



Your charges explained

Rent and Service Charges April 2014

This leaflet was published January 2014. Any older versions
are now out of date including those with no date stamp.



This leaflet gives you information about your rent and service charges. These charges are based on the actual cost of providing services to you.

We also have a leaflet about the standard of service you can expect from us. To see this, go to www.wcht.org.uk/standards or contact 01923 209009 to request a copy.

What is the difference between rent and service charge?

Your rent pays for the repairs, maintenance and management of your home. Service charges pay for the cost of looking after shared areas or for personal services you have to pay for such as heating, water charges or insurance.

Why are my service charges more this year?

We introduced charging for services to communal areas last year. To make it more affordable for you, we decided to spread the cost of service charges so that it would take five years to charge you for the full amount. We therefore charged 20% for the first year, and this year it will be 40%. You won't have to pay the full amount until 2017/18.

2013-2014: 20% of the total cost of the service

2014-2015: 40% of the total cost of the service

2015-2016: 60% of the total cost of the service

2016-2017: 80% of the total cost of the service

2017-2018: 100% of the total cost of the service

What is the £12.00 per week cap?

We have decided to cap the increase in the communal service charges to £12.00 (per week). This means that even if 40% of the actual cost is higher, the maximum you will pay this year is £12.00.

However, this cap applies only to the communal service charges which have been introduced since April 2013. It does not apply to any personal charges, such as heating and hot water, support charge or water rates which are excluded from the cap and charged at actual cost. If this applies to you, your total service charge may be more than £12.00 per week.

Why are my heating and hot water charges not discounted?

These were existing charges that you have always paid for, therefore they are not included in the discount we have applied to the charges we introduced last year.

How have you worked out my rent increase?

The Trust increases its rents every year using a Government set formula. Almost all social landlords use this formula to set rent levels.

The rent is increased to meet the rising costs of looking after your home. We use something called the Retail Price Index, or 'RPI', to calculate this (RPI is a way of measuring inflation), and then add another half a per cent to that figure.

The April 2014 increase will be based on the annual RPI in September 2013, which was 3.2%.

Additionally the rent will be increased until it reaches a 'target rent' set by the Government, to ensure you are paying the same amount for the same type of property as other social housing properties in the area.

The formula that is applied to calculate your rent is:

$3.2\% + 0.5\%$ plus up to £2.08 per week.

No one will receive a rent increase that is above this amount.

Why do you have to increase my rent?

We increase our rents to meet the rising costs of looking after your home and it is something we need to do to ensure our viability for existing and future tenants. We are only charging tenants for the services we provide to them.

What if I don't pay?

You are legally obliged to pay for your rent and service charge. If you don't pay we will take court action and you could lose your home.

What if I can't pay?

If you think you will struggle to pay it is important to speak to our financial inclusion team/income team as soon as possible – they can talk through your options.

Are service charges covered by Housing Benefit?

Yes, we have confirmed with the Council that all the communal service charges will be covered this year. The existing personal charges, such as heating and hot water, are not covered by HB.

What if I am unhappy with the services provided?

If you are unhappy with any of our services, please let us know. Speak to Customer Services on 01923 209000 and they will help you. It is very important to us that you are satisfied with our services.

How can I get involved?

When we renew a major service contract we always welcome tenants' views, so do read our resident newsletters and check our website at www.wcht.org.uk. We will tell you when contracts are due for renewal and will give details of how you can get involved if you are interested.

The following table shows some of the services you may have to pay for and the services you may see on your statement, but services and charges differ from property to property depending on the services we provide you.

Type of Expense	Explanation of the service charge item
Concierge/security	This includes CCTV and door entry system maintenance and the cost of security patrols.
Rubbish clearance	This is the cost of removing bulky items left or dumped on our estates such as fridges and mattresses. This is different from the waste collection services provided by the council.
Bin area and rubbish chute	This covers the cleaning and maintenance of communal bins, areas and chutes.
Caretaking services	Provided by Trust staff, their duties include litter picking, clearing broken glass, etc.
Cleaning supplies	This covers your share of the costs where these are used.
Cleaning to communal areas	This covers the cleaning to communal areas, especially in blocks of flats
Communal aerial maintenance	The maintenance of communal aerials, primarily in blocks of flats and Independent Living schemes.
Communal TV licence	For the TVs in our Independent Living scheme lounges.
Communal area council tax	Your share of the council tax payable for the shared parts of an Independent Living scheme.
Communal area repairs and furnishings	All repairs to communal areas and replacement or repair of furnishing.

Type of Expense	Explanation of the service charge item
Communal area water rates	Your share of the water rates payable for the shared parts of a Independent Living scheme.
Communal boiler repair and maintenance	This is covered by a contract with PH Jones (part of British Gas) and deals with the shared boilers in some blocks and Independent Living schemes.
Communal keys, locks and fobs	Dealing with access to blocks and communal areas in some blocks and Independent Living schemes.
Communal kitchen maintenance	Dealing with the kitchens in some Independent Living schemes.
Communal Lifeline maintenance	Dealing with regular servicing of Lifeline alarms in communal areas in Independent Living schemes once every six months
Electrical testing and maintenance	The regular testing of the communal electrical installation in accordance with regulations. This includes communal lights, power sockets, power to electric doors etc.
Emergency lighting test and maintenance	Monthly testing of the emergency lighting systems, checking of lights and lamps and any repairs or maintenance necessary. This is required by law to ensure your safety in the event of evacuation in the dark.
Fencing repairs and maintenance	Provided by the Trust staff and contractors.
Fire safety equipment maintenance	Provided by specialist contractors including Honeywell and Chubb and covers testing and repair within four hours for any faults.
Grounds Maintenance	This covers grass cutting, litter picking, hedge trimming and tree pruning on Trust owned land.

Type of Expense	Explanation of the service charge item
Health and Safety	Includes the costs of inspections where necessary and equipment such as first aid kits.
Heating costs	Your share of any communal area or shared heating.
Insurance	Buildings insurance
Laundry room repairs	For our Independent Living schemes.
Legionella testing and maintenance	Dealing with water quality. The work includes testing of the water temperature, testing for bacteria etc and any necessary remedial work such as chlorination and cleaning.
Lift servicing and repairs	This service is provided using a contractor. The contract includes a 24/7 call out for attendance for a lift failure within 2 hours.
Lighting costs	In communal areas including hallways and stairs, provided by Scottish and Southern Energy.
Lightning protection	Primarily for our taller buildings.
Pest control	Provided by Watford Borough Council on a fee basis when required.
Refuse collection	Provided by Watford Borough Council, primarily for some of the Independent Living schemes, for communal bins.
Water coolers	Provided by Angel Spring in some Independent Living schemes.
Window cleaning	This includes cleaning communal windows in blocks.

Frequently Asked Questions

If I am on the ground floor, why should I pay for a lift?

The lift is one of the services everyone in the block has access to. Whether you choose to use it or not all residents will share the cost of communal services.

If I don't use the laundry, why should I pay for it?

The laundry is available to all tenants in the block(s) as a communal service so whether you chose to use it or not it is a service you share and pay towards.

I cannot see that our windows are cleaned, why should I pay?

The contractors may come at times that you are away from your home so you may not see the service provided. We do require contractors to inform the Site Officer or a resident that the service has been provided so this can be checked.

If you are unhappy with the services provided, please let us know. Speak to your Estate Services Officer (or Support Worker if in Independent Living scheme), or contact Customer Services on 01923 209000 and we will inform the relevant team or person responsible to ensure they are aware.

If you want to leave feedback you can do this online at www.wcht.org.uk/feedback, via email to feedback@wcht.org.uk or over the phone to any member of staff.

My service charge statement has services I don't even want.

Individual residents cannot 'opt out' of paying the costs of services that are being provided. There are contracts that are in place to provide these services, but we will inform you when they are up for renewal and you can let us know what level of service you want us to provide. The Trust will consult on service charges and will only introduce or cancel a service if at least 70% of tenants affected agreed. However, we may have a legal duty or there may be health and safety reasons to provide certain services and tenants will not be able to change this.

Or you could get involved the next time a major contract comes up for renewal to shape the level of service you receive and help choose contractors. Check our resident newsletters and our website at www.wcht.org.uk to find out when our contracts are due to change and how you can get involved if you want to.



Notes

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