

# **Guide to Flat Hunting and Flat Renting in London**

***READ THIS DOCUMENT CAREFULLY BEFORE YOU BEGIN TO LOOK FOR A FLAT. IT IS FOR YOUR BENEFIT.***

## **\*\* Housing Disclaimer \*\***

Grinnell College does not find housing for students, does not endorse any particular housing arrangement, and holds students responsible for securing their own housing. The College makes no representations or warranties and accepts no responsibility regarding the suitability or safety of any housing arrangement entered into by a student.

**General advice: it may take time to find a flat. You are advised to arrive in London *at least five days* in advance of the “recommended arrival date” in order to give yourself adequate time to flat-hunt.**

**You can prepare yourself in advance of arriving in London by consulting websites like [www.loot.com](http://www.loot.com) and [www.thegumtree.com](http://www.thegumtree.com). Also look at [www.studenthousing.lon.ac.uk](http://www.studenthousing.lon.ac.uk), where you will find a publication called the *London Student Housing Guide*, which may be downloaded. This contains much valuable advice, adding detail and example to the advice below. It also offers other valuable downloads, for example of a blank Inventory and Schedule of Condition form.**

### **More specific advice:**

**1. Looking at properties.** Try to view a property during daylight hours with a friend or those with whom you intend to share. This way you can all look for any problems with the accommodation. ***You should not view properties alone.*** Always look at least in pairs.

### **2. Useful flat-hunting equipment.**

- ***A-Z London Street Atlas.*** Page by page street map of London. Available from most newsagents and bookshops. ***Absolutely essential!***
- ***Phonecard.*** Instead of carrying around a large number of coins consider buying a phone card. These are available from Post Offices and many newsagents. Or consider buying an inexpensive mobile phone on a “pay as you talk” plan. Carphone Warehouse (many locations in London) is a good place to buy these.
- ***Program letter.*** Landlords may want evidence of when you will be leaving.

**3. Travelling around London to look at flats.** The Transport for London website ([www.tfl.gov.uk](http://www.tfl.gov.uk)) has a “Journey Planner” feature that will show you the best routes between any two locations. Get to know its features. The Grinnell office and classroom are at 99 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LA. The nearest tube station is Tottenham Court Road on the Northern and Central lines. However, both Covent Garden and Holborn stations on the Piccadilly Line are easy to walk from too.

Pricing and ticketing on the London underground is now hugely complicated by different ticket-purchase arrangements. Revisit Grinnell-in-London Handbook for advice about “Getting around London.” You are also advised to look at the Transport for London website ([www.tfl.gov.uk](http://www.tfl.gov.uk)) and in particular “**Your Guide to Fares and Tickets.**” See: [www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/fares-tickets/2007/downloads/TfL-Fares-Jan-2007.pdf#page=1](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/fares-tickets/2007/downloads/TfL-Fares-Jan-2007.pdf#page=1)

**4. Agencies.** Estate or letting agencies advertise properties which are available to buy or rent (let). There are many agencies in London and there is no limit on the number you can contact. It may be worth telephoning before visiting an agency. It could save a wasted journey.

Some agencies will charge fees for their services; others generate their income from fees or commission charged to the property owner. **You should ask the agency what fees, if any are involved BEFORE you ask them to find you accommodation.** Under the terms of the Accommodation Agencies Act (1953), it is illegal for agencies to charge for registering your details or merely giving out a list of properties for you to look at. Under the same act, agencies can charge you a fee for finding accommodation but only after you have accepted the accommodation. They can also charge you for services which are in the contract, such as an inventory fee or a fee for drawing up a tenancy agreement.

If you are asked to pay what appear to be illegal fees then you should complain to the Tenancy Relations officer for the borough in which the agency is situated. There are unscrupulous agencies which attempt to charge registration fees (they sometimes describe them as ‘contracts’ conditional on you ‘being offered’ accommodation. They then argue that if you are offered very bad property and you decline it, they have met their part of the agreement.)

**5. Newspapers.** The main newspaper source for finding accommodation is *Loot*, which comes out every day. You need to buy or get hold of it on the morning it is printed to have the best chance of securing accommodation. Most local newspapers also carry adverts for private accommodation within their circulation area. If you use this method you need to pick an area and make sure you buy the paper the day it comes out. Ask a local newsagent for information about this. Other newspapers and magazines also carry adverts for accommodation: *The Evening Standard* (Monday to Friday – early edition published mid-morning); *Time Out* (Tuesday); *The Guardian* (on Fridays).

**6. Location of your flat.** You will find it most convenient to live in Zone 1 of the London Underground. Your commutes will be shorter and you will probably have the greatest number of alternative means of commuting. It may be possible to walk to many destinations. You will be able to return home more easily and quickly during the middle of the day or before evening activities like going to the theatre. However, properties in Zone 1 will be more expensive and some neighbourhoods may be less residential.

Living in Zone 2 is also viable, and some students have even chosen to live in Zone 3. Properties in Zone 2 may be less expensive, though not necessarily; properties in Zone 3 are more likely to be less expensive. But your daily commute will most likely take longer from Zone 2; from Zone 3 it will also be more expensive. If you live farther away from the site, be sure your commute is as direct as possible: it’s best to live fairly near a tube station and not to have to change underground lines at all, or at least more than once. Changing lines may add a lot of extra time to your journey.

**7. Problems to look out for.** Try to avoid some of the typical problems students have encountered with private accommodation by checking that:

- toilets, showers, fridges, boilers, etc. *work*
- furniture is fire retardant
- all gas appliances, *i.e.* boilers, fires have a CORGI Gas Safety Certificate: **VERY IMPORTANT**
- fire safety appliances are fitted, *e.g.* extinguishers, smoke detectors, fire blankets, fire escape

You should also:

- **Check the state of the furniture, fixtures and fittings.** Is the flat properly furnished? Is there enough furniture for the number of occupants? There is no fixed definition of 'furnished'. As you are in London for a short time, you do not want to have to buy a great many things. Check before you move in that the flat is adequately furnished to meet your needs. If the landlord agrees to repair or provide furniture before you move in, try to get confirmation of this in writing. If the landlord's intention to meet your request is genuine, he or she should be willing to confirm it in writing, as a signed addendum to the lease.
- **Soft furniture may be a serious fire hazard.** Furniture should have the manufacturer's label on it saying it meets the requirements of the Furniture and Fire Regulations Act (1988). Only furniture purchased before 1952 is exempt from this!
- **Ask about cleaning and repairing.** If the flat is not in a clean condition or if something is in need of repair, seek written assurances that it will be cleaned or repaired before you move in.
- **Consider security issues.** Are the locks on doors and windows secure? *Check that windows can be shut and locked, and that keys are provided for those locks, if applicable.* Windows should be able to be locked no matter what floor the flat is on. If you do not know the area, visit it at night and see how comfortable you feel walking around. What will the walk be like to and from the nearest tube station? Is the entrance to the property in an isolated area or is there dense foliage near the entrance that might conceal an attacker?
- **Check heating.** Check that there is a heating system and that it works. Avoid paraffin heaters. Apart from being extremely smelly they are a dangerous fire hazard and should only be used in well ventilated areas. If you have a Calor gas heater, ensure it is also used in a well ventilated area and get a fireguard if possible. But central heating systems are best. Note that electric central heating is more expensive to use than gas central heating.
- **Mould and damp.** Check for evidence of this (*e.g.* damp marks on ceilings or walls; a musty smell).
- **Check for pests.** Look for mouse droppings or cockroaches in the food cupboards, in the corners of rooms, under furniture, etc. It can be incredibly unpleasant (and unhygienic) to live in a property infested with insects or vermin.

## 8. 'Holding Deposits' and Damage Deposits

- Once a property has been chosen by the tenant, the agent may lawfully charge a 'holding deposit' or retainer for guaranteeing that the property remains available to you before you have produced the full deposit and first month's rent. But always check carefully what the holding deposit commits the landlord or agent to. If you change your mind about taking the flat, the landlord could retain this holding deposit, arguing that he has lost potential rent while 'holding' the property for you. You should check the holding deposit agreement carefully: in some cases it could actually commit you to taking the property even before you have signed a tenancy agreement. **You should also get a receipt for any holding deposit.** This receipt should set down terms and conditions about circumstances in which the money could be returned to you or in what proportion. If you do agree to take the property, the holding deposit will normally become part of the permanent deposit or go towards the first month's rent. It should not simply become an additional deposit over the normal one.
- N.B. It is worth emphasizing the importance of getting a receipt whenever you hand over any money. The receipt should state clearly the amount you have paid, the date, your name, the name and address of the person you are paying the money to, and a description of what you are paying the money for.
- Most landlords will request a damage deposit of four, or possibly, six weeks' rent. This is a deposit against such things as
  - damage,
  - unpaid rent,
  - unpaid bills,
  - missing items,
  - cleaning requiredat the time of the tenants' departure. What the deposit covers and when it would normally be returned should be included in the tenancy agreement.

The Housing Act 2004 introduced a requirement for landlords to protect tenants' deposits in one of three approved schemes. This requirement came into force on 6 April 2007. (At present it does not apply to Holding Deposits.) The landlord is required to protect the tenants' deposit within 14 calendar days of when the deposit was physically received and **to give tenants information about the scheme being used for this protection.** Specifically, the landlord or agent is required to give you: contact details for the tenancy deposit scheme he is using; contact details for the landlord or agent; details of how to apply for the release of the deposit; information explaining the purpose of the deposit; and what to do if there is a dispute about the deposit.

The deposit must now be legally protected by either:

- A custodial scheme. The landlord passes the deposit to the scheme administrator who holds it safe for the tenant. The custodial scheme is called The Deposit Protection Service ([www.depositprotection.com](http://www.depositprotection.com)).
- An insurance scheme. The landlord will have applied to join one of these schemes. He retains the deposit but must notify the administrator of whichever scheme he has joined within 14 days of when this deposit was received. The insurance protects the deposit. The schemes are Tenancy Deposit Solutions Ltd ([www.mydeposit.co.uk](http://www.mydeposit.co.uk)) and The Tenancy Deposit Scheme ([www.tds.gb.com](http://www.tds.gb.com)).

- At the end of the tenancy, you should check whether you are leaving the property and its contents in the condition in which it was let to you – allowing for fair wear and tear – and check that you have paid your rent and any other expenses. Then agree with your landlord or agent how much of the deposit should be returned to you. Within 10 days you should have received the agreed amount of the deposit.
- If you and your landlord or agent can't agree how much of your deposit should be returned, there will be a free service offered by the scheme protecting your deposit to help resolve your dispute. Check the information your landlord or agent should have given you at the beginning of your tenancy for details.

**9. The Tenancy Agreement: what it means.** The tenancy agreement is a legally binding document and must not be broken. Here are some key points:

a) Tenancy agreements can be oral: there is no need for them to be in writing. The law does oblige a landlord on request to provide certain basic details in writing (including the rent payable, the date the tenancy began, the length of any fixed term). You are strongly advised, however, not to rent a property unless you can look at and sign a written tenancy agreement.

b) When you agree to rent a property, the landlord will ask you to sign a tenancy agreement. You will also be required to provide a deposit (usually one month's rent, but possibly six weeks' rent), and one month's rent in advance. **Be sure you read the tenancy agreement thoroughly and understand the exact length (i.e. number of weeks or months) of the agreement before you sign.**

c) You are most likely to be offered an 'Assured Shorthold Tenancy'. Following changes introduced by the 1996 Housing Act, an assured shorthold tenancy can now be created for any length of time (it does not have to be for a minimum of six months, as before). However, the landlord cannot seek possession solely on the grounds that the tenancy has ended until six months have elapsed from the beginning of the initial tenancy (unless there is a breach of contract on the part of the tenant). Tenancies created after February 1997 no longer have to include a notice stating that it is an assured shorthold tenancy. Assured shorthold tenancies are the default unless specific notice is served to the contrary.

d) The main obligations on a tenant are:

- To pay rent,
- Not to damage the property,
- Not to be a nuisance and annoyance to the neighbours,
- To keep all the terms of the tenancy agreement,
- To allow the landlord to inspect and/or carry out repairs, at reasonable notice.

e) The main obligations on a landlord where the agreement is a tenancy are:

- To give exclusive possession and quiet enjoyment (i.e. the landlord must not enter the property at will and must not disturb the tenant).
- To carry out certain repairs
- To carry out annual gas safety checks
- To supply furniture which complies with The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988

f) The flat you rent in London is most likely to be a **joint tenancy**, that is, several students will together sign a tenancy agreement as 'joint and severally liable' tenants. This means that each of the tenants is legally responsible for the whole rent, so that if one defaults on his share, the others are liable.

g) If the landlord wants to recover possession (evict you), then he/she usually has to give you two months written notice before obtaining a court order. He/she has to have legal grounds for getting you out. A landlord would be able to seek to recover possession, for example, if a tenant is found to have:

- caused a nuisance or annoyance to anywhere in the vicinity of the home.
- been convicted of using the property for illegal/immoral purposes.
- committed any arrestable offence in the locality of the house.

h) The amount of rent set at the beginning of the assured shorthold agreement cannot be changed during the fixed term unless there is a clause in your contract which allows this.

i) Once a tenant has committed themselves to a tenancy, the general rule is that they will be liable for the full rent for the whole term if they try to leave early. But --

- If it is furnished property unfit for human habitation from the outset (e.g. infested with bedbugs) they may be allowed to repudiate the contract (i.e. the contract stops, no further rent due)
- If the landlord or his agent induces a tenant to enter a contract by misrepresenting an important fact, the tenant may be able to rescind the contract (i.e. treat it as void from the outset and recover all payments made)
- In both cases, the tenant should take legal advice very quickly; the law is complex and delay is usually fatal. Unless they act quickly, tenants could lose the above rights.

## **10. Inventory and Schedule of Condition**

There is no legal requirement for the landlord to give tenants an inventory of the property, but it is good practice for him to do so. If you are not given an inventory at the time you agree to rent the property, you should make one yourselves as soon as you move in. If you can, do this in the presence of the landlord or agent. The inventory should note:

- The contents of the flat, in detail. This is the inventory.
- The condition and cleanliness of fixtures and fittings (e.g. existing stains on carpets or furniture, any appliances that are not working, etc. – any damage that you do not want to be accused of having caused). This is the schedule of condition.
- Take photographs and/or videos to support your observations. These could form important evidence in the event of a dispute.

Send a copy of the inventory with a polite covering letter to your landlord or agent and ask them to confirm in writing that this is an accurate account of the condition of the property and its contents. Keep a copy of this letter.

When you prepare to move out, clean the flat well. Check its condition and contents against the original inventory and schedule of condition. If possible, invite the landlord or agent to inspect the flat in your presence just before you leave. Get the landlord or agent to sign and date the annotated inventory document. If it is not possible to arrange such a meeting with the landlord, make your own record of its contents and condition on the last day, documenting this with

photographs that can be dated. If possible, get a witness to sign and date it as a true record of the state of the flat and its contents.

## 11. Money matters.

**Rent payments.** You must pay your rent on time and at the intervals stated in your tenancy agreement. If you are unable to honour a payment you must inform the landlord of your problem prior to the due date. *Always obtain a receipt for the rent paid, especially if you are paying cash.*

You should check if the rent includes the cost of utilities – water, gas and electricity.

**Deposits.** Usually the landlord will require one month's rent as a deposit. This is to cover damage to the property, and/or any other breach of the tenancy agreement. Your deposit or a proportion of your deposit will be withheld if you:

- fail to return ALL the keys at the end of your tenancy.
- are responsible for any damage to the property, either wilful or negligent.
- have not cleaned the property adequately.
- have left rubbish which needs removing from the property.

Get a signed receipt for your deposit which details your landlord's name and address, what the deposit is for, how and when it will be refunded.

**Bills.** Gas, electricity and telephone. If utilities (gas and/or electricity) are not included in the rent, you should contact the gas and electricity companies to register bills in the name of all tenants. It is essential that you telephone the companies to get readings taken both on the day you move in and the day you move out. All tenants are jointly responsible for the bills. London Electricity may be contacted on **FREEPHONE 0800 096 9000**. The British Gas General Enquiries number is **0845 609 1122**.

**Telephone.** If you want to reconnect a phone or have one installed, get in touch with your chosen telephone company. British Telecom is the one most commonly used. Check the details of any contract you enter into for a telephone, including payment dates. Ensure you have a clear agreement with your flatmates about usage of the phone and how the bill will be paid. After many years when this was not true, today most British phone bills are itemised call by call, but to be safe you should check that this will be true in your case.

Telephone connection:

- If there is a line ALREADY INSTALLED, then you need to call British Telecom (BT) on **0800 800 150** to enquire about setting up an account.
- If there is NOT a line, then you will need to have a line installed. Call BT to check current prices for having this done.

If you decide not to have a telephone, **strongly consider purchasing a mobile phone** for London and UK calls. At the bottom end of the market, these phones are relatively inexpensive and can be used on a pay-as-you-go basis. You probably will not be able to use the phone when you return to the US, however.

**Television.** Owners of property are **required to have a TV licence**. If there is a TV in your flat, check whether the TV licence fee has been paid. This is a yearly fee (currently £126.50 a year for a colour TV) which must be paid in full. It is, however, possible to claim a refund for

any unused quarter or quarters (three consecutive months) of the year. Visit [www.tvlicensing.co.uk/information](http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/information) for more details. *If you attempt to watch a television without a licence you may be prosecuted and fined up to £1,000. The authorities are very vigilant in this matter, so do not attempt to evade this requirement.*

**Council Tax.** Council tax is based on the value of a dwelling and is normally payable by all residents who are not exempt from it. Before renting a flat, you should discuss with the landlord or his/her agent what the council tax position is for that property. Students can normally claim full or partial exemption, which will either reduce their bill or cancel it out altogether. If a property is occupied solely by full-time students it should be exempt from the council tax. To apply for exemption or discount, students will need to obtain a “Student Certificate” from the program Resident Director verifying their full-time student status. Note that Oberlin College cannot absolutely guarantee that you will receive full exemption from council tax liability, though you should do so.

If any of your flatmates are not studying on the Grinnell-in-London program, the Resident Director will not be able to provide them with “Student Certificates.” If they are not full-time students elsewhere in London, they will be liable for Council Tax. The regulations are as follows, quoted from the *UKCOSA (The Council for International Education) Manual, 2006*:

. . . where all the residents of a property are students the property is exempt for council tax purposes. Where not all the residents of a property are students the students are treated as ‘invisible’.

For convenience, we will refer to any remaining adults, who do not qualify for a status discount, as ‘visible’ adults. . . .

Where a student is sharing a dwelling with a non-student (who is not disregarded for any other reason), the student is treated as ‘invisible’ for council tax purposes and so the council tax bill is reduced by 25 per cent as it is a property with only one ‘visible’ resident.

Thus, if one resident in your flat is not a student, the council tax bill for that flat will be 75 per cent of the full rate.

**Water rates.** Water bills are usually payable by the tenants unless otherwise stated in the tenancy agreement. Check the position before you sign a rental agreement.

**Insurance.** The landlord is responsible for insuring his/her belongings, but tenants are responsible for their own. *It is advisable to insure your own belongings.* It is also advisable to *insure yourself against your own or your flatmates’ negligence*, as you would legally be jointly and severally liable if large-scale damage were caused – for example, if there were a fire that was the responsibility of one of the joint tenants. For both these areas of insurance, check whether your parents’ existing policies might cover you.

**Repairs.** The landlord is responsible for carrying out repairs. Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 sets out the Landlord’s obligations and this clause is included in a standard tenancy agreement. However, you are expected to behave in a ‘tenant-like’ manner and this may involve attending to minor repairs yourself. Ask about the procedure for repairs and clarify responsibility for repairs to non-essential equipment (such as washing machine or television) provided by the landlord.

If repairs need to be carried out, then you should send written details to your landlord and keep a copy. If the repairs are not done within a reasonable amount of time, there may be a health and safety risk. In such a case you may be able to refer it to the Environmental Health Officer of your local authority (borough). If the disrepair is not a health and safety risk, but is related to fixtures and fittings which constitute part of your contract with the landlord, then you might have a contractual case for damages.

**Get all agreements in writing. Always confirm conversations/verbal agreements in writing, keeping a copy of any letters sent. In the event of a dispute, the nature of the evidence you could produce would be important. BE SURE TO GET AND KEEP A COPY OF YOUR RENTAL AGREEMENT. BE SURE TO READ IT CAREFULLY, CHECKING ALL SPECIFIC DETAILS OF YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AND THE LANDLORD'S RESPONSIBILITIES, BEFORE YOU SIGN.**

## **12. Landlord's general responsibilities for the property**

- the structure and exterior of the property.
- installations for the supply of electricity, water and gas (*must supply a Gas Safety Certificate*)
- installations for the heating of space and water.
- repairs to any facilities provided with the tenancy.

## **13. Your general responsibilities.**

- **Furniture:** never remove the landlord's furniture from the property, or store it in the cellar/outhouse/garage without his/her permission.
- **Shelving:** get written permission from your landlord before fitting shelves or making alterations to the property.
- **Posters:** if you use Blu-tack on the walls, you must remove all traces of it at the end of letting. Any grease marks must be cleaned off - some landlords specifically mention ornamenting the walls in their tenancy agreement.
- **Replacing light bulbs:** except florescent tubes or sealed light fittings.
- **Unblocking sinks and drains:** where it is likely you have caused the blockage.
- **Replacing broken windows:** unless caused by vandals.
- **Reporting repairs:** repairs should be reported when they occur. When repairs are required to avoid danger to health, safety risk or serious damage to buildings, contact your landlord immediately unless you have been asked to deal directly with a contractor. Only as a last resort should you contact a contractor if you cannot reach your landlord. Non-urgent repairs should also be reported to your landlord. Repairs reported over the phone should be confirmed in writing. If a dispute over the date repairs were reported arises, then this date will be accepted. *Always keep a copy of all correspondence for reference.* Report all problems as accurately as possible, so that the repair can be done properly.

It is often tempting to try to resolve problems on the telephone alone. Try to remember to put the matter in writing in case it is not resolved quickly. You don't need to write a formal or threatening letter, just a brief note confirming any verbal arrangements.

## 14. Safety.

**a. Gas safety.** The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations require landlords to have all gas appliances serviced annually by a CORGI registered gas installer. You should be shown a copy of the certificate when you agree to rent a property.

**Carbon monoxide poisoning** – There have been some fatal cases of carbon monoxide poisoning involving students. Carbon monoxide is invisible; it has no taste or smell. It is emitted by faulty gas appliances, e.g. boilers, heaters, which are either not burning correctly or are inadequately ventilated. **It is possible to purchase a carbon monoxide detector. One source of these is ARGOS, on New Oxford Street (just round the corner from Tottenham Court Road Station).**

Signs that carbon monoxide is being emitted from an appliance include:

- stains around the appliance
- scorching on any part of it
- a yellow or orange flame instead of blue
- signs of soot
- excessive condensation after use

The symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include:

- unexplained headaches
- sudden dizziness when standing up
- general lethargy
- sickness, diarrhoea, stomach pains, chest pains, muscular weakness

If you suspect an appliance is faulty:

- Do not use the appliance.
- Open the windows and ventilate the room.
- Inform the landlord immediately.
- call the **British Gas emergency number 0800 111 999. If you are in any doubt about whether or not it is a gas emergency, call this number!**

***Do not use the appliance until it has been passed as safe by a CORGI registered engineer.***

Incredibly, some landlords are unwilling to spend the small amount of money required to get the legally-required annual inspection carried out. ***Do not put your life at risk by accepting accommodation with unsafe or untested gas appliances.*** You can call the HSE Gas Safety free on 0800 300 363 for information on your rights. You can also check an engineer's claim to be CORGI registered on 01250 372300.

**b. Fire safety.** Inspect all appliances closely and look for signs of old, loose or burnt out wiring. Do not be afraid to ask questions. Are there clear exit routes which are free from obstruction? Would it be easy to get out in the event of a fire? Are there any internal fire doors (which should remain closed to check the spread of fire in a building)?

**Fire alarms.** If your accommodation has a mains operated fire alarm, it is your landlord's responsibility to keep it in working order. Report any problems to him or her.

**Smoke detectors.** Are there smoke detectors in the property? Would the landlord be willing to install some? They cost less than £10 each and do save lives! If the landlord has not provided them, **buy your own. One source of these is ARGOS, on New Oxford Street (just round the corner from Tottenham Court Road Station).** Never remove batteries or disable smoke detectors. They are installed to protect you.

**The London Fire Brigade carry out free home fire safety checks and will fit a free smoke alarm if necessary. For more details, call 08000 28 44 28.**

**c. Burglary.** If your flat is burgled you should:

- Report it to the **police** immediately.
- Contact your landlord with the **crime reference number** from the police. Without this reference number, he/she cannot make an insurance claim for the damage.
- Give him/her a list of any **necessary repairs**. Remember to provide reasonable access to the property so repairs can be undertaken.

**15. Moving out.** It is important to leave your accommodation the way you found it. Many landlords will not return your deposit in full unless the property is clean and tidy. Consider the following suggestions:

- If you had an Inventory and Schedule of Condition at the start of your tenancy, this will need checking. Missing/broken items will be chargeable. See recommendations in Section 10 above for more advice.
- Clean your own room plus communal areas. If your landlord has to employ a cleaner it will be costly and come out of your deposit. The property must be as clean as it was when you moved in. Remember to clean your stove (both the hob and inside the oven).
- Dispose of rubbish sensibly.
- If relevant, arrange for the phone to be disconnected and the final bill sent to your permanent address.
- Get meter readings from the gas and electricity companies on the day you move out, making a note of these readings yourself.
- Return all the keys to the landlord either in person or by registered post. **Failure to return keys on time may be taken as a continuing tenancy agreement. More rent could be legally demanded.**

Landlords should not use deposit money to pay for “reasonable wear and tear” to the property. You should ask your landlord when you can expect the return of your deposit money, which should be no later than ten days from the date you moved out. To avoid disputes about return of your deposit, it is worth remaining on good terms with your landlord if at all possible, and treating the property with every care.

## **16. If You Need More Help.**

If you are feeling discouraged while you are looking for a flat, come into the Grinnell-in-London office. We may be able to offer advice and suggestions.

Once you have taken a flat: If you encounter problems you cannot handle on your own and you

have rented your flat through a flat finding agency, begin by contacting the agency personnel to see what help or advice they can offer. There is much information about the law and your rights under it available through the internet. Come into the Grinnell-in-London office for initial advice.

Additionally, all local authorities (boroughs) have departments which can help private tenants with problems:

- a) Tenancy Relations Officers (or sometimes Housing Aid Centres) can intervene if your landlord is behaving unlawfully.
- b) Environmental Health Officers can investigate complaints regarding the safety of properties and can serve notices on the landlord requiring repairs and compliance with various statutory safety requirements.

You could also contact **Shelter London**, a housing advice service for people living in London. It provides advice to anyone with a housing problem. Advisers can review your rights and your options. Ring 0808 800 4444 (open 8 am to midnight 7 days a week). Website: [www.shelternet.org.uk](http://www.shelternet.org.uk)