



Block Management • Estate Management • Commercial Property

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## Plymouth Block Management Newsletter June 2024

Welcome to the June 2024 Newsletter from Plymouth Block Management. We are excited to bring you insights into the dynamic world of property management and to share the latest updates about our company. We understand the evolving perceptions, expectations and needs in our industry and will pass on the coming changes to legislation to help you understand your rights.

**Challenges Faced:** Over the past two years, Plymouth Block Management has encountered significant challenges, particularly in maintaining communication standards and response times to ensure your satisfaction. This period has tested us, prompting a strategic reevaluation of our company ethos and approach to ensure proactive measures are in place for effective progress.

**Achievements:** We're excited to announce significant strides in enhancing our services. Our clients are experiencing tangible improvements within the company, notably the transfer of our governing body from ARMA and IRPM to form The Property Institute. This consolidation marks a crucial step forward, with the imminent establishment of a new government regulator to ensure transparency and honesty across the industry.

**Staff Development:** In response to challenges with staff retention, we've launched an apprentice training program. This initiative ensures an eighteen month commitment from PBM, fostering in-house expertise and bolstering staff retention amidst industry-wide challenges.

**Enhanced Communication:** We've revamped our communication channels to better serve you. Our new website provides real-time updates on property legal changes and other pertinent information. Additionally, our AI bot is available 24/7 to address any queries, alongside our informative newsletter and upto date blog. Our online payment system streamlines the process of paying service charges and ground rent invoices directly through the website.



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**Client Portal:** Introducing our resident system and director's portal, accessible through our website. These portals empower leaseholders and directors to access crucial information, including service charges, reserve funds, account details, and important block documentation fostering transparency and accessibility.

**Personalised Service:** Our commitment to personalised service includes continued visits by our property managers. After each visit, they leave visit cards with notes and health and safety updates under every apartment door, demonstrating our dedication to your well-being. We're also working towards providing scheduled property visit dates on our website, enabling you to address any concerns directly.

**Fire Door Rules:** We want to bring clarification and transparency to the 'fire-door' policy in relation to the current fire safety regulations. According to current regulations any building under 11 meters is not legally required to have fire doors and therefore fire door inspections. Any building that are under 11 meters that were built with fire doors installed will still legally need to be maintained and inspected. Plymouth Block Management take the safety and wellbeing of all Leaseholders and Tenants as the highest priority.

The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 from 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023 any multi-occupied building in England with stories over 11 meters in height, the communal fire doors (including self-closing doors) must be checked quarterly. In relation to flat entrance doors the responsible person must undertake on-a-best-endeavour-basis an annual check of the flat entrance doors (including self-closing devices) that lead onto a building's common areas. Remedial works for any issues found during the inspection of communal doors can be paid for from the Service Charge.

**Improved Responsiveness:** To further enhance communication and response times, our property managers will be contacting leaseholders every Thursday to update contact details and address any queries promptly. Missed calls will be returned the following morning, ensuring no concern goes unaddressed.

#### **Arrears and Payments:**

For those who diligently pay their service charge on time, we extend our gratitude for your promptness and cooperation. Your timely payments are crucial in ensuring the smooth operation and maintenance of our block, as outlined in the budget provided, which adheres to the RICS guide.

However, for those who have fallen behind on their service charge payments, we urge you to take immediate action. It's essential to understand that delayed payments can significantly impede necessary service and repairs to the block, unfairly impacting those who fulfil their financial obligations on time.

As the Managing Director of the company, I extend my sincere apologies for any inconvenience caused by the actions taken to recover unpaid service charge arrears, including the issuance of formal demands as per the legal requirements outlined in your property lease. Please be aware that failure to address arrears may result in legal action being pursued.



We believe in fairness and transparency in our dealings, which is why we adhere to a process that includes sending four formal letters to leaseholders as a fair warning of potential legal action. Once legal proceedings commence, the company is unable to discuss the matter until a conclusion is reached with our solicitors.

We understand that financial difficulties may arise, and we are here to assist you in finding a resolution. If you are experiencing difficulties in meeting your service charge obligations, please reach out to our team as soon as possible. We are committed to working with you to find a mutually beneficial solution.

### **Service Charge Increases:**

Over the last 24 months or so, leaseholders are likely to have seen their service charge bills go up significantly. In its newly launched Service Charge Index, The Property Institute (TPI) has reported average service charge increase of 41% since 2019, as compared with a cumulative inflation rate of 23% over the same period. In the last year, there has been a 3% increase in the average service charge bill, according to the data, based on data gathered from 108 estates. In 2024, the average service charge cost per estate was reported at £467,138, meaning an average of £3,634 per leaseholder.

While unwelcome, this should not come as a surprise. After all, people who live in freehold homes have had to contend with rising energy costs, higher building insurance premiums and increases in cost to home improvement or repairs and maintenance projects. These are all things that leaseholders pay for through the service charge and contributions to reserve funds. Rather than making a profit, managing agents collect service charge funds to meet real expenditure.

However, in addition to repairs and maintenance, insurance and energy, this year managing agents – and therefore leaseholders – are having to contend with the cost of implementing the new building safety regime, which was brought in by the Building Safety Act in 2022. Depending on the complexity and age – among other factors – of a building, the cost of implementation can vary hugely. Unlike cladding remediation, the government made no provision for this to be paid for by anyone other than leaseholders.

To conclude: At Plymouth Block Management, we're committed to enhancing our services and adapting to your evolving needs. Through improved communication, staff development initiatives, and advanced online platforms, we strive for excellence in leasehold management. We remain totally transparent and endeavour to work on your behalf. We have listened to our clients and made the operational changes to give a better service.

Thank you for your continued support.

Mark Christie  
Managing Director

