

Customer Scrutiny Panel Deep-Dive into Service Charges

“What do customers think about the current way that SYHA communicates about their service charges, and how can this be improved?”

Executive Summary:

- Tenants want more information more often
- Tenants want to know what their money pays for and when to expect those services
- Tenants would like postal notification even though technology is moving forward, it's not always applicable
- Value for money is essential; consider the cost of your decisions
- Solutions need to be appropriate to what technology people use
- It should be easy for customers to contact the right department and the right people if they have a query
- Information on service charges should be easy to access on the website for tenants and staff

Introduction:

Who are the Scrutiny Panel?

We are a group of customers from different areas of SYHA. Some of us are tenants and some of us have been on the Good Work programme, and one of us is on the board.

We've got different life experiences and this brings different perspectives to the Scrutiny Panel. We're different ages, from different parts of South Yorkshire, different genders, have different religious beliefs and are from different ethnic and racial backgrounds.

As a current group, we've been running for over 2 years, but some members have considerable experience of scrutiny in its various forms at SYHA for over 10 years.

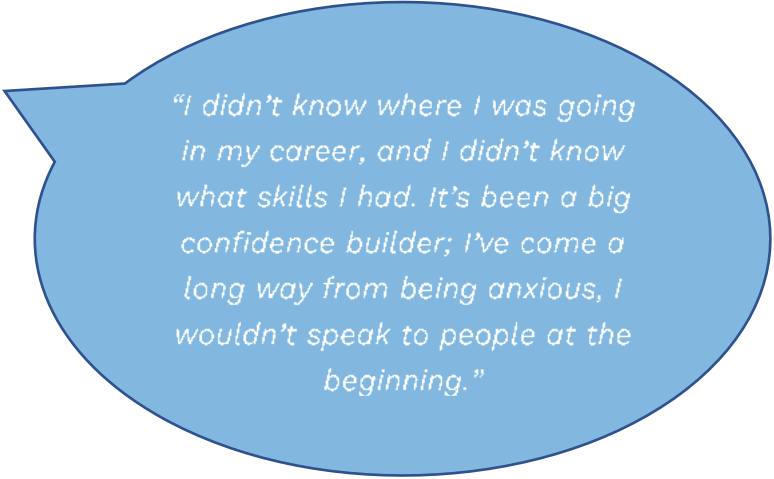
We're involved in scrutiny for different reasons:

- We're all curious
- We're all social housing tenants (even if not a SYHA tenant)
- We want to make a difference for all tenants



“I want to use my spare time to help people and use my ideas to do something about the issues people are facing. It's my contribution to life.”

Quotes from Scrutiny
Panel Members:



"I didn't know where I was going in my career, and I didn't know what skills I had. It's been a big confidence builder; I've come a long way from being anxious, I wouldn't speak to people at the beginning."

Why did we look at
service charges?

We've just come out of

Covid and now we're in a cost of living crisis, and people need to know where their money is going. People are making difficult decisions, and priorities have changed – and this is affecting companies too.

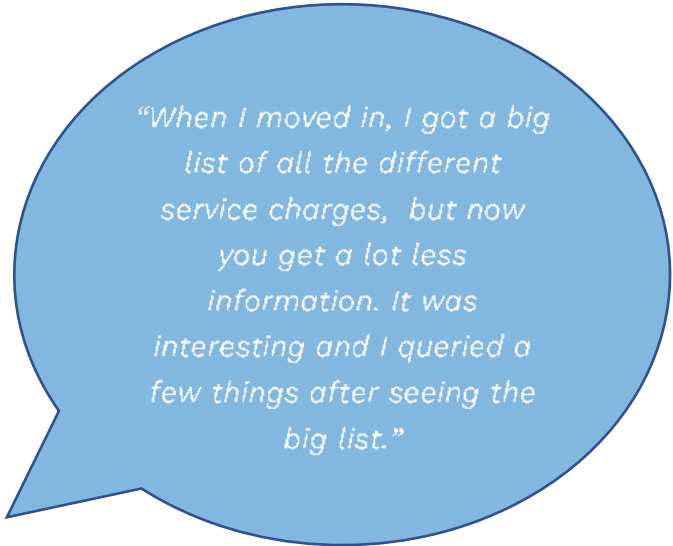
We conducted our first Annual Health Check in 2022 and this highlighted that service charges was an important topic to look at – *"SYHA need to be more **transparent** and **clearer** on what service charges are being used for. It felt that tenants didn't get a transparent breakdown of what was included in their service charge, and that some people did not really understand what they were paying for."*

We noticed that there's a **big variation** between fixed and variable service charges and what information people get.

If people are paying service charges, and you then show them what they're paying for, people are more satisfied and they're less likely to grumble. People are less likely to ask the question, but if they've got it in black and white they know what they're getting and can query it.

It's about keeping people **informed**. It's stopping people complaining before they start to complain. People don't like paying for things they're not getting.

It's **accountability**, we believe that everyone needs to know what they're paying for. Speaking to neighbours, they want to know where their money goes. If the mowing doesn't get done, why doesn't it get done?



"When I moved in, I got a big list of all the different service charges, but now you get a lot less information. It was interesting and I queried a few things after seeing the big list."

What were the aims/objectives of the project?

We formed a working group over Summer to research and prepare for the service charge project. We used the Annual Health Check to form our key **research question**: *“What do customers think about the current way that SYHA communicates about their service charges, and how can this be improved?”*

We decided to focus our project on general needs customers and aimed to achieve this **outcome**: *“All customers can easily access and understand information about their service charges.”*

We want customers to feel happy paying for their service charges, so they know **exactly what they’re paying for**.

We believe that small things can make a big difference, and we need to consider how we communicate with people who have different needs



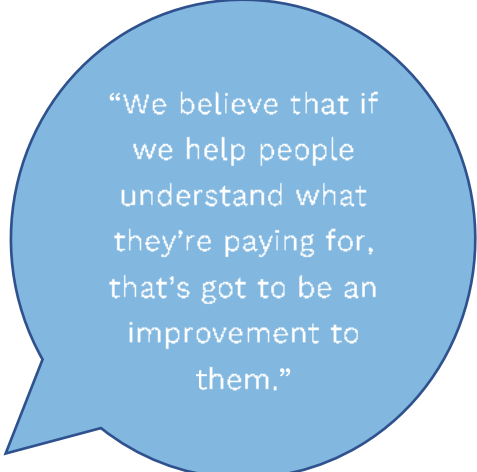
It needs to be **accessible** to everyone – we shouldn’t use jargon.”

In our September meeting we noted *“Written communication isn’t something SYHA is strong on. SYHA’s verbal communication, over the phone, in person etc is really good. How we communicate with people, the written language we use, should reflect how we talk to people.”*

What we did – Our Methodology:

How did we come up with the questions?

Over Summer the Service Charge Working Group Met with Simon Young (Head of Landlord Services) and Alison Ducker (Leasehold & Service Charge Team Leader). We read through documents that Simon shared, looked at the different communication that tenants received and decided on the scope of the project.



“We believe that if we help people understand what they’re paying for, that’s got to be an improvement to them.”

We came up with an initial set of questions as part of their service charge research over the summer. These were presented to the wider scrutiny panel, and we adapted the questions as a group.

In October we had some training from TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) on interviewing and questioning. We used this to help us shape the questions, so

they could be used on Microsoft Forms, and help our peer to peer interviews with tenants.

What training did we do before starting?

We had two training sessions from TPAS covering interviewing skills, negotiating, report writing, making recommendations and presenting to the board. We also had some training on data protection from Sarah Farncombe (Programme Coordinator - Customer Collaboration) and Ruth O'Sullivan (Programme Coordinator - Customer Collaboration), to update our skills. Samm Ellis (Group Lead – Data Protection) worked with Ruth & Sarah to get data protection approval for contacting customers and conducting peer to peer interviews.

How did we choose the tenants we spoke to?

We chose to contact 100 tenants to see if they were interested in being interviewed as part of the project. The strategy that we decided to use was finding tenants to interview from different geographical areas where SYHA has properties.

Area	Number of customers paying service charges	Number of customers selected
Sheffield	604 (34%)	34
Rotherham	351 (20%)	20
Barnsley	135 (7%)	7
Doncaster	300 (17%)	17
Chesterfield	257 (14%)	14
Everywhere else (Selby etc.)	149 (8%)	8

We also contacted “Involved Customers” who pay service charges to see if they were interested in having their say. The “Involved Customers” are people who Customer Collaboration have engaged with on other projects across SYHA and have given their consent to be contacted by the team. We made this decision as we had a poor response from the 100 tenants we invited to participate in this project and was below the 10% return that we aimed for.

From the **100 tenants** who were contacted via text, large print letter and phone calls, we had 5 who expressed an interest in the project. In total **8 people took part** in the project; 3 from the initial sample and 5 from the Involved Customer list. We conducted **peer to peer interviews** in person, over the phone, via Teams video calls and some people completed the questions as an online survey.

We decided to have a flexible approach to interviews based on customer needs

giving people a variety of options. We wanted to offer tenants different opportunities so it was accessible and fitted around their time and their needs.

We also agreed to offer a customer incentive for participating in interviews. We hoped this would **encourage a wider variety of people** to attend our sessions so we'd have a more representative sample of customers. We decided to have a one-off incentive to thank tenants for their time and contributions. For a peer to peer interview a tenant would receive a £10 voucher and if they completed an online survey they'd be entered into a prize draw for a £20 voucher.

Findings:

Tenants told us they had little communication about their service charges and most (50%) felt they **didn't know what service charges are** and they didn't know what they're used for. Tenants also felt service charge information isn't clear and easy to understand. From talking with tenants, most would like to know what they're paying for.

We believe that if people don't know what they're paying for then they don't know **what service to expect**, and aren't able to question if the work they're paying for is being done. People have busy lives and can get wrapped up in other issues, so they would like to ask questions but have more pressing things to deal with. We feel it's important to be **transparent and proactive with tenants**, to provide something simple, to inform people and **manage expectations**.

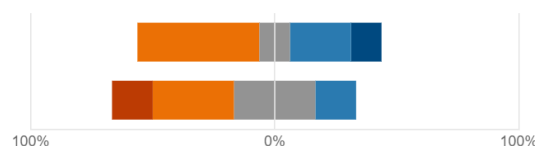
1. How much do you agree with the following statements?

[More Details](#)

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

I understand what my service charges are and what my service charges are used for

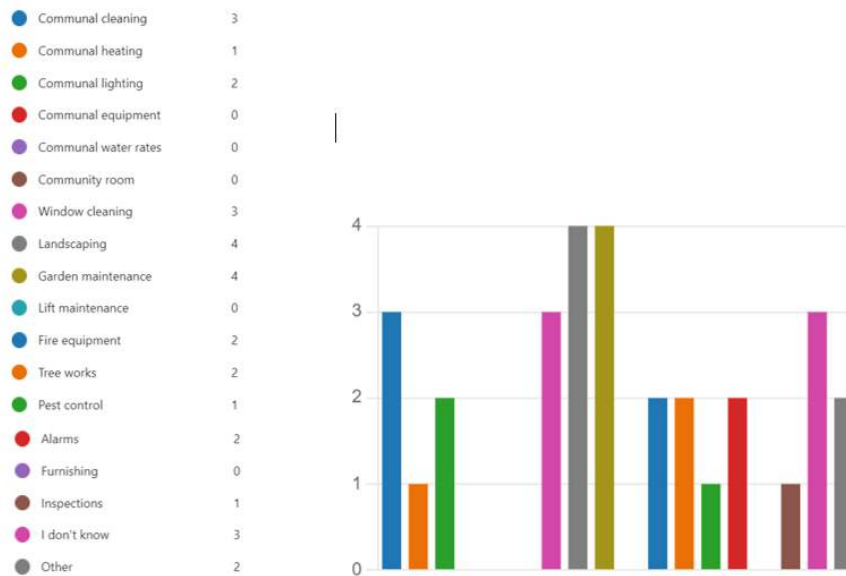
Service Charge information from South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA) is clear and easy to...



When we asked customers what they think their service charge pays for, the most common responses were:

- Landscaping
- Garden Maintenance
- Communal Cleaning
- Window Cleaning
- I don't know

3. What do you think your service charge pays for?



Out of the 8 people we spoke to 5 people said they were on Fixed, 1 on Variable and 2 said they didn't know. We didn't find a link between the type of service charge and their knowledge of what this paid for.

We found that a lot of people didn't know what services to expect and we think people didn't realise that different services were dependent on where they live.

5. Do you remember when you've got information about service charges in the past?

[More Details](#)



When we asked tenants if they remembered when they received information about service charges in the past, 62.5% said Yes and 37.5% said No. This is in line with what we expected based on our own experiences as tenants. It's possible that tenants have a brief look, consider the charges and then put it away as it's something people have **accepted they have to pay**.

For the tenants that said Yes, we asked them how they received this information; tenants said this was via letter when they first signed up for the dwelling or with the yearly rent increase. Again, there was no link between Fixed and Variable tenants.

We believe that when people receive this information at the start of their tenancy, it can be a stressful time and some people may not be able to take in the information. It's important for SYHA to talk to customers about this information and ensure they understand it. We believe the information should be shared in an interesting, tailored and thought provoking manner, and **help should be provided** to dissect it.

7. How easy was it to get information about your service charges?

[More Details](#)

Very difficult	1
Difficult	1
Don't know	2
Easy	0
Very easy	0



We asked the same 5 tenants how easy it was to get this information; only 4 people answered and their responses are quite mixed. We recognise that this is a **small sample**, but we still believe this shows that people don't know how to get information on service charges. We believe that tenants should be told regularly how to access this information and it should be easy for them to do so.

We asked the same 5 people why they found it "Very Difficult", "Difficult" or "Don't Know". One tenant said they had only received one letter of what was provided in service charges. They queried it due to a lack of gardening during the pandemic, but they received little response and had to complain via email to get further information. **They wanted a list of services** of what to expect every year and how often they should be carried out. This particular response has themes we see throughout other responses.

We believe that tenants should know how often services are going to be done so they can get **good value for their money**. We're in a Cost of Living Crisis, and if things aren't being done then it's money wasted. We understand that the pandemic was unprecedented, and that gardens may not have been maintained in the pandemic but it's important for tenants to know if that has been factored in to the payments.

"Secrets and lies" – This comment was made by a tenant who completed the survey online by themselves and has done so anonymously. In their responses they talk about a 400% rise in their service charge, and they refer to this as "*an absolute abuse of power*" and "*corruption*". From their responses it sounds like they have had a very difficult time communicating with SYHA staff and this has

damaged their image of SYHA. This is one example of how **better communication and transparency** helps build relationships between SYHA and customers, people will start to **trust** the organisation more and it has a positive knock on effect for customers.

We asked the same 5 tenants how easy it was to understand the information they received, and 4 people responded. The sample size is small and the results are mixed but 50% said the information was “Very Difficult” or “Difficult”. When we asked people why they felt this way, they gave the following responses:

“I had to go through so many people at SYHA to get to Simon Young and even he had no idea what had been going on in the square. Unbelievable.”

“It was clear at the beginning but not after the first year”

“Information wasn’t clear what the service charge was for”

9. How easy was it to understand the information you received about service charges?

[More Details](#)

Very difficult	1
Difficult	1
Don't know	1
Easy	1
Very easy	0



We asked everyone who took part in the survey what information they would like to know about service charges. We found the common response was transparency. **People want to know what their service charges pay for** in detail and when to expect these services. Once they know this they would like to be informed if anything changes, and **who to speak to** if they don't get the service they pay for.

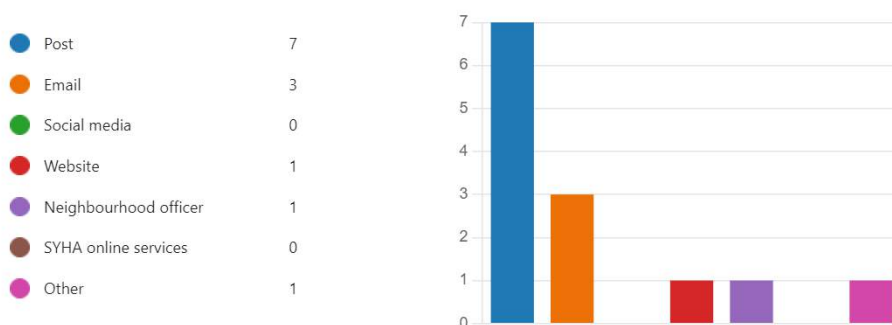
In question 12 we asked tenants when they would like to receive information about service charges. The responses were mixed, some people were happy with the current frequency, three customers wanted information ASAP, another tenant said they'd like the information every 6 months and one tenant said annually in a separate letter to the rent statement.

We think this shows that information should be available in a number of ways to **meet people's needs**, but also keep in mind what is **cost effective**. We also think it's important that the service charge letter stands out from the rent statement, if they're going to be sent out together people should be able to tell that the service charge information is different to the statement and a priority to read.

*"I will also appreciate if **my opinion** is taken into consideration. And an opportunity to give **feedback** on how the service charge **will impact on me** or benefit me."*

13. How would you like to receive information about service charges?

[More Details](#)

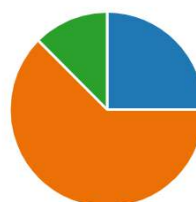
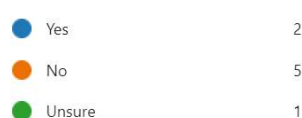


We asked everyone how they'd like to receive information about service charges. Tenants were able to pick as many options as they would like and we think this shows they support **information by Post** as 7 out of 8 people voted for this option, closely followed by Email.

For question 14 we asked tenants if they have spoken to SYHA staff about service charges; 25% of the respondents said Yes. From speaking with tenants we believe that other people may have wanted to speak with SYHA staff but their lives are busy and it's difficult to make time for something that they feel they aren't able to change.

14. Have you spoken to SYHA staff about your service charges in the past?

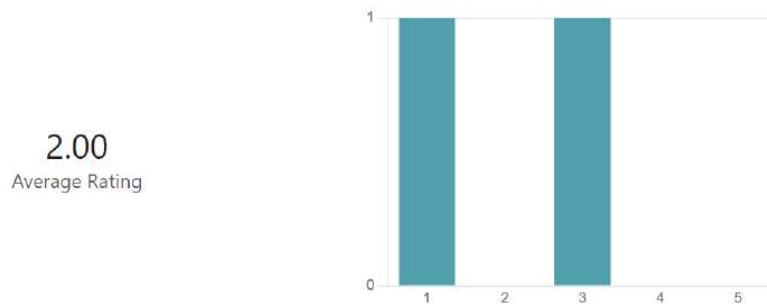
[More Details](#)



We asked the two tenants who had spoken to SYHA staff how they would rate their experience. One tenant rated the experience as a 1 or “Low”, the other respondent rated it as a 3 out 5. These results mean there is an **average score of 2**, which is on the lower end of the scale and isn’t the experience we would want for tenants.

15. How would you rate your experience of talking to SYHA staff about service charges? (1 = Low, 5=High)

[More Details](#)



In question 16 we asked the two tenants for more information on their experience of talking to SYHA staff about service charges. One person commented that they don’t know who to contact, but when they spoke with staff on the **helpline they were good**, and they have received a lengthy email response which they found satisfactory. However they commented “*The neighbourhood officer is never seen and not very responsive*” and the other customer said “**Nothing good. Everything to be improved.**”

For our last question we asked all 8 tenants if they have any other comments about how SYHA communicated service charges. We found the common themes were:

- Openness and transparency
- Opportunities for customers to give feedback
- Regular and effective communication

“I will like to see more transparency and an opportunity for me to give my feedback. More openness will be welcomed as well.”

Simon Young provided us with **documents that detail service charges** in different ways for specific SYHA schemes. We decided it would be very complicated and not practical to share these in the peer to peer interviews. Instead we read through the documents before putting the questions together, and again after the peer to peer interviews, once we’d discussed the findings.

We read through the “**Joseph Road service charge letter** for tenants in the block KN”, this includes a letter and a breakdown of service charges in a table. Here are our thoughts on the document:

- This is short and simple – it **gets your attention**
- It's good to have a phone number on the letter so people can get in touch for more information
- It looks good, hopefully this information is seen before entering into a contract for the property, so people are able to make an **informed decision about affordability**
- The letter doesn't explain why people living in a different block pay a different service charge, it would be useful for tenants to know this
- The table is very clear, easy to understand and read, although some people who are on the autism spectrum may find it difficult to process this information
- Add another column to the table or “**frequency of service**”, this will help with transparency, making it clear how often these things are done e.g. windows and communal cleaning each week
- Make it clear that this is the cost per person, per week
- This information might cause a lot of comments and queries from tenants

We read through the “**Cleaning Service Specifications Ridgeway**”, this document included days, times and duration of the works undertaken, as well as photos and descriptions of each step. Here are our reflections on this document:

- This is really good, it's **visually inviting** and explains things more clearly
- **Everyone would benefit from a document like this**, it would definitely help people with learning disabilities and people who are supported by visual documents.
- **Transparency** was a common trend in the responses, and photos are the most transparent
- Tenants wouldn't need this annually but it could be included in the starter pack to **show people exactly what is involved** and what they should expect
- This document could be displayed in a communal area and each task ticked off when it's completed each week
- This could be **accessible online** once tenants have moved in
- You need to consider the cost of sending this out every year and also consider tenants who can't use digital technology
- There could be the option to have it printed if people need it

Recommendations:

Based on your findings, what do you recommend that SYHA does to improve the situation?

- Provide a clear and simple breakdown, that is specific to the property or scheme and explains what the service charge pays for.
- Ensure customers know when services are completed and the frequency e.g. how often is the grass cut?
- Use the “Joseph Road service charge letter” as a basis for all service charge letters, with a table detailing the breakdown.
- Use the “Cleaning Service Specifications Ridgeway”, as a template, include this in the “starter” pack and have it available for tenants that are unable to access it online
- Ensure people are told when their service charges change, why this has happened and what the additional money pays for.
- Understand people's preferences for how service charge information is communicated, and consider using this to reduce costs and the impact on the environment.
- Consider using email and promoting the use of “My Account” on the SYHA website to share information about service charges, but not as the only approach as this will exclude people
- Be mindful of people's communication and learning needs, and how they may benefit from different support to understand service charge information.
- If service charge information is posted to tenants ensure other documents don't overshadow it, it needs to stand out visually and grab people's attention.
- Ensure people know who to contact, and how to contact them, if they have any questions about service charges, any feedback and know how to complain.

How does the scrutiny panel want to follow this up?

- Work with Customer Experience to develop a report on complaints and feedback
- Develop a simple text survey for tenants with yes and no answers to get more information on their experience
- In June 2024 see if there's an increase in complaints about service charges
- Review the impact again in 2025 and 2026

How do you want to communicate changes to tenants?

- Have reports available on the SYHA website and promoted through social media

Is there anything you've learnt from this process that you will use for future scrutiny projects?

- We need a bigger cross section of customers to answer questions or complete

surveys, aiming for a 10% response

- We need more time to do a project of this size
- A lot of time was taken up with the Data Protection Impact Assessment, this will help with future projects but it slowed us down
- We should have an easier process for contacting customers
- More time dedicated to contacting people to generate more interest
- We could advertise the project on social media so people come to us, instead of us contacting tenants to take part
- Consider running several projects concurrently, we could look at this an option to consider when working on future projects
- We need to assess why we're not getting a big enough response, to understand why people don't want to take part
- Look at ways we can make it more interesting; texting people for their opinions, using a shorter survey etc
- Going in to the community to find more tenants to engage with

Authors:

Dom Garvey

Pam Hankinson

Lisa Hughes

Roger Morley

Isaac Odeghe

Reminder Odeghe

Rodney Harris

SYHA Customer Scrutiny Panel January 2023

Appendix 1: Service Charge Time Line

When?	What?	Purpose	Who?
June – September 2022	Service Charge Research Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with Simon Young (Head of Landlord Services) and Alison Ducker (Leasehold & Service Charge Team Leader) • Understand the current communication to tenants • Read through documents sent to different schemes and areas • Decide on the scope of the project • Prepare draft interview questions 	Dom & Pam
7 th September 2022	Scrutiny Panel Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree on service charges plan so far • Discuss how to implement plan – interviews/focus groups, how to contact customers, what to ask • Evaluation of annual health check process/lessons learned 	Scrutiny Panel Pam & Dom
October & November 2022	Service Charge Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form Working Group • Start Interviewing Customers • Complete Interviews by 16th of December 	Working Group
5 th October 2022	Service Charge Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand availability, strengths and skills of panel • Interview arrangements, consent and monitoring forms • DPIA Update • Agree approach to interviewing & adapt interview questions • Discuss methodology and representative sample 	Working Group

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed on Customer Incentive for interviews 	
12 th October 2022	TPAS Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session on interviewing and questioning • Focusing on questioning, how to challenge, negotiation skills, enabling discussions and how to come to a consensus 	Scrutiny Panel
26 th of October 2022	Service Charge Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Protection Training • Project Update • Overview of customer sample • Teams Training 	Scrutiny Panel
16 th November 2022	TPAS Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session on “maximising the power” • Report writing, making recommendations, how to summarise and different ways to present to the board 	Scrutiny Panel
23 rd November 2022	Service Charge Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Received DPIA approval • Group phone call training • Confirm interview allocations • Review interview questions on Microsoft Forms • Discuss report template, start writing introduction and methods 	Working Group
23 rd November – 16 th December 2022	Peer to Peer Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers work in pairs to contact tenants for peer to peer interviews using survey on Microsoft Forms 	Working Group
7 th December 2022	Service Charge Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss volunteer progress with peer to peer interviews • Reflections on findings and common themes from interviews • Report Writing 	Working Group
21 st December 2022	Service Charge Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss Findings, read through Microsoft Forms data • Report Writing 	Working Group

11 th January 2023	Service Charge Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report Writing • Reflections on findings, common themes, recommendations and learning for future projects 	Working Group
18 th January 2023	Service Charge Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read through report, check for inaccuracies and ensure it's in the Customer Voice • Finalise Recommendations and Executive Summary 	Working Group
End of January	Send report to Landlord services		Sarah Farncombe
February	Meet with Landlord Services/the board to present findings		Scrutiny Panel
Summer 2024	Contact customers for feedback on changes		Scrutiny Panel

Appendix 2: Text to Customers

“Hi - SYHA's customer run Scrutiny Panel want to speak with tenants, to improve the way we communicate about service charges. Are you interested in sharing your thoughts with them? If they interview you, you'll receive a £10 voucher or we can send you a survey to complete in your own time. To find out more reply YES. If you don't want to receive texts from Customer Collaboration reply STOP. Further info on data protection www.syha.co.uk/privacy-notice”

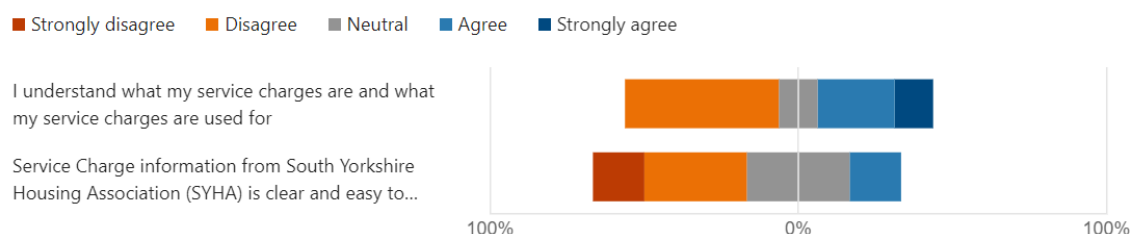
Appendix 3: Survey Questions

1. How much do you agree with the following statements?
 - I understand what my service charges are and what my service charges are used for
 - Service Charge information from South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA) is clear and easy to understand
2. Can you tell us why?
3. What do you think your service charge pays for?
4. Do you know if you pay a fixed service charge or a variable service charge?
5. Do you remember when you've got information about service charges in the past?
6. How did you receive information about service charges?
7. How easy was it to get information about your service charges?
8. Can you tell us why?
9. How easy was it to understand the information you received about service charges?
10. Can you tell us why?
11. What information would you like to know about your service charges?
12. When would you like to be informed about changes to your service charges?
13. How would you like to receive information about service charges?
14. Have you spoken to SYHA staff about your service charges in the past?
15. How would you rate your experience of talking to SYHA staff about service charges? (1 = Low, 5=High)
16. Do you have any comments about your experience of talking to SYHA staff about service charges? What was good? What could be improved?
17. Any other comments about how SYHA communicates service charges?

Appendix 4: Full list of Findings

1. How much do you agree with the following statements?

[More Details](#)

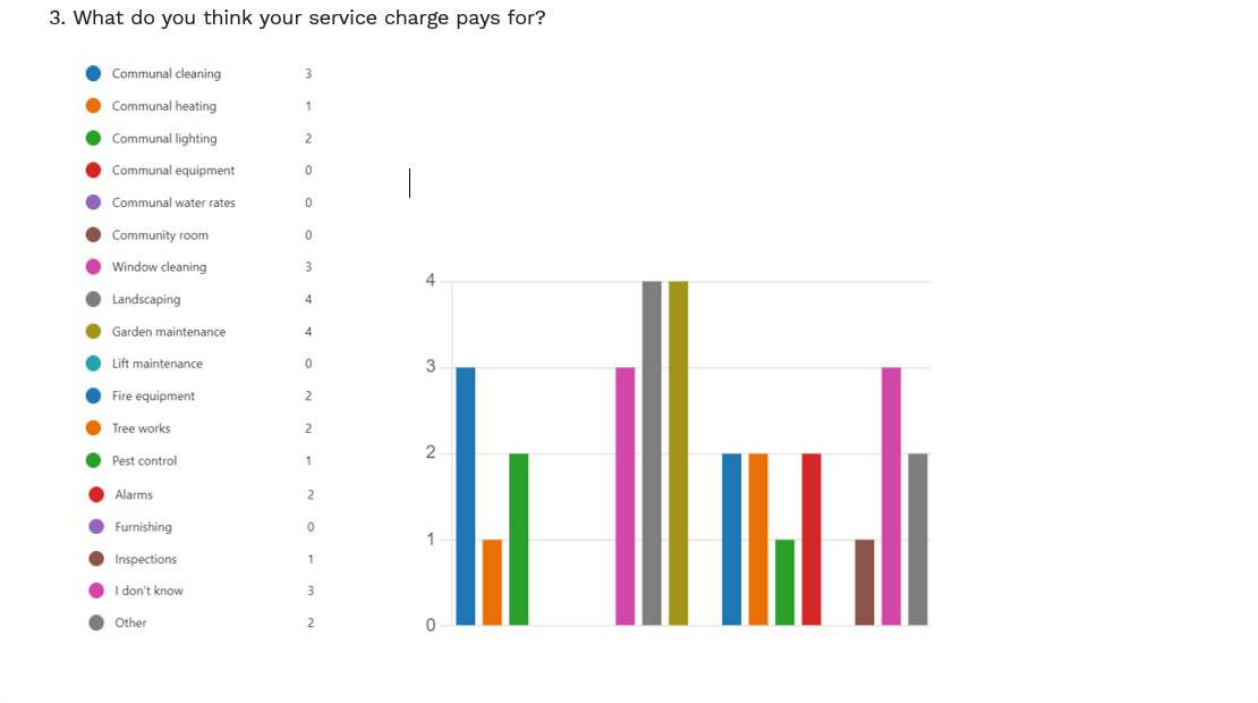


2. Can you tell us why?

- o Only get weekly amount paid without explanation of what it pays for
- o What are they?
- o Never seen the information
- o Didn't know about service charges until now
- o Really don't know what the money goes towards and how it's calculated
- o Window cleaning, cleaning and gardeners – that's what it pays for. Resident for 16 years, got the information a long time ago. Believe paying service charges is part and parcel of paying rent; have to pay it to live here. It's the only thing I feel I have control over, if I feel aggravated I'll call SYHA
- o Been in a flat for 5 years and received a letter about service charges when moved in, not had any since
- o I've had to complain about the abuse of the service charge by SYHA alot because they raised it by 400% during the pandemic but weren't following doing any of the things set out in my service charge list I was given with my contract. Still charging for work that had been completed etc. An absolute abuse of power. I've had to take it as high as I can in the company because of the amount of corruption I've received from employees at SYHA who frankly should never be allowed to be in their positions. The service charge is the biggest abuse of power at SYHA, the communication between SYHA and the client regarding this is abysmal. If SYHA were like a service provider, we would change to a better supplier. They know we can't so they can continue to treat us how they please. I only know what my service charge entitles me to from having to complain so

much about their mismanagement of it.

3. What do you think your service charge pays for?



4. Do you know if you pay a fixed service charge or a variable service charge?

[More Details](#)

Fixed	5
Variable	1
I don't know	2



5. Do you remember when you've got information about service charges in the past?

[More Details](#)

Yes	5
No	3



6. How did you receive information about service charges?

- o Notice of increment
- o When I signed for dwelling
- o With rent increase yearly
- o By letter
- o They increased it by 400% over the pandemic with no explanation to why. I round out that they had increased it 3 years ago to pay for a pest infestation at one of the properties on the street. That was treated then they kept this charge included in the service charge for the next 2 years before I complained. They have now taken it off but we will receive no refund for the additional £5,800 we have each paid for this on the street in the 2 years when it wasn't necessarily. The corruption that goes on at SYHA I'd phenomenal. This is one of many many examples I have of SYHA mismanagement of the service charge.

7. How easy was it to get information about your service charges?

[More Details](#)

Very difficult	1
Difficult	1
Don't know	2
Easy	0
Very easy	0



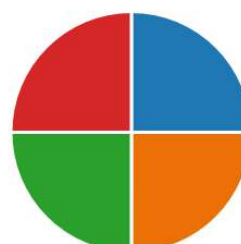
8. Can you tell us why?

- o Because it only tells me the amount I am paying not what I am paying for
- o Didn't enquire
- o Only had one letter of what is provided. Have queried it with little response and has had to complain by email to get information. Would like a list every year. No gardeners through pandemic so had to do own gardening. Has had to write emails to request services. Would like to know how often things are going to be done.
- o Secrets and lies

9. How easy was it to understand the information you received about service charges?

[More Details](#)

Very difficult	1
Difficult	1
Don't know	1
Easy	1
Very easy	0



10. Can you tell us why?

- o Information wasn't clear what the service charges was for
- o Was clear at the beginning but not after the first year
- o I had to go through so many people at SYHA to get to Simon Young and even he had no idea what had been going on in the square. Unbelievable

11. What information would you like to know about service charges?

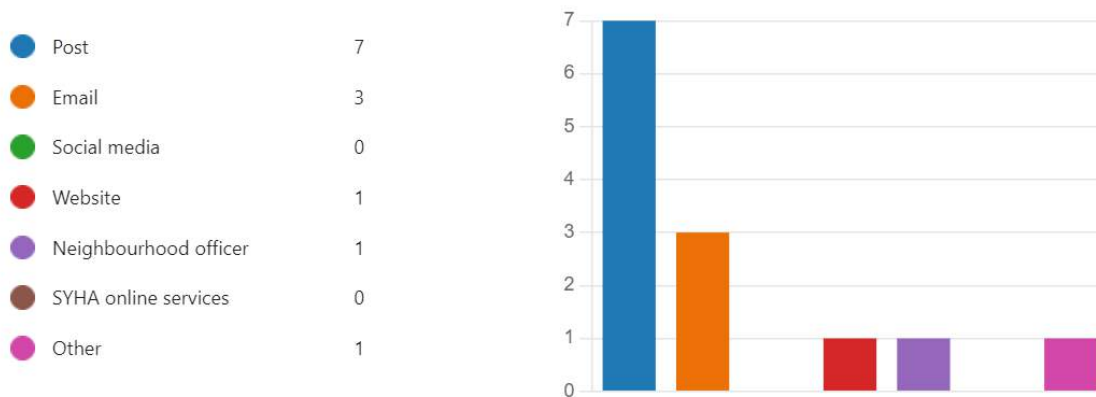
- o What I'm paying for. How to complain if I did not get the service I paid for
- o Specifics; what do grass cutters do in winter? Should be redeployed to clean gutters
- o What it includes, what I am paying, who to talk to if I do not get the service I am paying for
- o Itemised statement
- o More about where the monies go
- o I don't feel as if there's anything that I need to know that I don't already know. I would like to be informed if anything changes. I've got the information when we first got our tenancy agreement
- o Would like it reviewed and sent out every year and how and when they are supposed to be coming. What are they using the money for and when charges are going to stop rising.
- o Clear honest communication from people who are doing their jobs properly

12. When would you like to be informed about changes to your service charges?

- o The time I receive it at the moment is fine
- o ASAP
- o As soon as possible in case I have a query. I will also appreciate if my opinion is taken into consideration. And an opportunity to give feedback on how the service charge will impact on me or benefit me.
- o Annually in a separate letter to rent statement
- o As soon as possible
- o I want to
- o 6 months

13. How would you like to receive information about service charges?

[More Details](#)



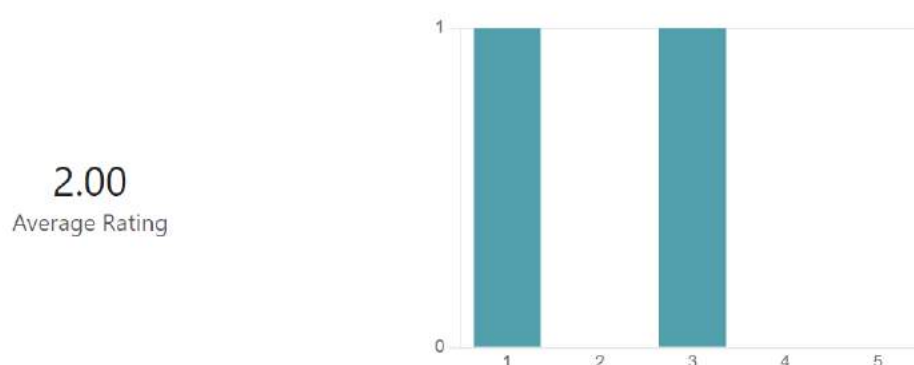
14. Have you spoken to SYHA staff about your service charges in the past?

[More Details](#)



15. How would you rate your experience of talking to SYHA staff about service charges? (1 = Low, 5=High)

[More Details](#)



16. Do you have any comments about your experience of talking to SYHA staff about service charges? What was good? What could be improved?

- o The neighbourhood officer is never seen and not very responsive. Other staff on the helpline have been good. Customer doesn't know who to ring. Last time customer emailed, got a lengthy response, which she feels was satisfactory.
- o Nothing good. Everything to be improved

17. Any other comments about how SYHA communicates service charges?

- o If monies are involved, company should consider due diligence
- o I will like to see more transparency and an opportunity for me to give my feedback. More openness will be welcomed as well. I am not happy that I have to ring up before they come to cut the hedges and bushes covering my kitchen window and car park
- o Need information by post
- o I've never had to call to talk to staff about service charges, I don't see the need for this survey doing – if I can understand it everyone can!
- o Not communicating regularly enough
- o SYHA should first learn to effectively communicate before applying tmit to practice. It's the cancer in that company.

Appendix 5: Joseph Road service charge letter for tenants in the block KN

Address

20th March 2017

Dear

Service Charges

At a recent meeting at Joseph Road a number of tenants asked if we could provide a breakdown of the weekly service charge. On the reverse of this letter you will find a breakdown of the service charge for your tenancy.

Please note, the amount of service charge paid by those tenants who live in the block is different to those living outside it.

I hope this is helpful and provides an explanation of the charges but if you have any further queries relating to this please contact me by phoning 0114 2900 200 or 0800 1380 380 and pressing option 2.

Yours sincerely

Simon Young
Housing Services Manager

Service Charge Breakdown (for tenants in the block)

Breakdown of costs	Cost per week (52 week rent payer)
Alarms and fire equipment repairs and testing	£2.85
Communal cleaning	£5.49
Window cleaning	£1.67
Laundry costs	£0.13
Communal lighting and emergency lighting running and repair	£6.33
Gas for communal heating	£2.30
Lift maintenance and repair	£1.50
Costs for community room, communal telephone etc.	£1.30
Landscape and garden maintenance	£2.13
Maintenance of other communal equipment including TV aerial	£0.33
Communal water rates	£1.03
Admin fee	£3.75
Depreciation on equipment like lifts	£5.45
TOTAL	£34.26

In addition to the service charge there is a **£12.68** per week charge for heating and hot water, and a **£5.20** per week water rates charge for your individual flat.

Cleaning Service Specifications

for

Ridgeway drive 19 and 20

All works to be undertaken during the hours 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday only. Every week (duration approx. 1-1.5 hours).

External.



1. Every visit. Sweep away any leaves and debris in the front of the door if there is some.
2. Every visit. Clean/wipe outside of the entrance door and glass.

3. Every visit. Pick up any litter from the pathway.

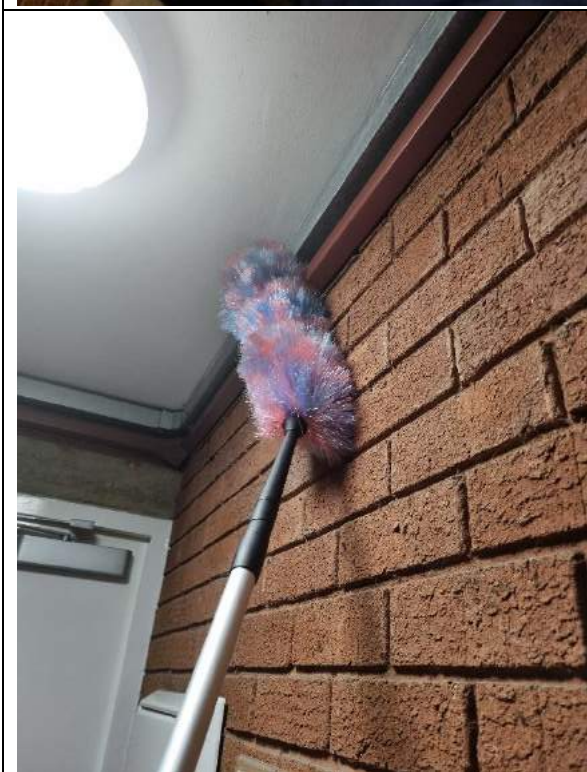
Internal communal area:



Ridgeway drive 19 and 20 has 4 blocks of flats, 2 each side. Ridgeway drive doesn't have cleaning cupboard, all equipment must be used from the van. (Sweeping brush, dustpan, battery operated hoover, cloths, cleaning sprays etc.,).



1. Dust and polish all horizontal surfaces (windowsills, meter boxes, handrails).



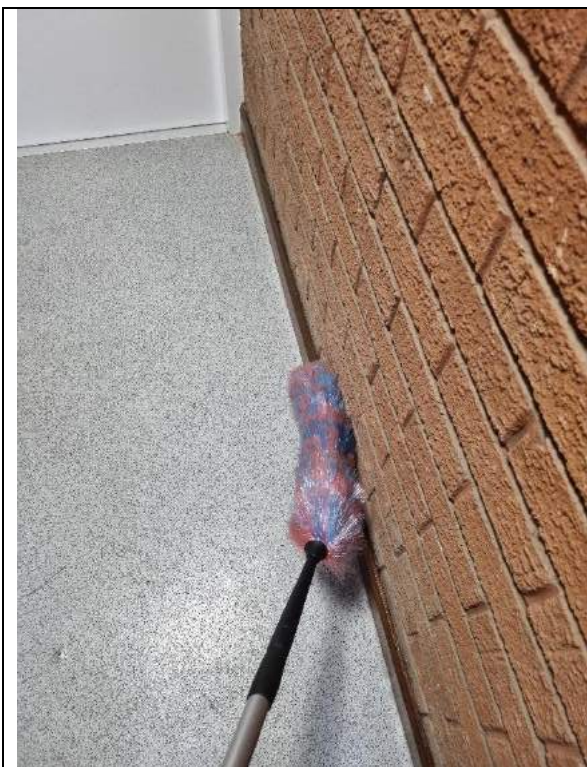
2. Remove all cobwebs when necessarily.



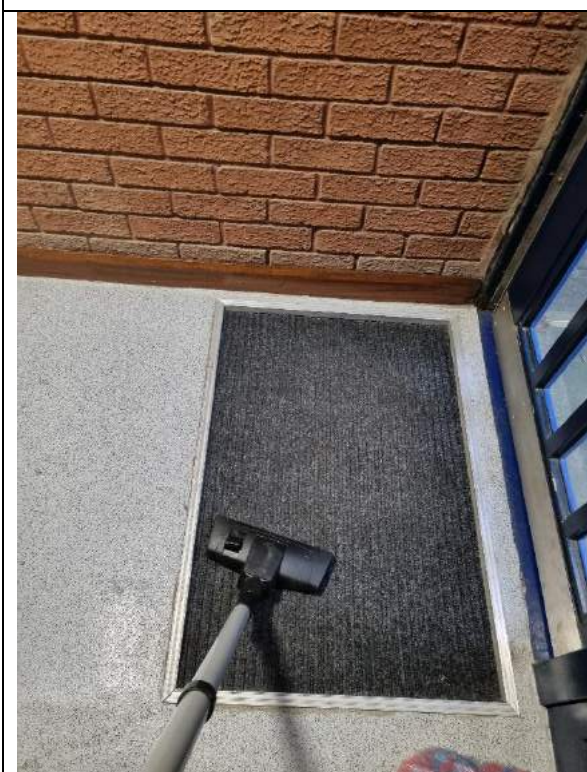
3. Every visit. Wipe/wash/polish all doors (if any marks or dust). Wipe all communal handles and light switchers.



4. Every visit. Wipe and clean all glass and frames (windows, doors, interconnection glass walls)



5. Dust (every week with duster) and wet wipe (if any spills etc.) clean the skirting bords.



6. Every visit. Hoover all floors, in all 4 blocks.



7. Mop the floors in all 4 blocks.