

Get Involved In Shaping Leasehold Services

Leasehold Forum

We would like Leaseholders to volunteer to form a Leaseholders Forum, this group would have the opportunity to help develop the service Leaseholders receive. As a Forum member you could be on the editorial panel of the Leaseholders News or of the Leasehold pages of the BCH web site. We would also ask for your comments on the future issues of the Leaseholders Handbook and the Leasehold Service Standards. If you prefer not to attend meetings you could contact us by post, email or phone.

If you do want to get involved, or if you have any ideas for the next Leaseholders News, or if you have any comments or suggestions about the information on our web site, please get in touch (contact details above).

Standing Order Payments

There are still some Leaseholders who are paying their Leasehold Invoices by Standing Order using their old account numbers. BCH and the Council are unable to change your standing order details with your bank it is the Leaseholders responsibility to contact their bank to ensure payments are going to the correct account number. All Leaseholders accounts now start with the number "8". Using your old account number means a delay in payments reaching your account and could result in unnecessary arrears reminder letters being sent to you.

Happy Birthday BCH

On 15th January 2008 it will be Blackpool Coastal Housing's first anniversary. It will be 12 months since we were created by Blackpool Borough Council to manage and maintain its housing stock. It has been a very busy year for the staff, board and partners in BCH and we are now awaiting the results of the Government's Audit Commission Inspection that took place during November which will tell us how we are performing and what our future prospects are.

We would like to thank those Leaseholders who have taken part in any focus groups, who are members of Tenant & Resident groups, who have attended any of the BCH conferences, or have taken part in any surveys. Your contribution is greatly appreciated and is helping us to improve our service to you.

To ensure all our services are accessible to all, documents are available in large print, Braille, on audio-cassette or computer disk upon request.

We can also provide help for British Sign Language users and provide information in other languages.

For more information please contact 477900.

Leaseholders Satisfaction Survey 07/08

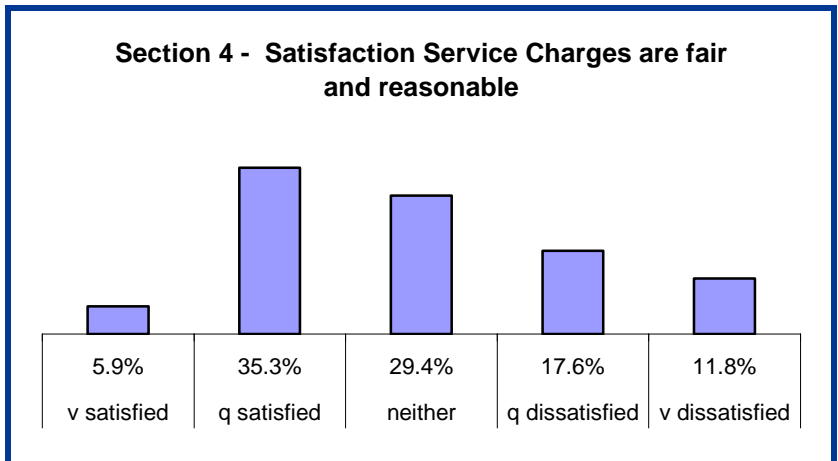
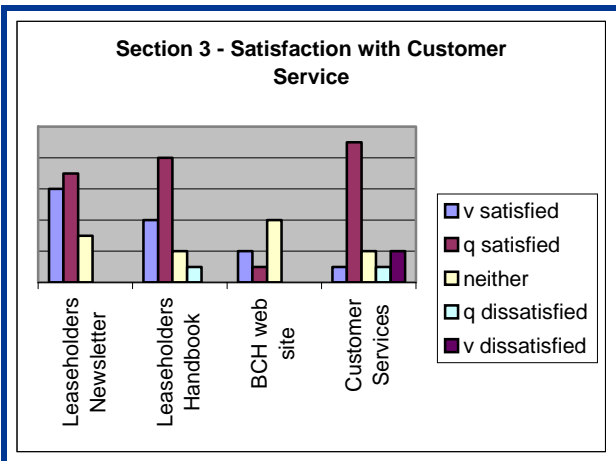
We are going to be asking all Leaseholders a series of questions so that we can measure how you rate the service we provide and how we can improve them.

A start has been made by asking a 10% cross section of our customers to take part in trialling a Customer Satisfaction Survey and to suggest questions they think should be asked. If you have not been involved in the trial but would like to take part please contact Maureen Olley in the Home Ownership Team.

Examples from the sample survey show:

- 76.5% of people had bought their home under the Right to Buy scheme.
- 47% had owned their lease for more than 10 years.
- 56% are paying their Leasehold Service charges by Direct Debit.

The initial results indicate we need to provide more information about the Gas Safety Scheme which is available to Leaseholders, and the areas of most concern are with cleaning and grounds maintenance.



The agreed final survey will be sent out to all Leaseholders in the New Year, and the results will be published in the Leasehold Newsletter. The results and proposed follow up actions will be a topic for discussion at the next Leaseholders Conference.

It is from your replies to such surveys and feedback we look at the service we are providing and implement changes. For example a Leaseholder phoned to tell us that the automated phone payment message on 01253 478751 was not very clear about which option Leaseholders should choose when they wanted to pay their Service Charge Invoice. As a result we have asked Blackpool Council to change the message to make it clear that option 4 should be selected if you wish to pay your Service Charge invoice this way.

Feedback from Leaseholders Conference 2007

Buildings Insurance - Following on from the discussion, which took place at the Conference, we are meeting with Blackpool Council Risk & Insurance section to discuss a revaluation of leasehold properties. This exercise will ensure all leasehold properties are valued at the correct insurance rebuild valuation, and that flats in the same block are charged at the same rate. We will keep Leaseholders informed of the outcome.

Digital TV reception (IRS TV element) - In 2009 the NorthWest of England is due to switch over from analogue TV reception to Digital reception. BCH have a contract with Avonline who have installed the necessary equipment for blocks of flats to receive a digital reception. If you are unsure if your flat has this service please contact the Homeownership Officer on 01253 477984.

Gas Maintenance & Safety Scheme - We are very pleased with the positive feedback we have had to our introducing this scheme to leaseholders. If you do not wish to join the scheme Reed & Errington, our partners can offer to you a safety inspection and issue an annual safety certificate at the same cost as that negotiated for our tenanted properties. For those Leaseholders who sub let it is your responsibility as a Landlord to arrange for annual gas safety inspections and you should send a copy your safety certificate to BCH.

Status Survey – Reducing Service Charges - As Blackpool Coastal Housing's Asset Manager explained to the conference, all of our managed properties are included in a status survey. As a result of this survey BCH has been able to provide to the Homeownership officer a list of leasehold properties that have installed full UPVC. We have used this information to check the Planned Cyclical Works element of the Service Charges of those properties and have been able to reduce the charge to over 140 accounts.

If you are planning to install UPVC please contact the Homeownership Officer to arrange for Landlord Consent and after the installation let us know and if it passes our inspection the Service Charge can be reviewed.

Note: The Planned Cyclical Works element of Service Charges is for the 6-year cycle of maintenance and painting to the communal parts of blocks and to windows and doors. The current charges are:

Maisonettes with "full" UPVC reduced charge	£31.61
Maisonettes full charge	£56.27
Flats with "full" UPVC reduced charge	£17.37
Flats full charge	£31.26

Service Charge Facts and Figures

Since April 2007 when Leasehold accounts were migrated from the Council computer system to one managed by BCH we have taken on the responsibility of issuing Invoices and reminders for unpaid Invoices, and the recovery of any arrears.

The major advantage of the change for Leaseholders has been the ability to offer payment by Direct Debit.

For BCH the advantage is that we can more easily see and measure our performance at setting charges and collecting Service Charges on behalf of your Landlord, Blackpool Borough Council.

As at 1st December 2007

132 - The number of Leaseholders paying by Direct Debit.

(If you wish to pay by this method please contact Homeownership on 01253 477984)

405 - Number of Leaseholders.

£436.77 - Average Leasehold Service Charges 2007 –2008 (including major works).

205 (50.6%) - Accounts fully paid or in credit.

167 (41.2%) - Payment arrangements being made (eg by Direct Debit or Standing Order).

33 (8.2%) - Accounts in arrears

Blackpool Coastal Housing can now start to compare our Charges and performance against other ALMOs and local authorities. We shall in future issues let you know what these figure show.

Landlord Consent - getting permission to make changes & improvements to your home

Your Lease has clauses that tell you to ask for Landlord Consent before undertaking any works to your home.

If you do not ask for consent and the work is found later not to be acceptable to your Landlord, or to have broken any of the terms of the lease, the Council as your Landlord can take legal action which requires you to rectify the work and you may be charged legal costs.

Your lease tells you to keep your home in a good condition and not to cause a nuisance to neighbours. If you are thinking of undertaking any major improvements such as work to kitchens or bathrooms you must first contact BCH.

We can arrange an inspection and offer help and advice that will ensure your planned work does not cause problems to your neighbours or break the terms of your lease.

It is important for Leaseholders in top floor flats to realise they have not acquired the right to the loft. The roof and the loft space are what are called "reserved" which means the Council still own it. Loft conversion will not be given consent

Currently you are not charged for consents either before or after (retrospective) the work. There are other local authority landlords and Housing Associations, who do charge, and we may in future have to charge for retrospective consents