

14. **Services** - Overview of the most important issues surrounding the utilities within both new and old properties highlighting the items that purchasers should be looking out for when buying a property or considering its upkeep and refurbishment. The Issues surrounding safety are of primary concern in relation to electrical and gas services.

The Property Doctor

Think Safe...

Written by Brian Shaw, Director, Bruce Shaw Property Consultants Limited

This article deals with the “services” within properties and covers gas, electricity, water, drainage and ventilation.

I am sure many readers who own a car, arrange for it to be serviced on an annual basis and some of you maybe service it yourselves. Similarly it is important to arrange for servicing of your gas or oil fired boiler on an annual basis. Servicing ensures that the boiler operates efficiently thus doing your bit for the environment and reducing the amount of gas or oil you burn thereby reducing your bills. Some of you may recall the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of Dunfermline Athletic’s Norrie McCathie. Carbon monoxide caused the tragedy and this was the result of inefficient operation of the boiler. Small wall mounted battery or mains operated carbon monoxide detectors can be purchased and warn of dangerous levels of this gas in much of the same way as smoke detectors. However, the real solution is to get your boiler serviced. Remember also, if you have a living flame fire, or any other gas fire, to get them checked also. When selecting a service engineer, ensure they are CORGI approved and that you are given a copy of the completed service checklist.

Like gas installations, electrical installations are, rightly so, heavily regulated and generally speaking it is best to use NICEIC approved contractors for checking or maintaining electrical systems. It is recommended that you should have your electrical installation checked (like an MOT) every 10 years by a NICEIC approved contractor. According to Government figures, around 10% of domestic fires are electrical, and of these, a third are directly due to old or bad wiring. This equates to over 2,000 electric shock accidents and 9,300 electrical fires in homes every year. If you are considering installing extra power sockets, take care as often this causes existing circuits to overload and fuse, so play safe and get an electrician to install them for you. As an additional precaution you should check your fuse board frequently, check in older systems for heat as this is often the early signs of problems, monitor the fuses and if frequent fusing occurs, get an electrician to check it out.

Water services along with waste pipes do not as a rule pose too many problems and require minimal attention. However, you should undertake some simple checks; at least once a year, inspect your water tank, especially if it is a galvanised steel and look out for rusting on the inside and in the case of all types of tanks check to see how clean the water is, externally check the overflow pipes and if they are discharging water this suggests a leaking ball valve. It is quite common for toilet cistern ball valves to leak. Regarding wastewater, if you know the location of manhole covers, it is worth checking once a year to see that they are running freely. However be careful when lifting the manhole lid, as it can be heavy!

Not too many homes have ventilation systems per se, however, modern homes do have extract fans located in bathrooms and many kitchens have cooker hood extracts. Remember to check the filter material in the cooker fans, as it has to be changed from time to time. Most people use the override switch to switch off the extract fan in the bathroom. Check once a year that works! Also, check in your attic that the fan is connected to flexi pipe and that this

terminates externally. You will be surprised at how many times the fan just terminates in the attic.

All modern houses by law now have mains operated smoke detectors, check that they work twice a year and once a year use a vacuum cleaner extension to suck out any dust from the unit.

In the final section of this article, we highlight some things to check if you are purchasing a property; ask for sight of service sheets as this will confirm if the boiler or fire is being maintained, look out for any surface mounted socket outlets and equally surface mounted wiring as the presence of these may signal DIY work which may not be compliant, check that all extract fans are in working order, specifically check the external termination point of cooker hood fan as sometimes it tends to end up in the conservatory, check for the presence of smoke detectors, in older buildings check the fuse board, lots of fuses and fuse wire lying around may suggest problems. We would suggest, in older buildings that you consider getting an electrician to check the system if the wiring is old. A typical electrical MOT costs around £100, whereas it can cost up to £4,000 to rewire a house.

Remember think safe and always use NICEIC (Electrical) or CORGI (gas) approved contractors.

If you have any queries, or need to consult the Property Doctor please contact either Colin Bruce or Brian Shaw on 01383 824450 or by mobile on 07900 913975, Bruce Shaw Property Consultants Limited, 6 Forth Reach, Dalgety Bay, Fife KY11 9FF or visit us on-line at www.bruce-shaw.co.uk.