

# Service Charges

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ? Why have I received a letter about the introduction of a service charge?

The letter is about a service charge, and it covers the cost of services provided to your scheme, home and/or neighbourhood. By law we must write to you before we ask you to pay a charge and we have done this in two letters.

### ? I am a joint tenant why have we both received a separate letter?

We must write to both tenants separately if you have a joint tenancy because you are both responsible for paying the rent and service charges.

### ? How is my service charge calculated?

The charge is an estimate of costs for the coming year, and this is shared between all customers who benefit from the services.

### ? What items are chargeable?

Depending on where you live, we will be charging you to pay for lift maintenance, building safety checks and communal building maintenance. In some blocks, we will also be introducing a new area caretaking service which will be an additional charge. Your letter will say which of these charges apply to you and what the cost of this will be going forward.

### ? What does the lift maintenance service charge cover?

The repair of the lifts on a day-to-day basis including regular servicing but not the replacement of the lifts.

### ? What does the building safety and maintenance charge cover?

This charge covers health and safety costs including legionella monitoring, servicing emergency lighting and servicing fire prevention systems. It also covers servicing & inspection of main entrance doors, internal communal doors, gates/barriers, TV Aerials, repairs to security lights and external lighting such as floodlights.

### ? What if I already pay a TV aerial charge?

From April 2025, the TV aerial charge will be included in the building safety and maintenance cost, so you will not receive a separate charge for this.

### ? What does the area caretaking charge cover?

This charge covers a weekly visit by the caretaking team to ensure that the communal spaces are clean, safe and tidy. The tasks and frequencies vary and are subject to communal space issues and priorities at the visit.

This service (and associated charge) already exists across most blocks, and we are now in a position to offer this service to other blocks.

# Service Charges

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ? When will I start paying these new charges?

We will introduce these new charges from Monday 7th April 2025. Although we could have introduced them with 4 weeks' notice, we wanted to give our customers time to plan for the increase, sort out their benefits and ask us any questions.

### ? I claim Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. Will it cover all my service charge?

Yes, all three service charges (lift maintenance, building safety and maintenance and area caretaking) are eligible for Housing Benefit and Universal Credit. For customers claiming Housing Benefit/Universal Credit, these costs will be covered as follows:

Housing Benefit claims will automatically be increased to cover the full cost of the new charge. Universal Credit claimants will need to include the new service charge when reporting your annual rent changes in April 2025. Further information will be sent to Universal Credit claimants nearer the time. If you're still unsure, please contact our Customer Finance team on **0161 217 6016 (option 3)**.

### ? What if I can't afford the changes to my service charge?

For any customers struggling to meet the cost of their rent and service charges, further support and advice can be found by scanning the QR code below, visiting [www.stockporthomes.org/support-services/](http://www.stockporthomes.org/support-services/) or you can request a written copy by telephone (**0161 217 6016, option 4**.)

You can also contact our Money Advice Team who can offer support to help with your finances and make sure you're claiming the correct benefits, so please get in touch on **0161 217 6016 (option 3)**.

### ? Why do I have to pay for these new charges if I haven't in the past?

As a landlord SHG have historically not passed these charges onto tenants however all landlords *can* and do charge for these services. These are a legitimate charge, based on actual costs and all new tenants signing up for a property will pay them from the date their tenancy starts.

### ? Is the cost of the charges not covered in my rent?

The service charges items are based on actual costs from the previous year, rent is fixed for the whole year and does not include any service charges. SHG rents are the lowest in the Borough compared to other social landlords so your home is still cheaper to rent on average even with the new charges

### ? I don't want to pay and disagree with being charged, what will happen if I refuse?

Your tenancy agreement which you have signed refers to you being liable for rent and service charges and if you refuse to pay SHG will follow our rent and service charge recovery procedure. Refusal to pay means you are breaching the terms of your tenancy agreement and putting your home at risk.

? **My lifts are always out of order, why should I pay when I know the damage to the lift is because of tenants and their visitors?**

All the charges are spent on repairing the lifts and it is vital we collect this money and keep the lifts working. The contractors we work with have a same day response to any lifts out of order however if following a visit, a part is required then this might mean the lift is out of use for longer. Lift repairs are always dealt with as a matter of urgency.

When we receive any reports of damage to the lifts the Safer Neighbourhoods team investigate and check any CCTV, where it is clear who has caused the damage, we recharge tenants. In the main though repairs are because of normal usage of the lifts by tenants and their visitors. We encourage you to report where you have witnessed this so we can take action on **0161 217 6016** or via the website with as much information as possible

<https://www.stockporthomes.org/neighbourhoods/anti-social-behaviour/report-asb/>

? **What if I want to talk to someone?**

We know that some of you would prefer to talk to someone and, depending on what your question is about, we can also arrange a chat with the relevant team to help resolve your query. If you live anywhere where there are regular resident meetings, we can speak to you about service charges at these meetings, but you can also arrange to speak to someone individually if preferred. Please call our One Number team on **0161 217 6016** and select option 4.

