

Service charges General explanation of charges

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Contents

Service charges	1
General charges	2
Building cleaning.....	2
Waste management service	2
Estate services	2
Concierge service.....	2
Grounds maintenance	3
Digital TV services.....	3
Communal electricity.....	3
Communal heating	3
Anti-social behaviour (ASB) team.....	4
Pest control.....	4
Servicing of plant and equipment	4
Fire risk assessment.....	4
Asbestos survey	4
Building insurance	5
Management charges.....	5
Repairs	5
Minor repairs	5
Cyclical repairs (decorating)	6
Major repairs	6
Improvements	6

General charges

Building cleaning

A contractor is appointed by the council to clean the internal communal areas of blocks of flats on a regular basis.

Low-rise blocks are cleaned once a fortnight and High-Rise blocks every day.

The contractor provides a cost per building based on the number of stairwells in both low and high-rise blocks and the frequency and specification for that building, ie a high-rise block would incur a greater cost for cleaning as the surface area to be cleaned and frequency is more than for a low-rise block.

The contract cost for the year for each block, including any variations to the contract such as additional cleans required or cleans not carried out, is then divided equally amongst the number of dwellings in that particular block.

Waste management service

This charge is levied on blocks, both low and high-rise, and covers removal of fly-tipping rubbish located around the block, clearance of rubbish from internal communal areas and bin chute clearance/removal (where bin chutes are present). Blocks that have bin chutes pay a slightly higher charge.

The cost for the year for this service is then divided up between all properties covered and according to the amount of service received. Tenants pay the same amount in their rent.

Estate services

Housing officers provide a valuable tenancy management service throughout Luton. Each officer manages a designated area (patch) and they are responsible for:

- tenancy support
- tenancy enforcement
- property inspections
- fraud detection
- dealing with low level anti-social behaviour (ASB)

Housing officers are agile workers which ensure that they are out on their patches regularly. The cost of this service is then divided up between all properties covered and according to the amount of service received. Tenants pay the same amount in their rent.

Concierge service

There is a team consisting of:

- housing concierge & inspection manager
- two team leaders (North & South) and 20 officers

14 of the 20 officers are in our high-rise blocks and have bases in Heswall Court, Green Court & Leabank. The remaining six officers are mobile and cover all the low-rise blocks.

The team's remit is to provide a quality frontline service to customers by ensuring that all issues that affect the quality of life of residents are identified, reported and resolved. The officers are

responsible for the monitoring and delivery of key services to Housing's internal and external communal areas including:

- cleaning
- grass cutting and similar land maintenance
- fire safety
- health and safety
- risk management
- environmental anti-social behaviour

Grounds maintenance

There is a service level agreement between the Parks Department and Housing Landlord Services. This uses the Green Space Quality Manual 2016-19 as the bench mark quality standard of performance.

The Parks Service will achieve acceptable as a minimal standard of performance at times of high volume grass growth and good at all other times. There will be bi-weekly grass cutting schedules from March to November and a dedicated gardening team for the Housing Landlord Services areas.

The cost for the year for each block is then divided equally between the numbers of dwellings in that particular block.

Digital TV services

This charge is for the maintenance of the digital equipment installed on all the council's blocks of flats and maisonettes. Our contractor maintains the network and the agreement we have with them means that they are on call 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

All residents, tenants or leaseholders pay the same amount; tenants weekly in their rent and leaseholders annually or monthly in their service charge.

Communal electricity

Any building with internal stairways and corridors will have communal lighting. The council receive bills from our electricity provider that are in the main actual costs although sometimes due to the consumption the meters are read and estimated alternately.

The council then recharge the lessee for the total cost levied upon them per annum, which will also include lift running costs in the high-rise blocks.

Communal heating

Some blocks of flats have a communal boiler providing heating and hot water to the whole block. The council are billed by the gas supplier and the costs for the year are apportioned between the number of properties in the building and the size of each property.

This means that if there are mixed sized properties in a block the larger properties will pay more as they have a greater area to heat. This is the only fair way to calculate these charges.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) team

There are two ASB officers that have responsibility for dealing with high level ASB throughout the town. They provide support and guidance to the housing officers when dealing with their low level ASB cases.

ASB officers deal with domestic abuse, cuckooing, crack houses and many other serious issues. They work in partnership with internal and external partners to tackle ASB. They work closely with the police to identify problem areas.

The cost for the year for this service is then divided up between all council properties covered. Tenants pay the same amount in their rent.

Pest control

The Housing department have a service level agreement with our Environmental Health department. This agreement is for the pest control officers to go out to any of our blocks of flats and maisonettes to look into and take appropriate action to eradicate any vermin or insect infestations.

The leaseholders will only see charges if any works are undertaken by Environmental Health to their block and each property within the block pays toward the cost.

Servicing of plant and equipment

Contractors from the council's approved list service all plant and equipment regularly. These costs can occur in all buildings but they are most prevalent in high-rise blocks.

The contractors are employed to carry out servicing on a regular basis but this varies from contract to contract according to legal requirements.

Each contract has a cost per service carried out per block and this charge is then divided amongst the properties within that block.

Fire risk assessment

The council employs a contractor under a service level agreement to inspect all our blocks of flats, once every three years for low-rise blocks and annually for high-rise blocks, as per our fire policy.

The building is inspected and a report compiled highlighting any issues that the contractor feels should be dealt with and these are given a high, medium or low priority rating to assist the council when planning any works.

Under the terms of the contract there is a charge per report and per block and that charge is then divided amongst the number of properties within that block.

Asbestos survey

This is carried out to both external and internal communal areas in blocks of flats and maisonettes under a long-term agreement that was entered into in June 2010. The services to be provided under the agreement are as follows:

Asbestos survey works, including testing and analysis to council owned residential properties and leasehold communal areas throughout the borough

The surveys are carried out annually and the charges are dependent upon the number of storeys in each individual building.

The cost for the year for each block is then divided equally between the numbers of dwellings in that particular block.

Building insurance

As per your lease the council, because it is still the owner of the building, you only lease the inside of your individual property within it. The council has to safeguard its interest and therefore insures all its stock of flats and maisonettes under a bulk policy.

The council pays the entire premium each year and leaseholders are recharged a proportionate amount based upon the size of their property and the type of property. This means that all two bedroom low-rise flats will pay the same amount but that amount will be different for two bedroom high-rise flats and two bedroom maisonettes.

Management charges

The terms of the lease state that: 'the object of the service charge provisions is to enable the council to recover all monies the council may incur in respect of costs, expenses, outgoings and charges relating to the said building so that there shall be no residual liability upon the council for any such matters except in relation to any flats within said building which have not been let on long leases by the council'.

It further states under qualifying expenditure that: 'such proportion of the salaries and wages and necessarily associated expenditure of any employee or employees of the council as may reasonably be apportioned to the running, maintenance and administration costs of said building and the cartilage thereof and to the preparation of the certificate and accounts kept...'

In other words, the management charge is for the time spent and costs incurred by any member of staff when dealing with leasehold properties.

The total cost to the council is divided up amongst the total number of properties involved to make a flat charge per property.

Currently the council do not recover all their costs and so therefore we will be increasing the charge annually until this is so.

Repairs

Minor repairs

These are day-to-day repairs carried out as and when necessary to all communal areas inside and outside the building.

The response repairs service is provided to Luton Council tenants and leaseholders through the repairs call centre.

The lease sets out exactly who is responsible for repairing the various elements of the building and the individual flat.

A report is run from our database showing all costs incurred per block and these are checked and then the costs apportioned between the numbers of properties in the block.

There may however be occasions when, under the council's responsibilities, we carry out repairs to an individual property and these will be recharged, and shown separately on the annual statement, just to the property concerned.

All repairs will be dealt with according to the established level of priority for repair work to be carried out.

Cyclical repairs (decorating)

The council, under the terms of the lease, are required to carry out external decorating and internal communal decorating every seven years. However, the council feels that this gap between decorating is too great and therefore has a five year cyclical plan in operation.

With high-rise blocks however this plan does sometimes slip due to the high costs involved to decorate the exterior parts of the building.

A contractor is appointed to carry out the works to a particular block and provides a cost for this work. This cost is then divided up amongst the properties contained in that block.

Major repairs

These works are normally carried out on a planned maintenance basis.

External and internal communal decorating does not come under this heading as it is done every five years making it a cyclical repair but because of the costs involved we follow the same consultation procedures as with major repairs and improvements.

The planned maintenance programme is reviewed regularly and changing priorities and financial constraints impact upon it. If sudden deterioration arises that was not foreseen this work would need to be brought forward. This may mean other works programmed for that year having to be put back to another year.

There is a legal requirement, under [section 20ZA of the Landlord & Tenant Act 1985](#), as amended by the [Commonhold & Leasehold Reform Act 2002](#), to consult leaseholders when the costs of works in a block exceed a certain amount. The amount is currently where the cost per leasee exceeds £250.00 for works and £100.00 for long term agreements.

Lessees receive this consultation in advance of the works being carried out and well in advance of actually being billed for them.

Improvements

These are treated the same as major works but are seen as enhancing the items already in place and the building as a whole.