

Service charges



Paying for the services we carry out

This leaflet is a plain English description of our service charges and it is to help you have a better understanding of the services we provide.

Your service charge is the money you pay towards the day-to-day running costs of your block, your estate and our administration cost for providing a leasehold service. All leaseholders in a block pay service charges and we pay for the proportion relating to tenants. We get the money from tenants through the rent they pay. Your leaseholders guide explains these service charges. You can get a copy of the guide from the Home Ownership Team by phoning 020 7517 4708 or 020 7517 4722.

How we work out your service charge

Each year in March, we will send you a statement showing your estimated service charge for the next financial year. Our financial year runs from 1 April to 31 March. We do our best to make this statement as accurate as possible and base it on what we spent in previous years. If you have bought your property part way through the financial year, your service charge will be set to the end of the financial year. If you want to pay your service charges in instalments by January, contact the Home Ownership Team.

By September we will tell you the actual amount that we spent providing services between 1 April and 31 March in the previous financial year. If we've overestimated your service charge, we'll pay this money back into your account. If we've underestimated it, we will add this money to your service charge account and we will explain why.

Any change to your service charge account is based on independently audited (investigated) accounts to make sure that the service charges are correct. The accountants will check that we've charged jobs to the right block or estate (so customers in one block are not paying for work carried out to another block).

You will also get a summary of your rights and responsibilities. This will include how to check the amount that we have spent on services to your estate and block.

When you get your bill, if you do not agree with any of the items on the service charge statement please let us know. It may be that jobs were done when you were not at home. We will keep a copy of the original bill and we will be able to explain the costs to you. We will do our best to give you a



full explanation and to make our statements as clear and as accurate as possible.

Depending on where you live, your service charge could cover:

- gardening;
- caretaking;
- boiler fuel;
- repairing or maintaining the boiler;
- electrical heating;
- repairing and maintaining the block you live in;
- building insurance;
- repairing and maintaining the estate;
- door entryphone;
- repairing and maintaining the TV aerial;
- repairing and maintaining the lift;
- hiring containers to store rubbish;
- heating and lighting shared areas;
- a concierge service;
- housing-management fees; and
- administration fee.



Horticulture (gardening)

A gardener will carry out various tasks depending on the season. This includes mowing areas of grass, removing weeds from soil beds, pathways and concrete areas, picking up leaves from the floor and looking after flower beds and trees.

Caretaking

Your Estate Caretaking Team are managed by the Local Housing Centre. They are responsible for a range of tasks including:

- cleaning the entrance lobby, lifts, stairwells and rubbish areas;
- checking that shared lights are working;
- reporting anything that needs to be dealt with such as graffiti or repairs in shared areas; and
- emptying bins and clearing blocked rubbish chutes.

Your Estate Caretaking Team are also responsible for cleaning the estate. This will mainly include things such as collecting litter and sweeping footpaths, parking areas and roads.

number of radiators, hot-air blowers and hot-water systems in your home. Fuel costs have risen considerably in recent years. Unfortunately these circumstances are beyond our control and this is why many of your charges have increased.

Repairing the boiler

If your home is connected to a shared boiler, you must contribute towards repairs and maintenance. This includes repairing and maintaining shared pipes, either outside your home or shared pipes that run through it. This charge does not cover repairing or maintaining pipes that only you use inside your home. For example, it does not cover the repairing or replacing radiators in your home.

Electrical heating

You must pay this charge if your home is connected to a shared electrical heating system. The charge does not cover replacing or repairing heating or hot-water equipment inside your home. The charge is only for supplying electricity that is used to run

and hot-water outlets in the block. As with all fuels, the cost of electricity has increased significantly, which means that suppliers are charging us more for them.

Repairing and maintaining the block your home is in

This includes any minor repairs or maintenance we carry out to your block and that cost each leaseholder less than £250. If repairs or maintenance cost more than £250 for each leaseholder, we must contact you before carrying out the work. We must do this in line with Section 151 of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002. Minor repairs and maintenance would normally include replacing light fittings, fixing or replacing glass in shared areas and inspecting and maintaining shared water tanks.

Building insurance

Your service charge covers the building insurance for your home, which you must have so that your home is covered for things such as a flood or a fire. You can get a copy of the insurance policy by writing to the Home Ownership Team. We will always try to get you the best value for money when buying building insurance. Building insurance is a part of your main service charge and we will not send you a separate bill for this. You will need to make your own arrangements for contents insurance to cover furniture, decorations and other belongings.



Boiler fuel

We charge you for heating and hot water if your home is connected to a shared boiler (district heating system). Our charge varies depending on the

heating systems and does not cover shared energy. The electricity supplier sends us a bill and then we work out how much we need to charge you. The amount we charge is worked out depending on the number of heating

Repairing and maintaining the estate

This includes any minor repairs or maintenance we carry out to your estate and that cost less than £250 for each leaseholder. If repairs or

maintenance are more than £250 for each leaseholder we must contact you before carrying out the work. We must do this in line with Section 151 of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002. Minor repairs and maintenance would normally include removing rubbish and repairing gates and signs.

Door entryphone systems

Some blocks are fitted with entryphone systems that are designed to keep out unauthorised people and increase security. From time to time we may have to repair the doors. If the entryphone system is not working, please tell your Local Housing Centre about this.

Repairing and maintaining the lift

Some blocks have a lift and, to make sure it is working properly, we need to check and repair it regularly. For example, we need to carry out safety inspections (this is needed by law), repair jammed doors and fix the lift when it breaks down. Where possible we will fit monitors that tell us when a lift is broken and when the repair has been carried out. This will improve our service. We will include the cost of this work in your service charge.

TV aerial

Some blocks and some freehold properties share a TV aerial. We need to check and repair the aerial occasionally to make sure it is working properly and that you have a good reception. We are also planning to upgrade your TV system so that it is ready for the digital 'switch over' which has been advertised nationally. We will include the cost of this work in your service charge.

Hiring a container to store rubbish

Various blocks have containers to store rubbish in. Your service charge covers the cost of hiring a container to store rubbish.



Lighting shared areas

This charge covers shared energy to your block and your estate. This can include lighting to your block, the power source for lifts, door entry systems and estate lighting.

Concierge

Some blocks have a concierge service. The concierge's job is to provide security, do some cleaning and to report incidents.

Housing management

Your service charge covers the cost of managing your block and estate. This includes the cost of:

- dealing with problems and questions;
- monitoring repairs;
- making sure people follow the conditions of their lease;
- inspections;

- resident meetings; and
- resident consultations.

Administration

Your service charge covers the cost of:

- having and running a dedicated Home Ownership Team;
- collecting service charges;
- dealing with any questions or problems with building insurance;
- providing specialist advice;
- going to leaseholder surgeries;
- holding meetings; and
- dealing with general questions and problems.

What type of lease do I have?

If you are a leaseholder your lease will be based on one of the following basic formats

- The Tower Hamlets (TH) lease
- The Greater London Council (GLC) lease

Are the payment terms explained in the lease?

If you have a TH lease you need to pay your service charge every three months for the three months to come. Your first payment must be made on the 1 April and the last is on 1 January. (See the fifth schedule, section 3 of the lease.)

If you have a GLC lease (under section 5c) you need to pay your service charge every six months. Your first payment must be made on the 1 April and the second on 1 October. You should pay your insurance in one instalment on 1 April. (See part 1, paragraph o of the GLC lease.) Please also see the section on building insurance in this leaflet.

Can I pay in instalments?

We understand that you might need to make payment arrangements that are different to those in your lease document, or you may want to pay your service charges in smaller and more regular instalments.

You can arrange to pay your service charges in instalments every month (by direct debit) to make sure that the account is settled by January. If you choose to do this, you can divide the cost into equal instalments over 10 months. But if you start paying by direct debit after April, the number of instalments you can pay in will be reduced.

Building insurance

Your service charge includes the cost of building insurance for your property. You can get a summary of the insurance policy or a claim form from the Home Ownership Team by phoning 020 7517 4708 or 020 7517 4722. You must arrange your own contents insurance.

If you are not able to pay

We do take legal action if you do not pay – but only as a last resort. If you are not able to pay, let us know as soon as possible and we will try to come up with an affordable repayment plan. You must not ignore any letters we send you about taking legal action against you to get back the money you owe. You should get independent professional advice.

Get in touch

If you have any questions about your service charge or if you are unable to pay any charges, phone us on 020 7517 4708 or 020 7517 4722. We are here to help you. If you have access to the internet, you can ask a question on our website at www.eastendhomes.net.

We aim to give you a service that provides value for money. But sometimes things can go wrong. If you are unhappy with our services, tell us why and we will try to put things right.

Ways to pay

Your service charge payment card lets you pay at a wide range of local shopping outlets or in a variety of other ways. You can use your payment card at any outlet displaying one of the following signs. Simply take your payment card to the counter with your payment. You will be given a printed receipt as proof of payment. You should keep this in a safe place.



Post office

Pay at any post office with cash, cheques or debit cards.



PayPoint

Pay by cash at any local shop displaying the PayPoint logo.



Payzone

Pay by cash or debit cards at any local shop displaying the Payzone logo.



Woolworths

Pay by cash or debit card at any Woolworths store.

You can pay your service charge by direct debit. Phone us on 020 7517 4708 or 020 7517 4722 for a direct debit instruction form. Fill in all of the information we ask for and send the form back to us. We will take care of everything else.



Direct debit

Direct debit is the easiest and most convenient way of paying. Paying your service charge by direct debit offers a hassle-free solution if you worry about paying your bills on time. You will need to have a bank or building society account before you can set up a direct debit.

You may find it easier to pay over the internet or the phone. You can do this 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



Internet payments

Pay over the internet. Make sure you have your payment card and your debit card. Log on to www.allpay.net and click where you see 'Make a payment'.



Telephone payments

Pay over the phone. Make sure you have your payment card and your debit card. Phone 0870 243 6040 and follow the simple instructions.

If you have any questions or you just want to know the balance on your service charge account, please get in touch. We will also be able to help you if your card is lost, damaged or stolen.

Leasehold Valuation Tribunal

If you feel that we have acted unreasonably, you may want to take your case to a Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (LVT). The LVT will hold a hearing and will hear both sides of the argument. The LVT will make a decision based on the evidence, and will give you their decision as soon as possible after the hearing.

You must apply to the LVT in writing and you must pay a fee. If you have access to the internet, you can download forms on the LVT website at www.rpts.gov.uk. Or, you can phone the LVT on 0207 446 7700.

Their address is: Rent Assessment Panel and Leasehold Valuation Tribunal, 10 Alfred Place, London WC1E 7LR.

How to contact us

Mile End Housing Centre

38 Wager Street, London E3 4JE
E-mail: mileend@eastendhomes.net
Phone: 020 8880 7055
Fax: 020 8880 7810

Island Gardens Neighbourhood Centre

137 Manchester Road, London E14 3DN
E-mail: islandgardens@eastendhomes.net
Phone: 020 7538 2340
Fax: 020 7537 0512

St George's Housing Centre

Shearsmith House, Hindmarsh Close, London E1 8HP
E-mail: stgeorges@eastendhomes.net
Phone: 020 7481 4110
Fax: 020 7481 4082

Holland Housing Centre

35 Commercial Street, London E1 6BD
E-mail: holland@eastendhomes.net
Phone: 020 7456 6700
Fax: 020 7456 6737

Glamis Housing Centre

Ground Floor, Roslin House, Brodlove Lane
London E1W 3EL
E-mail: glamis@eastendhomes.net
Phone: 020 7791 7947
Fax: 020 7791 7983

You can send us a text message to 07961 941584.

Useful contacts

Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice can help you if you have debt problems. They have offices in Bow and Whitechapel. Phone them on 0870 126 4014.

National Debtline

National Debtline is a free, confidential service that gives independent advice about coping with debt. You can get information online or phone the helpline on 0808 808 4000. They are open from 9am to 9pm Monday to Friday and from 9.30am to 1pm on Saturdays.

Fair Finance

Fair Finance work with us to provide an advice service for anyone who has money worries. Their office is at 47 Ben Jonson Road, Stepney, London E1 4SA. Phone them on 020 7780 1777. E-mail: info@fairfinance.org.uk

We produce leaflets on the following topics

- Rent
- Repairs
- Antisocial behaviour
- Customer care
- Estate services
- Resident involvement
- Lettings



Other formats - meeting your needs

If you ask, we can provide copies of this document in a range of formats, including:

- in community languages (including Bengali and Somali)
- in Braille
- in large print
- on audio tape.

To ask for a different format, please contact your Local Housing Centre.

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www.eastendhomes.net