

Maintaining the outside of your home

Guidance for homeowners



Housing and Constituencies

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Your handy guide

This leaflet provides guidance for homeowners on how to keep the outside of your home in good condition.

We have other leaflets providing useful tips. These include one about keeping your home safe, one about keeping the inside in good condition and one about saving energy. Just ask us if you'd like a copy of any of them or you can find them on our website.

If you can't manage any of the work yourself or don't have the time, don't worry - we can help you find reliable contractors, whether you need a plumber, an electrician, a builder, a roofer or any other tradesperson.

This is just one of a range of services we provide to homeowners in Birmingham through our Homeworks team. Our staff offer impartial advice and practical assistance to help you make your home a better place to live in so if you have any

questions, please call us. You will also find useful information sheets on a wide range of home maintenance tasks in any large DIY store or you might want to buy a good quality DIY book.

If you rent your home from the council your tenants' handbook and your repairs handbook have information about home maintenance.

Remember - if you are doing any work that will significantly change your home, you might need permission from Planning or Building Control. Contact us on 0121 303 9944 for advice if you're not sure.

Brickwork

Bricks are damaged by water soaking into them and freezing. The surface then starts to flake off. The only cure is to replace damaged bricks, or if large numbers of bricks are affected, to consider a render. (See next page for more on renders).

Leaking roofs or gutters can cause damp bricks.

You may have a problem with damp brickwork if:

- you see green algae growing on a wall
- wallpaper won't stay on and has black mould on it.

Common solutions

Pointing - this is the name given to the layers of mortar between the bricks in a wall. It is important that this layer is in good condition as it holds the bricks in place and protects the wall from water. Re-pointing is the job of removing any loose mortar and putting fresh mortar into the gaps.

Render - this is a covering for brickwork made out of sand and cement. It protects brickwork from rain and gives a smooth finish. Many rendered surfaces are also painted to protect them from weathering and to help keep walls tidy and attractive. Remember - repair small cracks immediately before water gets in and damages a bigger area and fix that leaking roof or gutter, and

allow bricks to dry out, before attempting to fix damp brick work.

Cracks - if cracks keep on appearing in your brickwork, you may have a problem with the foundations of your home and must get advice from a professional surveyor.

Damp proof courses

A damp proof course (DPC) is a waterproof layer between bricks. A damp proof membrane is used under a concrete floor. They are both there to stop water rising from the ground and getting into your house.

You must keep the DPC clear, otherwise it won't work. Follow these simple tips to make sure you don't bridge the DPC.

- Don't pile up rubbish or soil against walls
- Don't build paving or paths higher than the line of the DPC
- Keep nearby drains unblocked.

Specialist damp proof course companies will carry out free surveys to identify damp areas and can provide you with quotes to do any necessary work.

Remember!

If you think you can do it yourself:

- doing work to the outside of your house might look simple but it's difficult to make it look good. Poor repairs and badly matched bricks and mortar look ugly and could reduce the value of your home
- modern bricks are metric but the ones you have may be imperial size
- reclamation specialists may be able to provide you with an exact match for bricks
- if you need to use a ladder, working at height can be dangerous - so ensure your ladder is safe and secure.

Paintwork

Many houses nowadays have UPVC doors and windows which are virtually maintenance-free. But if you do have wooden paintwork, you will need to protect it from the rain, frost and sun. Usually this involves painting windows and doors with an oil-based paint, varnish or water-repellent stain. These will protect the wood but you will need to renew and repair paintwork regularly.

The best time to maintain your woodwork is at the end of summer when it has had time to dry out.

Outside paintwork should have three layers. If you miss out any of these, the wood on your house won't be properly protected:

Primer - this stops the wood from absorbing all the oil from the paint which would stop it protecting the paintwork

Undercoat - this smooths the surface and fills in small cracks

Topcoat - this provides the weatherproof coloured layer and is long lasting and tough

You can buy new paints that combine primer and undercoat but these tend to be more expensive.

DIY tips

If you think you can do it yourself, don't forget:

- if you need to use a ladder, working at any sort of height is dangerous - never work alone
- if you are burning old paint off woodwork, have something close to hand to put out any fire that might happen
- don't burn paint off near the soffit or roof gutter - you could cause a fire in the roof space. Paint stripper may be a better choice.
- keep oil-based paint and white spirit away from sources of heat

- if you use paint stripper, wear rubber gloves and protective glasses
- keep all paint, white spirit and paint stripper out of the reach of children.

Gutters

Gutters are channels put around the edge of roofs to collect rain water. Leaves, feathers and other rubbish can blow into gutters and break down into a mushy sort of compost. If you don't clear this out, it can block the flow of water down your pipes into the drains as well as allowing wind-blown seeds to take root. The water will then overflow and run down the outside walls of your home. This could damage the bricks and mortar and you might also get damp inside.

Types of gutters

Cast iron gutters - these were fitted to most old houses and will probably be rusty and not working very well by now. If your guttering is painted, it is probably cast iron and ideally needs to be replaced.

Plastic gutters – these are usually unpainted and are grey or black.

Both types of gutter need clearing out once a year and you will need to repair any sagging gutters.

DIY tips

If you think you can do it yourself, don't forget:

- if you need to use a ladder, working at any sort of height is dangerous - so secure your ladder safely, or consider using scaffolding.
- never over-reach when you're on a ladder - you might lose your balance
- if you put a home-made ball of wire netting at the top of the down pipe, this will stop rubbish washing down and blocking the pipe. If you have a funnel where several rainwater pipes meet, you can also cover this with wire netting.

Drains

A drain is a pipe that takes waste water from your home. When it joins other drains, it becomes a sewer.

If you live in Birmingham and your home was built before 1 October 1937, then Severn Trent Water is responsible for any blockage in the sewer. They will clear it for you but may charge you.

If your home was built after that date, you have a private sewer - this means you share the responsibility for it with your neighbour until your drains join the main sewer in the road.

Remember - it doesn't matter whose property the drain inspection cover is on. Everyone who uses the private sewer is responsible for its proper maintenance.

Common drain problems include:

- tree roots or shifting earth - these can cause blockages or the drain itself can start to collapse. You might have to hire equipment or pay a specialist contractor to sort it out but if you share a drain with a neighbour in an alleyway or on a shared access, think about splitting the cost
- resurfaced drives and yards blocking drains - if you do this sort of work, make sure that water can flow freely into a drain
- trees planted too close to the house - you should allow at least 6 metres (20 feet) for small trees and up to 18 metres (60 feet) for larger ones - check how much trees are likely to grow before you buy them.

DIY tips

If you think you can do it yourself, don't forget:

- clearing drains can be messy and difficult – you might need to use a specialist contractor
- you should never work on drains if you have cuts or grazes on your hands as you could get an infection
- wear rubber gloves and overalls or some old clothing
- always clear up the area around the drain afterwards with a solution made from one part bleach to nine parts water
- use the same solution to clean any tools you have used.

For information about unblocking sinks, please read our leaflet called 'Maintaining the inside of your home'.

Roofs and chimneys

Don't neglect your roof - small problems such as loose tiles or leaks in flat roofs can get worse over time and become much more difficult and expensive to fix.

Like roofs, chimneys are exposed to all weather conditions and can become dangerous. Common problems include:

- loose pots
- blocked flues
- cracked or perished brickwork
- damaged flashings (these are the coverings for the joint where the wall meets the roof).

But if you think you can repair your roof or chimney, think again.

You need specialist skills and working at height is dangerous so you should always get a competent contractor to carry out any work.

Fencing

Garden fencing will provide privacy and security for your home. For more information about other security measures for your home, please read our leaflet called "Keeping you and your home safe".

You can pick up information about how to put up a new fence or repair an existing one from any larger DIY store.

Before you start work, make sure:

- you and your neighbours have agreed on the boundaries between your properties
- ensure fence panels and posts are treated with preservative - never use untreated wood.

Safety tips

Be careful if you are using wood preservative on fences- it could be poisonous. Make sure you follow the manufacturer's instructions on the container. Always use a preservative that is not harmful to children, pets or plants.

How to contact us

We provide a wide range of services and help for homeowners. For more details:

- ring our Homeworks helpline on 0121 303 1116
- email us at homeworks@birmingham.gov.uk
- visit www.birmingham.gov.uk/housing for more information or to fill in an enquiry form
- write to us at Homeworks, Birmingham City Council, Housing and Constituencies Directorate, PO BOX 11415, Birmingham B11 1ZB

Money worries? Let us help

If you are worried about money or want to find out if you can claim any benefits, please tell us. Your neighbourhood office is there to help and can give you advice and information that may make all the difference to your financial situation.

For more information please contact your local neighbourhood office. birmingham.gov.uk/neighbourhoodoffices

This is important. If you do not understand this document then please ask a friend or relative, who speaks English, to contact your local neighbourhood office or housing team on your behalf. We will then arrange for an interpreter to meet with you.

هذه الرسالة مهمة، فإن لم تفهمها نرجو أن تطلب من أحد أصدقائك أو أقربائك ممن يتكلمون الإنجليزية أن يتصل بمكتبتي المحلي "تيرهود أوفيس" المحلي أو فريق الإسكان نيابة عنك. بعد ذلك سنرتب لقاء بك مع وجود مترجم فوري.

ARABIC

এটা খুবই গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। আপনি এই দলিলটি বুঝতে না পারলে দয়া করে ইংরেজীতে কথা বলতে পারেন এমন আপনার একজন বন্ধু-বান্ধব বা আত্মীয়কে আপনার পক্ষ হয়ে আপনার স্থানীয় সেইবারহুড অফিস বা হাউজিং টিম এর সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করতে বলুন। এরপর আমরা আপনার সঙ্গে সাক্ষাৎ করার ব্যবস্থা করব এবং এতে সহায়তার জন্য একজন ইন্টারপ্রিটার রাখা হবে।

BENGALI

此事極為重要，如果你看不懂這份文件，請找一位會講英語的親戚或朋友代你接觸當地的鄰舍辦事處或房屋服務隊。然後我們會安排傳譯員一起見你。

CHINESE

این اطلاعات بسیار مهم است. اگر محتوی این مدرک را نمی فهمید، لطفاً از یک دوست یا خویشاوندتان که به زبان انگلیسی صحبت کرده میتواند خواهش کنید که از طرف شما بانیبرهود آفس یا هوزنگ تیم محل شما تماس بگیرد. بعداً برای شما مترجم فراهم می کنیم که باشما ملاقات کند.

FARSI

આ બાબત અત્યંત મહત્વની છે. જો તમને આ દસ્તાવેજમાં લખેલી બાબત ન સમજાય તો કૃપા કરી કોઈ અંગ્રેજી બોલતા મિત્ર અથવા સગાંસંબંધીને તમારી સહાયતા નેપરહુડ ઓફિસ અથવા હાઉસિંગ ટીમનો તમારા વતિ સંપર્ક સાધવા વિનંતી કરો. પછી કુબાધિયા સાથે તમને મળવાની અમે વ્યવસ્થા કરીશું.

GUJARATI

ਇਹ ਗੱਲ ਬੜੀ ਜ਼ਰੂਰੀ ਹੈ। ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪਰਚੇ ਦੀ ਸਮਝ ਨਹੀਂ ਲੱਗਦੀ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਅਪਣੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਬੋਲਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਦੋਸਤ ਜਾਂ ਰਿਸ਼ਤੇਦਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਕਹੋ ਕਿ ਉਹ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਸਥਾਨਕ ਨੇਬਰਹੁਡ ਔਫਿਸ ਜਾਂ ਹਾਉਸਿੰਗ ਟੀਮ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੇ। ਉਸ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਅਦ ਅਸੀਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੋਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਗੱਲ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ।

PUNJABI

داؤیر مهم معلومات دی۔ کہ تاسی پہ دی سند نہ پوہیپی نومہربانی و کری دخبل بوملگری یا خیلوان نہ چه پہ انگریزی ژہ خبری کولای شی غوبتنه و کری چه سناسی له خواسناسی دیمی نیبرهود آفس یا هوزنگ تیم سره په تماس کی شی۔ بیا به مونتر ترجمان برابر کرو چه سناسی سره کتنه و کری۔

PUSHTO

Tani waa muhiim. Hadii aadan fahmaynin warqadan fadlan waydiiso ruux saaxiibkaa ama qaraabadaada ah oo af ingiriiska ku hadla inuu kuu waco xafiiska Dariska (Neighbourhood Office) ama kooxda guryaha asagoo adiga kumatalaya. Markaa Kadib Ayaan kuu balaminaynaa Turjubaan.

SOMALI

یہ دستاویز اہم ہے۔ اگر آپ اس دستاویز کو سمجھنے سے قاصر ہیں تو براؤ کرم انگریزی زبان سے واقف اپنے کسی دو۔۔ یا رشتہ دار سے کہنے کہ وہ آپ کی جانب سے آپ کے مقامی نمبر ہوؤ آفس یا ہاؤسنگ ٹیم سے رابطہ کریں۔ ہم پھر آپ سے ملاقات کرنے کیلئے ایک ترجمان زبان کا انتظام کر دیں گے۔

URDU

Đây là việc quan trọng. Nếu quý vị không hiểu tài liệu này làm ơn nhờ bạn hay người thân biết nói tiếng Anh thay mặt cho quý vị liên lạc với đội nhà cửa hoặc văn phòng nhà cửa ở địa phương của quý vị. Chúng tôi sẽ thu xếp một thông dịch viên đến gặp quý vị.

VIETNAMESE

If you would like this leaflet in large print, Braille, or on audio cd or tape, please call 0121 303 1116.