

# Your Rent and Service Charges 2013-2014

## Your weekly rent

The average weekly rent increase this year is 3.1%. The increase will take effect from Monday 1st April 2013.

Your rent and service charges are used to pay for all the services provided by the Council for its tenants. No money is paid from Council Tax towards the service and likewise, no money from rent is used to subsidise Council Tax.

If you think you may be entitled to Housing Benefit you can contact your Housing Officer for help with an application or you can apply directly at [www.stalbans.gov.uk/advice-and-benefits](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/advice-and-benefits).

## Paying by direct debit

If you pay by direct debit you will be notified shortly about how much your monthly payments will be. Direct debit is the easiest and quickest way to pay your rent. If you would like more information or an application form please contact 01727 819230 or email [andrew.stovell@stalbands.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.stovell@stalbands.gov.uk)

## Paying via the automated telephone payment line

To pay via the automated payment line you will need your tenancy reference number and a valid debit or credit card. Simply call 0161 785 3880.

## Having difficulties paying your rent?

The Council relies upon the income we receive from your rent and charges to pay for the services we provide. This includes repairs, improvements and estate and tenancy management services.

It is important that you contact us as soon as you start having problems. Don't ignore the problem as it will not go away and rent arrears will increase every week.

You can start by contacting your Housing Officer to tell them about the problem and how much you can afford to pay. Your Housing Officer will work with you to establish a reasonable repayment term. Little and often is the key. We would rather see smaller sums paid regularly than occasional lump sum payments.

## Getting to grips with debt

The Council, in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) provides a weekly money advice service to help tenants and leaseholders at risk of losing their homes due to rent or mortgage arrears and other debts.

The advisor can help you negotiate a realistic repayment agreement with all your lenders and also make sure you are getting all the help and benefits you are entitled to.

The advice is free and non judgemental – there is no debt which cannot be managed with good professional advice.

If you think you need help in sorting out your debts then contact your Housing Officer and ask for a referral.

You can also seek help directly from the CAB. It is located in the Council offices and is open Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from 10:00am to 1:00pm.



## Service charges – what are they?

Along with your rent you may also pay service charges for a range of services we provide. These are listed within the letter we send you notifying you of the variation in rents and charges.



**Heating Charges** – In some blocks there is a communal boiler. The bills are sent directly to the Council, we then recover the money through a weekly charge. This charge is not covered by Housing Benefit, Tenants have to pay this themselves. The charge may cover hot water as well as heating.



**Service Charges** – These cover the cost of grounds maintenance and caretaking services to blocks and are charged according to the amount of time the caretaker or contractor spends at the block. There are different charges for managing grassed areas, flower or shrub beds and hard surfaces such as drying areas. These charges are shared equally amongst the tenants and leaseholders within the block.



**Electricity Charges** – These relate to the cost of electricity for communal lighting in shared hallways and passages.



**Communal Facilities Charge** – This is a charge for tenants in sheltered housing where there are communal facilities such as a lounge, laundry or kitchen. It covers the cost of these facilities and repairs or replacement of equipment.



**Supporting People/Housing Support Charges** – These are charges for housing related support usually provided to tenants in sheltered housing or tenants who have a community alarm. Sometimes these charges are paid on behalf of tenants by Hertfordshire County Council, sometimes tenants pay the charges themselves.



**Garden Maintenance Charges** – These charges are paid by tenants, usually elderly people who have their gardens maintained by the Council. The contractor charges the Council for each garden they maintain (regular grass cutting and hedge trimming) and this is then recovered through the rent. The charge is spread weekly over the year, although the garden maintenance service is usually provided between March and October.



**Steam Cleaning** – Once a year we carry out steam cleaning of chutes and refuse areas of blocks of flats where there are shared bin areas. This service charge is a recharge of the actual cost we are charged for providing this service.