



**Horsham
District
Council**

General Information on Living in Short Stay Accommodation



Frequently Asked Questions

June 2010

What kind of help can I expect to receive from Horsham District Council?

The Housing Officer responsible for Short Stay accommodation is Jane Raymond, and she is here to help you with a wide range of queries and issues. She will monitor your rent account on a weekly basis. If you are in receipt of Income Support, Incapacity Benefit, Disability Living Allowance, or on a low income, some or all of your rent may be covered by Housing Benefit. You will, however, be responsible for paying your service charge and you will be advised how much this is when you sign your Tenancy Agreement. If you are unable to pay your service charge at any time, or if your benefit payments have stopped for any reason, you should inform Jane immediately. The Citizens Advice Bureau can also help you to sort out your welfare benefits (see enclosed leaflet for details).

Some of the forms you are asked to fill in may appear to be long and complicated and one of the roles of Jane is to help you to complete and return forms, set up standing orders and help you with any correspondence you have received relating to your Housing Benefit.

If you need help of any kind and are not sure how to go about getting it, the person you need to speak to is Jane Raymond, Housing Officer. You can contact her between 9am and 3pm every weekday on 01403 215210.

Buildings Supervisor:

Brett Peate is the Buildings Supervisor and deals with any maintenance problems. He can be contacted on 01403 215229. It is the responsibility of all residents to help to keep communal areas clean and to notify us of any problems. Please let Brett know about any maintenance requests or any queries relating to the building.

How long will I be in short stay accommodation?

It is very difficult to say how long you will be in short stay accommodation. The situation is heavily reliant on three factors:

- The size of accommodation you require and any specific needs you may have (e.g. no stairs).

- The Council's receipt of nomination rights to vacant properties from one of its registered social landlord



partners. As the Council no longer owns permanent homes, we work with our partners to help people in housing need.

- Your area of choice. We encourage all of our housing applicants to carefully consider their areas of choice. Horsham District Council has always been keen to ensure that people have as much choice as possible and this is why we offer the choice of between 1 and 43 areas. Generally speaking, the more restricted your choice of areas, the harder it is for us to help you.

In most cases, you will only be made one offer of permanent housing in accordance with Horsham District Council's allocation policy and homeless persons legislation.

What if my short stay home needs decorating?

In certain cases, where it is considered necessary, we may provide you with a decorating voucher to cover the cost of paint and brushes. This decorating voucher can be used at Wilkinsons in Horsham and Wilkinsons in Worthing. The decorating voucher can be used to purchase brushes and rollers, etc, but only white or magnolia paint. If you decorate your accommodation in a colour that is not acceptable to the Council, you will be charged the cost of repainting it in a neutral colour when you leave. If in doubt, please check with Jane Raymond or Brett Peate before you start painting.

It is essential that all short stay accommodation is kept clean and free from rubbish and we ask for everybody's co-operation in this. If you have any rubbish or spare furniture that needs to be disposed of, please contact us BEFORE you put it outside in the yard, as we can arrange to have it collected, rather than allowing it to become an eyesore for other residents and attract vermin. If you notice any dumped rubbish, please let us know as soon as possible.

What does my service charge cover?

Your service charge covers heating, hot water, electricity and water rates.

How and where do I pay my rent and/or service charge?

Within a fortnight of moving in to short stay accommodation, you will receive a plastic rent swipe card with your rent account number on it. Please use this card when you make your rental payments at the post office. You can also set up a standing order with your bank. Many people find that this is the safest and easiest way to keep their rent account in order.

How will I know whether or not I'm up to date with my rent and my service charge?

You will be sent a monthly statement showing any money outstanding. If you are unsure about your statement, Jane Raymond will go through it with you. If you are in arrears with your payments for short stay accommodation, legal action may be taken to evict you from the accommodation and an offer of permanent housing may not be made.

What should I do if I am experiencing problems with my neighbours or other residents in my short stay accommodation?

In the first instance, seek advice from the Jane Raymond.

If somebody buzzes me through the door entry system and I don't know them, should I let them in?

The answer to this is categorically, "no". You are responsible for the behaviour of anybody you let into the building. If you don't know them, you cannot possibly know how they are going to behave.

If I know something is going on that shouldn't be, drug dealing for instance, what should I do?

Any information we receive will be treated in complete confidence. We are grateful for any information that prevents a small problem becoming a major one.

Does anybody else have a key to my door?

There are only two keys to the lock on your door. You have one of them and the other is held by Horsham District Council. This means that people who stayed in your accommodation previously DO NOT have a key to your room. If they failed to return their key for some reason, the lock will have been changed. As the keys are security keys, you cannot have another one cut at the locksmith's. Where there are two tenants, you may request the spare key, but if this is lost, you will have to pay for the lock to be changed. The same applies to your mailbox key, with you being given one and the other held by the Council. If you lose your mailbox key, you will be charged for a new lock, as additional keys cannot be cut.

What do I do if I lock myself out or lose my key?

If you lock yourself out or encounter any other problems during office hours, you can call 01403 215210 for help. Outside office hours, contact the Duty Officer on 01403 215100. He/she can arrange for your door to be unlocked but you will incur a charge for this service.

It is particularly important that you never change, or attempt to change, the lock on your door. For your own safety and that of the other residents, authorised people from Horsham District Council must have access to your accommodation. If you fit your own lock, you have denied us this access and it will cost you £200 to have it changed back.

What should I do if I am not satisfied with the service I am receiving during my stay in short stay accommodation?

Horsham District Council is keen to offer a professional and responsive service to all its housing customers, within the limited resources available.

Staff have a duty to explain the housing services available to you and to follow procedures in providing this service in an objective and sensitive manner. In order that Horsham District Council can monitor the service provided and levels of customer satisfaction, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire after you are offered permanent



accommodation. Your constructive comments will be taken into account in trying to improve the service provided.

If you are not satisfied with the service you are receiving during your stay in short stay accommodation, you should contact the Housing Needs Manager, Sandra Carpenter at Horsham District Council, giving details of your complaint. This will be investigated and a written response sent to you as soon as possible.

If you are still dissatisfied with the response given, you may pursue your complaint further by writing to the Head of Housing Services, or take up the matter with one of the Council's elected members.

What happens when I move out of short stay accommodation?

When you receive the keys for your new property, we ask that you try to do the following things in order to allow the next tenant to move in very quickly after you vacate your short stay accommodation. Please remember that they will be in as urgent need as you once were yourself.

- Remove all rubbish and furniture. Any items left behind will be removed by the Council and you will be recharged for the cost.
- Thoroughly clean all rooms before you leave.
- Return door and mail box keys to Horsham District Council offices as quickly as possible. There is no point hanging on to mail box keys so that you can return to the accommodation and collect mail, as locks will be changed within a day of you moving out. You must arrange with the post office to forward on your mail to your new address. Please see the Post Office leaflet entitled "Moving Home?" for further details.

- Continue to pay any rent owing on your swipe card. Within one month of moving out of short stay accommodation, you will be advised of any money owing or credits on your rent account.

What procedure does Horsham District Council follow if residents fail to pay their rent and/or service charge, if they damage the accommodation or if they cause a nuisance to other residents?

When you receive your keys to your accommodation, you will be required to sign a Short Stay Tenancy Agreement. This contains the rules and regulations by which you are expected to abide whilst you are living in short stay accommodation. If you break the conditions of the tenancy, Horsham District Council may terminate your tenancy and take action through the court to regain possession of your accommodation.

Is it true that Horsham District Council will not take any action against me until I owe over £500.00?

No, action may be taken if your account falls more than 4 weeks in arrears.

Why have I been told that I am not allowed to keep a pet in my short stay accommodation?

It is the council's policy not to allow pets in its short stay accommodation. Short stay accommodation is totally unsuitable for most animals. Action will be taken against anyone breaking this rule.

We hope that this booklet has answered most of the questions that you might have. If you have any other queries or concerns, no matter how small, please contact us. Don't let small worries grow!

