



## Variable service charges

Information for residents

**WestKent**

Places to live. Space to grow.



## All you need to know about variable service charges

A variable service charge is where you pay for the actual cost of the services you receive on a yearly basis.

We estimate your service charge based on spending from the previous year. We factor in any changes to services, contract costs, VAT and inflation or any planned communal work coming up. At the end of the financial year, we will check the actual service charge spent and compare it with the estimated charges you've paid during the year.

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### What makes up my service charge?

The costs of the services you receive such as communal energy use, cleaning and grounds maintenance make up the total service charge. This varies depending on the services you benefit from. More information about the service charges you pay for can be found in your annual rent and service charge review letter, sent each February.

### What if you've over-spent or under-spent?

Once the financial year ends (31 March), we'll review what's been spent in the year and provide you with a summary by 30 September. This information will tell you the difference between what was estimated and what was spent, with any difference being carried forward to the following year. Any under-spend will reduce your weekly/monthly contributions to service charges or any over-spend will increase them.

## Important dates



We'll write to you each February with your new estimated service charges, and you should start paying the new amount in April.

We've mentioned a lot of dates, so we've set out below what happens and when.

|                                                                                                              |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| We send your rent and estimated service charge for the year ahead                                            | February  |
| You need to start paying your new rent and service charge amount                                             | 1 April   |
| Our financial year ends                                                                                      | 31 March  |
| We send a year-end account confirming what was spent during the year and what your balance is                | September |
| We send your rent and estimated service charge for the year ahead, including the balance issued in September | February  |

## Your legal rights

We will provide you with clear information about your charges and explain:

- what the charge is for when general terms are used such as 'maintenance'
- the exact cost
- when the charges were increased/decreased and why.

You have the legal right to:

- review any invoices or costs that make up your service charges
- scrutinise your service charges, including being consulted on contracts for services and any work we ask you to contribute to (if they are likely to cost more than £100 for services and £250 for work)
- have your service charges reviewed independently if you disagree with them.



## What if I'm unhappy with my service charges?

We aim to provide a service which meets the needs of residents and offers value for money. You can ask to view, inspect and take copies of invoices which make up your service charges.

We have created a new set of estate standards from feedback from over 600 residents across Kent. The standards clearly set out what you can expect from us and allow you to hold us and our contractors to account when things aren't going well. To see the standards, visit [www.westkent.org/estatestandards](http://www.westkent.org/estatestandards) or check the noticeboard in your communal area (if you have one).

If you feel we're not providing you with the service you expect or have a complaint about how we're handling your service charges, please get in touch by emailing [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk) or calling **01732 749400**.

If you're dissatisfied with our response, you have the right to appeal to the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) which will determine if the service charge is reasonable. To do this, you'll need to complete an application form and return it to the appropriate regional Tribunal office. Please note that you will need to pay a fee to submit an application. You can find more information on this process at [www.lease-advice.org](http://www.lease-advice.org).

## Ways to pay

You will usually pay your service charge as one payment with your rent. There are a number of ways you can pay - choose the one most convenient to you!

### Direct Debit

We can collect direct debits weekly or monthly (on the fourth working day of the month). Please call us on **01732 749400** to set your direct debit up.

### Online payments

Visit [www.wkha.mysecurepay.co.uk](http://www.wkha.mysecurepay.co.uk). You will need to enter your ten-digit tenancy reference number and confirm your postcode.

### My West Kent

Our resident portal. Visit [www.westkent.org/mywestkent](http://www.westkent.org/mywestkent). If you're not signed up, please contact us by emailing [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk) or calling **01732 749400**.

### Automated payments

Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, just call **01732 749442**. You will need to enter your ten-digit tenancy reference number and confirm your postcode.

### Online banking or standing order

You can pay using online banking or by standing order through your own bank or building society website using:

- Sort code: **60-19-02**
- Account number: **25867792**
- Reference: **Your ten-digit tenancy reference number.**

### Post Office and Payzone

You can pay at any Post Office or Payzone retail outlet using your West Kent payment card, please check the Payzone website for your nearest outlet. You can also look out for the Payzone logo displayed at shops and petrol stations. If you can't find your card, please email [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk) and we will order you a replacement.

### Housing Benefit

If you think you are entitled to housing benefit, contact your local council straightaway as a claim is usually not backdated. If it is, the maximum period covered for any backdate will be no more than four weeks.

## Support available

We know things are more difficult for many of our residents due to the cost of living. This section of our website is dedicated to providing you with information, tips and contacts to help you with your rent, living and energy costs. We can help with:

We can help with:

- finding out if you're eligible, and applying for welfare benefits and grants; including Pension Credit
- improving your confidence around budgeting
- maximising your income and dealing with bills, rent arrears and debts
- applying to foodbanks
- helping you access affordable furniture through Abacus, our furniture project
- getting into work, training or education.

We don't just provide a signposting service. We have teams dedicated to providing help, advice and financial support if you need it. We don't just provide a signposting service. We have teams dedicated to providing help, advice and financial support if you need it.



## My West Kent

My West Kent is a self service portal for West Kent residents. The portal allows you to:

- View your tenancy details
- Update your household and contact details
- View your rent account statements
- Request and view outstanding repairs
- Contact your tenancy services officer
- Report anti-social behaviour
- Make a complaint.

Visit [www.westkent.org/mywestkent](http://www.westkent.org/mywestkent)



## Contact us

If you have any questions about your service charges (or anything else), please get in touch. We aim to respond to most enquiries within five working days.

- Website: [www.westkent.org/contactus](http://www.westkent.org/contactus)
- Email: [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk)
- Call **01732 749400**



## WestKent

**West Kent Housing Association**

101 London Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1AX



[westkent.org](http://westkent.org)



01732 749400



WestKentHA



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