

Charging for housing support  
- an examination of current practice

**October 2010**

**Housing Support Enabling Unit**



# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Key Findings

- The charge for 'low level' support varies between areas – some people pay nothing whereas others pay the full cost.
- Most services taking part in the survey find that some of their service users are subject to charges.
- Charges can affect the extent to which people use services.
- Most local authorities charge for sheltered housing services depending on a person's income and savings.
- Most local authorities have discretion to waiver charges in individual cases.

## 1.2 Background

The Scottish Government's recent housing policy discussion paper 'Fresh Thinking, New Ideas' <sup>1</sup> invited comments as to whether 'low level' housing support should be paid for through charges. This is not, however, a new issue for housing support. Under the Supporting People programme people using 'longer term' housing support services could be charged for services but those using services before the programme started in 2003 had some protection<sup>2</sup>. 'Longer term' housing support consisted of services working with people for 2 years or more. Since the ringfence around funding for housing support was removed in 2008 local authorities have had more freedom to bring charging for housing support more in line with other types of social care. COSLA made this clear in its revised guidance on charging for non residential social care services in 2010<sup>3</sup> and has also developed a 'Community of Practice' on its website for local authorities to post their charging policies to help them benchmark charges<sup>4</sup>. This is the context in which the Unit set off to find out from service providers as well as from local authorities more about policy and practice across the country.

## 2.0 Survey Findings

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### 2.1 Extent to which people are being charged for services

A survey about experiences of charging for services generated a very good response with 92 people responding across a range of organisations working in nearly every local authority area in Scotland. Most respondents stated that their organisations provide more than simply housing support services e.g. care at home and housing support, which suggests that most are working in long term services. Of these, 73% said that some of their service users are charged for the services they use. The Unit also gathered information from a group of sheltered housing providers. In their experience 26 out of the 32 local authorities assess and charge some service users in sheltered accommodation.

### 2.2 Impact of charging on service use

Although 40% of respondents said they did not think there was any impact on the use of services where charging is in place a significant 36% observed that, in their experience, some people had either reduced their use of services or had stopped using services altogether. There were other implications of charging also, including people being confused about what they are paying for and having reduced spending money for things like holidays.

### 2.3 Collecting charges

In the majority of cases local authorities are collecting charges directly from service users. A small minority of respondents, however, said that they are expected to collect charges. Six respondents from four organisations said they are required to collect charges and of these three respondents from one organisation felt that having to collect the charge did affect the relationship they have with service users. The local authorities currently asking some of their providers to collect charges include Argyll & Bute, Glasgow City and North Lanarkshire. Only one of the six respondents stated that their organisation is paid an administrative fee by their local authority in recognition of the resources needed to collect charges. The collecting of charges can be particularly problematic for service providers where the charge is fairly small and where the service is accommodation based. In such situations the administration involved may appear burdensome and the charge can be difficult to separate out from the rent payments and/or rent arrears.

### 2.4 Range of charges levied by local authorities

The Unit has also been in contact with all 32 local authorities to ask how they would deal with people using housing support services. Two scenarios were used to gather and compare charging levels (see Appendix 1). The first scenario involved 3 hours of visiting support per week and the second scenario involved sheltered housing. In both scenarios the Unit provided some detail about income and savings. Responses were received from 27 local authorities. Charges relating to the visiting support scenario

ranged from £0 to £45 and 13 of the local authorities responding said they would charge in this situation. In the sheltered housing case charges ranged from £0 to £31.01 and 15 local authorities said they would apply a charge. The charges are detailed in the table in appendix 2.

## **2.5 Refusing a service**

Local authorities were asked how they would deal with the risk of people refusing services after a charge being levied. Most advised that they would carry out a risk assessment and decide if a person could afford it or not and the majority of local authorities stated they have some discretion as to whether to apply a charge or not in individual cases of hardship and where being left without support was deemed to leave a person at risk.

## 3. Conclusions

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Providers of housing support are increasingly likely to be delivering services to people who are being charged by their local authority for the services they use. This is particularly the case for services which work with people on a longer term basis – typically services working with older people and people with disabilities. Already service providers have experience of people reducing their use of services or turning them down because of charging but most local authorities have processes in place to assess the risk someone would face if they turned down services on the basis of charges. The actual level of charges which local authorities apply for housing support varies significantly between areas so that individuals may feel that what they are charged is more about where they live rather than what they can afford.

# 4. Appendices

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## APPENDIX 1

The scenarios presented to local authorities were:

### **Scenario 1: Visiting support**

Dan is 30 years old and lives in a housing association flat on his own. He has mild learning disability and uses a visiting housing support service for 3 hours per week to help him with shopping, cooking and other daily tasks. Dan's weekly income is approximately £160 (assuming entitlement to mid rate DLA and low rate Mobility, but excluding housing benefit). The weekly cost of the housing support service is £45.

### **Scenario 2: Sheltered housing**

Molly is 73 years old and lives in a one bedroom flat in sheltered housing. She is partially sighted and has some mobility issues but is able to deal with most everyday tasks for herself and has friends who help her with getting out and about. There is a sheltered housing manager on duty for part of the week and a telecare service in place. Together these services maintain daily contact with her and provide her with the security of having someone she can call on anytime of the day or night. Molly has a state pension of £97.65 and an occupational pension of £37.00 per week. She receives the lower Attendance Allowance rate at £47.80. Molly has £9,850 capital. The level of housing support grant available for the whole development is £16,712 which means a weekly amount of £10.37 per tenancy.

## APPENDIX 2

Responses from local authorities to the charging scenarios are laid out in the table below:

Local Authority	Scenario 1: Visiting support	Scenario 2: Sheltered housing
Aberdeen	No response	No response
Aberdeenshire	£0	£0
Angus	£10.98	£10.37
Argyll & Bute	£0	£4.20
Clackmannanshire	No response	No response
Dumfries & Galloway	£0	£10.37
Dundee	£45.00	£10.37
East Ayrshire	£37.95 (based on £213.85 income rather than £160)	£10.37
East Dunbartonshire	No response	No response
East Lothian	No response	No response
East Renfrewshire	No response	No response
City of Edinburgh	£0	£7.22
Eilean Siar	£0	£0
Falkirk	£0	£0
Fife	£0	If on HB no charge
Glasgow City	£11.29 (but if on Severe Disability Premium of £53.65pw then £30.07)	£9.61 (but if receiving Severe Disability Premium then £10.37)
Highland	£0	£10.37
Inverclyde	£24.70	£0
Midlothian	£2.03 if income includes DLA, or £25.50 if DLA is on top of figure given as income	£31.01
Moray	£28.04	£10.37
North Ayrshire	£12.80	£10.37
North Lanarkshire	£9.03	£10.37
Orkney	£11.34 (although many existing services users are protected from charges – so charge depends on date the service was used from)	£0
Perth & Kinross	£0	£10.37
Renfrewshire	£19.23	£16.47
Scottish Borders	£0 (also £0 under new policy)	£0 if on HB but £10.37 if not on HB (same for new policy)
Shetland	£0	£0
South Ayrshire	£0	£0
South Lanarkshire	£0	£0
Stirling	£19.02	£10.37
West Dunbartonshire	£20 per week (flat rate charged for housing support )	£0
West Lothian	£0	Unlikely

## 5. References

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<sup>1</sup> Fresh Thinking, New Ideas, <http://housingdiscussion.scotland.gov.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> Supporting People Guidance, Folder 1  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/access/housingsupport/supportpeople/Guidance>

<sup>3</sup> Cosla Health and Well-being Executive Group 18th February 2010, Appendix : Cosla Charging Guidance for non-residential social care services 2010 – 11

<http://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/ChiefExec/commRA07.nsf/e9ee67f48fbb9003802569d700533758/52556a211b5bb7a58025771f00362dc6?OpenDocument>

<sup>4</sup> Cosla Health and Well-being Executive Group 18th February 2010, Non-residential Social Care Services: Benchmarking Charges  
<http://www.cosla.gov.uk/attachments/execgroups/hw/hw100218item16.doc>