



TENANT INFORMATION PACK

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Before Moving In

Deposits

If you pay a deposit, your landlord or agent must protect it using a government authorised tenancy deposit scheme. Make sure you ask your prospective landlord or agent about which scheme they use.

All schemes should make sure your tenancy deposit is protected so that:

- You get all or part of your deposit back, when you are entitled to it
- Any disputes between you and your landlord or agent will be easier to resolve

At the beginning of a new tenancy agreement, pay your deposit to your landlord or agent as usual. Within 14 days, the landlord or agent is required to give you details about how your deposit is protected including:

- The contact details of the tenancy deposit scheme
- The contact details of the landlord or agent
- How to apply for the release of the deposit
- Information explaining the purpose of the deposit
- What to do if there is a dispute about the deposit

If you don't get this information, ask your landlord or agent the simple question – 'how is my deposit protected?' If this information is not provided within 14 days you may be able to claim compensation. More information is available from Shelter and Citizens Advice Bureau.

Inventory

Before you move into any property an inventory should be carried out. The inventory should accurately record the condition of any surfaces e.g. walls, fittings e.g. carpets and furniture including fitted appliances e.g. cookers. A joint visit should be undertaken with your landlord/agent to compare the property against the inventory. If there is any damage to any of the surfaces, fittings and fixtures ensure these are recorded on the inventory and you should only sign when you are happy everything has been properly recorded. If you discover any problems after moving in you must inform the Landlord as soon as so that they can be put right and you are not blamed for any existing damage. You should keep a copy of the Inventory so that it can be checked against the condition of the property when you move out. You will need this if your Landlord wants to makes any deductions for damages you want to dispute.

Energy Performance Certificates

All landlords and letting agents have to provide an energy performance certificate (EPC) before they rent out a home to a new tenant. An EPC will provide you with information on the energy efficiency of the property i.e. how much it will cost to heat and provide hot water and allow you to compare different properties. The EPC will also provide details on measures that can be carried out to the property to improve its energy efficiency. You can ask if these measures are going to be carried out as they will reduce your energy bills once you move into the property.

Moving In

Gas and electricity supplies

As soon as possible after you move in phone the numbers given below to find out who supplies the **gas and electric**. Make a note of the company name and telephone number on the front page of this booklet in the space supplied. Make a note of the meter reading(s), if it is not noted on your Inventory, on the front page, for easy reference. This will ensure your bill is correct for the date you moved into the property.

If you have **pre-payment meter** you will need to top up the existing key/ card as soon as possible and order new ones in your own name. Make a note of any existing debt on the key/card and inform the utility company as soon as possible so that you are not inheriting the previous tenant's debt. The utility company will need to call round to re-set the meter for you.

Water

The **water and sewerage companies** are most likely to be Veolia and Thames Water, if not they should be able to tell you who is. If there is a water meter, the reading should also be included on the inventory, but the water company should take a reading before sending you the first bill.

Once you receive confirmation of your accounts make a note of the account numbers on the front page of this booklet.

You will need to read the meters again periodically in order to receive accurate accounts and at the end of your tenancy before you move out. Make sure you inform the utility companies of your moving out date and new address so the **final account** can be sent to you for settlement and will not include for any gas and electric used after you move out.

- GAS – National Meter Helpline 0870 608 1524
- ELECTRICITY - MPAS 0870 601 5467
- VEOLIA WATER CENTRAL – 01707 268111
- THAMES WATER – 0845 9200888

Paying Your Rent

You must contact your Landlord to make arrangements to pay your rent as soon as possible, preferably before you move into the property. The easiest and most convenient way to pay your rent is by direct debit or standing order but your Landlord may wish to call round personally to collect the rent or any top ups. Any standing order or direct debit should be set up so that the rent reaches the landlord's account by the rent due date. Your bank or building society should help you set up the payment so that it is paid on the correct date.

If you need to make a claim for **housing benefit**, it is your responsibility to register your claim as soon as possible. If you have been assessed as vulnerable in any way there may be help with this.

If you have not been offered this service but feel that you are unable to cope with paying the rent and wish for the payment to be made direct to the Landlord, you must complete a **safeguard form**. You will need to give details of why you are unable to deal with this yourself and provide evidence of such things as; previous history of rent arrears or debt problems, drink, drug or gambling addiction, mental health or physical problems that prohibit you from dealing with your own finances. This form will be assessed and the Benefits Department may make payment direct to the Landlord for a short period in order for you to settle into the new accommodation or for longer if needed.

If your Housing Benefit does not cover the whole of the rent you will need to make arrangements with the Landlord to collect the **top up**. Do not wait until your claim is assessed before paying your first top up, pay at least the amount your housing officer indicated would be payable. If your Housing Benefit award is more or less than originally expected the top up can be adjusted. If you are awarded less than expected and you feel unable to pay the top up you must immediately contact your Landlord to discuss the situation.

If the rent is to be paid directly to you, it is sensible to open a separate bank account to pay the rent from, especially if the benefit is likely to be swallowed up by your overdraft before the rent is paid. Most people will be able to open a basic bank account. Housing benefit will be paid four weekly in arrears usually directly into your account. If you are paid by cheque you can sign the back and pay it directly to your Landlord, you do not need to wait for it to clear.

It is your responsibility to make sure that the rent is paid in full and on time. If the housing benefit is paid directly to you and you do not pay the rent to your Landlord, they can ask for it to be paid directly to them once you are six weeks in arrears. If there is a genuine reason why you are unable to pay the rent you must contact your Landlord as soon as possible, to find out if there is help available.

Your Landlord may evict you if you do not pay the rent. If you are evicted for not paying the rent, the Council may find you intentionally homeless. If this happens the Council will only have a duty to offer advice and assistance.

If you have difficulty paying the rent you should get advice quickly. Useful numbers are provided on the back page.

Living at the Property

It is your responsibility to keep the property clean and tidy and pay all the bills on time. If you do not look after the property well your Landlord may use this as a reason to evict you. Here are some tips on looking after your property: -

- You should keep all carpets and floor coverings, vacuumed, swept or washed regularly.
- You should keep the windows, glass and frames clean.
- Make sure the toilet is cleaned regularly with a lime scale and bleach product.
- Any white goods, such as cookers and fridges, must be kept clean inside and out with a purpose made cleaner.
- You may need to obtain permission from your Landlord to decorate. Your tenancy agreement should state if the landlord's permission is required. Your Landlord may apply to retain some of your deposit if you have redecorated without permission or it is not of an adequate standard.
- If you put up shelves or pictures any damage to the walls should be made good upon leaving the property.
- Do not make holes in double glazed window frames.
- When washing machines are plumbed in, the pipe work must be capped off at the end of the tenancy.
- Care should be taken when installing electrical appliances so as not to tear the floor covering. A competent person should carry out any electrical connections to existing electrical points. If new electrical wiring is required consult with your landlord
- Replace batteries in smoke detectors as required.
- Only a qualified electrician or gas engineer should install your cooker or light fittings etc. You can obtain a list of contractors from Hertfordshire Trading Standards <http://www.hertsdirect.org/business/tradingstandards/tmhome/> and also from the Gas Safe Register <http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/> or at the NICEIC website <http://niceic.com/>
- You must make sure that the garden is kept tidy; cut the grass and clear any rubbish regularly.
- You must put your rubbish out for collection on a weekly basis. Keep it in a dustbin until collection. Your Landlord may apply to retain some of your deposit for clearing rubbish or cleaning the property at the end of the tenancy.

Your Landlord should be allowed access at reasonable intervals for the purpose of carrying out a property inspection or to carry out repairs. He should give you at least 24 hours notice unless it is an emergency. You should not withhold your permission without a good reason.

Common Repair Issues

Minor repairs such as changing light bulbs and fuses are your responsibility. Any other disrepair or problems should be reported to your landlord as soon as possible. Do this either by a letter or email and keep a copy.

Condensation

Every home gets condensation at some time, there is always some moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. If the air gets colder, it cannot hold all the moisture and tiny drops of water appear. This is condensation. It occurs mainly during cold weather and is more likely near windows, in corners, in or behind wardrobes and cupboards.

These steps will help you reduce the condensation in your home: -

- Produce less moisture – dry washing outdoors or in the bathroom with the door closed and the windows open - Tumble dryers must be vented to outside - Cover pans and do not leave a kettle boiling.
- Ventilate to remove moisture – keep a small window ajar when at home – ventilate on opposite sides of the dwelling - ventilate kitchens and bathrooms when cooking and bathing – close the kitchen and bathroom doors when in use this prevents moisture reaching other rooms – use any mechanical extract fans installed in bathrooms and kitchens. Where possible place furniture against internal walls.
- Insulate, draught proof and heat your home – you can get help with the cost of insulation and new heating if you are on certain benefits – your loft should contain a minimum depth of insulation – insulation and draught proofing will keep your home warmer and cut fuel bills.
- Do not block permanent ventilators or chimneys – do not draft proof windows in the kitchen or bathroom – do not draught proof windows where there is condensation

Damp and Mould

Damp and mould has a number of causes.

- It may be caused by water penetrating through the roof where a tile is missing, spilling from a blocked gutter, around window frames or from a cracked or leaking pipe.
- Rising damp may be due to a defective damp-course or because there is no damp course. Rising damp only appears on ground floor rooms, and only up to a maximum of 1m up the wall. These causes of damp often leave a tidemark.
- If you have any problems with damp report them to your landlord straight away. Try to do this by either a letter or email and keep a copy. If your landlord does not respond contact the Private Sector Housing Team (their contact details are on the last page of this booklet) who will liaise with your landlord to get any repairs carried out.

Boilers

Your landlord must give you a copy of the Landlords Gas Safety Record when you move into the property.

Always make sure you have a gas supply before calling your Landlord if your boiler appears not to be working. Do not run out of gas if you have a prepayment meter as the boiler may need re-lighting and the Landlord could charge you for this. You must inform your Landlord as soon as possible if your boiler breaks down. Do not leave the call until late afternoon expecting a heating engineer to attend the breakdown the same day. Heating engineers are in high demand, especially in the winter and you may be required to wait indoors for some time before they can attend to the problem.

Your Landlord may give you the telephone number of their preferred engineer or make arrangements for you. Some Landlords take out an insurance scheme with the utility company and give you details to call for any problems. If possible ask your Landlord as soon as possible for the arrangements made for boilers problems.

Fences

If your fence gets broken or blows down during windy weather, you should inform your Landlord as soon as possible. They should be able to tell you which side fences belongs to your property. If the fence belongs to a neighbour and needs attention you should talk to the occupants and try to find out who's responsibility the fence is so that it can be mended.

Electrical problems

Any electrical problems must be reported to your Landlord as soon as possible. Do not attempt to repair electrical faults yourself, as they need to be dealt with by a qualified electrician. Your Landlord will organise this for you. Electricians are often in high demand and you may be required to wait indoors for some time before they can attend to the problem.

Water leaks and Blocked toilets

When you move into the property you should ask your landlord where the stopcock is.

- If a pipe is leaking near an electrical fitting, turn off the electricity at the mains or unplug the affected item.
- If the toilet gets blocked by being mistreated (putting items down the pan which should not go there) or cracked due to you dropping something down it; your landlord may charge you for the repair. However, your Landlord should treat such a problem as urgent so as to avoid any further damage to the property and for health and sanitation reasons. You must report this to your Landlord as soon as possible.

General Repairs

If you have a repair issue, you must bring it to your Landlord's attention as soon as possible and give them time to carry out repairs. You should continue to pay your rent whilst waiting for the repairs to be completed. If the repairs take longer than is acceptable you should contact the Private Sector Housing Team on 01727 819447 or 07787 285370. You must report the problem to your Landlord before calling the team and give your Landlord a chance to complete the repairs.

Ending the Tenancy

When you can leave the property depends on whether you have a fixed term or periodic tenancy. If you do not sign a new tenancy at the end of the original fixed term, your tenancy automatically becomes periodic. This means that everything stays the same except you are not tied in for a specific period.

If your Landlord wants you to leave the property for a reason other than rent arrears or the way you have conducted the tenancy, the Council may be able to assist you with finding alternative accommodation. However, if you are being evicted for some reason to do with the way you have conducted the tenancy, you may be found intentionally homeless and be offered only advice and assistance.

Your Landlord will need to serve you with the correct Notice which you should bring down to the Council offices as soon as possible and discuss what your options are. The Notice must be in writing and give you at least two months notice to vacate the property. If you do not have anywhere to go your Landlord cannot make you leave the property without a court order giving them possession of the property.

Your Landlord may give you notice to end the tenancy before the end of the contract if you fail to pay the rent, damage the property or behave in an antisocial way. If you receive a Section 8 Notice informing you that the Landlord intends to take you to court for possession, you should seek legal advice as soon as possible. You may be able to negotiate with the Landlord to save the tenancy. Do not ignore this notice as you may lose your home and the Council may find you intentionally homeless.

If you are in a **Fixed Term Contract** and wish to give notice to your Landlord you should give at least one month's written notice, to end the tenancy at the end of the fixed term. If you have a **Periodic Tenancy** you must give the notice on a day when the rent is due. If you do not end your tenancy properly you may still have to pay the rent. If you need to leave the property prior to the end of the tenancy, your Landlord may allow you to go provided there is a tenant who can take over the property, if not you may be liable for the rent until someone can do so.

Useful contact numbers

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING AT ST ALBANS CITY AND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Email : privatesectorhousing@stalbans.gov.uk

Telephone: 01727 819447 or 07787 285370

Write to:

Private Sector Housing
St Albans City and District Council
St Peters Street
St Albans
Herts
AL1 3JE

ST ALBANS CITY AND DISTRICT COUNCIL – HOUSING OPTIONS

01727 819413, 819449, 819410 or 819271

ENERGY SAVINGS ADVICE CENTRE

For practical advice on how to save energy and grants available for heating and insulation

0800 512 012

HERTFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

<http://www.hertsdirect.org/services/commsafe/commprotect/fire/fireandrescuework/>

COMMUNITY LEGAL ADVICE

0845 345 4345 - www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk

SHELTER

Shelter Hertfordshire, Queensway House, Queensway, Hatfield, AL10 0LS

Tel: 0844 5151944 or 0808 8004444

Fax: 01707 263 255

Email: hertfordshire@shelter.org.uk

www.shelter.org.uk

NATIONAL DEBT LINE

0808 808 4000 – www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

64 London Road, St Albans, AL1 1NG for debt and housing advice

or 0844 411 1444 - www.citizensadvice.org.uk