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1. Why Have a Professional Inventory?

Why have an inventory?

However well a tenant looks after the property, it will not be in the same condition at the end of the tenancy as it was at its start. Wear and tear to carpets, flooring, and other fixtures, fittings and decorations will inevitably have taken place. Even well looked after contents will deteriorate with time and use. Landlords need to allow for fair wear and tear during a tenancy.

Tenants will, however, be liable for breakages, missing items, or damage to the property, which are in excess of fair wear and tear, as well as cleaning. These issues will arise where a property suffers because of the tenant's carelessness, negligence, misuse or deliberate damage.

Deciding which of these scenarios applies will depend on having good-quality information to show a property's contents, condition and cleanliness at the start and end of the tenancy.

The deposit protection companies say that inventory should be carried out at the start of tenancy and preferably by a third party such as a professional inventory clerk. They also state that a new inventory should be created for every new tenancy. Also, most landlord insurance policies require an inventory to make a claim.

The inventory process

There is a common misconception that carrying out an inventory is a simple procedure – simply list the contents and state the décor, noting any marks or damage.

But in truth, it isn't that straightforward. A proper inventory (and schedule of condition) should contain both descriptions and photographs, and depending on the size of the property, can easily run to 40 or 50 pages for an average-sized house. This level of detail is important if a landlord wants to be sure they can claim from a tenant's deposit for damage.

It is best practice for landlords to arrange for the following to be carried out at the different stages of a tenancy:

- inventory (listing every item) and schedule of condition (detailing its condition)
- check-in (agreement of the inventory by the tenant)
- periodic visits where appropriate (checking the tenant is meeting the tenancy agreement obligations)
- check-out and dilapidation reports (report that determines change, damage, cleanliness, missing items, maintenance or general wear and tear).

The government deposit schemes, who adjudicate against loss caused at the end of a tenancy, recommend landlords have these types of evidence.

- A robust tenancy agreement in place that refers to the inventory
- Clear, detailed and professional inventory and schedule of condition
- Tenant's signature on the check-in inventory
- A comprehensive check-out report
- Proof of an impartial check-in and check-out process and audit trail
- Reports provided in text format with photos and/or video footage as supporting evidence
- Records of receipts, invoices, estimates, quotes and cleaning charges
- Records of all communication

It is important that a new inventory is carried out at a change of tenancy. An old inventory should not be re-used as the new tenant can dispute its accuracy.

Independent inspections

If you book your inventory through OpenRent, your service will be completed through suppliers who are fully accredited with professional inventory bodies.

The deposit schemes recommend that inventory and check out reports are carried out by independent providers. Their reasoning is that a report carried out by a landlord or their agent could be biased by overrating the condition of their property in an inventory, and being unduly harsh on a tenant in a check out.

As an independent inspector, accredited inventory companies are obliged to be impartial in their dealings with both landlords and tenants, and clerks have to make a judgment over whether to include something in the report, bearing in mind the guidance for fair wear and tear and avoiding betterment in favour of the landlord.

If a tenant or landlord asks an inventory clerk to include or change something in a report, the clerk cannot automatically take their word for it, and will have to ask for evidence to back up their request, such as pictures of issues, or receipts as proof of works/cleaning that have been carried out.

2. Different Types of Inventory Services

What service do you require?

It is easy to get confused between the different types of reports as different agents and companies use different terminology. This is a basic guide.

If your tenant is about to **move in** to your property, you require an **inventory**. If you want the inventory clerk to handover the keys and get the report signed, you need to book a **check in** as well.

If your tenant is about to **move out** of your property, you need to book a **check out**.

If you are unsure, you can confirm details with the clerk in advance of the appointment. Please note that a service booked in error cannot be refunded or exchanged once the job has been completed.

What is an inventory?

An inventory (technically also a schedule of condition) is a record of a property's condition at the start of a tenancy. It records the following items:

- all the rooms, furnishings and fittings included in the tenancy.
- the conditions of the same.
- meter readings which can be used to set up utility accounts.
- standard of cleaning in the property.
- independent, photographic evidence of the property's general condition.

The reports are fully photographic with supporting comments where needed.

In an inventory-only service, the clerk visits the property and completes the inventory inspection before the tenant moves in. The inventory is provided to the landlord who will have to arrange their own inventory signing and check in with the tenant.

What is a check in?

With the check in service, the inventory clerk meets the tenant at the property and will carry out the following procedure:

- clerk shows the inventory to the tenant.
- clerk records any details the tenant points out which were not already listed in the inventory.
- tenant electronically signs the inventory (typically on a tablet computer) but then has 7 days to let the inventory company know of any amendments.
- clerk retakes the meter readings (if check in is done on a separate day from the inventory).
- picture and list of keys which have been given to tenant.
- clerk hands over the keys to the tenant (if the landlord is not present).
- inventory company updates the check in report if the tenant reports any amendments in the seven-day notice period.

Ideally the check in should take place before the tenant has moved their belongings into the property. However, there is no reason an inventory and check in cannot be done on the same day, providing the clerk is given enough time to complete the inventory before the tenants arrive.

How does an inventory & check in work?

The inventory supplier will arrange two times:

- First, a time to meet the landlord or their representative to carry out the inventory
- Second, a time for the tenants to arrive so their check in can be carried out.

What is a check out?

A check out is carried out at the end of a tenancy, after the tenant has vacated. The tenant may or may not be present.

The check out inspection only notes items identified as being in a different condition from that recorded in the ingoing inventory. For this reason, it is strongly recommended that the clerk is provided with a copy of the inventory so they have a good idea of the property's condition at the start of tenancy.

Check outs are conducted on a room-by-room basis and record the following information:

- maintenance issues that have been created (or added to) during the tenancy.
- cleaning issues that have been created (or added to) during the tenancy.
- items that need to be removed.

- items that are now missing.
- the keys the tenant has returned (unless handed to agent/landlord beforehand).
- the tenant's forwarding address (if tenant is present).
- final meter readings.

Though the report should not be used as a final statement of tenant responsibility, it can be used as part of the evidence for a landlord to claim from the deposit if needed.

If the clerk is meeting the tenant for the check out, they can return the keys to the landlord if they live within 15 minutes' travel of the property.

3. Practical Details

When is the best time to do the inventory?

When the property is how you wish the tenant to return it to you at the end of their tenancy, i.e. after all cleaning and decorating has been finished.

Can an inventory be done after a tenant has moved in?

Yes, this can be done but it is not ideal for two reasons. First, it will be very difficult to work out if any issues were caused by the tenant after moving into the property but before the clerk arrived to do the inventory. Second, the clerk may not be able to fully inspect areas covered by the tenant's belongings.

Once the tenant has moved into the property they have certain rights. For example, they may only allow access at certain times or decline permission for photos to be taken inside the property. This means a full inventory inspection may not be possible. If you book to do an inventory and/or check in after the tenant has moved in, we recommend the landlord or tenant take their own meter readings on the day the tenancy starts, as readings taken during the inventory may not reflect the original utility usage for calculating bills.

For these reasons, we recommend that enough time and notice is allowed for the inventory to be carried out before the tenant moves in.

Do I need to be there for the inventory?

Not necessarily, just as long as someone is there to meet the clerk at the allocated appointment time. You do not need to stay in the property. If you do stay we ask you give the clerk time and space to complete an independent report.

What happens when the inspection visit is completed?

After the clerk has finished typing up their notes at the end of the day, the report will be checked by the inventory supplier's central office and then added to your OpenRent portal on the next working day so you can download from there. If you need the report sooner please inform the clerk at the time of the booking and our supplier will see what they can do.

Do the tenants need to be there for the inventory?

No, since the report is conducted so it's not biased in favour of the landlord or the tenant.

Do I need to bring anything to the inventory such as ID?

As long as you have the keys to let the clerk into the property, you do not need to bring anything other than yourself. However, it can be helpful if you can provide receipts for professional cleaning, redecorating and new items, to ensure these can be described properly in the report.

How long does an inventory last?

This varies according to property size and level of furnishing. The bookings advisor will be able to provide an estimate at the time of booking, but as a rough guide we normally recommend allowing 60-90 minutes for an average 1-2 bed property.

How are furnished properties treated?

Large furnishings will be inspected, pictured and, if necessary, described as per any other part of the property.

However, the clerk will not attempt to individually inspect or sort through kitchen drawers, units and other furnished cupboards. Collections of small items, such as cutlery, crockery and cooking equipment, will be pictured as a group and listed as an assortment of items.

The clerk will not remove duvet covers and sheets from beds. If you wish us to inspect a mattress, please make arrangements for bedding to be removed before the appointment time.

What information does your provider need before an inventory?

It is very helpful if you can let the clerk know the following information before the inventory.

- Location of all utility meters
- If all or part of the property has been professionally cleaned (with receipt)
- If all or part of the property has been redecorated
- If any new items have been supplied

- If there is anything in particular you want us to be aware of

What information does the clerk require before a check out?

- A copy of the ingoing inventory (if not carried out through OpenRent)
- If there are any maintenance issues you are aware of which you want to be checked
- If there are any clauses in the tenancy agreement the tenant has to comply with
- Key return details
- If any changes have happened during then tenancy, e.g. you have removed an item or put a new item in.

4. What Is and Is Not Included?

Does the inventory clerk check for smells?

The clerk will attempt to note any present notable odours. However, senses of smells will vary from person to person and so the accuracy of this is not something we can guarantee.

Common smells at properties include:

- Animal smell (if the tenant has kept a pet at the property)
- Nicotine/narcotics (smoking inside)
- Musty/moisture (usually from lack of proper ventilation)
- Air freshener (often sprayed by tenants before a check out to cover up other smells)
- Fresh paint

Note that the smells in a property also vary depending on the amount of ventilation. For example, on the day of an inventory/check in or check out, it is common for tenants to leave the doors and windows open while they move their belongings. This ventilates the property, and so reduces any smells inside. A few days later, after the property has been locked and sealed for security, underlying smells will naturally become much more apparent.

The clerk will only be able to comment on the smells they sense at the time of their visit.

Extra-property areas

While the clerk will inspect areas of properties that logically belong to it, some properties include extra areas which are not immediately obvious. Please inform the inventory company of the location of any extra-property areas which also need to be included in the inspection. Examples of these include: garages not attached to the property, such as en-bloc garages; allocated parking spaces; cupboards and rooms that cannot be directly accessed from the property; and sections of communal gardens which are the responsibility of the property occupant.

What is NOT included as part of the service?

The service is a visual inspection. This means the condition of items is assessed based on their appearance, not their functionality. The following items will be listed in the report and any visual defects will be noted, but they won't be tested for functionality:

- Kitchen appliances
- Taps, sinks, showers, baths and toilets
- Opening and closing windows
- Electrical items (except for light bulbs)

- Heating systems
- Burglar/security alarm systems (unless set on arrival and instructions provided in advance)
- Intercoms

Because the supplier will not be able to comment on the functionality of these items, any issues will need to be raised directly between the landlord and tenant.

There are some areas of a property that clerks typically will not inspect:

- Attics and lofts (unless accessible via a fixed staircase, such as loft conversions)
- Cellars and basements (unless accessible via a fixed staircase)
- Excessively full cupboards, drawers or storage areas
- Underneath or behind heavy or large items of furniture and freestanding appliances
- Packed boxes, bagged or packaged items, or unsorted 'jumbles' of items
- Anywhere the clerk feels is unsafe due to the condition of the area

5. Changes and Amendments

What if something changes after the inventory or something has been missed?

The landlord or tenant may of course disagree about the condition of an object or wish to highlight something they feel is important. Naturally it is also possible a clerk may occasionally not notice something during their time in the property - or something might change after the inventory is completed.

To address these scenarios, landlords & tenants have 7 days from the date of the report to add their own comments. If the service was an inventory only, the inventory will be amended. If a check in was conducted, the comments will be added to the check in report.

Why is there a seven day (five working day) notice period to report amendments?

Occasionally there will be issues which are only noticed after a report has been completed: for example, after someone has been living at the property for a few days, or by a landlord who is very familiar with the property. You have a notice period for reports which may need additions, amendments or clarifications. This is a perfectly normal part of the inventory process.

Inventory amendments can be accepted from tenants, letting agents and landlords. Where an inventory sign up has been completed, the amendments will be added to the check-in document. Where an inventory sign up has not been completed, the inventory will be amended as per the comments. Check out amendments can be accepted from letting agents and landlords.

How reliable are the reports?

OpenRent's supplier is a member of the Association of Inventory Professionals and recognised as independent inventory provider by all three deposit schemes. Their reports are often used as evidence of your property's condition in the event of a dispute over a deposit. As a company, they work with over 1500 letting agents across the UK and produce thousands of reports every month.

6. Bookings & Call-Out Charges

When can I expect to hear from OpenRent's supplier to book the appointment?

You will normally not be contacted until around seven days before your requested date. This will be done by phone unless otherwise instructed. Please note, you will be contacted by email if you do not have a UK phone number.

You are more than welcome to book in the job earlier if you wish, using the details we will provide once you have made the booking.

What are our suppliers' working days and hours?

OpenRent's inventory partners are closed on Sundays and bank holidays. Otherwise they are open every day of the year.

Normally the earliest appointment is at 9am or 9.30am. The latest appointment time depends on the season - during summer jobs can start at 4/5pm. In winter the latest a job can start is 3pm due to shorter daylight hours.

Please note appointment availability varies depending on your local area and at busy times we may not be able to guarantee your preferred time, especially if the job is booked at short notice.

I'm busy during the day, can you pick up keys from my workplace?

Our providers are happy to collect keys from a location of your choice as long as it's no more than 15 minutes' travel (depending on the clerk's mode of transport) from the property. We do ask for flexibility with this, i.e. that for collection and return of keys over a flexible time period rather than a specific slot.

Can an appointment be changed after a time has been agreed?

Yes, our suppliers are happy to rearrange appointments. It is best to contact our supplier directly if you need to change something - this will help us update your booking quicker.

Please note that any job cancelled or re-arranged after 12pm (midday) the working day before your appointment will be subject to a cancellation fee before we can re-book.

Appointment Timings

All appointment times are agreed on the basis that they are an approximate timing. Our clerks are subject to the same traffic jams, vehicle problems and delays caused by previous jobs that

many other contractors are subject to. If the clerk is running late for an appointment, they will attempt to contact you to let you know of the delay. We ask that you are patient. Clerks do their best to get to you and catch up with their timings, and the vast majority of our jobs go ahead at the agreed appointment time.

Cancellation / Call Out Fees

In a limited number of circumstances we need to charge a cancellation / call out fee, when a job has not gone ahead through no fault of OpenRent or the supplier and we need to recover some of the costs incurred.

This includes times when:

- A job is cancelled or re-arranged after 12pm on the working day before the appointment.
- We have been given incorrect access information, e.g. keys not available as per instructions, or the address given is incorrect.
- A job that does not go ahead when the clerk attends the property, for example, when the property isn't ready for inventory because works are still being completed or the old tenant has not fully moved out.
- There is no-one at the property to let the clerk in.*

*If there is no-one at the property at the appointed time, the clerk will wait 20 minutes (and attempt to contact you). If no-one arrives to let the clerk in within 20 minutes, it is likely that the clerk will move on to their next job and a cancellation fee may be charged.