

Transport and Environment Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 19 March 2013

Emergency Water Ingress Charges

Item number	7.18
Report number	
Wards	All

Links

Coalition pledges	None
Council outcomes	CO16
Single Outcome Agreement	SO2 and SO4

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Executive summary

Emergency Water Ingress Charges

Summary

This report requests the Transport and Environment Committee to approve proposed amendments to the current charging arrangements for responding to emergency water ingress requests.

Recommendations

- 1 It is recommended that Committee:
 - a) approves the revised charges for response to emergency water ingress requests.

Measures of success

- The emergency water ingress response service is provided on a full cost recovery basis.

Financial impact

- The amended arrangements for charging should allow full recovery of costs for providing an emergency response, as approved by the Executive of the Council on 18 November 2003.
- The additional income will be used to offset unfunded pressures within Services for Communities.

Equalities impact

The proposals may have an impact on the protected characteristic contained within the Public Sector Equality Duties (2010) and as such a summary Equality and Rights Impact Assessment Proforma has been completed. The service will continue to meet Human Rights obligations and as such, the report does not indicate a requirement for a formal Equalities Impact Assessment.

Sustainability impact

This report does not in itself produce any direct environmental impact.

Consultation and engagement

Not applicable

Background reading / external references

[Water Ingress – Emergency Response](#) (Executive of the Council, 18 November 2003)

Emergency Water Ingress Charges

1. Background

- 1.1 Following a decision taken in 2003 by Lothian and Borders Police and Fire and Rescue Services to cease responding to emergency water leaks in Edinburgh, it was agreed that the Council, which was already responding to a number of such incidents, would respond to all incidents.
- 1.2 Householders suffering serious water leaks from neighbouring properties are unable to force entry or take remedial action to stop the leak when occupiers are not present. The inability to deal with significant water ingress into a property may have serious implications for the safety and structural integrity of the property and may impact on the wellbeing and safety of householders affected by the water ingress.
- 1.3 The Council has relevant powers to investigate and force entry under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. The legislation permits reasonable cost recovery, including recovery of officer time and any contractors (locksmiths, plumbers) costs required to assist officers in their duties. The Executive of the Council on 18 November 2003 decided that provision of a water ingress emergency response service was essential to protect the safety and wellbeing of Edinburgh residents affected by water leaks into their property and approved provision of this service, including recovery of all reasonable costs.

2. Main report

Operational Arrangements

- 2.1 The Council's response to emergency water ingress requests is co-ordinated by the Environmental Health Service. During normal working hours, the Public Health Team deals with service requests. Responses outside of normal hours are covered by standby arrangements with staff in Environmental Health and Community Safety.
- 2.2 The decision to attend an incident is based on the officer's assessment of the problem. This is established through the initial telephone discussion with the householder suffering the water leak. If attendance is considered necessary, it will usually be within one hour of notification of the problem.

Circumstances where it is considered an emergency response is required are:

- clear and present danger of serious injury

- water entering a property at or near mains pressure where it is uncontrollable and likely to cause serious damage to property and/or present a serious risk to health or safety.

Current Charging Arrangements

- 2.3 Historically the Council has not recovered all reasonable costs for providing the emergency water ingress service. Currently costs are recovered only when the incident occurs outside normal working hours and when it is necessary to call out a contractor. The Council also makes a small charge towards the administration costs of invoicing. Recovery of costs is from the householder causing or responsible for the water leak, not the householder suffering the consequences of the leak.

Proposed Revised Charging Arrangements

- 2.4 Revised charging arrangements are proposed to enable the Council to recover all reasonable costs for providing the emergency water ingress service, in accordance with the original Council decision. The charges will be made against the householder causing or responsible for the water leak.

The additional income from recovered costs will be used to offset unfunded pressures within Services for Communities.

- 2.5 Charge for dealing with an emergency incident

It is proposed that on all occasions where responsibility for the leak can be established, a charge will be made. The charge will be based on officer time required to deal with the problem and will vary depending on whether the incident occurs during or out of normal office hours and the number of officers required at the incident, e.g. two officers will be required when forced entry is necessary, for evidential purposes. The charge, including administration charge, will range from £110 to £270 per incident, based on an average attendance time of 2 hours. In addition, any contractors' costs will also be recovered. Recovery of costs will be against the householder responsible for causing the water ingress and not against the householder affected by the water ingress.

- 2.6 Call-out charge

Officers' powers to investigate and enter premises causing water ingress relate to emergency water ingress incidents only. This requires the officer to make a judgement based on the information provided by the complainant during the initial telephone contact. Experience has shown that the situation can be presented as an emergency where in fact the incident is much less serious. To minimise unnecessary call-outs it is proposed that a call out charge of £30 would be made if an officer attends and the situation is not serious or an emergency.

Anyone reporting a water ingress situation will be advised of this potential charge to them during the initial call and advised this will be charged if the situation is not of an emergency nature. A call-out charge of £30 is proposed.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that Committee:
- a) approves the revised charges for response to emergency water ingress requests.

Mark Turley

Director of Services for Communities

Links

Coalition pledges

Council outcomes CO16 Well housed

Single Outcome Agreement SO2 Edinburgh's citizens experience improved health and wellbeing, with reduced inequalities in health
SO4 Edinburgh's communities are safer and have improved physical and social fabric

Appendices None