



VisitEngland™



Quality Standard

Self-catering Accommodation

VisitEngland's quality standard for self-catering properties

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Quality is the key

VisitEngland understands that quality is the key to success within the modern hospitality industry. For the Self-Catering sector to be successful and competitive both nationally and internationally, it is important that quality standards are set high and continue to improve. The Self-Catering standard is designed to help all businesses achieve success.

Our commitment to you

Our professional VisitEngland assessors will work with you to maximise the potential of your business. As a member of the star rating scheme you will receive a regular assessment visit. This visit will look at all aspects of your customer facing business, from viewing your website through to customer departure. Each assessment visit will be followed by a verbal debrief and a detailed written report. Both these tools are designed to help you to improve your business.

Quality across the star ratings

Our assessors will quality grade each aspect of your business to five levels, based on customer expectations of quality and current standards seen across the sector in the UK. The assessment is objective, and judgement will not be made on any aspect of your business based on style or personal taste. The aim is to add quality without taking away any of the character and style of the property. In advance of their visit your assessor will review your property's website, as would potential guests, to check that descriptions and images are up-to-date and a true reflection of the property.

What is quality?

Whatever the style or concept of your Self-Catering property, both quality and comfort is what your guests and VisitEngland assessors will be looking for. The assessor will be looking at areas such as:

Living & Kitchen Areas

- The quality and comfort of furniture
- Attractive, well-co-ordinated décor and soft furnishings

- The space and comfort provided for the maximum number of guests catered for
- Extra touches that enhance a guest's stay such as the availability of Wi-Fi, modern TVs, sound/music systems and outdoor facilities
- Well equipped, easy to use kitchens with a range of modern appliances

Bedrooms & Bathrooms

- The quality and comfort of the bed(s)
- The quality of bed linen and the presentation of the bed(s)
- Attractive, well-co-ordinated décor and soft furnishings
- Those extra touches that make the rooms more welcoming
- The quality of bathroom fittings and towels
- Ease of use: bedrooms and bathrooms can offer good ease of use, if well designed, without necessarily being large and spacious

Welcome & Hospitality

Your assessor will be looking at the welcome that you provide for your guests, which can range from a personal welcome to a well organised remote arrival procedure. Welcome packs and guest information are also an important element of the assessment, as is an assessment of the owner or management's ability to deal promptly with any problems should they arise.

Cleanliness

Cleanliness is of paramount importance to all customers at all star levels. It is expected that all properties will be thoroughly clean throughout, for all new arrivals.

How do we measure quality?

During your assessment visit, your assessor will make quality judgements across all aspects of your Self-Catering business, marking each sub-heading out of five. When the scores are totalled you will have an overall percentage score that will place you within one of the five star rating bands. However, to confirm a particular star rating, the scores awarded within each of the five key areas also need to fall within that band or higher. In this way you can be confident that your business is offering a consistent level of quality at the star rating awarded.

There are seven areas to be scored, plus an eighth, Recreation, for properties that have a pool or other leisure facilities or games areas. See the sample report below for the sub-headings for each scoring area. The only areas that must achieve the minimum score for the target star rating are the **key areas**. The score for the other areas help push up the overall score to the minimum required for the target star rating but are not crucial. These key areas are:

- Cleanliness
- Public areas
- Bedrooms
- Bathrooms
- Kitchen

Assessors are trained to award scores against national benchmarks in an objective and consistent manner.

Assessment Example

In the example on the next page, the property provides all services and facilities required for four star and is seeking a four star rating.

In order to be awarded four star, the property needs to meet the overall percentage required (at least 75%) as well as the percentages

required in each of the key sections (listed above). The property meets the overall percentage required for four star (with 79%) and achieves four star for cleanliness, public areas, bedrooms and the kitchen. However, the property fails to meet the score required for the bathroom. Although the property meets the four star score for the kitchen, the score is borderline.

The outcome is that a three star rating is awarded but with potential for four star. Advice is provided as to how to improve the scores in these two key areas in order to meet a four star rating at the next visit.

Hints & Tips

Be objective and self-critical when thinking about quality:

- Do not over promise. Do not be tempted to claim you offer luxury on your website unless the facilities you are selling are truly luxurious. Customers travel with expectations. It is better to exceed these expectations than not live up to them.
- Be a customer in your own business. Take time to use your website and to sleep in your bedrooms to experience what you are offering to your guests.
- No need to follow the crowd, don't be afraid to have your own style.
- First impressions: Arriving at any Self-Catering property for the first time involves a series of first impressions. Paying attention to the following critical areas will pay dividends:
 - The clean and tidy parking areas
 - Well-tended grounds and gardens
 - Fresh flowers and welcome baskets
 - Clean and well aired rooms
 - Beautifully presented beds

Quality Assessment Report

Exterior	Appearance of buildings & kerb appeal	5	13/15 = 86%
	Grounds, gardens & parking	4	
	Privacy, peace & quiet	4	
Management efficiency	Welcome & arrival procedure	4	12/15 = 80%
	House manuals & local info	4	
	Quality backup in the event of a problem	4	
Cleanliness	Living & dining areas	4	17/20 = 85% (4 star quality)
	Bedroom	4	
	Bathroom	4	
	Kitchen	5	
Public areas	Decoration	4	20/25 = 80% (4 star quality)
	Flooring	4	
	Furniture, furnishings & fittings	3	
	Lighting, heating & ventilation	5	
	Space, comfort & ease of use	4	
Bedroom(s)	Decoration	4	29/35 = 82% (4 star quality)
	Flooring	4	
	Furniture, furnishings & fittings	4	
	Lighting, heating & ventilation	4	
	Beds	5	
	Bedding & bed linen	4	
	Space, comfort & ease of use	4	
Bathroom(s) & WC(s)	Decoration	3	18/25 = 72% (below 4 star quality)
	Flooring	3	
	Furniture, fittings & sanitary ware	4	
	Lighting, heating & ventilation	4	
	Space, comfort & ease of use	4	
Kitchen	Decoration	4	30/40 = 75% (borderline 4 star quality)
	Flooring	4	
	Furniture, furnishings & fittings	4	
	Lighting, heating & ventilation	4	
	Electrical & gas equipment	4	
	Crockery, cutlery & glassware	3	
	Kitchenware, pans & utensils	3	
	Space, comfort & ease of use	4	
	Overall		139/175 = 79%

NB – this report is an example. Marks and scoring thresholds may be subject to change in future.

The assessment process

All our assessors are highly experienced within the Self-Catering sector. They experience best practice in all areas and can pass that knowledge on to you for the benefit of your business. They will assess the quality of your business honestly and always with the objective of helping you to improve your business. Make use of your assessor.

Determining the star rating

There are three main elements to the assessment process which will need to be satisfied to achieve a star rating:

- All statutory obligations must be met. These are listed in section 1.1 (see page 10)
- All minimum entry requirements (MERs) need to be provided. These are listed at the beginning of each assessment section and within each section there are additional requirements, or 'qualifiers' for each star rating level.
- The minimum quality scores. Assessors score each separate element in each area out of five. The overall score is totalled and then divided by the maximum number achievable (usually 175) and then a percentage is obtained for each section and an overall percentage. See page 6 for percentages required at each star rating.

When awarding a quality score out of five for an item, be it a floor covering, a piece of furniture or a kitchen appliance, our assessor will consider a number of factors.

- What is the intrinsic quality?
- What is the age and condition of the item?
- How well does the item perform the task for which it is intended?

An example of this might be a heating system for a cottage. Two cottages might have the same modern gas boiler and radiator system,

but the mark of five is more likely to go to the cottage with thermostatic valves on each of the radiators and a wood burner in the living room, as this would give guests the most flexibility.

To achieve a rating of five stars and an overall score of at least 87%, the aim is to score 'five' (out of five) in as many areas as possible, and certainly no lower than four anywhere. Scores of five are given when the item has that level of 'special' quality.

A four-star rating is likely to be made up of mainly scores of four, with a few marks at three and perhaps a few at five.

Continual investment from operators and rising guest expectations mean that the benchmarks are regularly shifting upwards. A bathroom that scored mostly 'fives' five years ago may only score 'fours' now. The assessors will always advise and suggest when and where upgrading should be prioritised to retain a rating. It is a good idea to visit other properties to get ideas or review websites of similarly-priced and rated properties.

Scores

For each area included in the assessment, the assessor will decide whether to award a score of

- 1 mark – Poor
- 2 marks – Disappointing
- 3 marks – Good
- 4 marks – Very good
- 5 marks – Excellent

After your visit you will receive a detailed written report on the customer experience with individual scores for each criteria. Positive aspects of your business will be outlined as well as areas for improvement. This will give you a benchmark for maintaining the quality of your services and facilities and will help you to prioritise and plan future developments.

Dispensations

Whilst most businesses can provide all the minimum entry requirements (MERs), it might not be possible for every business to provide every MER. This might be due to restrictions placed on a building by Listed Building status, for example.

VisitEngland operates a dispensation process to accommodate this type of problem and a dispensation can be sought through your assessor. This flexibility will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Dispensations will only be awarded if the website description has already been amended to make it clear to prospective guests that the missing item/entry requirement is not found at the property. Ratings cannot be confirmed until the outcome of the dispensation is known.

Overall quality bands					
	1 Star	2 Star	3 Star	4 Star	5 Star
Overall	34%-47%	48%-59%	60%-74%	75%-86%	87%-100%
Cleanliness	60%	60%	65%	80%	90%
Public areas	34%	48%	60%	75%	87%
Bedrooms	34%	48%	60%	75%	87%
Bathrooms	34%	48%	60%	75%	87%
Kitchens	34%	48%	60%	75%	87%

Description

For the purposes of participation in the VisitEngland Self-catering Quality Scheme, the property must be self-contained. A self-contained unit must have bedrooms, bathrooms, public area and kitchen all contained behind one main door where occupants have sole access.

Gold Award

VisitEngland's unique Gold award is given in recognition of exceptional quality within the star rating bands. This award helps customers find those extra special places where the owner and staff go the extra mile, whatever the size, style or star rating of the business. To achieve an award, you will need to demonstrate consistent levels of high quality in the five key areas identified by consumers as very important:

- Cleanliness
- Public Areas
- Bedrooms
- Bathrooms
- Kitchen

Eligibility for an award is triggered by the property's overall score meeting a minimum score in each of the critical areas listed above (see separate sheet showing the percentages required).

Awards are confirmed with the written assessment report but do require confirmation by the Quality Assessment Area Manager and may involve a second visit. The assessment report will show the scores in all areas, so owners can see how close they are to achieving an award and can ask the assessor's advice about key improvements required to aim for a Gold award.

A Gold award can give a significant marketing advantage. A gold logo can be displayed on websites and in other forms of advertising. Certificates are provided for display within the property and exterior signage is also available.

Hints & Tips

The assessment process:

- Ahead of your assessment, prepare your property as you would for guests on arrival. Make sure that the arrival pack and guest information is on display. Dress your beds and ensure the towels are in place. This will help the assessor experience your holiday home as a guest would.
- The first time you meet your assessor you might be concerned that you have not yet provided or understood all the requirements of the assessment scheme. Do not worry, your assessor will discuss this with you. If you need more time, the rating can be put on hold until you have completed the work and allow you time to add any items or facilities that might be missing. A further visit may be required, in which case this may be chargeable.
- Beyond that it is about help and advice. The style and character of your property are what make it unique. Your assessor is there to enhance that, not change it.
- Ask your assessor questions, lots of questions!
- Stay in touch. Assessors are happy to answer your questions in between assessment visits. You might like to arrange an extra interim assessment visit to discuss potential improvements to your property, especially if you are aiming for a higher rating or a Gold award.

Sustainability & Accessibility

Sustainability: Doing Business Even Better

Green tourism and sustainability practices in your business are one and the same thing; it's all about taking small steps that enable you to do business even better, not differently. Small changes will not only save money, improve employee relations, enhance profitability and provide a richer experience for customers but over time you will also improve your business' impact on the local economy, community and environment. 'Going Green' does not have to be a chore and is just as applicable to properties in a city centre as a rural location.

VisitEngland Can Help

VisitEngland is committed to promoting the adoption of sustainability practices among all tourism businesses. It is our aim to ensure that a sustainable approach is complimentary to improving the overall visitor experience in England. Your help is needed in this aspiration.

For further information on how to enhance your business to be more sustainable, along with case studies on the benefits of adopting sustainable practices, please visit www.visitengland.org/green.

Sustainable Tourism Certification

If your business is already a successful sustainable business and you wish to demonstrate this to new or existing consumers, you may wish to join one of the certification schemes that exist in England. These schemes are not operated by VisitEngland but by independent organisations which have been verified to ensure they are offering a rigorous and well-founded sustainable certification scheme that will allow you to confidently promote your green credentials. Visit

www.visitengland.org/green for more information.

Improving your Accessibility – A Lucrative Market

Many people have access needs including disabled people, such as those with hearing and visual impairments, wheelchair users, older and less mobile people and people with pushchairs. The accessible tourism market is worth around £12bn to tourism businesses in England and is growing due to an ageing population.

By making some small adjustments to your facilities, providing information on your accessibility and understanding the needs of disabled people, your business will appeal to a wider range of visitors and attract more business. Demand for accessible accommodation outstrips the current supply. Find out how other tourism businesses are benefitting from this loyal market at www.visitengland.org/access

Legal Obligations

Tourism businesses have obligations under The Equality Act 2010, which replaced the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005 (DDA) on 1 October 2010. Tourism providers should treat everyone accessing their goods, facilities or services fairly, regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, gender reassignment, religion or belief, and guard against making assumptions about the characteristics of individuals.

The Equality Act 2010 requires that service providers must think ahead and take steps to address barriers that impede disabled people. Providers should not wait until a disabled person experiences difficulties using a service, as this

may make it too late to make the necessary adjustment.

1. Make 'reasonable' changes to the way things are done – such as changing practices, policies or procedures where disabled people would be at a 'substantial disadvantage' e.g. amend a 'no dogs' policy.
2. Make 'reasonable' changes to the built environment – such as making changes to the structure of a building to improve access e.g. altering or removing a physical feature.
3. Provide auxiliary aids and services – such as providing information in an accessible format, an induction loop for customers with hearing aids.

A service provider cannot legally justify failing to provide a reasonable adjustment. The only question is whether the adjustment is a 'reasonable' one to make. What is 'reasonable' will depend on a number of circumstances, including the cost of an adjustment, potential benefit it may bring to other customers, the

resources an organisation has and how practical the changes are.

We Can Help

VisitEngland provides tourism businesses with a range of guidance, tools and resources to help increase engagement with the valuable accessible tourism market. Go to www.visitengland.org/access.

It is important to provide information on the accessibility of your facilities and services. This can be achieved by producing an Accessibility Guide (an improved format that replaces Access Statements), which is a requirement for all scheme participants. To produce and publish an Accessibility Guide go to www.visitengland.org/accessibilityguides.

More detailed guidance and accessibility ratings are provided by the National Accessible Scheme (NAS): www.visitengland.org/nas.

1 Overall standards

1.1 Statutory obligations

Legislation Affecting Self Catering Accommodation

- Safety
 - Health and Safety at Work
 - Fire, Gas and Electrical Safety
 - Electric Appliance Testing
 - Product Safety
 - Bunk Bed Regulations
 - British Standards applying to items such as cots, high chairs and play pens
- Premises
 - Planning Permission
 - Private Water Supplies
 - TV Licensing
- Discrimination
 - The Equality Act 2010 (see below)
 - Records
 - GDPR
- Consumer Protection Act
 - Advertising
 - Pricing
 - Unfair Contract Terms

For more information on legal obligations, see VisitEngland's Pink Book: legislation for tourist accommodation: www.visitengland.org/PinkBookOnline.

Additional VisitEngland Scheme Requirements

- Public Liability
Proprietors will be asked to provide evidence that Public Liability Cover is being maintained and to provide a signed confirmation, at application and renewal of participation, that the above requirements are being fulfilled.
- Accessibility Guide
Proprietors will be asked to provide evidence that they have written, and made publicly available, an Accessibility Guide – a description of facilities and services offered, specifically in relation to accessibility, to inform people with access needs. To produce and publish an Accessibility Guide go to www.visitengland.org/accessibilityguides.

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The Equality Act 2010 requires that service providers must think ahead and take steps to address barriers that impede disabled people. Providers should not wait until a disabled person experiences difficulties using a service, as this may make it too late to make the necessary adjustment.

- Make 'reasonable' changes to the way things are done – such as changing practices, policies or procedures where disabled people would be at a 'substantial disadvantage', e.g. amend a 'no dogs' policy.
- Make 'reasonable' changes to the built environment – such as making changes to the structure of a building to improve access e.g. altering or removing a physical feature.
- Provide auxiliary aids and services – such as providing information in an accessible format, or an induction loop for customers with hearing aids.

A service provider cannot legally justify failing to provide a reasonable adjustment. The only question is whether the adjustment is a 'reasonable' one to make. What is 'reasonable' will depend on a number of circumstances, including the cost of an adjustment, potential benefit it may bring to other customers, the resources an organisation has and how practical the changes are.

1.2 Health, safety and security

- A high degree of general safety and security maintained, including information on procedures in the event of an emergency.
- If the proprietor is not resident on the premises, his/her name, address and telephone number or that of the agent, who must have a set of keys, to be prominently displayed, together with clear details of how to summon assistance in the event of an emergency.
- Prominently displayed printed details of how to summon the assistance of emergency services to be provided e.g. doctor, dentist, location of nearest payphone and casualty unit and vets (if pets accepted).
- All units to be provided with suitable refuse disposal and recycling arrangements as required by the Local Authority. Dustbins, where provided, must have lids. Arrangements for refuse collection to be specified and prominently displayed.
- Guests to be provided with a key to the entrance door of their unit, and where applicable a key giving access to the building and any other relevant facilities.
- A minimum of one well positioned smoke detector per property. Your fire risk assessment will determine whether these should be linked/hard wired.
- Adequate levels of lighting at night for safety and comfort in all public areas, including on stairways and landings and in car parks and paths/steps to the property at night, should be provided.
- Electricity should be available (not necessarily mains supply). Where it is not, this must be stated. Voltage to be stated if not on mains.
- Where electricity is available, an adequate number of power sockets to be provided, commensurate with the number of electrical appliances provided.
- Some forms of emergency lighting to be available, e.g. torch or night-lights. Candles are not acceptable for safety reasons. Rechargeable torches are useful, especially the type which flash in the event of a power cut.

Safety essentials

- You have a duty of care to ensure that the property you are letting out is safe.
- To comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, supply evidence that a Fire Risk Assessment has been carried out annually.
- Provide a Carbon Monoxide Detector in every room where gas or oil are burnt and in rooms where there is an open fire or wood burner. A detector should always be placed in a kitchen unless all appliances are electric and in any room where a central heating boiler is housed. People die every year in accidents caused by carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Regular Portable Appliance Testing (PAT Testing) will ensure appliances are safe, but don't forget that all aspects of the electricity supply need to be safe.
- An annual Landlord's Gas Certificate is required if you have gas in your property.
- Are garden ponds fenced, if you take children?
- Do you have a handrail fitted to stairways?
- If you plan to survey your guests after their stay, you could ask them if there is anything they thought unsafe or potentially dangerous.
- Finally, be sure to cover yourself with a good public liability insurance policy

Sustainability best practice

- Maintaining electrical, gas and oil fired equipment also helps ensure the equipment is working efficiently, keeping your fuel bills down as a result. When boilers are serviced, ask the engineer to carry out an efficiency test and provide an efficiency rating. If the rating is 'D' or lower you could make significant savings by replacing it with an 'A' rated boiler.

Accessibility best practice

- Consider fire safety for guests with hearing loss who may not hear the smoke alarm. Strobe light fire alarms or a domestic paging system may be appropriate. See the 'Listen Up!' guide on www.visitengland.org/access.

1.3 Booking & prices

- Make clear to guests exactly what is included in the prices quoted for the property, including service charge, taxes and other surcharges, e.g. electricity, fuel, towels, cots etc. Where VAT is applicable, all prices to be shown inclusive of VAT at standard rate.
- Full details of accommodation, including sleeping arrangements and bathroom (whether it is equipped with a bath or shower) provided on the website or printed form in advance of booking. Where sleeping accommodation is provided by means of bed settees, wall beds, "Z" beds, camp beds etc., in addition to the bedroom accommodation, the type, size and number of bed spaces to be clearly indicated.
- Details of any in-house policies, e.g. no smoking, no pets etc. must be communicated at the time of booking, for example, clearly stated on website. If requested, allow guests to see the property before booking (if property is occupied this may not be possible).
- Website or printed information required. A floor plan is encouraged. Arrangements for access communicated pre-arrival.

- Prospective guests should be made aware, prior to booking, of charges for additional services or facilities available, including cancellation terms, housekeeping and/or breakage deposits.
- Guests advised at the time of booking, or subsequently, in the event of any change in booking details.
- Prices quoted at the time of booking not exceeded.
- Guests provided with details of payments due and a receipt if required.
- The receipt to be clearly presented and well laid out.
- The following information to be readily available prior to booking:
 - Car parking arrangements near unit
 - Arrangements for pets
 - Distance of unit from nearest shop(s), etc.
 - Nature of water supply, if not mains (water supply must meet all statutory regulations for drinking water)
 - Types of energy supply if not electric
 - Electricity voltage, if not standard
 - A map and/or directions showing the location of the unit on booking or provided on website
 - Distance of unit from nearest public transport

Accessibility best practice

- Offer your guests a choice of how to contact you e.g. telephone, fax, letter, email, text message and find out about Text Relay used by people with a hearing impairment at www.textrelay.org
- Always ask if an enquirer or any of the guests in the party have any specific access requirements. Promote your Access Statement.
- Provide guest information in a range of formats e.g. large print, photographs, video, audio description and possibly Braille.
- Even if you don't accept pets, state that you welcome trained assistance dogs [legal obligation]. Many disabled people rely on assistance dogs to provide independence. See the dog as being part of the person.

Sustainability best practice

- If you have taken actions to improve your impact on the environment and local area, make sure this is mentioned on your website/leaflet – this will add to the appeal of your business. You may want to consider taking part in a certification scheme to back up these credentials – search for 'sustainable tourism certification' on www.visitengland.org
- Include the full range of transport options for reaching your property in promotional and booking information. As well as providing greater choice this will enable you to appeal to a wider range of customers www.transportdirect.info provides a door-to-door journey planner for both car and public transport.
- Pre-arrival information can promote options for local food delivery services and nearby shops so that guests do not feel the need to stock up before leaving home or ordering a supermarket delivery.

2 Exterior

2.1 Appearance of buildings & kerb appeal

- First impressions are very important. Whatever the size of the property or the location, guests will be impressed if, on arrival, the property looks well cared for.
- Any signage should be prominent, well-maintained and cleaned regularly. Some owners prefer not to advertise that their property is let out, in which case the name or number of the property should be clearly visible from the road or the approach to the property. First-time guests will appreciate reassurance that they have arrived at their destination.
- Whatever the location of the property, it should look welcoming, with clean paintwork and windows, well-tended gardens all year-round and evidence of little extra touches, such as hanging baskets or window boxes to make it stand out from other properties in the road or area.
- Wherever possible refuse bins or oil tanks should be screened.
- Ensure any flower beds, porches, patio or parking area are completely litter free when guests arrive. Cigarette butts dropped by previous guests do not leave a good impression!

Assessors will award the highest scores in this area for properties where the owners' attention to detail and maintenance is exceptional and where the overall presentation of the exterior of the property suggests to guests they will not be disappointed when they go inside.

2.2 Grounds, gardens & parking

- Gardens and/or open areas that are part of the unit should be maintained in good order, whether for the sole use of the property or shared.
- Where gardens are available then garden furniture should be provided.
- If the property has ancillary areas, the facilities provided will be considered in the assessment of the establishment, where under the control of the operator. They should be well surfaced, in good condition and adequately lit.
- Parking is a key consideration for guests that arrive by car. If parking is not available off-road, assessors will review the advice and steps taken by the property owner to assist guests in finding a parking space on their arrival and on their return to the property each day.
- On-site parking needs to be clearly marked to reduce stress for guests when they arrive and well-lit for late arrivals in the dark.

Assessors will award the highest scores for immaculate gardens and grounds that really 'wow' guests on arrival, whatever the size of the plot or the location.

If a property has no grounds, garden or parking, then assessors will not score this section, but mark as N/A.

2.3 Privacy, peace & quiet

- Many customers choose self-catering accommodation instead of serviced accommodation as they want to relax and enjoy the company of their friends or family, without being disturbed by neighbours.
- Any outside space for guests' use should be screened from adjoining/neighbouring properties, where possible.
- In city centre locations, this is inevitably more difficult, but guests will appreciate the provision of double or triple glazing to reduce traffic noise, good blackout curtains or blinds and other measures to allow guests to enjoy a good night's sleep and minimal disturbance from the occupants of neighbouring properties. Air conditioning might even be installed in locations where opening windows at night is not conducive to a good night's sleep.

Assessors will reserve the highest scores in this section for those properties where the guests' privacy is undisputable and there is minimal risk of disturbance from neighbouring properties or unwelcome traffic noise. The steps taken by property owners to minimise noise or light intrusion will be taken into account in the scoring.

Hints & tips

Don't forget the outside space:

- If you offer space, be it a garden or a balcony, treat it as part of the house and furnish and equip it to a similar standard.
- Be sure to have enough seating for all guests, unless you have a small balcony area.
- Guests at the higher star rating levels will expect something more than plastic garden furniture.
- Barbeques are very popular with guests. Ensure it is safe, high quality and easy-to-use. It should always be cleaned between lettings so factor this in to your cleaning schedule and your changeover day costs.
- If you welcome small children, consider enclosing at least part of the garden, where possible, to allow parents maximum opportunity to relax knowing their children can play safely.

Accessibility best practice

- Provide within the grounds of the property or identify nearby, a free run/spend for area for assistance dogs.
- Ensure paths are kept clear of obstacles, debris, moss, ice and fallen leaves and have firm, well-maintained surfaces. Ensure that any permanent features are securely fixed e.g. flower pot arrangement.

3 Cleanliness

3.1 General

- Cleanliness is of paramount importance to guests, so a high standard of cleanliness must be maintained throughout the property, whatever the star rating. Particular attention must be given to kitchens, bathrooms, shower rooms and toilets and items involving direct contact with guests, such as bedding, linen, towels, baths, showers, washbasins, WCs, flooring, seating, crockery, cutlery, glassware, kitchen utensils and equipment.
- It is the proprietor's responsibility to ensure that all properties are thoroughly cleaned throughout, before each new let, irrespective of whether the guests have cleaned it prior to departure. Any broken or damaged items should be replaced.

Hints & tips

Housekeeping

- It is, of course, essential that your holiday home is thoroughly cleaned and prepared for in-coming guests.
- There should be no evidence of the previous guests (no left-over food, clothes, rubbish, old newspapers and of course no hairs from the dog or human guests).
- Housekeeping is probably the single most important part of the holiday home letting process; there are more customer complaints about cleanliness than any other area.
- For those owners who are not able to carry out their own housekeeping, it can present a real challenge. Good reliable cleaning services can be difficult to find, so think about who can carry out this task for you. It might be your letting agent, a contract cleaning company, or a local resident/neighbour.
- Remember, it's not just about the cleaning. The general presentation of the property also needs to be good, including the beds and contents of the kitchen cupboards, for example.
- Be specific when instructing cleaners and housekeepers, to ensure that the extra touches are carried out to your requirements.
- Don't skimp on the hours allocated for the cleaning. If you are aiming for a four or five star rating, your housekeeping standards will need to be consistently 'very good' or 'excellent'. Allow enough time for those (hopefully) rare occasions when the outgoing guests leave the property in a real mess.
- Most guests will leave the property tidy on departure, but don't expect them to thoroughly clean before they leave. They would not do this in a hotel or B&B.
- Do not leave anything to chance. Ask your customers for feedback to ensure that they are happy with the cleaning service.

Sustainability best practice

- Consider using low impact and chlorine free cleaning products, including microfibre cloths that reduce the amount of cleaning liquid required.

4 Management efficiency

4.1 Welcome & arrival procedure

The assessor will ask questions about your check-in procedures and guest information provided prior to arrival. The highest scores will be reserved for those that demonstrate an excellent understanding of guests' needs, with a level of personalisation aiming for every guest to get the most out of their stay, going home with some lasting memories and experiences to talk about, relaxed and refreshed from their holiday.

Hints & tips

- Arrival and welcome procedures vary greatly, and although a personal welcome may be considered the 'gold standard', many owners and operators have developed alternative solutions and they can work very well.
- Remember, guests have chosen a self-catering holiday. A personal welcome is very good but keep it short and informative and allow guests to settle in to their holiday home. Calling back at the property, phoning or sending a text later in the day or the following morning is a good idea. This gives the guests time to have any questions ready.
- Many owners do not live near their holiday home, so will rely on a housekeeper or agent to meet and greet guests. However, if using a third party means a fixed time for guests to arrive, this may be a negative for some guests, as unexpected traffic can cause delays, or they may simply get lost on the way. This can be stressful for the guests.
- Key safes are increasingly used so guests can simply let themselves in at whatever time they arrive. For this to work well the property needs to be completely ready for the guests with the heating on in the winter or shoulder months and if there is an open fire it should be laid ready to light with a match. In summer the property must not be too hot on arrival. Think about how this can be managed if you do not live nearby and cannot check just before the guests arrive.
- Guests will often arrive in the dark, so ensure outside lighting is effective and guest parking is clearly marked.
- Consider the safety of guests arriving in the dark at an unfamiliar location. Ensure there are no hazards.
- If there is no parking at your property, guests will appreciate detailed advice (in advance) on where to park and the charges and options for payment.
- Offer a welcome pack of essentials to ensure guests can at least make a hot drink (with fresh milk) on arrival. If you want to provide a very special welcome hamper, think about including items that would exceed guests' expectations and tailor to the age of the party where practical. Home-made cakes and local produce may be appreciated by your guests.
- Remember that, however generous the welcome hamper, it will not make up for a cold property, no hot water or missing towels.
- Consider how much to tell guests in advance about what you provide. Surprises are appreciated, but most guests would rather know in advance if they need to bring toilet paper, dishwasher tablets etc.

Hints & tips (cont.)

- The booking process for self-catering can often involve many queries from prospective guests and these emails and calls provide an opportunity for the owner to tailor the welcome to each party. Try and find out your guests' interests and what they want to do when they stay in your property. Highlight before they arrive, or on arrival, any special local events or activities that may interest them, e.g. in cathedral cities, is there a choral evensong that your guests might enjoy? Where's the best picnic spot/best local place for a pint of beer, best pub to hear live music, best garden centre to buy plants, best bakery for bread etc.?
- Keep a record of interests of returning guests. If they like to eat out at the best local restaurants, offer to book a table for them, so they do not miss out.
- Think of what might surprise or delight your guests, e.g. box of toys by age, so only put out the toddler box when toddlers are booked in, newspaper delivery (does not need to be free – could be an optional chargeable extra), 'baking' box with all families would need to make cakes on a wet afternoon.

Accessibility best practice

- Specific training is available on how to welcome all types of guests e.g. VisitEngland/DisabledGo online training, Welcome All and WorldHost Customers with disabilities. Consider learning to communicate in basic British Sign Language (BSL).
- Ensure guests identifying themselves as being disabled, e.g. those with visual impairment, are offered a familiarisation tour.
- Provide a vibrating alarm clock for hearing impaired guests.

Sustainability best practice

- If you are showing guests around the property, time taken to familiarise them with the heating controls will help ensure they are comfortable and your business does not incur unnecessary expense.
- Consider providing an example(s) of local produce to welcome guests – providing information on where they can purchase it and other similar items.

4.2 House manuals & local information

To award the highest score in this section, the assessor will be looking for well-indexed information on how everything works in the property plus a range of local information that demonstrates the owner's local knowledge and a genuine appreciation of the interests of the different guests.

Hints & tips

- A good house manual, with an index, is vital to ensure guest feel comfortable living in a property with which they are unfamiliar. It is also essential if you want to reduce the number of calls from guests when they cannot locate something or cannot operate an appliance.
- All the instructions for operating the appliances need to be easy to locate, comprehensive and very easy to understand. Top of the list will be controls for the heating and hot water and how to operate the TV but knowing how to operate the timer on the oven might be important for some guests. If the manual is not that clear, re-write the information in your own words. Any idiosyncrasies about your property should be explained.

Hints & tips (cont.)

- Include how to contact the owner, housekeeper or agent in an emergency or with any questions or problems. If you are aiming for a high star rating, you should provide a contact number that will be answered 24/7, in case of a major emergency.
- Provide a list of local services, such as the nearest doctor, A&E, dentist, vet etc.
- Think about how easily guests will find items in the kitchen and consider having an inventory with the location of each item listed. Torches, matches, spare light bulbs and fuses etc. might be needed in a hurry. Will guests easily locate the switch for the heated towel rail? Will they know where to find the bedding for the sofa bed?
- Guests will need information on your recycling procedure and make sure you provide spare recycling bags if these are essential.
- Local information is just as important. As well as the usual tourist information leaflets you might also provide menus for local pubs, restaurants and takeaways. Consider including information on upcoming local events, especially at visitor attractions nearby. Providing maps for walking and cycling will be appreciated and you may wish to leave information on guided walks and local cycle hire. Tailor your information to suit your location and the interests of the guests you tend to attract. The more personal the service you can offer, the more appreciative your guests will be.
- A simple 'Guest Notebook' might also be provided. By making the first entry about how much you enjoyed a local restaurant or tourist attraction, you will soon find that many more recommendations follow.
- Consider buying a local Ordnance Survey map, which you could mount on the wall, even marking recommended places.
- Provision of Wi-Fi is considered essential for most guests and then a whole extra layer of information is available to your guests. If you don't offer any Wi-Fi, do you offer a range of up-to-date guide books and maps? If you are in a rural area and the service is variable, make this clear to your guests and manage their expectations.
- If mobile coverage is variable at your property, make sure guests are aware of this and which networks tend to provide a usable signal. If you have neither Wi-Fi nor a strong mobile signal, then a payphone may be required, otherwise guests will struggle to contact you in an emergency. In rural areas it is important to make clear in all booking and confirmation information the connectivity at the property.

Accessibility best practice

- Remember to include basic accessibility information for local pubs and attractions or Accessibility Guides where available.

Sustainability best practice

Each property could contain, where possible, an up-to-date visitor information folder including:

- A range of places to visit and events – placing an emphasis on those within a short distance, and, if feasible, information on reaching them by public transport.
- Don't forget the property and any grounds – highlight points of interest or opportunities to explore.
- Information covering a variety of means of exploring the area – cycling, walking, horse-riding, public transport. Rather than simply providing timetables and maps, provide examples of the potential experiences to enjoy, including options for stopping points.
- Details of places nearby to buy local food, drink and gift products.
- Promote any actions being taken by the business to improve the impact of guests' stays and ideas for how they can join in to make a difference.

4.3 Quality back-up in the event of a problem

To award the highest score in this section, the assessor will be looking for evidence of the highest level of management response to any problems (whether real or perceived) that guests may experience during their stay. Online reviews will be taken into account and any comments in the guest book.

General best practice

- Guests will expect a response if they have a problem at any point during their stay. You can minimise the risk with a robust cleaning and maintenance regime, but it is inevitable that appliances might fail during a stay, so think about how the guest can report a problem and how you will be able to respond. Guests will not be satisfied if they can only leave an answerphone message with no idea when they will hear back from you.
- Any shortcomings in housekeeping should be avoidable. Best practice is to have a second person to check over the property before guests arrive. If you have multiple properties on site and more than one person in this role, consider checking each other's cottages before signing off.
- What back-up plan do you have in place in the event of guests leaving the property in a very poor state? Can you pull in extra assistance at short notice?
- Encourage guests to report back any minor issues before they leave, perhaps by emailing them the evening before they leave. This might give you time to replace any broken or faulty items before the next guests arrive.
- Put in place a good support network of tradespeople for plumbing or electrical problems so you can be sure that they will prioritise fixing problems for your guests. It is not good enough to tell a guest that you cannot get hold of a plumber, for example.
- Build into your annual maintenance budget a realistic figure for replacing 'worn' items of equipment, especially the relatively low-value items, such as frying pans and towels.
- If you manage your own property, you will still need cover for holidays, sickness or your own family emergencies. Train up someone who is reliable and who will look after your guests well in your absence.
- Owners of multiple units should keep onsite spares of items that are most likely to fail.
- Remember, it's how you deal with a problem or crisis that matters. Guests will be understanding, if you are genuinely sympathetic when they are disappointed or frustrated by any delay in fixing the problem.

5 Public areas

5.1 General

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- Dining table and seating facilities for the maximum number of guests.
- Where there is a functional open fireplace, a fireguard, poker, hearth brush, tongs, shovel, fuel container and ashes bucket provided.
- Easy chair and/or sofa seats provided, sufficient for the maximum number of advertised guests.
- A TV to be provided where a TV signal is available. Where terrestrial TV channels are not available, every effort should be made to provide an alternative such as cable or satellite TV.
- Non-flammable waste paper bins provided in living areas.

Hints & tips

The Extra Touches

- Some of your guests might book your holiday home to 'get away from it all'. Others will want some technology to hand, and those that do not, will not turn it on. So, think about providing Wi-Fi, docking stations and games consoles.
- There are many other extra touches that can be added to make your holiday home more comfortable and to encourage repeat business. These range from walking maps of the local area, binoculars, books and games to larger items such as hot tubs.
- Guests will appreciate the extra effort that goes in to providing the extra touches but try to avoid personal clutter. Personal items should be stowed away in locked cupboards and containers.

Accessibility best practice

- Provide a variety of seating: low, high, firm, soft, with and without arms.
- Ensure TVs can provide subtitles to benefit hearing impaired and foreign language speaking guests.
- On each step or change of level, provide a nosing strip that contrasts in colour to the floor.
- Avoid deep pile carpets that may cause trips or make it difficult for a wheelchair to manoeuvre.

5.2 Furniture, furnishings & fittings

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- All exterior windows in living areas fitted with opaque curtains, blinds or shutters. Glass doors will also require covering where the lounge is used for sleeping or where lack of privacy could be an

issue (the apex of an 'A' framed window and roof light windows need to be curtained only where the lounge is used in sleeping accommodation).

- Where there is sleeping accommodation in living areas, there must be adequate storage for bedding and guests' clothes.

Hints & tips

Privacy

- Beautiful views might be one of the main selling points for your holiday home, but always be mindful of the privacy of your guests.
- Quality is partly about choice and the option as to whether to pull a curtain or blind adds to that personal choice.
- Bathrooms without opaque window covers will make guests feel uncomfortable and a well fitted blind helps to dress and finish a room. Indeed, all windows within the property should be fitted with a curtain or blind.

Accessibility best practice

- Consider having the door frames a contrasting colour to the wall and avoid high gloss finishes to assist visually impaired guests.

Sustainability best practice

- Make sure that furniture or furnishings are not blocking heat from circulating into the room.
- When an item has come to the end of its life in your property remember that it may still have a useful life elsewhere. You could make use of Freecycle or offer to local community facilities. For electric appliances, remember to choose energy-saving models with low running costs (check for an energy rating or consult www.sust-it)
- Use could be made of local artists' work, prints, or photographs depicting local scenes, historical and heritage related images – it all adds to a visitor's enhanced sense of place.

5.3 Heating, lighting & ventilation

- Adequate means of heating must be available at all times and guests must be able to override a time switch for the heating and hot water. If storage heaters are the means of heating the property, additional supplementary (portable?) heaters must be provided. Free standing paraffin and Calor gas heaters are not acceptable. Coin meters not acceptable (except for a washing machine in laundries)
- All living room areas to have at least one window opening directly into the open air.

Accessibility best practice

- Ensure windows and curtains can be reached by your guests and are easy to open and close.
- Enable lighting levels to be adjusted using a dimmer switch.

Sustainability best practice

- Achieve comfort and efficiency by maximising insulation, ensuring that any radiators have thermostatic radiator valves (TRVs) and guests are confident in how to use heating controls. Properties need to be warm ready for guests' arrival but consider when to start bringing the property up to the required temperature so that energy is not used unnecessarily.
- As lights in these areas are likely to be on the longest, make these a priority for low energy options such as LEDs for halogen down lighters and low energy bulbs (CFLs) for standard incandescent bulbs. Providing a number of lights and light switches helps to avoid an 'all or nothing' situation.

6 Bedrooms

6.1 Furniture, furnishings & fittings

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- A bedside table/shelf and light for each permanent bed, including bunk beds (twin beds may share a table and light and top bunk to have light, but a shelf should only be provided where safe to do so).
- Non-flammable waste bins to be provided.
- A dressing table (or equivalent) with mirror, wardrobe or clothes hanging rail/space and adequate drawer space ideally in each bedroom (shelf space is an acceptable alternative to drawers) to be provided.
- Sufficient hangers per person. Wire hangers are not acceptable.

Two Star

- As minimum

Three Star

- A hairdryer must be provided.

Four Star

- As three star.

Five Star

- A hairdryer is provided in every bedroom (except children's rooms).

Hints & tips

How many guests should I be catering for?

- There is no hard and fast rule here, but always be aware of space, comfort and usability in all areas of the property.
- Gone are the days of squeezing as many beds as possible into the available space; today's guests are expecting more.
- Bedrooms need to be comfortable for the number of guests sleeping in them and you need to provide ample clothes storage and ease of use to all items of furniture.
- Do not be tempted to accommodate more guests than can comfortably use the lounge dining and kitchen areas.
- Sofa beds might provide that extra sleeping space, but if you are looking to provide a high-quality experience to all your guests, then it might not be the best option.

Accessibility best practice

- Avoid deep pile carpets that may cause trips or make it difficult for a wheelchair to manoeuvre.
- Providing a ground floor bedroom may increase the property's appeal to older couples, extended family groups and people with broken limbs and other impairments that limit mobility.
- Consider having the door frames a contrasting colour to the wall and avoid high gloss finishes to assist visually impaired guests.

Sustainability best practice

- Thermally lined curtains will not only help to keep the bedroom warm but will help to block out light and reduce noise, leading to better sleeping conditions.

6.2 Beds & bedding

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- Single beds – minimum size 183cm x 76cm/6' x 2'6". Double beds – minimum size 183cm x 120cm/6' x 4'. If minimum size only, then this must be made clear in all advertising and booking confirmation.
- At least one bed for adults which is not a bunk bed.
- A mattress protector or under blanket fitted to all beds (plastic or rubber mattress protectors are not acceptable for normal use. Where a rubber cover is provided for children, it should be as an optional extra in addition to the normal mattress protector). Pillow protectors also required.
- All beds (excluding sofa beds) should be made up on arrival with freshly laundered linen and fresh linen should be supplied (at least weekly) for guests that stay more than one week.
- Spare linen and bedding available on request. Sheets must be poly-cotton or cotton.
- Linen must be included in the rental fee.
- Where a bedroom is accessed via another bedroom, then this must be clearly advertised.
- Where a bathroom is accessed via a bedroom (not including en suites), then these units must be designated, and advertised, as only being suitable for single family occupation.

Two Star

- All beds to be full size (except those clearly specified in brochures etc. as being for children's use; or bed settees. Size of bed settee mattress to be clearly shown on website).
 - Adult single – minimum size 190cm x 90cm/6'3" x 3'
 - Adult double – minimum size 190cm x 137cm/6'3" x 4'6"
 - Child size – minimum size 183cm x 76cm/6' x 2'6"

Three Star

- As two star.

Four Star

- All advertised sleeping spaces are to be in bedrooms only (where studio flats are clearly advertised as such, an exemption will be made to this).

Five Star

- All beds to be full sized proper beds including beds for children (exclude 'Z' beds used on a temporary basis for children only).

Bed access

Where there is only access to one side of a double bed, a maximum rating of Three Star can be awarded and guests must be made aware at the time of booking.

Galleried Bedrooms

- Where a property accommodates only two guests, any rating can be achieved (the galleried bedroom must be advertised as such).
- Where the property accommodates more than two guests and there is a galleried bedroom, this must be clearly advertised.

Sofa Beds

Sofa beds may be counted in the maximum number of sleepers up to Three Stars.

At Four Stars any sofa beds in the property (bedrooms or public area) must **not** be counted in maximum number of sleepers in any description on any website. Any search results should not include the sleepers accommodated on sofa beds. They can, however, be mentioned in descriptions.

At Five Stars any sofa beds must **not** be counted in maximum number of sleepers (whether in bedrooms or public areas) and must **not** be mentioned in any descriptions on any websites. A sofa bed may be left in the property, but if not as comfortable as a regular sofa, the 'Comfort' score may be reduced.

Hints & tips

- Beds are one of the most important items you will purchase.
- Always buy the best quality that you can afford.
- Increasingly, guests will expect double beds to be 5ft wide and even 6ft ('zip and link' combined), especially at the highest star ratings. It is likely that this will soon be a requirement at Five Stars.
- A good quality bed will last longer, if the mattress is turned regularly.
- Consider high quality mattress options.
- Match quality of the bed with high quality bed linen and dress it well to give the best first impression.

Accessibility best practice

- Provide zip and link beds so that a guest and partner or a guest and carer/personal assistant can be accommodated.
- Provide blocks so that bed heights can be adjusted.
- Provide hypoallergenic bedding.

Sustainability best practice

- Blankets do not need to be wrapped; freshness can be indicated by tying the folded blankets with a re-useable ribbon, or other tie, or simply by folding neatly. Alternatively, they could be placed in a re-useable bag.

6.3 Heating, lighting & ventilation

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- Means of heating the unit must be available at all times, which means guests should be able to override a time switch. If storage heaters are the main means of heating, freestanding electric heaters should be available to supplement the storage heating.
- All bedrooms to have at least one window opening directly into the open air, windows to have opaque curtains, blinds or shutters.

Accessibility best practice

- Ensure windows and curtains can be reached by your guests and are easy to open and close.
- Enable lighting levels to be adjusted using a dimmer switch and/or make available additional bedside/dressing table lamps.

Sustainability best practice

- As bedrooms can be left unoccupied for long periods, encourage guests not to leave power on unnecessarily when they leave by using friendly, positive information. Check windows are draught-proof and that heating appliances are not blocked by furniture or curtains.
- Choose good quality low energy light bulbs to avoid the frustration of long warm-up times (Which? provide online reviews of low energy lighting and other appliances) and make use of multiple lights/switches to provide guests the choice of how much lighting is required.

7 Bathrooms & WCs

7.1 General

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- All units to have at least one bathroom and WC for every six guests. The bathroom to be equipped with a bath or shower, bathmat, towel rail (pegs and hooks are not acceptable), shelf or flat surface and wash basin. Where the base of the bath or shower is not anti-slip then a non-slip mat must be available. Soap dish to be provided in showers.
- If any bedrooms have an en suite bathroom, then the ratio of other bathroom(s) to other bedrooms must meet the minimum of 1:6 guests. For example, a property with five double/twin bedrooms, one en suite bathroom and one shared bathroom will not meet the ratio, as four double/twin bedrooms will share one bathroom. A property with five double/twin bedrooms, two en suite bathrooms and one shared bathroom will meet the ratio, as three double/twin bedrooms share one bathroom.
- Where no shower is available this must be clearly advertised.
- Unless en suite and the unit sleeps only two people, access through a bedroom to the only bathroom in the unit is not normally acceptable.
- The washbasin in the main bathroom is minimum 36cm x 24cm/14" x 9" internal, although a standard size wash basin is always recommended where space allows (additional basins offered in en suites or separate WCs where the basin in the main bathroom complies, could be of smaller dimensions).
- A mirror above or adjacent to the washbasin.
- All units to have at least one WC equipped with a full toilet roll and holder, toilet brush and disposal bin with sanitary bags or a lidded bin.
- All windows to have opaque curtains, blinds or shutters (glass doors to bathrooms and WCs must also have opaque curtain(s) or blind(s)).
- Heating to be provided in all bathrooms. A heated towel rail is acceptable. Heated bulbs are discouraged.
- A means to provide hot water available at all times (i.e. ability for guests to turn on boiler or immersion at any time).
- A lock or bolt to be provided on all bathrooms/WC doors, including en suites.
- Shaver point adjacent to the mirror, preferably with light. An adapter elsewhere in the unit is an acceptable alternative, providing it can be used close to a mirror.

Two Star

- As minimum

Three Star

- Where three or more guests are accommodated a shower must be available. This must be hands-free but can be fitted over a bath e.g. mixer tap.
- Towels - (one hand and one bath towel per guest) to be provided at no extra cost.

Four Star

- Extra WC and washbasin (which may be in another bath/shower room) to be provided if the unit sleeps five or more.

Five Star

- All units to have at least one bathroom with bath/shower, WC and basin for every four guests. Ratio to be maintained if the property sleeps more than four guests. If no bath in the unit, showers should be of exceptional quality and the shower room spacious with top quality fittings, and this must be clearly highlighted in pre-booking information.
- If the property sleeps five or more, and there are four guests per bathroom, an extra W.C./cloakroom is required, but not if the ratio of bathrooms to guests is better/higher than one to four. For example:
 - A property with four double bedrooms and two shared bathrooms will have four guests per bathroom and will therefore need an extra W.C./cloakroom.
 - A property with three double bedrooms and two shared bathrooms will have three guests per bathroom and therefore will not need an extra W.C./cloakroom.
- There must be a means of drying towels in the bathroom all year round (e.g. towel rail with electric element)

Hints & tips

Bathroom Ratios

- The provision of en suite bathrooms in holiday homes is growing and growing quickly.
- When setting up your holiday home consider the ratio of bathrooms to guests. The VisitEngland standard looks for different ratios at the different star rating levels, but try to exceed these, as customer demand will move that way over time.
- That extra bathroom might be a greater value to you than a third or fourth bedroom. Think of the two or even three couples wanting to holiday together (or two or three single guests).

Accessibility best practice

- Hot water supply should have at each fitting a mixer valve, controlled to a maximum 41°C to prevent scalding.
- Provide a selection of equipment such as bath seats, toilet seat height raisers and shower chairs.
- Provide a support rail by the shower attachments.
- Provide towels that contrast in colour to the walls and floor to assist visually impaired guests.
- Ensure windows and curtains can be reached by your guests and are easy to open and close.

Sustainability best practice

- Although providing shower facilities can help reduce water consumption, remember that power showers can use more water than a bath. Where water pressures are not low, aerated shower heads, which mix air with the water to provide power with less water, can be used to improve water efficiency. Aerated basin taps mix air with the water to provide a 'foamy' flow of water which is more efficient than a standard tap fitting.
- In older toilet cisterns, which have a larger capacity, water saving devices (often available free from water supply companies) can be fitted easily to reduce water use.
- Larger, pump action dispensers (topped up at all times to ensure they are well-presented) can replace the need for individually wrapped soaps and toiletries. Assessors will look at the contents and style of presentation. Alternatively, make use of locally produced individual soaps.
- There is no need for the spare drinking cup/glass to be either plastic or wrapped.
- Heated towel rails can enhance the visitor experience but ensure that they can be controlled so that they are not left on unnecessarily throughout the whole day.
- Halogen down lighters are popular in bathrooms but can now be replaced with LED equivalents that use up to 10 times less energy and last 10 times longer.

8 Kitchen

8.1 General

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- A cooker with an oven, with at least two shelves, a grill and at least four boiling rings that may be used simultaneously with the oven or grill. If two guests only are accommodated, then two boiling rings plus oven and grill must be provided. For any larger numbers i.e. twelve or more, accommodated, it is anticipated that additional cooking facilities will be provided. A microwave is an acceptable alternative for one boiling ring. A combination microwave (oven, grill and microwave) is acceptable as a grill or oven, provided that a three-ring hob is also available separately.
- Microwave oven to be provided, and microwave cookware or compatible crockery.
- A refrigerator with an ice making compartment (unless a freezer is also provided). Larder fridges are not acceptable if no freezer is provided.
- A sink equipped with a draining board, dish drying rack, hot water and cold drinking water supply to be provided.
- At least one hygienic work surface.
- An opening window or Local Planning Authority approved ventilation system. Opaque curtains, shutters or blinds on external glass doors and windows.
- A covered waste disposal bin to be provided, with liner.
- A fire blanket to be readily available. This should be between the cooker and the door, and wall mounted. Storage in a cupboard or over the cooker is not acceptable. It could be sited outside the kitchen provided it is quickly and easily accessible (further advice can be sought from your local fire prevention officer).
- Storage space suitable for food.
- Vacuum cleaner provided in each unit (may be compact type), unless a daily cleaning service is provided.
- Where a dishwasher is provided, crockery, cutlery and utensils should be dishwasher safe. Extra crockery should also be provided, so the dishwasher does not have to be operated at each mealtime for smaller numbers of guests.
- Sufficient storage space for crockery, cutlery, kitchen and cleaning equipment provided.

Two Star

- As minimum

Three Star

- As minimum

Four Star

- Access to washing machine if not provided in the unit. Ratio of one machine to every five units. 24-hour return laundry service also acceptable.

- Access to a freezer (not just a 3* icebox within a fridge), but it could be in a shed/garage etc. Assessors will use their judgement on appropriate size, depending on the occupancy of the unit. Dispensations may be considered if the property sleeps up to four guests, as long as the lack of a freezer is clearly highlighted in pre-booking information. Access to a shared freezer would be acceptable.
- If owners choose to put in a dishwasher instead of a washing machine, where space is limited, a dispensation may be requested. It must be clear on the website which appliances are in the unit and which are not.

Five Star

- Freezer provided within the unit.
- Dishwasher provided within the unit (consider size for the number the unit accommodates).
- Washing machine provided in the unit (may be provided in an exterior purpose-built laundry room on multi-unit sites but must have 24-hour access). Ratio maximum of one machine to every five units. Use of property owner's washing machine is not acceptable (24-hour return laundry service also acceptable).

Hints & tips

Equipping the Kitchen

- Guests expect all the modern conveniences of home, even if they are not intending to use them.
- Your property might be in an area surrounded by restaurants, but not all guests want to or can afford to eat out all the time; therefore it needs to be fully equipped.
- If you have the space, then a dishwasher, washing machine, dryer and separate freezer should all be considered, in addition to the other essential equipment.
- Provide double the amount of crockery, cutlery and glassware, particularly if you do provide a dishwasher.
- Add extra touches, such as champagne flutes.

Accessibility best practice

- Ensure crockery contrasts with table surface to assist visually impaired guests.

Sustainability best practice

- Most guests will now be familiar with separating at least some of their waste, but systems do vary around the country so providing a simple, clear system is essential to gaining participation. Clean, well-presented and labelled/colour-coded containers are essential.
- Given that fridges and freezers will be on for long periods, then it is essential to consider their running costs as well as their purchase cost by choosing an energy efficient model. Where there is going to be a gap of several days between guests, consider switching off the fridge and leaving the door open to ensure there is ventilation.
- Halogen down lighters are popular in kitchens but can now be replaced with LED equivalents that use up to 10 times less energy and last 10 times longer.

Items	Notes	Higher Star Ratings
Matching crockery and cutlery	Sufficient for number of guests unit sleeps. Extra if dishwasher in unit. Plenty of teaspoons essential, nothing chipped or cracked. Egg cups should be included	Greater range of items, e.g. different sizes of plates and bowls and mugs/cups & saucers. Not essential to offer cups and saucers but aim for very good quality and range. Guests will expect small knives & forks and soup spoons at higher star ratings.
Glassware	At least tumblers and wine glasses. A water jug might be appreciated.	Possibly champagne flutes or greater range and quality of glasses to suit target market.
Serving dishes	To suit target market – possibly salad bowl, platter, fruit bowl, bread basket etc. Consider small containers/dishes for serving crisps & nuts.	Greater range and quality expected at higher levels.
Serving spoons		
Teapot, milk jug & container for sugar. Condiments (salt & pepper)	Cafetiere or coffee maker might be included, depending on target market.	At higher star ratings guests may expect different sizes of teapots, cafetieres & jugs.
Useful containers for bread, items etc.	Some airtight lidded plastic in different sizes worth including, especially if can go through dishwasher.	
Bread knife, carving knife & and other sharp knives	Larger capacity units would need greater range so if group all cooking together, they have sufficient.	
Chopping board(s), bread board etc.		
Range of kitchen utensils	e.g. tin opener, potato peeler, grater, fish slice or similar, potato masher, ladle, kitchen scissors, wooden spoons, whisk etc.	At higher star ratings more gadgets would be expected, e.g. food processor, bread mixer, pasta maker, electric whisk etc. and pestle & mortar.
Range of kitchen bowls, measuring jugs etc.	Kitchen scales should be considered, depending on target market.	At higher star ratings, guests may expect bakery items, such as cake tins, cooling racks, rolling pin, cutters, pie dishes, casserole dish etc.
Roasting tin(s) and other oven-proof trays, dishes etc.		
Electric kettle and toaster		
Range of saucepans (including one non-stick) and at least one frying pan	Ensure adequate provision of large saucepans and frying pans if unit takes larger groups. Omelette pan might be appreciated.	Ensure frying pans in very good condition.
Colander or sieve		
Corkscrew and bottle opener		
Tray(s)		

Items	Notes	Higher Star Ratings
Ice-making tray (unless ice making unit)		
Vase(s)		
Straws (for children and disabled guests) NB – paper straws are a widely available and more environmentally friendly alternative to plastic		
Ashtrays (if smoking permitted)		
Matches/lighter		
Facility to dry clothes (airer or clothes line with pegs)	Plastic/wicker laundry basket might be appreciated	
Vacuum/broom, floor mop & bucket, dustpan & brush, as appropriate depending on flooring		
Basic supply of cleaning materials, washing-up liquid, toilet roll for each WC	Guests might appreciate starter supply of dishwasher powder/tablets.	At higher star ratings, operators might consider leaving kitchen roll, foil, cling film etc.
Iron and ironing board		
Oven glove or mitts		
Supply of clean tea towels/ kitchen towel		
Spare light bulbs		
Torch(es)		
Tablecloth or place mats, as appropriate	Consider plastic cloth(s) for dining table if welcome families.	Linen/cloth napkins may be appreciated by some guests
Washing-up bowl with new sponge/disposable cloths/clean brush		
Door mat at exterior door(s)		

9 Additional facilities

9.1 General

For example: laundry, recreation, reception, shop, bar, restaurant facilities. None of these are required, but where they are provided, their quality and condition will form part of the quality assessment.

Sustainability best practice

- Laundry – washing machines and, in particular, dryers, can use significant quantities of energy. When replacing equipment choose an energy efficient model with lower running costs. Some businesses also invite guests to make a donation towards a local charity when making use of dryers as a means of moderating use without being prohibitive.
- Reception/ shop/ bar/ restaurant – Use the opportunity to stock a range of the best locally produced food and drink (e.g. bacon, sausage, eggs, jams) and local crafts which can act as souvenirs and gifts.

Appendix: Code of conduct & conditions for participation

Code of Conduct

The operator/manager is required to undertake and observe the VisitEngland Code of Conduct:

Prior to booking

- To describe accurately in any advertisement, brochure, or other printed or electronic media, the facilities and services provided;
- To make clear to guests in print, in electronic media and on the telephone exactly what is included in all prices quoted for accommodation, including taxes and any other surcharges. Details of charges for additional services/facilities should also be made clear, for example breakfast, leisure etc.;
- To provide information on the suitability of the premises for guests of various ages, particularly for the elderly and the very young;
- To allow guests to view the accommodation prior to booking if requested.

At the time of booking

- To clearly describe the cancellation policy to guests i.e. by telephone, fax, internet/email as well as in any printed information given to guests;
- To adhere to and not to exceed prices quoted at the time of booking for accommodation and other services;
- To make clear to guests if the accommodation offered is in an unconnected annexe or similar, and to indicate the location of such accommodation and any difference in comfort and/or amenities from accommodation in the establishment.

On arrival

- To welcome all guests courteously and without discrimination in relation to gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion or belief.

During the stay

- To maintain standards of guest care, cleanliness, and service appropriate to the type of establishment;
- To deal promptly and courteously with all enquiries, requests, bookings and correspondence from guests;
- To ensure complaint handling procedures are in place and that complaints received are investigated promptly and courteously and that the outcome is communicated to the guest.

On departure

- To give each guest, on request, details of payments due and a receipt, if required/requested.

General

- To give due consideration to the requirements of guests with accessibility requirements, and to make suitable provision where applicable;
- To ensure the accommodation is prepared for the arrival of guests at all times when the establishment is advertised as open;
- To advise guests, at any time prior to their stay, if there are any changes in what has been booked;
- To have a complaints handling procedure in place to deal promptly and fairly with all guest complaints;
- To hold current public liability insurance and to comply with all relevant statutory obligations including legislation applicable to fire, health and safety, planning and food safety;
- To allow VisitEngland representatives reasonable access to the establishment, on request, to conform that the Code of Conduct is being observed or in order to investigate any complaint of a serious nature notified to them.
- When a business is sold or ceases to trade, every effort should be made to inform VisitEngland.

Terms & Conditions for Participation

For the Terms & Conditions for participation in the VisitEngland Self-catering scheme, please visit www.visitenglandassessmentservices.com/terms.

Self-catering Accommodation