

Section 20 frequently asked questions

This FAQ explains Section 20 consultation notices in simple terms. It covers what they are, why you may have received one, and what happens next.

A Section 20 notice affects customers who pay a service charge that can change (known as variable service charge payers) and may have to pay towards building work or a long-term service. This usually includes leaseholders, shared owners and some other relevant customers.

If you have questions about a notice you have received, please get in touch using the contact details in the covering letter.

If you need this document in another format or language, please visit a2dominion.co.uk/translations, or call 0800 432 0077.

What is a Section 20 consultation notice?

A Section 20 consultation is a legal process landlords must follow before starting certain major works or signing long-term contracts that customers (whose service charges can change) may pay for through the service charge.

It applies when the cost to any one affected customer is expected to go above the legal limit.

The notice explains what's planned, why it's needed, and how you can share your views in writing.

Why have I received a Section 20 notice?

You've received a notice because works, services or a long-term agreement are being planned for your building or estate, and some of the cost may be charged through your service charge.

By law, landlords must consult affected customers when those costs are likely to go above set limits.

Do you take my suggestions into account?

Yes. We read and consider all written comments we receive during the 30-day consultation period.

Your comments can help us understand practical issues, concerns about timing or access, and anything else relevant to your building or estate.

We may not be able to make every change people ask for, but we will consider the comments we receive and explain our response where appropriate.

Do I have to pay anything now?

No. A notice is not a demand for payment.

Any service charge you may need to pay will be worked out later, in line with your lease or tenancy agreement, once the works, services and costs are confirmed.

What are qualifying works?

Qualifying works are major works to a building or estate where the cost through the service charge is expected to be more than £250 for any one affected customer, including value added tax (VAT).

This could include major repairs, decorating, roof or lift repairs, fire safety works, window replacements, or other work in shared spaces. Your notice will explain what is planned and why.

What are qualifying long-term agreements?

A qualifying long-term agreement is a contract that lasts more than 12 months and is expected to cost any one affected customer more than £100 a year through the service charge, including value added tax (VAT).

This could cover services such as cleaning, grounds maintenance, lift servicing, fire alarm servicing, door entry maintenance, closed circuit television (CCTV) maintenance, waste services or building management.

Some long-term agreements may also allow larger repair, replacement, or improvement works to be instructed under the agreement. Where those works are expected to cost any one affected customer more than £250, they may also be treated as qualifying works (see above) and may require a separate Section 20 consultation for the works.

What's included in a Section 20 consultation?

A Section 20 consultation usually has two or three stages, depending on the type of work or contract.

- **Stage 1 - Notice of intention**

This tells you what is being planned, why it may be needed, and how to share your comments in writing.

In some cases, it will also explain how to nominate a contractor.

You have 30 days from the date of the notice to respond in writing.

- **Stage 2 - Notice of proposals or estimates**

This gives further information about the estimates, proposals, contractors, or costs being considered.

Stage 2 has a further 30-day observation period.

- **Stage 3 - Notice of award or reasons (not always needed)**

This explains the decision that has been made and why, if needed.

For example, for qualifying works, a Stage 3 notice is not usually needed if the contract is awarded to the lowest estimate or to a contractor nominated by affected customers.

The landlord or managing agent will share this within 21 days of the contract being agreed.

What is an observation period?

An observation period is the time you have to send written comments or questions about a Section 20 notice.

It's a 30-day period from the date of the notice, and your notice will explain where to send your comments.

What is public notice?

In some cases, instead of asking affected customers to nominate contractors, the law requires the proposed works or services to be advertised publicly.

Affected customers are still consulted. You will still receive notices, be told what is planned, and be able to send written comments.

The main difference is that we do not invite contractor suggestions, because the contractor is chosen through a formal open tender process instead.

Why have I received a notice from another landlord, managing agent, or third party?

Some buildings and estates are looked after by more than one organisation.

For example, we may be your landlord, but another organisation or managing agent may be responsible for arranging certain works, services, contracts or estate management. They may also be the organisation sending the notice and managing the consultation.

If you receive a notice from another organisation or managing agent, please follow the instructions in that notice. This includes sending any comments, questions or contractor nominations to the address or email shown there.

While we may not be running that consultation directly, we understand the costs may still affect you. Where appropriate, we may review the information shared with us and pass on any concerns or questions with the organisation managing the process.

Where can I get independent advice about Section 20 or service charges?

You can get free, independent advice from the Leasehold Advisory Service. They provide clear guidance to help you understand your rights and what a Section 20 notice means for you.

Visit: <https://www.lease-advice.org/>