

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

The Private Sector Team would like to wish all our private landlords and agents a Merry Christmas and a Happy New year. This year has been particularly challenging and difficult for us all, we are looking forward to a prosperous 2021 where we are hoping to be able to resume some normality in working life.

Working arrangements

The Private Sector Team continue to work from home, following Government advice by only attending the workplace when essential and minimising contact with others. The team will not be available from 24th December 2020 until 4th January 2021 however emergency cover is provided by contacting 0345 600 6400. We have been unable to run our usual forums and events however the team are currently looking into bringing these to you virtually. More information will follow.



Private Rented Sector Accreditation Scheme

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic the Private Sector Team have continued to run Northumberland County Council's Private Rented Sector Accreditation Scheme. We have made adaptations to inspections to ensure everyone's safety whilst ensuring properties are still meeting the required standards. This is an important initiative between the Council and private landlords/agents as the scheme aims to raise standards and recognise good practice in the private rented sector. It is a voluntary scheme that provides recognition to landlords and letting agents who take a responsible approach to property management.

Benefits of the scheme include:

- A free inspection of the property along with advice regarding property standards
- Refund to the cost of an Electrical Installation Condition Report, if needed
- Free advertising on Northumberland Home finder website
- Free reference checks on potential tenants
- Quick access to our Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme and Tenant Accreditation Scheme.

For more information about the scheme, please contact a member of the team or complete our application form online [here](#).

Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme

Northumberland County Council's Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme is available to help people find suitable, affordable accommodation by providing a bond guarantee to secure a property in the private rented sector. It is available to tenants who are unable to raise the funds from another source and the property must pass the accreditation scheme standards. The landlord will be given a paper guarantee that can be claimed upon at the end of the tenancy (up to 12 months) if there has been damage to the property or rent arrears. If you would like further information, please contact the team.

Landlord responsibilities

During the Covid-19 pandemic landlords are still legally required to keep their property in good repair and ensure inspections are performed, but this must be balanced against the risk of infection and spread of the virus. Routine repairs and inspections can be performed however, if you or a contractor visit the property you should follow the Government's guidance for people working in homes. Good communication with tenants and workers is essential to ensure everyone understands the social distancing and hygiene measures needed. If you tenant is self-isolating then, unless the repair work is a threat to safety or life, it should be rearranged for a suitable time in the future.

Reminder - Changes made to EICR

Legislation

From 1 July 2020 you will be required to have an electrical inspection and a report on the condition of the property (EICR) performed by a qualified person. For pre-existing tenancies, you will need to have an EICR performed on all existing tenancies before 1 April 2021. For further information please click [here](#)



Consultation - minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C for 2030

The government is consulting to upgrade as many private rented sector homes as possible to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C by 2030, where practical, cost-effective and affordable. The deadline for submissions is 30 December 2020. Further information can be found [here](#).

New - How to Rent Guide

The government has released a new How to Rent Guide. This version must be given at the start of any new tenancy. For more information, please click [here](#).

Green Homes Grant

The Government launched the Green Homes Grant (GHG) scheme in October, offering funding towards energy efficiency improvements to your property.

The vouchers will cover two-thirds of the cost of eligible improvements, up to a maximum government contribution of £5,000.

Improvements must be completed by Wednesday 31 March 2021.

To check if you're eligible please follow this link; <https://www.gov.uk/check-eligible-green-homes-grant>

Evictions - Coronavirus Act 2020

Evictions are now subject to a six-month notice period, except for cases involving anti-social behaviour and domestic violence. All section 21 evictions are on hold until after 11th January 2021, tenants can only be evicted by court bailiffs before then in very limited circumstances. Many private tenants have been experiencing hardship during the Covid-19 crisis which could affect their ability to keep up with their rent payments. It is important for landlords to be flexible and have a frank and open conversation with tenants falling behind in their rent at the earliest opportunity, to allow both parties to agree a sensible way forward.

If unsure it is always best to seek professional legal advice and for more information please click [here](#).

Universal Credit - Where to go for help?

There is support for Employment and Benefits during the Covid-19 pandemic. If you are affected by Coronavirus, the following link provides information about the changes the government has brought in to support the people who are already claiming benefits, need to claim benefits or are at a risk of losing their jobs due to Coronavirus. Please follow this link for further information <https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/employment-and-benefits-support/>

To keep up to date on any Universal Credit updates and to register for quarterly newsletters please follow the link provided.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-landlord-engagement-newsletters>



Contact The Team

The team are currently working from home answering calls via mobile phones and emails. Email privatesectorhousing@northumberland.gov.uk.

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