

Self-help Guide – Finding Accommodation

What does this guide cover?

This guide is for people who are looking for somewhere else to live. It will take you step-by-step through the process of finding suitable accommodation and being a tenant.

The guide also tells you where to go for help if you have problems.

Homeless today?

If you are homeless today and have nowhere to stay, here is a list of cheap, local hostels: [Hostel Accommodation Factsheet](#) [PDF, 255kb]

If you are homeless because you are experiencing domestic abuse/violence contact:

- For women: Refuge – National Domestic Abuse Helpline <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/> tel 0808 2000 247
- For men: Respect – <https://mensadviceline.org.uk/> tel 0808 8010 327

The steps

1. Work out what **size** property you need;
2. Work out what you can **afford**;
3. **Search** for accommodation;
4. Help in paying for the rent in advance and deposit to secure a property;
5. Find out your rights and responsibilities as a tenant.

The Councils' '[Looking for somewhere to live](#)' leaflet also contains useful information.

Social Housing (Council and Housing Association)

The only way to become a social housing tenant is through the Housing Register.

If you meet the [eligibility criteria](#) you can apply for social housing through the housing register.

The waiting time for rehousing from the housing register is normally years. The majority of social housing lets are made to high priority social housing transfer applicants. Eastbourne and Lewes each have about 1000 households on the housing register. Households on Band C on the housing register will normally wait over five years to be rehoused.

If you are homeless or will be homeless soon you will need to look for private rented accommodation. Social housing is not an immediate solution to your housing problem. The only exception is for people aged over 55 who want sheltered accommodation (accommodation that only accepts people over a certain age – some schemes accept over 55s others over 60s). If you are homeless or threatened with homelessness and aged over 55 **and** have medical or support needs, you are

advised to complete a housing register application with a medical and support needs form.

Step 1: What size property should I look for?

If you receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Element (UCHE) the government sets your bedroom entitlement and the maximum amount of assistance with rent you can receive. This is called the local housing allowance (LHA). The bedroom entitlement is also a good guide for other households on a low income.

LHA rules allow one bedroom for:

- Every adult couple
- Every adult aged 16 or over (including lodgers)
- Any two children of the same sex under age 16
- Any two children regardless of their sex under age 10
- Any other child

In some circumstances you may be allowed an additional room, for example, if you have a severely disabled child who cannot share with another child. For more information see [the Shelter website](#).

This means that a boy and girl would be expected to share a room until one of them is 10. Two boys or two girls would be expected to share a room until one of them is 16.

Single-Person Households aged under 35

Most single-person households aged under 35 receive the shared room rate and are expected to live in a house where they have their own bedroom but share kitchen and bathroom or toilet with other residents. There are some exceptions for under 35s, see the [Shelter website](#).

I share responsibility for a child with another adult

When calculating the bedroom entitlement only include children for whom you receive child benefit.

To calculate how many bedrooms you are entitled to, use the [LHA bedroom calculator](#).

Now you know what size of property to look for you need to work out how much rent you can afford.

Step 2: What rent can I afford?

If you get either Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Element there will be a maximum amount, called the local housing allowance (LHA) on which your entitlement to assistance with your rent will be calculated.

LHA is the maximum amount of benefit that can be paid towards your rent; the amount you receive may be reduced if you have other income besides Universal Credit

LHA is based on your bedroom entitlement and the where the property is. Areas with higher average rents get a higher LHA amount.

To find out the LHA rate for a property, search for the [LHA rate by postcode or local authority](#).

You can look for properties with fewer bedrooms than your bedroom requirement and will still get the same LHA entitlement. A household with a 3-bed entitlement will get the same LHA if they move into a 2-bed property. If this household looks for 2-bed and 3-bed accommodation, this will broaden the choice of affordable properties and sometimes a living room can be used as a bedroom.

If you are about to claim benefits or are not sure if you are getting all the benefits you are entitled to, use a benefit calculator; this website lists three [benefits calculators](#).

Single Person Households aged under 35

Single-person households aged under 35 receive the shared room rate and are expected to live in a house where they have their own bedroom but share kitchen and bathroom or toilet with other residents. There are some exceptions for under 35s who are entitled to the 1-bed rate see the [Shelter website](#).

Single Person Households aged over 35

Single person aged over 35 in receipt of:

- Universal Credit gets the 1-bed rate whether living in shared or self-contained accommodation.
- Housing Benefit gets the 1-bed rate in self-contained accommodation, but the shared room rate in a house with shared use of kitchen and bathroom/toilet.

It is not uncommon for rents to be above the LHA for the area .You can get accommodation with a rent above the LHA rate, but you need to ensure that you can afford to the shortfall between the housing assistance you receive and the rent. Completing a budget planner will show you how much you can afford to pay above the LHA rate and help identify areas of expenditure that you might need to reduce. You may need to consider moving to an area where rents are at or close to the LHA.

Income and Expenditure

The next step is to complete a [budget planner](#), to make sure you can afford not only the rent, but also the other costs that you will need to pay such as council tax, gas/electricity and other essential living costs.

If you're expenditure is more than your income you will need to look at ways of reducing your outgoings. If your income is greater than your expenditure you may be able to increase the amount that you can afford for rent above the LHA rate.

For more information on budget planning and where to go for money advice contact:

- Citizens Advice <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/> can give free advice face to face, by phone or email. They also have a budget planner <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/budgeting/budgeting/work-out-your-budget/>
- The Money Advice Service <https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en> set up by the government to give free advice.
- Turn2Us <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/> have a free helpline to help you calculate your benefit entitlement, find grants and find an adviser to help you.

Now that you know what size property you require and how much you can afford you can begin to look for a home.

Finding a new home

When looking for a new home you will improve your chances if you look over as wide an area as possible. Restricting your search to a few areas will mean that it will take longer to find somewhere to live.

Do I need a guarantor?

A guarantor is someone who agrees to pay your rent if you fail to pay. Having a guarantor is not essential, but some landlords and letting agents ask for a guarantor. Having a guarantor will give you access to more properties.

Who landlords will accept as a guarantor varies from landlord to landlord and letting agent to letting agent.

When agents/landlords do want a guarantor, they will often want the guarantor to be a homeowner who is in employment.

Ask friends and family if they can act as a guarantor for you.

There are rent guarantor schemes which will act as a guarantor, for a fee. An example is [Rent Guarantor](#) who can assist people on benefits and those in work.

Pets

Having pets may severely limit the number of landlords who will accept you as a tenant. Some landlords are happy to accept pets, some will ask you to sign an additional agreement, making you liable for paying for extra cleaning at the end of the tenancy and for the need to keep your pet under control.

LetswithPets <https://www.letswithpets.org.uk/> gives advice on finding a property if you have a pet and a list of websites that allow you to filter for pet-friendly tenancies.

Do I need a reference?

Some landlords and letting agents will ask for a reference from a previous landlord and some will do credit checks before offering you a tenancy.

If you have a history of rent arrears or a poor credit history; for example, debts or County Court Judgements this may limit your choice of properties. However, private rented accommodation can still be found if you look in the right places. You will have a better chance of finding somewhere to live if you look for accommodation in places where landlords advertise directly rather than through letting agents.

Where to look for accommodation

Having internet access makes finding accommodation much easier but is not essential.

Many libraries offer free internet access. For computer access in libraries in East Sussex you need to book a session – tel: 0345 60 80 196

You can search for accommodation on the following websites:

- Rightmove: <https://www.rightmove.co.uk/>
- Friday Ad: <https://www.friday-ad.co.uk/property/>
- Gumtree: <https://www.gumtree.com/categories/flats-houses>
- PrimeLocation: <https://www.primelocation.com/to-rent/>
- DSSmove: <http://www.dssmove.co.uk/>

To search for rooms in shared houses, there are a number of websites including:

- SpareRoom: www.spareroom.co.uk
- OpenRent: <https://www.openrent.co.uk/>
- Zoopla: <https://www.zoopla.co.uk/>

Eastbourne Homes Investment Company Limited (EHICL) have several properties in Eastbourne to apply for an EHICL property. There are **no bidding requirements for these properties**. Applicants who are successful will be offered an Assured Shorthold Tenancy. Check the [Homes First Lettings website](#) for the available properties. If you want to be considered for any of these properties you will need to complete an [application form](#). 

Other places to search for somewhere to live include:

- Facebook Marketplace – properties to rent;
- Ask friends who are currently renting if their landlord or letting agent has places to rent;
- Ask friends and family if you can stay with them, or if they know somewhere you can stay.

Letting Agents

Letting agents are a useful source of accommodation, there are several letting agents covering Eastbourne and Lewes district. They can be found by searching online.

Letting agents cannot refuse to consider someone just because they are on benefits.

What can a landlord or letting agent charge for?

The only payments that landlords or letting agents can charge for are:

- Rent
- A refundable deposit equivalent to no more than 5 weeks' rent.
- A refundable holding deposit of no more than 1 week's rent
- Payment for ending the tenancy early
- Payments for utilities (gas, electricity and water), TV licence, phone, internet and Council Tax
- A charge (set out in the tenancy agreement) for late rent payments or replacing a key.

Landlords and letting agents cannot charge you for anything else such as:

- Registering with them
- Producing a tenancy agreement

Scam Adverts – Beware!

Most adverts for properties to rent are genuine, but several scams exist. Fraudulent landlords may post adverts for properties that look attractive and cheap. However, they may not own the property and ask for money before letting you see the property. Never pay money to a landlord or agent before seeing the property. Avoid making payments through money transfer companies such as Western Union and MoneyGram.

What to look for when considering renting a property

- Is the rent affordable?
- How long is the tenancy agreement for? Most are either six months or one year. If it is a one-year tenancy will you have to pay if you want to leave before the end of the year?
- Is the property in good condition?
- How is the property heated? Make sure that you will be able to afford to heat the property in the winter.
- If you rely on public transport, is it near buses or a train station?

Before you move in:

There are several things that the landlord must give you before you move in:

- Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). The EPC gives you information about a property's energy use and typical energy costs. Energy ratings go from band A (the most efficient) to band E (less efficient). Properties with a rating lower than E cannot be let.

- Valid Gas safety certificate (if the property has gas)
- Valid electrical condition (EICR) certificate
- A copy of the [How to Rent Guide](#)
- Is the tenancy to be let furnished or unfurnished?
- Once you have signed up for the tenancy you will need to arrange to have the bills that are not included in the tenancy put into your name, for example, electricity, gas, water rates and Council Tax. Take meter readings for all the utilities.
- The landlord is required to carry out a 'right to rent check' they will need proof of your immigration status, showing that you have a right to live in this country. For more information and details of what documents are acceptable see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landlords-guide-to-right-to-rent-checks>
- If the accommodation is a house in multiple occupation (HMO) your landlord may need to have a licence to let the accommodation: <https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/housing/private-housing/houses-in-multiple-occupancy/>

Negotiating the amount of rent

You may be able to negotiate the amount of rent with the landlord and get a small reduction in the rent.

Tenancy Agreement

A tenancy agreement does not have to be in writing, but most landlords and agents will give you a written tenancy agreement to sign. The agreement is binding so make sure that you read the tenancy agreement and are happy with it. When you sign up for a fixed-term tenancy (for example a 6-month or 1-year tenancy) you will normally be liable for the rent during the whole period of the tenancy, even if you leave early; unless the tenancy agreement states otherwise.

Inventory

An inventory is a list of the items that are included with the tenancy, for example oven, washing machine and furniture. It will also usually include a description and/or photos to show the condition of the property.

Not all landlords use an inventory, but if there is an inventory, check that it is accurate. The landlord may deduct money from your deposit to pay for any items that are missing at the end of the tenancy, or for any damage.

Rent in Advance/Deposit

Most landlords want rent paid in advance when you sign the tenancy agreement and a deposit which the landlord pays back at the end of the tenancy minus any rent arrears or costs of cleaning and repairs.

The deposit cannot be more than 5 weeks' rent. The deposit must be deposited with a government approved deposit scheme and the landlord must give you written confirmation of the details of the deposit scheme used.

There is no limit to the rent in advance, which will be whatever amount you and the landlord agree on. If you are able to pay several months' rent in advance the landlord may not require a guarantor.

Listed below are sources of financial help for rent in advance/deposit:

- Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) <https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/benefits-and-grants/discretionary-housing-payments/> you must be in receipt of either Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Element to apply for a DHP or that there will be an eligibility for either benefit when you move to your new home,. If you get a DHP it will normally only cover one months' rent in advance.
- Bank loan or loan Credit Union loan <https://www.eastsussexcu.org.uk/>
- Ask friends if they can lend you the money
- If you are a Lewes District Council resident you may be eligible to apply for an interest free loan from a local charity Homelink.
- If the Council accept that you are homeless, or threatened with homelessness you may be able to get a discretionary interest-free loan (subject to terms and conditions)
- Budgeting loan from the DWP – if you are in receipt of one of the following benefits: UC, ESA, JSA, IS or pension credits.

When you pay the rent in advance/deposit ask the landlord for a receipt, especially if you are paying in cash.

Your rights and responsibilities as a tenant – FAQs

Can the landlord come in any time they want?

As a tenant, other than in an emergency, your landlord can only come into your property after giving you at least 24hrs notice that they want to inspect the property or carry out repairs.

If your landlord has given reasonable notice you have to allow them in.

There are repairs that need doing, who is responsible?

Repairs that are your landlord's responsibility include:

- Electrical wiring
- Gas boiler and pipes
- Heating and hot water appliances provided by the landlord
- Sinks, baths, toilets and drains
- If you are in a flat, the common areas such as halls and stairs
- The structure and exterior, this includes walls, stairs, roof, doors and windows.

If repairs are needed to the property always write to the landlord, this is evidence that you have requested the repair.

If the landlord has not carried out the repair after a reasonable period, contact the Housing Standards team tel: 01273 471600 01323 410000

They can inspect the property and work with your landlord to ensure the repairs are done.

The landlord hasn't done the repairs, can I withhold rent payments?

We would not advise you to withhold your rent payments without taking legal advice, from, for example, BHT Sussex (Formerly Brighton Housing Trust)

<https://www.bht.org.uk/>

Eastbourne Advice Centre 01323 642615

Brighton Advice Centre 01273 645455

You are responsible for carrying out repairs

- If the disrepair is caused by you, someone in your household, or your visitors;
- You will also be responsible for minor repairs and for changing light bulbs, smoke alarm batteries or fuses.

As a tenant you have a duty to use the accommodation in a 'tenant-like manner'. This means you have to keep it clean, ventilate properly when cooking or using the bathroom to prevent mould caused by condensation.

My landlord wants to evict me, what rights do I have?

With a few exceptions your landlord can only evict you by first serving the correct notice and then applying for a court order. It is a criminal offence for a landlord to evict you without having a court order.

It is a criminal offence for your landlord to harass you to try to get you to leave or to cut off gas, electricity or water supplies, without a good reason for doing so.

The main exception not requiring a court order is where you live in a house or flat and share accommodation with your landlord; a lodger arrangement where you share the kitchen, bathroom or sitting room/lounge with the landlord or a member of the landlord's family. Your landlord would need to give you reasonable notice to leave the property. Reasonable notice would depend on how regularly you pay your rent – for instance if you pay your rent weekly your landlord would only need to give you a week's notice.

If your landlord wants to evict you, or is harassing you to leave, get advice from:

- BHT Sussex (Formerly Brighton Housing Trust) <https://www.bht.org.uk/>
Eastbourne Advice Centre 01323 642615
Brighton Advice Centre 01273 645455
- Lewes and Eastbourne Councils' Housing Solutions Team 01273 471600
01323 410000

I am in rent arrears, or about to get into rent arrears. What should I do?

If you are in rent arrears, or unable to pay the next rent payment it is important to take action as soon as possible.

Get advice from either Citizens Advice <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/> or BHT Sussex (Formerly Brighton Housing Trust) <https://www.bht.org.uk/>
Eastbourne Advice Centre 01323 642615
Brighton Advice Centre 01273 645455

It is important to contact your landlord to discuss the arrears; the landlord may agree to a payment plan and is less likely to evict you if you keep them in the picture and have a plan for paying off the arrears.

Can I take in a lodger or sublet the accommodation?

Whether you can take in a lodger or sublet the accommodation will depend on what your tenancy agreement states.

Many tenancy agreements allow you to have a lodger, this means you can rent out a spare room in the accommodation, whilst you are still living there.

Subletting, where you leave the accommodation and rent it to somewhere else is usually not allowed.

For some social housing (Council or housing association) tenants it is a criminal offence to sublet your accommodation.

What are my responsibilities as a tenant?

As a tenant you have several responsibilities, including:

- To pay the rent and other charges you are responsible for
- To use the property in a tenant-like manner – keeping it clean, well ventilated to avoid condensation, not damaging the property.
- To report any disrepair to the landlord
- To allow the landlord to inspect the accommodation, after giving reasonable notice.
- If you are going away when it is cold turn off the mains water to prevent it freezing
- Not to be a nuisance to your neighbours