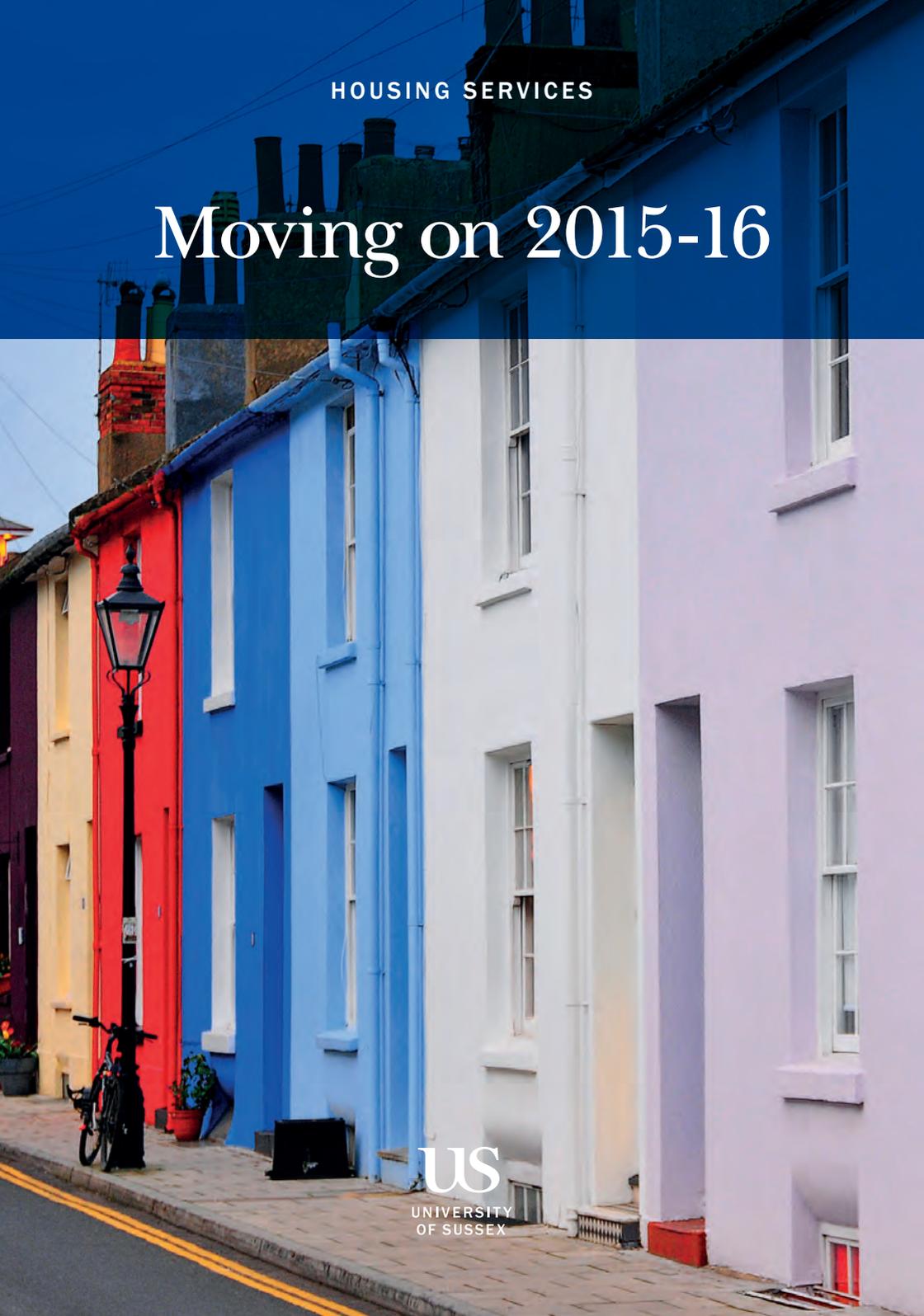


HOUSING SERVICES

# Moving on 2015-16



US  
UNIVERSITY  
OF SUSSEX

# Introduction

Welcome to this brief guide on what to do when moving into the private rented sector.



## WELCOME

Welcome to our advice booklet aimed at helping you with your private sector housing search. We know that our students enjoy being part of the communities in which they reside, and we hope that our tips help you do the same. This booklet provides advice about:

- what to look out for when viewing properties;
- how to avoid problems;
- advice about living well in the community;
- what to do if you experience any problems and how we and others can help you.

Our booklet sets the scene. More information is provided on our website, including our database of properties that conform to our Code of Standards, Sussex Student Pad: [www.sussex.ac.uk/accommodation/privatesector](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/accommodation/privatesector)

You are very welcome to pop in and chat with the team, either in our on-campus base in Bramber House, or as part of the University's Information Base, 91 Lewes Road. Both open Monday-Friday, 10am-4pm. Our other contact details are provided on the back of this booklet.

We look forward to helping you.

**Dean Spears, Head of Housing**

## WHAT ARE YOUR OPTIONS?

- Stay in campus accommodation – this is unlikely unless you are eligible to apply for a family flat or have requested a reasonable adjustment via the Housing and Health process which has been accepted. Contact Student Support Services [www.sussex.ac.uk/studentssupport](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/studentssupport)
- Become a residential advisor – you get to stay on campus and have a reduced rent – see [www.sussex.ac.uk/accommodation/studentssupport](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/accommodation/studentssupport) for details of the job description, time required and responsibilities.
- Most students prefer to reside in a shared house or live with their landlord as a lodger.



## WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS?

HOUSING TYPE	PROS	CONS
<b>A shared house</b> This is likely to be known as an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST)	Secure – you can't be evicted without legal notice and a court order  Deposits have to be protected by a tenancy deposit scheme	Usually a joint tenancy – see section 3  Inflexible – usually have to sign up for a fixed period e.g. 6, 9 or 12 months  Can be difficult to end it early if your circumstances change
<b>Lodgings</b> Living with a landlord in their home	Flexible – usually either party can give notice and end the agreement easily  May require less deposit and less rent upfront  Can suit quieter students/postgraduates etc as not in big shared house	Less security – may have to leave at a week's or a month's notice  Less privacy – living with landlord  May be more house rules  No protection for deposits apart from through court action
<b>Large houses</b>	There's always someone to talk to!	More difficult to get agreement between large groups on communal issues such as bills and cleaning rotas

## SECTION 1 BEFORE LOOKING FOR A PLACE



### WHO DO YOU WANT TO LIVE WITH?

Problems between tenants in shared houses are one of the top reasons students come to us wanting to leave their house early. Living with people you no longer like, or with conflicting lifestyles, can be stressful, affecting your studies and your health.

#### Ask yourself a few questions:

- Do you like your own space? Would you prefer living on your own (more expensive), or as a lodger?
- Could you move in with your boyfriend/girlfriend? What if you broke up?
- Do you share similar lifestyles with your friends (such as study/going out etc)?

- Are your friends reliable/good with money?
- Is a large group (five or more) such a good idea? Why not split into smaller groups but try and live in the same area or street?

#### Council Tax

Remember most full time students are exempt from paying it but if you are planning to live with someone who is not a full-time student then seek advice. The local authority will need to see proof that you're a full-time student unless you live in University accommodation. For more information visit: [www.sussex.ac.uk/ssro/counciltax](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/ssro/counciltax)

#### Registration to vote

If you are a British citizen and wish to vote, you need to register individually via [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/council-and-democracy/voting-and-elections/register-vote](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/council-and-democracy/voting-and-elections/register-vote)

### TIP

Know exactly who you're living with, and think about extra costs e.g internet, gas, water, agency fees.

## SECTION 2 FINDING A PLACE

### SUSSEX STUDENTPAD

This is a free online database of local landlords directly advertising private houses or lodging rooms in their homes to Sussex Students, which means no agency fees for you. Sometimes they are flexible about contract length or guarantors. There are also Homestay landlords who offer half-board or full-board catering/washing options. As well as advertising available properties, it has a student messageboard if you need to find a housemate. Housing Services also have a Facebook page where you can hook up with other students who are househunting – Sussex University House Hunt.

[www.sussexstudentpad.co.uk/accommodation](http://www.sussexstudentpad.co.uk/accommodation)

#### Why use Sussex Studentpad?

To register with the University, landlords have to show that they have met certain legal obligations and signed up to our Code of Practice. You can complain to the University if you feel that your landlord is not conforming to our Code of Practice. For more details, visit:

[www.sussex.ac.uk/accommodation](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/accommodation)

### SUSSEX STUDENT LETTINGS

Renting a property (especially for the first time) can feel daunting, but the Students' Union's own agency, Sussex Student Lettings, can help make finding your new home as straightforward as possible. Unlike private sector lettings agents, Sussex Student Lettings don't charge any fees to students – not for any initial administration, sign-up or other associated fees! It offers housing advice to students in the private sector but can't help with contract reading. For free, expert contract reading, please visit Housing Services. Sussex Student Lettings is on the ground floor of Falmer House, where you can pop in to see what's available, call them on 01273 678787, or visit their website: [www.sussexstudentlettings.com](http://www.sussexstudentlettings.com)

#### OTHER LETTING AGENTS

Housing Services is not able to recommend agents but advises you to check online reviews and visit the SU Rate Your Landlord survey to see what

experiences students have had with a particular letting agent before signing up with them:

[www.sussexstudent.com/rateyourlandlord](http://www.sussexstudent.com/rateyourlandlord)

Don't set your heart on a property if you're not happy with the agent. There are other properties out there, so be prepared to walk away and look elsewhere until you have signed your tenancy agreement. There is no major regulation of letting agents so shop around and note:

- they can charge a fee for finding accommodation;
- it's illegal for them to charge a fee if they don't find you anything;
- they can charge for references (though if you have previously lived in Sussex uni accommodation you can request a free reference from us at [www.sussex.ac.uk/residentialservices/privatesector/referencerequest](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/residentialservices/privatesector/referencerequest))
- they often insist on UK guarantors, who usually also have to be homeowners; and
- they may ask for significant amounts of rent in advance if you can't provide a guarantor.

#### SOME USEFUL WEBSITES

[www.fish4lettings.co.uk](http://www.fish4lettings.co.uk)  
[www.findaproperty.com](http://www.findaproperty.com)  
[www.rightmove.co.uk](http://www.rightmove.co.uk)  
[www.theargus.co.uk](http://www.theargus.co.uk)  
[www.friday-ad.co.uk](http://www.friday-ad.co.uk)

You may pay no or lower fees by finding a house through private adverts but take care – they are usually not vetted. Use common sense and follow the site's guidance and safety tips. If you think an advert is suspect, you can report it to the site. Many students report bad experiences with private landlords found through popular sites such as Gumtree. This isn't the website's fault but remember that they don't check on prospective landlords/properties.

We do not recommend any websites or their external content, but provide the links here to help your independent research.

## SECTION 2 FINDING A PLACE

### HOW MUCH WILL ACCOMMODATION COST?

How much can you afford? Rents vary but average rent locally is approximately £90-£120 for a room in a shared house (bills exclusive). Agent fees vary so shop around for the best deal and negotiate! If a room seems overpriced, check Zoopla website for average rents in that street or area and use this information to negotiate with agent or landlord.

### Examples of Private Sector Fees (by law all agents should display or provide a list of their fees)

Agent's fee	£100-£220
Holding fee	usually a month's rent to secure the property (this may be held as part of the damage deposit if you take the property). It may also be non-refundable if you subsequently drop out, so check.
Rent	£440 a month (or £110 per week)
Deposit	(usually one month or six weeks in advance)
Total	£1250 or £660 (if holding fee is held as part of the damage deposit)

### DEPOSITS – GET PROTECTED!

There is no limit legally on the amount of deposit a landlord can request – it could be one month's rent, six week's rent or more. It covers the landlord if you don't pay your rent or damage the house.

#### TIP

Look at more than one house, even if it's just to be sure the first one is perfect!

However, if you are an assured shorthold tenant and you pay a deposit it MUST be registered with a national Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme within 30 days of you paying the deposit. There are three schemes and you must be notified of which one holds your deposit and certain prescribed information about your scheme.

For more information and contact details of the schemes see: [www.gov.uk/tenancy-deposit-protection/overview](http://www.gov.uk/tenancy-deposit-protection/overview)

### WHAT IF I DON'T GET THIS INFORMATION?

- Ask your landlord/letting agent to provide it.
- Check if any of the other tenants are a 'lead tenant' for the scheme and they've been given the information, but haven't told you.
- Use the Shelter online tenancy deposit checker to see if your deposit is protected: see [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)

### HOW WILL DEPOSIT PROTECTION HELP?

If there is a dispute about deductions from the deposit the scheme deals with the matter and makes an independent decision – it is not up to the landlord – and you should get your deposit back quicker at the end of the tenancy. If your landlord refuses to register your deposit – seek advice. You could take them to court and possibly be awarded up to three times the deposit as compensation.

### GUARANTORS

You may be asked to provide a guarantor – this usually needs to be a UK based homeowner, often your parents or a relative. They are signing to say they will pay the rent or cover the costs of any damage (over the deposit amount) if you don't pay. Make sure they are only signing to guarantee your personal rent liability (not the full property rent)! If you cannot provide one it is likely the landlord will ask for more rent in advance – possibly the full six or 12 months of the agreement's length. This is not illegal but the amount may be negotiable.

## SECTION 3 CHOOSING YOUR PROPERTY AND CHECKING YOUR CONTRACT



Once you have identified a potential property, you can save yourself a lot of hassle and worry if you take the time to properly consider a few key issues before you formally agree to the tenancy and move in.

### FIRST OF ALL, DON'T PANIC!

Students sometimes feel pressure to rush into taking a property as quickly as possible. The first place you see probably won't be the most suitable for you. It is much better to see several places (with your group if applicable) before making any firm or joint decisions.

The reality is that there is usually a steady stream of reasonable properties available through the spring and summer months. They don't all disappear in the first few weeks! So, don't panic but don't leave it until the last minute either.

### THINK ABOUT THE LOCATION OF THE PROPERTY

- How is it placed for local amenities and services such as shops, banks etc?
- How convenient are transport links to and from campus, and into the centre of town?
- Can you imagine yourself happily living in the neighbourhood for the length of your tenancy?

- Would you feel safe walking home at night?

### IF POSSIBLE, SPEAK TO THE CURRENT TENANTS

They are the people best placed to give you an honest opinion.

- Are there any 'hidden' defects or problems with the property or appliances?
- What are the neighbours like? Are they noisy, or alternatively are they likely to complain about your noise?
- What are the landlord/letting agents really like? How efficiently do they respond to queries, repair requests etc? Do they make unreasonable demands?

### TAKE TIME TO CHECK THE TENANCY AGREEMENT BEFORE YOU SIGN IT

You are welcome to contact University Housing Services to clarify your responsibilities and your landlord's responsibilities in your tenancy agreement. Many disputes between landlords and tenants are caused by misunderstandings about the various contractual obligations in the agreement. For instance:

- How much is the rent and when should it be paid?

## SECTION 3

### CHOOSING YOUR PROPERTY AND CHECKING YOUR CONTRACT

- Can you afford it? Can your housemates also afford it?
- Does the contract require a large deposit and initial rent to be paid in advance?

#### WHAT IS THE LENGTH OF ANY FIXED-TERM PERIOD IN THE CONTRACT?

Many tenancy contracts specify a minimum length of occupation, for example six months. If you sign such a contract and there is no early termination clause then you may find it difficult to obtain the landlord/agent's agreement if you subsequently wanted to move out early. Unless you can find a replacement tenant you may find that the landlord insists on holding you liable for ongoing rent for the whole of the remaining term. Most agents will also charge a fee to transfer contracts to a suitable replacement tenant.

You may like to ask the landlord/agent about how they would deal with such a scenario, but the moral of the story is don't enter into a fixed term contract if you have doubts that you will want to stay in the property for the whole of the relevant period!

#### ARE YOU BEING OFFERED A 'SOLE' OR 'JOINT' CONTACT?

If you sign a sole contact then you can't be held liable for your housemate's contractual obligations. However, if all of you sign one joint contract then you will all be 'jointly and severally' liable for all the tenants' obligations under the contract. For example, if one of you causes damage to the property then any of you could be billed for the cost of this; and if one of you were to move out before the end of a fixed-term period, the rest of you may be liable for a resulting shortfall in the rent unless a suitable replacement tenant has been found to (officially) take over the rest of the contract for the empty room.

**So if you are being asked to sign a joint contract you have an added reason to think carefully about your fellow housemates – do they understand the above, and are they**

**serious about wanting to stay for the length of any joint fixed-term?**

#### DOES THE CONTRACT SPECIFY TO WHAT EXTENT THE PROPERTY IS FURNISHED?

Clarify this; you don't want to suddenly discover that it is your responsibility to supply all your own furniture, and possibly a fridge or washing machine as well!

#### WHO IS RESPONSIBLE UNDER THE CONTRACT FOR PAYING UTILITY CHARGES?

Gas, electricity, water, wifi will usually be the tenants' responsibility. Also check if you are allowed to change supplier under the contract.

#### WHAT OTHER OBLIGATIONS WILL YOU HAVE UNDER THE CONTRACT?

For instance, are the tenants responsible for the upkeep of any garden? Are you forbidden to smoke in the property? Does the contract require you to obtain permission from the landlord/agent before redecorating or fixing things to the walls?

#### THINK ABOUT THE CONDITION OF THE PROPERTY WHEN YOU VISIT

You should always visit a property before you sign up to a tenancy. During your visit it is worth taking the time to properly check the state of repair and general condition of the accommodation, internal fixtures and appliances before you sign up to a tenancy. Remember – try asking the existing tenants about any problems they have had!

Here is a list of the sort of things you could be checking regarding the condition of the property:

- Look at the exterior of the property. Is the guttering in place? Are any roof tiles missing or window frames obviously rotten?
- Are there any obvious areas of damp or mould on interior walls or ceilings?
- Is there adequate ventilation in the kitchen and bathroom?

## SECTION 3

### CHOOSING YOUR PROPERTY AND CHECKING YOUR CONTRACT



- Do windows open and close properly, and can they be locked?
- Is the condition of the carpets, curtains and decorations satisfactory?
- How is the water heated (e.g. gas boiler, immersion heater etc)? Does the system appear to be in working order? If appropriate, ask to see the Gas Safety Certificate for the property – all landlords must get gas appliances, pipework etc checked by a Gas Safe Registered engineer every 12 months and show you the safety certificate when you move in – visit [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk) for further details.
- Are any of the taps leaking?
- Does the toilet flush?
- How is the property heated (central heating, electric fires etc)? Are all relevant fixtures in working order? Is it double glazed?
- Are there enough electric power sockets in your room? Are there any obvious bare wires or damaged plugs?
- Do any electrical appliances provided by the landlord (washing machine, cooker etc) work?
- Is there a means of escape in the event of a fire? Are there smoke alarms?

If you find a property you like which needs some repairs, get a commitment in writing from the

landlord that the repairs will be carried out within an agreed timescale before you sign up to the tenancy. Do they promise to clean before you move in? Who does any gardening?

See section 5 for a brief outline of a landlord's legal repairing obligations.

**Don't forget – if you have any questions about your contract, are unsure about anything or want to make sure it covers all the relevant legal points get a copy of your contract and get it checked by Housing Services. If your potential landlord won't allow you the time to get your contract checked independently, this could be a bad sign for the future! Obtain a written receipt for all monies handed over to agents/landlords. You should also insist on a rent book if paying rent by cash or cheque.**

#### TIP

Read your tenancy agreement properly to make sure there are no hidden fees, rules or nasty surprises.

## SECTION 4 MOVING IN

### MOVING IN CHECKLIST

- Make sure you do an inventory (a list of fixtures and fittings and the condition they are in) – this is your proof of the condition of the property when you move in and will help protect your deposit. Get it signed and dated by the landlord and you and keep a copy.
- Has your landlord registered your deposit with a deposit scheme and given you all the relevant information? (See section 2).
- From November 2012, rules mean that smaller shared houses – multi-occupational properties (HMO's) – in Hanover and Elm Grove, Moulsecoomb and Bevendean, St Peters and North Laine, Hollingdean & Stanmer and Queen's Park need to be legally registered with the council to ensure they are safety-compliant. To check your house has an HMO certificate before you rent, please see the council's webpages at [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/housing/general-housing/licensing-houses-multiple-occupation-hmos](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/housing/general-housing/licensing-houses-multiple-occupation-hmos)
- Check all the meters for gas, electricity and water. Take readings when you move in and give to the supplier to make sure you don't get charged for the previous tenants' useage. Make sure all your names are put on the top of subsequent bills for the duration of your tenancy.

- Check the gas safety certificate – this is a legal requirement to ensure gas appliances have been safety checked every year (see section 3).
- Check the energy performance certificate – this is a legal requirement and shows how energy efficient the building is. An A rating is the most efficient, G is the least – the average is D. The more energy efficient, the more money you will save.

All tenants now need to prove their identity before renting. Please ensure you present your passport to your agent or landlord to check as part of the rental process. If you have a university card as well or other proof you are a current student, show them this too.

- If you have a TV, get a license! If you get caught without one (and you probably will), you can end up with a hefty fine and a criminal record. Visit [www.tvlicensing.co.uk](http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk) for details.
- Take out property insurance or find out if you are covered by your parents' policy.
- Keep a record of any contact you have with your landlord or agent, this will save you a lot of time if you get into any disputes.
- Find out when your rubbish and recycling days are from your local authority website e.g. [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk)



## SECTION 5 DURING THE TENANCY

### AGREE SOME BASIC RULES FOR LIVING WITH YOUR HOUSEMATES

For example:

- Cleaning rotas – who does what, and when?
- Should basic foodstuffs (milk, bread) be pooled, or bought individually?
- Do you need an agreement regarding noise after a certain hour, overnight visits by friends, etc? What does your contract say?
- If bills and expenses are to be shared, who is to be responsible for collecting money from other housemates and making payments?

Short, regular planned house meetings can be a good way of ensuring that you continue to communicate with each other, and can lessen the likelihood of serious resentments or disputes building up.

Expect to not always have your own way. That is the reality of communal living – it is always a process of give-and-take. Try to keep the property, particularly the landlord's furniture and the internal decorations, in a reasonable condition.

It is accepted that 'fair wear and tear' will occur during a tenancy, but you will probably be billed for anything more than this. Disputes about deductions from deposits at the end of the tenancy can be stressful and time-consuming.

### TRY TO BE A GOOD NEIGHBOUR

Introduce yourselves to your neighbours when you move in. They may have unfounded or unnecessary fears about living next door to a bunch of students which you can allay; and getting off to a good start will make it more likely that channels of communication can be maintained.

Confine noisy activities (music, vacuum cleaning etc) to reasonable hours. It is surprising how much noise can penetrate the walls of your property. Not all of your neighbours will keep 'student hours'; some may have early starts for work or have young

children. Brighton has no shortage of party venues, some of them free, so please keep partying away from residential areas.

Don't let rubbish accumulate outside your property or in areas shared with neighbours. You can find out refuse and recycling collection times from your local authority – e.g. [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk) Some areas of Brighton & Hove have communal rubbish bins at the end of the street so check which type your property has.

### SAVE MONEY DURING YOUR TENANCY!

Save money by turning off lights and electrical appliances when not in use, only boil the water you actually need in your kettle, and try putting extra layers on in cold winter months as opposed to cranking up the thermostat.

Also, think about putting your heating on a timer and using draught excluders – it all helps to reduce your energy costs.

Save on water meter costs by having short showers (put the soap on first!), waiting until you have a full load for washing machine – and using a tooth mug when brushing your teeth rather than leaving the tap running. Report any water leaks or faulty taps.

Keep your fridge and food cupboard fairly well stocked. This way when you get hungry late at night, you've no excuse to go to the nearest expensive takeaway.

Think about buying food and essential items (e.g. loo rolls) in bulk which is usually more cost effective.

Shop around for the best deals regarding broadband and gas and electric suppliers. A good starting point is: [www.moneysavingexpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com)

**If you have any dealings or negotiations with the landlord or agent during your occupation, ask for confirmation of important points in writing (letter, email), and keep a copy of these.**

## SECTION 5 DURING THE TENANCY

If you experience a repair problem, or discover a defect in your property during your occupation:

- Certain kinds of disrepair will always be the responsibility of the landlord to put right and pay for. For instance serious damp, problems with the main structure of the property (roof, walls, window frames etc), faulty central heating, leaking plumbing.
- If you want to raise a repair problem with your landlord or agent – do this in writing! The landlord's legal repair obligations will not be properly triggered until you have properly put them 'on notice' about the problem.

- Ask the landlord/agent to give you a realistic timescale for when any repair work will be completed.
- If you have any problems, visit Housing Services at 91 Lewes Road below or on campus at Bramber House, where we are located on the second floor. Both offices open Monday-Friday 10am-4pm.

▼ University of Sussex Information Base, 91 Lewes Road



## SECTION 6 MOVING OUT

### GIVING NOTICE

Make sure you give written notice according to your contract to avoid paying an unnecessary extra month's rent (even if you're in a fixed term contract you may have to give notice to move out).

### REQUEST YOUR DEPOSIT BACK

The landlord may be able to legitimately deduct money from the deposit for rent owed, damage to the property etc. They should not charge you for 'fair wear and tear' e.g. carpets become worn with time but cigarette burns or stains on the carpet could be charged for. If there is no dispute over the amount of the deposit to be returned you should get it back within 10 days of your request to the scheme – please see individual schemes websites for more details. If there is a dispute you can request the scheme make a decision on a fair deduction.

### KEEP IT CLEAN AND WELL MAINTAINED

Your contract should promise that the property will be cleaned and in good condition before you move in. If it is not clean or there is a maintenance issue, report these to your agent/landlord immediately. Take photos and don't leave it until the end of contract, when they might charge you for not leaving the same property clean or for broken items not reported. Ask your agent/landlord for a cleaning checklist and agree on a weekly cleaning rota with your housemates so there is not so much to do when you vacate.

### DO YOUR GARDENING

Leaving your garden untidy could result in expensive professional re-charges for gardening. If you can't do it yourself, it may be cheaper to pay a gardener as the landlord may charge you more. Check with your agent if a lawnmower or gardening tools are provided.

### REMOVE RUBBISH

Leaving rubbish inside or outside the property in the garden is also expensive – get rid of it. Check your local authority's website for details of your local tip

and recycling facilities or advertise any decent stuff in advance on Freecycle at [www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org)

### INVENTORY CHECKOUT

Arrange an inventory check out/ inspection with your landlord/letting agent. If this is not possible, make your own notes and take dated photos of the condition of the property.

### RETURN YOUR KEYS

Remember, you can be charged for lock changes as well as lost keys if you don't. Return them directly to agent and landlord and label them from you/with house ID.

### METER READINGS

Take them on the day you move out and notify companies by email of final readings and all your forwarding addresses so you can pay equal share of final bills.

### FINALLY

Happy house hunting! We wish you a successful house share for the forthcoming year. If, despite following the tips in our guide, you still encounter problems, please don't hesitate to visit the Housing team.

The University Housing Services team are here to help you through every step of your house search. Our contact details are on the back cover and we look forward to seeing you soon, either on our on campus base in Bramber House, or in the University's Information Base, 91 Lewes Road: both 10am-4pm, Monday to Friday.

### TIP

Clean up well, put furniture back if possible, make notes and take dated photos of the condition of the property.



## CONTACT US

### Housing Services team

University of Sussex  
Bramber House  
Falmer, Brighton BN1 9QU

T +44 (0)1273 678220

E [housing@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:housing@sussex.ac.uk)

[www.sussex.ac.uk/accommodation](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/accommodation)

## CONNECT WITH US



Sussex University House Hunt



[pinterest.com/housingservices](https://pinterest.com/housingservices)

