

Housing Advice Leaflet



An introduction to private renting

You can find rented accommodation by:

- contacting local letting agencies
- responding to adverts in Friday-ads, and your local newspaper.
- responding to notices in shops and supermarkets
- looking at the following websites:
www.friday-ad.co.uk, www.rightmove.co.uk,
www.findaproperty.com
- You can access the internet for FREE at your local library

You should find out as much as possible about the costs of the accommodation:

- how much is the rent?
- does it include bills?
- how much is the council tax?
- are the bills shared with other people?

Deposit and rent in advance

Landlords normally ask for one month's rent in advance and one month's deposit. The landlord is legally required to pay your deposit into a deposit protection scheme. This law was introduced to stop landlords from unfairly withholding deposits. The landlord should give you information about the scheme within two weeks of you paying the deposit. If you leave the property in good condition with no unpaid bills, your full deposit should be returned.

Letting agencies

Some letting agents charge agency fees, some don't. It's a good idea to try different ones. You should ask the agent if they charge, how much and if you will get the money back.

They should provide an inventory before you move in which you should check carefully. These are records about the property telling you what furniture is included and what standard the property is in.

References

Landlords often ask for references to prove that you are reliable and able to pay the rent. This normally involves providing bank details and / or a letter from your employer. Sometimes letting agencies charge for carrying out reference checks.

Tenancy agreement

This is a written or verbal agreement that sets out the responsibilities of the landlord and tenant. It should cover the amount of rent, when payable and whether bills for water, electricity etc are included. A tenancy agreement will make it easier to deal with any disputes. You should keep a copy of the tenancy and proof of rent payments you make.

Council Tax

This is a local tax set by councils to help pay for local services like policing and rubbish collection. It applies to all homes and you will probably have to pay. Check with your landlord / letting agency.

If you move house it is important to inform your local council so that they do not continue to charge you for that property. Not paying your council tax could result in being summoned to court.

Local Housing Allowance

If you are earning a low wage or have dependant family you may be eligible for help with the cost of your accommodation. To find out if you are eligible, contact one of the organisations on the back of this leaflet for advice.

Tenants rights and responsibilities

Tenants should:

- Pay the rent on time
- Report any repairs to the landlord
- Repair any damage they have caused
- Be considerate towards neighbours
- Comply with the tenancy agreement
- Keep the property clean and free from refuse (find out where to put your rubbish and on what days it is collected)

Tenants should have:

- A rent book and tenancy agreement
- Freedom from harassment and illegal eviction
- Usually at least two months notice to leave a property
- Reasonable notice by the landlord to visit the Property

If the landlord wants you to leave

The proper procedure for evicting you depends on the type of agreement you have with your landlord and the reasons s/he wants you to leave. In most cases landlords will have to give a written notice. Even if you don't have a written tenancy agreement, landlords still have to follow these procedures. Similarly, landlords are not allowed to harass their tenants (for example, by coming round too often or at unsuitable times). If you think you are being harassed or illegally evicted, contact one of the listed agencies for advice.

Disrepair or poor housing conditions

Your landlord is responsible for making sure your home is well maintained and meets all the required health and safety requirements. All gas and electrical appliances such as cookers, heaters, boilers and washing machines must be in good order and safe to use. A gas safety certificate should be given to you at the start of the tenancy.

If the property you live in is unsafe, has inadequate fire safety arrangements, lacks heating or hot water, has damp or mouldy walls or anything else that may affect your health and safety, you should report it to your landlord. Ask them to put it right and ask how long it will take. It will help if you report any problems to the landlord in writing and keep a record. If you are unhappy with the response, you can contact your local council.

Houses of Multiple Occupation

Any property with three or more floors and five or more tenants sharing facilities (kitchen, bathroom etc) must be licensed with the local authority as a House of Multiple Occupation. This is to make sure that certain safety standards are met. The licence should be clearly displayed in the property.

Housing Provided by your Employer

There are legal standards about how many people should live in certain types of property, to prevent overcrowding and fire hazards. If you think your accommodation is not safe, or may not meet the standards, contact your local council. Your landlord does not need to know you have contacted them. There are also rules which say how much money an employer can deduct from your wages to pay for housing.

Renting from a Housing Association or Local Council

If you are planning to stay in East Sussex for some time, you may wish to apply for Housing Association or Council Housing. Rents are usually lower than private rented accommodation but there is a lot of demand for this type of housing. You will need to complete a Housing Register application form to go on to the waiting list. Your housing application will be assessed on your current housing circumstances. Once you have received your assessment you can register an interest in properties advertised in the 'Homemove' magazine. You need to check if you are eligible to go on the housing register. Your council can give you advice on this.

Contacts

Contact your local council if:

- your accommodation is unsafe or does not have adequate facilities
- you are worried about being evicted
- you are having problems with your tenancy or your deposit
- you want advice on finding private rented accommodation
- you want to register for social housing

If you need someone who speaks your language please ask for an interpreter.

Local Councils

Hastings Borough Council Housing Services

Housing Information Point
Renaissance House
The Old Christchurch School
London Road
St Leonards on Sea
TN37 6AN.

10am–4pm (Monday – Friday)
Tel: 01424 451100

Eastbourne Borough Council Housing Advice Centre

1 Grove Road
Eastbourne
BN21 4TW

9am – 5 pm Monday – Friday (except Wednesdays when offices open at 9,30am)
Tel: 01323 410000

Rother District Council

Bexhill Community Help Point
Amherst Road
Bexhill-on-sea
TN39 3JX

8.30am – 4.30 pm Monday – Friday (except Wednesdays when offices open at 9.30am)
Tel:01424 787000

Other organisations that you can contact for advice:

Shelter

Housing and homelessness charity
Tel: 0808 800 4444

BHT

Provides advice in housing, welfare benefits and debt

BHT Hastings Advice

8 Cambridge Road
Hastings

9am – 1pm and 2pm-5pm (Monday – Friday)
Tel: 01424 452634

BHT Eastbourne Advice

Braemar House
28 St Leonards Road
Eastbourne

9am – 1.00pm and 2pm – 5pm (Monday – Friday)
Tel: 01323 642615

Homeworks

Provides housing support to help people keep their accommodation or move into new accommodation

Homeworks East – Hastings and Rother
Tel: 01424 858341

Homeworks West – Eastbourne, Lewes and Wealden
Tel: 01273 89870

Large print and translated versions of this form are available on request. Please call 01424 451342.

