

Deposits, rent and fees

This information is for people renting privately in Northern Ireland.

Moving into a new home can be expensive. Before you sign a tenancy agreement, make sure you know exactly what you need to pay for and how much it costs.

If you get Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, it may not cover your full rent. [Speak to our advisers](#) to check what your benefits cover. Make sure you can afford the property you want.

As a private tenant, you might be interested in taking part in [Renters' Voice](#). Renters' Voice is supported by Housing Rights. It is made up of private renters who work with those in a position to improve the private rented sector, including:

- landlords
- politicians and
- government representatives

Paying a deposit

Usually, your landlord will ask you to pay a deposit:

- this often happens at the same time as signing your tenancy agreement
- your landlord cannot ask for more than one month's rent as a deposit since 1 April 2023
- ask your landlord for a receipt when paying the deposit

Your landlord must then protect your deposit in a [deposit protection scheme](#). They have 28 days to do this after you give them the deposit.

Within 35 days of paying the deposit, your landlord must give you:

- written information with details about the tenancy
- a deposit protection certificate with details about the protected deposit
- an information leaflet which tells you how to get your deposit back when your tenancy ends. This leaflet will be from the scheme.

Your landlord may have committed an offence if:

- they do not protect the deposit
- they do not provide you with this information
- they do not do so within the above timeframes

You can report this to your local council. They may fine your landlord.

A deposit paid before 1 April 2013 does not have to be protected.

Help with paying a deposit

There are some charities that can help with deposit money. Normally, you must meet specific conditions. [Speak to our advisers](#) if you need help.

You can also try to negotiate with your landlord. For example, ask if you can pay the deposit in instalments. Always get any agreement details in writing.

Zero deposit scheme

Sometimes you can pay a one-time fee (usually one week's rent) to a zero deposit company. This would happen instead of paying a full deposit. This is called a 'zero deposit scheme.' This option can be tricky, so [it's helpful to get advice](#) before using it.

Keep in mind, you:

- do not get the money back at the end of the tenancy
- must still pay for any damage you caused

You can contact the scheme if they claim you damaged the property and charge you for it.

Getting your deposit back

After you leave, your landlord will check the property. You may not get some or all of your deposit back if you:

- left the tenancy early
- caused damage
- owe rent or other fees
- lost or broke things belonging to the landlord

The way you get the deposit back depends on:

- whether you and your landlord agree on how much should be returned, and
- which type of scheme your landlord used to protect the deposit

[A deposit protected in a custodial scheme](#) will be dealt with and returned by the scheme holding it. If there is a dispute, the scheme will make a final decision on how much to repay you.

[A deposit protected with an insurance scheme](#) is dealt with and returned by the:

- landlord if there is no dispute
- scheme if there is a dispute

If you disagree with the amount the landlord returns, speak to your landlord first. If you cannot agree, you can then complain to the deposit protection scheme.

To help make sure you'll get your full deposit back, check your:

- [signed inventory](#) and that nothing is missing
- [tenancy agreement](#) to see what you need to fix or clean

Deductions from a deposit

There are rules about how much your landlord can take from your deposit to pay for certain things. Your landlord can keep some, or all, of your deposit for things like:

- unpaid rent or arrears
- damage to the property
- missing or broken furnishings

The amount your landlord deducts should:

- use the most affordable solution, such as cleaning or repair, rather than replacement
- reflect the loss they sustained rather than the full value of the item
- be fair and not leave them in a better position financially

An example would be if an eight-year-old dishwasher broke. Your landlord cannot deduct the value of a brand-new appliance. They could only deduct the value of an eight-year-old dishwasher. This is often called 'like for like'.

You can find more information in this [joint guide to deposit deductions](#).

When a deposit is not protected

Before 1 April 2013, a landlord did not have to protect a deposit. The only way to get your money back was to take the landlord to small claims court if they kept the deposit. If:

- you paid a deposit before April 2013, or
- you paid it after this date, but your landlord did not protect it in one of the schemes

you should allow your landlord up to 28 days after your tenancy ends to return the deposit.

This allows a reasonable amount of time to pass before taking the matter to small claims court.

To dispute a non-protected deposit with your landlord, you should:

1. **write to your landlord and ask them to return your deposit.** You can ask why they are not returning the deposit. Give a date for when you expect them to reply, and keep a copy of the letter.
2. **if you disagree with their reasons for deductions, you can write a second letter.** You can explain why you think the deductions are unreasonable. State how much you expect the landlord to give back. Tell the landlord you'll take them to court if you don't get your deposit back.
3. [take your landlord to small claims court](#). You do not need a solicitor for this.

Paying rent in advance

Usually, your landlord will ask you to pay rent on the first of the month for the coming month. This means that when you sign a new tenancy agreement, you need enough money to pay the deposit and rent.

Keep in mind that [Housing Benefit and Universal Credit](#) are paid in arrears.

You may be able to [apply for help to cover your rent](#) in advance.

Rent increases

New rules were introduced on 1 April 2025 to restrict how often a private landlord can increase the rent they charge.

These restrictions apply to the majority of private tenancies. However, the level of rent will be set instead by [the Rent Officer](#) if your tenancy is:

- a [protected or statutory tenancy](#) or
- a [rent-controlled tenancy](#) because the property failed its fitness inspection

When can the landlord increase your rent?

The new rules mean that from 1 April 2025, for most private rented tenancies:

- your landlord can only increase the rent after you have been a tenant for 12 months, and
- once it is increased, they will have to wait another 12 months before increasing it again

This means your landlord can increase the rent only once every 12 months.

For example:

- You have a 12-month fixed-term tenancy agreement. The landlord cannot increase your rent during that time. Check your tenancy agreement to see when your tenancy ends.
- Your six-month fixed-term tenancy ends, and you continue to rent monthly. This is sometimes called a 'periodic' or 'month-to-month' tenancy. Your landlord will have to wait until you have been in the tenancy for 12 months before they can increase the rent.

If your landlord tries to increase the rent more often, they may be committing an offence. You should contact the Environmental Health department in your local

council. However, there is a risk that your landlord will serve you with a notice to quit the tenancy if you complain. This is known as retaliatory eviction.

Housing Rights operates a [free mediation service](#). This service is for tenants and landlords in the private rented sector, as well as young people. Mediation can help resolve housing disputes, including rent issues.

Notice of rent increase

From 1 April 2025:

- your landlord must give you at least three months' notice if they want to increase rent
- they must give this notice in writing
- the notice should state the date on which the increase will occur and the new rent level

['In writing' can include electronically, such as email or text](#). The landlord can also use a [Notice of Variation](#) to provide this information.

Moving costs

You may need to pay to:

- move your belongings
- buy more furniture or appliances
- set up utilities, such as an internet connection

Insurance for your belongings

You should always get contents insurance for your home. This will cover the costs if your belongings are damaged or stolen. Your landlord's insurance only covers their property and belongings.

Letting fees

In Northern Ireland, [it's illegal for a letting agent to charge a tenant certain fees](#).

A landlord may choose to use a letting agent to manage their property. Letting agents usually charge landlords for their services. The agent should not be passing these costs on to you.

Letting fees are illegal for things like:

- applying for a tenancy
- checking your credit status
- checking your guarantor
- deposit administration
- tenancy administration

[Speak to our advisers](#) if an agent asks you to pay these fees.

Restrictions on charging letting fees only apply to letting agents, not individual landlords. It's not illegal for a landlord who manages their own property to charge you for these things.

If you do pay any fees, get a receipt showing what the payment is for. You can always try to get the money back after you start the tenancy. If the money is not returned to you, you may be able to take the agent to court to get the money back. You'll need to seek legal advice to do this. You have up to six years to try to reclaim the money.

Holding deposit

A landlord might ask you to pay a holding deposit. This payment is usually to reserve the property before you sign a tenancy agreement. You should get this deposit back if the landlord decides not to rent the property to you.

When you pay a holding deposit, make sure to get a receipt showing what you've paid for and how much.

The landlord should also explain, in writing, what happens to the holding deposit if:

- you decide not to go ahead with the tenancy
- the landlord decides not to rent the property to you
- you sign a tenancy agreement and become a tenant

If you go ahead with the tenancy, the landlord may want to keep the holding deposit as a tenancy deposit. They would then need to protect it in a deposit

protection scheme.

More advice

- [Certificates and paperwork](#)
- [Finding a private rental](#)
- [Tenancy rights](#)