

20 February 2023



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Dear

2023/24 Rent increase

I know that this letter will be one you would prefer not to receive, as it concerns the increase to your rent from 1st April or 1st May. A calculation specific to your home is attached. Please read it and ask us questions if you do not understand it.

The headline increase in social housing rents is 7%. This is the highest increase since I joined Broadland 20 years ago.

I therefore want to explain the background to this rent increase and describe the impact it will have on our services to you.

In recent years rents have increased 1% faster than inflation. If we had used that formula this year, the rent increase would have been 11.1%. Understandably the Government and the housing sector were genuinely concerned about the impact of such a large increase in rents in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis.

As a result, the Government have capped rent increases for social housing tenants at 7%. Technically speaking, the rent cap applies only to existing social and affordable rented homes, but we have decided to cap all rent increases across all our homes at 7%.

We agree with the rent cap. We know that many people living in our communities are struggling with their bills, especially for electricity and food. We are pleased that the Government have acknowledged that. We were also pleased that they are increasing welfare benefits by 10.1% in April.

Nonetheless, we also know that our costs of running Broadland are going up much faster than 7%.

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Last April's rent rise for social housing rents was 4.1%. Since then, we have seen cost increases of over 10% and in some cases over 14%.

Costs have increased in all our activities and you will, I am afraid, recognise this if you pay a service charge as well as rent. For example, some of our electricity contracts have increased by 300%, which is extraordinary.

We have also seen significant increases in the interest we pay on our existing loans from the banks, which have been used to build and buy the homes we own.

In real terms, a 7% rent increase, whilst it is painful for you, is a reduction in our income. This sadly means that we must make some painful decisions on how we spend money.

We all know that £1 can only be spent once. The impact of less money coming in is that we will have to postpone some maintenance programmes that we know tenants regard as important.

Our focus over the next year will be on reactive maintenance and complying with every bit of regulation that applies to us. This includes any works required to comply with building and fire safety.

Following the awful disaster at Grenfell, the Government have made some major changes to fire regulations. If this directly affects your home, then you will hear from us. We have prepared several videos to help you understand how to stay safe in your home in case of a fire and other relevant information on where you live. Check out our webpage [www.broadlandgroup.org/tenants/fire safety](http://www.broadlandgroup.org/tenants/fire%20safety). Electrical safety in your home continues to be a high priority for us. Unsafe wiring is one of the most common causes of house fires, that is why we need to visit every 5 years to test your wiring and electrics.



I am sorry that some of our planned new windows, bathrooms and kitchens, as well as some other programmes, will be put on hold for now. I am also disappointed that we will have to delay some of our energy efficiency work. This seems particularly unwelcome, as we know that they reduce tenants' energy bills. However, we must be realistic about how much money we have available to spend.

We will continue to look for grants so we can make energy improvements to homes. Sadly, the nature of that money is that it is not guaranteed so spending cannot be committed before it is allocated.

Another casualty of the cost-of-living crisis will be in the number of new homes we will build.

We know that there are many people in housing need in Norfolk and Suffolk. We wish we could keep building about 150 homes every year, but instead we are going to half our programme for the next three or four years. The new annual target will be approximately 50 new rented and 25 new shared ownership homes.

The last few years have been difficult for many people in many ways. The pandemic changed the way we all lived. It also caused backlogs in our repairs to homes. I am pleased that we can finally see the end of the catch up – so far, since last April, we have completed over 8,720 repairs.

We will continue to do our best to support you. If you are struggling to pay your rent or look after your home, please talk to us sooner rather than later. The earlier you talk to us, the more likely it is that we will be able to help (see our website cost of living help and advice).

The next year will have challenges for all of us. We know that the increased cost of living affects everyone. I am pleased that our rent increases are well below the current inflation rate, but sad that this means that we will not be able to do everything we want to.

Broadland, as a charitable housing association, is 60 years old this year. We started because of a commitment to help people who cannot afford to buy or rent in the open market. Over the years we are proud that we have helped thousands of people.

We are committed to carrying on making a difference in Norfolk and North Suffolk. We look forward to the day when we can reinstate postponed programmes of improvements and updating to the homes we own. Please bear with us as we cope with increased costs. We all hope that the situation will have improved by next year and that inflation and energy costs will have come down.

Your sincerely



Michael Newey
D.Sc. (Hon) B.Sc. FRICS FCIH FRSA
Group Chief Executive

If you are worried about the cost of living crisis and want more information go to our website at www.broadlandgroup.org or use the QR code



Tenant Privacy Notice - changes effective from 1st March 2023

We update our Tenant Privacy Notice once a year, to ensure that we are clear in telling you what we are doing with your data. This year's update will be active from the 1st March 2023, and will be available on our website, www.broadlandgroup.org, under About Us – Governance Documents – Data Protection and GDPR.

Brief details of the seven updates (all are additions) made this year are listed below:

- 5.1 [we may gather data] directly from you when you fill in surveys which we will regularly circulate to you.
- 6.3.1 b) We may also need to share consolidated data from surveys with our regulator, but if we do this you will not be identifiable as an individual in the data we share.
- 6.3.1 e) We may take audio recordings of complaint meetings at any stage. If we do this, it will be solely for the purpose of producing accurate minutes. These will be deleted one month after the meeting.
- 6.3.2 d) We may share your forwarding address with the Council Tax department, to enable them to charge you and/or BHA accurately after you leave one of our properties.
- 9.6 We may need to share any data, including CCTV footage, with the police service if necessary. If this happens it will be formally requested by the police and will be managed on a case by case basis, with the intention of only sharing the data that is absolutely necessary.
- 9.7 We may need to share notes and photos, or other data, with the Fire Service if requested, for example after an incident. Where this is requested we will ensure that as little data as possible is shared.
- 9.8 If you are making a claim against a BHA insurance policy, we will endeavour to provide all the detail you need for this. The information should largely be provided by yourself, but if BHA needs to provide data we will do this on a case by case basis to make sure this data provision is covered by an appropriate lawful basis for sharing.

If you would like to talk to us about these updates, or about anything concerning Data Protection or our use of your data, you can contact us on data@broadlandgroup.org or speak to the Data Protection Officer on **01603 750173**.