



Wicklow County Council

Rental Accommodation Scheme

Inspections.

Guidance for Landlords.

Revision History

Revision	Date	Details	Amended By
0	18/11/2013	Draft	
1	19/11/2013	Typographical errors corrected.	
2	2/4/2014	Gas installation servicing and safety checking updated. Electrical PIR information expanded.	JD
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1.0 Scope:

Accommodation will be inspected to assess the following:

- (1) Compliance with S.I. 534 of 2008 – Housing (Standards for rented houses) Regulations 2008. (Note that all private rented accommodation must comply with this – this is not just in relation to RAS!)
- (2) Compliance with current Building Regulations – in particular Fire Safety.
- (3) General condition and suitability for renting to Council Tenants.

The Council's Engineer will take photographs of the property, both inside and outside as part of the inspection.

Note that a BER is also a requirement of the scheme, so issues such as insulation will also be covered by that survey.

The inspection is a visual inspection limited to items which can easily be seen and accessed without the need for tools, disassembly or destructive testing. It excludes cracks or other defects hidden by paint or other surface coatings, wallpaper, fabrics, furniture or floor coverings or concealed within the fabric of the building or relating to buried services.

No warranty is given or implied. The list of defects identified, if any, should not be taken to be exhaustive. Failure to identify or state defects or non-compliances with Building Regulations, National Rules for Electrical Installations or other relevant standards, shall not be construed as meaning that the property complies with those standards.

No contract between the Council and the landlord or tenant for engineering consultancy services of any kind is intended or is to be implied.

This report is not a structural inspection or survey. It is not a valuation report. It is not prepared for the purposes of satisfying the requirements of any financial institution for the purposes of a mortgage or property transaction of any kind.

To assist the landlord, suggested means of compliance may be given. There may be several means of compliance, but it is up to the landlord to select the most cost effective approach to suit his/her circumstances. Further professional advice, if required, on how to comply is a matter for the landlord. Any reference to any brand or specific product is made only to assist the landlord in compliance – the exact specification for replacement items or modifications is a matter for the landlord or his/her advisors.

1.1 Time required:

A typical 3 bedroom house will usually require 45 minutes to inspect. A 1- or 2- bed apartment will usually take 30 minutes.

1.2 Attendance:

The current tenant, the landlord or his or her agent must be in attendance and be able to stay for the full duration of the inspection. Any person nominated to be present in lieu of the landlord or tenant, must be an adult – i.e. over 18. Inspections will not be carried out unaccompanied or in the presence solely of minors.

1.3 Outcome of Inspection and Remedial works:

A written Summary will be provided to the landlord within a couple of working days of the inspection. The summary will state any problems or issues which must be addressed, the reasons and a suggested means of compliance. If the landlord wishes the property to be accepted onto the scheme, the remedial works identified in the Summary must be addressed. There is no time limit for completing these works but no contract will be signed until the RAS section is satisfied that these items have been dealt with.

1.4 Re-Inspection:

A Re-inspection will usually be required to verify that the issues identified on the first inspection have been rectified properly. Re-inspections will not be required in cases where the only items are Gas boiler service reports or electrical Periodic Inspection Reports and associated remedial works as these will be subject of separate certification.

2.0 Heating

2.1 Gas boilers and appliances

Landlords will be required to have the gas installation in the dwelling checked and serviced as follows:

An Annex E safety check shall be carried out on the **entire installation**. That includes the pipe work from the gas meter to all appliances.

An Annex C service shall be carried out on **each gas appliance** e.g. boiler, gas fires, gas cookers. The Annex C service must be carried out annually. This should be done by an RGII registered contractor. The RGI (registered gas installer) should provide the landlord with a “Declaration of conformance for existing installations with a gas meter for new appliance fit (except boilers), repair, safety check and /or service.”- RGII Cert 3. This cert should be submitted to the RAS section. Note that these certs are examined by WCC for anomalies. The completed cert should accurately reflect the number, type and location of appliances within the dwelling and the class of work carried out on each. Landlords should note that a properly conducted service of a gas boiler should take approx 40 minutes to complete.

2.2 Oil fired boilers

Oil fired boilers should be serviced annually.

The contractor and individual technician must be OFTEC registered. On completion of an existing oil fired appliance service, the contractor shall complete and provide OFTEC Form CD11 to the landlord and this shall be submitted to WCC RAS section. In the case of new oil fired installations, OFTEC Form CD10 shall be submitted. In cases where there is doubt about the location or safety of an existing oil storage tank, we reserve the right to request a "Domestic oil storage tank spillage and fire risk assessment" – OFTEC form TI/133D – to be submitted.

2.3 Open fires and back boilers

Chimneys should be swept at least annually. Frequent sweeping helps to prevent chimney fires. The charge (Nov 2013) for Fire Brigade attendance at a chimney fire is €250.

Tenants should also be warned of the dangers of burning refuse and in particular plastic packaging in the fireplace.

Refractory material of fire-backs must be in good condition. There should be no evidence of smoke escape around fire surrounds or mantle-pieces.

2.4 Bottled gas heaters and cookers.

Bottled butane gas is sometimes used to fuel cookers and portable heaters (i.e. "Superser" heaters). The combustion of butane produces large amounts of water vapour which will condense on any cold surface with which it comes in contact. The use of bottled gas indoors, combined with poor ventilation and poor insulation/cold bridging often gives rise to serious problems with black mould and condensation.

A further issue arises when gas cylinders are located outside the house and the supply must be brought through the wall to the inside. The flexible rubber hose (usually orange in colour) which connects the gas regulator to the appliance must not pass through the wall. The section passing through the wall should be a metal pipe (usually copper).

Otherwise there is a risk of chafing of the rubber hose which could allow gas to escape and fill the wall cavity with consequent risk of a gas explosion. (The set up shown in the photo below is not acceptable).



3.0 Electrical Installation

All houses and apartments will require a Periodic Inspection Report (PIR).. This must be carried out by either a RECI or ECSSA registered contractor. RECI and ECSSA are the 2 Safety Supervisory Bodies. According to their websites, there are 55 ECSSA and 66 RECI contractors in County Wicklow. Electrical contractors may be sourced from the following websites:

<http://www.reci.ie>

<http://www.ecssa.ie>

It is up to the landlord to engage the electrician and to pay for the report.

The PIR involves a full inspection of the electrical system in the dwelling. Apart from visual inspection, a suite of tests using instruments (e.g to measure RCD tripping times) is also carried out. The electrician will complete a 4 –page report from a duplicate book with serial numbers. Photocopies of specimen documents taken from, for example ET101, are not acceptable and will be returned. All questions on the PIR must be answered (this is stated on the PIR anyway). Incomplete PIRs will be returned to landlords for referral back to their electrician. The outcome is shown on Page 4 of the report. The standard required for compliance with Section 13 of the Housing (Standards for rented Houses) Regulations 2008 is “No remedial work is required”. If remedial work is required “The following observations are made” section will apply. The electrician will have inspected the installation for compliance with the National Rules for Electrical Installations 4th Edition ET101:2008. Any issues identified will be listed on Page 4 and these are classified into categories 1,2,3 and 4.

Explanation of coding used on Page 4 of the PIR	
Code	Meaning
1	Requires urgent attention
2	Requires improvement
3	Requires further investigation
4	Does not comply with current national rules for electrical installations

For acceptance onto the RAS scheme, we will expect that all items coded as 1, 2 or 3 are rectified.

Note that 3 means the electrician cannot give a definite YES or NO answer to one or more of the questions on the report form. A typical example would be the earth electrode and its inspection box. This may have been covered over by a concrete ramp or decking and therefore cannot be seen or accessed by the electrician without further invasive work. Clearly earthing is a critical issue in relation to any electrical installation, so this issue cannot be left indeterminate/unanswered. Therefore all items which are coded “3” should be investigated further and on establishment of the facts, they will then become either 1, 2 or 4 items.

To save time in processing applications for RAS, landlords may instruct their electrician to investigate all “3” items from the outset so that they may thus be reported as 1,2 or 4 only.

Code “4” items are those which do not comply with the latest wiring rules but which did comply with the wiring rules which were in force at the time of the original installation. Such items are not necessarily unsafe. Accordingly, for acceptance onto the RAS scheme, landlords are not required to rectify Code 4 items but may decide to do so at their discretion. However the statement “ this does not necessarily imply that the electrical installation inspected is unsafe” – found at the bottom of page 4 of the PIR form may be subject to certain provisos or conditions. An example would be the matter of earths at light switches and fittings. The latest rules require earths at light switches but in the past this was not a requirement. This is often a code 4 item and is safe so long as the light switches are of the plastic type. If a landlord or tenant subsequently replaces the plastic light switch with a metal (e.g. decorative brass) switch, earthing is now a definite issue. This highlights the fact that the PIR is a snapshot of the condition of the electrical installation at the *time of inspection only*. It is not a certificate.

Note that all PIRs submitted to the RAS section will be examined for anomalies and completeness.

For acceptance onto the RAS scheme, we will expect any remedial work identified in the PIR to be done. Proof that the work has been done will consist of either:

- (a) A Declaration of Compliance with ET101 for Minor Electrical Installation Works – usually referred to as a “Minor Works Declaration”. This will apply for minor repairs or alterations such as replacement of damaged sockets, light fittings etc.

Or

- (b) A new Completion Certificate. – this will apply to more serious work such as replacement of fuseboards with modern consumer units or addition of extra circuits to an existing consumer unit.

It is in the landlord's own interests to have the PIR carried out as it provides a very useful health check on the state of the electrical system in the house.

Common issues arising would include (but not limited to):

- Electric showers not protected by separate 40 A/30mA RCBO.
- Light fittings in bathrooms –e.g pendants or batten holders where globe fittings are required.
- Bonding of pipework
- Burnt /overheated or otherwise damaged sockets.
- Earths at metal switches and light fittings.
- MCBs not of correct type – e.g. industrial rated mcbs.
- PVC/PVC cables run on the surface without mechanical protection.

Common issues with PIRs (**which will result in landlords being required to refer the PIR back to their electrician**).

- Incorrect form used or form photocopied from a specimen document.
- All questions on the form not answered fully or conflicting answers such as YES and NO ticked.
- PIR used to list rectifications carried out – when (as described above) a minor Works Declaration or Completion Cert should have been used.
- Code 3 items on Page 4 which have not been investigated further – these will need to be resolved.

Note that with effect from 1st of October 2013 certain electrical works in domestic premises may only be carried out by registered electrical contractors. There are exceptions where this does not apply, see the following link for details:

<http://www.safeelectric.ie/>

4.0 Fire Safety Issues:

4.1 Smoke alarms:

(a) Houses

Housing (Standards for rented houses) Regulations 2008 - section 11- require **either**:

1 No mains powered smoke alarm

Or

2 No 10 year battery powered smoke alarms.

Note that the 10 year type alarm is powered by a lithium ion battery which has a life of 10 years and is sealed into the smoke alarm. It is not possible to remove or replace this battery and after 10 years the whole unit must be replaced. These are made by various manufacturers and are available from electrical wholesalers, some retail outlets and certain internet sites. The manufacturer's information leaflet should be read carefully when installing smoke alarms to ensure they are located to best effect.

(b) Apartments

In the case of apartments only, 1 No mains powered smoke alarm is required.

Landlords and tenants may decide to install additional smoke alarms of any type over and above these minimum requirements. Carbon monoxide detectors, heat detectors

etc are also wise precautions but are not required to comply with the above mentioned regulations.

4.2 Fire Blanket:

All dwellings require a fire blanket. This would usually be located in the kitchen.

4.3 Emergency Evacuation Plan:

This is only required for apartments in multi-occupancy buildings. It would normally consist of a map or building plan showing the nearest fire exit or escape route(s) from that apartment. Ideally it should be fixed to the inside of the front door of that apartment.

4.4 Emergency lighting:

This applies to multi-occupancy buildings only.

4.5 Internal Linings:

The most common issue here would be in relation to the use of tongued & grooved V-sheeting and other timber products (such as hardboard) on walls and ceilings. Especially if these are painted.

T&G Vsheeting applied to ceilings should be fixed over 12mm plasterboard. Any paint or varnish used should be fire resistant. The area of such linings should not exceed 5m².

4.6 Fire stopping/firebreaks

The attic (if there is one) will be checked. In mid-terrace or semi-detached houses and apartment blocks, the party wall will be inspected. Common problems:

- Party wall does not rise above level of highest ceiling at all or only partially. (i.e. a terrace of houses where it is possible to walk or crawl from one house to another through the attics). This can be a problem in houses of any age but particularly in houses of the early 20th century and older.
- Party wall exists but there are significant gaps between it and the underside of the roof covering. Depending on the size, these gaps will require filling with blockwork or cement mortar or mineral fibre or other non-combustible material. Note: landlords should be aware that there are a large number of products available which may be described as “fire resistant”, “fire retardant” etc – which is not the same as “non-combustible”. These may not be suitable for this type of application. The characteristics and performance of this kind of product will usually depend on the method of use, the size of gap to be filled etc. The performance predicted by the manufacturer will only be achieved subject to the conditions under which the product was originally tested and certified.
- In timber frame houses, the party wall should consist of a partition with a double layer of 12mm plasterboard on both sides, with the joints staggered.

4.7 Means of Escape – stairs

Stairs must not discharge into a kitchen.

Means of Escape – bedroom windows

Fires will often start downstairs in the kitchen. If a fire starts at night, occupants will likely be asleep and by the time they become aware of the fire, the hallway and stairwell may be filled with smoke and flames. Bedroom windows may then provide the only

available means of escape and rescue. It is important that window openings are of a sufficient size to allow occupants to escape through them.

Accordingly, bedroom windows will be checked for compliance with 1.5.6 of the Technical Guidance Documents – Part B of Building Regulations 2006 which gives minimum sizes and areas:

- The area of the window opening must be at least 0.33m².
- The minimum width or height of the window opening is 450mm.
- The bottom of the window opening must be no more than 1100 mm above floor level.

Note that the opening area is calculated from the width and height of the opening when the sash (casement) is in the fully open position and not the from the apparent size of the frame opening. This is because many modern windows use hinges which cause the sash to move towards the middle of the opening (to facilitate cleaning the outside from the inside).

Common issues:

- Opening width or height is less than 450mm. In many cases this can be rectified by fitting a different type of hinge (see link below) which allows the sash to open without restricting the escape route. This will work in 90% of cases. The remainder have frame opening sizes which are too small regardless of hinges and these will require window replacement.

<http://www.era-security.com/media/downloads/e3---1357914917.pdf>

- Bottom of window opening is more than 1100mm above floor level. This can only be rectified by a complete change of window. A new window complying with Part B of the Building Regulations 2006 will be required. In a very small number of cases the window sill itself is too high and lowering of the sill height would then be required as well as a new window.



Example of a bedroom window which does not comply with Part B.

Other requirements apply to rooflights in attic conversions but note that it is the policy of Wicklow County Council's RAS section, not to accept attic conversions.

Windows generally:

Loose handles, damaged hinges etc will need to be repaired.

5.0 Roofs:

Common issues would be:

- Missing tiles or slates.
- Rotten soffit and fascia boards. Holes in soffits and fascias will allow birds to enter the attic.
- Paint peeling off soffits or fascias. Paintwork which has deteriorated to bare timber will require priming, undercoat and gloss painting.
- Gutters – full with weeds and grass. Gutters hanging off. Joints leaking.
- Downpipes missing or not properly fixed to the wall.
- Flat felt roofs – condition of felt and decking.

6.0 Attics:

Cold Water Storage tank:

Common issues:

- No proper lid on the tank. Sheets of cardboard or aeroboard are not acceptable. The best solution is to measure the tank and get a purpose made plastic lid from a builders providers – these are sold separately. Note that a hole will need to be made in the lid to allow the hot water expansion pipe to discharge into the tank. The hole made should only be large enough to suit the diameter of the expansion pipe. Providing a 4” opening for a ¾” pipe defeats the purpose of the lid.
Tanks must be covered to prevent contamination from rodents, birds, glass fibre (from insulation) and general dirt which is present in attics. Older houses built before slating felt came into use, usually have mortar on the back of the slates and laths. This can easily fall into uncovered tanks.
- Inadequate storage volume or no tank at all.. Part G of the Building Regulations (1.6 of the TGD Part G) requires a volume of at least 212 litres for a house with 3 bedrooms or less and at least 349 litres for a house with 4 or more bedrooms. 24 hours storage must be provided for each dwelling to allow for inevitable interruptions to mains water supply which happen due to burst mains and other events. If a dwelling does not have a cold water storage tank, it will not be possible to flush toilets etc during such interruptions to supply.
- Heating system feed and expansion tanks. These are sometimes positioned above the storage tank. This is bad practice. In some cases the overflow pipe from the feed & expansion tank has been found to be discharging directly into the cold water storage tank. This is a potentially quite serious health hazard as water overflowing from the heating system will usually be heavily laden with corrosion products and possibly corrosion inhibitors which are sometimes added to heating systems.
- Galvanised steel tanks. Landlords would be well advised to replace these with plastic tanks. While they may appear to be in good condition, they often suffer from corrosion due to differential aeration cells especially where sludge has accumulated at the bottom of the tank. A burst galvanised steel tank can create a lot of costly damage in terms of repairs to ceilings, furnishings etc.
- No access or inadequate access to attic to check or maintain tank.
- See also Fire-stopping /fire-breaks.
- Insulation will also be noted. In particular, absence of same. The BER survey will have covered this anyway.
- Tears in slating felt.
- Woodworm in roof timbers.

7.0 Ventilation:

This subject is covered by both the Building Regulations and the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations.

Lack of adequate ventilation is a common fault in many houses. Together with cold bridging and lack of heating it is associated with complaints about damp and mould. It also contributes to carbon monoxide poisoning events.

Common issues:

7.1 Background Ventilation:

- No background ventilation. External wall vents with a minimum cross-sectional area of 6,500mm² are required. If these are not present the neatest way to install them is by core-drilling. Note however that a sleeve must be inserted to seal the cavity – otherwise smoke from a fire could enter the wall cavity and make it's way into other parts of the building. Some houses satisfy the background ventilation requirement by means of ventilators built into windows and doors.
- Background vents are present but are either closed.or have been taped over or blocked with newspapers etc. Hit & miss vent covers are often painted over which prevents them from sliding.

7.2 Mechanical Ventilation:

- Section 9 of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations. Requires “adequate ventilation shall be provided for the removal of water vapour from kitchens and bathrooms”. In the case of bathrooms this usually means extractor fans ducted to the outside air.
- A common problem is that flexible ducting is often used and this usually passes through the attic. Inspections have found these disconnected from the roof terminal or pulled off the ceiling fan itself. Accordingly steam etc is just being circulated into the roof space or insulation which may cause damage in the roof.
- **Cooker Hoods/extractor fans.** Apart from Section 9, Section 8 of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations requires “*Suitable facilities for the effective and safe removal of fumes to the external air by means of a cooker hood or extractor fan.*”
- Cooker hoods must be connected to the outside air by means of a duct. Re-circulation type hoods which just contain a grease filter and circulate the water vapour around the kitchen are not acceptable. They do not remove the water vapour to the outside air and they require the filters to be changed on a regular basis.

8.0 Bathrooms:

Common issues:

- Wash- hand basin loose and not properly fixed to the wall.
- Tap bodies not properly fixed to the wash hand basin or bath and rotate.
- Taps not serviceable – e.g. no water at all.
- Taps leaking.
- Poor drainage from wash hand basins due to blockages in waste pipes or bad plumbing.
- No traps on wash hand basins (and therefore no water seal to prevent foul gases from coming back up the waste pipe).
- Tiles missing from around baths and showers.
- Poor sealing around baths and showers.
- Mould on tiles, walls and ceilings.
- Sanitary ware chipped or cracked significantly.
- Cisterns not filling.
- Cistern flush valves defective and water running continuously into the w.c. bowl.
- Flush pipe (non close coupled w.c.) leaking.

- Multiwik leaking.
- W.c. bowl not fixed to floor.
- Cistern not fixed to wall.
- Toilet seat missing or broken or hinges missing or broken.
- Bath screens and shower enclosures – seals worn, torn or missing and leaking.
- Electric shower hose/shower head support rails loose / not properly fixed to wall.

9.0 Hot water Storage:

Section 8 of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008 requires “minimum capacity requirements for hot and cold water storage facilities”. Cold water storage requirements are dealt with above. Hot water storage is provided by means of the hot water cylinder, usually located in the hotpress. While rare, inspections have found dwellings with no hot water storage. Also immersion heaters should be provided on hot water cylinders (these can easily be retrofitted). Lagging jackets should also be provided except when the cylinder has factory applied insulation.

10.0 Internal doors:

Common issues:

- Holes in skin of flush doors.
- Broken handles.
- Missing handles.
- Handles with excessive wear and springs broken or worn out.
- Mortice locks missing or with parts such as the bolt missing.
- Hinges fixed to frames with only 2 out of 8 screws.
- Doors binding on tiled floors.
- Doors not closing.

11.0 Substandard Extensions:

- Extensions built on garden boundary walls with no dpc.
- Extensions with floors level with or less than 150mm above outside ground level.
- Extensions built with insufficient head height.

12.0 Paintwork/internal decoration:

External paintwork – paintwork in poor condition especially on timber such as soffits & fascias will inevitably lead to deterioration of the timber it is meant to protect. Internal paintwork is being inspected at the start of a 4 year contract period, so it needs to be in quite good condition to allow for the kind of reasonable wear and tear which may happen over 4 years. If marks, stains, dirt etc are confined to a particular room, then only that room will require re-painting. Mould or stains due to water damage (caused by leaking roofs or baths/showers etc) or peeling paint due to steam will all need to be re-painted. A fungicidal wash should be used on mould before re-painting.

13.0 Kitchens

13.1 Kitchen Units and worktops:

This is covered by Section 8 of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008.

Common Issues

- Insufficient number of wall and floor units to store food, cooking utensils, cutlery, etc.
- Kitchen units in bad condition – e.g. holed, damp, not fixed to wall or floor properly, hinges broken or hanging off. Carcasses disintegrating – e.g. melamine edging hanging off shelves etc. Doors and other surfaces not amenable to cleaning – e.g. absorbent non sealed materials like bare MDF. Evidence of rodents – droppings.
- Worktops in bad condition or not fit for purpose. Worktops must be of a suitable type – e.g. melamine. Worktops made up of timber blocks glued together with joints opening up and which are un-hygienic due to dirt accumulation in joints.



13.2 Kitchen Appliances:

Section 8 of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008 contains a list of appliances which must be supplied by the landlord.

Common Issues:

- Any of the appliances on that list either partially or completely unserviceable. (e.g. one or more rings on a cooker not working, fridge-freezer not working etc).

14.0 Drainage/Sewerage:

Common issues:

- Soil Vent Pipes terminating less than 900 mm above any opening into the building (such as vents and windows) which is within 3m horizontally of the pipe. (Risk of foul gases from sewers/drains entering the building). This is easily rectified by extending the SVP.
- Waste pipes from sinks, showers, baths, wash-hand basins without any rodding access for clearing blockages and connected directly to drains instead of discharging to a gully trap.
- Waste pipes not bracketed to walls.
- Septic tanks – evidence of emptying/maintenance will be sought. Problems with percolation areas, ponding and location of septic tanks (e.g not within curtilage of house).
- Decking – this is often laid without regard for access to gully traps, AJs, manholes etc. Access hatches should be provided or else the decking should be removed.

15.0 Lighting:

This is covered by Section 10 of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008. This requires suitable and adequate means of artificial lighting. This is rarely an issue but a small number of houses have been inspected which did not have central ceiling mounted lighting points but depended on table lamps. This would not be considered suitable or adequate.

16.0 General Safety:

Anything which is liable to cause injury or ill-health to tenants.

- Broken fittings with screw points and sharp edges.
- Un-guarded edges or changes of level in gardens etc. Risk of fall from a height.
- Security of boundaries – e.g. missing fence panels or lack of proper walls, gates, fences etc for security of small children in rear gardens etc.
- Decking – slip/trip hazards due to build up of algal slime. Requires pressure washing , chemical cleaning or removal of deck.

END