

World's End Residents' Association



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Councillor Kim Taylor-Smith
Deputy Leader, Lead Member Housing and Social Investment
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Town Hall
Hornton Street
London W8 7NX

By email to: cllr.kim.taylor-smith@rbkc.gov.uk

12th March 2023

Dear Councillor Kim Taylor-Smith,

The Committee of the World's End Residents Association hopes you are well.

Council tenants living on the World's End Estate recently started receiving letters from the Council informing them of the rent increase due to take effect in April 2023.

The Committee of the World's End Residents Association (WERA) is extremely concerned by the planned rent increase. It is quite simply enormous and well above the current rate of inflation. It can only serve to push low-income households living on the estate, whether of working age or retired, into serious financial difficulty.

Using a two-bedroom flat on the estate as an example:

- The total rent payable on a two-bedroom flat has increased from £172.26/week to £207.28/week; an increase of £35.02/week or 20.3%.

This is significantly above the current rate of inflation, which stands at 8.8%, and will require some tenants to find an additional £1,821.04 a year to simply pay their rent. In the current economic climate it is unrealistic to expect anyone to be able to increase their net income by such a large amount in a single year.

Several individual service charge items within the rent are notable for large increases. Again, using a two-bedroom flat on the estate as an example:

- The amount charged for Caretaking and Cleaning has increased from £9.06/week to £10.15/week; an increase of £1.09/week or 12%.

This service was recently taken in house by the Council on the basis that this would lead to significant cost savings and thus reduced costs to tenants and leaseholders. An increase of 12% suggests otherwise. This merits some explanation.

- The amount charged for Communal Electricity has gone up from £3.06/week to £6.89/week; an increase of £3.83/week or 125.2% (more than double).
- The amount charged for Estate Lighting has gone up from £0.14/week to £0.34/week; an increase of £0.18/week or 128.6% (more than double).
- The amount charged for Heating and Hot water has gone up from £12.63/week to £31.96/week; an increase of £19.33/week or 153% (over two and a half times as much).

The increase in the heating and hot water charge is of particular concern because it is not covered by any benefits tenants might be in receipt of. This means that Council tenants on low incomes, whether in work or retired, whether in receipt of benefits or not, will need to find an additional £19.33/week or £1,005.16/year to pay for heating and hot water. This will place a large and potentially unbearable financial burden on every single Council tenant living on the estate.

The WERA Committee is not ignorant of recent increases in energy costs. But the WERA Committee would have expected meaningful consultation if the Council had now decided to pass on these costs to residents in full. The Council had previously announced, with much fanfare and self-aggrandisement, that it would not. That policy appears to have been reversed without any consultation, explanation, or any kind of announcement.

The letter sent to Council tenants is also worded in such a way as to suggest that the increases in energy costs being passed on are based on forecasts rather than actual increases. The WERA Committee hopes that this is not the case. It would be extremely heartless and uncaring to pass on an increase of this magnitude based solely on a predicted increase in costs, which may never come to pass, rather than an actual increase in incurred costs.

Given the magnitude of the overall rent increase the WERA Committee is extremely disappointed that no meaningful effort was made to consult with or even notify the Association, which represents all the estate's Council tenants, in advance of these letters being sent out.

The WERA Committee would therefore appreciate it if you could provide:

1. Evidence that there was some meaningful consultation of Council tenants and the Resident Associations that represent them somewhere in the borough. WERA Committee members regularly attend meetings of the TCC. We have also reviewed all the published minutes of all recent TCC meetings. We can find no mention of a discussion of rent increases of 20% or more or of any meaningful consultation with Resident Associations.
2. Evidence that the proposed above-inflation increases in Communal Electricity, Estate Lighting and Heating and Hot Water reflect actual increases in the cost of energy incurred by the Council rather than mere forecasts. Please arrange for copies of the relevant invoices and contracts showing the actual incurred costs to be provided or made available for inspection.
3. An explanation as to why the Council has chosen to reverse course on its much-advertised policy of protecting Council tenants from the impact of above inflation increases in energy costs. Please provide evidence that this policy change was consulted upon, and that Council tenants and Resident Associations were consulted and notified in advance.

4. An explanation as to why the cost of the Caretaking and Cleaning Service has risen at a rate greater than inflation (12% versus 8.8%) and greater than all other non-energy-related service charge items in the rent. This is despite the service having been taken in house and promises that the exact opposite would happen; this service was supposed to become cheaper once brought in house, not more expensive. What has gone wrong?

The WERA Committee would very much appreciate a prompt response addressing all the issues highlighted above in full.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely, on behalf of the WERA Committee:

Ms. Eryl Wrage, Chairman.

Mr. Jules Montero, Committee Member.

Cc: Rt. Hon. Greg Hands, Member of Parliament for Chelsea and Fulham.
Councillor Gerard Hargreaves, Ward Councillor, Chelsea Riverside.
Doug Goldring, Director of Housing Management, RBK&C.