

Lambeth Tenants Handbook

Your Rent

Your Rent

Your rent helps us to pay for all of the housing services we provide from repairs to your home to improving the area you live in. This guide tells you more about your rent and our rent service.

The amount of rent you pay is decided by Lambeth Council in line with government guidelines.

Rent is a priority charge - It is very important to pay your rent and associated charges on time, whether you pay it yourself or are claiming benefit.

Late rent payments mean that we have less to spend on repairing and improving your home and the area you live in.

The frequency at which you pay your rent is entirely your choice; you can pay weekly, fortnightly, monthly or even quarterly, but never in arrears. All payments should be in advance meaning that the value you pay in should be the value that credits your account. Your account should always be in credit.

For example, if you choose to pay your rent weekly and your weekly charge is £120.00; your account should always be in credit of £120.00.

If you are going to be away from your home for a while, for example, if you are going on holiday you must make sure your rent is paid even while you are away.

Paying Your Rent

You can pay your rent in the following easy and convenient ways:

Direct Debit

With direct debit, you allow the council to instruct your bank or building society to pay your rent each month directly from your account. This instruction stays in place until you tell us to stop taking payments or you cancel the arrangement directly with your bank or building society. We require 14 days' notice to cancel direct debit instructions.

Payment by direct debit is easy to set up, and many tenants are now paying this way. The amount your bank or building society pays us is automatically adjusted if your rent goes up or down. If your rent changes, we will give you two weeks' notice of the change and then take the new amount automatically from your bank or building society account.

Benefits of Direct Debit

- Simple – you provide us with your details and your bank sets up the payment
- Convenient – you can choose any day of the month for payments
- Safe – the Direct Debit guarantee fully protects your payments
- Efficient for you and us – the money we save we use to improve our services

You have to give at least 14 days' notice to cancel a direct debit and we give you the same amount of notice if any changes are made to your direct debit.

To set up a direct debit:

Telephone: 020 7926 8790

Email: RentsTeam@lambeth.gov.uk

PayPoint, Post Office or Cashiers Office

You can pay at convenience stores, newsagents, supermarkets and service stations where you see the PayPoint sign (which is a double purple P). You will need your rent payment swipe card to pay.

You can also pay your rent at any post office in the same way using your rent payment card.

You can pay in cash at the cashiers' office at:

Brixton Customer Centre, Civic Centre, 6 Brixton Hill, London. SW2 1EG

It is important that you always keep a receipt as proof of payment and check your payment against your rent statement, or contact us to confirm the payment.

Credit or Debit Card over the phone

You can pay by debit or credit card by telephoning Lambeth Council's 24-hour automated hotline and following the instructions. Please ensure you have your 9-digit payment reference number to hand.

Telephone: 020 8290 2086

Online

You can pay your rent safely online using our rent payments page. For more information:

Visit: <https://housingmanagement.lambeth.gov.uk/pay-your-rent-and-service-charge>

Standing Order

A standing order instructs your bank or building society to make a regular payment to the council from your bank or building society account. You can set this up to pay at your chosen frequency i.e. weekly or monthly.

The instruction stays in place until you cancel the arrangement directly with your bank or building society and the amount you pay is fixed. This means if your rent changes it will be up to you to contact your bank or building society and inform them of the change as your standing order will not adjust automatically.

To set up a standing order:

Telephone: 020 7926 8790

What Your Rent Covers

Your rent is made up of net rent and service charges. The net rent covers the general cost of maintaining and managing your home and neighbourhood. The service charges are for services specifically provided to your home or local area, for example, ground maintenance, estate cleaning, or communal facilities such as a concierge and estate lighting. If you think you are being charged for a service you are not receiving, for example you have had no hot water for several days because your water heater has broken, please contact us on 020 7926 6000.

If you are on a low income, you may be eligible for housing benefit towards your net rent and certain service charges. However, housing benefit does not cover some other charges that may be added to your rent. These include:

- Heating and hot water charges for communal heating and hot water systems
- Some charges associated with Sheltered Accommodation

Other costs relating to your home may be charged separately and not included in your weekly rent, for example the cost of hiring a garage from us.

Housing Benefit and Welfare Reforms

If you are on a low income you may be entitled to housing benefit to help towards your rent. Housing benefit is paid directly into your rent account and helps toward the cost of your rent. It does not cover water charges, heating charges and other service charges.

Your entitlement to housing benefit depends on your household income.

The amount of housing benefit you get will depend on:

- How much money you have coming in – work related income or benefit income
- How much money you have in savings
- Your overall household income

When to Claim and Changes of Circumstances

- Whether your household is fully occupied or you have spare bedrooms (see below: Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy)
- How much rent you are liable to pay and the level of eligible rent (housing benefit will not cover service charges)

If you think you are entitled to Housing Benefit you should make a claim immediately, this will enable you to get support for the entire duration of your entitlement. Should you fail to apply immediately, you should apply as soon as possible and request a backdated claim. You will have to show good cause for not applying immediately.

If you already have an active claim, and your circumstances change in the following ways:

- someone moves out of or into your household
- you acquire or lose a job
- your income or your household income changes in some way

- someone in your household gets into employment,

You should notify Housing Benefit IMMEDIATELY of these changes. This will avoid accumulation of an overpayment from Housing Benefit which may result in your subsequent entitlement being reduced.

Information to Support your Claim

When applying for Housing Benefit you will have to submit information alongside your claim in order to allow your eligibility to be assessed. You should be ready to supply the following:

- Your National Insurance Number
- A copy of your Tenancy Agreement to prove rental liability
- Proof of identity – this will be for yourself and for all members of your household. It is important to update your household details at all times with Housing Benefit i.e. if someone moves in or moves out
- Proof of your income – this may be wage slips, your audited self-employed accounts for the tax year, or proof of benefit entitlement
- Proof of Income for all other working age members of your household – remember Housing Benefit is calculated on Household income, it may be that working age children are in full time education – you will have to evidence this
- Any outgoings you may have for child care – this can be a letter from a nursery or child minder for example, showing how much you pay, your payment frequency and the child minders registration number

Bank Statements – this will have to be for all of your bank accounts including any savings accounts you may have.

Supporting documentation for a Housing Benefit Claim or change of circumstances can be handed into the following offices:

Civic Centre, 6 Brixton Hill, SW2 1EG

North Area Office, 91 Kennington Lane, SE11 4HQ

South Area Office, 139 Albert Carr Gardens, SW16 3HB

For more information, please contact:

Telephone

Housing Benefits and Council Tax: 0345 302 2312

The Central Income Team: 020 7926 8790

Email

Housing Benefit: Benefitsinfo@lambeth.gov.uk

Central Income Team: RentsTeam@lambeth.gov.uk

Your home is at risk if you do not pay your rent. If you get housing benefit, you are still responsible for making sure your rent is paid and on time.

Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy

The number of rooms you have (that could be considered bedrooms) in your property is outlined on your tenancy. If you claim Housing Benefit to help with paying your rent, your entitlement may be reduced if your home is considered too large for you. This deduction is known as the "Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy" or "bedroom tax". This change could affect you if the make-up of your household changes i.e. someone moves out, or if you move into a property that is too big for you.

What you need to Know – Bedroom Entitlement and when you may lose some of your Housing Benefit

Depending on how many spare rooms you have the reduction in Housing Benefit will be different. For one spare room you will face a reduction of 14%

For two spare rooms or more you will face a reduction of 25%

Sometimes, it may not be evident that you have a spare room so it is worth looking over what the room entitlement is. You are entitled to ONE room for each of the following categories:

- Any adult couple
- Each person over 16
- A disabled child who cannot share a bedroom with another child due to their disability (you must seek further advice on this, see contact details below)
- Two children of the same sex under 16
- Two children under 10 regardless of their sex

For example: if you live in a 3-bedroom property with your partner and one child under the rules you will be under-occupying by one bedroom.

Benefit Cap – What Benefits You Are Entitled To

Currently, under the Welfare Reform Act, the maximum amount of benefit you can receive is as follows:

- A Single Person can receive up to £296.35 per week
- A family (including single parent households) can receive up to £442.31 per week

This is inclusive of Housing Benefit, and if the level of benefits you receive already adds up to £296.35/£442.31 per week depending on what category you fall into, your housing benefit will be reduced so that you do not exceed the cap level.

For example: A family in receipt of Income Support, Child Benefits, and Child Tax credits at a rate of £500 per week will receive no housing benefit regardless of their entitlement.

A family in receipt of income support, child benefits and Child Tax credits at a rate of £400 per week would be eligible to £42.31 worth of housing benefit regardless of their entitlement.

If you have been employed continuously for 12 months, and you lose your job through no fault of your own, the benefit cap won't apply to you for the first 39 weeks of your claim.

You are also exempt if your family receive one of the following:

- Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment
- Attendance Allowance
- Support component of Employment and Support Allowance
- Industrial Injuries benefits

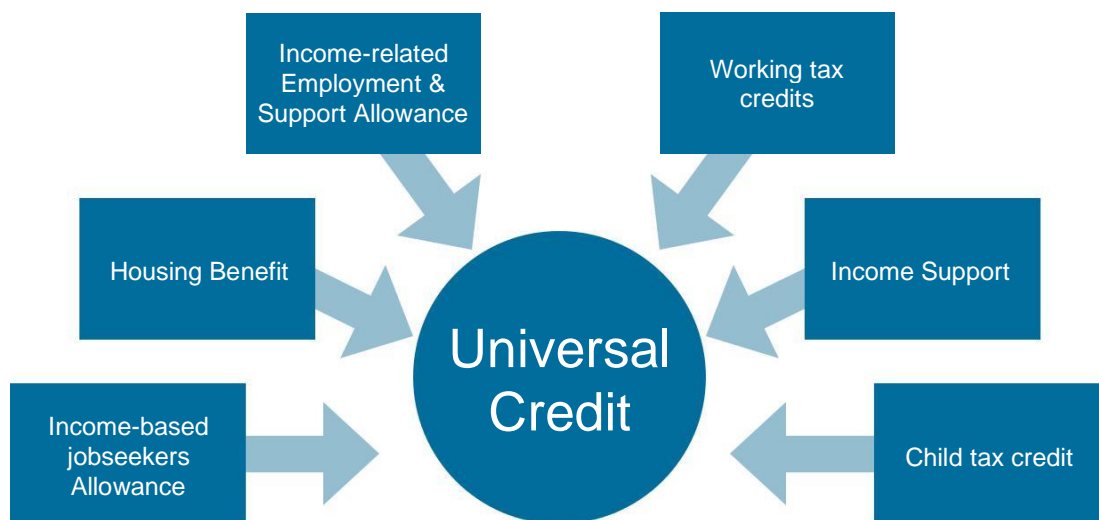
The cap also doesn't apply if you are of pension age, or you receive war widows' or war widowers' pension.

Universal Credit

The Government's Universal Credit scheme started to be rolled out in Lambeth in February 2016. Over time every council tenant who receives Benefits will be affected by Universal Credit. By about 2022 all the Benefits payable to you will be 'bundled' together into one payment every month paid directly to your account (bank, building society, credit union).

At first Universal Credit affects only new, single, benefit claimants who do not have housing costs.

Universal Credit is replacing the Benefits shown:



Pension credit is not yet included under Universal Credit and therefore if you or your partner are over pension credit age, you will not be able to claim Universal Credit.

How does this affect me and my rent?

Before Universal Credit, Housing Benefit was paid to the council to cover a portion of your eligible rent. Under Universal Credit, it is your responsibility to pay your rent from the Universal Credit paid into your account and any other income you may have.

Because Universal Credit is paid monthly and not fortnightly or weekly, you will have to budget to pay your rent monthly.

- There are no paper forms for Universal Credit. All claims or changes of circumstances have to be made through an online portal.

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit>

For more information on the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (also called the 'Bedroom Tax'), the Benefit Cap and Universal Credit, and any support that may be available to you, please contact our Welfare Solutions Team on:

Telephone: 020 7 926 6399

Email: RentsTeam@lambeth.gov.uk

Introductory Tenancies – Your Obligations during this Period

As a part of our policy for Introductory Tenancies you will be contacted by one of our income officers in the first 10 days of your tenancy to ensure that everything is going smoothly with the start of your tenancy.

As per procedure, the Income Officer will check to ensure that you are aware of your rent charges and will check if you have applied for Housing Benefit if you think you are entitled.

This Income Officer will be your port of call should you have any issues regarding your rent within the first year of your tenancy.

As an introductory tenant your rights are much more limited than a secure tenant and as such, failure to pay your rent in this period or resolve any issues in terms of Housing Benefit could result in us refusing your transition to a secure tenancy.

Refusal to pay rent will result in a possession order being taken out on your property and ultimately may result in the termination of your tenancy.

Difficulties Paying Rent

Our job in the rents team is not only to ensure that your rent is paid but that you have access to all of the support available to enable you to be in a position to do so.

Your Income Officer will make sure you get support in the following areas, should you need it:

- Debt Advice
- Budgeting Advice
- Benefit Support/advice/appeals
- Employment Support
- Advice on Welfare Reforms and access to support
- Financial support for everyday expenses

We are here to help!

If you are having difficulty paying your rent, you should contact us immediately so that we can try to help you find a solution.

We may be able to help you set up a repayment plan to clear what you owe us. Repayment plans are flexible and designed to suit your needs, there is a statutory minimum that you can contribute to your arrears which changes per year. We can also check whether you are claiming the benefits you are entitled to, and can refer you to the right agencies for debt advice, counselling and support.

When we take legal action

If your arrears continue to grow and you do not take reasonable steps to clear them, we may take legal action to recover the money you owe. This could result in a County Court Judgment against you, and you could lose your home.

If you are evicted from your home because of rent arrears, you will be considered intentionally homeless and will not be eligible for re-housing by any council.

As well as the above, if you have rent arrears, you will not be able to:

- Exchange your property with another tenant or get a transfer
- Rent a garage or parking space and, if you already have one, it may be taken away from you
- Keep your right to buy your home
- Stand for executive positions on your tenants' and residents' association
- Get a mortgage. Building societies or lenders will ask us for a reference about your rent payment record when you apply for a mortgage

Keeping you informed about your rent account

We send all tenants a rent account statement every three months (quarterly). This is similar to a bank statement and will show your weekly rent charges, the payments you have made and, if appropriate, any housing benefit payments that have been paid on your behalf.

Your rent statement will also show the balance of your account up to the date the letter was sent. This will tell you how much you owe us and if you are in arrears, or how much your account is in credit.

As well as receiving quarterly rent statements, you can ask us for extra statements at any time or an update on your rent account balance.

Email us and we will email you a rent statement within two working days.

If you have any questions about your rent account statements or if you want to request an additional rent statement you can also contact the Central Income Team on the details at the end of this section.

Rent credit refunds

If your account balance is significantly in credit, you can ask us to refund you the credit.

We will carry out a series of checks on your account and housing benefit before approving your refund.

We will check the following:

- If you have any outstanding debt with Housing Benefit
- If you owe any money on a garage account
- If the credit in your account is as result of a discretionary payment intended to support you with your rent

If any of the above applies, we will use your credit to pay these debts first or may refuse your refund.

If you are entitled to have your rent credit returned, we will pay it back into your bank or building society account.

To find out more about getting a refund of credit on your rent account, contact us on the details at the end of this section.

Changes to your rent and charges

We have the right to change your rent and other service charges at any time, but we usually only do this once a year. We will give you at least two weeks' written notice if we propose to change your rent or service charges. We will send you a

Rent Notification letter, which shows the new rent and other charges you will have to pay and the date when your rent will change.

Contact us

If you have any questions about your rent account, contact us on:

Telephone: 020 792660820

[Email: RentsTeam@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:RentsTeam@lambeth.gov.uk)

Visit: www.lambeth.gov.uk/council-tenants-and-homeowners

Write to us or drop in on weekdays, 9am to 5pm, to speak to a member of the Rents Team at:

North Area Office

91 Kennington Lane, London, SE11 4HQ

Monday to Friday 9:00am – 5:00pm (10:00am – 5:00pm Wednesdays)

Or

South Area Office

Albert Carr Gardens, Streatham High Road, SW16 3HB

Monday to Friday 9:00am – 5:00pm