

Andrew Kidds
Head of Customer Contact

 @Andkidds_Accent



Customer Portal

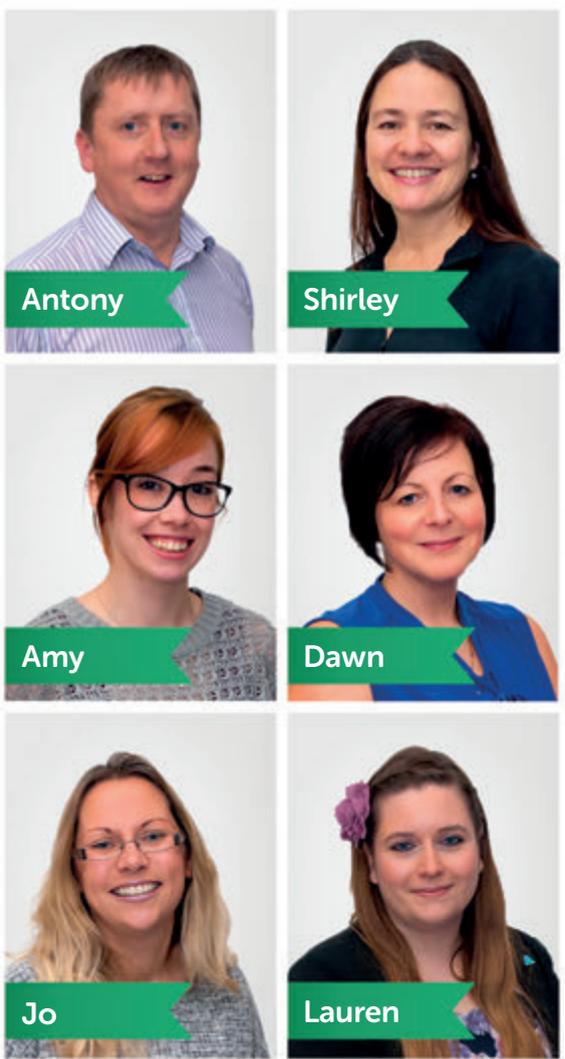
Since the launch of our customer portal, almost 3500 residents have activated their personal accounts.

If you haven't already accessed your account, or you've misplaced your username or password, please contact us. Those of you who have already activated your accounts will know how simple and easy the service is to use.

It's a quick and easy way to keep track of your account, and it's available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – so it's convenient too!

Visit <https://login.accentgroup.org> today and see for yourself!

 Please note this service is not currently available to freeholders.



New service for homeowners

Later in the year, we will be changing the way we deliver services to homeowners (see more on page 7). In the meantime, to ensure you receive the 'personal, modern and better service' we promise, we have introduced a dedicated contact number and email address that will connect you directly to a customer advisor who will be able to help with all your enquiries.

 0345 678 0588  homeownership@accentgroup.org

The new homeownership number will get you straight through to our homeownership contact centre team (pictured left), who are based in Shipley, West Yorkshire. The team will deal with all your enquiries on right to buy, service charges, leases or transfers. They will also raise repairs for the areas we are responsible for.

The new service will ensure your call is answered by an advisor trained in home ownership. If you prefer you can still contact us using the current generic number, which will continue to appear on our letterhead for the time being.



Wanted: Resident Members

Gordon Perry, Chief Executive

🐦 @accentgroupLtd

We're looking for committed and enthusiastic residents to join our regional compliance and scrutiny committees. You will work closely with other residents, our independent committee members and our senior managers, to scrutinise regional performance and contribute to the regional improvement of services.

This is an important role and a great opportunity if you are looking to develop personally or further your career, whilst helping to improve our services. We will provide all the training and support you need.

We value the knowledge and experience our resident members can bring to the committee. We need people with good communication skills, who are keen to learn and are passionate about providing excellent services to our residents.

The committee works on a voluntary basis. We would need you to attend at least four formal meetings and up to four ad-hoc meetings a year. Meetings are held in the evening but there may be some daytime visits to our homes. You will be paid travel expenses and any loss of earnings.



Please give serious thought to this opportunity and, if you'd like to apply, we'd love to hear from you. Contact us or email customerservices@accentgroup.org for more details



Claire Stone

Executive Director of Communities & Assets

@claires1965



**Surveyor
Project
page 7**



"We apologise for any inconvenience caused and thank you for your comments received"

Communal Repairs Contract

Accent will not be entering into the repairs and maintenance contracts we recently wrote to you about.

We realised that the proposed contracts were commercially unviable for Accent. As a result of the decision, we will undertake a review of how we should deliver our service in future. For now, we will focus on making sure that our existing services are sustained and meet residents' satisfaction, then focus on a re-launch in April 2017.

We now have an opportunity to look again at how we deliver our repairs and maintenance contracts to see if we can further improve service and value for money. We will seek to re-procure these services later this year and will provide you with the same level of communication on all contractual information where necessary. In the meantime we will continue to provide a high level of service to all of our leaseholders.

As part of this commitment Accent has invested in a series of surveying programmes which will assist further procurement programmes in the future.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR LEASE?

If the answer is 'no' or 'not sure' or 'only some of it', why not have a look at the 'Understanding your lease quiz' on the LEASE website: www.lease-advice.org.



Review of Management Fees

As part of your service charge, we collect a management fee. This covers the cost of providing the service. It includes things like office overheads, the salaries of those who deliver the service, and the cost of managing contracts. We know you want to see clarity in the charges that you pay, and that we need to set out exactly what we are charging for and demonstrate that it is a reasonable cost.

What are Management Fees?

The management fees you pay us as part of your service charges are basically the costs that we incur in managing the property. They pay for the offices, salaries, National Insurance, pensions and training of staff; computer systems, telephones, post, stationery etc. Without management fees, we would not have the income to run the business and provide a service to you.

The rest of your service charge is used to pay for the services, repairs and insurances required for your building.

We have, therefore, reviewed the management charge element of your leasehold service charges to ensure that we recover the full cost of the service.

We have noticed that the charges vary considerably from scheme to scheme and do not always reflect the level of services received.

At present, we charge both a flat fee and a variable administration charge to cover our costs in providing a service. We think this may be confusing. So, from April 2017 we will be charging a fixed annual fee based on the type of property you live in and the level of services you receive. For example, people who live in houses and bungalows won't contribute towards the management of flats, but will contribute to the management of communal estate areas where there is a charge for estate services.

We believe that this will provide a fairer, more transparent way of charging and it will mean that this element of your service charge will not change significantly year on year.

We have introduced a tiered level of charging each property type (it's similar to your council tax banding) and is grouped as follows:

- TIER 1**
- > Shared ownership and bungalows no estate charges
 - > Houses and flats covered fully by managing agent
 - > Freehold with charges – small estate

- TIER 2**
- > Freehold with charges on estates
 - > Shared ownership houses on estates with charges
 - > Leasehold houses with charges

- TIER 3**
- > Shared owners flats and maisonettes
 - > Leasehold flats and maisonettes

- TIER 4**
- > Bungalows managed by DOMUS
 - > Freeholder with charges managed by DOMUS
 - > Bungalows for the elderly

- TIER 5**
- > Shared Owners Accent responsible for repairs
 - > Freeholder Accent responsible for repairs
 - > DOMUS managed leasehold for elderly
 - > Flats for the elderly

We expect the annual fixed management fee for each Tier for the 2017/18 financial period to be as listed in the table below:

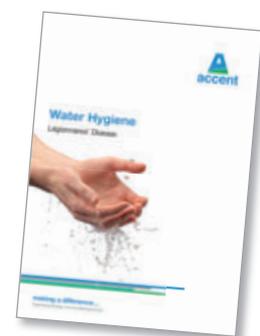
| TIER | AMOUNT £ per annum | AMOUNT £ per Week |
|------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | £100 | £1.92 |
| 2 | £175 | £3.37 |
| 3 | £325 | £6.25 |
| 4 | £375 | £7.21 |
| 5 | £425 | £8.17 |

What happens now?

If you have any comments regarding this proposal, please contact us. We will, of course, contact each of you with details of what tier your property has been placed in and what your annual charge will be in due course.

Our Health & Safety Responsibilities

Our health and safety leaflets (with all our customer leaflets) are available to view and download on our website.



Our health and safety leaflets provide detail on our responsibilities as your landlord, and guidance on how you can protect you and your family from the risks that can occur in your home.

- **Gas Safety** – keeping the gas supply and appliances in your home safe.
- **Asbestos** – where and why asbestos may be in your home and what you need to know.
- **Water Hygiene** - the possible causes and symptoms of Legionnaires' disease and simple precautions to take.
- **Health & Safety and Energy Efficiency** – keeping your home safe, warm and energy efficient.
- **Condensation** – preventing damp and condensation.

To view or download any of our leaflets please visit www.accentgroup.org/customer-publications – if you don't have access to a printer, and you would like any of our leaflets, please contact us.



Andrew Williams

Executive Director
Customer Services

@accentgrouppltd



Fire regulation arrangements for communal areas

In accordance with fire regulations, we have a responsibility to:

- Keep stairs, landings and corridors in communal areas of blocks of flats clear of tripping hazards.
- Take reasonable steps to prevent the spread of fire and remove things which are a fire hazard.

Some landlords do not allow any items in corridors and stairways. We will allow some, but we may need to restrict them to make sure everyone stays safe. We carry out

an annual inspection, a 'fire risk assessment', to make sure that communal areas are safe and comply with relevant fire legislation. If there are any issues with items in communal areas, we will talk to you about them. In some cases your items may be removed, for example, you must not leave bikes, shopping trolley bags or rubbish in communal areas.

If you would like one of our information leaflets, please contact us or visit our website.

Important
Information
Please take
note...

Buying more of your home

Many people who can't afford to buy their home outright choose shared ownership. You buy part of your home, and pay rent on the rest.

You can also choose to increase the share you own gradually until you are the outright owner. This is called 'staircasing'. Please check your lease first as some leases do not allow you to purchase your home outright.

Normally you would buy further shares in a minimum of 10% blocks (your lease may have more detail). The more you own, the smaller share you rent, so both your mortgage and your rent payments change. It's important to check out all the costs involved to make sure they are affordable. Your rent account will need to be up to date before you can proceed.

Peter, a recent shared owner says...

"It was relatively easy to apply for and Accent turned it round really quickly. They got the valuation... and I got the mortgage. Now I own my home."

If you end up owning your home outright in the future there will be no further rent payments.

In some cases there can be a limit on how high you can 'staircase' up, perhaps ultimately towards owning a maximum of 70% of your home. This is often in areas where there have been strict planning clauses about who lives in the property, e.g. only people over the age of 55. Check out your lease for the full terms which apply to your property as they vary from one home or development to another. If you have any queries about your entitlement or your options, please contact us.



If you are interested in increasing the share you own in your home, send your request in writing to the address below or email legalsales@accentgroup.org

Homeownership Team
Accent Group Limited
Charlestown House
Acorn Industrial Estate
Charlestown, Shipley
West Yorkshire
BD17 7SW



Insurance

Whether you own your home outright, or you are a shared owner or a leaseholder, it's essential you have the right insurance for your needs...



You need to have contents insurance in case anything inside your home is lost or damaged. This can also cover, but doesn't always, fixtures and fittings like kitchen units and bathroom fittings. Remember that if something goes wrong with any of your appliances it's important you can afford to have them repaired or if possible claim on your house insurance.

Insurance is often one of the things people stop paying for if they are trying to reduce their outgoings, but is often regretted when something goes wrong. If you're a leaseholder and you live in a block of flats, your landlord, Accent, DOMUS, or managing agent, will pay to insure the main building and the communal areas in case of damage and the need to claim, but this does not cover your personal space or property.

It is always worth checking your own lease documents for more information.

How we deliver the service

We are changing how we deliver services to all our homeowners, with an emphasis on delivering a more tailored service to meet your expectations and requirements in this distinctive part of our business.

This will be achieved by:

- ✓ Introducing dedicated customer advisers in our contact centre.
- ✓ Establishing a central homeownership team.
- ✓ Appointing a homeownership manager.
- ✓ Providing more information on homeownership on our website
- ✓ Launching a range of on-line leaflets to explain leasehold, shared ownership and service charge matters.

There will be more information in the next issue. If you have any ideas for useful leaflets or information you'd like to see on our website, please let us know.



Surveying Project

Through to the end of the summer, you may spot one of our contract surveyors on site carrying out an inspection. They are

updating our information on the condition and life expectancy of facilities such as lighting, wiring, lifts etc, and attributes of our buildings like roofs, windows, main entrance doors. Once this exercise has been completed, we will then be in a better position to plan what major repairs are required when, and share this with you.

All our staff have photo ID. If you have any concerns about who is in your building ask to see their identification or ask their name and call our contact centre on 0345 678 0555.



Rachael Walsh
Head of Strategy & Regulation

 @rachaelwaccent



We have recently reviewed how we should engage with you on scrutinising and improving services...

We know that many of you want information, influence and choice in the services we deliver, but don't have the time or desire to get actively involved. So, we are looking at ways to make it easy for you to influence how we deliver services.

One way we can do this is to make more use of the customer profile information you have already given us, for example, when we make decisions about services for older or younger people, or families. We will also make it easier for you to engage with us electronically by, for example, online and email surveys.

Of course, you can still get more involved if you would like to. Our compliance and scrutiny committees are responsible for ensuring services are delivered well within our regions, and we are always looking for residents to join (see page 2). We also hope you will get involved in scrutiny exercises, for example, by attending a focus group or assessing the quality of specific services.

If you are interested in any of the above ways of getting involved, or would just like more information, please contact us.



We hope you've enjoyed reading the first edition of your newsletter. If you have any suggestions or comments that could improve Homeownership News, then please let us know, contact details below...

STAY IN TOUCH!

 Charlestown House
Acorn Park Industrial Estate
Charlestown, Shipley
West Yorkshire BD17 7SW

 0345 678 0588

 <https://login.accentgroup.org>

 homeownership@accentgroup.org

 @accentgroupLtd



Our contact centre is open from 8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday, and from 8am – 12pm on Saturday