

# The professional inventory – what is ‘fair wear and tear’?



**Pat Barber**, Chair of the Association of Independent Inventory Clerks (AIIC) answers.



**W**ith the rise in demand for rental properties building at a fast pace and a raft of accidental and first time landlords opening up the market, there is a real need to outsource some of the tasks associated with renting a property.

One of the major areas that agents and their clients need help with is inventories. With the right inventory, both landlords and tenants are protected and covered for fair wear and tear, damage and cleaning costs. It is the best way to avoid arguments about what was or wasn't in a rented property and means that the condition of the property is clear.

#### ► DEPOSIT CLAIMS AND AWARDS

In 2010, the Dispute Service (TDS) reported a huge rise in the number of tenancy deposit disputes from 577 in 2007-08, to 6,284 in 2008-9 and to 11,613 in 2009-10.

Even allowing for the growth in the number of registered tenancies, the number of disputes exceeded the organisation's own estimates by over 2,300 cases.

In over 90 per cent of cases at the Mydeposits deposit scheme where awards were made against the landlord, the key reasons were lack of inventories, check ins and check outs. Check outs have become increasingly important to ensure that the landlord and agent cover the costs of any damage or cleanliness issues caused by tenants.

According to new research by Mydeposits, 21 per cent of disputes are caused over a disagreement about how much of the deposit should be kept for things such as cleaning the

bathroom or getting stains out of the carpet after the tenant is gone. The need for detailed, consistent and well documented inventories has never been more important; if an item – and its condition – is not registered it is always difficult to prove liability.

#### ► SCHEDULES AND STANDARDS

The inventory and schedule of condition should itemise every wall, flooring and surface, clearly describing its condition, so there can be no dispute at the end of the tenancy.

Details like the make model and condition of appliances are especially important as are detailing the quality and colour of light switches and socket covers,



#### Did the dog eat the sofa? Is this fair wear and tear?

Every room should have the standard of paintwork recorded with any visible marks, dents or scratches.

The cleanliness of each room and tidiness of the garden at the start of the tenancy needs to also be noted in complete accuracy. A selected number of photographs can also be taken to support the written word where necessary. Photographs of gardens are particularly useful.

It is worth remembering that an inventory is a binding legal document that provides an accurate written record of the condition and contents of a property at the beginning of a tenancy. It is only effective if it is accurate.

However, inventories can be a very time-consuming and laborious process, so some landlords and management companies opt for their own inventory 'tick sheet' reports,

which fall far short of the standard required.

There is a huge difference between a professional inventory drawn up by a fully trained experienced inventory clerk and poorly produced lists from landlords themselves. A three-bedroomed property cannot be summarised with a piece of A4 paper and a simple list of items in the property. It requires details of condition if it is to be used in the event of a dispute.

#### ► BUT WHAT IS FAIR WEAR AND TEAR?

Nothing lasts forever and generally we get what we pay for – the simple fact of life is, that things do wear out. But the general rule is that the better quality usually means longer life expectancy.

When assessing fair wear and tear, a number of factors need to be taken into consideration. The main ones are the quality of the supplied item, the condition at the start and end of the tenancy and any extenuating circumstances. ►



**'The tick box sheet falls far short of the standard of inventory that is required.'**