

Welcome to HOWM's latest newsletter! We have designed this newsletter to keep you informed of HOWM's activities and to give you the opportunity to provide feedback on us as a company. We aim to publish our newsletter at least once a year but if you would like us to publish more frequently, please let us know.

## CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS



HOWM consistently ticks all the boxes for the second year in a row!

Having asked a sample of customers to complete a Customer Satisfaction Survey either by post or telephone, as part of our on-going commitment to service improvement. We'd like to say a big thank you to all who responded, as your answers will help us continue to develop and improve our services.

We would also like to thank you for the extremely positive and constructive feedback we received and can confirm that HOWM reached and even exceeded its 90% total customer satisfaction target once again.

Our results are published in full on our website which can be found at [www.howm.co.uk](http://www.howm.co.uk), which also includes testimonials from some of our satisfied customers. We have also included our two 'You Said – We Did' action points in this newsletter, under the articles on 'Rent Statements' and 'Contact Details'.

## **NEW LAWS AND REGULATIONS AFFECTING LANDLORDS ON MINIMUM ENERGY EFFICIENCY STANDARDS**

**We urge our Landlords to read this industry update so that you can plan for any changes you may need to make to your properties by the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 deadline:**

### **OVERVIEW**

As from the 1st April 2018 there will be a requirement for any properties rented out in the private rented sector to have a minimum energy performance rating of E on an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). The regulations will come into force with effect from 1st April 2018. After this date it will be unlawful to rent a property which breaches the requirement for a minimum E rating, unless there is an applicable exemption. A civil penalty of up to £5,000 will be imposed by Local Authorities for breaches of the minimum standard. There are separate regulations effective from 1st April 2016 under which a tenant can apply for consent to carry out energy efficiency improvements in privately rented properties. All EPCs must be a current EPC, i.e. no more than 10 years old.

### **PROHIBITION ON LETTING**

A domestic private rented sector property is substandard if the EPC rating is F or G, unless an exemption applies. The legislation prohibits a Landlord from letting out a substandard property. If there is an EPC in place which shows that the property is an F or G then it must not be let; otherwise the Landlord is liable to penalties, subject to any available exemptions. Energy efficiency improvements must be carried out to bring the property up to an E rating at the minimum, unless one of the exemptions is applicable.

### **ENFORCEMENT IN RELATION TO EPCs**

- Local Authorities will enforce compliance with the regulations.
- Where a Landlord considers an exemption applies allowing them to let their property below the minimum energy efficiency standard, the Landlord will need to provide such evidence to a centralised register, the "PRS Exemptions Register" and we would ask that you furnish HOWM with a copy of the same for our records. Landlords may be required to submit relevant evidence and details of their exemption to the Register. The Government may use this information to assist Local Authorities in targeting their enforcement activity.



**Landlords: Don't risk an unlimited fine, imprisonment, or your  
tenant's death!**

**Make sure your gas safety certificate is up to date**

**[www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)**

## **SAFETY CHECKS FOLLOWING THE GRENFELL TOWER FIRE**

Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in London, the Government has issued the following safety guidelines to all Local Authorities, Registered Providers of Social Housing and Housing Association Chief Executives :

### **Summary of Safety Guidelines**

- Notify Fire and Rescue Services immediately if your building contains Insulation with Aluminium Composite Material
- Check that the fire risk assessment has been carried out within the previous 12 months and that the recommendations within the action plan of the assessment have been completed; also, confirm that there have been no material changes (to the building, the fire safety measures or the occupancy) that could, potentially, undermine the validity of the fire risk assessment
- Engage with residents to ensure they fully understand the emergency fire procedures in the building, particularly the meaning of “stay put”. Ensure that fire procedure notices are accurate.
- Check that, at ground level, or on any balconies, there are no combustible materials (e.g. storage of refuse) in the vicinity of the cladding. Ensure that there are measures to prevent combustible materials in such locations
- Instruct residents that they must not have any barbeques on any balcony.
- Check that all flat entrance doors, and doors that open onto escape corridors and stairways, are fire-resisting and effectively self-closing against any resistance of a latch
- Check all walls that separate flats, plant and store rooms, etc. from escape routes to ensure there are no obvious routes for fire or smoke spread (e.g. holes where services, such as pipes and cables, pass through walls).
- Check that any smoke control systems, including associated fire detection systems, are operating correctly.
- Check all facilities provided for fire-fighters, including fire-fighting lifts and dry or wet rising mains. If you have **ANY** concerns you should contact your local fire and rescue service, who will, if they have not already done so, carry out an inspection to ensure functionality
- Ensure that there is sufficient roadway access and hardstanding for firefighting vehicles attending incidents and to be set up to fight any fire externally
- Check that insulation or other materials that form the façade meet all relevant standards
- Residents to be advised to ensure all smoke alarms are present and working in their flat; to report concerns about fire safety measures in the building (e.g. presence of combustible materials in escape routes) to their landlord and, understand the purpose of any interim measures begin taken.

We thank you in advance for reading through these guidelines and considering these instructions in relation to the properties you place with us.

## NEW HMO REGULATIONS

Please read this update on the government's intended changes to HMO regulations so that you are aware of how this will affect your rental properties. Please note that while these changes were expected to come into force this month, the DCLG has now confirmed that it now hopes to introduce the required secondary legislation in **April 2018**, ahead of full implementation in October 2018.

Although there will be a six month grace period for licence applications when the new regulations are implemented, if you need to adapt your property to meet the regulations, **you are best doing this now while you have time on your side**. A summary of the changes is as follows:

The requirement for a HMO to be defined as a minimum of three or more storeys in height is being removed – HMOs will now be deemed as any HMO that is occupied by 5 or more persons in 2 or more households will require a mandatory licence from the Local Authority to be used as an HMO, regardless of the number of storeys present.

Mandatory HMO licensing is also being extended to flats above and below business premises (regardless of storeys). You will now need an HMO licence for this type of premises before offering it for use as rented accommodation. It does not matter if you have a family living in your property which is a flat above a shop, the flat is still going to be classed as an HMO that needs a licence.

The size of sleeping accommodation is also being added to the mandatory licence conditions; a minimum room size of 6.52sq/metres is required for sleeping accommodation to be used by a single person, and the minimum room size for two persons is 10.23sq/metres. Additionally any area less than 1.5m high from floor to ceiling will not be included in a room size calculation, so this will impact on whether the room is the required 6.52 / 10.23 square metres. Children will now be counted as a full person under the new regulations.

The government is still consulting on whether Landlords will need to undergo a 'Fit and Proper Person Test', so do not be surprised if criminal record checks are made mandatory for licence holders.

Waste: a mandatory condition relating to household refuse is being introduced, and Landlords will be required to provide "adequate receptacles for the storage and disposal of normal household waste" for all HMOs.

The Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) is to become mandatory for all private rental sector houses. **Very importantly for all HMOs (not just licensable HMOs) is that there is an obligation to have fixed electrical installations in every HMO inspected and tested at intervals not exceeding 5 years by a qualified electrician.**

As already mentioned in another article in this newsletter, minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS) are expected, and by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 all private sector rentals that are new or renewing must have an EPC rating of E or above. By 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, this standard will need to be met across all existing tenancies.

Non-compliant HMO Landlords will find themselves at risk of penalties, including criminal prosecutions and the new civil penalties of up to £30,000 at the end of the six month grace period for applying for a licence, so please act quickly once the regulations come into force. If you need to alter the layout of your properties to meet the room size standards, renew your electrical certification meet any other of the criteria needed to make your property a fully compliant HMO, please do so while you can, before the new regulations come into force.

Thank you for your co-operation with this matter.

## **HOWM'S OFFICE HOURS AND CONTACT DETAILS**

Following some feedback in our latest customer satisfaction survey, we would like to remind you of our contact details and standards for out of hours calls, as published in our internal Communications Policy and the Customer Care Policy that we have published externally on our website, [www.howm.co.uk](http://www.howm.co.uk).

Please send all hard copy correspondence to: Housing Options West Midlands Limited, Suite 212, Albert Wing, The Argent Centre, 60 Frederick Street, Birmingham, West Midlands, B1 3HS.

Our opening hours are 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, except on bank holidays and any other statutory holiday periods.

Our telephone, fax and email details are: T: 0303 030 0133, F: 0121 212 3166, E: [enquiries@howm.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@howm.co.uk).

Answer machines will be used when the main office is closed but an emergency call out service is also provided to all clients. Recorded messages will be audible and accurate, and will give the caller an option to leave a message. The message will also advise callers what to do in the case of an emergency.

## **RENT STATEMENTS**

Feedback on our latest customer survey recorded that some of our Landlords would prefer to receive their rental statement in the post rather than by email. HOWM is ISO 14001 certified so we try to cut down on paper usage wherever we can, however if you would prefer to receive your statements in hard copy format, or wish to provide us with any other feedback then please let us know in writing via [enquiries@howm.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@howm.co.uk). Many thanks!

## **IMPORTANT CHANGES TO HSE LEGISLATION ON THE CONTROL OF LEGIONNAIRES DISEASE**

**The Health and Safety Executive has recently updated legislation regarding the control of Legionnaires' disease. This revision means the legislation now applies to residential lettings, which were not covered previously.**

All residential properties which are rented out must now have a risk assessment undertaken to determine the risk of Legionella, which then allows landlords to implement a suitable control scheme.

Legionella are bacteria that are common in natural water systems (rivers and lakes etc.) and artificial water systems, e.g. hot and cold water systems (storage tanks, pipework, taps and showers). We usually associate Legionella with larger water systems, e.g. in factories, hotels, hospitals, museums and cooling towers, but they can also live in smaller water supply systems used in homes and other residential accommodation.

As a Landlord, under health and safety law, you have a duty to take suitable precautions to prevent or control the risk of exposure to Legionella. Carrying out a risk assessment is your responsibility and will help you to establish any potential risks and implement measures to either eliminate or control risks.

To identify the risks in your water system you, or a competent person who understands your water systems and any associated equipment, should establish any possible exposure to Legionella risks, as part of a risk assessment.

Your risk assessment should include:

- Management responsibilities, including the name of the competent person and description of your system;
- Any potential risk sources;
- Any controls currently in place to control risks;
- Monitoring, inspection and maintenance procedures;
- Records of the monitoring results, inspection and checks carried out; and a review date.

If you decide that the risks are insignificant and are being properly managed to comply with the law, your assessment is complete. You will not need to take any further action, but it is important to review your assessment periodically in case anything changes.

The Health & Safety Executive have released some useful guidance on why and how the assessments need to be carried out you can access this on the HSE website: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/legionnaires/>.

With winter fast approaching it might be a good idea to clear gutters and drains of leaves and debris. Take particular care that the gulleys are clear as overflowing gutters can drench walls and cause damage to your property.

It might also be a good idea to insulate external drain pipes (e.g. those for central heating) with waterproof tape or similar material so that you don't end up being called out for burst pipes on a cold winter's morning.

## **GUTTERS AND DRAINS**

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## **ACCREDITATIONS UPDATE**

As the certifying body for HOWM's ISO accreditations has merged with another company, HOWM's annual ISO audits have been moved to January 2018; we hope to bring you news of our latest successes on that front in our next newsletter!

**Thank you for the time you have taken in reading our newsletter and please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to have input into our next publication or have any feedback to provide**