

Tenant Alteration and Improvements Guidance Document

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Introduction

Swindon Borough Council recognises and encourages that tenants have a right to carry out improvements to their Council owned homes. This guidance document outlines how we deal with requests to carry out alterations or improvements, ensuring that staff and customers are aware and understand why requests may be approved or declined. We consider all alteration and improvement requests in line with the tenancy agreement, relevant legal and regulatory requirements and best practice. For the purpose of this document, a customer improvement or alteration can be defined as:

- Where a customer makes any change to the existing fabric of the building, the grounds or boundaries
- Where a customer replaces any Swindon Borough Council fixture or fitting with one of their own.

Aims and Objectives

This document will:

- Provide guidance to tenants on what works we will (and will not) accept. It should be noted that this is not an extensive list and each case will be considered in its own merit.
- Provide guidance surrounding what will happen to the alteration or improvement at the end of the tenancy.
- Outline the process and requirements of applying for permission alongside any conditions that we will apply.
- Advise tenants on their statutory right to compensation and when this applies.

Considering the Requested Alteration or Improvement

Only tenants with a secure tenancy have the right to apply to have alterations or improvements to their home.

The council will not bear the cost of the improvement. Where an improvement or alteration to a home has been approved by us, it is the responsibility of the customer for any ongoing repairs and maintenance of these improvements.

Certain works will need to be completed by a competent tradesperson, such as any gas or electrical work. The Council will require details of the person completing the works, the exact detail and scope of the works and will request the appropriate certification be provided on completion of the works.

Requesting Permission

Permission for alterations or improvements must be requested by tenants in writing. We will, where appropriate, request:

- Tenants obtain all necessary approvals, such as planning permission and building regulation/control, before applying for permission with us.
- An indication of when the work will start and timescales of the work.
- Details of who will carry out the work with copies of their insurances and professional registration

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- Description of the work, including photographs and/or plans and materials to be used.
- Relevant compliance or regulatory documentation when required.
- Access to review the works before, during and after completion.

The Council will make the decision on whether the information provided by the tenant is enough to make a determination on the alteration or improvement or whether any additional information is required from the tenant. If additional information is required, the Council will request it from the tenant.

Once all information is received, the Council will respond to the alteration or improvement request to grant or refuse permission. This will be done in writing, within 40 days. The tenant should not commence work, or make arrangements with contractors until the Council has given written permission for works.

Refusing Permission and Appeals

The council will be fair and consistent in considering all alteration and improvement requests made by tenants. Permission for requests will not be unreasonably withheld. If a tenant disagrees with the decision made or conditions set, they can appeal in writing within 20 days. Following the appeal, a decision will be taken by the Asset Manager and will be confirmed in writing.

Permitted Works

We will consider granting permission for alterations and property improvements and whilst not exhaustive, examples may include:

- Installing a kitchen or bathroom
- Wood, tile or laminate flooring
- Installing Space or Wall Heating
- Satellite dishes and aerials
- Building or removing a structure in a garden including shed, greenhouse, wall or fencing
- Felling a tree in the garden
- Installing a driveway or pavement crossing
- Decorating the outside of the property.
- Air source / ground source heat pumps.
- EV charging points

Types of Works that will not be considered

In some cases, we may need to decline permission for an alteration or improvement. We will refuse permission to an alteration or improvement where the proposed work would:

- Reduce the overall value of the home
- Breach any planning, building or health and safety regulations or legislation.
- Invalidate a warranty or guarantee period of a new build property
- Reduce the energy efficiency of a property

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Examples of alterations and improvements where we will refuse permission include, but are not limited to:

- Structural alterations in nearly all cases including new openings for windows and/or doors
- Alterations that will increase or decrease the number of bedrooms
- Any non-structural alterations to partition walls, doorways or archways.
- Changing the use of rooms, for example, changing a living room into a bedroom, kitchen into bedroom or switching bathroom/kitchen configurations or moving services.
- Replacing a level access shower / wet room if in a 'decent condition' with a standard bathroom.
- Loft conversions
- Conservatories
- Extensions
- Lean-tos
- Porches
- The relocation, removal or installation of internal partitions.
- Installation of gas fires
- Installation of solid fuel heaters
- External fittings to properties fitted with External Wall Insulation
- Any works that will affect the integrity of the building i.e. water/damp ingress
- Any amendment to, or replacements of Fire Doors
- Boarding of the loft to create a storage area.

Retrospective Permission

All works require permission before they commence. If you have not applied for permission to carry out alterations or improvements to your property, you will have to seek retrospective permission.

All retrospective requests will be expected to meet the same specifications outlined in this guidance document. For permission to be granted, the first stage is for a surveyor to attend to inspect the works. Depending on the alteration or improvement, it may be possible for this to be done via the receipt of photographs.

When the works have been viewed and any required certification or documentation received, the surveyor will either approve the works or notify the tenant of what is required to gain approval. All works and test certificates required to allow for approval will be undertaken at the cost of the tenant. If the work is outside of what is allowed as a tenant alteration or improvement, or the work is to a poor standard, it will need to be removed.

Compensation

In some circumstances, tenants may have the right to reclaim the cost of improvements they have made when their tenancy ends. This is in line with the [Secure Tenants of Local Authorities \(Compensation for Improvements\) Regulations 1994](#).

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Claims for compensation must be made no more than 28 days before and no more than 14 days after end of the tenancy.

Tenants may be eligible for compensation if:

- They are a secure tenant
- The works were carried out after the 1st April 1994
- That the works had the written permission of the Council

A summary of the scheme is as follows:

- Not all improvements carried out in a customer's home will qualify for compensation. The method of calculation, the qualifying improvements and notional life of each qualifying improvements that is eligible for compensation is outlined in the appendices.
- The Council will request that receipts of invoices are provided for the works completed that are being claimed for.
- Compensation can be claimed for the cost of materials and labour costs. The tenant's own labour costs are not eligible.
- There is a lower limit of £50 and an upper limit of £3,000 for any one improvement.
- Any payments made to tenants will be offset against any arrears.
- Tenants will not be able to claim if they are buying their home through the Right to Buy Scheme because improvements are not included in the purchase price.

The following table lists the improvements which may be considered for compensation at the end of the tenancy, as outlined in the Secure Tenants of Local Authorities (Compensation for Improvements) Regulations 1994:

A.	B.
<i>Qualifying Improvement</i>	<i>Notional Life</i>
1. Bath or shower.	12
2. Wash-hand basin.	12
3. Toilet.	12
4. Kitchen sink	10
5. Storage cupboards in bathroom or kitchen.	10
6. Work surfaces for food preparation.	10
7. Space or water heating.	12
8. Thermostatic radiator valves.	7
9. Insulation of pipes, water tank or cylinder.	10
10. Loft insulation.	20
11. Cavity wall insulation.	20
12. Draught proofing of external doors or windows.	8
13. Double glazing or other external window replacement or secondary glazing.	20
14. Rewiring or the provision of power and lighting or other electrical fittings (including smoke detectors).	15
15. Any object which improves the security of the dwelling-house, but excluding burglar alarms.	10

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Staff Training

The council will ensure that regular induction and refresher training is available for all staff to make them aware of the Tenant alteration and improvement guidance document to insure that a positive service is provided to its tenants.