



How to: Rentstart

Search for a property in the Private Rented Sector (PRS)

- Affordability and Budgeting
- How to Search for a Property
- Viewing possible properties
- Who is responsible for what in the property?
- Deposits and the Deposit Guarantee Scheme





Affordability and Budgeting

How much rent can you afford? How to balance Universal Credit allowances or your finances through employment.



Benefits and Entitlements:



- If you are not working, then you may be entitled to the full amount of rent via Universal Credit. This will be explained on the next page.
- Other Legacy benefits (previous benefits now incorporated into Universal Credit) ie Housing Benefit and ESA, etc, are still available to those already on them.
- All new claims go via the benefits system including, but not limited to, Universal Credit.
- Those under 35 are entitled to the shared Accommodation Rate under universal credit, unless on additional benefits such as PIP.
- Single, childless individuals over 35 are entitled to the 1-bedroom rate of universal credit.



Benefits and Entitlements: Continued

- Universal Credit: You will get a personal allowance AND a housing element when you find accommodation.
- Typically, each single, childless person can claim their personal UC allowance of up to either £334.91 or £265.31 (per month) depending on age (25 years old-under or over) and hours worked in paid employment.
- In addition, you will get a housing element which is depending on your local housing allowance and age/situation.
- If you are over **35 years old** you will be entitled to the 1 bedroom rate of £850.02 per month in Elmbridge (or the rental amount if it is lower than £850.02 per month) regardless of whether you rent a room in shared accommodation or a 1 bedroom property.

Local Housing Allowance:

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) use Local Housing Allowances (LHA) rates to calculate the UC Housing Element for tenants renting from private landlords. LHA rates relate to the area in which a claim is made- these areas are called Broad Rental Market Areas.

Walton/ Elmbridge LHA rate: as of April 2022

- Shared accommodation rate: for those under 35 years old: £476.72 per month
- One Bedroom rate: for those over 35 years of age £850.02 per month
- Two Bedrooms rate: £1100.00 per month
- Three Bedrooms rate: £1349.98 per month
- Four Bedrooms rate: £1769.99 per month



Discretionary Housing Payment

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) can provide support if your council decides that you need extra help to meet your housing costs. **Please be aware this is a discretionary payment depending on your circumstances.**

- On occasion you may have a shortfall in your rent. This means there is a gap between the amount you receive in the housing element of your benefit and the amount of your rent. This is where DHP comes in.
- Who can apply? – Anyone who needs more help with housing costs and is currently claiming Housing Benefit or Universal Credit with housing costs towards rental liability. You must have lived in the borough for at least **6 months prior to application.**
- Your council will look at your circumstances to see whether you are eligible for DHP. They will decide whether you are entitled to a DHP, how much you will be paid and for how long you will receive the payment. This will be awarded for an initial period of 6 months and then reviewed.
- You can apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment online.





If you are working

- Think about how much rent you can afford to pay.
- 35% of your take-home pay is the most that many people can afford, but this depends on what your other outgoings are (e.g maintenance ayment or debts).
- You can still apply for the Universal Credit housing element if you are on a low income and may be awarded a contribution towards your rent.





Budgeting

- If you are working you will need to budget and work out how much rent you can afford before completing the property searches. Complete a budgeting sheet to help you with this. If you copy and paste the link under it can help you determine your budget.
- <https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/everyday-money/budgeting/budget-planner>



How to Search For a Property



- **Try to avoid estate agents/letting agents.** They will often need credit checks, guarentors and references. The websites listed on this page may not require these and you are likely to be dealing with the landlords directly.
- **Remember your budget.** Benefits towards your housing costs only pay for the rent. You will need to pay for your bills, especially utilities- council tax, water rates, gas, electricity, broadband.
- **Options:** your options for searching will depend on your age, your income, local housing allowances, whether you are single or living with a partner, your support needs and whether you have a non dependant person in the household.
- Most single people will need to look for a room in a shared house. For those over 35 or those who are earning, a 1 bed property may be affordable.
- If you are working, budget and look at affordability.
- If you are unemployed and living with a partner, look at a joint UC claim allowance instead
- **Do not pay to register with anyone offering to help you find a property-** by law landlords and agents are not allowed to charge people to register with them when searching for a property.

- Now you know your budget, you need to search for a property.

Searching Tips:

- Suggested websites to begin looking at are:

- 1 Gumtree
- 2 Spareroom
- 3 Openrent
- 4 Dssmove.co.uk
- 5 Dssaccepted.co.uk



How to conduct house viewings

- Appearance is everything. First impressions count for a lot. *Dress to impress. Treat a viewing like an interview so dress like you are heading to an interview.*
- Be Friendly. *Building a rapport with a landlord will make you more memorable, which is always helpful when you want to be considered for the property. You do not need to mention benefits until you meet the landlord where you can disclose the details you wish to share.*
- Be Prepared. *Make a list of all the things that are important to you and any questions you want to ask before the viewing. Once you're in the property it's easy for things to slip your mind.*
- Take a Friend. *Never go into a viewing alone. You do not know who you are going to meet or the place you are going to. Either take a partner or a friend.*
- Check the Details. *Check outside of the property. Do you have a car? Is there parking?.*
- Check the bills. *Ask about utility and council tax bills so you know what to expect.*
- Check who the owner is actually- *do they live locally? Who will be responsible for the repairs?*
- What's included. *Ask what fixtures and fittings are included. i.e Carpets? Oven? Fridge? Curtain poles?*
- Look out for damp or obvious signs of disrepair both inside and outside.

Be Cautious

- Don't part with any money- at this initial stage.
- Sometimes people ask for 'reservation deposits.'
- Sometimes people ask for money up front in cash or by bank transfer
- Sometimes people say you can take the property NOW if you pay NOW.
- The problem is that 'sometimes' the person you meet has not got the right to rent the property to you and might 'scam' you into paying to ensure you get it. Don't be fooled!
- Renting is a legal commitment- You should have a proper contract to show what you must pay, how often and what it covers.
- Don't pay anyone any money without formal paperwork relating to the property – and a simple scribbled 'receipt' is NOT enough.



Landlord responsibilities

- **Complete safety checks and maintenance.-** These will include gas safety, electrical, fire and carbon monoxide alarm tests and maintenance.
- **Carry out most repairs including dealing with smoke alarms, water gas and electric supply and ensure the property is free from serious hazard.**
- **Deposit paperwork** - If you have provided a deposit, the landlord must protect it in a government approved scheme
- **Maintain the structure** and exterior of the property and maintain any appliance and furniture they have supplied.
- **Seek your permission to access your home and give at least 24 hours' notice of proposed visits** for things like repairs and those visits should take place at reasonable times.

Tenant responsibilities

- Make sure you know how to operate the boiler and other appliances.
- Regularly test your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors – at least once a month.
- Report any need for repairs to your landlord.
- You are responsible for not just your own room but also the communal areas.
- You are also responsible for your visitors and their behaviours.
- **Pay the rent on time.**
- **Pay any other bills** that you are responsible for on time, such as council tax, gas, electricity and water bills.
- **Look after the property.** Get your landlord's permission before attempting repairs or decorating.
- **Not take in a lodger** or sub-let without checking whether you need permission from your landlord.





Deposits and the Deposit Guarantee Scheme

- Renting from an independent landlord:
- How much is the deposit?
 - The maximum deposit is up to 5 weeks' rent unless the rent exceeds £50,000 per year. When you are entering an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) by law our landlord must protect your deposit in one of the Governments recognised Deposit Protection Schemes. Once they have received the money and it is protected you should receive a certificate and details of the protection from your landlord. When your tenancy ends and if you have left the property in a good condition, you should get your deposit back in full.

Keeping this in mind.....

- The Rentstart Deposit Guarantee Scheme works as an agreement between the tenant, landlord and Rentstart to guarantee to pay the deposit should the Landlord need to make a claim, when you leave, there is damage to the property.
- Rentstart do NOT give cash deposits to landlords.
- The maximum amount of deposit guarantee Rentstart will offer is currently £750 for a 1 bed and £550 for shared accommodation.
- If your deposit comes to more than this amount, you will need to top this up yourself.
- The landlord needs to understand the Rentstart Deposit Guarantee Scheme before agreeing to rent to you and must sign an agreement before the tenancy start date. We will explain our scheme to the landlord where possible.
- If you find a landlord willing to accept Rentstarts' Deposit Guarantee Scheme, then you must contact Rentstart with the landlord and property details.



• UC - Universal Credit- is a payment to help with your living costs. It's paid monthly. You may be able to get it if you're on a low income, out of work or you cannot work. Universal Credit has replaced the following benefits for most people:

- Housing Benefit
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance

• Legacy Benefits A legacy benefit is a benefit which is being or has been replaced by Universal Credit . Some will still be on these legacy benefits but will be expected to gradually move over to Universal Credit. There are six legacy benefits: Income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit.

• ESA If you are ill or have a health condition or disability that limits your ability to work, you may be able to get New Style Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). New Style ESA is a fortnightly payment that can be claimed on its own or at the same time as Universal Credit (UC).

• LHA Local Housing Allowance: LHA is a flat-rate rent allowance determined by the Valuation Office Agency Rent Officers. The rates are based primarily on the location and the number of people living in the property. This means that the LHA for one area will be different to another area.

• DHP: Discretionary Housing Payment: A discretionary housing payment (DHP) is an extra payment that you can apply for from your local council if you're struggling to pay rent. You don't need to repay a DHP. You need to be receiving housing benefit or the universal credit housing element to get a DHP which is awarded at the discretion of the council.

• AST: Assured Shorthold Tenancy An Assured Shorthold Tenancy is the most usual type of tenancy agreement used. ASTs can only be used by private landlords and housing associations. They can only be used when the landlord doesn't live in the property and when it is the tenant's main home.

• Shared accommodation Shared accommodation is when you have your own bedroom but share other rooms in a house such as kitchen and bathroom.

• 1 Bed Accommodation. 1 bed accommodation is self-contained where you have your own bathroom and kitchen facilities. This includes studio accommodation which is a single room with all facilities.

