



ST LUKE'S HOUSING SOCIETY

MCMASTER HOUSE

Rent and Service Charge Information 2024-25





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Rent and Service Charge Summary 2024-25

This information pack accompanies your annual rent letter. The information includes details of your rent and service charge details for the new financial year 2024/25.

A rent increase will be coming into effect from the 01/04/2024. This will allow us to meet rising costs in line with inflation and the cost-of-living. In addition, this will enable us to continue delivering a good level of service to our residents and meet operational costs.

What Charges do I pay?

Your monthly charge is made up of the following:

1. Rent
2. Eligible service charges (see enclosed sheet)
3. Ineligible service charges (heating and hot water)
4. Support charge (24 Hour Emergency Response Service via pull chords)

Why is my rent increasing?

From 01 April 2024, the rent you pay for your home will increase by 7.7%. We review our rents each year in line with government guidance. To calculate the increase, we use September 2023 Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1%. This is to ensure we can continue to meet increasing operational and maintenance costs, whilst still maintaining safe and affordable for those who need it.

It is important to note, as a provider of Sheltered accommodation, we are exempt from the guidelines set out by the government and we are permitted to increase the basic rents by more than 7.7%. This is permitted to allow sheltered and supported schemes to factor in the higher operations costs of running sheltered schemes. We try to strike a balance between keeping rents affordable and making sure we can maintain the quality of our properties and scheme.

The costs of providing services and investment in homes in England are rising rapidly, and the economic climate remains uncertain. We have continued to review our rent levels against the cost of renting on the open market in the local area.

For residents at McMaster House, the average cost of renting a one-bedroom home from us is significantly lower than renting a similar sized property in the local area. We have carried out up to date rent comparisons of another local registered social housing scheme in the local area. In comparison, our overall rents remain considerably lower.

Where does my rent money go?

Rent pays for repairs and improvements to resident's homes and carrying out safety works. As a not-for-profit society, the rental income we receive is reinvested back into maintaining and operating McMaster House.

The rent will help to keep up with rising costs, ensuring that we can continue to provide a good level of service to residents. Rental income allows us to carry out repairs to your homes and ensure that every property meets the highest safety standards.

Will my Service Charges and Support Charge change too?

Service charges are variable, meaning they may go up and down each year, depending on the amount spent on your scheme. Because we do not know exactly how much it will cost to provide your services each year, we must estimate how much we think it is likely to cost.

To make sure we are as accurate as possible, your new service charges are based on how much your services cost in previous year and consideration is given to what services may need to be provided in the coming year.

We review your service charges in line with our service contracts and service costs. These are based on the actual amount we expect services to cost each year. So, we charge you less when prices go down, but higher charges when they increase.

Please see a copy of the Service Charge Schedule and Information Sheet on Services provided to residents at McMaster House.

Utility costs

As a result of these unprecedented energy prices, we increased our utilities by 60% for 2023-24. This helped to ensure these costs were covered. For 2024-25, the utility costs charged estimated are based the actual costs for 2023-24 and we have taken the decision to not uplift these costs for the coming year.

Maintenance Contracts

As expected, many external contractors are also increasing their costs, so we have reviewed our existing contracts over the last few months and analysed our repairs and maintenance.

Due to some unplanned emergency repairs, we have now negotiated a pre-planned maintenance contract for 12 months with Lowe and Oliver. They will be carrying out all planned maintenance to our boilers, central heating, water safety (including Legionella monitoring), emergency light testing and all fire alarm servicing and testing. They will also be providing emergency cover out of hours which provides additional reassurance to our residents and staff. We are hoping that this will be a more cost effective and reliable solution to our scheme going forward.

Communal Cleaning and Window Cleaning

Due to changing staff resources, we reinstated a communal cleaning company in October 2023 to carry out cleaning to the communal areas and continue window and gutter cleaning. This will now remain in place and has been added back into the service charge.

Digital Switch Over

As some residents may be aware, we are living in a more digital world. By 2025, housing providers and other businesses will be required to move over from analogue systems to digital. This upgrade was carried out in November 2023 and our system is now in place to meet this deadline.

Communal Areas – Internal Decoration

As per information throughout the year, after several years following the extension works and COVID, we started decorating our communal hallways and installing some frames artwork to help create a welcoming environment. This work has not been service charged to residents and has been paid from the associations reserve funds.

We hope to continue upgrading and decorating our scheme both internally and externally over the next twelve months.

Communal Areas – External grounds and patio area

We carried out some works to the communal patio at the rear of the communal lounge during Summer 2023. We hope to continue improving this area for our residents over the next few months for all to enjoy. This work has not been service charged to residents and had been paid from the associations reserve funds.

What do I need to do now?

Please see the enclosed letter which confirms how much your new rent and service charge payments will be from 01/04/2024. You will need to contact your Bank or Building Society and amend your Standing Order to us to ensure the full rent amount is covered in plenty of time before 01/04/2023. We have sent letters out earlier this year to allow residents more time to make any changes. Our Bank details are as follows:

Account Name: St Luke's Housing Society Limited

Account Sort Code: 30-94-04

Account Number: 00140340

What if I claim Housing Benefit / Universal Credit?

- If you claim Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, you will need to inform your local authority what your rent amount will be so they can reassess your claim.
- In addition, if you are in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, please can you provide the office with a copy of your claim reference number so we can make sure we send all details over to the local authority to ensure they have the updated rent information. You can contact them on the contact details below:

Oxford City Council

Online: www.oxford.gov.uk – Benefits Section

Telephone: 01865 249811

We will also let Oxford City Council know what your new rent and service charge payments will be from April 2024.

Please be aware, even if you are in receipt of these benefits, it is your responsibility to ensure your claim is in place to cover your rent payments.

You will also need to make sure you set up payment to cover any shortfall for the Support and Ineligible charges within your service charges. Your benefits will not cover all charges, so you will always be liable for these.

What if I can't pay or I'm worried about how this will impact on me?

We appreciate that we are living in difficult times and people are anxious and worried about their finances. If you are worried, please come and speak to us. We are happy to book time out with you to go through the information and any worries you may have.

We are also happy to discuss any income and expenditure concerns you may have and can help give you and advice and support. We can also help to check if you are maximising your income, claiming benefits you may not know you are entitled to and advising you on places to go for support.

You can also visit www.stepchange.org and www.citizensadvice.org.uk for free advice on benefits and debt advice.

If you have any other questions about your rent or service charges, you can get in touch with us at accounts@saintlukeshs.uk or call us on 01865 769726.

Helpful Information

For further information and advice, you may find the following helpful:

Age UK Oxford

39 West St Helen Street, Abingdon, Oxford, OX14 5BT

Telephone helpline: 01235 849400

helpline@ageukoxfordshire

Barton Advice Centre

Barton Advice Centre, Underhill Circus, Barton, Oxford OX3 9LS

01865 744165

www.oxfordshirewelfarerights.com

Citizens Advice Oxford

Wesley Memorial Hall, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1 2DH

0808 27 87 909

www.citizensadviceoxford.org.uk

Entitled To

Welfare Benefits Calculator online

www.entitledto.co.uk

Mental Health and Welfare Support

Oxfordshire Mind

Hotline (10am -1pm Monday to Thursday) 01865 243585

www.oxfordshiremind.org.uk

Samaritans

116 123 – Free from any phone

0330 094 5717 – local charges may apply.