

# Notice that you must leave

a brief guide for landlords and tenants



# housing



## Notice that you must leave

This booklet explains the basic rules about bringing a residential tenancy (or licence) to an end:

- either by the landlord or tenant serving notice to quit; or
- by a landlord serving a notice of his or her intention to seek possession.

Like the other booklets referred to in the text, it appears in the series of housing booklets produced jointly by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Welsh Assembly Government.

It is divided into three sections:

- notice by landlords
- notice by tenants
- licences

*This booklet does not give an authoritative interpretation of the law; only the courts can do that. Nor does it cover all cases. If you are in doubt about your legal rights or obligations you would be well advised to seek information from a Citizens Advice Bureau or consult a solicitor. Help with all or part of the cost of legal advice may be available under the Legal Aid scheme depending on your personal circumstances.*

## Contents

<b>How to bring a tenancy or licence to an end</b>	2
Must a landlord serve notice?	3
What is an excluded tenancy?	4
<b>Landlord's notice to quit</b>	5
What are the rules for serving a notice to quit?	5
Notice of intention to seek possession	6
What are the rules about a notice of intention to seek possession?	7
After the notice runs out	8
Questions on possession	8
<b>Notice by tenants</b>	10
What must a tenant do if he or she wants to give up his or her tenancy?	10
What information goes in the notice?	10
<b>Licences</b>	11
Does a licensor have to give notice to end a licence?	11
What is an excluded licence?	11
<b>Rental Purchase Agreements</b>	12



## How to bring a tenancy or licence to an end

People who live in property for which they pay a rent or charge to another person will be either tenants or licensees, depending on the terms of the agreement which lets them live in their home. The person who is the other party to the agreement will be the landlord or licensor. Tenants have rights which depend mainly on when they took out their tenancy agreement. Licensees have fewer rights. This booklet sets out the position on the notice which the landlord or licensor must give when he or she wants his or her property back, and the notice the tenant must give. The type of notice will depend on the *type* of agreement the tenant or licensee has and the *terms* of the agreement.

The features of regulated tenancies under the Rent Act are described in the housing booklet *Regulated Tenancies*; new-style assured and shorthold tenancies are described in *Assured and Assured Shorthold Tenancies: a Guide for Tenants* and *Assured and Assured Shorthold Tenancies: a Guide for Landlords*; housing association lettings in a series of residential charters published by the Housing Corporation and lettings to agricultural workers in Agricultural Lettings No 23. Secure tenancies such as most council tenancies are discussed in the booklet *The Council Tenants' Charter* which covers the notice provisions for secure tenants. Tenancies under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 and the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 are not covered in this booklet. If you are not sure which type of tenancy applies in your case, look at these booklets. They are available from Citizens Advice Bureaux and rent officers, and direct from the Department for Communities and Local Government or the Welsh Assembly Government. You can find the address of the nearest Citizens Advice Bureau or rent officer in the phone book, or from your local council, or the local library. Tenants with long leases at low rents should see the Department for Communities and Local Government booklet *Long Residential Tenancies: Your Rights to Security of Tenure*.



## How to bring a tenancy to an end

### Bringing a tenancy to an end

***Must a landlord serve notice on his or her tenant to bring a tenancy to an end in every case?***

No (see below). But if the dwelling is let under a *periodic tenancy* which is a tenancy running from week to week or month to month, or some other period, with no date fixed for the tenancy to end) the landlord must normally serve either a *notice to quit* or a *notice of his or her intention to seek possession*. These notices must be in prescribed form – that is, they must contain certain information required by law. A notice to quit does not have to be in a prescribed form if the tenancy is an excluded tenancy (see below).

***What are the tenancies for which a landlord does not need to serve one of the notices described in this booklet?***

Fixed term tenancies which are granted for definite periods end automatically when the agreed period of the tenancy runs out, though the tenant may have a statutory right to remain in residence under the Rent Act 1977, the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976, or the Housing Act 1988.

Special rules apply for bringing *protected shorthold tenancies* to an end. These are explained in housing booklet *Regulated Tenancies*.

*Secure tenancies*, held by tenants of registered housing associations and those held by charitable housing trusts which started before 15 January 1989, and a very few starting afterwards, are also subject to special rules. These are explained in a series of residential charters published by the Housing Corporation. Secure tenancies where a body such as the local authority is the landlord are described in housing booklet *The Council Tenants' Charter*.

### ***What is an excluded tenancy?***

It is a tenancy which was entered into on or after 15 January 1989 (except as the result of a contract made before that date) and meets one of the following conditions:

- under the terms of the tenancy, the tenant shares accommodation with the landlord or family member immediately before the beginning and end of the tenancy. The landlord or family member must be occupying the shared accommodation at those times as part of his or her only or main home. If only a family member shares, the landlord must be occupying at those times as his or her only or main home, another part of the same building (which must not be a purpose-built block of flats). (Staircases, passages, corridors, storage areas and means of access are not counted as ‘accommodation’ for the purposes of deciding whether the tenant is sharing with the landlord or the family member);
- the tenancy was granted as a temporary expedient to a trespasser;
- it is a tenancy for a holiday;
- the tenancy is rent free, and the tenant is not providing services which have a financial value.

See also page 11 – excluded licences.

### ***If the landlord does not need to serve a notice in prescribed form or a notice of his or her intention to seek possession, does he or she have to serve any notice at all?***

Yes, in most cases. There is a common law requirement that the landlord should give a periodic tenant notice to quit which is as long as the period of the tenancy. (For yearly tenancies, six months’ notice is needed.) So for example, if it is a weekly tenancy, he or she should get a week’s notice. If the tenancy agreement says he or she must give a particular length of notice, he or she must give that notice in full. The notice must comply with anything the agreement says, and unless the agreement says something different the notice must bring the tenancy to an end at the end of a complete period of the tenancy. It is advisable to give notice in writing.

***For which tenancies must a landlord serve a notice to quit in prescribed form?***

All contractual periodic tenancies (which are not excluded tenancies), including those under the Rent Act 1977 and the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976. A different sort of notice is needed for tenancies under the Housing Act 1988 (See pages 3 and 6) and for secure tenancies (see booklet *The Council Tenants' Charter*).



**Landlord's notice to quit**

***What are the rules for serving a notice to quit in prescribed form?***

The notice must:

- be in writing
- be given at least four weeks before the date it runs out, and
- include the information set out below.

*The tenancy agreement cannot change these rules*, but, subject to this, the notice must comply with anything the agreement says. Unless the agreement says something different the notice:

- must bring the tenancy to an end at the end of a complete period of the tenancy (for example at the end of a month, if the tenancy is by the month); and
- will have to be longer than four weeks if the tenancy period is more than four weeks.

***What information has to be included in a landlord's notice to quit?***

The information is:

- If the tenant or licensee does not leave the dwelling, the landlord or licensor must get an order for possession from the court before the tenant or licensee can lawfully be evicted. The landlord or licensor cannot apply for such an order before the notice to quit or notice to determine has run out.

A tenant or licensee who does not know if he or she has any right to remain in possession after a notice to quit or a notice to determine runs out can obtain advice from a solicitor. Help with all or part of the cost of legal advice and assistance may be available under the Legal Aid Scheme. He or she should also be able to obtain information from a Citizens Advice Bureau, a Housing Aid Centre or a rent officer.\*

You can buy notice to quit forms with the required information printed on them from law stationers.

### ***Does the notice to quit bring the tenancy to an end?***

In the case of a Rent Act tenancy or a Rent (Agriculture) Act tenancy, when the notice to quit or a notice to determine runs out, the tenancy comes to an end. In most cases, however, the tenant will have rights to stay on in the property under the Rent Act 1977 or the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976. A notice to quit does not bring an assured tenancy or an assured agricultural occupancy under the Housing Act 1988 to an end.

### **Notice of intention to seek possession**

#### ***For which tenancies must a landlord serve a notice of intention to seek possession?***

Periodic assured tenancies and assured agricultural occupancies under the Housing Act 1988. He or she must also serve notice of his or her intention to seek possession on certain grounds where he or she wishes to get possession from an assured tenant (including an assured shorthold tenant) before the fixed term has come to an end. He or she can only do so when he or she has said in the tenancy agreement that he or she might want to get possession on those grounds.

\* 'a notice to determine' here refers to a notice served on a licensee to end his licence.



***What are the rules about a landlord's notice of intention to seek possession?***

If a landlord is seeking possession from an assured tenant or an assured agricultural occupant, he or she may only do so on grounds laid down in the Housing Act 1988. There are special rules for getting possession from assured shorthold tenants but a landlord may also obtain possession from an assured shorthold tenant on any of the grounds in the Act. These are set out in *Assured and Assured Shorthold Tenancies: a Guide for Tenants* and *Assured and Assured Shorthold Tenancies: a Guide for Landlords*.

If a landlord wants possession on grounds 3, 4, 8 or any of grounds 10-15 of Schedule 2 to the Housing Act 1988, he or she must give *at least two weeks' notice* in the prescribed form (which he or she can get from law stationers or large booksellers).

If a landlord is seeking possession on any of the other grounds, he or she must give *at least two months' notice* in the prescribed form (which he or she can get from law stationers).

Sometimes longer notice will be needed.

Where the landlord is seeking possession of an assured shorthold tenancy using the shorthold rule, he or she must give *at least two months' notice* and in some cases longer. There is no prescribed form for serving notice on a shorthold tenant (unless the landlord is going for possession on one of the grounds in the Act), but a landlord may like to get advice from a solicitor or a Citizens Advice Bureau on how to do it.

***Are there any circumstances in which the landlord does not have to serve a notice of his or her intention to seek possession?***

*The landlord should always serve notice.* If for any reason he or she does not, and possession proceedings come to court, the court may consider in a particular case that there were just and fair reasons why the landlord did not serve notice, and let him or her off this particular legal requirement.

The court cannot do this in any circumstances if the landlord is seeking possession on ground 8 under the Housing Act 1988 (the two months' rent arrears ground – see *Assured and Assured Shorthold Tenancies: a Guide for Tenants* and *Assured and Assured Shorthold Tenancies: a Guide for Landlords* or if he or she is going for possession from a shorthold tenant simply because the shorthold has expired. See also page 9.

### After the notice runs out

#### ***Does the tenant have to leave when a notice to quit or notice of intention to seek possession runs out?***

No. Normally the tenant cannot be lawfully evicted unless the landlord has obtained an order from the court. Under the Protection from Eviction Act 1977 as amended by the Housing Act 1988 it is not lawful for a landlord to enforce his or her right to recover possession of his or her property from a tenant other than through the courts. This does not apply if the premises are occupied by an excluded licensee (see page 11) or an excluded tenant (see page 4) whose tenancy started on or after 15 January 1989. Illegal eviction is a criminal offence. Local authorities have powers to prosecute and any complaints should be made to them – see housing booklet *My Landlord Wants Me Out*.

### Questions on possession

#### ***Will the court always grant the landlord a possession order when a notice has run out?***

This will depend on the type of tenancy, the grounds on which the landlord is seeking possession, and whether the landlord proves his or her case to the court.

If the tenant has a regulated tenancy under the Rent Act 1977, a statutory tenancy under the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976, or an assured tenancy or an assured agricultural occupancy under the Housing Act 1988 the court may only grant an order on one of a limited number of grounds laid down in those Acts. Some of the grounds (or cases as they are called in the Rent Act 1977 and the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976) are

*mandatory*, and if the landlord proves his or her case the court must give him or her possession. Some are *discretionary*, and the court will only give the landlord possession if it thinks it is reasonable to do so. The Rent Act 1977 cases are set out in housing booklet *Regulated Tenancies*, and the Housing Act 1988 grounds in *Assured and Assured Shorthold Tenancies: a Guide for Tenants* and *Assured and Assured Shorthold Tenancies: a Guide for Landlords*. The cases and grounds as they apply to agricultural tenancies are set out in housing booklet *Agricultural Lettings No 23*.

If the tenancy is either a *protected shorthold tenancy* or an *assured shorthold tenancy* the court must grant the landlord an order for possession provided the landlord has followed the correct procedures.

***Does the landlord need to go to court for possession if he or she lives in the same property as his tenant?***

This will depend on when the letting started, and whether the landlord shares any accommodation with his or her tenant.

For lettings which were entered into on or after 28 November 1980, but before 15 January 1989, the landlord will normally have to go to court to get his or her tenant to leave if the tenant does not want to go. The court must grant the landlord possession. Tenancies which were entered into before 28 November 1980 are subject to special rules. For lettings which were entered into on or after 15 January 1989, if the landlord or a family member shares accommodation with his or her tenant in a property which contains the landlord's only or main home (see conditions on page 4) he or she will generally not need a court order. If he or she does not share accommodation with his or her tenant, unless one of the other exclusions applies, he or she will need a court order. The court may not grant him or her possession immediately, but it can only defer possession for a certain length of time. For fuller details on the rules, see housing booklets *Renting Rooms in Someone's Home: a Guide for People Renting from Resident Landlords* and *Letting Rooms in Your Home: a Guide for Resident Landlords*.



## Notice by tenants

### *What must a tenant do if he or she wants to give up his or her tenancy?*

He or she should get in touch with his or her landlord. If the tenant has a fixed-term tenancy, the tenant may only give up his or her tenancy before the end of the fixed term if the landlord agrees or the agreement says he or she can (this does not apply to protected shorthold tenancies: see housing booklet *Regulated Tenancies*). If neither the terms of a fixed-term tenancy nor the landlord allow the tenant to end the arrangement early, he or she will be contractually responsible for ensuring rent is paid for the entire length of the fixed term. However, this does not mean that the landlord can necessarily claim for the whole term's rent if the tenant leaves early: there is also a responsibility on the landlord in this situation to try to cover his or her losses in other ways, notably by trying to re-let the accommodation. If he or she is a periodic tenant, unless the landlord agrees otherwise, he or she may have to give notice to quit. If he or she does not do so, he or she may have to go on paying rent.

### *What information goes in the notice?*

No special information need be included in a tenant's notice to quit, but unless it is an excluded tenancy, to be valid it must:

- be in writing, and
- be given at least four weeks before the date it runs out.

The tenancy agreement cannot change the above rules, but apart from this, the notice must do whatever the agreement says. If the agreement does not say anything about what the tenant should do, the notice:

- must bring the tenancy to an end at the end of a complete period of the tenancy (for example at the end of a month, if the tenancy is by the month), and
- will have to be longer than four weeks if the tenancy period is more than four weeks.

If the tenant is a statutory tenant (that is, a tenant who remains in possession under the Rent Act after the tenancy agreement has come to an end) and he or she does not make a new agreement with his or her landlord, he or she must, unless the landlord has said he or she does not need to:

- give *at least four weeks' notice*; this may be longer if the original tenancy agreement required a longer notice. *Three months' notice* is required if the original agreement was for a fixed term and did not say anything about notice being needed to bring the tenancy to an end. Also,
- the notice must be in writing but no special information need be included.



## Licences

### *Does a licensor have to give notice to end a licence?*

If the licensee has a periodic licence which is not an *excluded licence* under the Protection from Eviction Act 1977 as amended by the Housing Act 1988, he or she has to give notice in prescribed form (see page 5) whether or not the licence started before 15 January 1989. The information he or she must put in the notice is the same information as in the notice to a tenant, and it has to follow broadly the same rules as the notice to quit for a tenant, see page 5. He or she will also need to get a court order to evict the licensee in this case. For an *excluded licence*, the notice must be 'reasonable' in the circumstances. Notice of the same length as would be required for a similar tenancy would normally be considered reasonable (but this is not laid down in law). As for an *excluded tenancy*, the licensor does not have to give notice in writing.

### *What is an excluded licence?*

See the definition of *excluded tenancies* on page 4. A licence in those categories listed can be excluded for exactly the same reasons as a tenancy is excluded. (Some licences, however, will be restricted contracts if they were agreements which started before 15 January 1989 and in these cases the landlord will need a court order for possession – see

housing booklets *Renting Rooms in Someone's Home: a Guide for People Renting from Resident Landlords* and *Letting Rooms in Your Home: a Guide for Resident Landlords*.) In addition, a licence can be an excluded licence if the accommodation concerned is in a hostel provided by certain public bodies such as local authorities or housing associations registered by the Housing Corporation or Housing for Wales.

***Does a licensee have to give notice if he or she wants to leave the property?***

Generally, yes: the law for licensees is the same as for tenants. A licensee of an excluded licence should give notice as for licensors, ie of reasonable length.

***If the agreement is described as a licence, does that mean it is a licence?***

Not necessarily. The distinction between a licence and a tenancy is not always straightforward and the occupier should get legal advice if he or she is not sure whether he or she has a licence or a tenancy. Even if a licensee has an excluded licence, and the licensor may not need to serve notice and obtain a court order, *it is illegal to use force to remove someone against his or her will from residential accommodation if he or she originally occupied it with the owner's agreement*. See housing booklet *My Landlord Wants Me Out*.

## Rental purchase agreements

### *How do you get possession from a person who has a rental purchase agreement?*

It is normally necessary to obtain a court order to get possession from a rental purchaser. Under housing law, a rental purchaser is someone who is buying his or her property under an agreement to pay in more than two installments, and who does not own the property until all, or an agreed part, of the purchase price has been paid.



### Further information

The other housing booklets referred to in this booklet are:

*The Council Tenants' Charter* (95 HC 006)

*Assured and assured shorthold tenancies:*

*A guide for tenants* (97 HC 228A)

*Assured and assured shorthold tenancies:*

*A guide for landlords* (97 HC 228B)

*My Landlord Wants Me Out*

*(Harassment and Illegal Eviction)* (92 HUG 218)

*Renting Rooms in Someone's Home:* (02 HC 00231)

*A Guide for People Renting from Resident Landlords*

*Letting Rooms in Your Home:*

*A Guide for Resident Landlords* (02 HC 00232)

*Agricultural Lettings*

*Regulated Tenancies* (92 HUG 221)

*A series of Residents Charters*

*Residential Long Leaseholders:*

*A Guide to Your Rights and Responsibilities* (03 HC 01756)

If you would like further copies of this booklet, please contact the Department for Communities and Local Government,

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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

Published by the Department for Communities and Local Government  
and the Welsh Assembly Government

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on paper comprising 75% post consumer waste and 25% pre consumer waste.

Product code 92HUG220.