



Your service charges – 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.

How is my charge calculated?

The charge is calculated annually based on the cost of services you receive for the previous year and estimated costs for the coming year.

What items are chargeable?

Every type of service we can charge via service charges are listed in the table at the end of this document, 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 have my service charges increased?

The economy is still challenging. Although costs for utilities have gone down this year, gas and electricity prices are higher than in previous years.

Whilst we always work to ensure the best value for money for our customers, wider pressures mean that the cost of delivering some services, for example grounds maintenance or providing fire safety equipment, have increased. In some cases, costs have increased for delivering essential building safety services and we have contacted customers separately to provide more detail around this.

Some customers may see an increase in charges for grounds maintenance, cleaning and waste management services. In 2023, we brought most of these inhouse with these moving over from external contractors to our Onward Environmental team.

The cost of delivering these types of services have increased due to economic pressures beyond our control. For example, vehicle costs, equipment costs and tipping costs are all much higher than they were in previous years. But these costs would have been significantly higher if we had carried on using our external contractors rather than bringing services inhouse.

We also provide services to external communal areas, for example maintaining car parks and external lighting. We now have more accurate data that captures the full costs of delivering these services and as a result in some cases you may see changes in your service charges in this area.

We understand that the cost of living continues to be a challenge and if you are concerned about increases, or would like to discuss these, please get in touch.

Why does my neighbour pay a different amount to me?

You only pay for the services that are provided directly to your house or in the building and/or 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. Or in some cases, you might have different terms in your tenancy agreement around non-charge weeks. If you have any queries please get in touch.

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 below. If you're unsure please contact moneyadviceteam@onward.co.uk

What if I can't afford the increase?

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

Where can customers find a schedule of the services they receive?

Our Onward Environmental team provides grounds maintenance, cleaning, window cleaning, and waste management service for most customers. Most internal communal areas are cleaned fortnightly, with some properties and older persons schemes being cleaned more frequently. Window cleaning takes place usually every two months or as stated in the property agreement.

Grounds maintenance visits take place every two weeks. Litter picks are carried out on all visits. Grass is cut during the growing season, except in cases of extreme wet weather, and hedge and shrub reduction works are carried out from November to February. Some grassed areas, for example meadows, may be cut less frequently. You can find out more by visiting www.onward.co.uk/services/environmental-services/ or giving us a call.

For those customers that receive a service from Onward Environmental, we will send a newsletter which sets out the services that we provide and when you can expect to receive these. If you have any questions about your grounds maintenance service please get in touch.

Service charges explained

The table below sets out the different service charges and explains what these cover.

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 older persons 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 older persons and supported accommodation.

Utility and scheme charges (cont.)

Scheme Manager services

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 in older persons properties.

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, including vacuuming or mopping floors, wiping down skirting, balustrades, windowsills. This work is mainly carried out by our inhouse team, Onward Environmental, but in some cases by an external contractor. Most internal communal areas are cleaned every two weeks, with some properties and older persons schemes cleaned at a different frequency.

Grounds maintenance

This includes grass cutting, litter picking and weeding. In the Winter period from November to February this also includes hedge and shrub reductions. Grounds maintenance visits take place every two weeks across the year.

Gritting bins are checked and refilled when needed. For some sites, such as older persons schemes, an external contractor will attend to grit surfaces whenever the ground temperature falls to 0°C.

Trees

We have a legal responsibility to maintain trees. All customers with a communal tree on their scheme will be charged a proportion of the costs for the provision of our Tree Team. This will include things like the surveys conducted by our Tree Officers, and a portion of the costs to provide our Arborists who carry out the work.

Any actual works carried out, such as pruning or felling trees, over the previous 12 months will be charged specifically to the customers on the scheme where the work was done, proportional to the size of each job carried out.

Waste management

All customers will be charged for a proportion of the cost of the provision of our Waste Management Team.

Any actual works carried out, like fly tip removal, over the previous 12 months will be charged specifically to the customers on the scheme where the work was done, proportional to the size of each job carried out.

Upkeep of communal areas (cont.)

Window cleaning	This is the cost of our inhouse window cleaning service. A small number of areas are covered by external contractors. Most window cleaning takes place every two months. Our team use a pole reach system for windows at height which is safer for operatives, and more cost effective for customers
Pest control	This charge is applied where a pest control contract is in place covering communal areas.
Third party management	This charge is applied when a third party provides estate services.

Health & Safety testing

Health & Safety testing	This is the cost of periodic risk assessments and testing, including fire risk assessments, water safety testing, portable appliance testing and lightening conductors.
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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.
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 for general needs customers within individual tenancies.
Luncheon Club	Provision of meals in older persons schemes.
Personal electricity	Individual electricity supply.

Individual services (cont.)

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

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 in older persons schemes.

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.