

Advice for Young People aged 16 or 17

This factsheet is for young people aged under 18, who need housing advice in Kent.

If you are leaving care, ask for our separate factsheet for Care Leavers.

Do you think you would like a place of your own?

Looking for a place of your own is not at all easy, and you are probably better off trying to work things out where you are. Here are some things that you should know:

- You cannot normally enter into a tenancy contract until you are 18.
- Most private landlords charge a deposit and at least a month's rent in advance – so you will need some savings.
- Most private landlords will not rent to young people unless they have a 'guarantor' (someone who agrees that they will take responsibility if the rent isn't paid) – this could be a parent, for example.
- On top of the rent, you will have other regular bills, such as electricity & water – and you may need to buy some furniture. This will depend if the place is 'fully furnished' or not.
- Your tenancy agreement will include some rules that you must abide by – a bit like being at home. You will not be able to do exactly as you please, otherwise you may be evicted (and then it will be difficult to find another place).

However, if anyone you are living with is being threatening or violent towards you, you should seek help straight away. The first people you should contact are Children's Social Care. If you live in Medway, call 01634 33466 (01634 304400 in an emergency), or email ss.accessandinfo@medway.gov.uk. If you live elsewhere in Kent, the number is 03000 412323, or email kentcfis@kent.gov.uk. If you don't want to go to the Council, you can 'phone **Childline** on 0800 1111.

Have you been asked to leave?

Up to the age of 16, your parent(s) have legal responsibility to ensure you have a safe place to stay. If they can't provide that, you can get help from Children's Social Care (see above). After you reach 16, your parents could give you notice to leave. If you are homeless and under 18, Children's Social Care will have a duty to explain your choices and assess your needs, so you should contact them first of all. The assessment will decide whether you are a 'Child in Need', and therefore whether Children's Social Care must accommodate you. They will probably negotiate with your family, to see if it is possible for you to return home. You can ask a friend or professional advisor to be with you at your assessment, to help you understand what is happening. If you don't know anyone suitable, you could contact **Coram Voice** (0808 800 5792) or **NYAS** (0808 808 1001) for support.

There is a 'Joint Protocol' in place in Kent – this is an agreement between Kent County Council and the local councils, about how 16-17 year olds should be helped. You can read it at <https://www.kenthousinggroup.org.uk/strategies-protocols/>

If Children's Social Care find you are a 'Child in Need' and have a duty to accommodate you, they will also provide you with the support you need (including financial support). It is unlikely that you will be given your own flat, without first being in supported accommodation. If the assessment finds you are not a 'Child in Need', or you decide

(after taking advice) that you do not want to be accommodated and supported by Social Care, you can apply to the local housing authority (district or borough council – see below). If you have been assessed by Kent Children’s Social Care, they will make arrangements with the local housing authority for a joint assessment to be carried out, to assess your housing and support needs.

The approach taken by a local housing authority is different to Children’s Social Care. Firstly, the housing authority will check that you are eligible for help (this will depend on how long you have been living in the UK, and your nationality). Then they will satisfy themselves that you do not have anywhere where you can safely continue to live (i.e. that you are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days). Anyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days is entitled to a ‘Personalised Housing Plan’ (PHP).

This plan will include the steps that both you and the council will take, in order to resolve things. You will need to take responsibility to follow the steps in your plan.

If you are not yet homeless but are under notice to leave, this help will last for 56 days, and will focus on trying to help you to stay at home. This help could end if you deliberately and unreasonably fail to co-operate with the council.

If you become homeless or are already homeless now, and are 16 or 17, the housing authority will have a duty to find you temporary accommodation. This should not be bed & breakfast accommodation, but it will be wherever is available at the time. The council will also work with you to create or amend your PHP, to include steps to help you find more settled accommodation. Again, this help will carry on for up to 56 days. If you follow the steps but don’t find anywhere in this time, the housing authority will decide if they have a duty to offer you something. There will be a ‘full housing duty’ if you are still under 18 or are vulnerable for another reason – and your homelessness is not directly caused by something that you have deliberately done, or not done. If you are found to be ‘intentionally homeless’, you will have to leave any temporary accommodation you were given.

Applying for social housing

You can apply to join the register for social or affordable housing (council or housing association properties) by registering at <https://www.kenthomechoice.org.uk/choice/login.aspx>. However, you will need to have a local connection with the council area you apply to, and you may be asked to undergo an assessment of your ability to keep a tenancy. You may only be able to bid for properties if the council you apply to are sure you are ready. Once registered, you are likely to be waiting a very long time before you qualify for an offer – this is not a quick option. If you are given a tenancy, a designated responsible adult would hold the legal interest on your behalf until you are 18, and there would need to be support in place for you. You may be required to take a parent or guardian to an interview.

Contacting your local Council

Ashford: <https://www.ashford.gov.uk>
Canterbury: <https://www.canterbury.gov.uk>
Dartford: <https://www.dartford.gov.uk>
Dover: <https://www.dover.gov.uk>
Gravesham: <http://www.gravesham.gov.uk>
Maidstone: <https://self.maidstone.gov.uk>
Medway: <https://www.medway.gov.uk>
Sevenoaks: <https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk>
Folkestone & Hythe: <https://www.shepway.gov.uk>
Swale: <https://www.swale.gov.uk>
Thanet: <https://www.thanet.gov.uk>
Tunbridge Wells: <http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk>
Tonbridge & Malling: <https://www.tmbc.gov.uk>