

Frequently asked questions

Rent charges annual review:
April 2016 to March 2017

INFORMATION FOR ASSURED AND ASSURED SHORTHOLD RESIDENTS WHO DON'T PAY A SERVICE CHARGE

HOW RENT CHARGES ARE CALCULATED

Q: Am I an assured or assured shorthold tenant?

A: Assured and/or assured shorthold tenancies were introduced in 1989. The landlord is responsible for setting the rents for these tenancies, using a formula set by the government (see below - How does East Thames work out rents). Rents are recalculated every year and the new rents are payable from the first Monday in April.

Q: How does East Thames work out rents for existing residents?

A: In 2001 the Government introduced a ten year 'rent restructuring' programme that aims to ensure that rents are set in a way that is fair for everyone. This means that all social landlords, including East Thames, calculate their rents in the same way. This is to make sure that rents remain affordable and reflect the size and location of the home. The Government's policy means that for each general needs and supported housing affordable home we set a 'formula rent'. This target rent is calculated using the following factors:

- 30% of the formula rent is based on relative property values;
- 70% of the formula rent is based on the relative local earnings; and
- consideration is given to the number of bedrooms so that (other factors being equal) smaller properties have lower rents than larger properties.

East Thames Group has decided to reduce social rents by 1% in 2016-17 in line with government guidelines.

Q: How does East Thames assess the value of properties?

A: East Thames uses a 'beacon' approach to assess the value of homes. This involves selecting a few 'beacon' properties in each postcode area and having these valued independently. This value also takes into account additional factors as follows:

- communal heating
- additional living/communal space
- additional bed space where property has two double bedrooms compared to one double and one single bedroom
- separate and secure utility room
- new kitchen, bathroom, double glazed windows or insulation
- recently redecorated (internal or external)
- private garden or access to a communal garden
- off-street, communal and secure parking
- private entrance
- new build property

HOW TO PAY FOR RENT & SERVICE CHARGES

Q: What's the easiest way to pay my rent?

A: You can choose to pay your rent by:

Standing order or direct debit

One of the simplest, fastest ways to pay as the money comes out of your account automatically.

Using your rent payment card in shops displaying these signs

You need to pay at least three days before the rent is due.



Using a debit/credit card over the phone at any time on 0844 557 8321 (automated service) or 0844 557 8323 (to speak to an operator)

You need to have your debit/credit card and rent payment card to hand.

Using debit/credit card on our website, www.east-thames.co.uk/pay-your-rent

cheque payable to East Homes

Please write your name, address and tenant reference number on the back and post to customer account management team, 29-35 West Ham Lane, Stratford, London E15 4PH.

The easiest way to pay is by direct debit, as once it is set up, the payments are automatic and you don't need to worry any further. If you would like to set up a direct debit, find out about other ways to pay, or order a replacement rent payment card, contact us on **0300 303 7333** (Monday 8.00am to 8.00pm and Tuesday to Friday 8.00am to 5.00pm).

Q: I pay by direct debit or standing order, do I need to adjust this?

A: Each year we send you a letter explaining how much your rent and service charges will be for the coming year. If you pay your rent by standing order, you need to contact your bank straight away to arrange for the payment to be adjusted from 1st April 2015. If you pay by direct debit, the amount will be increased automatically, so please ensure you have sufficient funds in your account.

Q: What can I do if I'm having problems paying my rent?

A: If you have problems paying your rent, coping with debt, or would like advice on welfare and benefits, please contact us for a free appointment with a welfare and debt advisor. Call our customer contact centre on **0300 303 7333** (Monday 8.00am to 8.00pm and Tuesday to Friday 8.00am to 5.00pm), drop into our head office to speak to a member of our team at 29-35, West Ham Lane, Stratford E15 4PH (Mon-Fri, 9.00am to 5.00pm) or email welfare.benefits@east-thames.co.uk

Q: What do I need to do if my rent or part of my rent is paid by housing benefit?

A: We will be contacting your local housing benefits office to inform them of your new rent. If however, your claim is suspended or is being assessed at the time of receiving your rent increase notification, you will need to take it to your local housing benefits office yourself.

MORE INFORMATION

Q: If I am unhappy with my new charge, what can I do?

A: As an assured or assured shorthold tenant, you have the right to appeal against any rent increase. To appeal, please write to the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) Residential Property (FTT), 10 Alfred Place, London, WC1E 7LR for an independent valuation. Once the FTT have reviewed your rent, they will write to you, advising you of the new revised rent and the date from which the new charge will take effect.

If you have any further questions

Call: 0300 303 7333 (Monday 8.00am to 8.00pm and Tuesday to Friday 8.00am to 5.00pm)

Email: rents&servicecharges@east-thames.co.uk

In person: 29-35 West Ham Lane, Stratford E15 4PH (Mon-Fri, 9.00am to 5.00pm)

Online: www.east-thames.co.uk/rents-and-service