**Sharing Tenancies – What You Need to Know**

***Hints & Tips to Make it Easier for You & Your Housemate***

**Living with housemates**

Moving into a rented house or flat can work really well. Knowing what to expect from shared living can give you a much better chance of keeping your tenancy. This guide is to help you to understand problems that can happen when you share. It lets you know how to deal with them.

This leaflet is aimed at homeless households who are thinking of moving into one of The Highland Council’s shared temporary tenancies. It’s also of use to anyone who is considering sharing their home (for example in a private rent).

**Why Share**

You can get a good standard of temporary housing at a more affordable price. Also, instead of sharing your accommodation with several others, you’ll only share with 1 person. We try to find a good match for you. We’ll give you both help & support too.

**Sorting out problems when sharing a house or flat**

Living with people can sometimes be difficult. But problems can often be easily solved if you deal with them quickly. A small issue can become a big problem if it is not dealt with. Some common problem areas are:

* cleaning
* dirty dishes
* paying for everyday products such as milk and toilet paper
* paying bills
* visitors
* safety and security

These things usually become issues when housemates haven’t agreed or understood what is acceptable. So the best thing is to agree, at the start, how to behave.

**House rules**

To avoid tension it’s always a good idea to agree house ‘rules’. And when agreeing the ‘rules’, it’s important to remember that everyone is different - with different outlooks and different expectations.

If you are moving into a house where other people already live ask them what the house rules are. This also helps to show them that you want to fit in.

Successful sharing households use a Sharer’s Charter for their ‘house rules’. We will give you an example which you and your housemate can use to agree your own ‘rules’. Here are some things that could be covered in your Sharer’s Charter. You could add: ***We agree that:***

* ***Cleaning of communal areas to be done weekly – check rota!***
* ***Dishes to be done straight away after eating.***
* ***We will take a turn each week to top up the meter to pay for the heating & electricity.***
* ***Kitty – £3 per week each. This will pay for milk, tea, sugar, bread, toilet roll, cleaning products, toothpaste, washing up liquid – value brand only.***
* ***Davie will be responsible for household kitty. The kitty record book is kept in the kitchen drawer.***
* ***Let others know if you plan to have friends over.***
* ***No loud music/noise after 10 pm unless agreed.***
* ***Knock before you enter rooms.***

**Cleaning responsibilities**

You are responsible for keeping your own room clean and tidy. But there are also communal areas to consider (e.g. bathroom, kitchen, living room). In some shared houses people set up a cleaning rota, so everyone takes a turn cleaning communal areas. *Tip -* Agree on who is responsible for cleaning and when.

**Dishes**

Some people prefer the kitchen to be spotless at all times, others think it is fine to wash dishes at the end of the day. *Tip -* Agree with your housemate when the dishes should be done.

**Sharing food and other items**

Many house and flatmates put a set amount of money into a kitty to buy the things everyone uses – milk, toilet paper, cleaning products. One person may be responsible for buying them or housemates can take turns. It is important to agree what items the kitty covers, and what brands.

*Tip -* Check with your housemate - what happens if someone goes away for a time. Do they still have to pay? Or, if they have someone staying for a few days, do they pay more?

**Visitors**

It is nice to have visitors over, and you should be able to have your friends and family over. Sometimes they might stay overnight. That should also be ok. But if someone who was not paying rent and not putting money in the kitty was staying over for more than a night or two, how would you feel? *Tip -* Agree when and for how long it is ok to have visitors.

**Bills and Housemates**

Paying bills can sometimes lead to arguments amongst housemates. Whatever the disagreements it’s important to remember that unpaid bills do not go away. Council tax departments and utility companies go after people named on the account even if they have moved. They can take legal action if you don’t pay your bills after several demands, so it’s important that you pay promptly.

**Pre-paid meter**

The property will have a pre-paid meter for you gas or electricity meter. You could each take turns to top up the meter e.g. weekly. Or you might decide to have a kitty that can be used to top up the meter. *Tip -* Agree how you will top-up your meter.

**Living safely and securely**

You should always feel safe in your new home. These simple tips can be helpful in protecting your privacy and safety when you first move into a shared a house or flat.

• You should not go into someone’s room without their permission - and they should not come into yours.

• But if you move into an existing house share where they are used to going into each other’s rooms, you should make clear if it makes you feel uncomfortable.

• When you first move in, do not leave your valuables around the house or show them off until you get to know the people in the house a little bit better.

• Some properties may have locks on the rooms, but others won’t. It is important that you feel safe in your home, and you should make sure that you feel ok with the other people you move in with.

**Good communications**

A notice board or white board in a central place is handy to leave messages. It’s a good way to communicate if people are not at home. It can also be a good place to keep receipts, bills and to remind people of things agreed. *Tip -* Keep the house rules on the notice board. And a record of who has paid for what.

**Sorting out problems**

If someone is creating a problem or has upset you, talk to them about it.It is better to explain how someone’s actions make you feel, rather than accusing them of behaving badly.

* You could have an initial friendly chat to explain what you are upset about and this might resolve the situation.
* If that doesn’t help, then a house meeting may be the place to bring it up.

If you are having big or on-going problems, you may wish to ask your Housing Officer to help you to sort it out. For example referring you both to a conflict resolution service if you’re having serious problems.

**Rent Liability**

You will be liable for half of the rent of your shared accommodation. For example: the average temporary accommodation rent & service charge for a 2 bedroomed flat per sharing temporary tenant is £58 per week (£108 per week in total). The Council will tell you how much the charge is when it discusses your shared temporary tenancy offer with you.

If your housemate moves out, you will not be liable for their half of the rent. The Council will be. This is why we need to move someone else in as quickly as possible. And make sure that that their room isn’t left empty for long.

**If your housemate moves out**

If your housemate moves out, we (the Council) will offer their room to someone else. We will try to make a good match for you. We all want the tenancy to succeed without problems!

If you don’t agree with the match we make, we will explore solutions with you. However if issues can’t be resolved you may need to move out. This is because you agreed to share the property and you will be in breach of your occupancy agreement. Remember everyone who is offered shared housing has been assessed and vetted by us and has been deemed to be suitable for sharing.

**What type of lease will I have?**

We will use an occupancy agreement. This is the type of lease we also use in HMO temporary accommodation. It sets out your rights and what you are responsible for.

**Council Tax**

You will be liable for half of the Council Tax. We will tell you how much this when we discuss your shared temporary tenancy offer with you.

If your housemate moves out, you will not become liable for their half of the Council Tax. The Council will pay that for you. This is why we need to move someone else in as quickly as possible. And make sure that that their room isn’t left empty for long.

**What about longer term sharing?**

If you find sharing a good way to reduce your housing costs, we can help you into a longer term shared tenancy. You may find there are other benefits to sharing too.

**Questions and More Information**

Do you have questions? Do you want more information? Are you interested? If so, speak to your Housing Options or Housing Management Officer.