

## Rent and Service Charge: Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q. I pay my rent by Direct Debit do I need to alter my payments?**

A. No, Estuary will make any necessary changes. We will also take into account any agreement or court order you have to clear arrears.

### **Q. I pay by Standing Order do I need to do anything?**

A. Yes, you will need to inform your bank to change your payments in line with your revised rent and/or service charge. If you have an agreement or court order to clear arrears and are unsure of what the payment should be please speak with the Income Team (Tel: 0300 304 5000) or email [income.team@estuary.co.uk](mailto:income.team@estuary.co.uk) or the market rent team if you are a shared owner/leaseholder at [Marketrent.team@estuary.co.uk](mailto:Marketrent.team@estuary.co.uk)

### **Q. I receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit to assist my housing costs; do I need to let them know of the change?**

A. Yes, even if your rent and service charge is fully covered by Housing Benefit or the Housing Element of Universal Credit, it is your responsibility to inform the appropriate person. With Housing Benefit you need to inform your local Council Housing Benefit Department. For Universal Credit you need to update your online journal. You may need to supply a copy of the rent/service charge review letter to either so please keep this in a safe place.

### **Q. Are all the costs within my Service Charge eligible charges for Housing Benefit and Universal Credit?**

A. Yes

### **Q: Why has my service charge changed?**

A: Your service charge is calculated annually to cover the actual costs incurred by Estuary in providing services for you. These services include:

- Communal Repairs
- Mechanical & Electrical Services, (such as communal lighting, lift maintenance, pumping stations, fire safety)
- Removal of bulk waste (fly tipping)
- Window cleaning
- Gardening
- Cleaning

In most cases, your service charge is based on an average of the last 4 years **actual spend**, which can result in an increase or decrease in the amount you are required to pay each year. The service charge covers essential servicing and maintenance of

on site equipment, such as lifts, CCTV, door entry systems and pumping stations as well as communal repairs, gardening and cleaning services.

**Q. I do not use the Communal areas – why should I pay a Service Charge?**

A. All residents are required to contribute to the operational costs of the communal areas; this is set out in your tenancy or lease agreement. The costs cover a wide range of services such as external and internal lighting, fire safety, grounds maintenance and repairs. These services are essential for providing a safe and clean environment for our residents.

**Q: I am not happy with the service I receive – do I have to pay my Service Charge?**

A: Yes, payment of the Service Charge is contractual and must be paid to avoid falling into arrears. However, if you are dissatisfied with a specific area of service, please contact us and we will ask a member of staff to contact you regarding your concerns.

**Q; I have just received my service charge statement and it includes window cleaning but I do not receive this service. Why have I been charged?**

A: Window cleaning is a standard item on the service charge statement and applies to communal window cleaning only. Please check the amount column. If the entry is '0' then you are not being charged for this service.

**Q: Can you tell me more about the bulk refuse service?**

A: Estuary does not provide a clearance service. You must make your own arrangements to dispose of any items other than general household waste. We suggest you contact your local Council, as they generally provide a disposal service. If there is a cost contained within your service charge for bulk refuse collection this is based on historical costs for removing fly tipped items from your estate/block. Any resident identified as a fly tipper, or of disposing household waste/items incorrectly will be charged to cover our disposal costs.

**Q. How can I help Estuary keep service charge costs down?**

A. Help us to reduce **vandalism** by reporting any acts of vandalism in communal areas immediately. If we are able to identify those responsible, they will be charged directly for the damage caused.

If your property is serviced by a **Pumping Station** please refrain from disposing of baby wipes and other non-flushable items in the system. The average cost to repair a blockage is £350!

**Fly Tipping** – Please note that residents must make their own arrangements to dispose of any furniture, kitchen appliances, household items or materials etc. You should contact the Council, who provide your normal rubbish collection, as they should be able to assist you. Do not place these items in communal areas while you are waiting for their collection. On some of our estates we provide communal refuse bins; however these are just for general household waste and recycling only. Residents and non residents, responsible for fly tipping will be charged the full cost of disposing of these items. The removal of items left illegally on the association's land cost Estuary over £150,000 in 2018. These costs will continue to rise if items are not disposed of responsibly.

We encourage our residents to report incidents of fly tipping on the Association's land. Contact details as below.

We hope that the above FAQs have been helpful, however if you wish to discuss any aspect of your rent/service charge statement further, you can contact us via our website <https://www.estuary.co.uk/contact-us> , by emailing us directly on [info@estuary.co.uk](mailto:info@estuary.co.uk) or by telephoning 0300 304 5000