

Cleaning deposit disputes on rise

According to the Association of Independent Inventory Clerks (AIIC), landlords and agents are increasingly faced with dirty properties at the end of the tenancy agreement, which has led to cleaning being the commonest disagreement in cases brought in disputes and arises in around half of the cases.

In the last year, the proportion of disputes involving cleaning claims has climbed again and is now at the highest level since records began (52 per cent) compared with damage (45 per cent), redecoration (28 per cent), rent arrears (18 per cent) and gardening (12 per cent).^{*} (*Source: TDS, April 2012.)

Many tenants fail to leave the property in the same condition at check out and are often very surprised when they are told that professional cleaning is required. Pat Barber, Chair of the AIIC, said: "Time and time again we see properties that have been left very dirty by tenants at check out and they are often shocked to find that professional cleaning can cost anything from £10 to £20 per hour, depending on the area and type of work required.

"Tenants rarely treat their rented property in the same way they would a property they owned themselves. 'Not my problem' is a common statement from some tenants, however sometimes it is. Accidents happen during a tenancy and tenants need to realise that they must take financial responsibility for things that are beyond normal wear and tear."

Common problems that tenants seem to think are just normal wear and tear issues are – melted areas on acrylic sinks, knife marks on worktops, large chips on paintwork and even light bulbs that need replacing are often thought to be just wear and tear issues by tenants.

"It is vital that landlords and agents do a thorough check in and check out, so they have the right proof of condition at the start and end of a tenancy agreement. At the check-out stage, the tenant should be made aware of the areas requiring cleaning and the potential costs involved.

"Some tenants claim that cleaning is 'just normal wear and tear'. The simple answer is no, this is not the case. If an area or item was clean at check in, it should be left clean at check out. If something can be cleaned then it should be. If any dust or crumbs are present then this is clearly not clean."

AIIC has put together the most common cleaning problems at check out:

- Stained and marked carpets – this is a very common problem with some tenants trying to hide stains with rugs and furniture. Tenants are also known to cut out the stain and fill the hole with carpet they have cut from a hidden part of the property e.g. under the bed or in the wardrobe
- Ovens cause the most problems. If it was listed as completely clean at check in, it must be left in the same condition. Burn marks to any part of the appliance means it is not clean. Tenants are amazed that professional oven cleaning costs between £50 and £80
- Heavy limescale to kitchen and bathroom fittings – the response of tenants is often "it's not my fault, this is a hard water area"
- Grease deposits throughout the kitchen, surfaces and cupboards may look clean but will feel sticky to touch
- Thick dust and cobwebs, particularly around furniture and on the ceilings
- Dirty windows that have obviously not been cleaned during the whole tenancy



Unlicensed Rochdale landlord fined

A Rochdale landlord has been fined £10,000 for failing to license his multi-occupied premises.

Inspectors who visited the property, at 35 Tweedale Street, found a minor living in the attic conversion and discovered that the fire regulations had been breached.

Landlord Mohammed Din, of 10 Chepstow Close, Rochdale, admitted failing to comply with the regulations and claiming a discount for single person occupancy, despite having five tenants, at a hearing at Bury and Rochdale Magistrates' Court in August.

He was fined £10,000 which took into account his guilty plea. Costs of £314 were awarded along with a £15 victim surcharge making a total of £10,329. The prosecution was brought following a visit to the property by Rochdale Borough Council officers.

Councillor Terry Linden, Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services and Housing, said: "These regulations are there to protect tenants by

making sure rented properties are safe to live in which is why it's so important that landlords comply with them.

"There is absolutely no excuse for landlords to breach these regulations and we will always seek to prosecute those whose properties are dangerous or who might think they can wait for us to find them before applying to be licensed."

