

Stevenage Borough Council

# Income Services: Leasehold Service Standards

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<b>Approved by</b>	Assistant Director/SLT Kerry Clifford Assistant Director Housing and Neighbourhoods
<b>Owner</b>	Karen Long Head of Housing
<b>Version</b>	1
<b>Author</b>	Elizabeth Ddamulira (Income Services Manager)
<b>Business Unit and Team</b>	Managing Homes
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## Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Current Service Standard.....	3
3. Proposed New Service Standard .....	3
4. Reviewing and Monitoring .....	7
5. Getting Involved .....	7
6. Next Steps/Implementation .....	7
7. Version .....	9

## 1. Introduction

Our Housing and Neighbourhoods service standards are the commitments and service targets which tenants, leaseholders can expect from both the Income and Resident and Estates Services.

The Income Services team is committed to putting great customer service at the forefront of everything that we do and provide a high standard of service at all times. At the heart of this is our commitment to putting the needs of our customers first. Our aim is to meet every standard, and where we can, to surpass it.

The service standards also provide you with information on what the **Housing and Neighbourhoods** Department monitors and reports on performance to ensure that we are meeting these standards.

The levels of service that we offer here are reliant on the co-operation of all parties involved. This includes us, our partners and our customers.

## 2. Current Service Standards

**2.1 Involving you.** Looks at how we involve you in shaping our services. We will...

- Deal with your complaints fairly and within the published timescales. We will explain our complaints procedure to you and use your feedback to improve services.
- When you contact us by letter, we will respond within 10 working days of receipt. If your enquiry needs further investigation, we will keep you informed of the progress.
- Give you the opportunity to have your say and shape our services by offering a wide range of resident involvement activities.

**2.2 Provide leaseholders with an estimate** of their service charge annually along with a certificated summary of the previous year's actual service charge which will detail any credit or debit from the estimate amount.

## 3. Proposed New Service Standards

### 3.1 Background

The standards are reviewed to make sure they are meeting customer needs and are aligned with the new consumer standards introduced by the Social Housing Regulation Act.

The consumer standards are as follows:

- **Quality** - quality of the home, communal spaces and services to tenants

- **Neighbourhood** - landlords' role, working with other agencies, to contribute to the wellbeing of neighbourhoods in which tenants/leaseholders live.
- **Transparency** - landlords' role in making information accessible to tenants including roles and responsibilities within landlords, so tenants know who is responsible for matters relating to consumer standards.
- **Engagement and accountability** - engagement between landlords and tenants, including how complaints are handled. Landlords' accountability to tenants/leaseholders and treating tenants/leaseholders with fairness and respect.
- **Safety** - landlords' safety responsibilities including safety within the home and in communal areas.

### 3.2 Section 1: Proposed new standards for Leaseholders

#### 1.) Generally

Our Commitments to you

- We will listen to you.
- We will be polite, fair, and always show you respect.
- The level of service that you receive will be consistent, and in line with our corporate policies and procedures.
- Our service will be transparent, and we shall be honest.

#### Section 2. Proposed new standards for Leaseholders

Team responsible – Income Services Team

Contact information – Tel: 01438 242666

Email: Leaseholdincome@stevenage.gov.uk

#### Service charges

We will:

- Allow you access to your Service Charge account 24 hours a day; 7 days of the week and check your transaction history by going online to: [www.stevenage.gov.uk](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk) and clicking onto Your Accounts at the top of the page. If you don't have an online account, why not sign up for one now using the above link? You can also pay your council tax, garage rent, leasehold charges, business rates (NNDR) and invoices directly through our website.
- make sure you understand your responsibility to pay your Service Charge on time and offer advice when you assign or purchase your flat.
- provide estimated service charges before the start of the new financial year, so that leaseholders are aware of any proposed changes in service or charge levels and can plan their finances accordingly.
- review each part of the annual service charge, for example, cleaning, electricity and communal repairs with leaseholder representatives.
- review the itemised bills so they are clearer, explaining how costs have been calculated and why leaseholders are being charged.

- produce accurate and transparent service charge final accounts within six months of the end of the financial year, detailing the differences between the estimates and final costs incurred.

### **Major works –**

With the aim of making, it easier for you to budget for major work, we will:

- You will receive invoice for major work once the work has started on site, rather than billing after the works have completed. This means you will never receive a bill for work that is subsequently delayed.
- involve leaseholders in the scrutiny of major work, both during and on completion of a project
- make major works' final invoices more in line with the estimated costs; by ensuring you never receive a final bill that is more than the estimate.
- Offer up to 5% per cent discount depending on the amount of the major works' bills if paid in full within the specified time period.
- provide a breakdown of costs for major works charges once the project is completed.
- review and widely publicise the payment options that we offer including any interest free, or deferred, payment plans for major works bills. This includes help for leaseholders facing significant financial hardship by allowing them to spread the cost of larger bills.

### **General enquiries and resolving issues.**

We will:

- write to new leaseholders, giving our contact details and offering the opportunity to meet with us to discuss their rights and obligations.
- have a clear dispute process whereby if there are common concerns amongst leaseholders relating to a particular project these can be considered by a panel of senior Council officers.
- respond to queries and disputes on major bills within four weeks. This gives us time to consult widely, for example with surveyors and contractors to ensure a full response.
- respond to your enquiries within 10 working days, in complex cases, we will notify you within 10 working days of the additional time required to address your enquiry in full.
- resolve any disputes or enquiries you may have with your bills, or with the services or repairs provided to your homes, using plain language where possible, including signposting to independent experts where appropriate.
- make ourselves available to you as far as is reasonably possible. This will include attending evening meetings, arranging home visits, at your convenience, in addition to being available during normal office hours.
- where appropriate our leasehold managers to represent leaseholders in discussions with the Council or other organisations.

- treat everyone equally, without discrimination. If you have specific needs such as information in another language or format, we will aim to provide this.

## **Financial management**

We will:

- Allow you access to your Service Charge account 24 hours a day; 7 days of the week and check your transaction history by going online to: [www.stevenage.gov.uk](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk) and clicking onto Your Accounts at the top of the page. If you don't have an online account, why not sign up for one now using the above link? You can also pay your council tax, garage rent, leasehold charges, business rates (NNDR) and invoices directly through our website.
- at the beginning of each financial year, provide you with an estimate for the day-to-day service charges and a payment plan for the forthcoming year, with various repayment options.
- be available to discuss concerns about paying service charges
- Provide a range of ways to pay service charges
- review the accounts of all leaseholders, taking action if any account falls into arrears.
- let you know if you overpay or underpay your charges, we will set out clearly any necessary changes to your payment plan).

## **Help us to improve our service to you.**

- Send us any additional information that we ask for to help us manage your property effectively and keep us in touch with you.
- provide us with up-to-date contact details to help us keep in touch with you especially in the event of an emergency
- Provide us with annual gas safety certificates for any gas appliances you may have within your property.
- If you sub-let your property, give us the contact details for your tenants and a copy of any agreements with them. This means we can contact the occupier easily if we need to, for example if a leak is reported which may be coming from the flat.
- Co-operate with us to help resolve individual issues by providing copies of any relevant correspondence and documents, such as letters to and from the Council, evidence of payments made, plus details and dates including photo's where necessary relating to the issues.
- Do not carry out internal or external structural alterations to your property without first getting our written consent (including window replacements, loft conversions, alterations to doorways). You may be in breach of your lease agreement.
- Keep important information that we send you such as your insurance policy details and Section 20 notices.
- Keep details of the person you have raised queries with so we can follow up issues easily.

- Let us know when we have got things right and when we have things wrong. This will help us to improve our service.
- Pay your service charges including your major works service charges when they are due.

## 4. Reviewing and Monitoring

We want to make sure that we keep to our service standards by regularly monitoring them. These are to be reported and published quarterly with an explanation where performance has not met target. We will also report performance against these key indicators to residents via relevant communication platforms.

We will monitor and as required adapt and change our services through:

- Feedback from our customers about how we do things.
- Service specific satisfaction surveys e.g., on rents and leasehold management.
- A council resident satisfaction survey to measure tenant and leaseholder satisfaction with the overall housing service that takes place every two years.
- Analysing and learning from complaints and comments
- Providing an annual report which we will develop with resident representatives, that shows our progress against service standards and targets.
- Annually review the performance indicators we report and the targets we set so they remain relevant, challenging but achievable

## 5. Get Involved

We welcome any comments, that will help us to improve the service that we are offering.

We believe the best way to deliver a quality service is by listening to you and acting on your feedback.

If at any time you would like to comment, compliment ,complaints, give us feedback about our commitments, or you feel that we have failed in any of our commitments then please contact us directly at [income@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:income@stevenage.gov.uk) or follow Stevenage Borough Council's complaints procedure set out on our website at [www.stevenage.gov.uk](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk).

## 6. Next Steps/Implementation Plan

We would like your feedback in the proposed new set of Service Standards that will ensure residents receive the best possible service when they call, email or access Council services in person.

We will keep our performance against these service standards under continuous review, and we will change in line with your feedback.

We acknowledge that we won't always be able to provide residents with the outcome or decision that they want, but the Service Standards are about ensuring all residents are treated fairly and with care and compassion.

The Action plan below will reflect on-going feedback received from residents and act as ways to know if we are improving:

- Resident satisfaction survey feedback
- Complaints, comments, and compliments

### Action Plan October 2024

Actions	Target completion date	Date completed	Update
Measure performance against each Service standard	October 24 January 25 April 25		
Collate information from Residents feedback, complaints, comments and compliments each quarter.	October 24 January 25 April 25		
Implement changes from feedback once a year	From August 2024		
Review Key Leasehold scheme to reintroduce	From Oct 2024		
Review with leaseholders what they want in their invoice			
Update / revise letter to new leaseholders to include contact visit us for further information about your service charges	From Oct 2024		
Ensure sure staff aware of how to access language lines	From Oct 2024		
Review current practice of sending bills when work has completed to ensure that	From Oct 2024		



<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target completion date</b>	<b>Date completed</b>	<b>Update</b>
leaseholders receive invoice for major work once the work has started on site, rather than billing after the works have completed. This means you will never receive a bill for work that is subsequently delayed.			
Review processes to ensure SBC involve leaseholders in the scrutiny of major work, both during and on completion of a project	From Oct 2024		
Review Dispute resolution	From Oct 2024		
Review and agree a process for leaseholders to provide us with annual gas safety certificates for any gas appliances they may have within the property.	From Oct 2024		
Review process of obtaining and storing data if Leaseholder sub-let property, to give us the contact details for their tenants and a copy of any agreements with them. This means we can contact the occupier easily if we need to, for example if a leak is reported which may be coming from the flat.	From Oct 2024		

## 7. Version History

<b>Date</b>	<b>Outlined Amendments</b>	<b>Author</b>