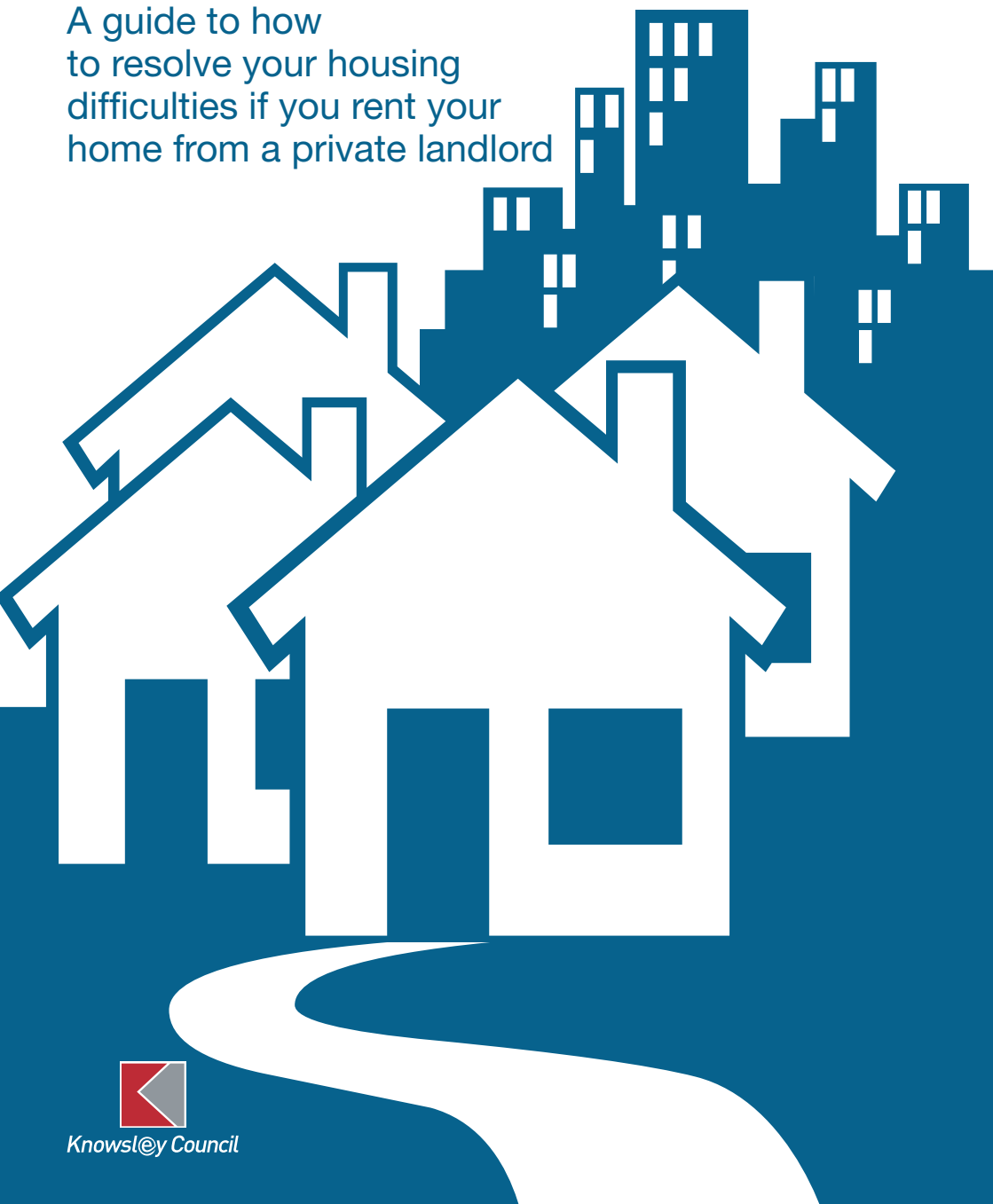


# Housing Advice for Private Sector Tenants

A guide to how  
to resolve your housing  
difficulties if you rent your  
home from a private landlord





## Knowing your rights

Sometimes when you live in private rented accommodation, it is not always easy to find out what your rights are. The Housing Options Service can provide you with information and advice on a range of issues to help you to resolve your housing difficulties.

It is important that you are clear about your rights as a private sector tenant, particularly if your landlord has already served you with a notice. If you contact us, we can explain your rights to you and check that you are not being illegally harassed or evicted. You can also get free, confidential and independent advice from your local Citizen's Advice Bureau on your rights as a tenant in the private sector.

## Types of Tenancy

You have the right to a tenancy agreement and certain information. The most common type of tenancy in the private sector is an Assured Shorthold Tenancy. This type of tenancy is for a fixed amount of time.

After an initial fixed period (usually six months) your tenancy can be renewed or ended. With this type of tenancy, it is generally easy for your landlord to evict you after this initial period. However, he or she will still have to give you notice, and will have to get a court order for you to leave if you do not leave at the end of the notice period.

If you live in your landlord's home as a lodger, you will have fewer rights and your landlord may only have to give you verbal notice to leave.

For further information about your rights as an assured shorthold tenant, and to find out about other types of tenancy, please contact the Housing Options Service. You can also get advice and information from your local Citizen's Advice Bureau, or from the charity Shelter. Contact details are listed at the back of this leaflet.

## Rent and Housing Benefit

If you receive benefits, before moving into private rented accommodation, you should contact your benefits office to get a pre-tenancy determination. This will tell you the maximum amount that Housing Benefit or the Local Housing Allowance will pay on a specific property. This may not necessarily be the amount that they will pay to you, depending on your circumstances.

Housing Benefit is designed to help people who are unemployed or on low incomes to pay their rent. You can claim Housing Benefit towards your private sector rent, and you may also claim if you are living as a lodger (but not with relatives).

You can claim Housing Benefit by contacting the council's Housing Benefit Department. If you are not sure whether you are entitled to Housing Benefit, or any other type of Benefit, please contact us or speak to your local Citizens' Advice Bureau for advice.

## Dealing with Debt

If you find that you are getting into debt, it can be difficult to know which bills to pay first. Please remember that paying your rent should always be your first priority, because you are at risk of losing your home if you do not pay it.

For further free, confidential advice on how to deal with rent arrears and manage other forms of debt, please contact your local Citizens' Advice Bureau. The contact details are at the back of this leaflet.

## Paying your Rent

If you live in rented accommodation, you must pay your rent on time in order to keep your home. If you get into arrears with your rent, your landlord may evict you.

If you are having trouble paying your rent, you should contact your landlord (or letting agent) as soon as possible, before the situation gets any worse. If you contact us, we can speak to your landlord for you. Often, we can work with you and your landlord to find a solution that works for you both.

Your right to stay in your home will depend on the type of tenancy you have and when it started. Whatever type of tenancy you have, you should speak to your landlord as soon as possible. If you are in arrears you should make a realistic offer, which you can afford, in order to pay off the arrears.

It may be that your landlord is willing to negotiate with you about your rent arrears. For example, you may be able to pay off a certain amount each week or month in order to pay back the arrears. Before agreeing to this type of arrangement, you should check that the arrears have been calculated correctly and make sure that you can afford the repayments, on top of your normal rent. Your local Citizens' Advice Bureau can help and advise you with this.

If you are in arrears simply because you are waiting for your Housing Benefits claim to be paid, then you should get in touch with the Housing Benefits Section straight away to explain this. If you have been waiting for more than 14 days, ask for an interim payment to be made. If you are having problems with a Housing Benefits claim, you can speak to your local Citizens' Advice Bureau for independent advice.

If you find that you cannot afford to repay your arrears in instalments, or if your landlord is not willing to let you pay off your arrears in instalments it will not be possible to make an arrangement and your landlord may give you notice to leave.

## Notice to leave

If your landlord serves you with a notice asking you to leave your home, you need to seek advice before doing anything.

Even if you have been given a court order or bailiffs' warrant, it is still not too late to do something about it. If you have been given a notice to leave, you should contact us as soon as possible. The sooner you get advice, the better chance you have of resolving the problem.

**Do not leave your home without getting proper advice.** If you do so, it may affect the decision we make if you need to apply as homeless, and may affect the duty we have to help you.

# Protection from Harassment and Illegal Eviction

It is important that you understand your rights as a private sector tenant, particularly if your landlord has already served you with a notice to leave. Your rights will depend on the type of tenancy you have.

It is illegal for your landlord to make you leave your home without following the correct legal procedure. If your landlord threatens you or forces you to leave, physically throws you out or stops you from getting into your home (for example by changing the locks) you have been evicted illegally. Illegal eviction is a criminal offence and can result in a criminal record, imprisonment and large fines for the landlord.

Some landlords put pressure on tenants in order to get them to leave a property without following the correct legal procedure. For example, they may cut off water, gas or electricity supplies, enter your home without your permission or interfere with your belongings. This is harassment, and it is also illegal.

For more information about your rights as an assured shorthold tenant, and to find out about other types of tenancy, please contact the Housing Options Service. We can advise you on how to protect yourself against illegal eviction, explain your rights to you and check that you are not being illegally harassed or evicted.

You can also get free, confidential advice and information from your local Citizens' Advice Bureau, or from the charity Shelter.

# Useful Contacts

## General support and advice

Citizen's Advice Bureau

[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

CAB Knowsley: 0845 1221 300

Email: [advice@knowsleycab.org.uk](mailto:advice@knowsleycab.org.uk)

[www.knowsleycab.org.uk](http://www.knowsleycab.org.uk)

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Shelter

Tel: 0808 800 4444

[www.england.shelter.org.uk](http://www.england.shelter.org.uk)

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Housing Benefits

Tel: 0151 489 6000

[www.knowsley.gov.uk](http://www.knowsley.gov.uk)

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## Health Related Services

NHS Direct

Tel: 0845 46 47

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

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Knowsley PCT Options – GP Access

Tel: 0800 917 3683

GP Led Health Centre,

St Chad's Clinic, St Chad's Drive,

Kirkby, L32 8RE

[www.knowsley.nhs.uk](http://www.knowsley.nhs.uk)

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## Support for those experiencing domestic abuse or hate crime

National Domestic Violence Helpline

Tel: 0808 2000 247

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Knowsley Domestic

Tel: 0151 548 3333

Violence Support Services

Fax: 0151 632 8865

First Step Centre, Peatwood Avenue,

Kirkby, L32 7PR

[www.kvss.org.uk](http://www.kvss.org.uk)

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Safer Knowsley Partnership

Tel: 0800 953 4433

(8am – 6pm Mon – Fri)

Calls made to this number will  
not show on your itemised bill



Contact Us

Housing Options Service

**Tel: 0800 694 0280**

9am – 5pm Mon – Fri (9am – 4pm Wednesday)

(An out of hours service is available on this number in an emergency)

You can also get this information in other languages and formats.  
Please phone Customer Services on 0151 443 4031  
or email [customerservices@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:customerservices@knowsley.gov.uk)

[www.knowsley.gov.uk](http://www.knowsley.gov.uk)