

The Bridge Trust Supported Accommodation Handbook



A BRIDGE FROM HOMELESSNESS

*For information on how to make an application for accommodation or if you'd just like to know more about the services we offer please call our office on
01732 368363*

or take a look at our website:

www.thebridgetrust.org.uk

You can also find copies of our application form and admissions policy to download on our website.

We look forward to hearing from you.

**A LARGE PRINT VERSION OF THIS DOCUMENT IS
AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST**

Welcome to The Bridge Trust Supported Accommodation

We hope your stay here will be pleasant and productive and we are here to help you with any problems and issues you may wish to raise so don't be afraid to ask.

The Bridge Trust is committed to ensuring our service users have as much respect, dignity, independence, choice and control over their own lives as possible.

This guide is to help you understand the rules and guidelines designed to ensure a safe and pleasant environment for everyone. It also provides information on the services and assistance available to you in your accommodation and the surrounding area. Please take the time to read it.

What can I expect from my stay?

The aim of The Bridge Trust is to help homeless people make the journey from homelessness to independent living. We do this by helping you make decisions about your life, assisting you with any problems you have, for example reconciling you with family members. We will set goals together and support you in reaching these.

Ultimately we aim for you to feel confident about moving into your own accommodation, and this may either be via our move-on project which continues the support offered by The Bridge Trust, or via another suitable option.

The Bridge Trust understands this process is different for everyone and some are able to move on fairly quickly and some remain with us for a maximum of two years.

Statement of Purpose

Our Vision:

We work to alleviate homelessness by giving people the opportunity to exercise their right to have a home.

Our Mission:

Founded on Christian principles, we provide single, homeless adults with the best accommodation, support and related services that will empower them to move on into independent living.

Who is here to Support you?

There are seven members of staff within the Trust's support team, they are:

Stephen Taylor:	Support Services Manager
Lynne Mepham:	Support Services Co-ordinator
Sally Ramkurrun:	Supported Housing Officer
Nick Doggett	Supported Housing Officer
Adrian Hill	Supported Housing Officer
Brian Trott:	Housing Revenue Officer

All the staff are here to support you and help you during your stay.

Other Bridge Trust staff which you may also come across are:

John Handley:	Chief Executive
Amanda Mankelow	Receptionist/ Administrator

These staff work from The Bridge Trust's offices in Tonbridge. The contact details are:

The Bridge Trust, 17A Quarry Hill Road, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 2RN

Tel: 01732 368363 info@thebridgetrust.org.uk Web: www.thebridgetrust.org.uk

Where to find our Tonbridge office.



Contents

	Page
1. Welcome to The Bridge Trust	4
2. Your Bridge Trust Accommodation	5
• Your Room	5
3. Your Key Worker	5
4. Room and Building Checks	5
5. Your House and House Meetings	6
6. Resident Participation	6
7. Accommodation Charges	6
8. Alcohol Policy	7
9. Drugs Policy	7
10. Smoking	7
11. The Support Service	8
12. Support Plans	8
13. What we do not provide	9
14. Other type of support on offer	9
15. Engaging with the Housing Support Service	9
16. Risk Assessment	9
17. What is Expected Of You	10
18. What You Can Expect From The Bridge Trust	10
19. Abandonment	10
20. Health and Safety	10
21. Warnings, PEN's and Appeals	11
22. Confidentiality	11
23. Equal Opportunities	12
24. Protection From Abuse	13
25. Harassment and Violence	13
26. TVs and other electrical items	13
27. Fire Drill and Fire Safety	14
28. Catering	14
29. Contacting staff out of hours	14
30. Court Fines	14
31. Visitors	14
32. Mail	14
33. Medication and Health	15
34. Medical Emergencies	15
35. Matters of Faith and Belief	15
36. Proof Of Income and Identification Documents	15
37. Laundry	15
38. Pets	15
39. Leaving Us and Moving On	15
40. Storage of Personal Belongings	16
41. Complaints	16
42. Making a complaint to Supporting People	16
43. Supporting People and Having your Say—Service User Panel	17
Service User Charter	18

Your Key Worker will go through this handbook with you.

PLEASE NOTE THAT IN THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENT THE WORD 'HOUSE' SHOULD BE REGARDED AS REFERRING TO ANY OF THE FIVE RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES OWNED OR MANAGED BY THE BRIDGE TRUST INCLUDING THE FLATS IN SOUTHBOROUGH

1. Welcome to the Bridge Trust

Our Aim and Values

The Bridge Trust (TBT) aims to offer practical and goal-focused support to 23 residents and 3 ex-residents who have moved on into independent living, many of whom have a history of rough sleeping or an unsettled accommodation history. The housing related support is holistic, and includes close work with other agencies to ensure residents' needs and goals are met.

TBT supported temporary housing service aims to provide you with access to services that will:

- Promote your independence.
- Give you choice about the way services are delivered.
- Maximise your privacy and dignity.
- Safeguard your welfare.

Our Purpose

The Bridge Trust's purpose is to give you support in moving from a situation of homelessness to one of having your own secure accommodation, from perhaps benefits dependency to paid employment, or from lacking control over your own lives to being able to take control. Your stay with The Bridge Trust should therefore be a time of increasing empowerment.

There are many definitions of empowerment but the following is the definition to which the Trust adheres and strives to work by:

Empowerment may be defined as "the means by which individuals, groups and/or communities become able to take control of their own circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others to maximise the quality of their lives".

Empowerment means:

- having increased control over your own life;
- having information with which to make choices;
- being listened to;
- being responded to based on what has been said; and
- sharing appropriate power.

Being empowered leads to:

- the reality of having control – of actually being able to make choices, give instructions, take charge;
- the sense of being empowered – of feeling competent, confident, and respected;
- the image of being empowered – of being seen as someone who has power and control, and is able to use it.

We aim to empower our residents by a number of ways of which the following are perhaps the most important:

- Our Resident Participation strategy which is designed to give you a say in matters which most affect your lives with us.
- Our Support Planning programme whereby in conjunction with your keyworker you set goals

along your personal road to independence and work to achieve them. Your Support Plan should be the culmination of a process of discussion and negotiation between you and your keyworker. To that end you have the right to initiate a review of your Plan at any time.

Your keyworker will discuss the issue of 'empowerment' and what it means in relation to your stay with the Trust at your first keyworking session.

2. Your Accommodation

The Bridge Trust (TBT) manages a total of 22 individual rooms split between five properties within Tunbridge Wells, Southborough and Tonbridge. The properties range in size between a seven bedroom house to a shared two bedroom flat.

You will be allocated a specific room in one of our houses, and will share kitchen and bathroom facilities with all the other in your house.

The Bridge Trust (TBT) is a provider of supported accommodation. This means that during your stay, you will be expected to participate with both internal staff and external agencies that will help you deal with any outstanding support issues and assist you into long-term independent accommodation.

Your room

You will be allocated a specific room in one of our properties. This is yours and you will be given keys to your bedroom door and the front door of the property.

You must keep these doors locked. If you lose a key you will be liable for the full cost of replacing it. We will take an inventory of your room when you move in and you are responsible for handing it back to us in the same condition at the end of your stay.

Your room should contain all the items detailed on the inventory at the back of your Licence Agreement. If for any reason your room does not have all of the items on the inventory please ensure that the staff member who books you in makes a note to that effect.

Please note that residents' belongings are not insured under the Trust's policy. If property belonging to the Trust is taken from your room, you are liable for the cost of replacement.

After consultation with staff you may be able to redecorate your room. However you may be required to pay all the costs involved in redecorating your room depending on the state of the decoration when you moved in.

You may also add your own possessions to your room and/or rearrange the furniture provided so long as in doing so you do not cause a hazard e.g. the furniture is placed in such a way as to seriously restrict exit from your room in the event of a fire.

3. Your Key Worker

You will be allocated a Key Worker within 24 hours of moving into a TBT house. Your Key Worker will meet with you as soon as possible after your move in day and on a weekly basis after this.

Participating in key working is an essential part of maintaining your licence agreement and attendance is compulsory. **If you do not engage you will lose your accommodation.**

4. Room and Building Checks

Your room

Your room will be checked regularly both to see if any repairs are needed and that you are keeping your room in good order. Staff should give you 24 hours notice of their intention to check your room. Although staff have the right to enter your room at any time, staff will not normally enter your

room except for room checks. Two important exceptions to that are if staff fear for the safety of a rooms occupant or there is need to enter the room to effect an emergency repair. By signing your License Agreement you have agreed to co-operate with this.

5. Your House and Resident Forums

You share your house with between one and six other people (depending on which house you are living in) and you are communally responsible for the fixtures, fittings and general cleanliness of all the communal areas.

Resident Forums have a standard agenda but you are encouraged to include items that are of importance to you. There will also be information and consultation on any changes in our policy, Health and Safety issues, feedback on maintenance issues and it's another chance to access a staff member in an informal setting. These Resident Forums can also be a good place to address issues that come up as a part of communal living, such as dealing with noise, and any other minor disagreements that may arise between residents.

6. Resident Participation

Resident Participation – is all about getting involved in decisions about where you live. It is also about you recognising your ability to bring positive change.

Your views about your accommodation and TBT are important to us and there are a number of ways for you to let us know what you think. If it is a problem and it is urgent, please speak to any member of staff, your Key Worker if possible. If you have a confidential issue please ask your House Rep to bring your complaint/suggestion to the attention of staff. You may also bring up any issues in your Key Working sessions or at your Three Month Review. Before you leave we will do an exit interview with you. This will give you the chance to talk about your experience of staying here and tell us what was good and what could have been better.

There are a variety of ways you can get involved, from verbal feedback up to sitting on a consultation review panel. The minimum you are expected to commit to is attendance at your monthly Resident Forum.

If there is something that is stopping you becoming more involved then please speak to your keyworker. This can be anything like being nervous of sitting in a meeting or not understanding our policies because they are too long. Just by letting us know you are already helping to bring change for yourself and maybe other residents who were having the same problem.

There is a full policy and procedure for Resident Participation, a copy of which is available on request.

7. Accommodation Charges

Your weekly charge is made up as follows (the amounts will vary depending on which property you are accommodated in):

- Licence charge: this pays for the accommodation.
- Service charge: this covers the provision of communal services including your use of utilities (gas, electricity, water) and security such as the fire equipment.

These charges are reviewed every 6 months and you will be notified in advance of any changes. The charges are detailed on your Licence Agreement which you would have received a copy of when you moved in.

Depending on your income and personal circumstances your rent would normally be covered by Housing Benefit if you are on full DWP benefits. **However the Service Charge will not and will need to be met by you personally as this is ineligible for Housing Benefit.** If you are not in receipt of the full Housing Benefit because of your income and personal circumstances then the

shortfall in accommodation charges will need to be met by you personally.

For more information about charges, or about your entitlement to Housing Benefit or other welfare benefits please contact your Key Worker who can either advise you themselves or put you in touch with a specialist agency.

Please note that as a matter of routine practice The Bridge Trust will apply for your service charge to be deducted from your benefits at source. However it can take many weeks before the Direct Payments start and until they do you are liable to make the required payments yourself.

8. Alcohol Policy

Our houses are designated as either 'DRY' or 'WET' houses. The rules regarding this may change at the discretion of the staff team though they are required to inform you of any change beforehand. You will be informed which type of house you will be moving into when you sign your licence agreement.

In a 'Wet House' you are not allowed to consume or make an open display of alcohol or alcohol containers in any communal area of our houses. In this case 'communal areas' refers not only to any shared areas in the house but also any outside area that is part of the property. In a 'Wet' house you are however allowed to drink alcohol in your own bedroom.

In a 'Dry House' it will be classed as a breach of your Licence Agreement to drink or display alcohol or alcohol containers anywhere on the property. This means that you may not consume alcohol in your room nor in any shared areas of the property whether indoors or outdoors.

Unless you are expressly told otherwise by a member of the Support staff you should assume your house is a 'Dry House'.

9. Drugs Policy

The Bridge Trust does not support the use of any substances (including prescribed drugs and alcohol) in such a way that may endanger the physical, emotional or mental health and safety of anyone living or working at our property – or our neighbours. However, TBT recognises that some residents will be coming into its houses with a history of substance misuse.

The Bridge Trust is committed to providing all residents with a safe environment and one in which we hope you will be able to reduce drug related harm – both for yourself and others.

TBT offers residents:-

- A Key Worker who can offer support on a range of issues.
- Referrals to specialist dependency agencies.
- Advice and information on harm minimisation and safe practices.
- Sharps bins for the disposal of needles.
- Information about needle exchange services.

Each of our houses have the following rules, which are for your own safety and the safety of others:-
Dealing: anyone suspected of supplying controlled or illegal drugs on the premises will be asked to leave immediately and their details will be passed on to the police.

Disposal of needles: anyone found to be discarding or storing needles in a dangerous manner, or leaving them anywhere in or around the building will be issued with a warning.

10. Smoking and Vaping (use of E-cigarettes etc)

Smoking is not allowed in any communal area of the house. You may smoke in your own bedroom, or that of another resident if they have given their permission for you to do so. Smoking is not allowed in your bedroom if anyone who enters your bedroom objects. If you smoke in your bedroom

you must keep your bedroom door closed. Smoking is allowed in the garden or any other outside area. Breaching the rules on smoking is a criminal offence and will be treated as a serious breach of the Licence Agreement.

Vaping is not allowed in any communal area of the house. You may vape in your own bedroom, or that of another resident if they have given their permission for you to do so. Vaping is not allowed in your bedroom if anyone who enters your bedroom objects. If you vape in your bedroom you must keep your bedroom door closed. Vaping is allowed in the garden or any other outside area. Whilst ignoring the above rules about vaping is not breaking the law it is still a breach of your Licence Agreement.

Please note that despite what you may have heard, standing in a room where smoking is not permitted whilst leaning out of the window and smoking is still breaking the law and therefore not allowed.

From time to time vaping is allowed in some houses though even then not in the kitchen or dining area and not if any fellow resident or visitor objects. Unless you are told otherwise by a member of the Support staff you should assume that vaping is not allowed in your house.

11. The Support Service

The main task of the Key Worker is to help you live as independently as possible and help you to access any support you need from other agencies, such as Social Services, Substance Misuse Services or other specialist agencies.

Your Key Worker will meet with you regularly and you must attend these meetings. Failure to do so could put your accommodation at risk.

Your Key Worker will talk with you about any support needs you have and the best way in which your needs can be met. You will be asked to sign an individual Support Plan which sets out the services you can expect to receive, and how, when and by whom they will be delivered.

They will be in regular contact with Social Services, healthcare professionals, family members, etc., on your behalf and with your consent.

12. Support Plans

Support Plans

Your Key Worker offers a flexible and personalised support that takes into account your own particular needs.

The focus of the support planning service is the Support Plan. It is therefore expected that you fully engage with the support service in order to meet the requirements of the licence agreement.

Once this has taken place, your Key Worker can then write up the first initial Support Plan. This will take place within one week. A full Support Plan will take place within 2 months of you entering the house. These are reviewed every two months. Every resident signs and is given a copy; the original is kept in your file in the office.

What are Support Plans?

- A Support Plan is a document that is used to record your support needs that are identified when you and your Key Worker meet.
- A Support Plan will act as an agreement between you and your Key Worker as to the type of support you will receive and how this will take place.
- You will receive a copy of the Support Plan. If you do not agree with any of the contents please tell your Key Worker. You have the right to appeal against the contents of your Support Plan if you disagree with the contents. In order to have your case looked into please contact the

Support Services Co-ordinator who is based at the Tonbridge office.

What is in a Support Plan?

- The Support Plan contains relevant information about you e.g. name, address, tenancy start date, service start date
- Support Plans also contain information and details of other professionals and support agencies involved in your service e.g. Doctor, other health professionals, Social Worker etc
- Support Plans identify any support needs and then lists the action to be taken, by whom and to what timescale.
- There is space for you and anyone involved in the service to add their comments. If you are happy with the content and the agreed actions then you should sign it and be provided with a copy.

When and how are Support Plans Reviewed?

A review is when you, your Key Worker and other relevant people look through the Support Plan. A Support Plan review involves looking at each of the identified support needs and reviews your progress and any outcomes of each action. This will involve all people present at the review and we will actively seek your point of view. From these discussions we will decide:

- Are there any more support needs?
- If support needs are ongoing how are they progressing?
- If support needs have been met, are there any new ones or can the case be closed?
- A review is always a good opportunity for you to discuss how you feel the Support Service is going and any changes you would like to make.
- After you and your Key Worker have reviewed the Support Plan the Key Work Manager will sign this off.

Support plan reviews will be held every two months, however you may request a review whenever you feel it is necessary.

13. What We Do Not Provide

We are not able to provide the following type of service:

- personal care or administer your medication; if you need this sort of help you should let your Key Worker know who will arrange support to access specialist services that can assist you.
- professional counselling; but we can listen and offer advice in directing you to counselling services (e.g. bereavement, anger management, substance misuse).

The general aim of the Supported Housing Service is to provide you with support in maintaining your short-term accommodation and to work with you towards independent living skills and integration into the local community.

14. Other Types of Support on Offer

- Advice on housing rights and responsibilities contained within the Licence Agreement. This includes issues such as accommodation charges arrears, maintenance, house rules and threats to your licence agreement.
- Help to claim housing benefit and other benefits entitlement. This can include information, help with form filling and support in attending interviews.
- Advice and support on other matters where the Key Worker will help access other services that may be able to help e.g. Careers Advice, Citizens Advice Bureau, leisure facilities, support groups, etc.
- Advice on money management, advice on dealing with debts. Help with understanding bills and advice on methods of payment. However staff are not specialist debt advisors and may therefore refer you to more specialist services.

- Assistance with dealing with house-mate disputes.
- Support in achieving own personal goals (e.g. attending part time training, going back to work, paying off debts etc.)

Your Key Worker will work with you and other agencies to find, apply for and obtain appropriate move-on accommodation.

15. Engaging with the Bridge Trusts Housing Support Service

The support service will only be provided to those people who want the service and are willing to engage with their Key Worker. TBT provides support planning services which you are expected to engage with - if you do not you may lose your accommodation.

16. Risk Assessment

What is a Risk Assessment?

A Risk Assessment is a process that you will do with your Key Worker soon after you move in to our accommodation. It helps us understand you and your past history.

Key Points

There may have been times in the past where you have harmed, or felt like harming, yourself or somebody else. If you have these feelings now, we want to help you reach a point where you feel able to discuss them with staff. This way, we hope to minimise the chances of you acting upon them.

What does the risk assessment process involve?

In your first few sessions with your Key Worker, they will discuss with you in some detail your past history. By talking together, we hope that we can build up a clear picture of if and when you might be at risk of harming yourself, and what helps you stay safe. You will also discuss whether you have ever harmed other people or felt like harming other people. You will be looking at what makes you angry and any coping strategies that you have identified. You will also discuss what could and should happen if you feel violent in the future.

The information that you discuss will be recorded on your Risk Assessment form and a copy will be kept in your file. TBT reviews Risk Assessments every 12 months and after any significant incident. You have the right to ask for a review of your most recent Risk Assessment at any time.

The Bridge Trust believes in risk management rather than risk avoidance. Taking risks is part of life and as part of your progress towards becoming independent you will be encouraged to take risks and go a little beyond your comfort zone. Any decision to do so will of course be yours alone. Our role will be to help you decide what risks you want to take, to discuss with you what the possible consequences are and to support you

17. What is Expected of You?

To be considered for the Support Service you will need to acknowledge your support needs and be willing to receive the agreed support.

You must be willing to meet your Key Worker on a regular basis to receive the agreed support. The Bridge Trust has a Non-Engagement Policy, whereby the service may be withdrawn if appointments are not kept. This means that if you repeatedly miss your appointments without good reason you may lose your accommodation.

You must be willing to work with your Key Worker to achieve the actions recorded in your Support Plan.

Staff should be able to work in a safe environment where they are not subjected to any physical or verbal abuse. It is expected that you do not attend appointments under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

18. What You Can Expect From The Bridge Trust

- Fair treatment.
- To offer a supportive and non-judgemental service.
- To be punctual in attending appointments.
- To give reasonable notice if we are unable to keep an appointment if an emergency has arisen.
- To work within the confidentiality policy, observing the procedures for reporting abuse or neglect.

19. Abandonment

We require 7 days notice of your intention to vacate your room. We ask that you inform the staff if you intend to be away for two nights or more because if you have not been seen for two nights we may enter your room to check that you are still in residence and have not come to any harm. If you are not seen for more than two days we may put a notice of abandonment on your room; if you do not then contact us within 14 days you will lose your accommodation. Any non-perishable personal belongings left following your departure will be stored for 28 days only, without liability for loss or damage.

20. Health and Safety

Please do your bit to keep the building safe. Do not block fire exits and if you see anyone doing something you think is not safe, please let the staff know.

The staff check each area regularly to make sure no hazardous objects are lying about. If you see something that is broken or you think might be dangerous, please report it to the staff straightaway.

Our repairs schedule is as follows:

Emergency repairs – the work will be completed or started within 48 hours.

Urgent repairs – the work will be completed within five working days.

Non-urgent or routine repairs – the work will be completed within 28 days.

It is also important that you keep your accommodation secure. Therefore do not let anyone except your own visitors into the house. Do not leave doors and windows open when there is no one around and especially not at night.

You will be given a health and safety tour of your house showing fire exits, door releases, extinguishers, toilets, and other facilities.

21. Warnings, PEN's and Appeals

If you breach your licence agreement or any of the policies of the Trust, you may be issued with a warning. Common reasons for warnings include unacceptable accommodation charge arrears, failure to engage with the support process, and unacceptable behaviour towards staff or fellow residents.

The Bridge Trust has a three stage warning procedure, after which you will be issued with a Pre-Eviction Notice of the Trust's intention to terminate your Licence Agreement and evict you in 28 days time.

Please see the *Breaches of Licence Agreement* and *Arrears Management Policies and Procedures* for further information.

A Notice of Immediate Eviction can be issued immediately if you found to have committed a serious breach of your licence agreement, such as assaulting a member of staff or another resident. You will be asked to leave the building immediately and your licence agreement will be terminated.

You have the right to appeal any warning or eviction notice if you feel that it has been given unfairly, but it will not be withdrawn until after the outcome of the appeal. Please see the *Appeals Procedure* for further information.

22. Confidentiality

Within The Bridge Trust, we treat the information you give us about yourself very carefully.

Anything that you tell us is kept confidential within the staff team. We will only talk to other workers outside the Trust about you if you have given us your permission to do so. The only time that we may not ask your permission first is if we think that you are at risk of harming yourself or someone else. Then we have a duty to let another organisation or person know that there is a risk to them or that you may hurt yourself.

The assessments and paperwork that we do for you are kept on your personal file. You have the right to look at this file if you would like to. If you want to see your file, you should talk about it with your Key Worker and request to do so. Please be aware that you will have to wait a full working day between your request being made and your being able to access your file.

If there is anything on your file about anyone else, we will remove that before you look at the file. If you think anything on the file is wrong or out of date, you may ask us to change or delete that information. If we agree that the information is incorrect, we will do so. If we refuse to delete certain information from your file at your request, we will tell you in writing why that is.

Requests for Information by Other Individuals and Organisations

As a rule, you must give written consent before TBT can disclose personal data (information) to other individuals or organisations. The exceptions to this rule are organisations who may need to make enquires about you to fulfil their statutory duties:

Police, Council tax offices, Courts and Court officers, Hospitals and Health Authorities, Local Authority (housing departments), Education Authorities, Social Services, Probation Service.

The following basic information about you can be released to the above organisations without prior consent, provided the information requested is relevant to the purpose of the enquiry;

Your name
Date of licence agreement
Present address
Previous addresses
Previous landlord
Referral Agency
HB change of circumstances
Forwarding address/ Employer details

The following types of “sensitive” information **WILL NOT** be released to the above organisations.

Action against licence agreement
Legal details - injunctions, orders etc.
Family relationships
Race/ ethnic origin
Religious beliefs
Trade union affiliations
Medical details
Sexual life/ orientation
Criminal proceedings/convictions
Financial details

A full copy of our *Confidentiality* Policy can be provided on request.

23. Equal Opportunities

The Bridge Trust is committed to not discriminating against people for any reason at all. If you

would like to see a copy of our full *Equal Opportunities* Policy and Practice Guidelines, please ask your Key Worker.

In practice, this means that we will tailor our work to the individual needs of each resident. If you need extra help with reading or writing for example, we will make sure that you get it. There are lots of other ways in which we can help you to meet your needs, whether these are religious, cultural or to do with an illness or disability.

If a resident is behaving in a discriminatory manner, the staff team will challenge this and may give warnings. This includes activities like making racist jokes or comments, making homophobic jokes, or comments or any behaviour which might make a resident feel insecure or persecuted. If another resident is making you feel this way, please talk to a member of staff about it and we will try to put a stop to it.

During your stay you have the right to be protected from abuse or harassment. We will take allegations of this nature extremely seriously. Please speak to your Key Worker or another member of staff if you feel that you are being abused or harassed.

24. Protection From Abuse

The Bridge Trust is committed to protecting its vulnerable residents from abuse. If you feel that you are being abused in any way – physically, emotionally, financially or sexually – our booklet ‘Guide To Good Health’ tells you how to get help. If you prefer you can speak, in confidence, to your Key Worker.

Who abuses?

It can be anybody, and it is difficult to deal with because they are people you should be able to trust:

- A member of your family
- A friend
- Your doctor
- Your teacher
- Your social worker
- Your carer
- A member of staff
- Somebody working or volunteering at an organisation you attend

There are many types of abuse:

- Physical - being rough with you, hitting, bullying
- Emotional - shouting, humiliating or threatening you
- Financial - stealing your money or pressuring you to give money to someone when you don't want to
- Neglect - placing you at risk by not providing the support you need
- Misuse of medicine - forcing you to have medicine you don't need or withholding your medicine
- Sexual - unwanted sexual contact, including sexual conversations
- Discriminatory - name calling and treating you less well because of your culture, disability or gender
- Institutional - not giving you choices about how you live, when you eat or how you dress

What can I do if I am being abused?

Talk to your Key Worker. He or she is trained to know what to do and will help and support you. Our staff have received training on how to help people who are experiencing abuse and they will be happy to help you.

If your Key Worker is the person who is abusing you please tell another member of staff. If you feel you cannot tell any of the staff please contact the Police.

25. Harassment and Violence

It is our policy that each individual has the right to retain their personal dignity and independence. Each person has the right to have their social and emotional needs, culture, politics, gender and sexual orientation respected. Due to these principles harassment is not tolerated. Racial, sexual or other harassment towards other residents or staff will result in eviction. Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs will not be accepted as an excuse for harassment.

Violence will result in eviction whether this is to residents, staff, visitors or property. We may also evict for threats of violence.

26. Television and Other Electrical Items

If you wish to have your own TV in your room you are free to do so, BUT, you are responsible for getting your own TV Licence which is a requirement by law.

Residents are allowed to use a DVD player in the lounge but staff have the right to stop the showing of films which they deem unsuitable.

All electrical items used on Bridge Trust property must be safe for use and the Trust reserves the right to check any item you wish to use.

27. Fire Drill and Fire Safety

Please read the fire drill notices in your house and familiarise yourself with the location of fire extinguishers and most importantly the exit points. If the fire alarm sounds please exit the building immediately, closing all doors behind you. You should not re-enter the building until you are certain it is safe to do so.

Tampering with fire safety equipment and wedging open fire doors are viewed very seriously by The Bridge Trust. Doing either of those could result in you losing your accommodation.

28. Catering

The Bridge Trust is self catering throughout. If you would like advice with shopping, cooking or budgeting, staff will be pleased to advise you where you might access help. There is an emergency food store which can be used in extreme emergencies such as when waiting for your first pay or benefits cheque to arrive. However supplies are very limited and are allocated sparingly. Please let staff know if you have any dietary requirements.

29. Contacting Staff out of Hours

Support outside of normal office hours or at the weekend can be accessed by telephone. Should a problem arise outside office hours which needs immediate staff attention please contact the staff member on-call (the relevant telephone number will be displayed on the office door). In the event of needing the emergency services of Police, Fire or Ambulance dial 999 immediately. Only after speaking to the relevant service should you contact the staff member on-call.

30. Court Fines

It may be that you are under considerable pressure with the knowledge that you have not addressed the problem of outstanding fines to the courts be it for previous offences or other situations. It might be a relief to you to know that we would be willing to help you sort out the problem with a fines officer, or other creditors, who at the end of the day only want to clear their books, leaving you with the whole affair as history. Of course we cannot pay your fines for you but will support you in coming to a mutually satisfactory arrangement with your creditors. Come and talk it over with your Key Worker and let us help you sort it out.

31. Visitors

You may have visitors in your room or in the communal areas but they must leave the premises before the times set out in your Licence Agreement. Please remember that you are responsible for the behaviour of your visitors. Staff retain the right to refuse entry to any visitors and your visitors are required to leave if requested to do so by staff. Please respect the rights of the other residents of your house to the quiet enjoyment of the house. Permission may in exceptional circumstances be granted for visitors to be allowed to stay overnight. This permission must be obtained by staff beforehand.

No visitors aged 17 years or younger are allowed into any of The Bridge Trust houses without prior written permission from staff.

32. Mail

All mail is delivered through the front door letterbox of the house. Staff do not have the right to open your mail. To ensure that you get letters and other documents from The Bridge Trust staff will sometimes push them under the door to your room.

33. Medication and Health

You should register with a GP and a dentist soon after your arrival. Please ask the staff for a list of local surgeries. For details of mental health, drug, alcohol and other support agencies please ask your Key Worker. If you are worried about visiting your GP staff may be able to accompany you but please remember to give sufficient notice.

Staff are not allowed to hold your medication for you, and neither are they allowed to hand out pain-killers for headaches or other ailments.

34. Medical Emergencies

If the situation is serious you should call for an ambulance immediately.

Staff cannot be responsible for taking you to hospital, however, should they do so, they are not required to wait until you are discharged.

35. Matters of Faith and Belief

Whilst The Bridge Trust is a Christian based charity, our service is open to those of all faiths and those of none. Details of local places of worship are included in your Guide To Good Health which is included in your Welcome Pack.

Should you need assistance in fulfilling any religious or spiritual observances whilst staying with us, please talk to your Key Worker who will explain what assistance we can provide.

36. Proof of Income and Identification Documents

If you are unemployed the member of staff who booked you in will have explained to you that you need to get proof of income from the DWP or Job Centre as soon as you can after your arrival and give it to a staff member.

You also have to provide two forms of ID, staff will explain to you what ID is acceptable.

The time is limited in which the local council will accept this information. Failure to provide it in time will almost certainly result in no housing Benefit being paid, and unless you have other means with which to pay the rent you will be asked to leave.

If you are in paid employment you will need to provide staff with details of your employer and place of work. You should discuss with the person who books you in whether you might still be eligible for

Housing Benefit and what you will need to do if you were to make a claim.

37. Laundry

Washing Machines and tumble dryers are available, free of charge for your personal laundry. You are also responsible for laundering your own bedding. The Bridge Trust is not responsible for loss of bedding or clothing from the laundry room.

38. Pets

Residents require written permission from The Bridge Trust before they are allowed to keep pets of any kind in their rooms. Dogs (except guide dogs) and cats are not permitted on Bridge Trust property.

39. Leaving Us and Moving On

The Bridge Trust's purpose is to enable and empower you to move on into your own independent accommodation at the end of your stay with us. From the day you first meet your Key Worker you will be working together towards this goal.

There are many different avenues for this to be achieved including private renting, live in work, moving in with friends or family or perhaps taking up a social housing tenancy. Which of those is the best avenue for you to gain housing independence will depend on such factors as your own personal desires for your future, your previous history and current support needs, and of course what is available.

As you are probably already aware, finding secure accommodation is not always easy and this is why you and your Key Worker will have to do a lot of work with external agencies to find you long-term accommodation. The people that usually get prioritised are those who are prepared to join in with the process and make an effort to work with staff on a regular basis. This means attending meetings, and going to appointments. It also helps if you keep up to date with your accommodation charge payments.

At the end of your stay with TBT, you will be asked to attend an exit interview.

40. Storage of Personal Belongings

We will store non-perishable personal belongings for 28 days after you leave The Bridge Trust, after which time we will dispose of them. If you are evicted by the bailiffs we will only keep your belongings for 14 days. If you wish to collect belongings we have stored you will need to make an appointment to do so as they are not stored at your former place of residence.

41. Complaints

The Bridge Trust aims to provide an efficient and sensitive housing service to all our residents but if you feel that we have fallen short of our aim please raise your concern with one of the support workers. You have the right to complain if you feel that you have been treated unfairly whether by TBT or a fellow resident/s or that you have received poor service from the Trust.

The Bridge Trust has alternative procedures for handling complaints depending on whether you are complaining about the service The Bridge Trust provides or about the behaviour of another resident. Please be assured that The Bridge Trust takes either type of complaint equally seriously.

You can make both informal and formal complaints; a copy of the formal procedures should be included in your Welcome Pack. The names and addresses of those to appeal to within TBT and time scales are also contained in the procedure.

How to make a complaint

You can make both informal and formal complaints either verbally or in writing (complaint forms are

available in the Tonbridge office or from any Support Services staff member). You can initially make a complaint to your Key Worker (or any other member of staff); they will record your complaint and try to resolve the issue for you. If the outcome is not to your satisfaction your Key Worker will suggest you then make a formal complaint.

Formal complaints will be looked into by the complaints coordinator (who this is will depend on the nature of your complaint and you should be told who will be dealing with the complaint at the time of making it). You should receive a reply within a maximum of 10 working days.

42. Making a Complaint to Kent County Council

KCC is committed to contracting quality services that respond to the needs of service users and their representatives. All organisations providing a KCC contracted service must operate a robust complaints policy and procedure that is assessed as part of the monitoring, review and accreditation process.

The KCC team is governed by the Kent and Medway Adult Protection Procedures and will use the Adult Protection protocols to raise concerns with other key stakeholders. Any complaint raised more than 1 year after the issue was raised or resolved will not normally be investigated.

Stage 1

Please start by contacting The Bridge Trust and using their complaints procedure, as most problems can be resolved in this way. However, if your complaint relates to something that you believe threatens your health, safety or welfare, or if you are not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint made to us, please contact Supporting People:

If you do need to complain directly to Supporting People about us or other service users, or if your complaint is about the Supporting People team, then please write to:

Kent County Council
Supporting People
Room 4.02
Sessions House, County Hall
Maidstone,
Kent.
ME14 1XQ

or you can phone the KCC team on 01622 694511 or email them at

supportingpeopleteam@kent.gov.uk.

Your complaint will be investigated by a senior officer.

Stage 2

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint following Stage 1, please write to:

The Managing Director (Communities)
Invicta House
County Hall
Maidstone
Kent
ME14 1XX

What if your complaint is still not resolved?

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint following Stage 1, you have the right to take your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman, who is an independent and impartial person appointed by central government to investigate complaints about maladministration by local authorities.

The Local Government Ombudsman
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London
SW1P 4QP

Visit the Local Government Ombudsman website at

www.lgo.org.uk

Advice line: 0845 602 1983

43. KCC and Having Your Say—Service User Panel

This forum meets 4 times a year to discuss KCC's commissioned homelessness services and gives you a chance to tell us your ideas and opinions. There are lots of ways to get involved:

- Feedback on current services.
- Helping us develop the strategy or policies.
- Conferences for service users.
- Informal coffee mornings/meetings.
- Websites or leaflets we are considering.
- Changes to the current programme.
- Newsletters/magazines.
- Meetings/focus groups.
- Becoming a mystery shopper.

You can be involved as often or as little as you like. If you would like more information or would like to get involved in the panel then contact them:

Email: [**supportingpeopleteam@kent.gov.uk**](mailto:supportingpeopleteam@kent.gov.uk)

Phone: 01622 696171

Write to: Kent County Council
Supporting People
Room 4.02
Sessions House
Maidstone
Kent
ME14 1XQ

Service User Charter

You Want a Service That:

Cares about your safety

Provides support 24/7

Provides you with the information you need but no more

Asks for and respects your opinion

Quickly takes action when there are problems

Respects and values you as an individual

Makes its staff available outside of normal office hours

Gives you a say in matters that affect you

Enables you to change things about the Trust that you're not happy with

Treats you fairly

Promotes opportunities to access useful support from other agencies

You Expect Our Staff To:

Treat you with respect

Take ownership of problems

Listen

Communicate

Make you feel valued

Be available when needed

Work with you to achieve your goals

You Can Help Us By:

Respecting your housemates, your neighbours, your accommodation and our staff

Keeping your room and the rest of your accommodation clean and tidy

Paying your accommodation charges on time

Getting involved

Knowing your responsibilities

Engaging with the support service we provide

Reporting problems promptly

Attending appointments on time

A full copy of the Service Users Charter is available from our office by request.