

Your 2021 rent & service charge



The government has ended the four year rent reduction for social housing from 6 April 2020. This means RHP, like other social landlords, will be able to increase their rents for assured, assured shorthold, affordable and fair rented tenancies, but only by a maximum of inflation (the Consumer Price Index) plus 1% each year. September's inflation rate of 0.5% will be used, so the rent increase will be no greater than 1.5%.

We're committed to maintaining rents at an affordable level whilst still complying with the government's rent increase system and will continue to work hard to make sure you continue to receive the best possible value for your rent.

WHAT DO MY SERVICE CHARGES INCLUDE?

If you receive a service charge, it's an extra charge alongside your rent. You will only pay the actual costs of the services we provided for your block or estate. These vary according to where you live and the type of property you have. For example, if you live in a flat on an estate, you will receive more services than if you lived in a flat in a street property. Your service charge is your share of what it costs RHP to provide these services. It's based on services we expect to deliver from April 2021 to March 2022, either through existing contracts or charges from the previous year. Your service charge may include:

Grounds maintenance

This covers the cost of maintaining the communal grounds on the estate. This charge may include grass cutting, weeding, pruning of shrubs, planting etc. it may include some litter clearance and sweeping of car park areas.

Tree maintenance

If we know that your estate is in the programme for tree maintenance, then there is an estimate of the cost.

Caretaking

The charge includes the cleaning of external and communal areas – stairways, entrances, rubbish chutes, car parks, bin sheds, paths and gardens. Also, the removal of graffiti and any minor repairs carried out by the caretaker.

Window cleaning

This is the estimate for cleaning the communal windows only. These are usually cleaned quarterly.

Bulk rubbish removal

This is for the collection and disposal of bulk rubbish from blocks and estates that the Council don't take as part of their domestic refuse collection service.

Bin replacement

This is for the cost of replacing any bulk refuse containers.

Second bin collection

Some estates receive a second refuse collection from Richmond Council, and this is recharged.

Communal electricity

This is the cost of supplying electricity to communal areas, internally & externally. The charge includes electricity costs for lifts, door entry systems, emergency lights, smoke vents & fire alarms.

Lift maintenance

This covers the servicing, maintenance and repair of lifts, and engineering insurance.

Maintenance of building services

To comply with health and safety regulations, building services such as fire alarms, dry risers, and emergency lighting, must be regularly tested and serviced.

Central heating

The estimate for gas is based on expected usage and includes the cost of repairs and maintenance of any communal heating system.

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WHAT IF I WANT TO APPEAL AGAINST THE NEW RENT CHARGE?

If you've been issued with a section 13 notice, please refer to the guidance notes. If this doesn't apply to you please get in touch with RHP so we can help.

WHEN WILL MY NEW RENT START?

The start date for the new rent and service charge is on **Monday 5th April 2021**.

DO I NEED TO UPDATE MY PAYMENTS?

If you pay by Direct Debit, you don't need to do anything because we will automatically adjust your payment (including any arrears). You will receive a letter confirming your new payments. If you pay in any other way, you'll need to change the amount yourself.

WHAT IF I CLAIM UNIVERSAL CREDIT?

If you receive Universal Credit you will need to tell them of the changes to your weekly rent. Call the official helpline on **0800 328 9344** or use your journal on the Universal Credit portal.

WHAT IF I CLAIM HOUSING BENEFIT?

If you receive housing benefit in the Richmond borough, you don't need to do anything, we will notify them of your new rent charge. If you claim housing benefit in Hounslow, Kingston or Hillingdon you will need to tell them of your new rent charge.

Kingston: **020 8547 5001**

Hounslow: **020 8583 4242**

Hillingdon: **0300 123 1384**

IS MY SERVICE CHARGE COVERED BY HOUSING BENEFIT?

Usually yes. Communal services like grounds maintenance and cleaning are covered by housing benefits and Universal Credit. Services such as water, electricity and heating for your personal use are not covered. If you are unsure, please contact your local housing benefit department or Universal Credit directly.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM HAVING PROBLEMS PAYING MY RENT AND SERVICE CHARGE?

If you're having difficulties paying your rent and service charges please contact our rent team as soon as possible at **customer.services@rhp.org.uk**.

Your rent advisor can discuss your payments with you and offer financial support.

If you want to find out if you're entitled to help with paying your rent, you can:

- Use the governments online benefits calculator at **www.gov-uk/benefits-calculators**
- Contact your local authority Housing Benefit Team
- Obtain free, independent and confidential advice from Citizens Advice. They are contactable on the advice line on **03444 111 444** or via their website at **www.citizensadvice.org.uk**.

WAYS TO PAY

Direct Debit

This is the easiest way to pay because we can collect your rent on any day you choose, and we make sure your payments are updated if there are annual adjustments.

Online

You can access your RHP online account through any internet-connected device with the extra convenience of accessing your account 24/7. Sign up for your free online account at **www.rhp.org.uk** to make payment 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Bank standing order or internet banking

You can pay free of charge at any branch of Lloyds Bank, other banks may charge if you do not have an account with them. Please ensure you give the following details with your payment:

Sort code: **30-80-12**

Account number: **10864568**

Account name: **Richmond Housing Partnership**

Reference: **Your rent account number**