

Rental Red Flags Checklist

What to check before you sign anything — ever.

Dodgy landlords, scam listings, and overpriced holes exist everywhere. Use this before every viewing and before signing any contract.

ONLINE LISTING RED FLAGS — BEFORE YOU EVEN VIEW

■ Too cheap for the area	If it's 30%+ below market rate, it's either a scam or a dump. Both are bad.
■ No real photos	Stock images, blurry photos, or only exterior shots = they're hiding something.
■ "Pay deposit to view"	Legitimate landlords never ask for money before a viewing. Walk away.
■ Landlord "abroad" or "unavailable"	Classic scam setup. Keys will be sent by post. Deposit disappears.
■ Listing posted very recently with pressure	"Multiple people interested, decide today" = pressure tactic. Take your time.
■ No address given until you pay	You need to be able to verify the property exists before handing over anything.

AT THE VIEWING — WHAT TO CHECK

- Check damp and mould**
Look behind doors, under windows, in corners. Smell the place. Mould causes serious health issues and landlords are legally required to fix it.
- Test all taps, shower pressure, hot water**
Low pressure is annoying. No hot water is a dealbreaker. Test everything.
- Check windows open and close properly**
Especially if you're in a hot climate. Also a fire safety issue.
- Count power sockets**
Too few = constant adaptor use and potential fire hazard.

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- Check phone signal**
Do it in the bedroom and the kitchen. Thick walls kill signal.
- Check the locks**
Front door, your room door. If they're flimsy or keys are "being cut", be suspicious.
- Check what's included**
Bills included? Wifi? Are the appliances actually working? Test them.
- Ask about the neighbours**
"Lively" or "young crowd" = noisy. Ask directly if there have been noise issues.
- Ask how long the property has been available**
If it's been empty for months, ask why. Previous tenants left for a reason.
- Ask how to report maintenance issues**
How responsive is the landlord? Ask for examples of recent repairs made.

BEFORE YOU SIGN THE CONTRACT

- Read the entire contract**
Yes, all of it. Especially the break clause, notice period, and deposit terms.
- Verify the landlord owns the property**
In the UK: check Land Registry (gov.uk/search-property-information-land-registry). Free.
- Confirm the deposit protection scheme**
UK landlords are legally required to protect deposits in an approved scheme (TDS, DPS, MyDeposits). Ask for proof.
- Get the inventory in writing**
Everything in the flat, its condition, photos. Sign it. Keep a copy. This protects your deposit.
- Never pay cash without a receipt**
Bank transfer with a reference is always better. Paper trail protects you.
- Confirm who pays which bills**
Council tax? Water? Internet? Who's responsible for what needs to be crystal clear.
- Check the break clause**
Can you leave early? Under what conditions? What's the penalty?

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- *In the UK, if a landlord asks for a deposit over 5 weeks rent, this is illegal. Report it to Shelter (shelter.org.uk) or the council.*

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