

Estate charges at Stonewater



A guide for
customers who
own their home
Freehold

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Glossary of terms

Before we get started, here are definitions for some of the key terms we use in this guide.

Estate charges

An estate charge is the amount you pay (if applicable) for the delivery of services on your scheme.

Variable charges

This means the amount you pay changes every year, depending on how much your services cost. All estate charges for customer who own their home freehold are classed as variable.

Accounting year

Usually a 12 month period, but this may differ depending upon your transfer documents with us.

Credit

If your estate charge letter shows a credit balance bought forward, this means that the amount you have paid towards your estate charges for the year is more than the actual amount spent and the credit will be carried forward into the next year.

Debit

If your estate charge letter shows a debit balance bought forward, this means that the amount that you have paid towards your estate charges for the year is less than the actual amount spent. You are liable for the additional costs under the terms of your transfer documents.

Reconciliation

This is what the process is called when we compare actual costs incurred against estimated costs.

Scheme

We group some of our properties into schemes, the scheme may have a name that differs from your road name or your personal address as this refers to a wider group of properties and addresses.

Introduction

We want to help you understand estate charges at Stonewater so we've put together this handy guide to give you all of the information you need.

This information is for all Stonewater customers who own their home freehold to give you a general idea of estate charges. It won't cover your specific charges and you'll be sent a summary of these separately.

What is an estate charge and how do they work?

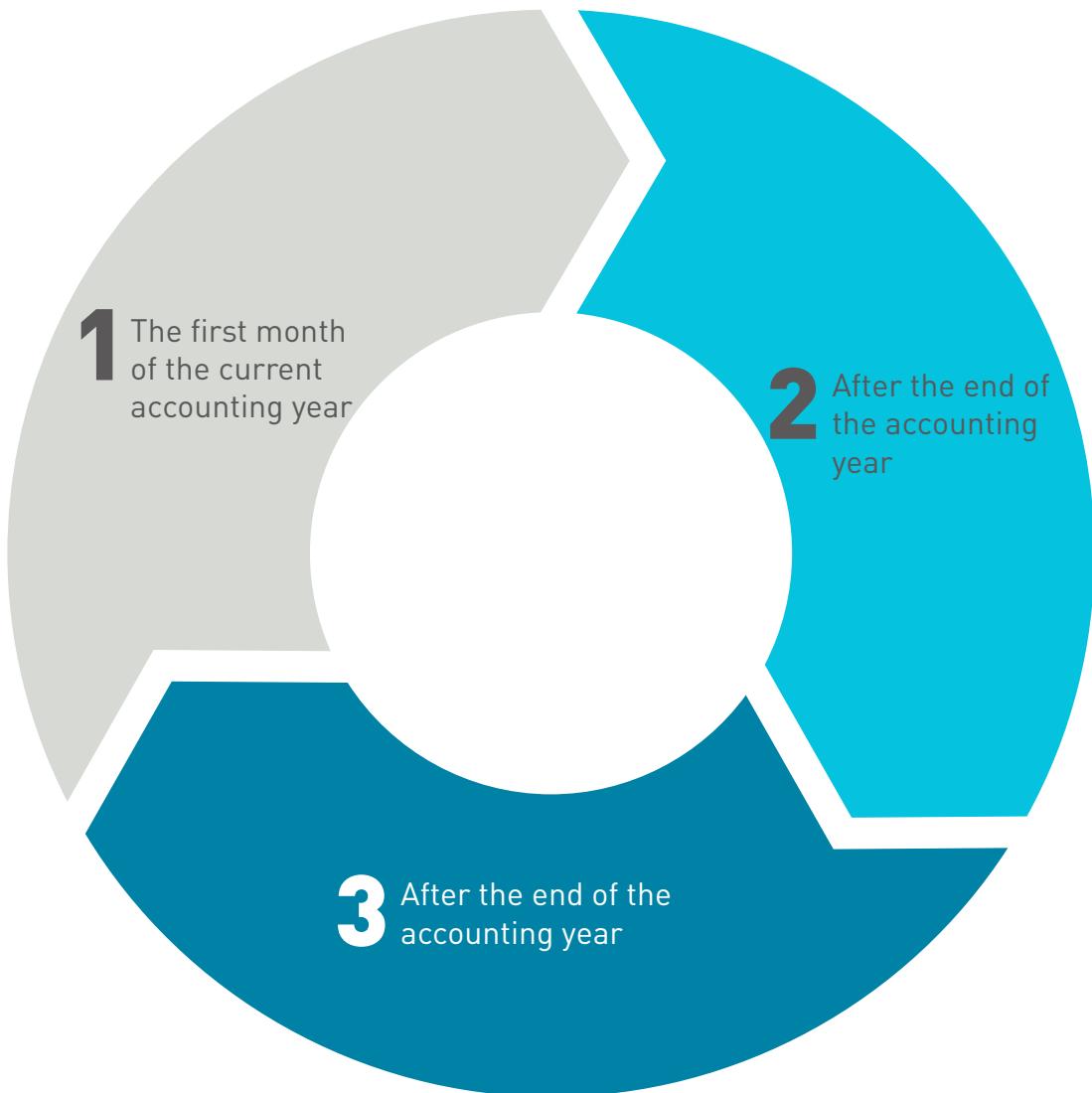
An estate charge is the amount you pay (if applicable) for the delivery of services on your scheme. This may include things like grounds maintenance, refuse disposal, lighting, general repairs and maintenance and the cost of managing these. The amount charged depends on the services provided. You can find more information on your estate charges in your transfer documents.

At the beginning of your accounting year we'll send you an estate charge estimate. Your estimate is a calculation of how much we think we're going to spend during the upcoming year based on the services you receive. We calculate the estimates based on known costs, contracts and the previous year's actual costs. The estimate for the year is usually applied to your account in twelve monthly amounts but this may differ depending upon your transfer documents.

As soon as practical, after the accounting period has ended, we review the accounts to understand the difference between what we estimated we would spend and what we actually spent. We use this information to see if there's an underspend - meaning we collected too much money from you, or an overspend - meaning we didn't collect enough money. This is called a reconciliation of account. If there is an underspend a credit will be applied to your account.

If there is an overspend, then a debit balance will be applied to your account which may mean you need to increase your monthly payments to cover the cost. Your transfer documents will outline how and over what time you are required to pay this.

Estate charge cycle



- 1** We send you your estate charge estimate and you pay monthly in advance by direct debit
- 2** We reconcile our accounts and find out if you've over or underpaid for your services for the year
- 3** We apply a credit to your account if you've overpaid, or a debit if you've underpaid.

How do I pay?

Paying your estate charges is important and we want to make it easy for you to pay in whichever way suits you best. If you're struggling, we are here to help.

Ways to pay

The quickest and easiest way to pay is by logging into MyHome and setting up a secure online payment, wherever and whenever it's most convenient for you. MyHome also gives you access to lots of other services all in one place, such as viewing your account details and reporting repairs.



You can set up a Direct Debit by logging into your MyHome account. If you don't have access to the internet you can phone us on 01202 319 119 to set up your Direct Debit.



We can take card payments over the phone, just call us on **01202 319 119**.

If you're using Allpay, just have your payment reference number to hand. If you don't know what that is, contact us and we can tell you.

Pay online quickly and safely with Allpay via allpayments.net/Allpayments/Signin



By Allpay app – available on Apple or Android devices.

By text (Allpay) – register your details here allpayments.net/TextPay/Login



By phone (Allpay) on 0330 041 6497
This is an automated 24-hour service

Post Office or Paypoint- By payment card at a Post Office or PayPoint outlet

Worried about paying your rent or estate charges?

We want you to know that whatever financial hardship you find yourself in, we are here to help. Our team are here to support you, without judgement, but to do that we need you to talk to us.

If you're struggling and would like to speak to someone, please call us or email customers@stonewater.org

Estate charge summary explained

List of services provided to your scheme

Services provided to **All Properties**

How much was actually spent the previous year

Comparison between the estimate and actual

Service Category	Estimate 25/26	Actual 25/26	Variance 25/26	Estimate 26/27
General repairs and maintenance	£1,000.00	£0.00	-£1,000.00	£1,000.00
Common area costs	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Refuse disposal	£1,000.00	£150.09	-£849.91	£1,000.00
Health and safety costs	£500.00	£0.00	-£500.00	£500.00
Grounds maintenance	£7,920.00	£8,048.88	£128.88	£7,920.00
Tree works	£1,000.00	£0.00	-£1,000.00	£1,000.00
Planned and cyclical works	£0.00	£43,750.00	£43,750.00	£0.00
Management charge	£14,350.00	£14,350.00	£0.00	£14,350.00
Total Expenditure	£25,770.00	£66,298.97	£40,528.97	£25,770.00

Divided by number of properties on the scheme: 175Number of properties these services apply to

Individual property share	£147.26	£378.85	£231.59	£147.26
Overcharge/Undercharge from last year		£231.59	The variance from the previous year	
Estimate for this year		+£147.26		
Total estimate charge		£378.85		Estimated share of the total expenditure

Your share of the total cost broken down for each section

Your total for this year

Understanding your estate charges

You can find an A-Z of our most common estate charge terms below. You may not receive all of the services listed, the services you are charged for are set out on page one of your letter.

***Communal Electric** - Electricity for communal areas.

Day to Day Repairs – Communal – Repairing and maintaining external communal areas such as boundary walls, fences on the wider estate.

***Grounds Maintenance** - Maintaining communal outside spaces owned by Stonewater. This service depends on your scheme but can include maintaining balancing pond or other attenuation systems, litter picking, grass cutting, weed removal, weed spraying, shrub pruning and bedding, hedge trimming, leaf removal, sweeping and moss removal.

Front gardens for individual homes are not usually included.

Major Repair Provision - Contribution towards sinking fund to cover major works carried out in the future.

Management Charge – Our fee for collating the service charge information, calculating the bills and sending the information as well as arranging and monitoring service contracts and repairs.

***Management Company** - Third party management of the scheme.

***Pest Control** - The removal of pests such as mice, squirrels or wasps.

Provisions - These are regular amounts collected as part of the service charge, put into a provision fund. This covers the cost of larger items that need to be replaced from time to time, such as door entry systems and lifts. In addition, homeowners' provisions, often referred to as sinking funds may be collected to cover external redecorations and repairs to the structure of the building.

***Refuse Disposal** - Fly tipping and bulk item removal, which is split between all properties at the scheme unless we are provided with evidence of the person/people responsible for the fly tipping.

Scheme – We group some of our properties into schemes. The scheme may have a name that differs from your road name or your personal address as this refers to a wider group of properties and addresses.

Service Charges - A service charge is the amount you pay (if applicable) for the delivery of services to your property or on your scheme.

Sewage System Maintenance - Maintenance and waste disposal for septic tanks and cesspools.

Variable Service Charges – Based on the terms of your agreement, if the cost of the services you're paying for goes up you will receive a debit balance on your rent account after your reconciliation. If the cost goes down, you will receive a credit balance on your rent account after your reconciliation.

*** - Housing Benefit and/or Universal Credit eligible. Please check with your benefit provider to find out what you're covered for.**

Estate charge FAQs

What is an estate charge?

An estate charge is the amount you pay (if applicable) for the delivery of services on your scheme. This may include things like grounds maintenance, refuse disposal, lighting, general repairs and maintenance and the cost of managing these. The amount charged depends on the services provided.

How do estate charges work?

At the beginning of your estate charge year we will send you an estate charge estimate. Your estimate is a calculation of how much we think we're going to spend during the upcoming year based on the services you receive. We calculate the estimates based on known servicing costs, contracts and prior year actual costs. The estimate for the year is usually applied to your account in twelve monthly amounts. Your estimate may increase some years and decrease in others.

What is a reconciliation and when will it be done?

As soon as practical, after the financial year has ended, we review the accounts to understand the difference between what we estimated we would spend and what we actually spent. This will determine if there is a underspend, meaning we collected too much money, or overspend, meaning we didn't collect enough money. This is called a reconciliation of account. If there is an underspend a credit will be applied to your account but if there is an overspend, then a debit balance will applied to your account which may mean you need to increase your monthly payments to cover the cost. Your transfer agreement will outline how you should pay this and over what time period. The credit or debit will show as a manual adjustment on your account.

How are my estate charges split between my neighbours and me?

Estate charges are split depending on your property type, what is specified in your lease

or transfer documents and the services being provided to your scheme. For example, this could be based upon a percentage, or the number of properties that benefit from the service being provided. You can normally see the split for charges on your estate charge summary. If you would like further information as to how your estate charges are split, please contact us on 01202 319 119 or via email servicecharges@stonewater.org.

I have received a letter with the incorrect road name on the estate charge summary.

We group some of our properties into schemes, the scheme may have a name that differs from your road name or your home address as this refers to a wider group of properties and addresses.

I have had charges applied to my account following a reconciliation for a period of time before I owned my property?

If you purchase part way through an accounting year you may be liable for charges not yet demanded, even if they relate to a period prior to your purchase. In such circumstances your conveyancer/solicitor would normally arrange for the seller to set aside some money to cover their part of the period (usually called a retention or retainer), so you may wish to speak to them to see if this took place and for more information.

Estate charge FAQs continued...

How can I tell what services I am receiving?

The services provided to your scheme can be found on the estate charge summary or rent review letter you receive yearly.

Why do I pay grounds maintenance?

The grounds maintenance in your service charge relates to the maintenance of the shared outdoor spaces where you live. This covers areas that are owned by Stonewater and can include grass, trees, shrubs and paved areas. The charge is shared fairly between all Stonewater customers who live on the scheme.

What is my management fee for?

The management fee includes our costs of preparing and setting budgets at the start of the financial year, managing the estate charge accounts throughout the year and preparing the year end accounts including issuing your estate charge statement. It also includes the costs of managing and monitoring service contracts such as grounds maintenance and refuse disposal.

I do not believe I receive one of the listed services or that the service is being completed as it should be, what should I do?

We know we don't always get things right and we're sorry if, on occasion, you feel let down by our services. If something should be delivered in your home or neighbourhood but isn't, please report via our website so we can fix it. Visit stonewater.org/estateservices.

If you think you're being charged for something incorrectly, please let us know via our website so that we can look into it for you.

How can I pay my estate charges?

Estate charges should be paid in advance each month, preferably by direct debit. The Income team deal with all payments and are able to set up a direct debit for you over the phone on 01202 319 119. The easiest way to pay your estate charges is using MyHome. If you would like to pay online, or set up a new direct debit, please visit myhome.stonewater.org.

If you pay by direct debit, we will adjust your direct debit each year as your estimate/bill changes and when your reconciliation takes place. If you pay by any other method, then it is your responsibility to amend your payments accordingly to ensure that your account does not fall into arrears.

Housing Benefit and Universal Credit

If you are in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, some estate charges will be covered via this payment, whilst others are classed as ineligible and therefore not covered, meaning you are responsible for paying these charges. Eligible charges are usually those which relate to services carried out in communal areas of the property, such as communal cleaning. Personal charges/services, such as individual heating, water and electricity would be classed as ineligible and therefore would not be covered.

You can find out more about eligible and ineligible service charges on page 8 of this guide.

Help and support

If you have any questions about your estate charges, please call us and we'll be happy to help you.

You can also email us at servicecharges@stonewater.org



How to get in touch:



Go to
myhome.stonewater.org
Report repairs, set-up a direct debit and manage your tenancy 24/7

Call us on 
01202 319 119

Lines are open Mon-Fri 8am-8pm and Saturday 9am-1pm

Go to 
stonewater.org
For the latest news and livechat



Join the conversation
discuss.stonewater.org
Give feedback and more

