

A guide to service charges

A service charge is a payment made by a customer towards the costs of providing and maintaining services such as repairs, maintenance, improvements, insurance and management costs.

The amount can vary according to the costs incurred in running a property, block, scheme or estate. Customers' individual charges will vary according to the services they receive.

Below are some examples of what we include in a service charge alongside a short description and what property tenure they apply to. If you would like to know more, please contact the Service Charge Team on **0333 400 8222** or email **servicecharges@aster.co.uk**.

All customers have the right to inspect accounts, receipts and other supporting evidence relating to the collection and administration of service charge accounts. Where appropriate, we may make a reasonable charge for this service.

* This is Asters interpretation of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit regulations. Always check with the local benefits office first.

Service	Description	Rented	Leasehold / Shared Ownership	Freehold	*UC / HB Eligible	Frequency of service
Air conditioning	Costs for servicing and repairing communal air conditioning systems in situ within our blocks.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2 servicing visits a year plus repairs as needed.
Bin clean / emptying and litter-picking	Reactive charge and covers work carried out on estates including litter picking in shared areas such as bin stores or car parks, investigating / and carrying out minor repair works. It is an estate charge, and is not only applicable to flats.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Reactive service carried out as needed.
CCTV maintenance	Servicing and repair of the communal areas monitored by a CCTV system. Covers any repairs carried out during the year.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1 servicing visits a year. Plus repairs as necessary.
Cleaning materials	Cost of cleaning materials brought to allow staff to maintain the shared areas.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	As needed.
Communal electricity	Providing electricity in communal areas. This is normally in stairwell and entrance ways in flats but can also include external lighting such as in car parks, certain bin stores or street lighting. This charge isn't just applicable for flats and can be passed onto houses too.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Bills received as and when.

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Communal gas	Providing heating in communal areas of some of our buildings, especially our supported housing customers.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Bills received as and when.
Communal internal cleaning	Cost of cleaning service we provide to internal communal areas. This may be provided by our in-house teams or an external company.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	At least once a month. However this could be more frequent depending on where you live.
Communal room hire income	Certain shared schemes have communal rooms that can be hired for meetings or guest rooms that can be rented to family members.	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A	N / A
Communal telephone lines	Cost of providing a dedicated telephone lines within communal lifts and telephone lines for hard wired alarm systems. Also covers the phone line for any CCTV equipment as well as the fire system.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Bills received as and when.
Communal water	Water in communal areas. It includes standing charges and how much water is used. This can also serve bike stores or bin stores and isn't just applicable for blocks of flats. This can also be referred to as "Water - Utilities".	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Bills received as and when.
Door entry system maintenance	This covers a contract for all door entry systems. Once reported, someone will attend to carry out any necessary repairs, including at weekends. Any faults out of office hours can be reported using the normal repairs line. The contract covers call-outs and repairs.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Reactive service. repairs carried out as needed.
Estate cleaning services	Reactive charge for external estate work such as the removal of graffiti and fly-tipped items.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Reactive service carried out as needed.
External lighting	The charge pays for electrical light fittings in external shared areas to be checked to make sure they are safe and working properly. Any work required will need to be paid for as a repair.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Bills received as and when.

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Fire system and safe maintenance	<p>For areas that have communal fire systems, this covers the cost of repair, replacement and annual servicing of equipment and weekly testing.</p> <p>This incorporate dry risers, automatic opening vents and emergency lights.</p> <p>Fall arrest covers the costs for repairing, servicing and inspection the fall arrest system located on some of our roofs.</p> <p>This equipment, where in situ, ensures that operatives and contractors can safely access the roof.</p>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	<p>Weekly fire alarm testing.</p> <p>Fire alarms serviced 4 times a year.</p> <p>Fire blankets and fire extinguisher once a year.</p>
Gates / barrier maintenance	The servicing and repair costs to maintain and access car park areas with security gates.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2 service visits a year plus repairs as needed.
Ground floor windows	The cleaning of windows to individual's flats on the ground floor.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Covered by HB but no UC	At least 4 times a year but could be more often depending on where you live.
Grounds maintenance	<p>Cost of cutting grass and looking after other garden / estate shared areas maintained by us or an external company.</p> <p>This includes hard-standing areas such as car parks or garage areas.</p> <p>This also may not be the grounds directly surrounding a property.</p> <p>This charge can be applicable for both houses / bungalows and flats.</p> <p>The level of service may vary in different regions.</p>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	<p>25 visits a year.</p> <p>Grass cut 17 times a year between March and October.</p>
Independent living	<p>The Independent Living service charge, formerly known as Enhanced Housing Management has not changed.</p> <p>The service does not provide individual care or support but reflects a more intensive housing service than is provided to our general needs customers due to the nature of the extra care and sheltered buildings residents within these schemes.</p>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A
Lift maintenance	<p>Ensures an engineer will attend within 24 hours of a problem being reported.</p> <p>This also covers servicing carried out during the year.</p>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6 service visits a year plus years as needed.

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Lifeline system maintenance	Maintenance of the communal alarm system. This can also cover any alarms within individual properties.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Repairs completed as required.
Lifeline system monitoring	Monitoring of the communal system. This can also cover any lifelines or alarm support within individual properties.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	24 hours monitoring 7 days a week.
Management fees	Costs to prepare and send out service charges based on a percentage of the overall service charges. More details on how this is calculated can be given upon request.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A
Peace of mind	Delivering an independent living service by a third party.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N / A
Personal aids and adaption costs	Servicing and maintaining any personal aids and adaptations installed to a property, for example stair-lifts and hoists.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Stair-lifts 1 service a year. Through floor lifts 2 services a year.
Personal electric charge	In some individual properties the electricity is supplied via a meter that the utilities company charge us for. We then recharge this back to residents via Service Charges.	Yes	No	No	No	As bills are received.
Personal heating	In some individual properties we pay the bills for the heating. We then recharge this back to the residents via Service Charges.	Yes	No	No	No	As bills are received.
Personal water charge	In some areas we are responsible for the invoicing of water supplies to individual properties rather than an external water provider.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	As bills are received.
Pest control	External company to deal with any pest problems found on the communal estate areas.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Undertaken as needed.
Playground maintenance	Weekly inspections to ensure the equipment is safe to use as well as servicing and repair of playground equipment on the estate. Reactive work may cover any litter picking required during the year.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Weekly safety inspections and repairs as needed.

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Repair and replace essential equipment	<p>We use this to recover costs from our rented customers for the replacement of equipment within your property / block / estate. For example: door entry systems, soft furnishings, fire alarms, lifts, careline systems.</p> <p>When items such as these are replaced rather than recoup the cost in a single payment we will instead recover this cost over a number of years. Leaseholders and shared owners will also pay towards the replacement items but we recoup the costs in a single payment.</p>	Yes	**No	No	Yes	Equipment replaced as necessary.
Sanitary bins service	Contracts for the removing and disposal of hygiene bins.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	N / A
Sewerage	Dealing with waste water if a property isn't linked to the public sewer system.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A
Tree works	<p>Tree maintenance work we need to carry out.</p> <p>These charges are set up in the same way as our grounds maintenance – just because you cannot see a tree directly outside a property, customers will still need to contribute towards this charge.</p>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Work undertaken as needed.
TV license fee	Communal TV licenses.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	As bills are received.
TV system maintenance	Annual inspection and minor repairs of equipment supplied to communal areas or to certain individual homes.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Serviced once a year. Repairs carried out as needed.
Water safety management	<p>This is the cost for maintenance needed to ensure the water supply complies with water regulations, and managing the risk of Legionnaire's disease. This is a legal requirement and keeps communal water supplies safe.</p> <p>This type of maintenance includes temperature monitoring, flushing, tank inspections, risk assessments, repairs (remedial works from issues found in risk assessments, inspections and maintenance reports), shower cleaning, water heater maintenance etc.. Communal water supplies include; communal kitchens, guest rooms, communal toilets / bathrooms and communal laundry rooms i.e. any shared supply.</p>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Communal water temperatures checked monthly. Cold water tanks inspected annually.
White goods maintenance	Annual servicing, cleaning and minor repairs of equipment supplied to communal areas such as communal kitchens and laundry rooms as well as certain individual homes.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Serviced once a year. Repairs carried out as needed.
Window cleaning	Depending on the contract in place, we arrange for an external contractor to clean communal windows.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes apart from ground floor windows	At least 4 times a year but could be more often depending on where you live.

** Leaseholders and shared owners will also pay towards the replacement items but they we recoup the costs in a single payment.

Leaseholder specific charges

The services listed below are charges that are specific to leaseholder and shared ownership customers. However they may also pay for some the services mentioned above.

Service	Description	Rented	Leasehold / Shared Ownership	Freehold	*UC / HB Eligible	Frequency of service
Administration costs	This charge is used for properties that we lease out to other organisations where the lease agreements enable us to charge a service charge, but it is not specific about what this is for.	No	Yes	No	Yes	N / A
Accountancy /audit fees	Costs of providing professional financial services to adhere to service charge legislation and produce annual financial accounts where necessary.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Once a year.
Buildings insurance	Insure the structure of a building.	No	Yes	No	Yes	Annual insurance policy.
Communal decorating and communal unit cost decorating	Cost of maintaining and renewing decoration of communal areas in some schemes.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A
Communal repairs	Any repairs carried out within the communal areas including bin, cycle store and external areas of the building.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	As necessary.
External decs and roof works	This charge is for work scheduled on a rolling programme, such as painting the outside of a building and re-roofing. We will consult with customers before any work of this type is undertaken. This consultation is referred to as a Section 20 and is a legal requirement to do before the actual work is done.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Decoration works take place every 6 years.
Garage building insurance	Insuring a garage under our property.	No	Yes	Yes	No	Annual insurance policy.
Ground rent	Ground rent is rent paid under the terms of a lease by the owner of a building to the owner of the land on which it is built.	No	Yes	No	Yes	Annual rent.
Gutters and gullies clearance	Gutters to be unblocked and cleaned and have leaves removed from roof gullies to help drainage.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A

Service	Description	Rented	Leasehold / Shared Ownership	Freehold	*UC / HB Eligible	Frequency of service
Major works - doors	<p>Work scheduled on a rolling programme that is for replacement communal and individual property front doors.</p> <p>We will consult with customers before any work of this type is undertaken.</p> <p>This consultation is referred to as a Section 20 and is a legal requirement to do before the actual work is done.</p>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A
Major works - energy efficiency	<p>Work scheduled on a rolling programme that is for energy efficiency works.</p> <p>We will consult with customers before any work of this type is undertaken.</p> <p>This consultation is referred to as a Section 20 and is a legal requirement to do before the actual work is done.</p>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A
Major works - fascia and soffits	<p>Work scheduled on a rolling programme that is for replacement of fascia and soffits.</p> <p>We will consult with customers before any work of this type is undertaken.</p> <p>This consultation is referred to as a Section 20 and is a legal requirement to do before the actual work is done.</p>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A
Major works - lift replacement	<p>Work scheduled on a rolling programme that is for replacement of lifts.</p> <p>We will consult with customers before any work of this type is undertaken.</p> <p>This consultation is referred to as a Section 20 and is a legal requirement to do before the actual work is done.</p>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A
Major works - rain water goods	<p>Work scheduled on a rolling programme that is for replacement of rain water goods i.e. gutters.</p> <p>We will consult with customers before any work of this type is undertaken.</p> <p>This consultation is referred to as a Section 20 and is a legal requirement to do before the actual work is done.</p>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A
Major works - walls	<p>Work scheduled on a rolling programme that is for replacement works to boundary walls.</p> <p>We will consult with customers before any work of this type is undertaken.</p> <p>This consultation is referred to as a Section 20 and is a legal requirement to do before the actual work is done.</p>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A

Service	Description	Rented	Leasehold / Shared Ownership	Freehold	*UC / HB Eligible	Frequency of service
Major works - windows	<p>Work scheduled on a rolling programme that is for the replacement of windows.</p> <p>We will consult with customers before any work of this type is undertaken.</p> <p>This consultation is referred to as a Section 20 and is a legal requirement to do before the actual work is done.</p>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	N / A
Sinking fund contra	<p>This contra charge is when monies from the Sinking Fund are used to off set the costs of External decorations and Roof Works carried out to the property.</p>	No	Yes	Yes	N / A	N / A
Sinking funds	<p>Shared Owners and Leaseholders build up an amount in advance of renewal, redecoration or Major Works being required.</p> <p>It is often stipulated in the lease of the property these charges are to be collected to capture annual 'wear and tear' rather than requesting one-off amounts from the owner at that time.</p> <p>Depending on what is stated in the lease depends on what is covered by the sinking fund, commonly (not exclusively) it is replacement of doors, windows, roofs and redecoration.</p>	No	Yes	Yes	No	N / A