard flooring, the tenant will be made aware that permission can be withdrawn at any time if the flooring is found to be contributing to noise nuisance and/or noise transference. The tenant may then be required to replace the flooring with underlay and carpet.

## 5. REQUESTING PERMISSION

- 5.1 Before starting any improvement works, tenants should set out in writing the exact nature of the proposed improvement using our Home Improvement Proposal Form.

5.2 Tenants must submit:

- Plans/illustrations of the proposed works, including an itemised schedule of works from the contractor.
- Proof that the person/contractor chosen to carry out the work is suitably qualified or experienced (e.g., registered with a trade body)
- Written proof that approval has been obtained where necessary from the Local Authority Building Control and Environmental Health departments, electricity board or water company

5.3 If planning permission is required, the tenant will be responsible for proving to Innisfree that permission has either been granted by the Local Authority or is not needed. The tenant is responsible for any costs associated with obtaining permission.

5.4 The proposal and supporting documents should be addressed for the attention of the Maintenance Team and can be emailed to [Maintenance@innisfree.org.uk](mailto:Maintenance@innisfree.org.uk), or posted to 190 Iverson Road, West Hampstead, NW6 2HL.

## 6. CONSIDERING A REQUEST

6.1 When we receive a proposal to improve the home, we will allocate a Reviewing Officer to review the documents and determine whether the improvements can be given approval.

6.2 The Reviewing Officer will review the proposal, supporting documents, and any information we hold on the property. If they have any questions or concerns regarding the proposed improvements, they will contact the tenant and may arrange a home visit.

6.3 We aim to give a response to each request within 20 working days of receiving the proposal and **all** relevant supporting documents. Where clarification, investigation, or further enquiries are needed, a decision may take longer to be made – in this case, the Reviewing Officer will keep the tenant informed of the proposed timeframe.

6.4 We are unable to grant permission to residents living in rooms in our shared houses, or licensees.

- 6.5 Where a property contains or is assumed to contain Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs) that may be affected by the proposed works, Innisfree will arrange for an assessment of the area through our Asbestos Management Policy and Asbestos Management Plan.

## 7. ACCEPTING OR REFUSING A REQUEST

- 7.1 If the proposal does meet the criteria outlined in this Policy the application will be accepted, the Reviewing Officer will inform the tenant in writing. Once this written approval has been received, the tenant may start the works. Any works must be undertaken by a registered contractor, and the tenant is responsible for paying the contractor.
- 7.2 Once works are completed, the tenant should advise the Reviewing Officer. The Reviewing Officer may arrange for a member of staff to inspect the property to ascertain whether the works have been carried out according to specification. Should Innisfree need to appoint a building surveyor or specialist consultant to represent the organisation, the cost of this appointment will be the responsibility of the tenant.
- 7.3 If the proposal does not meet the criteria outlined in this Policy, the decision will be made to refuse the application. The Officer will inform the tenant of the reasons for their decision in writing.
- 7.4 Where a tenant is unhappy with the decision to refuse their proposal, the tenant should raise their concerns as a Stage 1 complaint through Innisfree's Complaints Policy. They can speak to any member of staff to raise their complaint, or write to [complaints@innisfree.org.uk](mailto:complaints@innisfree.org.uk)

## 8. TENANT RESPONSIBILITIES

- 8.1 Before improvement works are undertaken, the tenant is responsible for:
- Providing a written proposal and supporting documents (including planning permission or a waiver where necessary) to Innisfree for our consideration
  - Waiting for a written approval from Innisfree before starting any works
- 8.2 During improvement works, the tenant is responsible for:
- Ensuring the work is undertaken following the specification

- Arranging any inspections that may be required through Building Control regulations
- 8.3 Following completion of the works, the tenant is responsible for:
- Informing Innisfree that the works have completed
  - Providing any relevant certificates issued on completion of the works
  - Rectifying any damage caused by the improvements
  - Paying for any costs incurred if faults develop as a direct result of improvements
  - Returning the property to its original state if the improvements installed are removed
  - Should any services (gas, electricity, water) be affected, the tenants must provide Innisfree with a test certificate for this service at the end of the works
- 8.4 The tenant will be responsible for any repairs or maintenance to the home improvement for the life of their tenancy.
- 8.5 Any improvements will become the property of Innisfree after the tenant's tenancy ends.

## 9. IMPROVEMENTS CARRIED OUT WITHOUT CONSENT

- 9.1 When it is identified that a tenant has carried out an improvement without Innisfree's consent, we will arrange for the alteration to be inspected.
- 9.2 If it is determined that the alteration is dangerous or would not be granted retrospective permission, the tenant will be instructed to reinstate the previous fittings.
- 9.3 If the tenant refuses to reinstate and make the area safe, Innisfree may seek legal advice and may undertake the works on the tenant's behalf – in such instances, Innisfree will recharge the tenant for doing so through our Rechargeable Repairs Policy.
- 9.4 Where it is determined that the alterations are satisfactory, the tenant should request retrospective permission for the improvements – this retrospective request will be considered in the same way a standard proposal is considered, as above.

## 10. REIMBURSEMENT FOR IMPROVEMENTS

- 10.1 If a Secure Tenant is moving out of their home and has carried out permitted improvements, they may request reimbursement for specific improvements made, under The Secure Tenants of Local Authorities (Compensation for Improvements) Regulations 1994.

10.2 The following table lists the improvements for which compensation may be considered at the end of a Secure Tenancy, and the notional life of the improvement:

Qualifying Improvements	Notional Life
Bath, shower, wash hand basin, or toilet	12 years
Kitchen sink or work surfaces for food preparation	10 years
Storage cupboards in bathroom or kitchen	10 years
Thermostatic radiator valves	7 years
Insulation of pipes, water tank, or cylinder	10 years
Loft or cavity wall insulation	20 years
Draught proofing of external doors or windows	8 years
Any other object which improves the security of the dwelling (excluding burglar alarms)	10 years

10.3 To calculate the amount of reimbursement owed to a tenant, Innisfree use a formula outlined in The Secure Tenants of Local Authorities (Compensation for Improvements) Regulations 1994. The calculation takes into account the cost of the improvement, and the expected lifetime the improvement has left when reimbursement is requested. The calculation is:

$$C \times \left(1 - \frac{Y}{N}\right)$$

**C** = The cost of the improvement - excluding the amount of any grant or minor works assistance paid in respect of the improvement, under Part VIII of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (6), or the Home Energy Efficiency Grants Regulations 1992(7).

**N** = The notional life of the improvement

**Y** = The number of years – with part of a year being rounded up to a full year. Starting on the date the improvement was completed, and ending on the date the reimbursement is claimed.

10.4 When submitting the request for reimbursement, the tenant should provide written proof of permission for the works, and proof of cost of the works carried out. Without this, the request will be declined. The request for reimbursement can be sent via email to [Maintenance@innisfree.org.uk](mailto:Maintenance@innisfree.org.uk) or via post to 190 Iverson Road, West Hampstead, NW6 2HL.

- 10.5 If the request for reimbursement is denied, the tenant can appeal this decision by writing to the Operations Director within 20 working days of the request response.
- 10.6 If the request for reimbursement is approved, the Maintenance Contracts Manager will confirm this in writing, explaining how the reimbursement will be paid.

## 11. AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS

- 11.1 Any home improvements necessary because of a tenant's health or disability should be discussed with the tenant's Housing Officer in the first instance.
- 11.2 Aids and adaptations to a property due to tenant health needs will be considered under our Aids and Adaptations Policy, and not as a Home Improvement request.

## 12. DATA SHARING

- 12.1 All information will be stored in our Housing Management systems. All case notes, case files, and personal information will be kept confidential in line with the Data Protection Act 2018. We will adhere to the Data Protection Act and comply with General Data Protection Regulation for Sharing Personal Information to ensure that we maintain confidentiality of all parties.
- 12.2 We will share information with third parties where we have an information sharing protocol in place, if there are safeguarding concerns, or we have a duty to do so for the purpose of crime prevention under the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 (and any other relevant legislation) justify it.

## 13. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

- 13.1 We are committed to embedding the Equality Act 2010 into our Policies and Procedures. As part of this commitment, staff should facilitate reasonable adjustments and adapt our standard policies and procedures wherever possible, to ensure every individual can access our services.

13.2 To make an adjustment means to change work practices to avoid or correct the disadvantage to a person with a disability. This may include:

- Allowing more time than we would usually for someone to provide information that we needed.
- Providing specialist equipment or additional support such as a sign language interpreter.

## 14. CONSULTATION AND REVIEWING THIS POLICY

14.1 The policy will be reviewed every 3 years, or with any changes to regulation or legislation.



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