

# Annual rent and service charge variation

## Your support guide

In a couple of weeks' time, you will receive your annual rent and service charge variation notice. In simple terms, this is your weekly or monthly charge over the financial year.



**Our guide will help you understand:**

- the letter you will receive
- our rent setting process
- what you will need to do.

**For more detailed information:**

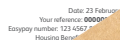
[www.riverside.org.uk/rentsetting](http://www.riverside.org.uk/rentsetting)  
[www.riverside.org.uk/service-charges](http://www.riverside.org.uk/service-charges)

Our letter to you is a legal notice for payment. Some customers tell us this can sometimes feel complicated but, whilst there are a lot of words, it's simpler than it might look.

- a date from which the new charge is due
- an explanation of how we've calculated the change
- details of your current charges
- details of your new charges
- instructions on what to do next to vary payments, should you need to.



- We tell you how to vary payments if you get Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. There is also information on how you can get support if you are struggling to afford the charges.
- This is an itemised breakdown of all service charges you are being asked to pay along with a legal document summarising your legal rights and obligations.
- Depending on your type of notice, you may have a Section 13 notice. This is another part of the letter we are legally required to provide which summarises the changes and provides your legal rights in relation to them. Please do not worry if you do not receive this, it is only applicable for some customers.



# Our rent setting process

## How do we set rents?

We review our rent levels each year in line with Government guidance and cannot increase rents by more than the rate of the Consumer Price Index in September plus one percent (6.7 % in September). When reviewing rents, we look at typical incomes, the cost of maintaining homes, what we need to invest in improving homes and services, as well as comparing our rents to those of other social housing providers.

## What level of rent increase can customers expect this year?

Due to higher costs resulting from higher inflation, rents will increase by 7.7 %, which is the inflation figure as at September 2023, plus 1 %. For some customers that figure may be lower, and we will always ensure that typical social housing rents are no more than 30 % of average local incomes for lower-wage households. For shared owners, rents will go up in accordance with the lease but by no more than 7.7 %.

## What is the thinking behind that decision?

Deciding to make an increase like this at a time when we know money is tight for customers was a very difficult decision and we know this will be an additional financial burden for some people. However, given that we capped rent increases last year, we feel that this year we must prioritise ensuring we maintain our homes to standard.

Around 60p of every £1 of rental income is spent on maintaining homes with the rest going towards supporting that work, helping customers, honouring our financial commitments and running the organisation.

## How will service charges change this year?

Some customers pay a service charge on top of their rent to fund services like grass cutting, window cleaning and other things. Service charge costs will vary depending on what services we provide at your building. As with rents, service charge costs are affected by inflation and changes in price. So, if we've implemented new services or entered into a new contract to provide services to you, you may find that costs are higher. Similarly, where costs are variable, like with the cost of electricity, water and gas, you may find that costs have increased as a result of higher prices.

## I'm struggling with paying my rent, where can I get help?

If you struggle with, or expect to struggle with affordability, it's vital you talk to us. We've made £500,000 available through our Helping Hand Fund which is designed to help customers experiencing financial or other challenges.

Visit [www.riverside.org.uk/letstalk](https://www.riverside.org.uk/letstalk) to get help and find out more or call our dedicated support team on **0800 529 8789**.

# Paying your bill and getting support

**There are a huge range of ways people pay their rent and service charge bills and, depending on how you do so, you may need to take action.**

Check out our quick guide below. We'll also remind you of this information in the annual statement mailing we post to you.



## **If you pay by Direct Debit**

You don't need to do anything. The amount taken from your account will update automatically.



## **If you pay by Standing Order**

Why not call us and switch to Direct Debit so the amount you pay is automatically updated?



## **If you pay via My Riverside or with my Easypay card**

You can pay the new amount in the same way you always have.



## **If you pay via Housing Benefit paid direct to Riverside**

We'll confirm any new changes with your local authority. However, If you've made a new claim since 1st January and it's paid direct to us, you will need to notify your Housing Benefit office of your new rent and charges. Please do this immediately.



## **If you get Housing Benefit or Universal Credit paid direct to you**

It's your responsibility to make sure your local authority, or for Universal Credit, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), know your new charges and make any relevant changes. We advise you do this as soon as you get your annual statement. You can update your claim at: [www.universal-credit.service.gov.uk/sign-in](https://www.universal-credit.service.gov.uk/sign-in).