

## **Appendix 3**

### **Service Charge consultation feedback – January 2022**

In early December 2021, we wrote to 688 tenants living in sheltered schemes (9) and blocks of general needs flats (21) about our proposal to introduce service charges to cover the costs of: -

- *Communal electricity*
- *Communal cleaning (windows and generally)*
- *Provision and maintenance of fire alarm systems (where applicable)*

We also advised of the start of a formal consultation period from the 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021 to 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2022. Tenants were invited to provide comments on the proposed charge by telephone, email and in writing. Consultation also included holding 9 drop-in sessions at sheltered housing schemes, giving tenants an opportunity to meet with Officers to ask any questions.

51 tenants responded to us in a number of ways. A summary of the main points from the feedback that we received is below: -

- Wanted to know why pay for electricity when the building had solar panels.
- Concerned about the increase, but if they were to get it, the communal areas need cleaning.
- Assumed that the £3.00 per week from all the tenants was to pay for the electric only.
- Asked how often the windows will be cleaned?
- Requested that the floors in the communal areas be included in the cleaning.
- Were worried about the extra cost if they were on low income and not in receipt of housing benefit
- Were happy with the proposed charges and will pay.
- Understood why we were making the changes, but wanted good, value for money services.
- Asked what the difference was between the amenity charge and the proposed service charge.
- Felt that service standards proposed would help the Council monitor that the work was being done and to the standard expected.
- Were concerned that when their cleaner is off, that the cleaning time may not be sufficient.
- The communal cleaning needs to be monitored and inspected more.
- Accepted that charges were to be made but were not supportive of the proposal to implement these.
- Supportive of the charge if it was accompanied by improvements to services and effective monitoring of the service charge for through service standards.

- Concerned that these costs will increase annually.
- I already pay full rent and council tax and feel it is a bit unfair to be charged more but the hallways, corridors and stairways are filthy.
- Since the recent retirement of the cleaner the new cleaning arrangements are only half of what they were, so how would this an improvement?
- How can you put a service charge what is a legally enforceable installed fire system?
- One of the main things that residents require is the feeling of security. We need security cameras and extra lighting in the car park areas. If these were to improve them maybe people would be willing to contribute to a service charge.

Of the 51 out of 688 tenants who responded: -

- 58.82% (30 people) understood why we were making this change and did not mind paying but wanted to make sure that they would receive a good service that represented value for money
- 21.56% (11 people) said that they were unhappy with the proposal
- 15.68% (8 people) expressed empathy or acceptance that changes had to occur
- 3.92% (2 people) were concerned about affordability of the service charge costs currently and, in the future

NB: 51 tenant responses out of a possible 688 responses = 7.41%

Responses to the key questions/issues raised by tenants during the consultation are summarised as follows: -

**Question 1** - *How does the service charge differ from the Amenity Charge? And what does it cover? It is my understanding that we already currently pay a service charge on this property of £1.37 per week. Is the proposed £3 per week additional to this or instead of this?*

**Response** - Tenants currently pay an amenity charge which is a charge for grounds maintenance/estate management of housing open spaces and community safety. The service charge is an additional charge and is to cover the cost of communal electricity, communal cleaning and provision and maintenance of the fire alarm system (where applicable). The Council incurs specific charges for services to tenants (as above), which are not currently being charged for.

**Question 2** – *In the Sheltered Scheme I live in, we have solar panels which supply electric, so why do we have to pay for communal electricity?*

**Response** - The electricity bills we receive will be for the demand on top of the electricity the Solar Panels generates. The Solar Panels will not generate electricity when the sun goes down and so we still need to purchase electricity for communal areas where it is consumed during hours of darkness. E.g. lighting

**Question 3** – *There is no communal cleaning where I live in currently and the floor needs cleaning. I live in a general need flat.*

**Response** – In general needs flats, where there are no window cleaning or general cleaning, the Council will be introducing regular cleaning which will improve the condition/environment.

**Question 4** - *I am unhappy about the charges and feel I pay enough rent and council tax already.*

**Response** - The Council incurs specific charges for services to all tenants, which are currently not being charged for within the weekly rental charge. The Council has no option but to charge for some of the costs for services to tenants if it is to maintain existing services and improve service provision. Charges associated with renting council properties is entirely separate from the Council Tax which a charge levied on all residential properties.

**Question 5** - *What happens to people who currently don't receive any help from benefits to pay for the service charge?*

**Response** – For those people who currently don't receive any help from benefits the Council will offer them a private appointment to discuss their individual and financial circumstances. It may well be that some people who currently don't qualify for Housing Benefit do qualify due to the increase in their housing costs. Each individual person's circumstances need to be assessed separately though.

**Question 6** - *I understand that the lights are on in the communal area, however I do not believe this would require an additional £3 per week from all of the tenants to supply this and how often will the windows be cleaned?*

**Response** – The £3.00 charge per week is not purely for electricity. This charge will be used to recover some of the costs that the Council already pay for electricity, communal cleaning (where applicable) and provision and maintenance of the fire alarm system (where applicable). A service standard will be available for all tenants and this will outline how often the windows will be cleaned.

**Question 7** – *All the time I have lived in the Court we have asked for improvements to internal and external security to the building we live in.*

**Response** - The service charge does not cover the cost of improvements to internal and external security of buildings, however the raising of the service charge does take some pressure off resources that could be used for building enhancements.

**Question 8** – *The communal areas need to be monitored and inspected more.*

**Response** – The communal areas will be inspected on a regular basis to ensure that the required standards set out by the Council are being met. In addition to this, surveys will be sent periodically to tenants asking for their views on the standard of cleaning.

**Question 9** – *What do I do if I am unhappy about the service provided covered by the service charge?*

**Response** – Quality of service is very important to us, therefore if you have any issues of concern about service provision, please contact us on Tel: - 01623 450000 (ask for Housing Management and Tenancy Services) or by emailing – [tenancy@ashfield.gov.uk](mailto:tenancy@ashfield.gov.uk)

### **Consultation Outcome**

We have considered the feedback received. As on balance there are insufficient comments to be detrimental to the introduction of the service charge, the recommendation is to proceed to introducing a service charge with effect from the 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

This will affect tenants living in the following sheltered schemes and general needs flats: -

#### **Sheltered Schemes flats**

Aspley Court, Sutton
Beauvale Court, Hucknall
Brand Court, Sutton
Brook Street Court, Sutton
Darlison Court, Hucknall
Desmond Court, Underwood
Sherwood Court, Kirkby
Summerhill Court, Huthwaite
Titchfield Court, Hucknall

#### **General Needs flats**

Brickyard Drive, Hucknall
Brierley Road, Sutton
Butlers Close, Hucknall
Caunts Crescent, Sutton
Chatsworth Drive, Hucknall
Deepdale Court, Sutton
Eastwell Court, Hucknall
Goodall Crescent, Hucknall
Holgate Walk, Hucknall
Jephson Buildings, Sutton

Lammas Close, Sutton
The Oval, Sutton
Rockwood Court, Hucknall
Spring Street Flats, Hucknall
Stanton Court, Sutton
Stoneyford Court, Sutton
Truman Drive, Hucknall
The Twitchell, Sutton
Twitchell View, Sutton
Westbourne Road, Sutton
Willowbridge Court, Sutton

If approved, Tenants will receive a formal Notice of Variation (under Section 103 of the Housing Act 1985) in February 2018. This will include full details of the new service charge and will inform them of the date on which the change will become effective. Tenants will not need to sign a new Tenancy Agreement.