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**FIRST-TIER TRIBUNAL
PROPERTY CHAMBER
(RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY)**

Case Reference : LON/00AP/LSC/0709

Property : 22c Woodland Rise London N10
3UG

Applicant : A Constantinou

Representative :

Respondent : M Chaudri

Representative :

Type of Application : For the determination of the
reasonableness of and the liability
to pay a service charge

Tribunal Members : Dr Helen Carr
Mr Hugh Geddes

**Date and venue of
Hearing** : 10 Alfred Place, London WC1E 7LR

Date of Decision : 17th December 2013

DECISION

Decisions of the tribunal

- (1) The tribunal determines that the demands for insurance for the years 2011 – 13 are payable by the Applicant.
- (2) The tribunal makes the determinations as set out under the various headings in this Decision.
- (3) The tribunal does not make an order under section 20C of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

The application

1. The Applicant seeks a determination pursuant to s.27A of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (“the 1985 Act”) as to the amount of service charges payable by the Applicant in respect of the service charge years 2011 - 13.
2. The relevant legal provisions are set out in the Appendix to this decision.

The hearing

3. The Tribunal held a pre-trial review of this matter on 21st October 2013 and issued directions on the same date. In those directions it was decided that the matter should be determined on the basis of written representations and without an oral hearing.
4. The Directions gave an opportunity for either party to request an oral hearing. Neither of the parties requested an oral hearing and the matter is therefore being determined on the basis of the papers provided.

The background

5. The property which is the subject of this application is a period property converted in 1985-6 into three flats; a ground floor two bedroom flat with sole use of the garden, a two bedroom first floor flat and a one bedroom top floor flat.
6. Neither party requested an inspection and the tribunal did not consider that one was necessary, nor would it have been proportionate to the issues in dispute.
7. The Applicant holds a long lease of the property which requires the landlord to provide services and the tenant to contribute towards their

costs by way of a variable service charge. The specific provisions of the lease and will be referred to below, where appropriate.

The issues

8. At the start of the hearing the parties identified the relevant issues for determination as follows:
 - (i) The payability and/or reasonableness of service charges for 2011 – 2013 relating to insurance premium and the 10% service charge for management of insurance.

9. Having considered all of the documents provided, the tribunal has made determinations on the issue as follows.

Insurance

10. The Applicant's case is that the insurance charges made by the Respondent are excessive. The total demand for insurance for the property in 2011 was £2,348.94, with the Applicant's share being £685 (which includes 10% management charges), the total demand for insurance in 2012 was £2,539.67 with the applicant's share being £814.50, (again including 10% management charges) and in 2013 the total demand for insurance was £2,499.63 plus £318.66 of which the Applicant's share was £904.20 (including 10% management charges).

11. The Applicant has obtained an alternative quotation for insurance from AXA for £1080 which he states is on similar terms to the policy obtained by the Respondent.

12. The Applicant notes that the Respondent responded to complaints by the Applicant and obtained and paid for an insurance policy with AXA of £1272.94. However the policy was not taken out because the Applicant made an insurance claim and the AXA offer was withdrawn. The policy with AXA was not taken up once the claim was resolved.

13. The Respondent argues that the Applicant was fully aware of the insurance charges when he purchased the flat in 2011. His solicitor did not raise any issues in connection with the level of charges.

14. The Respondent owns one of the flats in the building which he lets out to tenants. He pays the largest share of the insurance and therefore it would not be in his interests to obtain excessively expensive cover.

15. In response to complaints about the cost of insurance the Respondent finally agreed to seek cover with the Applicant's preferred insurer, AXA, although he chose not take the cover suggested by the Applicant but a different policy, which he considered adequate.
16. Almost immediately after the Respondent instructed his broker to take out the AXA policy the Applicant notified the Respondent that he wanted to make an insurance claim. The Respondent notified the insurers and all insurance offers were withdrawn.
17. This caused stress to the Respondent and delayed the sale of another lessee's property. Importantly it caused expense as the Respondent had to organise daily and weekly emergency insurance cover which explains the extension cover costs charged in 2013. Eventually normal cover was put in place for 2013.
18. The Respondent states that he does not receive any commission from the broker. The broker, Berkley Alexander are a reputable and award winning broker. The insurance policies chosen by the Respondent are ones that he considers to be in the long term best interests of the Building.
19. The Respondent states that the cover offered by AXA in the quote obtained by the Applicant was a landlord's policy and did not disclose the claims history of the property.
20. The Applicant's response to the points made by the Respondent are set out in a letter to the Tribunal dated 2nd December 2013. He explains the timing of his claim, and states that he provided full information to AXA about the property so that the quote obtained was on a like for like basis.

The tribunal's decision

21. The tribunal determines that the amount payable in respect of insurance charges is reasonable and payable.

Reasons for the tribunal's decision

22. The Respondent has a long term interest in the property and is entitled to choose insurance policies which reflect that interest as long as the costs are reasonable.
23. Although the Applicant has produced a cheaper quote, reasonableness does not equate to the cheapest available policy. The insurance charges, in the experience of the tribunal, fall within a reasonable scale.

Application under s.20C and refund of fees

24. In the application for the Applicant applied for an order under section 20C of the 1985 Act. Having read the documentation from the parties and taking into account the determinations above, the tribunal determines not make an order under section 20C of the 1985 Act.

Name: Helen Carr

Date: 17th December 2013

Appendix of relevant legislation

Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (as amended)

Section 18

- (1) In the following provisions of this Act "service charge" means an amount payable by a tenant of a dwelling as part of or in addition to the rent -
 - (a) which is payable, directly or indirectly, for services, repairs, maintenance, improvements or insurance or the landlord's costs of management, and
 - (b) the whole or part of which varies or may vary according to the relevant costs.
- (2) The relevant costs are the costs or estimated costs incurred or to be incurred by or on behalf of the landlord, or a superior landlord, in connection with the matters for which the service charge is payable.
- (3) For this purpose -
 - (a) "costs" includes overheads, and
 - (b) costs are relevant costs in relation to a service charge whether they are incurred, or to be incurred, in the period for which the service charge is payable or in an earlier or later period.

Section 19

- (1) Relevant costs shall be taken into account in determining the amount of a service charge payable for a period -
 - (a) only to the extent that they are reasonably incurred, and
 - (b) where they are incurred on the provisions of services or the carrying out of works, only if the services or works are of a reasonable standard;and the amount payable shall be limited accordingly.
- (2) Where a service charge is payable before the relevant costs are incurred, no greater amount than is reasonable is so payable, and after the relevant costs have been incurred any necessary adjustment shall be made by repayment, reduction or subsequent charges or otherwise.

Section 27A

- (1) An application may be made to the appropriate tribunal for a determination whether a service charge is payable and, if it is, as to -
 - (a) the person by whom it is payable,
 - (b) the person to whom it is payable,
 - (c) the amount which is payable,

- (d) the date at or by which it is payable, and
 - (e) the manner in which it is payable.
- (2) Subsection (1) applies whether or not any payment has been made.
- (3) An application may also be made to the appropriate tribunal for a determination whether, if costs were incurred for services, repairs, maintenance, improvements, insurance or management of any specified description, a service charge would be payable for the costs and, if it would, as to -
- (a) the person by whom it would be payable,
 - (b) the person to whom it would be payable,
 - (c) the amount which would be payable,
 - (d) the date at or by which it would be payable, and
 - (e) the manner in which it would be payable.
- (4) No application under subsection (1) or (3) may be made in respect of a matter which -
- (a) has been agreed or admitted by the tenant,
 - (b) has been, or is to be, referred to arbitration pursuant to a post-dispute arbitration agreement to which the tenant is a party,
 - (c) has been the subject of determination by a court, or
 - (d) has been the subject of determination by an arbitral tribunal pursuant to a post-dispute arbitration agreement.
- (5) But the tenant is not to be taken to have agreed or admitted any matter by reason only of having made any payment.

Section 20

- (1) Where this section applies to any qualifying works or qualifying long term agreement, the relevant contributions of tenants are limited in accordance with subsection (6) or (7) (or both) unless the consultation requirements have been either—
- (a) complied with in relation to the works or agreement, or
 - (b) dispensed with in relation to the works or agreement by (or on appeal from) the appropriate tribunal .
- (2) In this section “relevant contribution”, in relation to a tenant and any works or agreement, is the amount which he may be required under the terms of his lease to contribute (by the payment of service charges) to relevant costs incurred on carrying out the works or under the agreement.
- (3) This section applies to qualifying works if relevant costs incurred on carrying out the works exceed an appropriate amount.
- (4) The Secretary of State may by regulations provide that this section applies to a qualifying long term agreement—

- (a) if relevant costs incurred under the agreement exceed an appropriate amount, or
 - (b) if relevant costs incurred under the agreement during a period prescribed by the regulations exceed an appropriate amount.
- (5) An appropriate amount is an amount set by regulations made by the Secretary of State; and the regulations may make provision for either or both of the following to be an appropriate amount—
- (a) an amount prescribed by, or determined in accordance with, the regulations, and
 - (b) an amount which results in the relevant contribution of any one or more tenants being an amount prescribed by, or determined in accordance with, the regulations.
- (6) Where an appropriate amount is set by virtue of paragraph (a) of subsection (5), the amount of the relevant costs incurred on carrying out the works or under the agreement which may be taken into account in determining the relevant contributions of tenants is limited to the appropriate amount.
- (7) Where an appropriate amount is set by virtue of paragraph (b) of that subsection, the amount of the relevant contribution of the tenant, or each of the tenants, whose relevant contribution would otherwise exceed the amount prescribed by, or determined in accordance with, the regulations is limited to the amount so prescribed or determined.]

Section 20B

- (1) If any of the relevant costs taken into account in determining the amount of any service charge were incurred more than 18 months before a demand for payment of the service charge is served on the tenant, then (subject to subsection (2)), the tenant shall not be liable to pay so much of the service charge as reflects the costs so incurred.
- (2) Subsection (1) shall not apply if, within the period of 18 months beginning with the date when the relevant costs in question were incurred, the tenant was notified in writing that those costs had been incurred and that he would subsequently be required under the terms of his lease to contribute to them by the payment of a service charge.

Section 20C

- (1) A tenant may make an application for an order that all or any of the costs incurred, or to be incurred, by the landlord in connection with proceedings before a court, residential property tribunal or the Upper Tribunal, or in connection with arbitration proceedings, are

not to be regarded as relevant costs to be taken into account in determining the amount of any service charge payable by the tenant or any other person or persons specified in the application.

- (2) The application shall be made—
 - (a) in the case of court proceedings, to the court before which the proceedings are taking place or, if the application is made after the proceedings are concluded, to a county court;
 - (aa) in the case of proceedings before a residential property tribunal, to that tribunal;
 - (b) in the case of proceedings before a residential property tribunal, to the tribunal before which the proceedings are taking place or, if the application is made after the proceedings are concluded, to any residential property tribunal;
 - (c) in the case of proceedings before the Upper Tribunal, to the tribunal;
 - (d) in the case of arbitration proceedings, to the arbitral tribunal or, if the application is made after the proceedings are concluded, to a county court.
- (3) The court or tribunal to which the application is made may make such order on the application as it considers just and equitable in the circumstances.

Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002

Schedule 11, paragraph 1

- (1) In this Part of this Schedule “administration charge” means an amount payable by a tenant of a dwelling as part of or in addition to the rent which is payable, directly or indirectly—
 - (a) for or in connection with the grant of approvals under his lease, or applications for such approvals,
 - (b) for or in connection with the provision of information or documents by or on behalf of the landlord or a person who is party to his lease otherwise than as landlord or tenant,
 - (c) in respect of a failure by the tenant to make a payment by the due date to the landlord or a person who is party to his lease otherwise than as landlord or tenant, or
 - (d) in connection with a breach (or alleged breach) of a covenant or condition in his lease.
- (2) But an amount payable by the tenant of a dwelling the rent of which is registered under Part 4 of the Rent Act 1977 (c. 42) is not an administration charge, unless the amount registered is entered as a variable amount in pursuance of section 71(4) of that Act.

- (3) In this Part of this Schedule “variable administration charge” means an administration charge payable by a tenant which is neither—
- (a) specified in his lease, nor
 - (b) calculated in accordance with a formula specified in his lease.
- (4) An order amending sub-paragraph (1) may be made by the appropriate national authority.

Schedule 11, paragraph 2

A variable administration charge is payable only to the extent that the amount of the charge is reasonable.

Schedule 11, paragraph 5

- (1) An application may be made to the appropriate tribunal for a determination whether an administration charge is payable and, if it is, as to—
- (a) the person by whom it is payable,
 - (b) the person to whom it is payable,
 - (c) the amount which is payable,
 - (d) the date at or by which it is payable, and
 - (e) the manner in which it is payable.
- (2) Sub-paragraph (1) applies whether or not any payment has been made.
- (3) The jurisdiction conferred on the appropriate tribunal in respect of any matter by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) is in addition to any jurisdiction of a court in respect of the matter.
- (4) No application under sub-paragraph (1) may be made in respect of a matter which—
- (a) has been agreed or admitted by the tenant,
 - (b) has been, or is to be, referred to arbitration pursuant to a post-dispute arbitration agreement to which the tenant is a party,
 - (c) has been the subject of determination by a court, or
 - (d) has been the subject of determination by an arbitral tribunal pursuant to a post-dispute arbitration agreement.
- (5) But the tenant is not to be taken to have agreed or admitted any matter by reason only of having made any payment.
- (6) An agreement by the tenant of a dwelling (other than a post-dispute arbitration agreement) is void in so far as it purports to provide for a determination—
- (a) in a particular manner, or

(b) on particular evidence,
of any question which may be the subject matter of an application
under sub-paragraph (1).