



## Your rent - frequently asked questions

### Why are you increasing my rent?

Our rent increases are set within a limit that is set by the Government called the Government Rent Standard. Under this, rents can increase by inflation (Consumer Price Index) plus 1%.

### How have you calculated the increase?

Rents are set each year based on the Consumer Price Index figure in September plus 1%, which was 6.7% in September 2023. Rents will, therefore, increase by 7.7% for social, extra care and older persons properties, in line with the Government Rent Standard. More information will follow in rent letters which are sent in February.

We have reached this figure as it will enable us to continue to manage and maintain homes and services and invest in your neighbourhoods. We do recognise that the cost of living is continuing to increase and are here to help customers that might need extra support.

### When will rents go up?

Rents will change from 1st April 2024 for weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual charge accounts.

## I claim Universal Credit. Do I need to do anything?

Once you've received the letter confirming your rent charges in February, you will need to inform the Department for Work and Pensions of this via their online portal after the rent increase has been applied. You can do this [here](#).

It is important that you don't do this until your rent has actually changed to make sure there are no issues with receiving your benefits, so you should do this on the day of or the days following your rent changing. If you do not manage your Universal Credit via the online portal, then you will need to contact the DWP by phoning the helpline on **0800 328 5644**.

For support in doing this contact our Income & Financial Inclusion team by calling **0300 555 0600** or emailing [financialinclusionteam@onward.co.uk](mailto:financialinclusionteam@onward.co.uk)

## I claim Housing Benefit. Do I need to do anything?

If your Housing Benefit is paid directly to you, then you will need to inform Housing Benefit of your rent before 1st April 2024 to make sure you receive the correct payments. To do this you will need to contact your Local Authority and ask to speak to the Housing Benefit department.

If your Housing Benefit is paid directly to Onward, you do not need to take any action. Onward will inform Housing Benefit of your new rent.

## What do I do if I can't afford the increase?

If your Universal Credit allowance or Housing Benefit isn't enough to cover the additional rent increase, please contact our Income & Financial Inclusion Team who will be able to advise on the options that are available. The team can provide free, confidential advice around managing your money, household budgets and additional support you might be entitled to; we are here to help.

If you think you will struggle to pay your rent, please let us know as soon as you can. You can get in touch with a member of the team by calling **0300 555 0600** or by emailing [financialinclusionteam@onward.co.uk](mailto:financialinclusionteam@onward.co.uk). Click on the 'Support Services' section of our website to find out more about the services that are available.

## What if I am affected by the under-occupancy charge?

You will need to make sure that your payments cover your benefit shortfall. You may find that your payments must increase to avoid falling into arrears. If you have any questions, please speak to our Income & Financial Inclusion Team.

## Do I have to change my Direct Debit mandate or Standing Order?

Your Direct Debit will be adjusted automatically by our Income Team – you don't have to do anything. We may increase your Direct Debit by an additional amount on top of your usual payments if you are not paying fully in advance.

However, if you make rent payments by Standing Order you will need to contact your bank to amend the amount before 1st April 2024.

## What is the 53 week year and how does this change rents?

Every few years there is an extra Monday in the year. 2024 is one of these years. Because weekly rents are charged on a Monday this means there will be 53 weeks rent to pay rather than the usual 52. This means that you will need change your payments to cover the extra week.

To calculate the new figure, you look at how much rent you pay each week, times by 53 and divide by 12. So, for example, if your rent was £80 per week you would use the following calculation:

$$\text{£80} \times 53 \div 12 = \text{£353.33}$$

If you pay by standing order you will need to adjust this yourself by getting in touch with your bank. If you pay by direct debit you don't need to do anything; we will change the payments for you. If you pay weekly there will be no change.

## What does the 53-week year mean for Universal Credit payments?

When calculating Universal Credit, the DWP work out monthly rent by multiplying a week's rent by 52 and dividing by 12. This is the case even when there is an extra week in the year.

You won't normally notice this except for every few years when the extra day falls on a Monday, which it does in 2024, it will show on the rent account as a full week's debt. The DWP does not change the way it calculates Universal Credit payments on a 53-week year, which means that your monthly payments will not cover the monthly rent in 2024.

So you will need to work out the shortfall and pay this. We've included an example below.

- 53-week year rent calculation: weekly rent  $\text{£100} \times 53 \div 12 = \text{£441.67}$
- 53-week year Universal Credit calculation: weekly rent  $\text{£100} \times 52 \div 12 = \text{£433.34}$

So, in this example the customer would have a shortfall of £8.33 per month to pay.

## What is a void allowance charge?

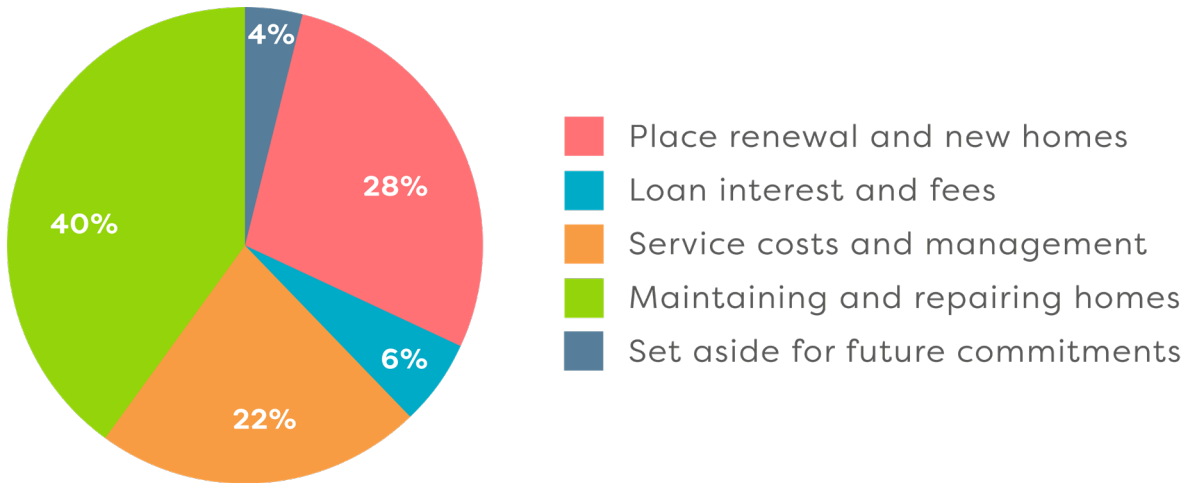
Some of our customers live in 'Specialised Supported Housing' (SSH). This type of accommodation offers a higher level of support, equivalent to the type of services or support which would be provided in a care home. A number of complex assessments are required before an individual can move into SSH. This means that rooms within a scheme can often be vacant for periods of time.

The void allowance charge covers the ongoing costs of managing vacant units before an individual moves in. The charge ensures that we have an income that enables us to continue to maintain and invest in these types of services.

## How do you spend the money from rents?

Increasing rents means that we can continue to manage and maintain homes for our customers and invest back into our neighbourhoods. The chart below shows how we have spent money from rent this year.

### How we spent your money in the last financial year



## Getting in touch.

If you have any questions, please get in touch in one of the following ways:

Call 0300 555 0600  
Online via the My Onward portal  
Writing to us at Onward, 2 Christie Way, Renaissance Court,  
Manchester, M21 7QY

*If you or someone else you know would like a printed copy of this document please get in touch.*

## Interested in getting involved?

Would you like to work with us to improve our services? If so, we'd love to hear from you! Please get in touch to discuss joining our Customer Engagement Community by emailing [customerengagement@onward.co.uk](mailto:customerengagement@onward.co.uk)