




Cheshire West & Chester Council

## The Top 10 Most Common Housing Hazards



This leaflet explains the most common housing hazards that the Council's Housing Standards Team deal with on a daily basis.





## Your responsibilities as a landlord

Under the Housing Act 2004 you are responsible for ensuring your property is safe to let. This guide has been produced to help you identify the ten most common Hazards found by our Housing Standards Team when carrying out Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) inspections.

To ensure your property is compliant you need to be able to recognise these common hazards and take appropriate action to reduce any risk. By doing this you will prevent the need for enforcement action, be less likely to receive complaints about disrepair issues and more likely to retain long term tenants.

### 1. Damp and Mould

The most common complaint the Council receives from tenants relates to damp and mould in their home. There are 3 main causes of damp and mould and they are as follows:

**Condensation damp and mould.** Condensation damp and mould is the most common defect. It is often unsightly and can lead to respiratory problems. As a landlord you need to assess whether your heating is affordable and adequate and if there is sufficient accessible ventilation. You may also need to treat affected areas or use fungicidal paints to help prevent recurrence.

**Penetrating damp.** Where there are signs of penetrating damp this can often mean there are serious maintenance issues where water is leaking into or through the property. Examples often consist of: holes in the roof, blocked gutters, leaking pipes all of which need urgent investigation and repair to prevent serious damage to your property such as crumbling walls and collapsed ceilings.

**Rising damp.** This always occurs at ground level or below and often is an indication that the property's damp proof course is damaged or breached. It often requires more major work to prevent its recurrence.

For more information on how to deal with damp and mould, please see our leaflet "What to do if your property is damp or has mould".

## 2. Crowding and minimum space allowance

There are minimum space standards for self-contained flats and shared accommodation. The amount of space needed varies dependent on the nature of the let. For example, if tenants are sharing facilities they may require larger kitchens or additional toilets. If tenants sharing do not know each other prior to the tenancy beginning they will need larger bedrooms. Similarly a couple in a one bed unit will require more space than a single person.

A key factor in assessing space is looking at whether it is useable. Unusable space must be excluded. Further information is available by contacting the Council's Housing Standards Team.

## 3. Electrical hazards

You must ensure that the electrical provision in your property is safe to use. If you let a House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) you need to ensure that any appliances you provide as part of the tenancy are portable appliance tested (PAT). The best way to ensure that the electrical provision in your property is safe to use is to get an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) from a NICEIC or NAPIT registered contractor which states it is 'Satisfactory'.

If your property has burned, cracked, and loose socket plates, badly sited sockets and any where the core wiring is exposed (including lighting fixtures) are all indicators that there may be serious electrical problems. If left unattended such problems could lead to fires or tenants suffering electrical shocks.

Not having enough sockets in the right locations is likely to lead to use of extension cables. This could lead to trailing wires or overloaded circuits which in turn increase the risk of accidents and fires occurring. When getting electrical work done always use a qualified electrical engineer or electrician who is a registered competent person.



## 4. Fire Safety

When assessing fire safety, there are two main factors to consider: **fire detection systems** - such as interlinked smoke and heat alarms, giving occupants time to get out and **fire escape and separation measures** - providing a safe route for occupants to leave the building.

A basic level of fire safety would be to ensure you have effective smoke detection along the route of escape and that any doors leading onto it are solid, unglazed, well-fitting when fully closed and capable of staying closed.

Further fire safety measures are required in properties that have 'inner rooms' or have been converted into shared or self-contained flats. These properties may require sophisticated alarm monitoring systems, emergency lighting and additional fire escape routes.

In properties with common parts landlords are required by law to undertake a fire risk assessment which considers the risk of fire starting and the measures in place to mitigate that risk. For example if you need to pass through a kitchen or living room to get from a bedroom to the external exit door you will need to consider measures that offer increased fire separation, such as installing fire doors and/or providing an alternative means of escape.

It is important that any fire detection and protection system that has been provided is suitably maintained to ensure it is in full working order at all times. Alarm maintenance and equipment service records and logbooks should be retained.

From October 2015 you are required to install a minimum of one smoke detector per floor or you can be **fined up to £5,000!** However, you should also be aware that the layout of your property can alter the amount of detection and separation required. So, for example landlords with conversions to shared or self-contained accommodation should note that one detector per floor may not be enough to make your property acceptably safe.

For further advice please visit the Cheshire Fire and Rescue website at: [www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/business-safety/fire-safety-advice-for-businesses/fire-safety-guides](http://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/business-safety/fire-safety-advice-for-businesses/fire-safety-guides).

## 5. Excess Cold

This common hazard is a failure to adequately heat/insulate your property. All rooms (including kitchens and bathrooms) should have controllable fixed heating which is capable of achieving an internal temperature of 18c when it is below freezing outside.

Under new regulations the heating you provide has to be affordable or your tenants can require you to take effective energy efficiency measures.

This includes providing heating which is cheaper to run as well as installing double glazing, loft/cavity wall insulation etc. From 2018, properties must have an Energy Performance Certificate of Band E (SAP38) or better.

You need to identify where cold can enter the property and ensure that internal and external windows, doors etc are free from draughts when closed.


## 6. Excess Heat

You must ensure that your property has adequate ventilation to all rooms and unprotected or uncontrollable sources of heat are minimised.. Your property should have openable windows throughout and mechanical ventilation in bathrooms and kitchens that are controllable by the tenant. (See Excess Cold). Blinds or shuttering could be used if there is a large expanse of south facing glazing.

## 7. Falls

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System mention 3 common types of falls which are as follows:

**Falls on steps and stairs** can normally be addressed by providing an adequate handrail the entire length of the stairs. However, if the staircase is poorly lit, uneven and/or in disrepair, other measures such as better lighting and remedial work are also required.



**Falls between levels** are usually the result of inadequate or low guarding on the landing over the staircase, but can also refer to falls from windows with low sill heights (below 110cm), including 1st floor 'means of escape' windows and into unguarded basement light wells.

You need to make sure that internal guarding is sturdy and secure, not less than 90cm in height (external guarding must be 110cm) and that it cannot be easily climbed over or through by young children.

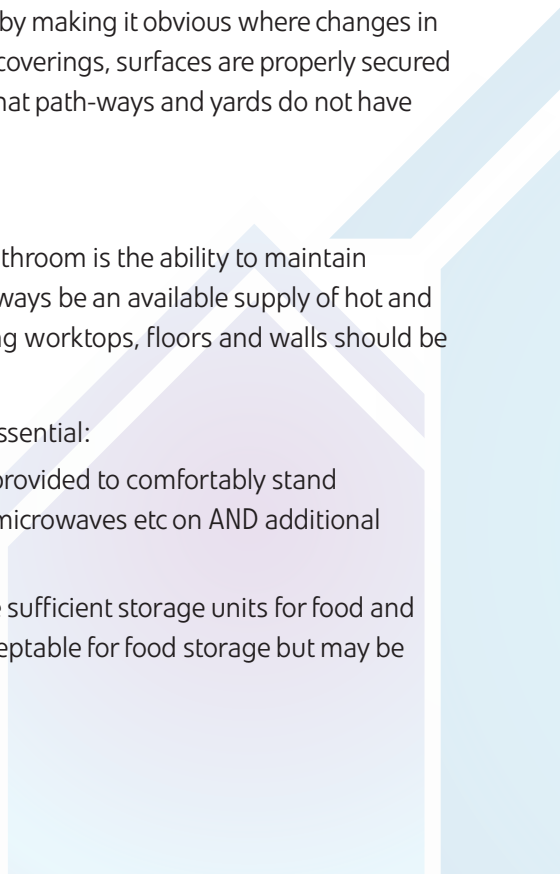
Falls from means of escape windows are usually resolved by ensuring that window restrictors are installed. It is important to remember that any limiter must operate manually without a key so that it will not prevent escape in the event of a fire.

**Falls on the Level** caused by tripping on loose carpet or changes in level in or between rooms can usually be resolved by making it obvious where changes in floor level occur and ensuring that floor coverings, surfaces are properly secured and level. It is also necessary to ensure that path-ways and yards do not have slippery or uneven surfaces.

## 8. Food safety

The main requirement in a kitchen or bathroom is the ability to maintain hygienic surroundings. There should always be an available supply of hot and cold running water. All surfaces including worktops, floors and walls should be watertight and washable.

In a kitchen good layout and design is essential:

- There needs to be enough worktop provided to comfortably stand appliances such as kettles, toasters, microwaves etc on AND additional space for preparing food.
  - You must consider whether you have sufficient storage units for food and utensils. Below sink units are not acceptable for food storage but may be used for utensils.
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- There also needs to be adequate electrical socket provision. We recommend a minimum of 2x double sockets above worktops and sufficient below the worktops for large appliances such as washing machines, cookers, fridges etc.
- Badly burnt/scuffed worktops, flooring etc which are no longer capable of being kept hygienically clean should be replaced.

## 9. Personal hygiene

Common problems in bathrooms often arise from poor maintenance. These can be addressed by regularly renewing the seals around baths, sinks and showers to prevent unnecessary leaks, replacing broken tiles or sanitary ware to ensure they are capable of being hygienically cleaned and ensuring that there is adequate heating and easy to access ventilation to help prevent any build-up of damp and mould resulting from condensation.

If your bathroom window is difficult to reach or open consider installing mechanical extract ventilation to help prevent mould. **Please be advised that mechanical extract ventilation must be used if there is no external ventilation available.**

## 10. Entry by Intruders

Your property must be capable of being secured.

This means all external doors (including basement doors) and windows must be strong and secure with undamaged frames, capable of being fully closed and locked to deter burglary.

Failure to provide a suitable lock not only creates an unacceptable risk to your tenants, but may also render void any property insurance you may have. The property's external access points should be well lit and feel safe.

Badly maintained and dilapidated properties with overgrown hedges broken fences and littered gardens provide cover for criminals. They send a message that the area is not monitored, and that criminal behaviour has little risk of detection. They are also unsightly and can lower property values in the area.

## Want further information?

For more information about anything in this leaflet, please contact the Housing Standards Team via email:

**[housingstandards@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:housingstandards@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)**

Further guidance on the Housing Health and Safety Rating System is available at:

**<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-health-and-safety-rating-system-guidance-for-landlords-and-property-related-professionals>**.

### Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services

Council information is also available in Audio, Braille, Large Print or other formats. If you would like a copy in a different format, in another language or require a BSL interpreter, please email us at

**[equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)**

**Tel:** 0300 123 8 123 **Textphone:** 18001 01606 867 670

**email:** [equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

**web:** [www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

**Cheshire West and Chester Council**  
HQ  
Nicholas Street, Chester  
CH1 2NP

[www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)