

# Service Charges 2024-25 Frequently Asked Questions

## Your service charge explained

A service charge is a fee you pay for extra services where you live. These might include things like security (such as door entry systems and CCTV cameras), cleaning, heating, lighting in shared areas, and maintaining the grounds. You can find a list of these different charges in this document.

Every year in August, we send you a letter detailing your rent and service charges. The new charges start on 1st October.

We make sure the charges are fair and the services provided meet a good standard. You'll only have to pay for services that benefit your home.

If you need to pay a service charge, your tenancy agreement will explain how we'll keep you informed about any changes to the services or costs.

## What services are covered?

Because the buildings and estates we own and manage are all different, the charges are different too. Not all services are paid for by your service charge.

If you live in supported housing, your service charge might include money to cover staff time for helping residents keep their tenancies and manage housing needs. It can also cover the costs of maintaining shared areas like gardens, laundry rooms, and lounges.

**Below are some common services that may be included in your service charge.**

**Depending on your tenancy agreement, some or all of the service charges listed below might apply to you. You will only be charged if your home benefits from the service.**

<b>Service Charge</b>	<b>What this covers</b>
Maintenance and Servicing of Communal Lifts	<p>These costs cover everything we do to keep the lifts in your building working and meeting legal standards. We are required by law to provide these services as your landlord.</p> <p>*You will only be charged for this service if your building has a lift.</p>
Maintenance and Servicing of Security Systems	<p>This charge is for maintaining and replacing any security systems in your building, such as CCTV cameras, security doors, and intercoms.</p>
Health & Safety Services and Equipment	<p>This part of your service charge covers the management of health and safety services, such as checking for legionella, fire safety, emergency lighting, and regular testing of shared electrics and heating. We are required by law to provide these services as your landlord.</p>
Maintenance and Servicing of Communication Systems	<p>This charge is for the costs of providing, maintaining, and replacing any communal equipment that allows you to receive digital TV at your home.</p>
Maintenance and Servicing of White Goods	<p>This charge only applies to residents in supported housing schemes. If you live in supported housing, please discuss this with your Support Worker.</p>
Maintenance and Servicing of Communal Furnishings	<p>This charge only applies to residents in supported housing schemes. If you live in supported housing, please discuss this with your Support Worker.</p>
Maintenance and Servicing of Gardening/Grounds Equipment	<p>This charge only applies to residents in supported housing schemes. If you live in supported housing, please discuss this with your Support Worker.</p>
Maintenance and Servicing of Laundry Equipment	<p>This charge only applies to residents in supported housing schemes. If you live in supported housing, please discuss this with your Support Worker.</p>
Communal Utilities	<p>This charge is for shared utilities, like electricity, gas, water, lighting, phones, broadband, and TV licences (if applicable) in communal areas.</p>

<b>Service Charge</b>	<b>What this covers</b>
Communal Repairs and Decorating	These costs cover day-to-day repairs and regular decoration of the communal areas where you live (if applicable).
Cleaning Materials and Services	This charge covers the cost of cleaning shared areas in your building, such as landings, hallways, lifts, and external/internal windows (if applicable).
Grounds and Gardening Maintenance	This charge covers the cost of maintaining the outdoor areas around your block or estate, including car parks and hard surfaces. It may include landscaping, weed control, leaf, and blossom clearance, litter picking, and specialist cleaning services like removing blood, animal waste, and graffiti.
Refuse Disposal and Pest Control	This cost covers pest control and removing bulk waste from shared areas of your estate or block.
Communal Contents Insurance	This charge is for insuring the structure of the building (bricks and mortar) but does not cover your personal belongings.
3rd Party Service Management	If a third party, called a Managing Agent, manages and maintains your estate or building, some or all of their costs are passed on to residents under this heading.
Services Management	This charge covers the cost of managing and administering the services listed in your annual service charge statement. It includes staff costs for handling payments, setting service charges, consultations, and dealing with enquiries and complaints. If there is a managing agent, they may charge a fee in addition to our fee.

## Personal Utilities

If you live in supported housing, you need to pay a part of your service charge for personal utilities (like water, gas, and electricity) and council tax. If you're not sure which utilities you need to pay for, ask your Support Worker. Housing Benefit or Universal Credit won't cover these costs. If you're not in supported housing, you'll need to pay for your utilities and council tax directly to the suppliers.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## How do we calculate fixed service charges?

We use a fixed service charge, which means the amount stays the same throughout the year. Unlike variable charges, this fixed amount won't change even if our actual costs go up or down. If we spend more or less than expected, you won't owe extra or get a refund.

Each year, we estimate how much we'll spend on services for your property, considering inflation and contractor fees. We divide these costs among:

- Those who use the service,
- The number of properties in each block of flats, or
- The number of properties in each special accommodation unit.

We review our service costs regularly to make sure they offer good value and are as accurate as possible.

## How do I know what to pay?

Your annual rent and service charges will be listed in the letter you receive in August each year.

## What is depreciation?

Some services require a big upfront investment, like door entry systems. These can be expensive and last for many years, such as 15 years. Depreciation spreads out the cost over the item's lifespan. For example, for a door entry system, we would spread the cost over 15 years and charge you a bit each year.

## Will Housing Benefit or Universal Credit help with these costs?

If you get Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, most service charges should be covered by your benefits. You need to let Housing Benefit or Universal Credit know about any changes to your rent or service charge as soon as you get your notification. However, you'll need to pay for personal charges (like heating or water) yourself, as these aren't covered by Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

## What is the management fee?

The management fee covers the costs of managing the services we provide. This includes:

- Setting up and managing your rent and service charge payments,
- Organising and paying for estate or block work,

- Managing and producing service charge accounts, responding to inquiries, and handling lease breaches.

Our management fee is among the lowest in social housing in England and is much cheaper than private managing agents.

### **Why Has My Electricity and Gas Increased?**

Energy prices have risen sharply due to global gas price increases. The energy price cap will go up in April for many customers.

### **Why has the fire servicing increased?**

Changes in government rules aim to improve fire safety and reduce carbon emissions. This means the cost of maintaining housing is going up as we update our services to meet new standards. We have a Building Safety Management Team working to improve safety and make our buildings carbon-neutral by 2050, which involves more safety checks.

### **Why am I being charged for a Fire Risk Assessment?**

We are required by law to carry out Fire Risk Assessments regularly. Depending on your property, these assessments might be needed every one or two years.

### **Why am I being charged for firefighting equipment when there's no visible equipment?**

“Maintenance of firefighting equipment” covers various items, including:

- Dry risers, which carry wiring and services between floors and need regular checks to prevent fire spread.
- Automatic Opening Vents (AOVs), which are windows that open automatically during a fire to let out smoke.
- Fire risk compliance checks carried out periodically.

### **What should I do if I'm not happy with my service charge?**

First, call our Customer Service Team at 0207 501 6120. We will log your concerns and call you back within 20 working days. You can also email us at [customerservice@h4w.co.uk](mailto:customerservice@h4w.co.uk).

### **What if I'm charged for a service I didn't receive?**

Call our Customer Service Team at 0207 501 6120 to report this. We aim to complete our investigation within 20 days, but it may take longer for complex cases. We'll keep you informed. Provide details about the service you didn't receive, and we will check it out. If you're right, we'll adjust your account and refund you for the missed service