

## Report of the Chief Executive

**GENERAL NEEDS – COMMUNAL AREAS**1. Purpose of report

To seek approval from Housing Committee to introduce new services for communal areas, including block cleaning and window cleaning.

2. Background

In September 2021 Housing Committee resolved that consultation is completed with General Needs tenants that live in properties with communal areas to obtain their views on new services being introduced and a new charge to contribute towards the cost of providing these.

3. Detail

Currently General Needs tenants are not charged for services provided, such as grounds maintenance and communal lighting. These are paid from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). There are also services which are not currently provided, which many landlords would routinely provide. This includes block cleaning and window cleaning. Currently tenants are jointly responsible for cleaning communal areas on their schemes. This leads to variations on the standard of our blocks and an unfair expectation on our tenants.

All services that are proposed as part of the service charge will be eligible for Housing Benefit and the rent element of Universal Credit. This means that the tenants who claim benefit to pay their rent would also have this additional cost covered. It is not proposed that the Council seeks to recover all of this additional cost immediately, but rather that a similar approach is taken to the changes to the Independent Living service charge, which will gradually increase the amount payable over a number of years.

Results of the consultation can be found in the appendix.

4. Financial Implications

The level of service charge and budget will be approved by Finance and Resources Committee. The proposed initial charge is £1.50 per week, to be increased by CPI + 1% each year, in line with other fees and charges. The HRA will subsidise the overall cost, which will be included in the 2022/23 HRA budget.

**Recommendation**

**The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that communal block and window cleaning is introduced in General Needs Accommodation.**

Background Papers: Nil

## APPENDIX

**Consultation**

Consultation was required under Section 105 of the 1985 Housing Act as the changes proposed relate to the management of properties by Broxtowe Borough Council. Secure tenants likely to be affected must be informed of proposals, and be able to make their views known to us within a specified period, which is not defined in the Act. The consultation period was from 4 October 2021 until 31 October 2021.

1059 surveys were sent by post to all General Needs tenants that have shared communal areas to seek their opinion on the condition of their block and the introduction of new services. The survey was promoted through social media and Housing News bulletins and could also be completed online.

Only 11 responses were received. Due to the low response rate all comments provided are included in the report. The consultation asked the following questions:

*How satisfied are you with the standard of cleanliness in the communal areas of your block?*

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Very satisfied                     | 1 |
| Satisfied                          | 0 |
| Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | 4 |
| Dissatisfied                       | 3 |
| Very dissatisfied                  | 2 |
| Not answered                       | 1 |

*Would you support the introduction of communal cleaning of stairwells and landings for your block?*

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 6 |
| No  | 5 |

*Would you support the introduction of cleaning of communal windows in your block?*

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 6 |
| No  | 5 |

*Do you have any comments you wish to make about the cleanliness of your block or the proposed introduction of communal cleaning?*

- Flat blocks on Gibbons are a dumping ground for pushchairs and bikes making it unsafe for other tenants in the blocks in case of fires
- Myself and another tenant have kept the communal area clean and tidy for the past 18 years and the garden
- I don't see why I should pay for it to be cleaned when neighbours treat it as a dumping ground for all their stuff and boxes of rubbish because they can't be

bothered to walk 15 feet to a bin as they are no doubt on benefits so will get it free but also I keep my garden maintained but struggle with the amount of dog mess from my neighbour's dogs all over my lawn

- Communal areas were cleaned by a Council employee until lockdown with no cost involved. The service stopped with no explanation and now you want to charge for it!
- Even if it was just removal of the cobwebs that accumulate in the high ceiling areas, it would improve the look of the area greatly.
- I look after my environment.
- I do most of the cleaning anyway in it and I'm not going to pay when there are 3 flats in my block that get HB when they don't clean it

*Do you have any comments you wish to make about the proposal to introduce a charge for tenants to contribute towards the cost of communal services?*

- All for it
- If everyone paid it wouldn't be too bad
- The area outside each person's flat should be kept clean by the tenant - not charging everyone for those who are content to live with dirt outside their flat.
- As long as it was a minimal cost I don't see a problem with it
- It won't be little enough for me to pay it on top of my rent for the council to gain from it when I already pay a subscription for my garden bin which they don't empty and I have to ring to get emptied

*Do you have any additional comments?*

- Shame my neighbours don't take pride in the block/gardens
- Unwilling to pay for cleaning areas that are not used by me or near my flat

In addition to the formal consultation required in accordance with the 1985 Housing Act, the matter was also discussed by the Resident Involvement Group and Housing Performance Group.

The following comments were made by the Resident Involvement Group at the meeting on 12 October 2021:

- It is not fair for those on benefits compared to those having to pay
- An increase won't be very popular with tenants, especially with other bills increasing and low pay increases, if any.
- Need to ensure that charges are applied fairly
- Some tenants take good care of communal areas and others don't, which if left for years can affect workman being able to do their jobs
- Checks need to be completed to ensure service is being provided and to check quality
- Tenants should be told how much the services costs in comparison to how much they are being asked to pay
- Tenants should be told how often the services will be provided

The following comments were made at Housing Performance Group at the meeting on 2 November 2021:

- The initiative is welcomed. Residents don't always take responsibility for communal areas. Really happy about the change being made.
- Good idea for a tidy Borough
- Can see the stark difference between blocks owned by other landlords and Broxtowe Borough Council blocks
- Tenants have had the opportunity to feedback and it is right to look after our buildings
- Some councillors have been asking for this for some time. Happy that cleaning will be starting
- We need to keep an eye on fly tipping in communal areas and charge the culprits for clearance
- Fully in support of the move, the change will improve the quality of tenants lives and will keep the area clean
- Broxtowe Borough Council need to keep areas clean and tidy. Lives in a block and some residents always clean-up and other don't which is not fair but this change will make it more fair
- Very different to Independent Living, for example The Willows is clean and tidy and they have a really good cleaner