Feedback

Major refurbishment contract progress as at 23 October 2019

We have now sent 267 estimates with an average estimated cost of £14,235.47. It is important to remember this is an average of estimates and the costs are more than likely to reduce as the inclusion of provisional sums and contingencies does mean that the likelihood is that the costs will reduce at the point of invoicing. For example we will also look at the last 10 years' worth of repairs and remove any previously requested charges for temporary repairs where we will now be undertaking a full replacement.

Please note there are a number of items that we will not be recharging for. These include (but are not limited to):

- Door entry systems
- French drains
- Cable tidying
- Removal of unused satellite dishes
- Loft clearance
- Any works related to a Council properties i.e. doors and windows

No invoices with final costs have been sent. We expect the first will be sent around Spring / Summer of 2020. Please remember all leaseholders will have the opportunity to discuss their personal situation and an affordability assessment which will determine the best course of action for them. We can provide a bespoke service where necessary.

Please be encouraged to make observations about the work, because this is taken into consideration. An example of this is when we were in Symonds Green a number of observations discussed roof works and subsequently we decided not to do a full roof replacement. Although this would have been picked up when on site, this avoided a higher estimate being sent out initially to leaseholders.

Also please note that although we talk about year one and year 2 we actually will refer to phases instead and works will cross over financial and calendar years.

MRC questions that were raised at the previous leaseholder meeting:

1) Is Stevenage Borough Council going to offer lease extensions to Leaseholders who are having Major Refurbishment Contract works to soften the blow?

   This is not cost neutral and therefore is not something the council can afford.

2) Leaseholders would like to be able to access the list of block repairs online.

   We do not have the capability to do this at present, however we are in the process of upgrading our website and may be able to provide more in depth information online in the future.

3) Why are the oldest blocks not being attended to first as part of the MRC programme?

   We have carefully planned area by area considering the other works currently being undertaken throughout the Borough (Town centre regeneration; lift works; communal heating works; decent homes etc) as we need to be able to transport goods in and out of locations as well as setting up site welfare facilities. Therefore logistically this is not possible. A number of the oldest properties have been included in the first and second years but, should a newer block be in a similar location, it is more cost effective to do this at the same time rather than return and re-site all equipment later.
4) **Why are the MRC FAQ's on the website incorrect? It states that all blocks were built the same time.**
   This should have said that the majority of the buildings were built around the same time. However, this has now been removed from the current version of the FAQ’s and we would like to thank you for bringing this to our attention.

5) **Leaseholders who’s blocks currently don’t have a door entry system want to know if they will have a choice about having high cost items like this or can leaseholders and residents discuss this option before it is decided? What criteria will be applied to installing this and other improvements?**
   We have made a decision to install door entry free of charge to leaseholders where it is possible to install. Please note there are requirements to consider in relation to fitting door entries e.g. the landing has to be a minimum of 1500 mm long, directly outside the entrance and clear of the swing of any door.

6) **Can resident inspectors assist with monitoring of MRC?**
   Residents’ inspectors would prove complicated and difficult, as there would be health and safety concerns and any resident inspectors would not have the jurisdiction to instruct contractors. There are also time penalties if there are delays. Please be advised that SBC Clerk of works will sign off on all elements of work before handover. Satisfaction packs will be sent to all residents and everyone is encouraged to respond.

7) **When will leaseholders know how much it is likely to cost them? For example when will those due to have works done in year 20/21 have specific surveys carried out and when will they receive cost information?**
   Surveys for 2020/21 works, are due to start in early 2020. The aim is to get surveys completed as early as possible before the works. The team would like to provide a scope of proposed works to residents 3 to 6 months before works are due to start. We will invite all residents to attend a drop in consultation event when their property is due for works (we do this in several batches throughout the year). It is there that you can discuss the works and help us determine the final scope.

   It is only after this event that leaseholders will receive a Section 20 Notice of Estimates, which will show the estimated costs for each heading i.e. roof, external wall treatments, electrical etc.

   Works will only commence at the end of the 30 day observation period and each element of work will be signed off and re-measured when we believe it is of the standard we expect. Once the whole block has been signed off and these re-measures have been confirmed, there is a long process of adjusting the costs to reflect the actual works completed and the reasonableness of each recharge. It is only once we are satisfied that we have conducted this exercise in full that we will issue an invoice to the leaseholders within the block. We anticipate that this could take 3-6 months from the completion of the works, depending on the quantity of elements.

8) **Leaseholders want an idea of costs for different elements such as roofing for a 2 storey or 3 storey blocks. Is that possible?**
   There are far too many variables to be able to produce a document such as this. Using a roof as the example, we could be looking at a flat roof or a pitched roof or a combination of both. The coverings could be bitumen felt or asphalt, tile or slate and the structure could be reinforced concrete or laminated timber. There are roofs with Velux windows and roofs with different pitches which affects the size of the area.

9) **Can leaseholders visit other blocks that have already received MRC works?**
   We feel that this would not be helpful to you as each block is designed differently and as previously mentioned, the scope of works will be individual to each block. The best opportunity to discuss the works for your block will be at your specific consultation event.
10) Will Leaseholders windows in their property be replaced? If not what is the situation with regards to windows at each block?

The leaseholders' windows will not be replaced. If SBC tenants' windows are being replaced, then leaseholders can ask for a quote from the contractor. The cost will have to be paid via a separate invoice in advance of works being done. Please note that no leaseholder will be charged for the cost of any tenants’ windows being replaced.

Other questions raised:

11) Future STAR (Survey of tenants and residents) Survey’s – Leaseholders would like the option to provide their contact details with a view to receiving a response in regards to the feedback they provide.

It is important for respondents to feel that their anonymity will be preserved – some people may be suspicious about whether their answers really are anonymous if we ask them for their contact details. We welcome any feedback you may have in regards to your block throughout the year.

12) How many people received the star survey (just 4 out of the 9 present received it)?

The surveys were sent to all leaseholders so this is concerning if this was not received. Is it possible that access to the blocks to post them is an issue? Or that they thought it was junk mail? With respect to tenants, we only send to a sample, so not all tenants receive it.

Buying the Freehold

Please be aware that there may be some misinformation out there in this respect and we urge you to seek independent advice on this subject. There is a government website (Leasehold Advisory Service) that provides unbiased information for all leaseholders on all subjects and we would suggest that you refer to this website: www.lease-advice.org.

The current legislation is set down in the Leasehold Reform Housing and Urban Act 1993 (as amended). It is a right, subject to qualification, for the owners of flats in a building, and sometimes part of a building, to join together and buy the freehold of that building. The flat that you own is within a block and the freehold cannot currently be sold independently of that block. In some circumstances, it is possible for residents to purchase the freehold of a block as long as they meet certain criteria. Two of the main criteria are:

- Not have more than 25% of the internal floor area of the property as being non-residential and;
- At least two thirds of the flats must be let to ‘qualifying leaseholders’