

Further questions & information

Why have service charge costs gone up?

The increase in world energy prices means everyone's electricity and gas bills have increased. Where we have communal heating/lighting supplies, we have had to increase service charges to meet the expected costs. We have based our calculations on the standing charges remaining steady and energy costs increasing in line with the energy market.

Generally, costs are increasing, which feeds into the cost of services that we provide. We have had to reflect these changes within our service charge estimates for the coming year.

What has increased in particular?

Our communal energy supplies have been on a fixed-term contract, so we have been able to keep energy bills low for the last few years. That contract expires in February 2024, and its replacement is in line with current energy prices. Our new contract means that our energy suppliers now charge the same as other customers.

Some of our schemes have communal heating systems which also serve individual flats and these 'personal heating charges' are now on our new contract. This means tenants with a 'personal heating charge' will see their service charge increase. As with all energy bills, the less energy we use – the less the bill will be.

What is Progress Housing Group doing to reduce costs?

Although we have higher energy contract costs, we are continuing to improve the energy efficiency of your homes that we manage and, thereby, reducing communal costs and personal heating charges.

We have started a programme of work in our independent living schemes that targets areas of the highest energy use, including communal heating and lighting systems, to improve the energy efficiency of these systems. We have already completed work on a number of schemes, prioritising the least efficient systems first.

Our properties are already more energy efficient than the national average. We have also set stretching decarbonisation goals in our Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

Following your feedback that you would like to see us achieve a higher level of value for money on your service charge, we have extensively reviewed all our service charges and management costs. Following the review, the vast majority of general needs and independent living tenants will see a reduction in their service charge in 2024/25.

What can I do to reduce my bills?

Reducing energy usage will reduce energy bills. Things that can help include:

- Not leaving electrical items on 'stand-by' mode.
- Only use a washing machine when you have a full load.
- Using energy-efficient light bulbs.

How you can save energy

We can also reduce our energy usage and bills by making simple changes to our homes and habits, which could help offset the current price rises. The Energy Saving Trust has a lot of good advice in this area. It provides many tips and advice on saving energy and energy-efficient products (appliances, lighting, ways to save water, etc). Visit the website at www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/energy-at-home.

Some top tips include:

- Turn your heating down by one degree Celsius. It can save up to 10 percent on your heating bills.
- Keep the temperature in your home between 18°C/65°F and 21°C/70°F.
- Set your radiator valves to three or four. Most radiator valves control a room's temperature by changing the hot water flow to the radiator. These valves are usually marked with a scale from zero to six, where zero is off, and five or six is fully open. This is usually sufficient for most rooms. These valves are often misused as 'on/off' switches, and in rooms which aren't used all day, such as bedrooms or rooms which you don't use regularly, these can often be set too high.
- Try to avoid heat escaping by turning your heating off before opening windows.

More information about saving money and energy can be found on our website at www.progressgroup.org.uk/hub

Tenant consultation

During the year we plan to visit all of our 30 independent living schemes to talk to you about the services we provide, explaining how much they cost. We want to hear your views on which services you value and which ones you feel you don't need, as well as others service you feel we should be providing. I do hope that as many of you as possible can join these events - more details on the events will follow nearer the time.

If you need help

We understand that you might have worries or concerns about the predicted increases. We are committed to supporting you should you face financial difficulties. Please look at the enclosed leaflet about our Life & Progress support service.

Any queries? Contact us via our live chat service at www.progressgroup.org.uk, enquiries@progressgroup.org.uk, or 0333 320 4555.