



## **Rechargeable Repairs Policy – Focus Group Consultation Feedback**

### **1.0 Purpose of this Report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the consultation on the Rechargeable Repairs Policy. A virtual Focus Group discussed the policy and attendees raised any opinions and concerns.

### **2.0 Background**

2.1 The initial resident consultation that took place 19<sup>th</sup> December, until 13<sup>th</sup> of January did not provide sufficient feedback (the consultation received seven responses by 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021).

2.2 The survey questions in the consultation did not relate closely enough to the Policy. Therefore the discussion points used in the Focus Group were broader and open-ended. This allowed residents to discuss their views in a more informal setting, which allowed us to gain more insight into their honest opinions and concerns.

2.3 Seven Brent Residents attended the Focus Group. All seven residents are members of Brent Resident Associations. There was one leaseholder and six tenants present at the meeting.

### **3.0 Focus Group Questions and Summary**

3.1 Five discussion points informed the Focus Group. These are detailed in Tables 1-5 below.

3.2 Tables 1-5 summarise the responses to the discussion points. Overall, the attendees were supportive of the Policy.

3.3 The responses detailed in the tables below are close quotes from the attendees.

**Table 1.**

Discussion Point 1	
<b>1</b>	<b>The principle of recharging residents. Do you agree or disagree with the principle of recharging residents?</b>
1	<p>“Whilst I’ve been working from home I have been talking to residents and it would be a good idea to start charging the residents who constantly damage their properties. Say for instance, someone like me, who takes good care of my property, when I want something, the Council cannot do it because it is out of budget. It is a good idea - from what I hear from residents it would help them, it would give them a bit more confidence in the Council that they are actually taking steps and not just being taken for granted when something’s broken. There is a mentality of ‘yeah it’s okay the Council will fix it.’”</p>
2	<p>“One of the problems we seem to have is where people put fat and grease down their drains and they get blocked. Instead of charging the individuals who have done the damage, it seems to go across the Estate; everyone in the block has to pay for the work. I think everyone should be responsible for where they live and their surroundings”</p>
3	<p>“I am wondering when we start on this, it is true that everyone should be responsible; the Council should quite rightly put this amendment out. However, they should be mindful that there are many places that are not as fortunate as others; some areas are abused by strangers, using parking spaces, urinating etc. How does the Council go about ensuring that the right people are punished? Before we look at punishment let us look at something else. The Council has done a fantastic job but we need to see the Council move towards fixing existing problems or dealing with things in the pipeline and having information on this relayed to the tenants. Once we see something is happening then you can implement these packages. Would not like to think that this Council or any council would hide behind the Covid-19 situation and punish those already facing dire straits. Must be mindful of the impact that this pandemic has caused throughout the world. The Council has beautiful ambitions but these are restricted by funding. If the Council can find a way to put something into the community that will ignite it after Covid-19, even if that is positive information, residents need more feedback from the council.”</p>

**Table 2.**

Discussion Point 2	
<b>2</b>	<b>Should residents receive a reduced service if there are outstanding recharges? If so, what form could that take?</b>
1	<p>"I agree. Services should be reduced. There is one example of a tenant having work done to the house constantly because of damage. My personal views and the views of the other residents is leave the person in that situation until they respect the property that they are living in. 'Don't worry the Council will come and fix the damage mentality'. People seem to learn, might appreciate what they are losing out on."</p>
2	<p>"If someone is damaging their property, charge them. If they do not want to pay, that becomes a problem with the tenancy. I cannot see any other way of getting around it. Brent can go and repair many times if the person does not take any notice and they know that they are going to get it done - what is the point? If they are damaging the property they should be punished."</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>What form could this take?</b></p>
3	<p>"Financially penalise them. Make this effective to the rent or a service charge, dependent on whether it is a council tenant or a leaseholder. If they receive a financial penalty, they will not do it again."</p>
4	<p>"It is a justifiable punishment to punish people for deliberate action. Whoever is in the property must be held responsible. Leaseholder must take it up with that client and must get remittances for the damage that has been done. Continuous repairs can be put on the back burner. However, we should consider starting afresh after Covid-19. The Council must find a way to check up on people. Having a sense of community spirit means that you will have to punish people who will go against the grain."</p>

**Table 3.**

Discussion Point 3	
<b>3</b>	<b>When should exemptions from recharges be valid? Under what circumstances should Brent waive recharges?</b>
1	<p>"Mental Health issues. A lot of this is present in the community and a lot is hidden. If a GP or practitioner supports someone's case, that person can be exempt but not permanently exempt - exempt with a view to change it. This change might be taking medication and following doctor instructions, if one does not do that it is like breaking the terms of the tenancy. It would be justified to deduct from benefits if one</p>

**Discussion Point 3**

		<p>is not put in object poverty. The very elderly, hold on to the stiff upper lip but we must make ways to reach them. They might incur punishment before they are aware of what's going on, all that is raised in administering this 'punishment', going to have to recover funds where is justifiable. A lot of plans in the pipeline that could not have foreseen Covid-19, people will have to be patient and help the council to reach their goals."</p>
	<b>2</b>	<p>"The elderly, those on pension credit, families with young children. Children can misbehave and damage things. Do not want to be too harsh."</p>

**Table 4.**

**Discussion Point 4**

		<b>Are there any recharge items listed that you did not agree with?</b>
	<b>1</b>	<p>"One must look at the other side to this coin. Main contractors' work is subcontracted and work carried out in a sloppy way - have to look into that to make sure that the tenant has to call back. Not taking that the tenant is repeating this action. Finance permitted, Brent should designate someone or give somebody a job whereby they can go with proper training to make sure that jobs are correctly done. Residents are inadvertently paying for the same job more than once and some of the work is still not done. People sometimes coming and doing jobs and cannot communicate with the tenant, little things Brent might not be aware of. Have to look at the tenant side."</p>
	<b>2</b>	<p><b>Resident posed the question:</b> "Could we charge the Council for repairs that have not been carried out and we have had to do ourselves?"</p>

**Table 5.**

<b>Discussion Point 5</b>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Are there any recharge items that are not listed that you think should be included?</b>
<b>1</b>	The attendees did not explicitly name any recharge items to be added to the Policy. However, several of the attendees referred to issues with fly tipping in their estates. Therefore, this would be a worthy recharge item to consider adding to the Policy.

#### **4.0 Summary, Analysis and Recommendations**

- 4.1 Overall, the residents were supportive of the Policy. Many of the attendees cited personal experiences whereby the Policy would have been beneficial and effective.
- 4.2 There was some difficulty in viewing the Policy as a preventative measure rather than a punitive one. Therefore, it may be useful to emphasise further the nature and objectives of the Policy.
- 4.3 Additionally, it may be useful to make it clearer that the policy aims to punish *wilful* damage to properties, as there was also confusion around this.
- 4.4 The attendees suggested few changes to the policy. However, one resident suggested that the Council should consider implementing the Policy after the pandemic as to ensure that those facing financial hardships did not suffer further.
- 4.5 Several of the attendees highlighted that fly tipping was an issue for many residents. Therefore, it would be valuable to add 'fly tipping' to the list of recharge items.
- 4.6 Additionally, it is important to consider that the Policy should apply to repairs that the residents are responsible for but are unable to complete themselves and will not just be applied in the event of wilful damage. For example, renewing a toilet seat.
- 4.7 The attendees did not explicitly highlight any recharge items that they did not agree with. However, one attendee noted that some of the work and repairs carried out by contractors is of a poor standard. In this case, if a resident was recharged for a repair that was the fault of the contractor's substandard work, it would be unjust to issue a recharge.
- 4.8 The attendees cited four main resident groups that should be exempt from the Policy. These were; those with mental health issues, those on pension credit, families with young children and the elderly. Something that the attendees noted was that this should not be a permanent exemption in some cases. The example used was if someone with mental health issues was not taking their medication or

the advice of their GP or doctor then they should no longer remain exempt from the Policy.

- 4.9 The attendees highlighted communication with residents is a recurring issue and, therefore, the means of accessing the Policy and issuing recharges must be monitored and altered accordingly. One attendee used elderly residents as an example group. For example, if the Council issued an elderly resident a recharge and they were not aware of the Policy or the recharge items listed, it would be unjust to issue said recharge.
- 4.10 The attendees also agreed that residents who did not comply with the Policy should receive a reduced service until recharge fees were paid.
- 4.11 Overall, the focus group attendees supported the policy with the above amendments to be considered.