Housing Rights

https://www.housingrights.org.uk/housing-advice/repairs-and-bad-housing/repairs-private-tenants

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Repairs for private tenants

This information is for people renting privately in Northern Ireland.

As a private tenant, you might be interested in taking part in Renters' Voice. Renters' Voice is supported by Housing Rights. It's a group of people who rent privately in Northern Ireland that works to influence landlords, politicians, and government to make private renting better for everyone.

You should check your tenancy agreement to see who is responsible for the repairs to your property. If your home is unsafe or dangerous to live in, you can get help with getting your landlord to do repairs.

First, try to work things out with your landlord. If you are renting through an agent, you should contact them first. If the agent fails to sort the repairs, you should then contact the landlord directly.

Our mediation service may be able to help reach an agreement with your landlord or agent.

If your landlord continues to fail to do repairs, you could contact your local council . The environmental health department can carry out checks to see if your home is safe and meets legal standards.

Speak to one of our advisers before contacting the council. In some cases, contacting the council could put your tenancy at risk. This is known as retaliatory eviction.

Responsibilities for repairs

Private landlords are responsible for:

- checking and fixing the appliances they provide
- painting and decorating to fix normal wear and tear
- water, gas, heating and electrical systems
- fixing the structure and outside of the property (for example, roof, walls, chimney)
- mould or damp from structural problems (such as bad ventilation, damage to the roof)

As a tenant, you must take care of the property and keep it in good order. You're also responsible if you, or someone in your home, causes damage. For example:

- painting and redecorating items you damaged
- causing damage by using something you know is unsafe (for example, you know the sink leaks and you use it anyway)

Review your tenancy agreement before you sign it and check:

- what repairs you're responsible for
- if you must paint and redecorate before you leave

Be careful when making changes to your home. Get your landlord's written permission before you:

- paint, redecorate or make any structural changes to the property
- replace the landlord's items with your own (for example, a cooker or washing machine)

You should take steps to manage condensation in your property. The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) has some useful information on dealing with condensation and mould.

Repairs without a tenancy agreement

Even if you don't have a tenancy agreement, your landlord will have certain responsibilities.

Your landlord will be responsible for 'default' repairs if your tenancy began after 1 April 2007, and you either

- do not have a tenancy agreement, or

- the agreement doesn’t include information on who is responsible for repairs

In this case, your landlord will be responsible for:

- the exterior of the property – including paintwork
- the structure of the property – including drains, gutters and pipes
- all water, gas, heating, electricity and sanitation systems
- all appliances they provide
- all fixtures and furnishings they provide

If your tenancy began before 1 April 2007, your landlord is only responsible for:

- the structure of the property
- meeting basic fitness standards
- making sure the property is not a risk to public health or safety

Getting a private landlord to do repairs

You should inform your landlord of any repairs as soon as possible. If an agent is managing the property for the landlord, then you must tell them.

Check your tenancy agreement to find out how your landlord prefers you to report repairs. Repairs can usually be reported:

- in person
- over the phone
- by text
- by email
- in writing

Follow the steps below if you are having problems getting repairs done.

Document the process

Take photographs of the things your landlord should repair.

Write to your landlord or agent

Put everything in writing, even if you spoke to your landlord about the repair. You can use our templates to write a letter or an email.

You should:

- write to say what repairs you need. You should include pictures and keep a copy for yourself
- write to follow up if your landlord does not respond. You should include the date by which you expect the repairs to be completed. Make sure to give a reasonable amount of time
- write to let them know you're contacting the local council
- contact your local council

You may feel worried about asking your landlord for repairs if your tenancy agreement has ended or is about to end. Call our helpline for advice before contacting your landlord.

Housing Rights provides a free mediation service for tenants and landlords in the private rented sector. Mediation can help to resolve disputes over repairs.

Video: Help if your private landlord is not doing repairs

Video transcript

Private landlords don't have set times for carrying out repairs. When you report a problem, ask your landlord or estate agent how long they'll take to fix it.

If your landlord doesn't fix the problem in the time they said they would, contact them again. Do this in writing to make sure you have a record of following up with them.

Tenants often ask us if they can stop paying rent if their landlord doesn't do repairs. This is a risky step. Not paying rent means you're breaking your contract and it can lead to eviction.

But it can be really hard if your landlord doesn't respond, or they won't fix the problem. You can contact environmental health in your local council for help.

An environmental health officer can call out to your home and check its safe for you to live in. Show them proof of you already telling your landlord about the problem.

They can talk to your landlord and make them do repairs if your home doesn't meet basic safety standards.

If your contract ended, or will end soon, your landlord could decide to evict you instead of doing the repairs. A reasonable landlord won't evict you just for asking for repairs, but it is a risk.

Get in touch with Housing Rights if you need to talk through getting repairs done. You can call, email or chat to an adviser online.

Letting people into your home to do repairs

As a tenant, you have the right to the quiet and peaceful enjoyment of your home. This means your landlord (or anyone acting on their behalf) cannot enter your home without your permission. The exception to this is in the case of an emergency, e.g. a fire, gas leak, or frozen pipe.

Your tenancy agreement should state when your landlord can enter the property. For example, to carry out repairs or an inspection.

If your landlord needs to visit your home, they should:

- explain why they need access
- propose a suitable time and date
- give you at least 24 hours' notice
- wait for you to confirm that this is suitable

If you do not let the landlord or a tradesperson into your home, you might:

- not get the repairs the property needs
- have to pay for damage caused because repairs could not be done (for example, you did not let the landlord in to fix the roof, and there is water damage)

If your landlord enters your home without your permission, it could amount to harassment.

You should not unreasonably withhold permission for your landlord to enter the property. It is in your best interests to allow the landlord to enter to do repairs or to check the condition of the property.

If you unreasonably withhold permission, you may be breaking your tenancy agreement. This could lead your landlord to:

- serve you with a notice to quit or
- seek an injunction from the court, instructing you to give them access

If you are in dispute with your landlord about access, **our mediation service** may be able to help.

Standards in your privately rented home

A private rental must be in good condition. This means it must meet ‘fitness standards’. The environmental health department of your local council can decide if a property meets the standards.

For a rental property to meet minimum fitness standards, it must have:

- working drains
- a piped supply of drinking water
- an easily accessible toilet and sink
- either a bath or shower with hot and cold water
- adequate facilities for lighting, heating and ventilation
- proper space to prepare and cook food, including a sink

The property must not:

- be in serious disrepair
- have structural problems
- have dampness which could impact occupiers’ health

If a property does not meet fitness standards, environmental health can help get your landlord to do repairs.

Leaving because of no repairs

If you want to leave because a landlord did not do repairs, you should:

- write to the landlord and explain which repairs are their legal responsibility
- write again to say they are breaking your tenancy agreement and you’ll send a notice to quit if they do not finish repairs by a certain date

- send them a notice to quit and state that you’re sending it because of a material breach

This can help you defend your case if your landlord takes you to court for rent arrears. It’s still up to the judge to decide if the breach of contract makes the agreement void.

If you can show there was a ‘material breach', you cannot be sued. This is when you can prove your landlord broke your agreement. A material breach must be very serious.

It’s always risky to leave a tenancy early. Speak to our advisers and get help before you leave your tenancy.

Complaining about a letting agent

Letting agents may have their own complaints process. They are not regulated, so always choose to rent with an agent with a good reputation. You may be able to complain to **The Property Ombudsman (TPO) if you are unhappy with how an agent has managed your repair requests.**

TPOS only handles complaints against agents who are a member of TPO. You can contact your local council for help with a letting agent who is not completing repairs.

First letter (215.12 KB) Second letter (216.61 KB) Third letter (425.32 KB)

More advice

- Help from the council
- Paying rent for bad housing