

INSPECTIONS... A BREACH OF TENANTS' 'RIGHT TO PRIVACY' - OR AN INFORMAL LOOK AROUND AND A CHAT?

By **Mark Topham**

If done incorrectly or without consideration for all parties, inspections can cause more damage than good for long-term tenant relationships.

Let's find out how best to avoid the big NO NO's, and look out for my top tips at the end of this article.

Firstly, this is not a witch hunt. The overwhelming majority of tenants keep their properties in good condition. Do not be fooled by the popular social media posts portraying filthy, hoarding tenants who cause damage and have dozens of animals that no one knew about.

The purpose of regular inspections is to identify any necessary repairs, address any lifestyle issues and build rapport with the tenant. Yes, of course, you will be looking out for the obvious signs of damage or people living there without permission but this does not give you the right to go through their sock drawer and pillowcases; this is a routine inspection, not a search warrant!

How often you do these inspections is generally up to you, but we at TopMarks Property Mansfield recommend the first one three months after the start of the tenancy, and then every six months thereafter. This can usually be arranged informally at a mutually convenient time, but if you have a particularly difficult tenant you may want to formalise this to be able to present as evidence should you ever need it. Some insurance policies have requirements so check out your policy as well.

It's a good idea, where possible, to inspect during daylight hours. That way you have a better look at the externals. Oh, and don't be put off by a typical rainy British day! This gives you an opportunity to see the guttering in action.

Once you are in, look at the main 'risky' areas that you have a responsibility for, such as:

- **Smoke alarms - present and working**
- **Carbon monoxide alarms - present and working**
- **Are any electrical appliances you provided in good working order?**



- **Are the main means of exit clear from obstructions?**
- **Are all doors and windows working and locks functioning?**

Beyond this you are looking for any signs of damage or deterioration in the property, such as:

- **Any signs of damp**
- **Blocked gutters**
- **Damage to roofs**
- **Leaking water pipes**
- **Kitchen worktops**
- **Internal doors**
- **General wear and tear**

Most of the time the tenant will draw your attention to any repairs that are required. After all, it is in their best interest to get these repairs done as well.

Now you've got a list of work which requires addressing. Some of it may be your responsibility, for example, a slipped roof tile which is letting water in; and some of it may be the tenant's responsibility, such as moving furniture that is causing condensation on walls.

Ensure this is at the very least written down and agreed by all parties. There are many templates available to record your inspection and findings, or with a little help from AI, you can create your own.

Before you leave, make sure the tenant signs to agree the findings are accurate and true. This may be very useful should there be any future issues with the tenant.

Now you have a complete list of all work required, it's time to prioritise (preferably

with a coffee in hand). How you do this is up to you but I would say anything that could cause further damage and turn from a routine maintenance issue to an expensive repair needs addressing first. These are things like dripping water pipes and seals around baths etc. Other less important issues can be resolved over the longer term. As long as you have a plan which is reasonable and proportionate, it's difficult to be criticised.

Don't forget, any work for the tenant to address needs following up. This doesn't mean another inspection necessarily; this can be photos sent in showing the work has been done.

Remember to save all your documents, whether digitally or hard copy, so you can refer to them before the next inspection, or in case you ever need to rely on them for legal purposes. That way, you aren't working from memory... which in my experience doesn't get better with age.

My top tips

As I said before, these inspections do not give you carte blanche to start opening letters and searching your tenant's Google history for evidence of them purchasing a pet they haven't disclosed. However, there are things you can do to build a better picture of their lifestyle, which aren't intrusive.

1. **When you go in, take note of the number of trainers and shoes in the hallway. If you have a single male occupant but there are a few pairs of women's shoes, you may need to ask a few questions.**
2. **Take note of the number of toothbrushes in the bathroom, again this may be an indication of the number of people actually living there.**
3. **Speak to neighbours. It's always valuable to have a good rapport with neighbours. They are your main feed of information should there be any issues and will give you some honest feedback.**

If you're a landlord in the Nottinghamshire area and want to have a chat about how we can help you go hands-free...



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