

Need help or advice with renting privately?

We're here to help

Your Guide to

Renting Privately

What is **Privately Rented Accommodation**?

Privately rented accommodation is a property owned by a landlord and leased (or rented) to a tenant. The landlord could be an individual, property company or an investor. The tenant may deal directly with the landlord or a management company (letting agent) who looks after the property on behalf of the landlord.

There are various types of privately rented accommodation:

- **A room in a shared house (house of multiple occupation or 'HMO')**
- **Lodging with a 'live-in' landlord**
- **Student accommodation**
- **Sheltered housing (accommodation for older or disabled people)**
- **Flats, apartments of family houses**

Why look for Privately Rented Accommodation?

Unfortunately, the supply of Social Housing does not meet the demand. As such, waiting for housing through the Housing Register is likely to take a very long time and you may need to consider other housing options available to meet your household's need.

Realistically, the quickest way to resolve your housing problem will be to search for accommodation in the private rented sector. The main advantages of renting privately is that you are generally able to find a home more quickly and in a location of your choice.

Searching for Privately Rented Accommodation

When you start looking for privately rented accommodation, it's important to be realistic. You should consider:

- What you can afford
- What type of property you could live in
- What properties are available (and where)

You should not rent a property directly from an existing tenant. This is known as 'subletting' and the tenant might not have the landlord's permission to rent to you.

Searching on the Internet

The internet is a good place to look for accommodation. There are various websites including:

- Search Engines - Use a search engine (like Google) to search for properties to rent in your desired location.
- Local Letting Agents - Most Letting Agents have websites where they advertise the properties available to rent (you can refine your search by location, property size and rent).
- Property Websites - These advertise properties to rent whether you are looking for a flat, house or room share. You can search within your preferred area. Some websites that may be helpful include:
 - Rightmove
 - Zoopla
 - Primelocation
 - Friday-ad
 - Spareroom
 - Gumtree

Important Advice

Finding and securing privately rented accommodation isn't always easy. However, it's important that you are persistent with your search! You may find it helpful to ask friends and family if they are aware of anyone looking for a lodger or roommate.

Also, remember that this area can be very expensive. You should consider expanding your search to the surrounding areas, where you may find properties that are cheaper.

What is a Tenancy Agreement?

There are many different types of tenancies. The most common type of tenancy used for privately rented accommodation is an assured shorthold tenancy (AST). When you find a suitable property, the landlord or agent should provide you with a written agreement.

If your Landlord or Agent has issued you with an AST, they must provide you with the following documents:

- Gas Safety Certificate (issued within the past year);
- Energy Performance Certificate
- Electrical Installation Condition Report (issued within the past five years)
- Deposit Protection Certificate (and prescribed information)
- How to Rent Government Checklist Booklet

What is a Tenancy Deposit Protection Schemes

If you have a tenancy with a private landlord, your deposit must be protected. This means that your landlord has to register the deposit with one of three Government authorised tenancy deposit protection schemes. This safeguards your deposit and makes it easier to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. As the tenant, you have the responsibility of looking after the landlord's property and returning it in the same condition it was let.

Tenant Fees Act

The Tenant Fees Act protects tenants by banning most fees that landlords and lettings agents can charge. This means that tenants cannot be charged for:

- Viewing properties
- Reference or credit checks
- Admin fees to cover things like referencing, credit checks, immigration checks or guarantor checks
- Check-in and check-out fees (including fees for inventory)
- Renewing the tenancy

Tenancy deposits are capped at five weeks rent for properties with an annual rent below £50,000 or six weeks rent if the annual rent is more than £50,000. If your tenancy deposit is above the maximum limit, then your landlord should reduce your deposit according to the regulations set out in the Tenant Fees Act.

Who is Responsible for Repairs?

As the tenant, you are responsible for repairing any damage that you cause. It's recommended that an inventory of the property is carried out with the landlord when you move in. The inventory should include a list of the furniture and fittings and the condition of each room. This helps avoid disputes with your landlord in the future when you move out and will ensure that you won't be held responsible for any damage that you have not caused.

For most tenancies, the landlord is responsible for any repairs to the property. This includes repairs to the structure, the outside of the property and essentials such as the heating system and plumbing. You should notify your landlord of any defect as soon as you notice the issue. If your landlord does not carry out essential repairs after you have reported them, you should contact the Council's Private Sector Housing team on 01892 526161.

What Help can I get Towards Costs?

It is normal for a landlord or letting agent to ask for rent in advance and a deposit. In some cases, they may ask for one week's rent to hold the property. If you are on a low income, letting agents may ask that you have a 'guarantor'. This is someone who 'guarantees' to pay your rent if you fail to do so.

The Council may be able to assist you with an interest free loan to help towards rent in advance. The loan can be repaid in either weekly or monthly instalments over a maximum of three years. We may also be able to support you with a deposit bond guarantee.

Local Housing Allowance

If you are a tenant renting a property or room from a private landlord, the maximum amount of benefits you can claim towards your rent costs are based on the Local Housing Allowance (LHA). The current LHA rates can be found here: Housing Benefit (tunbridgewells.gov.uk). If you are single, under 35 and living alone you are entitled to the LHA at the shared room rate even if you may be living in a larger property.

Contact Us

You can contact the Council's
Housing Options Team by:



01892 526121



housingadvice@tunbridgewells.gov.uk