

Rents and Service Charges for 2020/21



The enclosed letter is your annual rent review notice. It tells you how much rent you will need to pay to Stonewater from April 2020.

For some customers the letter also includes additional service charges that you will need to pay.

How do we calculate your rent?

The Government regulates all social housing providers, and agrees what rent can be charged. Over the last four years rents have decreased every year, although the cost to Stonewater of delivering services has continued to rise.

From April 2020 the Government has given authority for rents to increase. So, you will see a small increase in your rent that is in line with Government policy and will allow Stonewater to further invest in your home and our services.

What is a service charge?

Some of our customers pay a service charge in addition to the rent they pay. Your tenancy agreement will state if this applies to you.

A service charge is a payment towards the costs of services for your home or the scheme you live in. Typical charges may include the cleaning, lighting and grounds maintenance of communal areas.

For your ease we have now included in your rent review notice a breakdown of each service charge item for your home; with the service listed individually along with your contribution towards this service. For some customers this year may be the first time you will have seen this.

How are service charges set?

Service charges are set each year based on the cost of delivering services and maintaining equipment within communal areas and reflect the expected costs for the coming year.

We appreciate that the rising costs of services can cause concern for our customers, so for the last four years you will have only seen minimal increases to your service charges, as Stonewater made the decision to not pass on the full cost of these services.

However, from April 2020 some customers will see an increase in their service charges as the cost of providing these services has risen.

We are committed to working with all our customers to ensure any increases to service charges are affordable and manageable, and we will continue to monitor all our services to make sure they are delivering value for money.

Do I need to amend my direct debit?

If you pay by direct debit Stonewater will amend your direct debit amount for you, and you will receive written confirmation of this from Allpay detailing the changes.

Do I need to amend my standing order?

Yes. If you pay by standing order you will need to contact your bank and amend your standing order to your new rent amount.

What do I need to do if I am in receipt of Housing Costs from Universal Credit?

You will need to update your claim with DWP via your portal during the assessment period when the rent change applies. For example, if your assessment period starts on 3 April and your rent changes from 6 April, you will need to update your portal after 3 April to ensure the DWP make the change during the correct assessment period.

What do I need to do if I am in receipt of Housing Benefit?

If your Housing Benefit is paid directly to Stonewater then we will advise your local authority of the change in your rent. However, we suggest that you should also take a copy of your rent review letter to the Housing Benefit team to ensure they are aware and adjust your claim.

They will confirm any change in your benefit in writing to you.

What can I do if I am having difficulty paying my rent?

We are here to help – please don't ignore any problems or concerns – contact us straightaway.

Stonewater is committed to helping customers who are having trouble paying their rent. It's in everyone's interest to agree a manageable and affordable payment plan. So, if you find you are unable to make your rent payment please let us know as soon as you can.

We want you to stay in your home and continue to be a valued Stonewater customer, and we will work with you to make sure this happens. However, we can only do this with your involvement!

How can I access my rent account?

You can check your rent account and make payments at any time using our online customer portal – MyHome.

MyHome puts you in control of your Stonewater account 24/7, wherever and whenever it suits you. You can:

- view your account details
- make payments
- update your profile
- report repairs
- get in touch and share your views

It's easy to use, mobile friendly and signing up also helps your Reward programme status. Register today at <https://myhome.stonewater.org/>

What do I do if I have a query about my rent or service charge?

If you have any questions about your rent notice, please contact us and we'll be happy to help. We have a dedicated phone line to help us deal with your enquiries efficiently. Please phone this number - **01202 312715** – and our advisors will assist you with your enquiries. Alternatively you can contact us via email at customers@stonewater.org.