

Moving In

Housing in the Private Rented Sector



Taking a little time at the start to sort out basic domestic arrangements could save you a lot of hassle later on.

INVENTORY

An inventory is a list of the furniture and other contents which you have been provided in the accommodation by the landlord. Ideally this should include the description, age and condition of these items. It should also provide comment on the general condition of the property, including details of any repairs or damage that exists before the start of the tenancy. This can sometimes be separate to the inventory and be called a Condition Report/Schedule of Dilapidation or a Check In/Out Document. If anything is missing from the Inventory which you notice in the accommodation, make a note on either the inventory or send separately in writing to the landlord. Both parties should hold a signed copy. This should reduce the possibility of a dispute over whether anything is missing or damaged at a later date. **It is important to ensure this reflects a true record at the start of a tenancy.**

If the landlord does not provide an inventory you can draw up your own (or the SAC can provide you with one). If your landlord doesn't cooperate, find an independent witness.

DISREPAIR

On taking up your tenancy you may find that the landlord has not completed maintenance and repair work, or that the place is messy and dirty. You will need to be both swift and methodical in your approach to these problems, taking notes and keeping records and documents. It can be useful to take photographs of the state of the whole property inside and out. Subsequently, should the landlord fail to carry out essential work, or blame you for any kind of disrepair or deterioration, you will have evidence in your support. See the SAC leaflet, "Steps to Getting Repairs Done" and the free government booklet from the Department for Communities and Local Government, - 'Repair: A Guide for Landlords and Tenants'.

ASK THE LANDLORD FOR INSTRUCTIONS

Do you know how to operate?

- The central heating system?
- The burglar alarm?
- The smoke alarms?

Do you know where the fuse boxes are?

Do you know what to do if the system trips or a fuse is blown?

Do you know how to turn off the water and gas supply, and how to drain the water system if necessary?

Utilities

Vital to avoid problems with unpaid bills left by the previous tenants: On the first day your tenancy commences get the Gas and Electricity meters read immediately. Have the account put into your name(s). It is your responsibility to arrange this, and pay the bills, not the landlord's. If you are a joint house hold you all have equal responsibility to pay. Ultimately it is the person(s) named on the account who is legally liable!

Has your landlord provided a CP12?

All gas appliances must be serviced and safety checked by a CORGI registered fitter, yearly. This is the landlord's responsibility and the law requires he gives each tenant a copy of that safety service - usually the 'CP12' form within 28 days of the check. A new tenant must be provided with a copy before they move in.

Following privatisation, competition between GAS and ELECTRICITY suppliers has now been introduced. National Grid Gas (0800 111 999 24hr emergency line) remains responsible for gas safety and NEDL - 0800 668 877 for the electricity network and related emergencies. If you are not sure which company supplies your fuel contact MPAS/North East - 0845 601 3268.

Competition means you may get unsolicited telephone calls or door step callers seeking your custom. You have the right to choose your supplier, but ensure

- You obtain a CHECKLIST of questions to ask from ENERGYWATCH the consumer watchdog who can deal with complaints on - 0845 906 0708. Their website shows comparison charts. (See Useful Addresses below).
- You don't rush into signing a contract before you understand your commitments and before you have compared prices. Check that if you sign you have a "cooling off" period and how long it is. Some companies do not require written contracts and will arrange to transfer supply with your oral agreement. Transfer normally takes effect after 28 days.
- You contract for each utility a supply from only one supplier.
- You ask for ID from callers.

You may choose to get your gas and electricity from different companies; you may still have two contracts and pay two standing charges.

No new wiring or metres are involved in changing suppliers.

Bills

Monitor your consumption of Gas and Electricity by taking regular meter readings. (Most houses and flats have a meter, often situated near the front door, in the cellar, or under the staircase in older houses). This is important to enable you to budget.

The previous tenants may be able to give you some idea of how much bills might be. Beware of estimated bills, which can be substantially incorrect, leaving you with extra to pay next time.

Remember to take a meter reading as soon as you move in and on the day you move out and notify the relevant suppliers. Make sure that you do not pay more pro-rata than for the actual period of your tenancy.

Bills can be paid in a variety of methods. Consult the back of each bill (or enclosures) for details, and check whether particular methods incur an extra charge.

To help you to budget and share bills, consider:

- How you will calculate 'shares'
- How and when your bills arrive
- When you receive your income(s)
- What arrangements is going to suit your shared household
- If you have difficulty, paying a bill, contact the company about paying by instalments.

Telephone

There are a range of service providers, all with different pricing structures, services and policies. It is therefore worth while shopping around for a service/package that suits you. If you can arrange to take on the account on the same day the previous tenant gives up theirs, you will not incur a reconnection charge. A deposit may or may not be required to get a phone service. You will need to check this with the Phone Service Provider. If you decide to change 'provider' you can have 'number portability' where you keep your existing number, but this may incur a small charge. However if you change your address this may not be possible and you should check with the provider. Most providers will charge installation and re-connection charges.

RUBBISH

Remember to find out which day the rubbish is collected and put your bin out regularly. Remember to return the bin to its normal place after collection. The Council will provide an extra large bin on request, and arrange for bulky refuse to be removed free of charge. You risk being FINED if you dump rubbish in your back lane and do not use you bin.

TV Licence

Remember to buy a licence or have your current one changed to your new address.

You can no longer pay for your TV Licence from the Post Office. See SAC leaflet - 'TV Licence' or the TV Licensing website under 'Useful Adresse's' on ways to pay. The quickest way to do this is online but other options are available. A colour licence costs £131.50 and a black & white £44.00. It is possible to pay by instalments through various schemes. See TV Licensing Enquiry Line in Useful Adresse's below.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Don't forget to notify relevant agencies of your new address, e.g. - University Department, GP, Dentist Bank/Building Society, Credit Card Company, DVLC, Utility Suppliers, TV Licensing etc.

Neighbours

Introduce yourselves - a good relationship will help to safeguard your property and minimise disputes. Be sensitive to the amount of noise you (collectively) make. This is the most common cause of bad feeling and complaints. Some local Council operate Noise Control Teams to deal with complaints about excessive noise particularly anti sociable hours. Please be aware Newcastle operates such a Team called Nightwatch.

Set up a House File

Remember to **keep your contract** and all correspondence from the landlord in a place everyone can access. Keep copies of all notes and letters you send to the landlord. Make notes, which are signed and dated, of all telephone calls to and from the landlord. These precautions should minimise problems, especially to do with repairs. Keep all bills and receipts for household related expenditure.

Going Away

Tell the landlord if you are leaving the property unoccupied for an extended period. The landlord may keep an eye on the property. S/he should not then be able to argue that any damage could be blamed on your neglect, but you must remember to ensure that all doors and windows are locked, and everything which should be switched off and made safe inside. It may be reasonable to give your landlord copies of both internal and external keys if you are going away for several weeks, so that if an emergency does arise, access is not prevented. Especially in periods of cold weather, this could be vital in order to deal with burst water pipes and tanks. If you have a good relationship with your neighbours, they may agree to keep an eye on the property during absence and let you or the landlord know if there are any problems.

BURST PIPES

(Information supplied by the University Accommodation Office: with thanks). Winter can bring very severe weather conditions to the North East. Frozen and burst pipes can cause damage, inconvenience and discomfort. If you are going to be away for more than a couple of days the following is suggested:

- **Central Heating** If you are in a property which has central heating we would advise you to set the timer on the system to switch on for at least 1 hour per day at say, 18°C temperature in order to stop the system from freezing up (1 hour during the day and 1 hour during the night is recommended); **OR**
- **If you do not have central heating** turn off the cold water at the stopcock. Turn on the cold and hot water taps in the kitchen and bathroom to release any water still in the system. Flush the WC so that the cistern empties. Ensure that all plugs are taken out of baths, sinks and wash-hand basins. (In emptying the system the cold water will stop first after a couple of minutes, the hot water will take longer than this so do not worry if it seems to be taking a long time.) Lastly

remember to turn off the gas at the lever next to the meter. This is only if you **do not** have central heating.

- Before you go ensure that all taps are properly turned off. In cold weather the water from a dripping tap can freeze in the waste outlet and result in flooding and expensive repairs.
- The water system in the property is fitted with a stopcock - a valve which controls the water coming into it from the mains. Knowing where it is and being able to turn it off quickly is the fastest way of preventing damage if you are unlucky enough to have a burst pipe. Most often it is located under the kitchen sink.

Please ensure that all members of your group know where it is and that it is working properly. In case of emergency turn the water off at the stopcock.

USEFUL HOUSEHOLD ADDRESS

The Accommodation Office

Newcastle University
19 Windsor Terrace
Tel: 0191 222 6360
E-mail: accommodation-enquiries@ncl.ac.uk
E-mail: private-rented-accommodation@ncl.ac.uk
Open Mon - Fri 9am - 4.30pm
(See their web-pages for more info.)

British Telecom

Free Enquiries Tel: 150
UK operator 100/international operator 155

TV Licensing

Enquiries: 0870 241 6468
E-mail: tvlicsc@capita.co.uk
www.tvlicensing.co.uk

DCLG - Dept for Communities and Local Government

www.communities.gov.uk
Government information and booklets on Private rented housing and council housing.

Energywatch

Tel: 0845 906 0708
www.energywatch.org.uk/help-and-advice/
Independent watchdog for gas and electricity consumers providing free impartial advice on a range of energy issues including complaints. Their website has price comparisons between energy suppliers.

Environmental Health Department

Newcastle Civic Centre

Tel: 0191 232 8520

www.newcastle.gov.uk

Gateshead MBC

Tel: 0191 433 3000

www.gateshead.gov.uk

The Housing Corporation

Tel: 0113 233 7107

Email: enquiries@housingcorp.gsx.gov.uk

www.housingcorp.gov.uk

For information & publications for Housing Association tenants

Leakline (all water & sewerage)

Freephone to report burst or leaking mains (24hours)

Tel: 0800 393 084

Note: in most cases when domestic supply goes wrong, you should first contact the landlord.

www.nwl.co.uk

E-mail: customercentre@ncl.co.uk

National Grid Gas

All Gas escapes/emergency

Tel: 0800 111 999 (anytime)

Enquiries: 0845 605 6677

Helpline: 0870 608 1524 (meter & supply details)

www.nationalgrid.com/uk

Northern Electric Distribution Ltd (NEDL)

Tyneside - lost/flickering supply (regardless of supplier) Tel: 0800 668 877 (24 hours)

Northumbrian Water - Customer Contact Centre

Tel: 0845 717 1100 - operations centre, 24hr helpline

Tel: 0845 733 5566 - bills

www.nwl.co.uk

OFWAT (Office of Water Service)

Tel: 0845 708 9367

www.ofwat.gov.uk

Water Industry Regulator

CCWater Northumbria

Regional office of the Consumer Council for Water. Independent body to deal with Consumer Complaints

Tel: 0132 546 4222

Email nothumbria@ccwater.org.uk

www.ccwater.org.uk

OFCOM (Office of Communications)

Helpline: 0207 981 3000

www.ofcom.org.uk

Watchdog for landline & mobile telephone companies

Telephone Directory Enquiries

A wide range of companies now compete. For details, see OFCOM website above. Go to 'Consumer information'.

Shelter (national organisation campaigning for homeless and badly housed people)

National Free 24 hour helpline: 0808 800 4444

www.shelternet.org.uk

Shelter North East Housing Aid Centre

1-2 Blackfriars Court, Dispensary Lane

Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 4XB

Tel: advice 0191 232 3778

Mon, Tues, Thurs & Fri 10am - 1pm

www.shelter.org.uk

Tenancy Relations Officers

Housing Advice Centre, 112-114 Pilgrim Street

Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 6SQ

Tel: 0191 277 1720

Drop-in: Tuesday 1pm - 3.30pm

Consumer Direct

Consumer information and advice

www.consumerdirect.gov.uk

101 24 hour number provided by Police & Local Council to deal with Community Safety Issues. Calls cost 10p.

Night Time Noise Service - Nightwatch

3 nights per week - Thurs, Fri, Sat 8pm - 4am.

Contact Anti-social behaviour hotline 0845 605 2222

Public Health & Environment Protection Team

Tel: 0191 232 8520

Email: phep@newcastle.gov.uk

ARCH (Agencies against Racist Crime and Harassment)

Freephone 0800 323 288

A multi-agency forum whose purpose is to collaboratively combat racist incidents in Newcastle.

Student Advice Centre

Floor 1 Union Building

King's Walk

Newcastle University

NE1 8QB

Tel: 0191 239 3979

Email: sac.reception@ncl.ac.uk

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You can access our website : www.unionsociety.co.uk/sac/

The SAC is a member of Advice UK (The independent advice network)