

Finding Accommodation in the Private Rented Sector

Social housing in Bath and North East Somerset is in very short supply and there is an extremely high demand for the limited number of housing association properties that become available. This means that waiting times can be very long and the choice you are offered will be limited. By contrast, the private sector allows you to choose from a range of accommodation types and locations. Finding accommodation independently in the private sector may be your best or only available housing option.

Sources for finding places to rent:

There are many ways to find accommodation in the private sector. Landlords have to advertise and it is a good idea to look in as many places as possible. Try to widen your areas of choice as much as possible. The smaller an area you wish to rent in, the less likely you will be to find somewhere or the less choice you will have, especially in rural areas.

1. Newspapers

Each of the local papers cover classified ads from both letting agents and private landlords. You can also search for vacancies using the websites for each of the papers. It is a good idea to get hold of a copy as soon as it comes out as many landlords will be phoned straight away and properties may have gone by the end of the day.

Bath Chronicle

www.thisisbath.co.uk Weekly on a Thursday. Tel: 01225 322322

The paper covers the City of Bath and neighbouring parts of Wiltshire and North Somerset including the towns of Bradford-on-Avon, Chippenham, Corsham, Frome, Melksham, Midsomer Norton and Radstock, Trowbridge, Westbury and Warminster.

It carries classified ads for rented accommodation.

Somerset Guardian

www.thisissomerset.co.uk Weekly on a Thursday. Tel:01761 417778

The paper covers the twin towns of Midsomer Norton and Radstock in the unitary authority of Bath & North East Somerset (BANES), including the villages of Peasedown St John and Timsbury. It carries classified ads for rented accommodation.

2. Trading papers

These are usually published weekly and carry classified type adverts for many different things including rented accommodation. Many of them have now moved online and this is the cheapest and most effective way to look for rented vacancies.

Gumtree.

www.gumtree.com/bath

This carries a large number of rented properties often from landlords advertising directly, which means you can save money by not having to pay agency fees.

Trade It.

www.trade-it.co.uk

This has a searchable property section with categories for houses and flats. It covers the Bristol and Bath areas as well as other locations in the South West.

3. Websites for rented accommodation

There are many more sites advertised on the specialised web sites than ever make it into the local papers. These cover houses, flats and rooms in shared accommodation. You can browse by location, type or price and register your details to be emailed when a suitable property is listed.

Just as with ads in the papers, you can advertise yourself on these websites as looking for accommodation and landlords and tenants can then contact yourself directly. If a website lets you post a 'wanted ad' then it is a good idea to do so.

The following websites specialise in adverts for rented accommodation:

www.housepals.co.uk

www.torent.co.uk

www.rightmove.co.uk

www.spareroom.co.uk

www.fish4.co.uk/iad/lettings

www.flatmateclick.co.uk

www.lettingsearch.co.uk

www.easyroommate.com

www.findaproperty.com

www.nextroommate.com

If you do not have email, you can sign up for a free account with companies such as www.yahoo.co.uk, www.hotmail.com or www.gmail.com The local libraries have free internet access. Ask the staff for help if you are unsure about how to use websites and the internet.

4. Notice-boards and shop windows

Cards placed in newsagents' windows advertise flats or rooms at the cheaper end of the market. You should go round the area you are interested in as regularly as you can to check if new ads have been put up.

5. Students' union or college

If you are a student, your college or university may be able to help you find somewhere to stay. You should contact your students' union or college for more details.

6. Word of mouth

Friends, family and workmates often tend to be a good source for finding out about accommodation. As such, it's a good idea to let as many people as possible know that you are looking for somewhere to live.

7. Advertise Yourself

As well as looking at adverts it is a good idea to put your own 'looking for accommodation' ads into at least some if not all of the local papers. Say what kind of accommodation you are looking for, how much you can pay and a little bit about yourself. Remember to include your contact details or a box number.

8. Letting Agencies

Accommodation agencies let and manage rooms, flats and houses on behalf of private landlords. Most agencies advertise in the local press, Yellow Pages and the Thomson Local Directory. It is advisable to visit a number of different agencies to increase your

chances of finding accommodation. Agencies can sometimes be expensive, as they often charge fees, and will expect rent in advance and a security deposit.

You can find a list of letting agents which cover the local area on the Council's website at: <http://tinyurl.com/cem3pm4>

Help with a deposit

There are two deposit bond schemes in operation.

1. SWAN. Tel: 01761 432445.

For single people or couples without any priority need, there is the scheme run by a registered charity: South Wansdyke Advice Network (SWAN). The scheme is intended to make it easier for people to rent in the private sector if they do not have the money for a deposit. They provide a guaranteed bond to a landlord instead of a cash deposit. You can contact SWAN for further information. The funds are limited so they can not help everyone. You must be eligible for housing benefit, over 18 and have a local connection with the district.

2. HOMEFINDER.

For those with a priority need for housing, the council runs its own deposit scheme. This can provide assistance with the rent in advance, the deposit and sometimes with letting agency fees. Your housing advisor will provide you with more information about this if you are eligible for the scheme.

Benefits

If you are claiming benefits you can apply for a Budgeting Loan to cover the first month's rent in advance. You can pick up a form from the Jobcentre and ask them for help completing it if necessary. You can apply for a Crisis Loan by phoning 0800 0328349.

Even if you are working you may still be eligible for some housing benefit. Housing benefit is worked out using the Local Housing Allowance, and is based on who lives with the tenant, which area the property is in, how much money the tenant has coming in and what savings the tenant has. The rates for different types of properties are given below. Some parts of BANES come under the rate for Bristol because the rents in those areas are slightly higher.

Payments are made direct to tenants but if you are considered to be vulnerable or have previous debt problems you can ask for payments to be made to your landlord.

Local Housing Allowance Rates

No. of bedrooms	Bath Weekly	Bristol Weekly
Shared accommodation rate	£70.00	£64.62
1 room	£126.92	£115.15
2 rooms	£155.77	£144.23
3 rooms	£184.62	£167.31
4 rooms	£290.77	£219.23

Addresses with BS type postcodes are likely to come under the Bristol weighting for LHA levels.

If you are claiming housing benefit but it is not paying all of the rent, you can apply for a 'Discretionary Housing Payment'. This is a 'top-up' type of payment decided on a case-by-case basis. It can give you extra housing benefit to cover the rent if you are struggling or have good reasons why it should be paid.

If you are under 25 and single you will probably only be entitled to a limited amount of Housing Benefit if you are not working. This is called the *single room rent allowance*, and is set by central government. The amount is that for 1 bedroom with shared facilities (see above). There are some exceptions, so ask your housing officer for further advice.

If you want to check how much housing benefit and tax credits you may be entitled to, you can gain a good estimate by visiting www.entitledto.com/

The best way to make a claim for Housing or Council Tax Benefit is to visit one of our local Council Connect Offices. The contact details can be found here:

<http://tinyurl.com/ca9u7hh>

You can also speak to someone about your claim during office hours on: 01225 477777 or send an email to benefits@bathnes.gov.uk

The local **Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB)** can also assist with assessing what benefits you are entitled to and helping you apply for them and appeal negative decisions.

Bath CAB: www.bathcab.org.uk

The office is located at 2 Edgar Buildings, George Street, Bath, BA1 2EE. You can phone on 0844 848 7919 and they have drop in advice sessions on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings.

Types of Accommodation

While many people would like their own place, this is often not possible when renting. It can be very expensive to rent your own flat or house. There are two ways to find cheaper accommodation: look for rooms in shared houses or for lodgings.

Shared accommodation is often very central in location and can be found relatively cheaply. Bills are shared which means that it can be much cheaper to rent in an otherwise expensive location. Likewise, lodgings in an owner's home is often much cheaper. You have less rights as a lodger but the rent in advance and deposit is often much lower.

Securing a place

When looking for private accommodation it is often 'first-come first-served' so it pays to contact landlords as soon as you see the vacancy. Try to give a good impression over the phone. You will often be asked some questions about yourself such as whether you are working, whether you have children, how old you are, whether you smoke or whether you have pets. It is better to be honest about these answers because you need to find a home that is suitable for you and your family and a landlord who is happy with yourself as a tenant.

When you meet the landlord aim to give a good impression. Viewing a property, even a cheap bedsit, is similar to an interview so it pays to be on time and to pay attention to presentation and manner. There may be several people wanting the same vacancy so the

better impression you can give to the landlord or letting agent then the more likely you are to be offered the room or flat. If you are using the HomeFinder Scheme then have some leaflets about it with you to give to the landlord. If you do not have the rent or deposit ready to give to a landlord say so and offer other alternatives. Many landlords are willing to negotiate and perhaps accept monthly payments for the deposit.

Tips for prospective tenants can be found in the following leaflet at: <http://bit.ly/nkaHxZ>
OR www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/tipstenantsassuredshorthold

Disclaimer.

Please note that the listing here of any organisation, website or service does not in any way mean that it is endorsed by Bath and North East Somerset Council. They are provided for information purposes only and you are advised to always exercise your own discretion and judgement when using any service.