

Dear Tenant

Consultation Letter

As you may be aware from recent local meetings, Thurrock Council (your Landlord) intends to introduce some changes to the service charges currently paid by its tenants.

Clause 2.1.2 of your tenancy agreement provides that 'where services are provided as part this agreement you will pay a service charge which is included in the total weekly payment. The services provided and their charges are shown in page 1 of your agreement. The service charge may include a sum payable towards a sinking fund, which allows us to collect an amount to cover any usually heavy costs for services which may have to be paid in the future.'

Clause 2.2.4 provides that 'we may after consulting with you and any other tenants affected, increase, add to, remove, reduce or vary the services provided. This may include adding services where you have not previously paid a service charge at all. We will establish a procedure for consultation which will be publicised and made available to you if you ask for it.'

The Council provides a range of services to Thurrock Council tenants living in flats and Maisonettes.

Services include:

- Lifts
- Electricity in communal areas
- Secure door entry
- Maintenance of the gardens/ areas surrounding the properties

You already have the use of one or more of these four services. Other Councils charge their tenants for these services but Thurrock Council has not done so up to now. The cost of providing these services is considerable and the Council cannot continue to subsidise these costs. The Council is proposing to introduce a service charge to all its tenants who have use of these four services. You would only be charged according to the services you use.

It is estimated that a charge of £7.79 per week (per property) would be made to tenants receiving all four services. If you are currently in receipt of housing benefit or universal credit, the proposed additional service charges is eligible to be covered by housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit. If you are not entitled to any benefits at present, you may want to contact the Housing Benefit department for a reassessment of your income to see if you are entitled to financial support towards any additional charges introduced.

Sheltered Housing

As you may be aware, tenants who live in sheltered housing receive an extra service provided by sheltered housing officers covering a range of services. In 2014 the Council introduced a basic service charge of £8 per week per property to all new tenants however the revenue generated from this charge does not cover the full cost of services provided.

The Council is now proposing to introduce a sheltered housing charge of £15 per week to all tenants who live in sheltered accommodation including current tenants. This charge will be

introduced gradually over a 3 year period, namely £5 in the first year, rising to £10 in the 2nd year and then to £15 in the 3rd year. For tenants in sheltered housing who currently pay £8 per week, there will be no extra charge until the 2nd year when their weekly service charge will increase to £10.

Have your say

There are two documents attached to this letter which explain the proposed changes and their effects as well as the answers to some frequently asked questions (FAQ's) that I trust will help you understand this process. You are invited to make any comments on the proposed changes no later than **31st March 2017**.

You can respond in any of the following ways:

- By completing our online survey at [ADDRESS TO BE CONFIRMED]
- By email to tenancyvariation@thurrock.gov.uk
- In writing to
Tenancy variation officer,
Housing
Thurrock Council Civic Office,
New Road, Grays,
Essex RM17 6SL
- By calling our contact centre on 01375 366120

Sheltered housing tenants can also attend the next sheltered housing forum to provide comments;

This will be held at [ADDRESS TO BE CONFIRMED] on [DATE TO BE CONFIRMED] at 10:30am *What happens next?*

We will consider all the comments we receive and then make a recommendation to the Thurrock Council's Cabinet. After this, if the above proposal is approved by Thurrock Council's Cabinet, we will serve you with a formal Notice of Variation (under Section 103 of the Housing Act 1985) later this year. This will include a copy of the new tenancy agreement with details of the new service charges and will inform you of the date on which the changes will become effective.

Yours sincerely

John Knight
Head of Housing
