

Your service charges explained

You receive information each year about your annual service charge. It is difficult to include full details in the letter to show how these charges are calculated. This document therefore presents further information to explain the charges and show how they are calculated.

Please let us know if you still have questions so that we can update this information for the benefit of others.

You pay your service charge under the terms of your tenancy agreement. The service charge you pay is detailed in your tenancy agreement and includes your contribution to:

- **Estate costs**

Includes external items such as grounds maintenance and lighting

- **Block costs**

Includes such items as lift repairs, cleaning, door entry systems and servicing equipment in communal areas.

Housing Benefit Entitlement

Housing benefit can help with the cost of some service charges. All charges listed below are eligible for assistance from housing benefit unless they have a blue asterisk* which means the tenant is responsible for paying the full charge.

* Please note these charges are not eligible for assistance through housing benefit.

Service charge items and descriptions

Here is a list of service charge items and a description of what they cover. Some or all of the items below may appear on your service charge statement.

- **Charges that may apply to all housing types**

Item	Description	Basis of calculation
Communal cleaning	Includes: Cost of the cleaning contract with City Cleaning for cleaning of communal areas and window cleaning.	Standard charge applied to every household within blocks or schemes included on the contract and set at a level to recover the contract costs.
Grounds maintenance	Contract costs for grass cutting, pruning, sweeping and weeding. Excludes the costs of leaf clearance and gritting.	Charge set at a level to recover the costs incurred on a site by site basis.

Communal Utilities	<p>Includes:</p> <p>Communal Electricity - Electricity costs for lighting to internal and external communal areas including corridors.</p> <p>Communal Water Supply – element of charge calculated for shared areas.</p>	<p>Actual cost – based on previous consumption for the last calendar year.</p> <p>Divided by the number of properties within the block</p> <p>Site by site based on previous 12 months usage.</p>
Fire and Security	<p>Includes:</p> <p>Door Entry systems - Servicing, repairs or rental to communal door entry system.</p> <p>Fire alarm systems and extinguishers - Equipment, refills and maintenance.</p>	<p>Total annual contract cost, divided by the number of properties within the block.</p> <p>Total annual contract costs averaged out across all units covered by the contract.</p>
Communal TV Aerials	Cost of digital television aerials upgrade.	<p>Standard charge applied to every household who benefits.</p> <p>Fixed charge set at a level to recover the costs incurred by March 2021.</p>
Service Contracts	<p>The council has long term contracts with several suppliers to provide statutory or safety related checks to services.</p> <p>Includes:</p> <p>Emergency Lighting & Electrical Testing – for ongoing maintenance and regular checks on emergency lighting systems.</p> <p>Water monitoring - Inspection regime and process to protect against legionella.</p> <p>Lift Maintenance - For servicing, repairs safety/insurance checks to all standard Lifts (not stair lifts).</p>	Standard charge applied to every household included on the contract and set at a level to recover the annual contract costs.
Sewerage Charges *	Sewerage charge applies where your property is connected to a Council owned and managed sewage treatment works, septic tank or cesspit.	Charge calculated on rateable values.

- **Specific charges based on the type of accommodation**

Charges for some General Needs housing only

Item	Description	Basis of calculation
Estate Service	This new service from April 2015 will manage the cleaning, grass cutting and grounds maintenance contracts across the district, carry out health & safety checks and will provide a regular presence to help fly tipping and other anti-social behaviour.	Charge is dependant whether the service is provided at Winnall Flats or for other areas the frequency of visits (quarterly, monthly, weekly) by estate services team.

Older Person's Housing only

Listed below are additional charges applied to households living in sheltered, Over 60s or Extra care (Matilda Place & Danmark Court) accommodation.

Item	Description	Basis of calculation
Sheltered Management	The staffing costs and overheads for the revised Sheltered Management service. From April 2015 the service will manage 12 sheltered schemes and 2 extra care schemes with responsibility for communal services and facilities, health and safety.	Service costs divided by the number of properties receiving the service.
Furniture, Fixtures & Fittings	Charge made to cover the maintenance and replacement costs of common room furniture, communal laundry facilities and communal kitchen equipment where it is provided in sheltered schemes.	Either actual costs incurred or based on forecast costs for the replacement of individual items.
Heating to individual flats *	Household energy costs paid by Winchester City Council and recharged to residents.	Actual cost – based on previous metered consumption for the last calendar year. Divided by the number of properties within the block.
Water Supply *	Water supply applies where the Council pays the metered water supply.	Charge is calculated on a site by site basis based on previous 12 months usage.
Alarm Charge *	This charge covers the cost of maintaining the equipment to provide an emergency alarm service together with the cost of monitoring and dealing with alarm calls.	Standard charge to all customers who receive the service based on estimated cost of service provision.

Temporary Accommodation only Charges

Listed below are additional charges applied to households living in temporary accommodation.

Item	Description	Basis of calculation
Temporary Accommodation Management charge	Staff salary and overheads	Total service costs divided by the number of properties receiving the service.
Furniture, Fixtures & Fittings	To cover the replacements costs of furnishings, fixtures, and white goods in communal areas.	Either actual costs incurred or based on forecast costs for the replacement of individual items.
Communal Telephone	Standing charge for provision even if calls are not made	Full costs recharged on a scheme by scheme basis
Council Tax Recharge	Council Tax on hostel accommodation paid directly by Housing	Site by site basis. Charge based on previous years cost split equally by the number of units per site.

Understanding the paperwork we send to you

We send you a number of documents each year to explain the service charges that you need to pay. We will send you some or all of the following documents.

- **Annual rent and service charge increase notice**

This shows you the proposed service charge we want you to pay from the start of the next financial year. This is a formal notification which is sent out to give tenants four weeks notice of the changes to their rent and service charges.

See example.

Dear

Notice of change of Rent and Charges

The Council's Tenancy Conditions require us to give four weeks' notice of a change to your rent. I am writing to tell you that with effect from 6th April 2015, the rent of –Address- will change to £---.--per week gross.

The amount detailed on this letter is your changed rent from April 2015.

Details of your rent and other charges that may be relevant to you are shown below:

Rent Charge after inflationary increase	£---.--
Total Weekly Rent Due	£---.--
Service Charge with Heating where applicable	£---.--
Water/Sewerage Charges	£---.--
Sub Total	£---.--
Housing Benefit	-£---.--
Housing Benefit Recovery	£---.--
Total due per week	£---.--

Please note: if you have a query regarding Housing Benefit entitlement please contact the Benefit section directly on (01962) 848 539.

If you do not wish to accept this change of tenancy you may terminate your tenancy but if you remain in possession of your property after the day on which the rent is increased, you will be deemed to have accepted the new rent.

If the breakdown of charges shown above has an amount greater than £0.00 on the Service Charge line, you will be sent a more detailed statement of how your service charges have been calculated for the coming year. This statement is due to be issued during March and will explain what the service charges cover and how they have been calculated for this year.

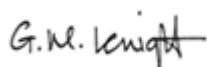
If you pay by Direct Debit, a separate letter will tell you how much money will be taken from your bank or building society account from April onwards.

If you pay at either the Post Office or Cash Office, please remember to take your existing payment card with you when making payments. Rent and charges are based on 52 collection weeks. Please note that from April 2015 there will be no rent-free weeks.

If you pay by standing order, please tell your bank or building society to amend your payment from April in line with the new weekly amount of £ . Please note that we cannot do this for you.

If you have a query regarding your rent account please contact the Rent Accounting section on 01962 848 521 or by email to rents@winchester.gov.uk

Yours Sincerely



Gillian Knight, Corporate Head of Housing

- **Statement of Service Charge**

We send this within three weeks of sending the rent and service charge increase notice. This statement is sent with a covering letter which explains that, in response to feedback from tenants through the 2013 Tenants Satisfaction Survey, an annual statement has been introduced to give more explanation behind the service charge.

The aim is to set out the detail and basis of charges to explain what items go into service charges and how these are calculated.

STATEMENT OF SERVICE CHARGES FOR 2015/16			
BLOCK NAME:			
PROPERTIES IN BLOCK:		NO. OF WEEKS FOR CHARGES	52
COSTS AND CHARGES:	Benefit Eligible Charges	ANNUAL COSTS	WEEKLY CHARGE
	Estates Service	£0.00	£0.00
	Sheltered Management	£0.00	£0.00
	Communal Cleaning	£0.00	£0.00
	Grounds Maintenance	£0.00	£0.00
	Communal Utilities	£0.00	£0.00
	Fire and Security	£0.00	£0.00
	Communal TV aerial	£0.00	£0.00
	Service Contracts	£0.00	£0.00
	Furniture, Fixtures & Fittings	£0.00	£0.00
	TOTAL SERVICE CHARGE	£0.00	£0.00
COSTS AND CHARGES:	Non-Benefit Eligible Charges	ANNUAL COSTS	WEEKLY CHARGE
	Heating to Individual Flat	£0.00	£0.00
	Water Supply	£0.00	£0.00
	Sewerage Charge	£0.00	£0.00
	Alarm Charge	£0.00	£0.00
	TOTAL NON ELIGIBLE CHARGES	£0.00	£0.00

What can you do if you're not happy with the services you currently receive?

What you can do depends on what you are unhappy about.

- **I would like more services.**

If you would like more services than you are currently receiving (e.g. a new door entry system) this may be possible, but the majority of residents where you live must be in favour and be prepared to pay a higher service charge for it. Your Area Housing Manager can tell you more about this.

- **I am not happy with the standard of services the Service Charge covers.**

We monitor our service chargeable contracts (i.e. cleaning and grounds maintenance) in a number of ways. We:

- Carry out estate inspections
- Regularly liaise with our contractors and meet them on site
- Regularly listen to tenant feedback through Tenant Scrutiny Groups
- Monitor complaints when you tell us you are unhappy with a service.

We want to make sure you are happy with the quality and cost of the services. If you would like to help us monitor the standard of communal service such as gardening, cleaning or repairs, please let us know. Contact the Tenant Involvement Team on 0800 716 987.

- **I don't consider the charge is value for money**

Service charges are based on actual costs or our best estimate which are adjusted when the actual charges are known.

How to pay your service charges

You can pay your rent (including service charges) in the following ways:

- By Direct Debit – Winchester City Council will tell your bank or building society to amend your payment in line with the details set out in the Increase Notice
- At the Post Office - Please remember to take your payment card with you when making payments.
- At the Cash Office at Winchester City Council, City Offices, Colebrook Street – you can be issued with a 'payment calendar' to help you keep track of your payments.
- Standing Order – you need to tell your bank or building society to amend your payment in line with changes set out in the Increase Notice.
- Online via the Council's website
- At a PayPoint Outlet

- By telephone to the Customer Service Centre
- Automated Telephone payment service – 01962 848 512

How to contact us

If you have a query regarding rent or service charges or you want to discuss payment options, contact the Rent Accounting Section on 01962 848 400 or email rents@winchester.gov.uk

If you have a query regarding Housing Benefit entitlement, please contact the Benefit Section directly on 01962 848 539.

Feedback

We would be interested to hear if you found this information helpful. Please give us your feedback by either completing the online suggestion form or calling the Customer Service Centre who will complete this on your behalf.

March 2015