

Understanding your rent and service charge review letter

Your personal circumstances

I receive housing benefit and don't pay any rent so why have I received a letter?

Even though you receive housing benefit, you are responsible for paying your rent. By law, we have to tell you of any changes and you have to tell the housing benefits department of any changes in your circumstances. This includes changes in your rent. If you don't, you may be paid the wrong amount.

Housing benefit only pays some of my rent. How do I calculate what I should pay when the rent goes up?

The amount you will have to pay will depend on how your benefit has been reassessed. If you aren't sure what to pay or you haven't heard from the housing benefit office, you will need to contact them. They will tell you the new amount they have awarded you. So you can then work out the difference.

I receive universal credit. What do I need to do?

You must tell the Department for Work and Pensions about your new rent. We can't do this for you. They may ask to see a copy of your rent review letter.

I pay or wish to pay by Direct Debit. What should I do?

New Direct Debit payments

You can set up a Direct Debit online in the My Account section of our website. Or you can contact us by phone and we will set up your Direct Debit payment plan.

In some cases, we may ask you to complete a paper mandate; for example, if payments are coming out of someone else's bank account or if you have a joint account which needs signatures from both account holders.

Existing Direct Debit payments

If you are already paying your rent by Direct Debit, we will contact you to confirm the new amount and tell you when your payments will begin. We may have to recalculate this if your housing benefit award changes.

Your rent

How has my rent been calculated?

The government tells all housing associations to use a single method of setting rents for most properties. Most rents are benefitting from a 1% reduction this year but some tenancy types are excluded (like private rented properties); instead, they have their rent increased by the September customer prices index figure plus 1%. Any other charges, such as service charges, are not affected by these rules.

What is a support charge?

If there is an amount against 'support charge' on the rent increase letter, it means you receive some form of support; for example, access to Orbit's Response Unit or having access to support scheme staff. Unless you live in a sheltered scheme, you will not be charged for a lifeline with your rent; this will be billed separately instead from April 2018.

Why do I pay a service charge?

A service charge is paid towards the cost of providing and maintaining services, such as communal gardening, cleaning or estate grass-cutting where the local council do not provide this.

What if I need more information about my service charge?

If you need any further information about your service charge, or you're not clear what the services cover, please contact us at

servicecharge.teammaidstone@orbit.org.uk.

Most concerns or disputes can be solved this way. The service charge may vary from time to time if the cost of providing these services changes.

Sometimes the service will cost more or less than what we planned at the beginning of the year. This will be taken into account when setting the new charge. The figure shown for your service charge is an estimated amount.

How can I appeal?

If your rent has increased, you have the right to appeal if you have been sent a **Form 4** with your letter. You may refer your rent to your local First-tier Tribunal who will independently decide whether the proposed new rent is appropriate.

Once you have asked them to assess your rent, they have the power to set a higher or lower rent – or leave the rent as it is. We will normally accept the decision of the Tribunal.

If you wish to appeal against your service charge, this should be through the First-tier Tribunal (which used to be called the Rent Assessment Committee). If you think you want to appeal, contact us and we will tell you how to do this.

Alternatively, you can look at the government website www.gov.uk

Select: Housing and Local Services – Council Housing and Housing Associations – Housing Tribunals. You will find the information you need in the section called 'Appealing to the Committee'.

How to get in touch

For further information please email us at:
info@orbit.org.uk

Or call:
0800 678 1221

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