

HOME MAINTENANCE GUIDE

This guide gives information and advice about who to contact and where to go to if you wish to carry out simple repairs to your home. The more work, especially preventative, you can do to your property yourself, the more money you will save in the long run.

DIY isn't easy. Hopefully, this guide will give you the information you need to tackle basic home repairs and give you details of where to go to seek professional help.

Wherever possible, we have given a contact number but, if you are in any doubt, you can contact us at 7 High Street, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 1SS, telephone on 01983 823040 or email at Housing@iow.gov.uk

Awareness

Your home is probably the biggest investment you will ever make. It needs to be looked after and maintained. There are several things that could happen if you don't do routine checks and repairs:

- your house could deteriorate resulting in unhealthy or dangerous conditions,
- you could damage adjoining buildings for which you may be liable,
- your house could lose some of its value,
- the area you live in could deteriorate gradually.

How to check your house

Inspecting your home regularly could help you spot a problem before it causes serious damage. Such problems can often be put right cheaply, but if left, could end up being expensive.

Inspect the outside

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| Chimney pots | Are they leaning or broken? If so, they may need replacing or the mortar holding them in place may need renewing. |
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| Chimney | Is it leaning, or are there many damaged bricks? If so, it may be dangerous. Bricks may need replacing; it may need re-pointing or even rebuilding. |
| Flashings | This is the lead sheeting around chimneystacks and wherever your roof and brickwork meet. They prevent water getting in at the edge of slates or tiles. Have they slipped or are they missing? If so, you should call a roofer to give you an estimate for sorting out any problems and keeping water out. |
| Tiles or slates | Are there any slipped, missing or broken tiles or slates? If so, they need to be replaced or put back in place. Call a roofer. |
| Roof timbers | Does the roof appear to sag? If so, one or more roof timbers may need replacing or strengthening. |
| Gutters and drainpipes | Are they leaking, damaged or overflowing? Even a small leak will damage bricks, rot wood and cause damp if it is not quickly repaired. |
| Overflow | If water is coming from these it |

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| | means that a water tank or toilet cistern ball valve is not working properly. Repair it quickly before any damage or damp is caused. |
| Bricks and mortar joints | Are brick faces or the mortar joints between bricks eroded or crumbling? Poor brickwork may allow water to penetrate |
| Cracks in the walls | If cracks suddenly appear in mortar joints or bricks or become much worse get advice or ask a surveyor or structural engineer to have a look. Look in the Yellow Pages. |
| Timber doors | Wood will rot if it is not properly protected with paint or stain. Check whether the paint is cracked, loose or peeling |
| Airbricks | These help stop the floors rotting by allowing air underneath. Don't block them with soil or paving and make sure they are clear and clean - see timber floors. |
| Damp proof course | Most houses have a layer to stop rising damp. Make sure that earth and paving are kept six inches below this or your |

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| | house may get damp. |
| Gullies | Have they got grids on the top, are all the waste pipes pouring properly into them and are they emptying properly? |

Inside the house

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| Timber floors | Are parts of the ground floor floors more springy or bouncy, especially nearer walls? This may mean rotten joint ends and some joists may need replacing - see also Airbricks. Rot may be dry rot - call a specialist quickly. They should be a member of the British Wood Preserving and Damp Proofing Association. See the Yellow Pages under Woodworm and Dry Rot Control. |
| Floorboards | Are there floorboards with areas of tiny holes in them? This may mean the presence of woodworm and treatment may be needed. Are there any loose or broken floorboards? |
| Skirting boards | Rotting skirting boards on the |

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| | ground floor may indicate rising damp or rot spreading from floor timbers. Woodworm may also affect skirting boards. |
| Electrics | Do switches spark or crackle when turned on or off? Are there any burn marks on sockets? Are any sockets, switches or light fittings loose, broken or cracked? Are all cables and plugs wired securely without any cracks, splits or coloured wires visible? Do fuses blow or light bulbs only last a very short time? If yes, call an approved electrician. |
| Gas appliances | All gas appliances should be checked once a year by a CORGI registered gas fitter to make sure they are safe. Burn marks on heating elements, or on walls behind or to the sides of gas fires, and flames that are more yellow than the normal orange-yellow may indicate a problem. This should be checked and put right immediately by an approved |

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| | CORGI registered gas fitter. |
| Plumbing | Are taps dripping or supply or waste pipes leaking? Repairs at an early stage could be quite cheap but, if left, faults could develop which will be expensive to put right. What may appear to be leaking to a cold water pipe may be no more than condensation. Dry out and warm the wet area of the pipe. If there is a leak, water should re-appear immediately. |
| Stairs and handrails | Are there any loose or broken steps and are all handrails, banister rails and spindles fixed securely? |
| Internal doors | Are all hinges secured tightly to the doorframe and door? |
| Central heating | See Gas Appliances - are there any radiators which are cold at the top or which don't get as warm as the others? If yes the radiator probably needs 'bleeding' - see Central heating |
| Plasterwork | Areas where wallpaper keeps coming off or where there is |

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| | crumbling plaster may indicate dampness. Long straight cracks parallel to external walls in ceilings or diagonal cracks to walls which start in a top corner may indicate a structural problem. If these appear suddenly consult a surveyor or structural engineer. |
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You could do some of these repairs yourself.

You need to decide:

- Can I do the work myself?
- If so, how and what tools do I need?
- Do I need to employ a builder or specialist?
- How can I pay for the work?
- Can I claim for the work from my house building insurance?

Where to get information:

There are many sources of information available to you to assist you with doing repairs yourself or getting information on professionally qualified tradespersons. Typical Sources of information are:

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| Libraries/bookshops | Libraries and bookshops provide clear guides on how to carry out repairs. You may need to check as some of the information in old books may not provide information on current building practices and products. |
| Yellow Pages/Local Phone Book | This is a good source of information to help you start your search for a tradesperson. Our advice - always phone contractors who are members of register trade bodies. |
| DIY stores | Many DIY stores provide easy guides on simple DIY tasks that you can pick up when you are buying your materials. |

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| Building supplies merchants | Speaking to the people who sell products is a good way of finding out how to repair your house. People who work in this environment have many years in the business and can offer years of experience. |
| Word of mouth | Speak to friends and neighbours and ask them if they have ever experienced the problem and what they did to resolve it. |

Do your homework – spending additional time doing research at the outset may save you time in labour costs.

Alternatively for simple repairs - <http://www.diyfixit.co.uk/> - The Isle of Wight Council is unable to recommend any of the products listed on the website.

The website provides diagrams of minor works that you can do yourself in a clear manner.

Finding a builder

A major concern for householders is employing a reputable builder/tradesperson. If you are unsure about a tradesperson you should:

- Ask friends and relatives to recommend you one. Ask the builder to provide you evidence of work that he/she has carried out in the past,
- Obtain more than two quotes. This is sometimes the best way to find out if a builder is going to charge you too much for the work that you need done,
- Ask the tradesperson if they are a member of a professional body or trade organisation

If you are still unsure then please contact one of the organizations listed below:

Fair Trades/Home Pro, Quadrant House, The Quadrant, Hoylake, Wirral **08707 344 344**. Web site: <http://www.fairtrades.co.uk/>

Building Advice Centre 0845 0520918 Telephone advice. Web site: <http://www.buildingadvice.co.uk/>

Building Employers Confederation, Bridge Court, Bridge Street, Long Eaton, Tel: **0115 9461922**

Federation of Master Builders - see Yellow Pages under Builders for individual members or phone **0207 242 7583**. Web site: <http://www.fmb.org.uk/>

Guild of Master Craftsmen - see Yellow Pages under Builders for individual members or phone **01273 478449**. Web site: <http://www.thegmcgroup.com/>

Glass & Glazing Federation - GGF - see Yellow Pages under Double Glazing for individual members or phone **020 7403 7177**. Web site: <http://www.ggf.org.uk/>

Electrical Contractors Association - see Yellow Pages under Electricians (look for the ECA logo on adverts) or phone **01435 863101**. Web site: <http://www.eca.co.uk/default.asp>

N.I.C.E.I.C. - see Yellow Pages under Electricians for individual members or phone **020 7564 2323**. Web site: <http://www.niceic.org.uk/>

CORGI - Gas - see Yellow Pages under Gas Installers for individual members or phone **01256 372300**. Web site: <http://www.corgi-gas.com/>

Institute of Plumbing - see Yellow Pages under Plumbers for individual members or phone **01708**

472791. Web site: <http://www.plumbers.org.uk/>

National Federation of Roofing Contractors, 62 Church Street, Whittington, - see Yellow Pages under Roofing (look for the NFRC logo on adverts) or phone **020 8735 0416**. Web site: <http://www.nfrc.co.uk/>

British Wood Preserving and Damp Proofing Association, 1 Gleneagles House, Vernon Gate, Derby, - see Yellow Pages under Woodworm (look for the BWPDA logo on adverts) or phone **01332 225100**. Web site: <http://www.bwpda.co.uk/>

Membership of these organisations can mean different things from simple random checks of member's work, to passing certain levels of qualification, to offering insurance under written guarantees, to an arbitration service in disputes. Find out what extra protection you are getting before you employ anyone

Getting a quote

- Once you have arrived at a shortlist of builders to ask for a quote, contact them and ask them to visit.
- Write down exactly what you want doing and,

where appropriate, take your own measurements such as plastering, ceilings, floors etc. Note how quickly the builders respond and whether they arrive on time or not.

- Note how carefully they inspect or survey for the work required. Did they take any measurements? Did they look for the possible routes of cables or pipes that may be in the way and need moving? Did they take the time to really find out what you want or what the problem might be?
- Ask them when you can expect the quote to be sent and note whether it arrives on time or not.
- Ask how long the job will take and how soon after your agreement they can start work.
- Ask whether the work will be guaranteed, for how long and whether the guarantees are insurance underwritten to remedy defects in the event of the builder going out of business.

All of these factors will help you decide whether you have confidence in a builder to carry out the work quickly and efficiently with as little risk of things going wrong as possible. If you do not have that confidence in any of the builders you have selected then find someone else. This may

take more time but your peace of mind is worth it in the end.

The final piece of the selection process is the price. If the quote is too high, it may be worth talking to the builder to see if there is any way that costs can be cut. There may be a cheaper, if less satisfactory way of doing a job. You may have to forego those gold plated taps in favour of plain plastic ones!

Before work starts

Meet your builder again and agree:

- start and finish dates and which areas of the house need clearing of furniture, carpets and curtains.
- the condition of any fixtures and fittings and surfaces that should be left undisturbed. If the builder damages anything, he should carry out all the necessary repairs.
- the times of the day work can be done and whether the builder can work weekends or not.
- when payment is to be made and how. On larger jobs, the builder may request 'interim' payments for items of work that have been fully completed. You may also 'retain' 5% of

the total cost for three to six months to make sure that the builder returns to any defects that become apparent after you have moved back in.

- the completion date and the amount of your costs each week that the builder should pay if your house is not ready to move back into by then. For example, if you are paying rent. If you order extra work it is reasonable to expect the completion date to be extended without penalty.
- what to do if you require extra work or something unforeseen happens. Always get a price, in writing, for extra work before it is done. Make sure instructions to carry out extra work are in writing.
- who is to pay for power used in the work. If the builder is paying, make sure you both read the meter when work starts and when it is complete.
- Write down all these agreements and both you and the builder sign it. **This is your contract.**

If you have to move out or no one will be at home while work is going on, check whether your house and contents insurances are still valid. If they are not valid, check that the builder's insurance will give you adequate cover.

Once work starts

Unless you have agreed otherwise, it will generally be your responsibility to move any carpets, curtains or furniture. Your builder needs space to work.

If he has to wait for things to be moved, the job may take longer and cost more. Make a daily note of what has been done and the weather conditions.

These notes will help resolve any difficulties if you find yourself in dispute with your builder. The weather may affect the timetable for the job. For example, work to paths, gardens or roofs cannot be done if there is a foot of snow on the ground.

Under exceptional weather conditions it is reasonable for the completion date to be extended, without penalty, if it affected the progress of the work.

Unless you know what you are looking for, there is no point checking any item of work until the builder says it is finished. Very often the finishing touches will be left until the end. Make notes of items you are not happy about and check them off as they are made good. Only make the final payment once you are completely satisfied. Make sure you get a receipt and any promised guarantees.



Home Maintenance Guide

A guide to doing repairs yourself or getting a builder to carry out repairs to your home.

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