

FINDING SOMEWHERE to LIVE:

If you have to find your own place to live, you will probably need to look for privately rented housing. It is unlikely that you would get any support from the district councils to find a place to live unless children are involved.

Housing can be very expensive, both to buy and to rent, and you may have to travel or live outside heavily populated areas if you want reasonably priced rented property. Perhaps the best way for you to start searching is by looking at the UK's biggest website, with over 1 million homes for sale and rent in the UK, at www.rightmove.co.uk

There are places to go for help in an emergency. Shelter is a charitable organization that offers specialist housing advice and support for people in trouble. Their website is at www.shelter.org

RENTING from PRIVATE LANDLORDS:

You should look in the local papers for houses to rent, and register with letting/estate agencies. Some district councils may give you lists of agencies that rent houses. Unfurnished homes will be cheaper, but need to be furnished! Always check that the rent you agree to is fair for the area, the facilities and the condition of the property. Not all private landlords are fair!

Some houses are rented on short tenancies, which may mean that they are 'holiday cottages' in the summer and the owner rents them for 6 months over the winter when the tourist season is quieter. You may also be able to rent a caravan or chalet on a holiday park. These are often seasonal, and you may need to leave when the tourists arrive in summer. Some holiday parks close for a month or two in winter.

RENTING from LETTING AGENCIES:

If you use an agency you may remove the risk of dealing with an unfair landlord. But an agency will charge fees to arrange the rental and usually their ongoing fees will make the rental more expensive. You may also have to pay a bigger deposit and go through more checks. You will have to consider the advantages and disadvantages of this.

RENTING from LOCAL COUNCILS and HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS:

Local councils and housing associations have accommodation but usually there is a long waiting list! They also usually insist that you have been resident and working in the area for several months. They also operate a 'points' system. Usually you will be given priority if you, or somebody you have to care for, is vulnerable (at risk). Ask your council about this if it interests you.

PAYING RENT:

If you are employed you will have to pay all your rent directly to your landlord or the agent. If you are claiming benefits, then, depending on your income, you may have to pay some money towards your rent and the council's housing benefit office may pay the rest.

PROBLEMS with LANDLORDS:

You have rights that protect you from being treated badly by your landlord. These are the same for everybody who is entitled to live in the UK. If you think you are being unfairly treated, or your accommodation is overcrowded, or if you are in dispute with your landlord go to your local Citizen's Advice Bureau or ask the council for help.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR:

Take care not to could upset or annoy your neighbours. Anti-social behaviour is a legal reason for eviction, whatever kind of tenancy you have. It can include having the stereo or TV on too loudly, not keeping pets under control, allowing your children to be a nuisance, leaving rubbish piled up, making a lot of noise outside your home or when you come in, and using the house for illegal activities such as drug-dealing or consumption.

You should also not behave in an anti-social way towards your landlord. You are responsible for the behaviour of everyone in your household and of anyone staying with or visiting you.

ENDING YOUR RENTAL:

You must end your tenancy properly. So you must give proper notice to your landlord or agent. It is possible to end your tenancy immediately with the landlord's agreement (get this in writing). But you normally have to give notice of up to one month. And you will have to pay whatever you owe.

Landlords have to follow procedures to evict (throw out) a tenant. They usually have to explain why they want to evict a tenant, but this is not always the case. This depends on the type of tenancy you hold.

A tenant cannot be evicted without an order from the courts. The landlord has to apply for that. Otherwise the landlord must ask permission to come into your home.

If you need further advice or assistance please contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau.