



Rural Key Management Procedure

Printable working procedure for homes, farms, estates, rural businesses and community premises

Purpose - to maintain simple, proportionate control of physical keys, fobs, access cards and entry codes so that authorised people can get where they need to go without creating avoidable security gaps.

1. Scope

This procedure can be adapted for houses, farms, smallholdings, workshops, village halls, churches, estate buildings, machinery, vehicles, fuel stores, gates and other rural premises. It covers permanent users, family members, employees, volunteers, contractors and temporary access.

2. Core principles

- Know what each key or credential opens and who is authorised to hold it.
- Issue the minimum access reasonably required for the task.
- Keep keys out of obvious or predictable locations and away from the asset they control.
- Keep master and spare keys under stronger control than routine working keys.
- Record issue, return, loss, replacement and authorised duplication.
- Remove access promptly when a person no longer needs it.
- Treat electronic codes, fobs and app-based access with the same discipline as physical keys.
- Keep the system practical: a simple process people actually follow is better than complex paperwork that is ignored.

3. Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Owner / manager / nominated custodian	Maintain the register, approve access, keep master/spare keys secure and review losses or anomalies.
Key holder	Keep issued items secure, do not lend or copy them without authority, and report loss immediately.
Contractor / temporary user	Use access only for the agreed purpose and return keys, fobs or codes at the end of the task.
All users	Challenge unexplained missing keys through the agreed reporting route and protect information about key locations and codes.

4. Key register

Give each controlled key or credential a unique reference that does not reveal the exact door or asset if the tag is lost. The register should record:

- Reference number
- What it controls
- Number of authorised copies
- Normal storage location
- Named or role-based authorised holders
- Issue date and return date
- Lost / damaged / replaced status
- Last audit date



5. Issue and return

1. Confirm the person is authorised and understands any restrictions on access.
2. Record the key reference, holder and date/time when the access is temporary or higher risk.
3. Do not attach addresses, building names or machinery descriptions to loose key tags.
4. Require return when the task, shift, tenancy, employment or volunteering role ends.
5. Check that returned keys match the register and investigate unexplained substitutes or duplicates.

6. Storage and spare keys

- Use a suitable secured cabinet, safe or controlled room for important keys; do not rely on a visible hook board in an accessible area.
- Keep vehicle and machinery keys away from the vehicle or machine and away from house keys where practical.
- Store master keys and emergency spares separately from routine working keys.
- Do not hide high-consequence spare keys in predictable external locations.
- Where emergency access is necessary, document who may use it and how use will be recorded.

7. Duplication, codes and electronic access

- Do not copy controlled keys without the owner or nominated custodian approving it.
- Keep a record of authorised duplicate keys and destroy or securely dispose of obsolete copies.
- Change shared gate or alarm codes when they become widely known, after relevant staff/contractors leave, or after suspected compromise.
- Remove former users from smart-lock, alarm, CCTV and gate-control apps; use unique passwords and multi-factor authentication where available.
- Avoid sending sensitive access codes in large group chats or leaving them written near the point of entry.

8. Lost, stolen or unreturned keys

Treat a missing key according to what it could allow someone to do, not just the replacement cost of the key itself.

1. Report the loss as soon as it is discovered; record the time, last known holder and what the key controls.
2. Decide whether temporary guarding, relocation of valuable assets, disabled access or another immediate control is needed.
3. If the key can be linked to the property or a high-value asset, consider changing the affected lock, code or credential promptly.
4. Update the register and document the replacement action.
5. Report theft to police using the appropriate route; call 999/112 where a crime is in progress or someone is in immediate danger.

9. Audit and review

- Physically account for master, spare and high-consequence keys at least quarterly; use a shorter interval where risk is higher.
- Review the whole system after theft, attempted theft, a lost key, change of staff/tenants, building work or a change in property use.
- Remove obsolete keys and labels so the cabinet does not become a collection nobody can account for.



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10. Simple key register template

Ref	Controls	Copies	Holder	Issued	Returned	Notes

Use and limitations

This is a general community template, not a site-specific security assessment or legal requirement. Adapt it to the property, insurer conditions, safeguarding needs, fire/emergency access arrangements and any employment or tenancy responsibilities that apply. Do not publish completed registers containing sensitive access information.