

## Explaining the rise in rent and service charges March 2023 – frequently asked questions for our tenants who are in receipt of communal heating

### Arabic

إذا كنت ترغب في التحدث إلينا بلغتك حول محتوى هذه الرسالة ، فيرجى الاتصال بمجلس مدينة ويستمنستر 3783 0800358 أو زيارة مركز الخدمة المحلي الخاص بك

### Bengali

আপনি যদি এই চিঠির বিষয়বস্তু সম্পর্কে আপনার ভাষায় আমাদের সাথে কথা বলতে চান, তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে ওয়েস্টমিনস্টার সিটি কাউন্সিলের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন (0800 358 3783) অথবা আপনার স্থানীয় পরিষেবা কেন্দ্রে যান

### Portuguese

Se desejar falar conosco sobre o conteúdo desta carta no seu idioma, entre em contacto com a Westminster City Council através do número 0800 358 3783 ou visite o centro de atendimento da sua área local, através do endereço abaixo indicado.

### Kurdish

Ger hûn dixwazin li ser naveroka vê nameyê bi zimanê xwe bi me re bipeyivin, ji kerema xwe têkilî Şaredariya Westminster (0800 358 3783) bikin an biçin navenda karûbarê xweya herêmî.

### Spanish

Si desea hablar con nosotros en su idioma sobre el contenido de esta carta, comuníquese con el Ayuntamiento de Westminster (0800 358 3783) o visite su centro de servicio local.

## Rent Increase 2023/2024

If you're a social housing resident, we follow rules set by the government when we calculate any changes to your rent each year.

The Council sets the rent in accordance with the social housing rent policy which is controlled by the government. Normally, any increase in rent is set at the rate of inflation (in September of the prior) year + 1%.

However, due to inflation hitting a record high of 10.1% in September 2022 and the ongoing cost of living crisis and rising energy costs, the government has decided to cap how much social rent can be increased by to a maximum of 7%.

In line with government guidance, your rent will increase by 7% from 03 April 2023.

Despite this, for most tenants who are claiming full benefit, the rent increase will be mitigated by increases in Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit.

Westminster City Council is launching the Rent Support Fund to help social housing tenants struggling with rent payments during the cost of living crisis.

The Council's Rent Support Fund has been created specifically to help those in financial difficulty. The money will be used to cover some or all the upcoming rent increases for households who are not entitled to Universal Credit or Housing Benefit. Tenants who are eligible for full benefits will receive the full rebate in their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit payments.

If you need assistance, please register your interest by scanning the QR code or following the link below and an income officer will contact you.

We anticipate that there will be high demand for this fund, so we will aim to get back to you within 10 working days following.

[www.westminster.gov.uk/housing/tenants/rent-and-service-charges/rent-support-fund](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/housing/tenants/rent-and-service-charges/rent-support-fund)



### What is the average service charges this year?

The service charge will vary depending on the size of your property and some of the specific charges delivered to your block and estate. The table below outlines the average base service charge and the average heating charge.

	2022/2023		2023/2024		Variance
Bedrooms	AVERAGE BASE SERVICE CHARGE				
0	£	261.64	£	283.70	8.43%
1	£	908.55	£	982.80	8.17%
2	£	786.41	£	834.11	6.07%
3	£	892.06	£	933.66	4.66%
4	£	1,030.62	£	1,084.85	5.26%
	2022/2023		2023/2024		Variance
Bedrooms	AVERAGE HEATING CHARGE				
0	£	449.91	£	586.26	30.30%
1	£	1,014.57	£	1,316.21	29.73%
2	£	919.82	£	1,291.79	40.44%
3	£	1,061.93	£	1,505.91	41.81%
4	£	1,113.08	£	1,606.11	44.29%

### Energy price increase

Leaseholders and tenants on a district or communal heating system will pay higher energy charges because of the significant rise in costs due to the energy crisis. This also affects the increase in communal electricity costs. We are aware that high energy prices are still a big concern for households and businesses across Westminster. However, our ability to bulk

buy gas means that the cost of energy to our residents on district heating networks is still approximately half that of the market rate.

In order to keep the cost of energy as low as possible we bulk buy gas for all our communal energy use across the city. In 2021 the purchase price went up to 6.2p kWh for gas for a fixed period of 12 months 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. This is the rate that is now being charged to you for the period April 2023 to March 2024 and compares well against the market rate of 10.3p kw/h.

The cost to our residents has gone up from the previous price where we paid between 1.5p to 2.2p kWh for gas from different providers, with only a small standing charge, which was reflected in your March 2022 invoice.

We know increases in energy costs are worrying for our residents, but we would like to reassure you that we worked hard to secure the best rate.

If you are finding it difficult to pay your rent and service charge then it is important to contact us as soon as possible, our friendly income team are here to help. The sooner you contact us, the sooner we can help you.

**Contact details:** Telephone **0800 358 3783** Email: [housing.enquiries@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:housing.enquiries@westminster.gov.uk)

### **But why are our costs going up when the wholesale price of gas is coming down?**

Heating and hot water charges are billed in arrears. This means that the amount we are billing you now are the gas prices we negotiated in late 2021 for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. Energy suppliers also typically buy their gas and electricity in advance, allowing them to fix some of their costs. This means that wholesale gas price falls are not immediately passed through to consumers.

### **Book a 20 minute online appointment**

You can now book a 20 minute online appointment to discuss your rent and service charges with one of our income advisors.

Every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday you can book between the hours of 9am to 5pm.

Every Wednesday you can book between the hours of 9am to 8pm.

Once you have booked your appointment you will receive an email to confirm your upcoming booking on Microsoft Teams. You can manage your booking, reschedule, or cancel your appointment at any time.

Please join the meeting via the Teams link you receive, we will call you after ten minutes of your appointment time if you have not joined the call.

Please provide a summary of what you would like to discuss regarding your rent or service charge to help us to prepare for your appointment.

Book a 20 minute appointment now by scanning the QR code or follow the link below

[www.westminster.gov.uk/housing/tenants/rent-and-service-charges/book-20-minute-online-appointment](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/housing/tenants/rent-and-service-charges/book-20-minute-online-appointment)



### **Cost of living support hub**

The cost of living crisis is affecting us all. We have found that around a quarter of households in Westminster, more than 31,000, face a serious reduction in living standards due to rising costs, such as fuel, energy bills and food. The information provided here can help you with everything from accessing government financial aid to finding local advice services. Whatever hardships you're facing, we're here to help.



For further information, scan the QR code or follow the link below.

[www.westminster.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support)

### **What other help is available**

You can also call the following for advice:

- Citizens Advice Westminster - Advice Line 0808 278 7834  
<https://www.westminstercab.org.uk/advice/online-enquiry/>
- National Debtline - Freephone 0808 808 4000  
[www.nationaldebtline.org](https://www.nationaldebtline.org)
- Shelter – 0300 330 1234 (calls cost less than local rate)  
[www.england.shelter.org.uk](https://www.england.shelter.org.uk)
- Step Change - Freephone 0808 138 1111 808 4000  
[www.stepchange.org](https://www.stepchange.org)
- Debt Free London - Freephone 0800 808 5700 (24 hours a day)  
[www.debtfreeadvice.com](https://www.debtfreeadvice.com)

### **Contact us**

If you have any queries in relation to your rent and service charges, or any other housing matter please contact us:

**Telephone: 0800 358 3783 (freephone)**

**Email: [housing.enquiries@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:housing.enquiries@westminster.gov.uk)**

**North Area Service Centre** - 1 Glasgow House, W9 1QY

<https://goo.gl/maps/4gbAm8kwjo75qj4e8>

**West Area Service Centre** - 155 Westbourne Terrace, W2 6JX

<https://goo.gl/maps/mNZkwKfLd4brdPDDA>

**Central Area Service Centre** - 24 Lilestone Street, NW8 8SR

<https://goo.gl/maps/oDnEQvMsLQuW59gr9>

**South Area Service Centre** - 137 Lupus Street, SW1V 3HE

<https://goo.gl/maps/yut3Det5ZSifQM8c7>