



City of Westminster

MAJOR WORKS SERVICE CHARGES EXPLAINED



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GENERAL INFORMATION

We will issue a section 20 notice for any proposed works before an estimated bill is issued. If there is a scheme planned in the Council's annual major works programme to your block (or estate) an estimated major works invoice will be issued with your estimated service charge account. This estimated major works charge will be based on the service provider's finalised full estimated cost for the works and will therefore be in line with your section 20 consultation notice.

Once the works have been completed on site and after the defects periods has ended, we will issue the final account for the actual expenditure on the whole contract. Defect periods are usually for a period of 12 months.

If you have been affected by COVID-19 and you have any concerns about your major works service charge invoice and how to make payment, please do not hesitate to contact Leasehold Operations directly where our staff will be able to discuss the payment options available to you:

Telephone: 0800 358 3783

Email: housing.enquiries@westminster.gov.uk

<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/housing/leaseholders/service-charges/book-20-minute-telephone-appointment>



MAJOR WORKS SERVICE CHARGES EXPLAINED

What are Major works ?

Major works projects are 'large scale' repairs such as window or roof replacements, fire safety work and communal decorations. The City Council is responsible for these works to maintain the common parts and fabric of the building.

Major works projects need a considerable amount of organising before they start.

This document sets out what to expect at each stage of a major works project, including our commitments and how you can get involved.

Please note that the process described here, primarily relates to larger traditional major works projects delivered by our major works term contractors. It also relates mainly to projects covering blocks of properties on estates.

The process may differ for individual street properties or smaller projects delivered by one of our other contractors such as fire safety works or emergency lighting upgrades. This is because they may differ in size in terms of budget, number of properties or timescales, or the work may need to be done urgently.

Who carries out major works ?

At the start of 2018, Westminster City Council entered into a ten-year partnering contract with two major works contractors. Axis Europe & United Living. United Living will deliver all major works projects in the south and central areas of the borough.

In total we work with six long term contractors. In November 2020 Axis Europe had given us notice of their decision to end the contract because of a change in business circumstances.

Important changes to major works in the north / west of Westminster - Axis Europe

When we entered a 10-year partnership contract with Axis Europe, they delivered major works projects across the north and west of Westminster. As mentioned above Axis Europe has given us notice of their decision to end the contract because of a change in business circumstances.

We have contacted residents with projects onsite or planned to start in the next year to explain the decision and the steps we are taking to minimise any delays.



We are consulting on our proposals for United Living, who deliver major works in the south and central areas of the Westminster, to manage some of the projects that Axis Europe will be unable to deliver. This includes consultation with leaseholders.

You can read the FAQs using the following link :

<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/yourhousing/media/1942>

How are charges for major works billed ?

Before any major works contract are started, we will issue a section 20 notice (Please see page 4 on details of section 20 consultation).

In April of each year, we will issue you the estimated costs for both service charge and major works. Major works estimates are based upon the contract cost identified in the specification of the works. Under the terms of the lease you are required to pay on estimated invoice, this means payment will be due in April. Payment options are available for major works (please see page 5)

When the contract has completed and the defect liability period has ended, the final account is prepared by the contract manager. The Final account details the works that was agreed on site and the amount that has been paid to the contractor to carry out the work. We will use the final account to revise the estimated cost that was billed to you to reflect what was actually spent on your block and (or) estate.

If we have overestimated the charges, you will receive a credit on your account, but if we have underestimated the charges you will receive an invoice for the additional costs.



SECTION 20 CONSULTATION

What is Section 20 consultation ?

Landlords, including councils, are legally required to consult with leaseholders before carrying out major works. This means that leaseholders are entitled to further consultation, often called a “Section 20” consultation because it was introduced by Section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

What does the section 20 letter include?

A section 20 notice includes the following:

- a description of the works
- the name of the contractor
- an estimate of the proposed works
- an estimate of your contribution to the proposed works
- notice period of 35 days to send us back your observations on the proposals.

We will respond to all written observations within 21 days of receiving it.

What is an observation ?

The law says you have a right to respond to a Section 20 notice up to 30 calendar days from the date of the notice, however Westminster City Council will give you up to 35 days from date of the section 20 notice. Your reply is known as an ‘observation’.

Westminster City Council must reply to any observations we receive within 21 calendar days. We must consider any comments or concerns you raise before going any further with the proposed works.

How do I make an observation ?

All Section 20 Observations must be made in writing to:

S20observations@westminster.gov.uk or Leasehold Operations, 137 Lupus Street, London, SW1V 3HE.

Please ensure you are quoting the contract number and S20 observation in the subject line. We cannot accept observations by telephone.



PAYMENT OPTIONS

Please talk to us

If you think you will find it difficult to pay your major works bill. The team is here to help and we can go through payment plans with you. It's important that you contact us as soon as possible to set up an agreement. Any delays may in some cases result in debt recovery action being taken and this may limit the help we can offer you.

Paying in instalments

If we send you an estimated bill for more than £200 you can choose to pay in instalments. There are a number of instalment options, depending on how much you need to pay:

INVOICE AMOUNT	PAYMENT OPTIONS AVAILABLE
£200 – £2000	If the bill is under £2,000 you can spread your payments over a year in 12 equal monthly payments No interest or administration fee will be payable
£2000 AND ABOVE	If you receive a bill for more than £2,000 you can spread payments over two years in 24 equal monthly payments No interest or administration fee will be payable
£5000 AND ABOVE	If you receive a bill for more than £5,000 you may be able to spread payments up to five years To be eligible you must live in your property as your main home and not own any other property Years one and two no interest will be charged Years three, four and five interest will be charged at one per cent above the Bank of England base rate An administration fee will be payable at the beginning of the scheme.



BORROWING MONEY TO PAY YOUR BILL

If you need to borrow money to pay your bill, there are a number of options available:

Applying for a private loan

A loan from your mortgage lender will probably be the cheapest way to borrow money to pay for bill. You will usually be able to borrow money from your existing mortgage lender as a further mortgage or home loan. Any money that you borrow in this way will be secured against the value of your property.

To apply you should contact your mortgage lender and let them have a copy of your outstanding bill.

Getting a secured loan

If you have a large bill (for example more than £2,000) and you do not have a mortgage, you may wish to contact a lender to arrange a secured home loan.

The interest rate on secured home loans is lower than it is for unsecured loans. Please note your home is at risk if you fail to keep up repayments on a secured home loan.

We can provide you with details of banks and building societies that have granted mortgages recently on properties close to your home.

Getting an unsecured loan

A loan which is not secured against your property will charge a higher rate of interest than a secured home loan.

However, this type of loan may be more appropriate to pay for bills under £2,000 as you are not normally charged the legal and administration costs.

Getting a loan from the council

If you bought from the council and are in the first 10 years of your lease, have a low income and are unable to obtain a mortgage or loan privately, you may be entitled to a loan from the council. However, the Government requires us to charge a relatively high interest rate, so this should *not* be your first choice. You will also need to pay the administration costs involved.



SUMMARY OF TENANTS' RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS

1. This summary, which briefly sets out your rights and obligations in relation to variable service charges, must by law accompany a demand for service charges. Unless a summary is sent to you with a demand, you may withhold the service charge. The summary does not give a full interpretation of the law and if you are in any doubt about your rights and obligations you should seek independent advice.
2. Your lease sets out your obligations to pay service charges to your landlord in addition to your rent. Service charges are amounts payable for services, repairs, maintenance, improvements, insurance or the landlord's costs of management, to the extent that the costs have been reasonably incurred.
3. You have the right to ask the First-tier Tribunal to determine whether you are liable to pay service charges for services, repairs, maintenance, improvements, insurance or management. You may make a request before or after you have paid the service charge. If the tribunal determines that the service charge is payable, the tribunal may also determine-
 - who should pay the service charge and who it should be paid to;
 - the amount;
 - the date it should be paid by; and
 - how it should be paid.

However, you do not have these rights where-

- a matter has been agreed or admitted by you;
 - a matter has already been, or is to be, referred to arbitration or has been determined by arbitration and you agreed to go to arbitration after the disagreement about the service charge or costs arose; or
 - a matter has been decided by a court.
4. If your lease allows your landlord to recover costs incurred or that may be incurred in legal proceedings as service charges, you may ask the court or tribunal, before which those proceedings were brought, to rule that your landlord may not do so.
 5. Where you seek a determination from the First-tier Tribunal, you will have to pay an application fee and, where the matter proceeds to an oral hearing, a hearing fee, unless you qualify for fee remission or exemption.. Making such an application may incur additional costs, such as professional fees, which you may have to pay.
 6. The First-tier Tribunal and the Upper Tribunal (in determining an appeal against a decision of the First-tier Tribunal) have the power to award costs in accordance with Section 29 of the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007.



SUMMARY OF TENANTS' RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS

7. If your landlord –

- proposes works on a building or any other premises that will cost you or any other tenant more than £250, or
- proposes to enter into an agreement for works or services which will last for more than 12 months and will cost you or any other tenant more than £100 in any 12 month accounting period.

Your contribution will be limited to these amounts unless your landlord has properly consulted on the proposed works or agreement or the First-tier Tribunal has agreed that consultation is not required.

8. You have the right to apply to the First-tier Tribunal to ask it to determine whether your lease should be varied on the grounds that it does not make satisfactory provision in respect of the calculation of a service charge payable under the lease.

9. You have the right to write to your landlord to request a written summary of the costs which make up the service charges. The summary must-

- cover the last 12 month period used for making up the accounts relating to the service charge ending no later than the date of your request, where the accounts are made up for 12 month periods; or
- cover the 12 month period ending with the date of your request, where the accounts are not made up for 12 month periods.

The summary must be given to you within 1 month of your request or 6 months of the end of the period to which the summary relates whichever is the later.

10. You have the right, within 6 months of receiving a written summary of costs, to require the landlord to provide you with reasonable facilities to inspect the accounts, receipts and other documents supporting the summary and for taking copies or extracts from them.

11. You have the right to ask an accountant or surveyor to carry out an audit of the financial management of the premises containing your dwelling, to establish the obligations of your landlord and the extent to which the service charges you pay are being used efficiently. It will depend on your circumstances whether you can exercise this right alone or only with the support of others living in the premises. You are strongly advised to seek independent advice before exercising this right.

12. Your lease may give your landlord a right of re-entry or forfeiture where you have failed to pay charges which are properly due under the lease. However, to exercise this right, the landlord must meet all the legal requirements and obtain a court order. A court order will only be granted if you have admitted you are liable to pay the amount or it is finally determined by a court, tribunal or by arbitration that the amount is due. The court has a wide discretion in granting such an order and it will take into account all the circumstances of the case.



IMPORTANT CONTACT DETAILS

IMPORTANT CONTACT DETAILS	
Westminster City Council Housing	In the first instance if you have any queries about your property or lease, contact us on: Telephone: 0800 358 3783 Email: housing.enquiries@westminster.gov.uk Website: westminster.gov.uk/yourhousing
Leasehold Operations team	The Leasehold Operations team can be contacted using the above-mentioned contact details. Alternatively, you can write to the team at the following address: Leasehold Operations South Area Service Centre 137 Lupus Street, London, SW1V 3HE
Compliments, comments or complaints	If you have any comments or complaints about our service, please contact Westminster City Council's Complaints Team W: www.westminster.gov.uk/complaints
OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS	
The Leasehold Advisory Service	W: https://www.lease-advice.org/
Gas leaks	Phone: 0800 111 999
Thames Water	Customer services: 0844 448 8694 24 hour emergency phone: 0845 9200 800
Pest control	Phone: 0800 358 0514
London Fire Brigade	Non-Emergency Switchboard: 020 8555 1200
Citizens Advice Westminster	T: 0300 330 1191 W: www.westminstercab.org.uk
National Debtline	T: 0808 808 4000 W: www.nationaldebtline.org