

Explanation of rent and service charges from 06 April 2020 for flats

Changes to your rent charges from 06 April 2020

This year your basic rent will be increased by 1% .We fully understand that any increase to your rent will not be good news. Government legislation has changed and from April 2020 and we are permitted to increase tenant's rent by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) +1% for the next 5 years following on from 4 year rent reduction regime.

We have carefully considered the rent increase and we believe that in order to deliver our commitments as set out in the Corporate Plan we need to maximise the money we receive from rents and apply the increase of CPI+1%. If we keep your rent as it is we are unable to deliver our commitments and would have to make some tough choices such as build less properties or not build at all or to invest less and to do less in your neighbourhoods and we don't think this is fair. We have ambitions to protect our assets and neighbourhoods and to plan for future generations of your families who choose to live in our homes.

There may be an increase to your service charges and water charges unless you have a water meter. The water charge increase is calculated by the water company and sent to us each year in February.

Service charges may increase but the same formula of CPI+1% will not apply. We set service charges in line with our Rent and Service charge setting policy. The policy states that we will set charges appropriately to cover the cost of providing the service to you.

The Council letter notifying you of the changes to your rent amount will provide you with 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 and water charges for the whole year. The total is then divided into 50 equal payments. This amount is the weekly rent we charge for you to live in your home. Your rent is payable weekly in advance, each Monday. This allows for two rent catch-up weeks each year.

These rent catch-up weeks give you the opportunity to catch-up with your payments if you owe rent. The rent catch-up weeks are the last week in December 2020 (week beginning the 21 December 2020) and the last week in March 2021 (week beginning the 29 March 2021). If you do not owe rent, 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 2020 and March 2021. 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 06 April 2020

If you live in a flat block, or your home is attached to an independent or Flexicare 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 independent/Flexicare 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).
Equipment Usage charge	An amount collected for use when equipment such as door entry system is in need of repairs or replacement.

Support charge (optional)	To provide a Supported Housing Officer (Specialist Housing Officer after April 2020) to offer help, support and advice alongside emergency assistance as and when required.
Careline charge (optional)	Covers 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 and Universal Credit Housing cost claim?

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

I claim Universal Credit: will I have to re-apply and will this result in weeks of delays in my rent being paid and accumulating rent arrears?

We appreciate that completing a Universal Credit claim can be very stressful and facing weeks of delays for any benefit payment is something we want to avoid. Please be assured you will not have to complete a brand new claim with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Once we write to inform you of the new rent you will simply need to inform them of this via the DWP portal after the rent increase has been applied. It is important that you do this before 6 April 2020 as we will then be asked to verify the increase on the landlord portal.

What if Universal Credit doesn't cover the rent increase?

If your Universal Credit allowance isn't increased to cover the additional rent increase, we strongly recommend that you make an appointment to see one of our specialist Welfare Benefits and Debt Advisors who can help you budget for the increase.

Where can I get some debt and budgeting advice from?

We have a dedicated specialist money and debt advice team working alongside the rent/income team who are trained to ensure you have maximised your benefits, help you manage your finances and support you through changes in circumstances. We encourage you to take advantage of this service.

Alternatively, there is advice and support available from the local Citizens Advice.

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 2020. If you are in receipt of UC Housing costs and housing benefit, you may be eligible for Council Tax support, please 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	Opening Hours	Address
Customer Service	csc@stevenage.gov.uk www.stevenage.gov.uk Telephone: 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 Telephone: 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 Telephone: 0800 1690190 0800 1690310 (Stevenage 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 Telephone: 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 On Telephone/Email: Monday – Friday 10am to 4pm	Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage, SG1 1HN

National Debt Helpline	www.nationaldebtline.org Telephone: 0808 808 4000	Monday – Friday 9am to 8pm Saturday 9.30am to 1pm	
Housing Options	housing.options@stevenage.gov.uk Telephone: 01438 242242	Monday – Friday 9am to 5pm	Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage, SG1 1HN
StepChange Debt Advice	www.stepchange.org Telephone: 0800 1381111	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 Telephone: 01438 242242	Monday – Friday 9am to 5pm	Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage, SG1 1HN