

Private rented accommodation



Basingstoke
and Deane

Private rented accommodation is the most viable housing option available as demand on social housing means that you are unlikely to quickly bid successfully via the housing register (Homebid).



How to find private rented accommodation

When approaching agencies or landlords you should always present yourself in a positive light. Pre-organised references from employers and previous landlords can help, as well as having details of someone willing to act as a guarantor.

You may not be successful with every enquiry you make, however if you remain proactive in your search for private rented accommodation you have every chance of being successful.

Internet and letting agents

Many local papers and letting agencies advertise on the internet. Letting agencies charge for some services. They cannot charge a fee unless you accept accommodation from them. They cannot charge just for taking your details. There are specialist websites that advertise properties to rent, for example:

- www.gumtree.com
- www.zoopla.co.uk
- www.findaproperty.co.uk
- www.rightmove.co.uk
- www.openrent.co.uk
- www.easy-apartments-to-rent.com
- www.spareroom.co.uk
- www.dssmove.co.uk
- www.basingstokegazette.co.uk

Personal contacts

You can put an advert online, on Facebook, Twitter or other social media sites, in a local newspaper or a shop window, stating the type and size of accommodation you require. In some areas, private rented properties are let the same day they are advertised. You should always view the property before paying any fees.

- Ask your friends, family or work colleagues.
- Shop windows or noticeboards.
- Try noticeboards in community centres, libraries and newsagents.

Newspapers

Local newspapers have a section advertising rented accommodation and flat-shares. Copies may be available in libraries and can sometimes be read online.

Funding private rented accommodation

Once you have sourced private rented accommodation you will usually be required to pay the landlord the first month's rent upfront and a deposit.

Deposit

If you have an assured shorthold tenancy (and most private tenants will have) the landlord must, within 30 days of receiving your deposit, protect it with one of the three government-approved tenancy deposit schemes and provide you with the information about the scheme and confirmation your deposit has been protected.

Rent in advance

Landlords will vary on how much rent in advance (if any) they will ask for. Don't hand over any money (cash or cheque) to the landlord or a letting agent without getting a receipt for it. The receipt should be dated and say what the money is for, detail the address of the property, the name or signature of the landlord (or agent) and the exact amount of money you have handed over. Please ensure you keep this as a record. If you are renting through a letting agency, you may also need to pay an agency fee.

Rent

If you have a private landlord, even if you get full housing benefit/housing element of universal credit, it may not cover all of your rent and you will have to make up the difference. The housing element of universal credit/housing benefit does not cover all charges, for example water, heating, hot water or meals, even if these are included in your rent. You apply to the Department of Work and Pensions for the housing element of universal credit, unless you are a pensioner, you live in certain kinds of supported housing, or you are in temporary accommodation.

How is the housing element of universal credit calculated?

If you have a private landlord, the housing element of universal credit/housing benefit will usually be calculated using the local housing allowance (LHA) rate. There is a LHA rate for different-sized homes. The LHA rate that applies to you will depend on who is part of your household and where you live. You will be assessed as needing a bedroom for each of the following that you have in your household:

- Every adult couple.
- Any other person aged 16 or over.
- Any two children of the same sex up to the age of 16.

- Any two children regardless of sex under age 10.
- Any other child.
- A room for an overnight carer required by the claimant or partner (in some circumstances).
- A severely disabled child who cannot share a room with another child.
- A room will be allowed for a foster child or children living with an approved foster carer.
- Parents of armed forces personnel who are away from home on operations will continue to be included when applying the size criteria.

Most single people under 35 who do not have dependants, are only entitled to a standard rate for a bedroom in shared accommodation, even if you have self-contained accommodation.

Different LHA rates apply in different regions. This can mean that in parts of the country, such as Basingstoke, it is difficult to find somewhere to live where the housing element of universal credit/housing benefit will pay all your rent. You can find out what the standard LHA is for your size of property, or for the size of property you are looking for, by visiting the LHA Direct page at <https://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/search.aspx>

Universal Credit

You will be in receipt of universal credit unless you are exempt. Please refer to the following website for further information at www.gov.uk/universal-credit

Benefit cap

The benefit cap is a limit on the total amount of benefit that most unemployed people aged 16 to 64 can receive. The amount your household receives from some benefits might go down to make sure you do not get more than the cap limit. There are a number of benefits that are affected by the benefit cap. If you are affected by the benefit cap you may not necessarily receive the full housing element of universal credit or the full rate of housing benefit. Please visit www.gov.uk/benefit-cap for more information.

Discretionary Housing Payment

If you are in receipt of the housing element of universal credit or housing benefit, you can apply to your local council for a discretionary housing payment (DHP) to pay towards any shortfall between the rent and your housing element of universal credit/housing benefit. DHP is a short-term measure to allow you time to make changes to your income and expenditure, or look for alternative, cheaper accommodation. Payments are made from a cash-limited fund given to local authorities each year and are only awarded in cases of financial hardship. You can request either a short-term regular payment or a lump sum payment. Please visit www.basingstoke.gov.uk/benefitadvice for more information.

Before moving in

Before you move into a new home you should check:

- How much the rent and any service charges will be.
- When and how you need to pay the rent.
- How the bills and council tax are paid.
- When or if the rent can be increased.

When looking around a property always take a friend along with you, or tell someone where you are going. You may have to provide the landlord (or letting agent) with references from a previous landlord, your employer or your bank. You may be asked to provide a guarantor who will agree to pay your rent if you are unable to.

Before you move into the property the landlord must provide you with:

- a gas safety certificate (if there are gas appliances)
- the energy performance certificate
- a copy of the government's how to rent guide.

If your landlord does not provide you with these documents, the landlord may not be able to evict you. If you have been served with notice and you are unsure whether your notice is valid, you should seek advice from the council.

After you have moved in

Once you move into the property if you have paid a deposit, your landlord should protect your deposit in a government-approved scheme and provide you with confirmation of this within 30 days of receiving your deposit. Keep this information safe as you will need it when you claim for your deposit back after you move out. If you are a lodger with a resident landlord, your deposit will not need to be protected by the landlord.

Inventory

The landlord or letting agent should provide an inventory (a list of the furniture and other items provided and details of the condition of the property). Check this carefully to make sure it is accurate. Make a note or take a photograph of the state of decoration, anything that is damaged and note anything that is about to wear out. Agree any changes to the inventory with your landlord. You should both sign it and each keep a copy.

Tenancy agreements

Most landlords will give you a written tenancy agreement. Tenancy agreements normally contain information on the amount of rent you need to pay, when the rent can be increased, how long the tenancy lasts for, and the rights and obligations you and your landlord have. Check to see who has to do repairs, who is responsible for bills and what happens if you want to leave. However, the law can override what is in your agreement. For instance, your landlord is responsible for certain repairs regardless of what your tenancy agreement says. Ensure you read any agreement carefully before signing it.

Your rights

Tenants' rights vary, depending on the type of tenancy you have. Unless you have a resident landlord, private tenancies are usually assured shorthold tenancies. You will normally be given a fixed-term tenancy, for example for 6 or 12 months. After this period expires, your tenancy can be renewed. If it is not and you do not leave, your tenancy will automatically become statutory periodic and continue on the same basis as before. If you are a lodger with a resident landlord you will normally be given a licence. This may be statutory periodic or for a fixed term.

Bills

You will probably have to pay all of the bills for the supply of gas, electricity, telephone and water to your home. If you are renting a property check to see which, if any, bills are included in your rent. You cannot claim housing benefit to pay for your bills, even if they are included in the rent. If you have a TV, you will have to get a television licence. You can pay many bills by direct debit to spread the costs and you can ask each supplier about different methods of paying your bills.

Council tax

Your council tax bill is based on the value of your home and the rate the council sets. Each home is given a valuation band, ranging from A (the lowest) to H (the highest). If a disabled person lives in the property, the council can place it in a lower band. If you live on your own you will get a 25 per cent reduction and possibly more if you claim benefits.

If you have a low income or are on benefits, you can claim council tax support from the council and you may be eligible for up to 100 per cent of the cost. In certain cases (including a room in a shared house), it is the landlord who has to pay the council tax, not the tenant.

Rent arrears

If you are having problems paying your rent, you should get advice immediately from the council, a Shelter advice service or Citizens Advice. It may be possible to sort things out, even if the bailiffs are on the way. You may be able to get financial or legal help, but you need to act quickly.

Useful organisations

Citizens Advice Basingstoke	01256 329984 To find details of your local bureau go to www.citizensadvice.org.uk
Community Legal Advice	To get free initial advice, call the helpline on 0345 345 4345
Department for Work and Pensions	www.dwp.gov.uk
Directgov	www.gov.uk
The Community Furniture Project	01256 320700
Jobcentre Plus	0800 055 6688 www.direct.gov.uk/en/
National Debtline	0808 800 4000 www.nationaldebtline.co.uk
National Domestic Violence Helpline	0808 2000 247 www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk
Shelter	0808 800 4444 www.shelter.org.uk/advice
Stepchange debt charity	0800 138 1111 www.stepchange.org
St Michael's Hospice Furniture Store	01256 471191
The Money Advice Service	0800 138 7777 www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk
Domestic abuse support	0330 016 5112

Contact details

www.basingstoke.gov.uk

Please contact Housing Services by calling 01256 844844 or emailing **housing@basingstoke.gov.uk**

www.basingstoke.gov.uk | 01256 844844

customer.service@basingstoke.gov.uk

  @BasingstokeGov

For general enquiries contact Housing Services by calling 01256 844844.



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www.basingstoke.gov.uk/signup

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