

Explanation of rent and service charges from 01 April 2019 for flats

Changes to your rent charges from 01 April 2019

This year, your basic rent will be reduced by 1% and will be lower than last year. This reduction will not apply to any service charges, heating and water charges. The council calculates service charges on the actual costs of providing and delivering essential and obligatory services in flat blocks. The water charge increase is calculated by the water company and sent to us each year in February.

Despite the basic rent being decreased by 1%, some tenants will find their weekly charges have increased, because their service charges have increased. Each year the council sends you a letter about planned changes to your rent, service charges and fees for the coming year. This year the letter notifies you of the changes to your rent amount, giving a detailed breakdown of any service or water charges and shows you the total amount due for your home.

Your total rent payments

The total amount you are required to pay each week is calculated by adding together the basic rent charge, any service and/or water charges and fee (where applicable) for the whole year. The total is then divided into 50 equal payments. This amount is the weekly rent we charge you to live in your home. Your rent is payable weekly in advance, each Monday.

There are two rent-catch-up weeks each year. If you are behind and owe rent, these rent free weeks give you the opportunity to catch-up with your payments. The rent-catch-up weeks are the last week in December 2019 (week beginning the 23 December 2018) and the last week in March 2018 (week beginning the 23 March 2019). If you do not have rent arrears, you do not need to pay rent on either of these weeks.

If you pay your rent by direct debit, your payments are calculated on a monthly basis; therefore we will collect the monthly payment as usual in December 2019 and March 2020. You do not need to do anything.

Basic rent

This is the weekly amount you pay for landlord services, including basic repairs and improvements to your home. This varies from property to property and the set weekly amount is in your Formal Notice of Rent Changes letter..

Management fees

A few of our properties are charged a management fee. The management fee (where applicable) is calculated using the actual costs of providing and delivering essential and obligatory services in flat blocks by an appointed management agent.

Changes to service and other charges from 01 April 2019

If you live in a flat block, or your home is attached to a sheltered or supported housing scheme, your charges include a contribution towards the upkeep of the communal areas of that building. These charges apply whether you use the communal areas or not.

These charges will be shown separately on the rent notice. The charges will reflect the actual cost of providing the service.

The charge	What it covers
Caretaking & cleaning service charge	Cleaning of communal areas, removal of fly tipping, etc.
Communal block repairs	This charge covers repairs to communal areas in flat blocks. This includes items such as communal glazing or repairs to handrails.
Communal block electrics	The cost of the electrical supply for communal lighting.
Water charges	Included in your rent notification letter.
Grounds maintenance	Grass cutting, weeding shrub beds and clearing litter in landscaped and communal areas around blocks of flats and sheltered/supported housing schemes.
Window cleaning service charge	Covers the cost of providing communal window cleaning.
Estate Service Charge	This charge covers the costs of repairs, estate lighting ground maintenance and cleansing of the areas and roads around your flat block.
Heating charge	Communal heating fuel supply costs (often in sheltered schemes/tower blocks).
Support charge (optional)	To provide a Supported Housing Officer to offer help, support and advice alongside emergency assistance as and when required.
Careline charge (optional)	Contributes towards the cost of the Careline alarm service.
Community Support Charge (optional)	Covers the cost of the visiting and support service provided by supported housing officers
Pest control	Covers the costs of dealing with pest infestation in communal areas
Management fee	Covers the inclusive costs of providing and delivering essential and obligatory services in flat blocks by an appointed management agent.

How do these changes affect my housing benefit claim?

If you claim benefit claim, the heating charge and water charge are not covered by housing benefit. You are required to make these payments yourself.

Garage rents

If you rent a garage, you will be notified separately about any change in the standard garage rent charge. For more information about garages please visit www.stevenage.gov.uk/garages

Council Tax

Your council tax is paid separately to your rent. Any changes to your council tax will be sent to you separately. You will receive this during March 2019. If you are in receipt of UC Housing costs and housing benefit, you may be illegible Council Tax support contact the Benefit services on 01438 242440

Paying your rent

You will need your nine-digit reference number to make a rent payment.

If you do not have a rent account card with your reference number on it you can apply for a new one at www.stevenage.gov.uk/pay or contact us on 01438 242666.

Method	How to Pay
Online account	Simply log on to: www.stevenage.gov.uk/pay and follow the prompts.
Direct Debit	Set this up on the councils website at www.stevenage.gov.uk/pay or contact the customer service centre for further information
Online on the Council's website	www.stevenage.gov.uk/pay . Debit or credit card (we do not accept American Express or Diners club).
Customer Service Centre – Payment Kiosk	Cash, cheque or debit card payments can be made at the payment machine in our Customer Service Centre
By telephone Automated Number	If you have a debit or credit card you can pay using our automated payments system on 01438 242345.
At the Post Office	Payment can be made at any Post Office using your account card.

Useful contact details

	Email address/Website	Teleph one	Opening Hours	Address
Customer Service	csc@stevenage.gov.uk www.stevenage.gov.uk	01438 242666 Monday – Friday 8am to 6pm	Centre is open Monday-Friday 08.30am to 5:30pm	Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage, SG1 1HN
Benefit Service	www.stevenage.gov.uk/benefits benefits@hertspartnership-ala.gov.uk	01438 242440	Monday – Friday 9am to 5pm	The Benefits Service, East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council, Wallfields, Hertford, SG13 8EQ
Council Tax Support	Same as above	01438 242440	Monday – Friday 9am to 5pm	
Department of Works Pensions – Job Centre Plus	www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit	0800 169019 0 0800 169031 0 (Steven age branch)	Stevenage Job Centre Plus: Monday and Tuesday 9am to 5pm Wednesday 10am to 5pm Thursday and Friday 9am to 5pm	38 – 44 The Forum, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 1EZ
Citizens Advice Bureau	www.stevenagecab.org	0344 411 1444	Drop-in-session: Monday and Tuesday 10am to 3.30pm Wednesday (appointment only) Thursday 10am to 3.30pm Friday 10am to 12.30pm Telephone/Email: Monday – Friday	Swingate House, Danestrete, Stevenage, SG1 1AF

			10am to 4pm	
National Debt Helpline	www.nationaldebtline.org	0808 808 4000	Monday – Friday 9am to 8pm Saturday 9.30am to 1pm	
Housing Options	housing.options@stevenage.gov.uk	01438 242242	Monday – Friday 9am to 5pm	Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage, SG1 1HN
StepChange Debt Advice	www.stepchange.org	0800 138111 1	Monday - Friday 8am to 8pm Saturday 8am to 4pm	StepChange Debt Charity Wade House Merrion Centre Leeds LS2 8NG
Tenancy Support Service (SBC)	tenancysupport@stevenage.gov.uk	01438 242242	Monday – Friday 9am to 5pm	Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage, SG1 1HN