



About your service charge.

Many customers currently pay a charge in addition to rent which covers communal services like cleaning and grounds maintenance. We understand that the quality and cost of these services is important to customers. Some of our customers will see changes in their service charges from the beginning of April. Whilst inflation has eased, housing associations and businesses continue to operate in a challenging economic environment.

Although costs for utilities have reduced this year, which is reflected in service charges, gas and electricity prices remain high compared to previous years. External pressures also mean that the cost of delivering essential services such as grounds maintenance and provision of fire safety equipment has increased.

Last year, we brought our grounds maintenance services inhouse to protect customers from escalating contractor costs. Costs for delivering these services have increased due to external factors, however these are less than if we had continued to use external contractors. Our Environmental Services Team are now also delivering services such as tree inspections, fly-tipping collection and gritting, which will be reflected in service charges.

Increases to service charges will vary across different schemes depending on the services that are provided. Last year we applied a cap for 12 months to service charges to protect customers from significant energy price rises. This year, we will also apply a service charge cap for our general let and housing for older people customers to protect those facing the potential for highest charges.

Our dedicated Financial Inclusion Team is also here to help any customers that are worried about their finances. The team offers free, confidential advice around income, budgeting, and financial support that might be available, so please get in touch by calling **0300 555 0600** or emailing financialinclusionteam@onward.co.uk

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a service charge?

Your service charge covers the cost of services provided to your scheme, neighbourhood and personal charges in relation to your home. Service charges cover things like communal utilities (i.e., gas, electricity and water) and scheme managers.

How is my charge calculated?

The charge is calculated annually based on the cost of services for the previous year and estimated costs for the coming year. Charges are shared equally between customers living in the same building who benefit from the services, so you only pay for the services you get.

What items are chargeable?

Every type of service we can charge via service charges are listed below, with an explanation of what they cover. Not all of the services listed are necessarily provided where you live, so where you do not receive a service, it will not be included in your charge. **You will only pay for the services you are provided with.**

Why does my neighbour pay a different amount to me?

You only pay for the services that you use whether direct to your house or in the area that you live. There may be rare circumstances where a neighbour pays a different amount. An example of this might be where you pay for the maintenance of a communal garden, but your neighbour has their own garden.

Will Housing Benefit or Universal Credit cover the increase in service charges?

If you receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, the majority of your service charges will be covered apart from individual charges. More information about individual charges is included in the table at the end of this document. If you're unsure please contact financialinclusionteam@onward.co.uk

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

If you are worried about your service charges, please contact our Financial Inclusion Team. We can offer support to help with your finances or support in helping you find employment, so please get in touch.

Utility and scheme charges	
Communal electricity	This is the cost of providing electricity in communal areas. Depending on your scheme this may include internal and external lighting, power source for lifts, fire alarms or door entry systems.
Communal gas	This is the cost of providing heating in the communal areas at some of our schemes, most commonly for our sheltered and supported housing customers.
Communal water	This is the cost of communal water supplies, including standing charges.
Council Tax	This is the cost of Council Tax for offices within sheltered and supported accommodation.
Scheme Manager	This includes salary and cover costs, mobile response provided by specialist agency (where applicable) and all other costs associated with the provision of a scheme manager.
Telephone line rental	This is the cost of the pay phone or phone line rental costs within the scheme.
Intensive housing management	This is the cost of providing additional support to supported housing customers.
Partner agent charge	This charge is applied when a third party agent provides additional services to supported housing customers.

Upkeep of communal areas

Communal cleaning

This includes internal cleaning of communal areas, such as vacuuming or mopping floors. This work is undertaken by our in-house team, but in some cases by an external contractor.

Communal cleaning also includes fly-tip removal carried out by our inhouse team. In some cases, this may be done by a specialist contractor.

Grounds maintenance

The covers costs for the following services:

grounds maintenance (including grass cutting, hedge trimming and litter picking)

tree maintenance (including tree surveys, planned tree works and reactive work to trees e.g., following storm damage)

gritting (replenishment of grit bins, and where appropriate an external contractor will attend whenever the ground temperature falls to 0°C)

Window cleaning

This is the cost of our inhouse window cleaning service. A small number of sites are covered by external contractors.

Pest control

This charge is applied where a pest control contract is in place.

Health & Safety testing

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This is the cost of periodic risk assessments and testing, including fire risk assessments, water safety testing, portable appliance testing and lightening conductors.

Provisions

Provision of external communal areas

This is the cost to maintain, repair and replace items within communal areas. This could include grit bins, garden equipment, play areas, external lighting and car parks.

Provision of fire safety equipment

This is the cost to maintain, repair and replace fire fighting equipment, fire detection and emergency lighting.

Provision of lift

This is the cost to maintain, repair and replace passenger lifts.

Provision of communal equipment

This is the cost to maintain, repair and replace equipment in communal areas and can include CCTV, TV aerials, laundry, security alarms, door entry, security gates and communal aids and adaptations.

Provisions (cont.)

Provision of communal furnishings and individual items

This is the cost to maintain, repair and replace communal furnishings and individual items. Communal furnishings can include furniture, floor coverings, carpets and decorating. Individual items can include white goods and lifeline equipment.

Provision of specialist equipment

This is the cost to maintain, repair and replace individual aids and adaptations including lifting equipment and hoists.

Individual services

(these are unlikely to be covered by Housing Benefit/Universal Credit)

Furniture

Provision of furniture within individual tenancies.

Luncheon Club

Provision of meals.

Personal electricity

Individual electricity supply.

Personal gas

Individual gas supply.

Personal water rates

Individual water supply.

Personal support charge

This is the cost for monitoring and maintaining lifeline alarm systems including mobile warden response.

TV Licence

This charge covers the cost of the communal lounge TV licence.

Management charges

Management charges

This covers the cost of running services, managing and setting up contracts, staff, administration and overheads, including the cost of preparing service charge information.