

Landlord's Guide to Accommodation Standards

Introduction

This condensed guide is for private sector landlords who have properties in Newham. It is a shortened version of the longer document referred to by various Newham Council officers used to determine whether accommodation is of a suitable standard.

This guide is not intended to be a substitute for proper regular inspection and maintenance of your properties, nor does it guarantee compliance with all relevant laws which apply to renting out property, but it certainly aims for a minimum level of compliance with the Decent Homes Standard, including being free from category 1 hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

Renting out property can be complex and being a landlord carries with it a number of responsibilities. Some of these are very specific, for example the need to have gas appliances safety checked on a yearly basis, whereas others are more general such as the 'duty of care' to tenants as well as those duties stated in tenancy agreements.

Landlords are well advised to become accredited and to understand all of the areas which are part of their responsibility. When this information is used together with this guide the landlord can have better confidence that they are providing better quality accommodation, and so protecting their property and investment, as well as being far less likely to fall foul of the law. Other sources of information for landlords can be found as internet links on the Council's website.

This guide is split into 4 sections, as follows:

1. External standards,
2. Internal standards,
3. General items and
4. Fire safety items.

Finally, bear in mind that this is a shortened guide and further information can be obtained from the Council's Private Sector Housing Group on 020 3373 1950.

1. External Standards

- 1.1 These areas of the building are essential for keeping the whole building weatherproof. As such all building coverings such as roof surfaces, external window frames and cills, chimneys, doors and so on should be secure, in good condition and repair. These should also be kept in good decorative repair, which can extend the life of various building elements, such as timber, if carried out on a regular basis, such as once every five years.
- 1.2 The property should show no visible signs of damp, wet or dry rot. The damp proof course should not be bridged (covered) by external render, paving or earth. Air bricks should be free from obstruction and should have grilles to prevent access by rodents.

- 1.3 All surface water drainage, such as gutters and gulleys, should be kept clear from accumulations to prevent overflows and possible damp problems.
- 1.4 There should be adequate provision of bins suitable for the number of occupants in the house.
- 1.5 Any external stairs or steps should be constructed and maintained to a standard that will minimise and prevent any users of them from tripping or falling. This will require handrails where there are turns or if the flight is more than three steps as well as adequate lighting, non slip surfaces and no protrusions or obstructions.
- 1.6 Any yards, paths and boundaries should be kept in good condition with adequate lighting, proper drainage and a level surface to prevent trips and falls. There should be no unguarded drops from any area.

2. Internal Standards

- 2.1 The design, layout and construction of the dwelling shall allow good standards of cleanliness and prevent the harbourage and access into the premises of pests.
- 2.2 All walls and ceiling should be sound, free from cracks and not bowing.
- 2.3 All floors should be sound and free from dry or wet rot. Any loose floorboards should be made secure.
- 2.4 All doors and windows should open and shut freely providing sufficient openings in appropriate locations that are easily reached and do not pose any excess risk of falls or collision (e.g. low headroom to doors must be avoided). If the bottom of any windows are lower than 1.2m from the floor then extra guarding will be required. All windows above the ground floor should have restrictors fitted limiting them to 100mm openings except where they are specifically fire escape windows. All bathroom and wc windows must be obscured glazing. Louvered windows are not acceptable.
- 2.5 Kitchens should have suitable layout, and specifically have adequate working space around cooking appliances, with all necessary facilities provided for the safe storage, preparation and cooking of food. This should be at least:
 - 2.5.1 a suitably located 4 ring cooker oven and grill;
 - 2.5.2 a sink with integral drainer on a 1000mm base unit, connected to adequate drainage with a suitable trap and with a tiled splashback above, of at least 300mm in height. Joints should be sealed with silicon sealant;
 - 2.5.3 a fixed cleanable worktop with impervious surface of at least 2000mm by 500mm with a tiled splashback above, of at least 300mm in height. Joints should be sealed with silicon sealant;

- 2.5.4 adequate storage cupboard units of at least 0.3 cubic metres;
 - 2.5.5 an adequate refrigerator and
 - 2.5.6 a minimum of two double electrical sockets above work surfaces.
- 2.6 The water supply to the premises should be separately supplied, and be suitable for drinking and domestic purposes such as cooking and washing. The kitchen sink supply should be from the mains. The stopcock should be provided within the dwelling. Any hot water tanks should be properly housed and covered, with adequate insulation.
- 2.7 All bathrooms and wc facilities should be well maintained, in good working order and free from defects. Bathrooms should not be accessed through bedrooms except in 1 bed flats. Baths and showers should be positioned to prevent falls with grab rails fitted where this may be a serious possibility. All joints should be sealed with silicon sealant. Adequate lighting must be provided. The minimum amenities required in a bathroom are as follows:
- 2.7.1 a fixed bath or shower and wash hand basin with a constant supply of hot and cold water and a direct drainage connection with suitable trap (minimum sizes: wash hand basin 500 x 400mm, bath 1700 x 700mm and shower 800 x 800mm);
 - 2.7.2 a WC properly connected to the drainage. The WC cistern overflow should discharge externally;
 - 2.7.3 dwellings with over three occupants should have a WC which is separate from the bathroom and dwellings with five or more occupants should have two WCs one of which may be in the bathroom;
 - 2.7.4 a separate WC compartment must contain a wash hand basin;
 - 2.7.5 adequate tiled splash-back should be provided to the bath and wash hand basin (300mm high);
 - 2.7.6 showers should have tiling of sufficient height to protect the decoration of the wall (minimum of 1.80m) which is properly sealed and a shower screen or curtain of a sufficient standard to prevent water damage to floor and
 - 2.7.7 a towel rail and toilet paper holder.
- 2.8 All stairs and steps should be maintained in good repair and be provided with adequate handrails and adequate lighting over the staircase. Stair coverings should be secure and free from holes or protrusions to prevent slips, trips and falls. Banisters should be properly constructed and maintained with a maximum gap of 100mm between banisters.
- 2.9 Any balconies should be adequately guarded with a maximum gap of 100mm between any rails and a minimum height of 1100mm to prevent falls.
- 2.10 The dwelling should be free from dampness, such as rising damp, penetrating damp and condensation. When considering cases of condensation consideration must be given to sources of heat and ventilation and the construction of the parts affected.

- 2.11 The dwelling should have adequate permanent ventilation in all habitable rooms, kitchens, bathrooms and wc compartments. Where kitchens, bathrooms and wc compartments have no windows this can be achieved by provision of mechanical ventilation in the form of humidistat controlled fans with suitable overrun.
- 2.12 All areas should have adequate provision for natural and artificial lighting.
- 2.13 There should be an efficient form of permanent fixed heating in the property as well as adequate insulation in the relevant areas, typically being loft spaces around pipework and hot water cylinders. The heating system should be fully controllable by the occupants consisting of a timer, thermostat and radiator valves with radiators located in every room. Portable heating appliances are not acceptable. Electric storage heaters at off peak or low rates may be an acceptable alternative to full gas central heating. These forms of heating should be properly installed and maintained by a Gas Safe Register or NICEIC approved engineer and certificates should be kept.
- 2.14 The electrical and gas installations should be properly maintained and tested by competent engineers (being NICEIC and Gas Safe Register respectively) and all test paperwork be kept. The installations must be maintained to the current standards for electrics and gas.

3. General Items

- 3.1 All furniture provided must comply with The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 (as amended in 1989 and 1993). Furniture that complies with these regulations can be identified by a tag that should be fixed to the furniture.
- 3.2 Any work on gas appliances and services shall comply with the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998.
- 3.3 Any work carried out at the property, which requires either Building Regulation approval or Development Control consent should have such approval.
- 3.4 The dwelling should provide adequate security to prevent unauthorised entry. This should involve adequate locks to front entrance doors, any side or rear access doors and window locks. At the minimum this will require mortice deadlocks to front and rear doors conforming to BS 3621.
- 3.5 The presence of any asbestos should be audited by a qualified asbestos auditor. Where asbestos is present in undamaged, sealed and undisturbed locations it is safer to leave it in situ rather than disturb any.

- 3.6 Dwellings should be kept free from pest infestations. Where pest infestations are found they should be treated in the correct manner by a professional pest control contractor, and all occupants should be made aware the locations of any bait or other chemical treatments.
- 3.7 All dwellings should be free from excessive noise with all conversions being carried out in accordance with Building Regulations in respect of sound insulation.
- 3.8 All dwellings should be occupied by no more than a maximum number of people for which the property can reasonably accommodate. Space standards exist which set a maximum number of people to use habitable rooms as sleeping rooms (kitchens, bathrooms, WC compartments and hallways are not considered to be habitable rooms). At least one separate living room must also be available separate from any rooms in use as bedrooms. The space standards are as follows:
 - 3.8.1 a room of more than 10.2 m² is suitable for up to two people;
 - 3.8.2 a room between 6.5 m² and 10.2 m² is suitable for one person only.
- 3.9 However there are further rules relating to how those rooms can be occupied. In particular no double room may be shared by two people of the opposite sex if they are aged 10 or over, unless they are a couple. The rules relating to space standards can be complex and if you have any queries as to how many people a room, or dwelling, is suitable for then you should contact the Council for further advice.

4. Fire Safety Items

- 4.1 Occupants should be protected from the threat of uncontrolled fire and its products i.e. smoke, and a safe means of escape should be provided. The rules for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) are complex and you should contact the Council's HMO Team for further advice on 020 8430 3808.
- 4.2 All escape routes (in general, the hallways and corridors leading from the rooms to the front door) should go to lower areas of fire risk, that is they should not pass through areas or rooms of higher fire risk such as kitchens. All kitchens must have a door that closes onto the hallway and have a fire blanket provided. Polystyrene tiles are not acceptable on any surface.
- 4.3 Hard wired mains linked smoke detectors with battery backup should be provided to the landing of each storey. Smoke detectors must confirm to BS 5446. The detectors must be interlinked. Where corridors/landings are particularly long or complex additional detectors may be required.
- 4.4 All detectors must be regularly tested to ensure they are operating correctly.