**Accommodation Scams**

Looking for accommodation can be a daunting prosect and unfortunately, we do hear of students being scammed, so here are some of the warning signs to look out for…….

It is important to check the details of the letting agency or landlord you are considering renting with. If you use an agency, you can check on their website their affiliation and redress scheme details – this gives you peace of mind that you are using a genuine agency and that certain standards will be adhered to. Private landlords are not regulated but in some areas they will need a licence to rent their property.

Be wary of adverts that are full of errors. Genuine landlords or property managers will take time to write their advert and proofread it too. If you come across an advert that is full of typos, has poor grammar, and contains excessive punctuation, it was likely created by a scammer.

It’s never a good sign if the person who posted an advert says that they are not able to or don’t want to meet you in person. Be wary if they say they are out of the country or only provide you with a mobile number or PO Box number. Even if you’re not able to meet in person, you can always request a real-time video walkthrough of the property, so you know it exists. A genuine landlord will often want to meet a prospective tenant, either in person or online, so that they can feel comfortable with trusting you as a tenant. Scammers typically don’t want to meet you, since they don’t want you to be able to report them.

Whenever you see a price that looks too good to be true, it probably is. Do your research on rental prices in the area for similar sized properties. A property that is priced below the going market rate in your area should be an immediate red flag.

Be wary of anyone who puts pressure on you to pay before you have seen the property or read the tenancy agreement. It is normal to be asked to pay a holding deposit to reserve the property, but paying large amounts of money in advance should be avoided. Any money should be paid via a website that displays the secure padlock sign and has https in the address bar, and don’t pay anything in cash.

The tenancy agreement you sign should have all the correct information on, including your name, rent, length of the tenancy, address of the property, landlord’s or agency’s contact information – if you are asked to sign a blank tenancy then the landlord could add in their own information afterwards and make you liable for more than you first thought.

Even if you meet someone in person who claims to be the landlord, you should always see the property before signing a tenancy or sending any money to them. It’s easy for someone to say they have a property and create a fake online advert, so you need to see the property in person and make sure the place is available. In most rental scams, the individual advertising the property doesn’t have any way to access the inside of the property. If a landlord instructs you to inspect the property by walking around the outside at your convenience, this is almost certainly a scam. Properties that are available right away are likely either scams or the sign of a disorganized landlord.

Whilst this list isn’t definitive, it will go a long way to help you identify any potential scams.

In short, if something does not feel right, then contact us in The Students’ Union Advice Centre and we can support you through the renting process.