

Appendix 2

Service Charge consultation feedback – January 2024

In early December 2023, we wrote to a total of 439 tenants and leaseholders about the 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 11 December 2023 to 7 January 2024. Tenants and leaseholders were invited to provide comments on the proposed charge by telephone, email and in writing. Consultation also included holding 2 drop-in sessions at sheltered housing schemes, giving tenants an opportunity to meet with Officers to ask any questions.

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

- Supportive of the charge if it was accompanied by improvements to services, done frequently and there is a service standard in place.
- Wanted to know why pay for electricity when the building had solar panels.
- Were worried about the extra cost if they were on low income.
- Accepted that charges were to be made but were not supportive of the proposal to implement these.
- Were happy with the proposed charges and will pay.
- Understood why we were making the changes, but wanted good, value for money services.
- The communal cleaning needs to be monitored and inspected.
- Does not affect me either way if introduced.

Of the 22 out of 439 people who responded: -

- 10 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.
- 8 people said that they were unhappy with the proposal. Some were concerned about how they would pay for it.
- 4 people provided comments (were neutral about the change).

NB: 22 tenant responses out of a possible 439 responses = 5%. In total 1.82% of those consulted raised a negative concern.

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

Question 1 – *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 2 – *There is no communal cleaning where I live in currently. I live in a general needs flat.*

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

Question 3 - *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 is a charge levied on all residential properties.

Question 4 - *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 will qualify due to the increase in their housing costs. Each individual person's circumstances need to be assessed separately though.

Question 5 – *The communal areas need to be monitored and inspected.*

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 6 – *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 the Housing Management Section) or by emailing – 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 introduce a service charge.

If approved, Tenants will receive a formal Notice of Variation (under Section 103 of the Housing Act 1985). 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.

Leaseholders will also need to be served with the appropriate legal notices as set out in the s20 Landlord and Tenants Act 1985.