

FREE GUIDE FOR UK LANDLORDS

The UK Landlord's Essential Guide

Your plain-English walkthrough of the responsibilities, compliance, licensing, tax and reform that every UK landlord needs to understand in 2026.

2026

General guidance only — not legal, tax or financial advice. Rules differ across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and change over time. Always confirm current requirements with the relevant authority or a qualified professional before acting.

Prepared by TrueDeed · truedeed.co.uk

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Six focused chapters covering the legal and financial essentials of letting a residential property in the UK.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Treat each checklist as a starting point for your own records. Letting law is devolved — where a rule is England-specific it is flagged. When in doubt, check GOV.UK or speak to a solicitor, letting agent or accountant.

Landlord responsibilities & compliance checklist

Before a tenant moves in, a landlord must meet a baseline of legal duties covering safety, documentation and the right to rent. Missing any one of these can invalidate a possession notice or lead to penalties.

Core legal duties

- **Gas safety:** arrange an annual Gas Safety Check by a Gas Safe registered engineer and give the tenant a copy of the certificate (CP12), normally before they move in and within 28 days of each yearly check.
- **Electrical safety:** in England, have the fixed wiring inspected at least every five years (an EICR) and supply the report to tenants.
- **Smoke & carbon monoxide alarms:** provide a working smoke alarm on every storey and a carbon monoxide alarm in any room with a fixed combustion appliance (excluding gas cookers), and test them at the start of the tenancy.
- **Energy Performance Certificate (EPC):** provide a valid EPC to prospective tenants — see Chapter 05 for the minimum rating.
- **Right to Rent (England):** check that adult occupiers have the legal right to rent in the UK before the tenancy begins, and keep copies of the evidence.
- **Deposit protection:** protect any deposit in a government-approved scheme and serve the prescribed information — see Chapter 04.
- **How to Rent guide (England):** give the tenant the current government "How to Rent" checklist at the start of an assured shorthold tenancy.

PRE-TENANCY CHECKLIST

- Valid Gas Safety Record issued and shared
- EICR in date and supplied to the tenant
- Smoke and CO alarms fitted and tested
- Valid EPC provided (rating E or above)
- Right to Rent checks completed and recorded
- Deposit protected + prescribed information served
- "How to Rent" guide handed over (England)
- Written tenancy agreement signed by all parties

Beyond move-in, landlords have an ongoing duty to keep the structure, exterior and key installations (heating, hot water, sanitation) in repair, and to ensure the home is fit for human habitation throughout the tenancy.

HMO licensing basics

A House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) is, broadly, a property rented to several tenants from more than one household who share facilities such as a kitchen or bathroom. HMOs carry extra duties and may need a licence.

When a mandatory licence applies

In England and Wales a property normally needs a **mandatory HMO licence** where it is occupied by **five or more people forming two or more households** who share amenities. There is no longer a storey threshold for mandatory licensing.

Additional & selective licensing

On top of mandatory licensing, individual local councils can introduce:

- **Additional licensing** — extends HMO licensing to smaller HMOs in a designated area.
- **Selective licensing** — can require a licence for some or all privately rented homes (not just HMOs) in a defined area.

Because these schemes are local and change, always check directly with the council for the property's area before letting.

EXTRA HMO DUTIES

Licensed HMOs must meet minimum room sizes, have adequate kitchen, bathroom and fire-safety provision, and the landlord/manager must be a "fit and proper person". Operating a licensable HMO without a licence can lead to substantial fines and rent repayment orders.

QUESTION	WHY IT MATTERS
How many unrelated occupiers?	Five+ from two+ households usually triggers mandatory licensing.
Are amenities shared?	Shared kitchens/bathrooms are a core HMO test.
Does the council run extra schemes?	Additional/selective licensing may apply to smaller lets.
Do rooms meet minimum sizes?	Undersized rooms cannot count toward the licence.

The Renters' Rights reforms at a glance

The biggest shake-up of the private rented sector in England in decades is reshaping how tenancies start, run and end. Timings and detail are set in regulations, so confirm the position that applies on your move-in date.

The headline changes

- **End of "no-fault" Section 21 evictions:** the reforms move to abolish Section 21, so landlords will need to rely on specified legal grounds to seek possession.
- **Move to periodic tenancies:** fixed-term assured shorthold tenancies are being replaced by open-ended periodic tenancies, with tenants able to end the tenancy on notice.
- **Strengthened possession grounds:** revised and new grounds (for example, where a landlord intends to sell or move in) are designed to give landlords a clear, evidence-based route to possession.
- **Rent increases:** increases are channelled through a defined statutory process, with tenants able to challenge above-market rises.
- **Decent Homes Standard & "Awaab's Law":** minimum quality standards and fixed timescales for dealing with serious hazards such as damp and mould are being extended to the private rented sector.
- **Private Rented Sector Database & Ombudsman:** a national landlord/property database and a mandatory redress scheme are being introduced.
- **Renting with pets, and anti-discrimination:** tenants gain a clearer right to request a pet (which landlords cannot unreasonably refuse), and blanket bans on renting to families with children or people on benefits are being outlawed.

WHAT LANDLORDS SHOULD DO NOW

Review your tenancy templates, get compliance documents in order, budget for any property improvements, and make sure you understand the possession grounds you may need to rely on. Good record-keeping becomes even more important once Section 21 ends.

These reforms apply to England. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland already operate their own separate regimes (for example, Wales under the Renting Homes (Wales) Act and Scotland under the Private Residential Tenancy).

Protecting the tenancy deposit

If you take a deposit on an assured shorthold tenancy in England or Wales, you must protect it in a government-approved scheme and tell the tenant where it is held. Getting this wrong is one of the most common — and costly — landlord mistakes.

The rules in brief

- **Use an approved scheme:** protect the deposit in one of the official tenancy deposit protection schemes within **30 days** of receiving it.
- **Serve the prescribed information:** within the same window, give the tenant the scheme details and prescribed information (who holds the deposit, how to get it back, and how disputes are resolved).
- **Choose custodial or insured:** custodial schemes hold the money for you free of charge; insured schemes let you keep the money but charge a fee and require you to hand it over if there's a dispute.
- **Deposit caps:** the Tenant Fees Act caps deposits — generally **five weeks' rent** where annual rent is under £50,000 (six weeks' rent above that).

WHY IT MATTERS

If you fail to protect a deposit or serve the prescribed information, a court can order you to repay the tenant up to **three times the deposit**, and your ability to use certain possession routes can be blocked until the deposit is returned.

At the end of the tenancy

Return the deposit promptly, less any agreed deductions for damage beyond fair wear and tear, unpaid rent or breaches of the agreement. Back deductions with evidence — inventories, dated photos and receipts. If you and the tenant disagree, the scheme's free dispute resolution service can adjudicate.

EPC & energy efficiency rules

Every let property needs a valid Energy Performance Certificate, and minimum energy efficiency standards set a floor on how poorly insulated a home you can lawfully rent. Energy rules are an area of active reform, so check the current targets.

Where things stand

- **You need a valid EPC:** provide one to prospective tenants; an EPC is generally valid for **10 years**.
- **Minimum rating today:** under the current Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) in England and Wales, you normally cannot grant or continue a tenancy on a property rated **F or G** — the minimum is band **E**, unless a valid exemption is registered.
- **Direction of travel:** the government has consulted on raising the minimum standard for the private rented sector toward **EPC band C** later this decade. The exact target and dates are set by regulations — confirm the current requirement before you let or renew.
- **Exemptions:** limited exemptions exist (for example, where all relevant improvements have been made or a cost cap is reached). These must be registered on the PRS Exemptions Register to rely on them.

PRACTICAL STEPS

Get a fresh EPC if yours is near expiry, act on the cheap "quick wins" it recommends (loft and cavity-wall insulation, LED lighting, heating controls), and keep evidence of improvements. Planning ahead for a possible band-C floor protects you from a rushed, expensive retrofit later.

Listed buildings and certain other property types can have different EPC obligations — check the specific position for your property.

Landlord tax & Section 24 essentials

Rental profit is taxable, and the way mortgage interest is treated changed significantly under "Section 24". Understanding how relief works helps you forecast your real, after-tax return.

How rental income is taxed

You pay Income Tax on your **rental profit** — broadly, rent received less allowable expenses such as letting-agent fees, repairs and maintenance (not improvements), insurance, ground rent and other day-to-day running costs. Profit is added to your other income and taxed at your marginal rate.

Section 24 — the mortgage interest restriction

- Individual landlords can **no longer deduct finance costs** (such as mortgage interest) as a normal expense to reduce taxable profit.
- Instead, relief is given as a **basic-rate (20%) tax credit** on those finance costs.
- The practical effect is that higher- and additional-rate taxpayers get relief at 20% rather than their marginal rate, which can push some landlords into a higher band and reduce net returns.

WORTH KNOWING

The finance-cost restriction applies to individuals, not to companies. Some landlords consider holding property through a limited company, but that brings its own costs, mortgage pricing and tax consequences — take professional advice before restructuring.

Other taxes to keep on your radar

TAX	WHEN IT BITES
Stamp Duty Land Tax	On purchase — a higher-rate surcharge usually applies to additional residential properties.
Capital Gains Tax	On selling a let property for a gain, after the annual exempt amount.
Making Tax Digital	Digital record-keeping and quarterly updates are being phased in for landlords above income thresholds.

Keep clean records of income and expenses all year, and file your Self Assessment on time to avoid penalties.

NEXT STEPS

Putting it into practice

Compliance is easier when it's a routine, not a scramble. Use these prompts to stay ahead.

- Diarise renewal dates for gas, electrical and EPC certificates
- Keep a single folder per property for compliance documents
- Review tenancy agreements against the latest reforms
- Check your council for HMO, additional and selective licensing
- Plan energy improvements ahead of tighter EPC targets
- Track income and expenses monthly for a stress-free tax return

MANAGE IT ALL WITH TRUDEED

TrueDeed's landlord dashboard helps you track compliance certificates, tenancies, rent and maintenance in one place — so the essentials in this guide stay on top of mind, not in a drawer.

Explore it at truedeed.co.uk.

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