



## Private Sector Lettings

### Further information

For more information, please contact

Housing Options Team  
Housing Options Centre  
New Walk Centre  
Welford Place  
Leicester  
LE1 6ZG

Tel: (0116) 252 8707  
[www.leicester.gov.uk/housing](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/housing)



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# LeicesterLet Home Finder Scheme

A Guide for Families

## Meeting housing needs

In Leicester, high house prices and a serious shortage of affordable homes for rent have left many people unable to meet their housing needs on their own.

Faced with a growing homelessness problem, the Council has set up a number of schemes to prevent homelessness and make it easier for people to obtain privately rented housing.

Although families with dependent children normally qualify for re-housing if they become homeless through no fault of their own, some would prefer to live in the private rented sector.

## LeicesterLet Home Finder Scheme

The Home Finder Scheme provides people on a low income with the opportunity to move into a home of their choice and to avoid homelessness AND a stay in temporary accommodation.

By providing the advice, support and financial help required, the Council has increased the housing options available to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Managed by the Council's Housing Options Team, the Home Finder Scheme is very flexible. It can be used, for example, to prevent private tenants from becoming homeless by helping them to find alternative accommodation when their existing tenancy is coming to an end.

### Qualifying for the scheme

We realise that not everyone is able to manage in private rented accommodation. The Home Finder Scheme is therefore only offered to people we consider suitable.

Everyone who qualifies for the scheme will have become homeless (or threatened with homelessness) through no fault of their own and they will normally have a local connection with the Leicester area.

### Suitability of accommodation

Before a property can be let under the Home Finder Scheme, the Council will carry out a series of checks to ensure that it is affordable, safe and fit for habitation.

Your property will be inspected to check that it is in a reasonable condition. If there is a gas supply, they will request a valid gas safety certificate.

To help us assess the affordability of the property, we will need you to obtain a pre-tenancy determination from the rent officer. This tells us the maximum rent that can be met by housing benefit, a rent allowance paid by the Council. If you have any difficulties in obtaining this document please contact the Housing Options Team for help.

## Length of tenancy

Most of the tenants assisted under the Home Finder Scheme will want to remain in their home for as long as possible.

Others will be hoping for an improvement in their situation, so will only need accommodation for up to a year.

Under the LeicesterLet Home Finder Scheme, tenants will normally take on an assured shorthold tenancy for at least 12 months.

## What we can offer

Under the LeicesterLet Home Finder Scheme, the Council will provide the deposit and rent in advance to the landlord in order to obtain accommodation in the private rented sector.

As well as offering financial assistance, the Council can offer comprehensive advice on all aspects of the lettings process and prompt housing benefit payments direct to the landlord.

Our Housing Options Team will help to organise the tenancy and will continue to provide the landlord and tenant with advice, support and practical help throughout the tenancy.

## Arranging a tenancy

If the property inspection is satisfactory and the rent is in line with the pre-tenancy determination, the landlord will be asked to submit an invoice and sign a form agreeing to the terms of the LeicesterLet Home Finder Scheme,

The invoice will normally be paid before the start of the tenancy, and the Housing Options Team will ensure that the tenant's housing benefit claim is completed and submitted before the first day of the tenancy.

## Ongoing advice and support

The provision of suitable rented accommodation under the LeicesterLet Home Finder scheme means the Council no longer owes a duty to house the tenants under homelessness legislation.

However, throughout the tenancy, the Housing Options Team will be available to try and help the landlord and tenant to resolve any problems that may occur and to provide them with ongoing information, advice and support.

The Housing Options Team wants to make it easier for people on low income to obtain private rented accommodation and also to ensure that they can **keep** it.

## Use of the Home Finder Scheme

The Home Finder Scheme offers families the opportunity to obtain private rented accommodation in the area of their choice, close to schools, employment and family support.

When you have found a suitable property a member of the Housing Options Team will need to be contacted. They will contact the landlord to discuss the possible use of the LeicesterLet Home Finder Scheme.

The Team will want to confirm the size of the property, the rent payable, the length of the tenancy and the landlord's intentions with regard to future lettings.

If everything is in order, including your pre-tenancy determination paperwork, the Housing Options Team will arrange an inspection of the property.

A letter will be sent to the landlord confirming the nature of assistance the Council is prepared to offer you under the scheme. Assistance is conditional on the property being safe and affordable.

## Rent in advance

The Council will normally pay one month's rent in advance. This will be paid directly to the landlord.

## Damage deposit

The Council will pay a damage deposit, normally equivalent to one month's rent, direct to the landlord. This will help cover the cost of repairing or replacing any items on the inventory that are damaged or go missing.

## Rent payments

Although not everyone helped under the home finder scheme is living on a low income, applicants will only be considered for the scheme if the Housing Options Team is satisfied that they are capable of paying their rent regularly and in full.

If the tenant is entitled to housing benefit, all of the housing benefit they receive will be paid directly to the landlord unless the landlord says that they are unwilling to accept direct payments.

To ensure that housing benefit claims are processed quickly, the Housing Options Team will ensure that you provide all of the information needed to assess the claim.

## Housing benefit

Many of the people assisted under the Home Finder Scheme will receive housing benefit to cover all or part of their rent.

Housing benefit is a means tested rent allowance paid by local councils to people who are living on a low income.

The maximum amount of rent that can be taken into account in the calculation of housing benefit will be set by the rent officer in the form of a pre-tenancy determination.

The amount of benefit a tenant receives depends on their age, the people living with them and their income and savings.

If the tenant is receiving income support or income-based job seekers allowance and there are no non-dependants living with them, housing benefit will normally cover the full rent referred to in the pre-tenancy determination.

Tenants with a higher income (or a non-dependant living with them) will normally have to pay at least part of their rent.

The arrangements we have introduced to process housing benefit and payment of housing benefit have ensured that we are able to process most claims within 2-3 weeks. This is dependent upon you providing all the information required to process your claim.

## Landlords' responsibilities

All landlords have a duty to maintain their accommodation in a good state of repair and in a safe and habitable condition.

They must ensure the safety of the gas supply, electrical installation and any gas or electrical appliances. An annual gas safety certificate must be obtained and all furniture and furnishings must comply with the current fire regulations.

At the beginning of the tenancy, landlords should produce a detailed inventory, recording the condition of the property and its contents. They should provide their tenants with a copy of the inventory and tenancy agreement.

Expert advice and copies of the Essential Guide for Landlords can be obtained from the Private Sector Housing Team at Leicester City Council.

## Tenant's responsibilities

Tenants assisted under the LeicesterLet Home Finder scheme are well aware of their responsibilities to treat the property with respect and to ensure that the rent is paid regularly and in full.

They are aware of the need for the prompt recording of repairs and of their responsibility to provide the landlord with reasonable access to the property and at least one month's written notice when they wish to bring their tenancy to an end.