

APPENDIX 4: Garage Rent Increase Report 2023/24

INCLUSIVE REGENERATION Estates Team Report		
Report Title	Rental Increases for Garages from April 2023 – Lewisham Homes and Regenter RB3	
Key Decision	Yes	Item No.
Contributors	Directorate of Housing, Regeneration and Public Realm	
Class		Date: November 2022

1. Purpose and Summary of the report

The purpose of this report is to advise the resident panel of the proposed increase in the rent paid by tenants for domestic garages owned by the Council for the next financial year. For the past few years, the garage rents have been increased in line with the Retail Prices Index, which currently stands at 12.6%. However, due to the current cost of living crisis and economic uncertainty, it has been decided to cap the increase at 10% for the next financial year.

2. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Council approves, in principle, an increase in rent for the garage portfolio of 10%, to be effective from April 2023. This increase is 2.6% less than the Retail Price Index for the current year.

Blue Badge holders will continue to receive a 50% deduction on the weekly rent.

3. Policy Context

The contents of this report are consistent with the Council's policy framework. It supports the achievements of the following corporate strategy objectives:

- Building an inclusive local economy – Everyone can access high-quality job opportunities, with decent pay and security in our thriving and inclusive local economy.
- Making Lewisham greener – Everyone enjoys our green spaces and benefits from a healthy environment as we work to protect and improve our local environment.

4. Background

For the forthcoming financial year from April 2023 it is intended that the increase applied is capped at 10%, which is 2.6% less than the Retail Prices Index.

There are approximately 134 Council garage sites in the borough, comprising 182 garage blocks. There are 2,379 garages in total, which are split 2,011 to Lewisham Homes, 311 Brockley Regenter and 57 TMO's. The split between social tenants/leaseholders and non-residential tenants is approximately 70%/30%

The current waiting list for Lewisham Homes garages is 3,426 applicants.

A housing tenant with LB Lewisham pays the basic price for a garage (subject to any specific discounts agreed) and a non-housing tenant pays the basic price with the addition of 20% VAT. Blue Badge holders receive a 50% deduction on the weekly rent.

The application of a discount is entirely a discretionary decision on behalf of the Council; garages are not a core social dwelling provision and all could be charged at a higher level, although there is some logic in offering some abatement to housing customers to help mitigate parking issues and neighbourhood management problems.

The current average basic rent charge (before discounts) for the garage stock is £16.62 per week. The highest rent charged is £24.90 per week and the lowest is £6.15 per week. However, some garages are charged at less than the lowest rate per week. These are discounted rates (50% of the full charge) for tenants with blue badges.

5. Financial Implications

The current annual rent roll for the garage portfolio is £2.056M, based on a basic average standard charge of £16.62 per week per garage (i.e. before discounts are applied).

If the rents are increased by 10%, as proposed, in April 2023, the revised annual rent roll will increase to approximately £2.262M, or from £16.62 per week to £18.29 per week per garage, an uplift of £1.66 per week on average, and a total increase of approximately £191,000 on the annual rent roll, or £151,000 after blue badge holder discounts have been applied.

6. Legal Implications

The Council's duties in relation to the consultation of tenants on matters of housing management, as set-out in Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985, do not apply to rent levels, nor to charges for services or facilities provided by the authority. There is therefore no requirement to consult with secure tenants regarding the proposed increase in charges. The Council still needs to act reasonably and the decision maker should therefore be satisfied that the increase is reasonable and justified. The general principle is that the Council should be seeking best value.

The Equality Act 2012 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The duty continues to be a “have regard duty”, and the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled “Practice”. The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act/equality-act-codes-of-practice-and-technical-guidance/>

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:

- The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
- Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
- Engagement and the equality duty
- Equality objectives and the equality duty
- Equality information and the equality duty

The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/public-sectorequality-duty/guidance-on-the-equality-duty/>

7. Crime and Disorder Implications

There are no specific crime and disorder implications in this report. However, levels of voids could increase in the future if there is a lack of investment. Poorly maintained garages with high vacancy rates can in turn lead to increased levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

8. Equalities Implications

The proposed 10% increase will be applied across the portfolio to residents and non-residents. Blue badge holders will continue to receive a 50% discount on the weekly rent as existing.

9. Environmental Implications

There are no specific environmental implications in this report.

10. Conclusion

The proposed rental increase is considered to reflect market rent and be sustainable, and will raise additional revenue from the portfolio of approximately £xxx191,000, or £151,000 net after blue badge discounts have been applied.

11. Further Information

If there are any queries on this report, please contact David Lee on mobile 07392 862107, david.lee@lewisham.gov.uk