

HOUSEHOLD BILLS:

There are a number of different services you normally need to pay for if you have your own accommodation in the UK. If you rent accommodation, find out from the landlord if any bills (gas, electricity, water, council tax and phone) are included in the rent. There are many suppliers of gas, electricity and telephone services. Some companies are cheaper than others but direct comparisons are difficult and prices change.

WATER:

You must pay for water in the UK. In most areas you pay a set water bill every year. This does not change no matter how much water you use. However, some companies use water meters so that you only pay for the water that you use.

GAS and ELECTRICITY:

Houses in the UK are usually connected to gas or electricity supplies (or both) to provide power and heat. When you move into a new property, you should contact the gas and electricity suppliers to put the bills under your name. Make sure you give them the meter reading for when you arrived, so you are not billed for what was used before you arrived. Gas and electricity is billed according to how much you use. Most houses have gas and electricity meters which the utility companies can check to see how much you have used. In some rented accommodation you need to buy a key which you insert into the meter each time you need to top up the gas or electricity. You can buy this key and top it up at your local post office or village shop. Some bills will be 'estimates' and some will be from meter readings. Obviously estimates can be inaccurate, so check your own meters if you want to know the true situation. If you call the supplier and give them your own reading, an incorrect bill will be amended.

COUNCIL TAX:

Council tax applies to all homes in the UK. This is a tax set by your local authority on all residential property. If you are on welfare benefits or a low income, you may be entitled to Council Tax Benefit, which will reduce the amount of Council Tax that you have to pay. There are rules about who should pay the tax. If you are living in accommodation provided by your agent or employer, and you are not staying permanently in the UK, it is unlikely that you will have to pay the tax yourself. Your local District or Borough Council will be able to tell you whether you have to pay or not. Only adults are taxable, and single people living on their own get special rates, as do any people claiming benefits.

TELEPHONES:

Most houses in the UK have a phone line (sometimes called landlines). If you do not have a line, you can contact a phone company to have one installed. You will usually have to pay for this. If you already have a phone line you can be connected for free. Mobile phones can be useful, but shop around. Phoning other countries is always more expensive than numbers in the UK, and phoning mobiles is usually more expensive than phoning ordinary phones. You will have cheaper calls if all your friends are on the same system. Make sure you can keep your mobile charged, even if you aren't using it, so you can get at the numbers in the memory and use it in an emergency.

There are public telephone boxes in many towns where you can put money or a card in to pay for phone calls. Cards are available in many shops. This is usually cheaper than a mobile phone.

You can also make emergency calls for free from all phones, even if you have no credit. Dial 999 or 112.

TELEVISION LICENSES:

If you have a television in your house then you must also have a television licence. You can get a TV licence application form from your local post office. A colour TV licence costs £145.50 a year but you can pay in instalments. Go to www.tvlicensing.co.uk for further details. Beware that you can be fined £1,000 for not having a television licence.

MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS:

Some rented properties have maintenance contracts. These are for the grass cutting, cleaning of shared areas, repainting etc. Ensure you know who pays the bills!