

SERVICE CHARGES POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy describes our arrangements for levying service charges.
- 1.2 We will only make a service charge where it is necessary to do so, i.e. where the costs of the items concerned are not covered by the rent. Examples of where a service charge may be required will include:
- where a development has communal grassed areas which require to be cut, or internal common areas which require to be maintained;
 - where we provide a service which would normally be the tenant's responsibility e.g. stair cleaning;
 - where the maintenance costs and/or depreciation costs of communal equipment such as door entry systems or other shared systems are not included in the rent;
 - where metered electricity consumption for shared services such as internal stair lighting is not billed directly to residents in a block.
- 1.3 The current items for which a service charge is made are listed in Appendix 1.
- 1.4 We will aim to ensure that all service charges represent value for money and that they are based on high standards and current good practice.
- 1.5 This policy is supported by detailed procedures.
- 1.6 This policy complies with Communities Scotland Performance Standard AS1.7.

2.0 NEW DEVELOPMENTS

- 2.1 In our planning of new developments we will aim, through liaison between the Housing Management, Maintenance and Development sections, to minimise the creation of unnecessary shared external areas for which service charges will require to be levied.
- 2.2 Where shared external and internal communal areas have to be provided we will aim to maintain such areas to high environmental and amenity standards.

3.0 SERVICE CHARGE CONTRACTS

3.1 We will regularly seek new tenders, or where appropriate renegotiate revised contracts or enter into partnering arrangements, for communal maintenance such as landscaping and stair cleaning, to ensure value for money.

4.0 CALCULATING SERVICE CHARGES

4.1 Service charges will be based on the actual cost of the service, plus a charge to cover our administrative costs in providing the service.

4.2 The share of the cost of providing a service apportioned to Almond owned property will be split equally between all the tenants receiving that service. In some cases this will mean splitting the cost over all Almond tenants, in others the cost will be split between specific groups of tenants.

4.3 Where a service is also received by owners living in the same block or scheme as our tenants, the costs will be shared by the owners according to the provisions of their title deeds.

4.4 Service charges will be reviewed annually, as part of the annual exercise to review rents, and any revisions approved will be applied, along with the new rents, from the beginning of April each year.

4.5 We will provide all existing tenants with a schedule of their service charges as part of the annual letter to tenants advising them of their new rents.

4.6 In the initial offer letter to an applicant we will clearly show the details of any service charges applicable to that property, in addition to the rent due. This information will also be stated in the Tenancy Agreement.

5.0 COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

5.1 We will respond to queries raised by applicants or tenants regarding their service charges within 7 working days, where we can reply based on the information currently held in our files.

5.2 If a query cannot be dealt with from the information we hold, we will acknowledge receipt of the query within 3 working days, request the relevant information from external parties such as contractors, and respond to the query as soon as all the required information is available.

5.3 We will respond to, and deal with complaints, about service charges in accordance with our policy and procedures on Comments and Complaints.

5.4 If a complainant remains dissatisfied with our response, including any response following an appeal, they may take the matter up with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

6.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 6.1 The Head of Housing Management is responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented.
- 6.2 The Head of Finance is responsible for recommending the annual service charges for approval by Committee.
- 6.3 The Head of Housing Management and the Head of Maintenance are responsible for ensuring that services provided by contractors, for which a service charge is made, are provided to a high standard.
- 6.4 The Head of Housing Management will ensure that this policy is reviewed at least every 5 years.

FIRST APPROVED	October 2002
VERSION NO.1	October 2002
NEXT REVIEW	October 2007

APPENDIX 1

CURRENT SERVICES FOR WHICH A SEPARATE CHARGE IS MADE

ITEM	COSTS SPLIT BETWEEN
Stair Cleaning	Craigshill & Ladywell tenants & owners (common entry blocks)
Electricity consumption – door entry systems - stairlighting	Craigshill, Howden & Ladywell tenants & owners (common entry blocks)
Communal aerials	Craigshill tenants & owners (common entry blocks & own access)