



Maintaining your property

How to arrange and complete works
efficiently and effectively



Maintenance and repairs – a fact of life

Repairs and maintenance work are a reality when renting out your property and it is important to be prepared for this eventuality. Staying on top of any work required can help to ensure that any larger issues are avoided and will help to keep your tenants happy in their property. In both cases this will help to reduce any costs you incur in the long term and increase the quality of the service you provide.

Issue reported – tenant or property visit

Tenants are best placed to report any issues that arise, and it is important to ensure that you or your agent have good lines of communications with them. It is helpful to ask tenants to raise any concerns, even if they are seemingly small. Often these small issues can escalate quickly, so early identification and resolution can ultimately save on expense and inconvenience.

Regular property visits by yourself as landlord, or your agent, are important in identifying any routine maintenance to keep your property in optimal condition and minimise risk of larger issues. This can be done at the same time as property inspections to check on how your property is being looked after. A minimum of two visits a year is recommended. Don't forget – tenant's need reasonable notice of a visit.

You should consider who is responsible for repair when any issue is identified. General maintenance and fair wear and tear on the property will fall on the landlord. However, issues which are a result of tenant action or neglect should be paid for by the tenant. If you feel that the tenant is liable for payment, it is advisable to be up-front and honest about this and to record it in writing to avoid issues later.

Once it is that you have identified a need for repair or maintenance, your next step will be to find a contractor to carry out your work.

Finding a contractor

Finding a good, reliable contractor can be difficult. In a perfect world you will already have identified appropriate contractors for the work as and when needed. If you only have a job for them infrequently, they may not prioritise you. Using a letting agent with good property management services can be value for money as they will have a selection of regular, reliable contractors to call on.

If you find yourself needing to find a new contractor for your work, there are some key steps you can go through to make sure you find the right person for the job.

Who to pick - specialist or general maintenance

Consider whether the work can be completed by a specialist or general maintenance company. A specialist may be more appropriate for certain discrete tasks such as drain clearing or plumbing repairs. General maintenance companies can deal with a wide range of which is useful if you are addressing a range of issues within the same property. This will allow you to more easily arrange any works required and will likely cost less than engaging multiple contractors.

If you are unsure who the best person is for your job, seek recommendations and speak to possible contractors to see how keen they are, whether they seem user-friendly and competent.

Quality of work - Reviews/word of mouth

A key concern with any contractor work is ensuring that you find someone who will do work to a high standard. There are three main ways to go about this.

Word of mouth

Working with contractors who have been recommended to you is ideal. You will be able to discuss the nature and quality of the work completed, and the experience with the contractor in terms of their communication/attitude etc. It is of course important to consider the relationship you have with the person recommending them, and any potential relationship between them and contractor when making any decision. Developing your own relationship with a trusted contractor will help for any future works.

Reviews and web presence

If you are unable to find a contractor through word of mouth/recommendations, then using online tools is the best starting point. This will allow you access both reviews as well the websites of potential contractors.

- Take care not to rely only on a contractor's website. Credible websites packages can be bought easily and reviews on them may not be independent.
- Sites such as Check a Trade and Trust Pilot will allow you to both find contractors and reviews for them. Try to look in detail at the substance of reviews rather than just looking at the star/number rating. Do the reviews detail what work was completed, how well it was completed, timeliness etc?
- Smaller contractors may not have any significant online presence and direct communication or use of references will be more helpful.

Talk to the contractors

If you are still unsure about a particular contractor and want to know more details – contact them. This will give you the best opportunity to ask questions, understand the work they are able to do and get a feel for whether they will suit your needs. We would always recommend speaking to them on – most likely on the phone, if possible, for this process.

Quotes and estimates

A key consideration when completing work is the cost of the work. It is recommended to get detailed quotes, not just an estimate, for work where possible (for emergency repairs this may not be practical). When asking for quotes be specific and detailed about work required and ideally confirm the work needed in an email. This will avoid any unexpected costs occurring if you do accept a quote. It is advisable to also be specific about when you need work to be completed – there is little value in receiving a quote only to find they won't be available in the time frame you need.

Qualifications

Some work **must** be done by an appropriately qualified person – for instance, a Gas Safe registered engineer for gas work, or an Electrical Inspection Condition Report (EICR) by an engineer registered with NAPIT or other professional organisations. Make sure the person you use is appropriately qualified. New boilers or new wiring will need to be certified as compliant for building regulations and a certificate lodged with the local council.

Public Liability insurance

All contractors should have public liability insurance and we would recommend checking this for any contractor you use for anything other than very minor work. The simplest way to access this is to request that they send you their certificate before any work is agreed.

Arranging works

Once you have found a contractor and agreed a quote you can arrange the work. There are some important considerations when arranging work.

Advise the tenants

You are required to inform the tenants of any visit to the property and this should be completed at least 24 hours before any visit is completed. When contacting the tenant, you can also query if they will be home at the time of the visit – this has implication for access, and it is helpful to let the contractor know. Don't forget that a tenant has exclusive possession of their property and can refuse access or dictate the time the property is available. Good tenant management helps build constructive relationships for times when the tenant's goodwill is needed.

Access

When arranging access for works we would always recommend checking if the tenant is willing for a contractor to enter when they are out. This can provide flexibility on timing of visits and avoid issues if the tenant forgets or unexpectedly must go out.

Bright Properties are an ARLA registered letting agent based in Oxford providing personalised property management services to landlords across Oxford and the surrounding area. We aim to raise the bar for property standards across the city. Being landlords ourselves, we understand the importance of diligent property management and deliver the same high standards for your properties as we do for our own.

This guide is intended to be informative. Any advice taken from this document should be followed up with a consultation with a relevant property

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