

Looking for somewhere to rent?

These hints and tips are intended to assist your hunt for privately rented accommodation in Exeter, however some will still be relevant if you are looking in other areas.

What kind of place do you want to live in?

It's important to have some kind of idea what you are looking for. Rents charged can vary greatly from one kind of property to another. If you need to claim Housing Benefit to help you pay your rent to a private landlord, the amount of Housing Benefit you may get may well be affected by the kind of accommodation you are living in. Also, whether you live with your landlord or not may affect your rights to remain in the property if the landlord wants you to leave.



Some different kinds of accommodation:

- **room in a shared house** – your own private bedroom in a house, sharing the kitchen and bathroom with other people in the house
- **bedsit** – a private room in a shared house, but you may have your own cooking facilities in your room. You still share a bathroom with other people in the house
- **studio flat** – a lounge/bedroom with your own self-contained kitchen and bathroom that you have sole use of
- **self-contained flat or apartment** – separate bedroom and lounge with your own self-contained kitchen and bathroom that you have sole use of
- **renting a room from a live-in landlord** – your own private bedroom, but you share the rest of the house/flat with your landlord who also lives in the property.

Where do you want to live?

This is an important consideration as the right location can save you travel time and transport costs. However, it's important to be realistic. Often property is let quickly and more often it can be unaffordable. If the right property comes up at the right price you may need to reconsider its location.

Newspapers

Check the *Express and Echo* every day. Tuesday is the main day for rentals. However, property for let is often listed on other days, too. Sometimes a landlord will take out an advertisement that lasts all week. It's important to buy the newspaper earlier rather than later in the week as property you see advertised later in the week may have already been let. Make a note of the phone numbers you are calling. Be sure to cross-reference them with ones you have already phoned earlier. This way you will make sure that you do not phone the same landlord twice.

The first edition of the *Express and Echo* now comes out around breakfast time. Try to get hold of an early edition. Accommodation is let very quickly so it's important to contact landlords as soon as possible. Be prepared to make arrangements to view anything that interests you the same day.

Your local library may stock newspapers. They can be found in the reference section of Central Library. Look in other papers such as *The Leader*. Landlords from out of the area sometimes advertise in the local trade/advert publications.



Word of mouth

Most accommodation is found by word-of-mouth. Many people are landlords but do not advertise the fact. There are at least 9,000 in Exeter alone, for example. It's important to speak to everyone you know: friends, family and their friends; people you attend training courses with and people you socialise with. Ask them to spread the word that you are looking for accommodation.

Shop windows

Local shop windows are a good place to look for cards advertising accommodation. Busy areas of high traffic are Heavitree High Street; Sidwell Street; St Thomas/Cowick Street, Magdalen Road and Fore Street. There may be empty flats above local shops. Speak to the shopkeepers. Even if the flats above their shops are not for rent they may know of other property elsewhere.

Tesco, Sainsburys and Co-op stores have community notice boards where you might find accommodation advertised. Don't forget you can advertise for "accommodation wanted" in these places yourself. If you have references, say so in your advert.



The internet

Accommodation is being increasingly listed on the Internet, although you may have to register to see the listings. If you do not have access to the net you can use Internet cafes or a library. Central Library offers 30 minutes free. Some useful websites:

www.spareroom.co.uk

www.flatshare.com

www.flatmateclick.co.uk

www.thisisexeter.co.uk

Letting Agents

Letting agents can be useful. However, you must remember that they work on behalf of the landlord not the tenant. Letting agents usually charge for their services. However, you should not be asked to pay any charges until they have found a place for you.

Holding Fees

Once you have found somewhere that you like the letting agent may ask you for a holding fee while they check out your references. If you decide to go ahead with the property then this should be deducted from your security deposit. However, if your references fail the checks or you change your mind then the letting agent does not have to return the holding fee to you.

References

It's almost certain that a letting agent will want to get references for you from your bank and possibly your employer. Landlords who are not letting property through a letting agent may also want to see references and may also charge a holding fee (which should be deducted from your first month's rent or deposit) in order to take his property off the market. You might find it handy to have references with you when you go looking for property. You could ask a previous landlord, your boss or someone else who knows you well to comment on your history as a tenant, or how you are as an employee, or give you a character reference.

Other places to look

The Oasis restaurant in the RD&E Hospital in Wonford often has advertisements by people looking to share accommodation. You may also be able to place your own wanted ad for accommodation here.

If your current landlord is a member of a landlord's association he may be able to put you in touch with another landlord who has property to let.

Personal safety

Be aware of personal safety when searching for somewhere to live. When viewing a potential place it is a good idea to let someone know where you are going and at what time you expect to return. Consider taking someone with you for the viewing.