

Scrutiny Panel Service Review: Service Charge Communications September – December 2023

Why look at Rent and Service Charge Communications?

As customers we understand just how important it is to make sure any communications are clear, straightforward and easily accessible. This is never more important than when it relates to rents and service charges

We wanted to make sure Stonewater's communications on rent and service charges was clear, easily understood, promoted the support Stonewater has to offer and sign-posted towards organisations that are there to help support customers..

What we focused on:

We looked at:

- the Resident Service Charge Policy
- How Stonewater currently communicates with customers around rent and service charges
- Performance and what's driving complaints
- Does Stonewater give the right amount of information
- Feedback from around 200 customers

Some of the key challenges:

Customer feedback told us:

- Customers often struggled to understand rent and service charge information and statements
- Complexity of information
- Uncertainty around service standards and what customers should expect for their service charges



Our Priority recommendations:

- Refresh communications that explain and reassure customers
- Improve letters & statements:
 - Create QR code for letters
 - Keep letters brief and to the point but with very clear direction on where to find comprehensive FAQs and guides etc.
- Review service charge statement look like and explore presenting in a table format.
- Use coloured envelopes to help identify rent and service information
- Share information about switching to fixed service charges for rented customers.
- Be clear about the differences between fixed and variable charges Use consistent words and messaging
- Explain why properties may be charged different amounts

What happens next:

We hope that you noticed that many of recommendations have already been implemented in the communications you've received this year. The improved communications resulted in a significant drop in queries about service charges compared to last year.

The Panel regularly receive updates on our recommendations to make sure they're moving forward and are improving services for fellow customers

If you'd like to see more recommendations, email us: scrutiny@stonewater.org.

For more updates on this and other customer engagement activity, [check out the customer hubb](#)

How do scrutiny reviews work?

The Scrutiny Panel is made up of a maximum of 14 members who work with Stonewater to review and improve services.

A review involves taking an in-depth look at a service and making recommendations for changes or improvements based on evidence and the panel's findings.