

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What will these new agreements cover?**

It is our intention to enter into 3 repair and service contracts, in which the successful contractors will be required to repair, replace and service the following:

1. Domestic white goods appliances

The types of equipment/services will include, but are not limited to:

- Cookers;
- Fridges (larder and worktop)
- Freezers;
- Fridge/freezers;
- Washing machines;
- Tumble driers;
- Toasters.

2. Commercial laundry equipment

The types of equipment/services will include, but are not limited to:

- Commercial tumble dryers;
- Commercial washing machines;
- Sluice machines.

3. Commercial catering and air conditioning equipment.

The types of equipment/services will include, but are not limited to:

- Commercial/domestic gas appliances;
- Cookers/Ovens;
- Commercial/domestic extract systems;
- Air conditioning equipment;
- Fridges/freezers;
- Dishwashers;
- Kitchen deep cleans.

Please refer to the specification for each we have made available to you for full details.

### **Why are you changing them?**

Our current contracts are coming to an end and we are retendering to ensure we receive the best value for money services for our customers.

### **How much will this cost me?**

Please refer to the attached Notice of Proposals.

### **When will I first see new charges in my service charge?**

It will only be the cost for the annual servicing, if relevant, that you will see in your service charge as an annual contribution. Repair and replacement works are recharged reactively. The servicing costs will first be added to your service charge account in the financial year 2022/23.

Repair and replacement costs will be charged reactively as and when works are reported, required and completed. They will be recharged via your service charge as part of the service charge reconciliation process, which typically takes place in the Summer of the financial year following that which the works are completed in.

**How much do I currently pay in my service charge towards this service?**

This information should be contained in your latest service charge statement. In the absence of this you will be able to check this with our service charge team – [servicecharges@aster.co.uk](mailto:servicecharges@aster.co.uk). The cost on your service charge statement will be under the heading “Contract Repair & Maint White Goods”.

You can also view your service charges online through [MyAster](#).

MyAster is an online portal where you can monitor your account with Aster, complete tasks yourself and contact us at any time to suit you. If you have not yet registered to use our MyAster portal service, please [click here](#) to get started.

**Will I be charged a weekly/monthly service charge for these services/equipment if I do not receive or benefit from them?**

No, you will only be charged for services/equipment you receive or benefit from.

**Why have I received this letter, I do not pay for or receive the benefit of any of this equipment or services?**

The approach we have taken is to write to all customers who have had a cost for the above equipment/service in the last two financial years connected to their property and/or those customers living in a property under our housing for the elderly or extra care schemes. We understand that this may include customers in homes that are not paying for these services due to their tenancy agreement. Despite this, you are being consulted with should this service be recharged to your home in the future. If you have any questions specific to your service charge account these should be directed to our service charge team - [servicecharges@aster.co.uk](mailto:servicecharges@aster.co.uk).

**If I receive the benefit of this equipment or this service but do not currently pay does this mean I will now begin to pay?**

No not if your form of tenancy agreement does not permit this.

**Who should I contact if I need to confirm if I benefit from any of these services/equipment?**

You should speak with your Housing/Neighbourhood/Independent Living Officer.

**For domestic white goods why are you only servicing tumble dryers?**

Domestic white goods are considered to be non-serviceable items and as such, will only be considered for either repair or replacement. In many cases, manufacturers do not advocate regular cyclical servicing on their machines due to the unnecessary strain put onto components if they are continually taken apart and then reassembled. The exception to this rule are tumble dryers which Aster have chosen to service annually to safeguard users against any fire risk (usually caused by trapped lint), or legionellosis (usually caused by trapped water and poor venting).

**When is the contract with the new suppliers due to start?**

As soon as possible following a successful completion of the Section 20 consultation.

**What weighing was used to evaluate the tenders?**

60% quality, 40% price.

**I am not happy with the current services provided.**

Under this consultation process we are unable to deal with complaints about the quality of current provisions. Please visit our website or contact your neighbourhood/housing officer through our contact centre on 0333 400 8222 to discuss any issues you are experiencing

**FAQs – Section 20 consultations**

### **What is a section 20 consultation and why does it affect me?**

The Section 20 consultation process was put in place to protect service charge payers and to make sure that landlords only carry out work or enter into service contracts that are necessary and at a reasonable cost.

Anyone who pays a service charge whether they are a leaseholder, shared owner or tenant maybe be affected by a section 20 consultation.

The process allows service charge payers the chance to comment on the works and sometimes to suggest contractors for the works depending on the value of the contract.

### **When is the S20 consultation process used?**

For any one-off works that will cost an individual service charge payer over £250 or for any new service (for example ground maintenance) that lasts longer than 12 months and will cost any service charge payer over £100, we need to let you know and give you the chance to comment on what we are planning.

Your comments form part of a formal consultation between us and you and it's our legal requirement under section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 to involve you.

### **How does the Section 20 consultation process work?**

This may vary according to the type of work and the cost but it's usually along these lines:

1. We send you a legal Notice telling you what work or type of contract we are planning to enter into. This will include letting you know where you can find out more details and how you can provide your comments.
2. We get some quotes from contractors, taking in to account any comments we've received.
3. We send you a 'notice of estimates' which gives you the details of the estimated costs. You are able to provide feedback to us on the estimates.
4. Taking into account any feedback we received we award the contract to a preferred supplier to carry out the work.
5. If the contractor is not the cheapest we will write to explain why they have been awarded the contract.

### **Can I nominate a contractor?**

No. If applicable, any nominations had to be made at Stage 1 of this consultation.

### **What is an observation?**

You have a right to reply with your comments to a Section 20 notice up to 30 calendar days from the date of the notice. Your reply is known as an 'observation'. We will give due regard to any observations received during the consultation period.

A summary of all the observations received and our responses to them will be sent out with the next stage of the consultation documents.

All the comments and feedback we receive are taken into account when planning the work and awarding the contract.

**How do I make an observation?**

Your observation must be in writing either by letter or email. Any email should be sent to [observations@aster.co.uk](mailto:observations@aster.co.uk). Letters should be sent to the following address, Section 20 Officer, Aster Group, Sarsen Court, Horton Avenue, Cannings Hill, Devizes, Wiltshire, SN10 2AZ. You can't make observations verbally over the telephone or in person.

**Is this Section 20 Notice a bill?**

No, this is not a bill. You don't need to make any payment in response to receiving this letter or any enclosed notices. Any charges will be communicated to you separately and applied through your service charges.

**What if I cannot afford to pay?**

If you are worried about how you will meet the cost please speak to your housing officer. For more information visit <https://www.aster.co.uk/existing-customers/leaseholder/what-to-do-if-you-are-struggling-to-pay>

**I have received a S20 notice but I don't think it's for me**

If you receive a notice to your address but not in your name please let us know, it may be that our records need updating or that the leaseholder is subletting the property to you.

If you are a leaseholder sub-letting your property please let us have a correspondence address so we can send S20 Notices to you there.

**I am planning to sell my property before the service described in the S20 notice is completed**

You should keep the documents safe and pass them to your solicitor when you have accepted an offer. Any potential purchaser needs to be aware of any Section 20 consultation.

**Where can I go for advice?**

You can contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau for independent advice. The following websites also have useful information about the S20 process:

<http://www.lease-advice.org>

<http://www.leaseholderadvicecentre.co.uk>