

Date Issued	23 November 2007
Last Revised	August 2018
Service Area	Corporate
Title	Rent and Service Charge Policy
Objective	To describe our arrangements for setting rents and service charges for our properties
Responsible	Director of Housing
Next Review Date	August 2023

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This policy outlines our approach to setting rents and service charges for all property owned by East Lothian Housing Association.

1.2 Our rent and service charge policy has the following main aims:

- To make sure that our rental income is enough to cover the costs of management and maintenance, providing a quality service to our tenants, future repairs and loan repayments
- To comply with the law and the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter which states “A balance is struck between the level of services provided, the cost of the services and how far current and prospective tenants and other customers can afford them”
- To ensure that costs are recovered in a fair and accountable manner
- To provide a framework for calculating rents for a full range of new build property types to be used when applying for Housing Association Grant.

2.0 General Principles

2.1 This policy applies to all residential property for rent and shared ownership.

- 2.2 We aim to charge similar rents for similar properties, as far as possible regardless of location; to set rents that will comply with the Scottish Government's requirements for Housing Association Grant and to ensure that our rents are affordable.
- 2.3 The amount of general service charge to be charged to each property will be the cost of providing the appropriate services to each scheme, averaged out over the number of properties in that scheme. An administrative charge of 10% of the costs will be added to the service charge for Shared Ownership properties.
- 2.4 In addition to the general service charge, some individual properties will attract a service charge for items such as furniture that are specific to the property. These charges will be calculated to cover the cost of the service and will be charged only to the property to which they apply.

3.0 Costs to be Covered

- 3.1 This policy provides a framework for setting rents for individual properties which, when added together, will generate enough income to cover all relevant costs. The costs to be covered by rental income include:

Housing Management Costs

The cost of providing a high standard Housing Management Service, as detailed in our annual budget, including items such as staff, rent collection, allocations, financial inclusion and advice services

VOIDS AND BAD DEBTS

The amount of rent and service charge income lost when properties are empty or when arrears cannot be recovered.

Maintenance Costs

The cost of day to day (reactive) repairs requested by tenants; keeping the properties safe and secure and the cost of regular (cyclical) maintenance such as external paint work, including the cost of administration.

Major Repairs and Renewals

The cost of improving or replacing components, such as heating systems, windows or doors, at the end of their useful life, and major repairs needed during the life of a property.

Loan Charges

The cost of repaying the loans that have been taken out to pay for buying, building, maintaining or improving our properties and the areas around them.

Insurance

The costs of property (buildings) and office insurance, public and employers' liability insurances.

Additional Services

Service charges cover the cost of providing services which are not covered by the rent charge, such as community alarms, stair or window cleaning, stair or courtyard lighting, factoring charges or furniture.

4.0 Affordability

- 4.1 We provide a range of homes for people in housing need. This means that our customers include single people, families with children, older people and people who need support to maintain a tenancy.
- 4.2 We endorse the SFHA's approach to Rent Setting and Affordability outlined in Guidance issued in June 2017 and will work towards fully integrating use of the Affordability Tool within this policy.
- 4.5 As a first step we will use the Affordability Tool to monitor the affordability of our rents for our new tenants and, where possible, act to address any affordability issues.

5.0 Rent Setting Structure

- 5.1. The rent setting structure is the mechanism used to determine the amount of rent to be charged for each new build type of property.
- 5.2 We use a points system to allow maximum flexibility when considering the rental income we need against the important aim of ensuring affordable rents are achieved. The points system also ensures that new build rents are comparable with rents for existing own build properties.
- 5.3 Points are allocated to each new build property dependant on its size and level of amenity.

- 5.4 The points to be allocated to individual properties are listed in **Appendix 1**.
- 5.5 A maximum of 5 points can be added to new build properties with additional development costs.
- 5.6 Additional points for energy efficiency measures arising from new technologies will be added only where there is an anticipated reduction in the running costs of the property to the benefit of the tenant.
- 5.7 Application of the rent structure results in a points value for each new build property.
- 5.8 In appraising new developments, the Housing Investment Division of the Scottish Government uses a Housing Association Grant (HAG) Subsidy Target (HST) which, if met, results in streamlined appraisal and approval of the development. The HST is calculated using a standardised rent for a 3 person property. If the **average** rent on a development is less than the standardised rent, the standardised rent will be used. This will result in less HAG and, if our rent setting formula results in rents that are lower than the standardised rent, rents will have to be increased to ensure that the standardised rent is achieved.

6.0 Calculation of the “Price per Point”

- 6.1 Starting from a base point in 1995 when the points system was introduced, the costs outlined in section 3 above were calculated in the form of an expenditure budget and provided a figure for the annual income required.
- 6.2 The points values of every property were added together to produce an overall points total for the Association's stock.
- 6.3 A "price per point" figure was then obtained by dividing the income required by the overall points total.
- 6.4 This “price per point” is increased each year by the same amount as our rents thereby creating a link between new build rent setting and rents for existing properties.
- 6.5 The rent to be charged for new build properties is arrived at by multiplying the points value of the property by the “Price Per Point” to arrive at a weekly rent figure.

7.0 Service Charges

7.1 Service charges are based on the actual cost of providing services. The services for which a charge will be made include:

- **Landscape Maintenance** (in areas where a buy out cannot be negotiated)
- **Electricity** - Stair lighting, external lighting (not provided by the local authority)
- **Cleaning** - Stairs, windows, external cleaning, bin and bin store cleaning
- **Component Replacement** - such as controlled entry systems, alarms, furniture and white goods
- **Community Alarm** - Line rental, warden charges, maintenance contract
- **Maintenance** - External paint work and replacement of floor coverings (for shared ownership properties only)

7.2 Service charges for new schemes will be based on estimated costs and will be reviewed to reflect actual costs at the earliest appropriate review date.

7.3 Service charges will be detailed clearly in the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement and will be paid monthly along with the rent.

8.0 Non Residential Properties

8.1 The rents for non-residential properties such as garages and workshops will be calculated according to the floor area, level of amenity and comparability with rents charged by other providers.

9.0 Leased Properties

9.1 The rent for leased properties will usually be set using the points system detailed at (5) above.

9.2 Some leased property may be subject to lower grant levels or additional costs. If required, rent will be set at the minimum level required to cover:

- (i) Repayment of any loan outstanding on the property
- (ii) A good standard of management
- (iii) A good standard of reactive maintenance to fulfil our obligations in terms of the lease agreement
- (iv) A sinking fund for future major repairs

10.0 Shared Ownership Properties

- 10.1 At development stage, the Occupancy Charge for Shared Ownership properties is set using the points system. The management and maintenance allowances set by the Scottish Government are deducted from the annual occupancy charge to provide the base charge.
- 10.2 The base charge is then multiplied by the Association's share of the property. The annual cost of building insurance, a management fee and any service charges are added and the resultant cost is the Occupancy Charge that Sharing Owners have to pay.

11.0 Rent and Occupancy Charge Reviews

- 11.1 We will consult tenants before increasing rents in time for their views to be considered by the Management Committee when it meets to consider the annual budget and proposed rent increase.
- 11.2 We will review rents and occupancy charges annually and apply increases on the first of April each year. We will give tenants and Sharing Owners four weeks written notice of the increase.
- 11.3 We may apply an additional increase during the year to any property that has been significantly improved out-with our normal maintenance programmes.
- 11.4 We will increase rents and occupancy charges by the minimum amount required to ensure that the costs detailed at (3) above are covered, taking into account expenditure over the previous year and anticipated changes in costs over the coming year.
- 11.5 Our rent increase will normally be linked to the Retail Price Index (RPI), a measure of inflation based upon the annual percentage movement in the retail prices index published by the Department of Employment for the 12

month period ending on 30 November each year or such other period as our Management Committee may determine.

- 11.6 In the event of negative RPI, our rents will increase by a minimum of 1% to reflect the fact that many of our costs, for example salaries or maintenance costs, will still increase.

12.0 Service Charge Reviews

- 12.1 The cost of providing services will be reviewed each year at the same time as the rent review and will reflect costs incurred in the year ending 30 September plus any anticipated changes in costs for the coming year.
- 12.2 Any over or under recovery of costs in previous years will be built in to the review.

13.0 Policy Review

The Director of Housing will ensure that this policy is reviewed at least every five years.

Appendix 1 – Points System for Calculating Rents

Property Type	
House: Detached	61
Semi detached/end terrace	59
Mid terrace	58
Flat	56
Property Size	
One double bedroom	+5
Additional double bedroom	+6
One single bedroom	+3
Additional single bedroom	+4
Separate dining room	+3
Large kitchen/diner	+2
Bathroom/Toilet Facilities	
Additional bathroom	+3
Additional W.C	+2
En Suite	+4
Separate Shower	+2
Additional Features	
Built in/Extra Computer/T.V/satellite access	+ 1-3 (per item)
Passive Solar Gain	+2
Energy Efficiency Measures	+0-6
External Features	
Front Garden	+1-2 (dependant on size)
Back Garden	+1-3 (dependant on size)
Driveway/Allocated Space	+1
Garage	+4
Car Port	+2
Private Communal Garden Ground	+1
Private Balcony	+2
Porch	+2
Heating	
Gas	+3
Electric	+1

Deductions	
No External Drying Facilities	-1
No overbath shower	-1
No controlled entry	-1