

Resident Engagement Panel

Service Charges Review (communal grounds maintenance and cleaning)

February – June 2025



Resident
Engagement
Panel

....Reviewed by tenants, for tenants!

1) The purpose of the review

The purpose of this review was to answer this question - Are the grounds maintenance and cleaning services providing value for money to residents?

Services charges were increased in April 2025 to reduce the shortfall in income received from residents. Cornerstone wants to ensure that the communal cleaning and grounds maintenance services being provided, and how we set the service charges, is value for money for the residents.

Feedback prior to the review had included residents' concerns about the recent increase in service charges and whether this represented value for money for residents.

2) The aims of the review

- To understand what services are being provided, where, and how
- To understand how service charges are calculated, what is included, the costs, and why service charges have increased.
- To understand how the performance of the services is monitored.
- To understand resident satisfaction levels with the services provided.
- To look at how we explain our service charges to customers.
- To make recommendations to Cornerstone for improvement where needed.

3) Who was involved with the review?

- Resident Engagement Panel members (volunteer residents).
- Other residents were invited to be involved, and some were contacted by the REP for feedback.
- Staff from the Executive Team, Finance, Housing and Property Services.
- Board members present at REP meetings.

4) Information provided for the review

- Feedback from residents in the Tenant Satisfaction measures and complaints about service charges.
- Visits to schemes where issues were raised with cleaning and grounds maintenance standards.
- A presentation from the Finance Manager explaining how service charges are calculated.
- One of Cornerstone's largest contractors for communal cleaning attended a REP meeting for questions and answers.
- Our Service Charge policy was provided for scrutiny and review.
- Tenant Satisfaction Measure results presented with a breakdown of satisfaction comparing contractors and locations
- REP members who had experienced dissatisfaction with cleaning and grounds maintenance themselves fed back on their own experiences.

5) The REP findings and recommendations

In response to the question 'Are the grounds maintenance and cleaning services providing value for money to residents?', the REP finding is 'not consistently, no'.

REP noted that in some areas, residents were happy with the standard of service provided, and in other areas, they were less so. Resident feedback shows that satisfaction, both with communal areas being clean and safe, and value for money could be improved. They noted residents' comments about preferring Cornerstone service compared to that of contractors in some areas and that monitoring of contractors could be improved.

There were three areas where they noted recommendations for improvement as follows:

Standards

1. Provide clearer service standards to residents on what service can be expected and when, with visible schedules on display in communal areas, and signing sheets for contractors.

2. Consider displaying photo standards in communal areas to show good and poor service in an easy-to-understand way, this could be used by both contractors and residents.
3. Ensure the service delivered is appropriate for the neighbourhood, i.e., not the same service across all areas, but rather an approach that suits each location.
4. Improve the consistency of service across neighbourhoods.
5. Regular neighbourhood inspections by Cornerstone, especially where there are complaints.

Resident involvement and feedback

6. REP to be able to continue inspecting areas and following up on complaints made and areas they inspected as part of the review.
7. Review the Estate Champion process to ensure reporting is easy and that regular, meaningful feedback from residents is promptly responded to.
8. Where complaints are made about standards, send 'pulse' surveys to others living there to check if it is a neighbourhood-wide issue.
9. Look at ways to involve residents in management of their green spaces.

Contract management

10. Cornerstone to review what is best value, an in-house service, external contractors or a mix of both? It was noted that both have merits, but the best value for residents should be considered.
11. New contracts should include clear service standards with penalty clauses for contractors who fail to meet these standards.
12. Contracts should include the removal of items such as communal garden waste.
13. Regular meetings with contractors, which include resident involvement, so they can hold contractors to account.
14. Involve residents in the procurement of new contracts.
15. Hold 'meet and greets' with residents and any new contractors, so they have an opportunity to answer questions and get to know the contractor.