

# A Guide for Landlords

## Preparation

Having confidence in your letting agent is vital. Ensure you choose an agent who knows your area well and can keep you updated of market conditions in order to keep void periods to a minimum. Always use an ARLA (Association of Residential Letting Agents) member such as Russell Simpson where our negotiators have all undertaken extensive legal training and hold the relevant letting qualifications. All ARLA agents have to adhere to a strict code of practice and are continually kept up to date with new and changing legislation ensuring you and your property are in safe hands.

## Presentation

The Central London rental market is extremely competitive and presenting your property in the best possible order is essential in order to secure a high calibre tenant at a good rental price. First impressions are crucial and we recommend you consider the following aspects:

- Walls – a new coat of paint prior to marketing the property makes a huge difference in making the property feel fresh and inviting. Choose a light, neutral colour wherever possible.
- Flooring – have the carpets steam cleaned and replace any which are excessively tired
- Plants – ensure the garden is in good order and plant up any window boxes or tubs
- Kitchens and bathrooms need to be as modern as possible, ensure all grouting and silicone is clean and that there are no cracked tiles
- Lighting – check that all bulbs are working and if you don't have overhead or wall lights, ensure you leave enough lamps to fully light the room
- Furnishing – in addition to standard furniture, a furnished property would also usually include a basic set of crockery, cutlery and glassware plus kitchen utensils, toaster, kettle, saucepans and a vacuum cleaner.
- In the winter months make sure the heating is coming on at least twice a day as a cold property can be very off putting.

## Marketing

Russell Simpson use a variety of marketing tools both online and offline. We start the marketing process by having professional photos taken of your property along with a detailed floor plan with which we draw up the property particulars. These are then sent to all prospective tenants, relocation agents and property finders.

All our properties, unless requested otherwise, will be marketed on our own website plus a number of other major property portals include Rightmove, OnTheMarket and Move To. In addition we advertise on a monthly basis in The London Magazine.

We regularly liaise with a variety of search agents and relocation agents who act for large multi-national companies and we also inform other local agents in order to ensure no stone is left uncovered.

## Legislation

Letting a property can be a legal minefield and Russell Simpson aim to guide you through this to ensure you and your property are not left at risk should an accident happen to your property or your tenant. Important legislation you need to be aware of include:

- **Gas Safety** – a Gas Safety Certificate issued by a GasSafe registered engineer is a legal requirement and must be renewed every year. If any appliance or pipework is deemed unsatisfactory it must not be used and must be repaired / replaced as soon as possible.
- **Electrical Safety** – an Electrical Safety Certificate is not required by law, however, it is a landlord's legal obligation to ensure all electrical equipment in the property is in full working

order and we therefore recommend a Portable Appliance Test (PAT) is carried out.

- **Fire and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1997** – It is a criminal offence punishable by a fine/prison to let a property containing non-compliant furniture. Any furniture made prior to 1950 is exempt and most furniture made after 1990 should be compliant and display the appropriate label confirming its compliance. The furniture which the regulations apply to include sofas, armchairs, scatter cushions, beds, padded headboards, mattresses, pillows and nursery furniture. Furniture which is exempt include carpets, curtains, pillow cases, duvet covers and bed linen.
- **Plug And Socket Regulations 1994** -All plugs must have a safety sheath and the correct fuse. All sockets must comply with the current regulations, which state that they should have an “off” switch and must be flush with the wall.
- **Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm Regulations 2015** – All properties must have a smoke alarm on every level. Carbon monoxide alarms are also required if your property has a solid fuel burning appliance.
- **Energy Performance Certificate** – Since 2008 all rental properties must have an EPC prior to being placed on the market.
- **Immigration Act 2014** – Landlord’s or their agents must now check that their prospective tenants pass the ‘Right to Rent’ requirements.
- **Tax** – All rental income is taxable and HMRC must be informed that you are letting out your property. Many costs can be offset against your tax bill and recommend you instruct an accountant who, if we are managing your property, we can work with to ensure you minimise your tax payable. If you are managing the property yourself it is crucial that you keep all receipts/invoices of any expenditures relating to the property. Overseas landlords are subject to further regulations and will need to register with HMRC as a Non-Resident Landlord, Russell Simpson can forward you the relevant form required.
- **Tenancy Deposit Scheme** - By law all deposits held under an Assured Shorthold Tenancy are required to be registered in a government authorised Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme. The scheme was introduced to improve the difficult area of deposit disputes and as such, it requires that all tenancies must have a professionally prepared inventory carried out at the commencement. Russell Simpson is happy to recommend some excellent inventory clerks and/or organise the inventory make on your behalf.
- **Insurance** – In addition to buildings insurance we highly recommend you also have contents insurance, even for an unfurnished property. Remember to inform your insurance company that the property is being let out as it could invalidate your insurance if you do not. Landlord insurance is also available and we would be happy to help arrange it for you.
- **Permissions** – If your property is subject to a head lease you may need to request permission to sub-let your property and in some cases (for example any Wellcome Trust properties) you and your tenant will need to sign a Licence to Underlet for which there will be a small charge. You should also notify your mortgage lender if applicable.

**On finding you a wonderful tenant Russell Simpson will:**

- Fully reference check all tenants and forward you the references for approval prior to asking you to sign a tenancy agreement
- Prepare a tenancy agreement and forward it to you/your solicitor for approval
- Arrange for signature of the tenancy agreement by both parties
- Collect all initial monies from the tenant including a 6+ week deposit
- Organise an inventory to be prepared by an independent clerk and checked by the tenant
- Transfer all utilities into the tenants names along with giving the utility company the relevant meter readings

**Property Management Service**

Many of our landlords, especially those who are based overseas or out of London, opt for our Property Management Service meaning that we are the point of contact for the tenant if there are any maintenance issues during the tenancy. In the case of an emergency tenants require a 24 hour number to call and we have a team of tried and trusted contractors on hand to assist with any problems. For more information on this service please see our *Guide to Property Management*.