

## Brockley Residents Feedback and Queries relating the Rent and Service Charges proposed increase for 2024/25

Meeting held at St Andrew's Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023

### Resident Feedback/Query and Responses:

1	<p>(TK) How is the cost of the garages distributed in terms of repairs to these garages?  (SS) Lewisham has a pot for repairing garages  (TK) within the current Section 20 Rydon asked for a contribution from leaseholders for garages</p>
2	<p>(AF) The water bill is now more expensive than when it was paid to the council.  (SS) The water company has taken back the responsibility to collect charges from Lewisham Council, you now have a direct link to them and can challenge the difference with your water suppliers.  (SRus) The council had an arrangement to collect on behalf of the water board. The water board now collects directly. The council has no influence towards water prices.</p>
	<p>(AF) Concerned about paying the water and other bills from Universal Credit  (SRus) Explained the council does not have control. Certain elements of Service Charge qualify under certain benefits. If you think you've been over charged, you can challenge the Water Board  (SS) Pinnacle have provided welfare officers to help with support and guide individuals. Advised to make contact. Some parts of Service Charge can be paid by UC. Income recovery team is responsible for the collection of Charges for Leaseholders and Tenants, they are available to talk issues through. Tuesday's and Wednesday's there is surgery at Brockley which anyone can make a booking to discuss money issues by emailing <a href="mailto:Brockley.customerservice@pinnaclegroup.co.uk">Brockley.customerservice@pinnaclegroup.co.uk</a></p>
3.	<p>(SR) Is the increase only for the estimated bill?  (SS) yes, adding the RPI, it gives an idea how much items go up for the coming year. You will be charged on the Estimates, this is then adjusted in the Actuals. The Actual is the bill regardless of inflation.  (SR) The Service Charge increases of RPI +1% are above inflation increases.  (SR) Is the 9.9 % negotiable?  (SS) The rate is in line with inflation, this is what it will cost for the new financial year. It is not negotiable.</p>
4	<p>(TR) The contract goes up by RPI+ X which gives a higher percentage therefore we keep it at just +1% to make the increase. When the RPI is higher on the Service Charge account, we try to minimise the deficit. No control over RPI, its fixed until the contract finishes.</p>
5	<p>(MB) After rubbish collection, some items are left on the floor where the job appears incomplete by the bin men  (SRus) Suggested reporting it on the website  Fly-tipping is an offence, resident's can contact 101 or log issues on 'Love Lewisham' website</p>
6	<p>(ET) Lewisham tenants fund charge is 15p, the charge goes into a fund to encourage the formation of TRA's who can then apply for grants each year, to cover administration costs, equipment/training etc.  It is managed by a board of Directors and is a registered company. There is training for Chairs, Treasurers etc..  Sam can help with setting up TRA's.</p>

7	I don't feel these charges are justified when there are no means of communicating with Lewisham Council officers, councillors or contractors and there are systemic problems with "appealing and substandard" work.
8	<p>This is the second consecutive year in which Pinnacle is imposing an almost double digit percentage increase (9.9%) on the cost of the service charge. This will place additional pressures on household finances during the cost of living crisis, and also, when many leaseholders are facing bills of (literally) thousands of pounds to contribute towards Regenter B3's major works programme. The paper is silent on these very real and specific financial pressures on leaseholders arising from the current major works round, which suggests Pinnacle did not consider these pressures in the round when determining this year's annual service charge increase. This is short sighted.</p> <p>We are always told that the increase of RPI + 1% on the service charge is mandated by the PFI contract that the council has signed with Regenter B3 (which requires the service charge to increase by RPIX). This gives leaseholders, and indeed the Council, no recourse to challenge any of these costs and "bakes in" <b>above inflation</b> increases over which no discretion appears to be able to be made. This seems fundamentally wrong.</p> <p>Many residents are wondering what will happen to the service charge after 2027, when the PFI contract with Regenter B3 expires and we understand the management of the properties in the Brockley PFI area will return to council management. I request that the Housing Committee seeks clarity on the future plans in this area (are the properties to return to council management?) And also, what will the consequences of this be for the future of the service charge and its calculation? Any proposed changes must be consulted upon fairly and transparently - particularly if they were to result in any further increases in service charge costs. I would ask that the Council responds on this point and provides residents with some reassurance.</p>

**Lewisham Council Housing Service**  
**Rent and Service charge meeting (TRA Chairs and Leasehold forum)**  
**Monday 13 November 6.30-8pm- Microsoft Teams**

**Feedback**

**Rents and service charges**

<b>Feedback</b>	
<b>Property Services</b>	
Communication	TRAs and residents cannot report communal repairs and leaks on the online system
Communication	There needs to be communication with residents about the cyclical maintenance programme
Communication	There is a lack of coordination and communication between departments.
Cost	Is there any correlation between increase in rent and increased service to residents – i.e. no maintenance
Investment	A lot of disrepair, even though decent homes were done ten years ago, it has not addressed the problems. Leaks are a huge issue and cause mould and condensation.
Investment	Pipes are failing, and causing leaks, because there is no cyclical maintenance programme
Investment	Legal fees for disrepairs could be reduced if there was investment in existing assets to repair leaks, etc. These aren't often addressed quickly enough which makes it more costly long term
Investment	Repairs system and capital programme system need to improve Kitchens and bathrooms changed every 15 years, but other works externally and communal areas have not been done in 25 years.
Repairs & Investment	What causes the huge delay for getting works done for leaseholders? Big delay for leak repair works – 2 years.
Compliance	Concern about security at independent living scheme – people coming in and no one knows who they are
<b>Resident Services</b>	
Consultation	Want LBL to take on board their (TRA/ Resident's views and ideas) and possible solutions i.e. for flytipping
Housing Management	Encourage TRAs to set up Tenant management Organisations (TMOs).
Housing Management	Independent living officer – given considerably more work, no change in amount of service charge for this reduced service

Environment	Gardening – not happening at Vineries
Environment	Environment is poor, need improved litter-picking
Environment	Appalling upkeep of the estate. Need to improve the basics and ensure the areas are well maintained Fly-tipping – can be resolved, put in a covered space, and put bins away from the road. If estates look good, people are less likely to litter.
<b>Other</b>	
Communication	There should be a road map for change with the Housing Services now they're in the council. How things will move forward.
Finance	Surprised that the council have gone with the maximum increase. It's misleading to say we are going with government advice, as the government say we can go up to 7.7%
ICT/ Home ownership/ Finance	There should be investment in a software upgrade to better predict and monitor service charges. There are currently many errors with the service charge billing

## Garages

Feedback
Garages don't have electricity, so unable to store electric cars. What are the plans for electric charging points? Can use a lamppost which already has an electricity supply
It should be clearer what the spend is on garages overall and not just the repairs costs.

## Lewisham Tenants Fund (LTF)

- No questions or comments on report
- Shirley - Chair of LTF asked to clarify that the LTF is a separate company.
- LTF requested a meeting with Gillian to discuss LTF

## **Response to feedback - Chair (Gillian Douglas (Executive Director of Housing))**

### **Rent and Service Charge**

- We are working on asset management strategy
- Have been impressed by the caretaking and environment teams, and believe they are doing a good job. They are not well resourced, and it's an aging workforce with sickness that needs to be covered.
- We need to set clear expectations for staff.
- We will see if we need to look at transferring resources between estates.
- Fly-tipping is an issue that requires solutions.
- Investment in the stock is needed.
- ACTION- Gillian asked for details of estates she should visit where residents have concerns
- ACTION- Gillian requested David (Colonnade) email her directly about the roof at Colonnade.

### **Garages**

- ACTION- David Lee to seek update from Martin O'Brien on plans for electric car charging point installation in the Borough

### **Final comments and next steps**

- Comments from this meeting will be presented to the Housing Select Committee (HSC) meeting, to help inform their discuss and inform their recommendations.
- Any additional comments following the meeting will go to Mayor & Cabinet (M&C) for a decision in February 2044.
- The report goes to full council at end of February 2024
- Residents will then be advised of the decision that is made.

### **Actions**

- Arrange for Gillian to visit Tanners Hill, Jerningham and the Pepys estate (as requested by residents at meeting)
- David Lee to seek update from Martin O'Brien on plans for electric car charging point installation in the Borough
- Follow up on LTF request for a meeting with Gillian to discuss LTF
- Lewisham Housing to discuss concerns raised at Vineries with independent living team (staff time/ resource available, and security)