

## Achieving Client satisfaction through best practice in the management of Multi-unit residential estates

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### INTRODUCTION

A whole range of reports have been produced on residential multi-unit development and management since the Auctioneering /Estate Agents Review Group first outlined the problems and the need for regulation in their report in July 2005.

There are also very serious underlying problems in multi-unit development – such as significant failings in the legal framework and estate conveyancing documentation, limitations and deficiencies with the current planning legislation and the system of Building control, and limited recourse or remedy for building defects or failed completions. Some of these flaws were highlighted in December 2006 when the Law Reform Commission published their Consultation Paper on Multi-unit development.

No regulation or reforms have been enacted and in the meantime, successful residential multi-unit estate management depends in varying degrees on the calibre of the developers, their professional team, the quality of design and construction, and the management's commitment and professional ability, together with the owners' understanding of the different responsibilities of the various parties.

Regulation and licensing of our service industry will serve as a means of addressing poor standards within our own service sector. However, this step alone will be insufficient to ensure quality residential estate management. Other reforms to the legal framework and operational systems within the development process are also essential.

Residential Multi-unit management is a fairly complicated recipe. All the constituent parts have to work well for the end result to be successful. Most complaints tend to arise in the early stages of a development. Often it is a question of a poorly designed, defective or unfinished development. On such occasions it is difficult to deliver good estate management. Service charge income is not meant to be spent on defective or unfinished buildings. The difficulties that exist in the marketplace are reflected in the continuous negative media coverage, much of it referring to the problems loosely as "management problems".

Consumer understanding is not aided by these factors and complexities. Furthermore people compare apartment service charge costs with conventional housing costs and often consider house costs to be zero, without any regard for the house owner's obligation to pay for house insurance, refuse collection, garden maintenance, painting and decoration and general repair. In reality the costs largely compare and are equivalent. However, a house owner has choice and independence in the level and timing of their expenditure whereas an apartment owner does not, albeit that the work may be done for them by a management company.

Recent surveys undertaken by Dublin City Council indicate that Managing Agent fees generally account for approximately 15% of the annual service charge, however, achieving client satisfaction is not easy and few dare to try.

I have been in this business for over 20 years and in the residential sector a professional Managing Agent certainly earns their fee.

The challenge is that In Ireland few apartment owners have an understanding of the legal framework and its flaws, and few even grasp the

purpose and operations of a management company and particularly what can be expected from a professional managing agent. Fundamentally few purchasers are aware of what is included in a service charge and the factors that affect its level.

A low service charge may not represent good value if a) the building is under insured b) soft services such as cleaning, refuse and ground services are not being undertaken c) building and M&E maintenance are being neglected and d) an adequate sinking fund does not exist.

Whilst legal reform and regulation are essential more consumer information would lead to the appreciation and acceptance of an appropriate service charge which would in turn facilitate quality estate services / best practice and protect investments in the longer term.

### CRITERIA FOR CLIENT SATISFACTION

Nonetheless, I have for many years enjoyed working with satisfied clients although often those relationships developed slowly as it takes time for clients to learn for themselves how the operations of a management company work best and what to expect from a professional agent.

The service criteria and measurements required to achieve client satisfaction in residential multi unit management that I have observed are as follows;

- **Value for money** – competent and reliable contractors and service providers
- **Good site appearance** – particularly evidenced by cleaning, grounds and waste service standards
- **Prompt response** – consistent operations and immediate attention to failures/faults and repairs
- **Good communications** – the circulation of regular and comprehensive information and reporting to all the residents
- **Secure financial management** – successful service charge collections, quality record keeping, transparency and reporting
- **Professional and consistent personnel** – appropriate qualifications and limited changes to staff assigned

### THE BUDGET - A PROFESSIONAL ASSESSMENT OF COSTS

A typical question I get from apartment owners is what do I get for my annual service charge and why am I paying an agents fee?

Service charges are advance contributions towards the cost of services required in a development during the year and they should be reasonable. To determine reasonable and to understand the level of service charge and what it covers you need to go back to how it is set. A budget is prepared by the Managing Agent and presented for review and approval by the Board of Directors. Budgets must be a professional assessment of costs prepared annually in advance and as carefully as possible using the best information available. It is short-sighted to fix a budget too low as cash flow/deficit problems and dilapidations will arise.

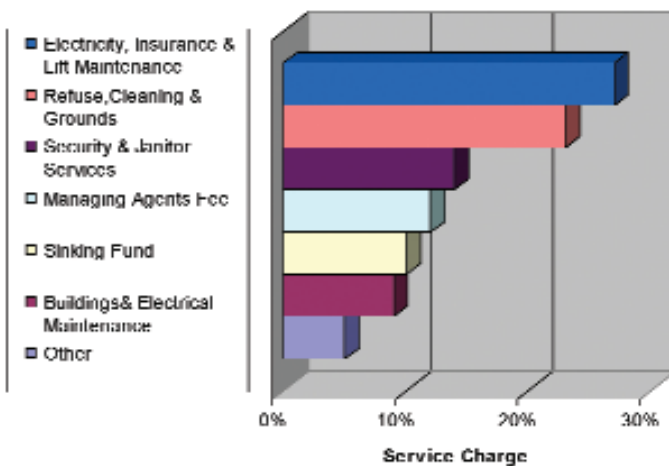
Low forecasts should be avoided. For example it is misleading in a new development, where warranties replace contracts in the initial period, to not highlight and account for a full years cost.

A copy of the approved budget should be issued with the service charge demand with explanations sufficient to explain the purpose and justification for each service cost, specification and frequency and any significant departures.

## SERVICE CHARGES

### 85% recurring consumption and maintenance costs

It is worth noting that generally 85-90% of a service charge budget relates to non-discretionary spend and covers annual recurring consumption and maintenance costs. For example electricity, insurance and lift maintenance account for 30% of costs. A further 25% goes on refuse, grounds and cleaning. 10% on other general electrical and building repair and maintenance costs and a further 15% on security/janitors services where applicable.



### 15% - DISCRETIONAL

Discretionary spend can be heavily influenced by the owners' board/committee of the day. They undertake the responsibility themselves on behalf of all owners and make critical decisions such as service specifications and frequencies, requirements for security measures, additional landscaping or determining the level of sinking fund provision to be included.

A board/committee can be represented by a mix of owner occupiers or landlord owners who may have different views according to the intended term of their investment. The longer term maintenance or quality of the development is determined ultimately by these individuals and their mix and preferences. The influence of personal preferences on how discretionary spend should be allocated can be a challenge to the professional recommendations proffered by the managing agent. After all an agent's duty is to put forward the requirements, any options and the corresponding competitive terms and quotes secured. The directors make the decisions.

## SERVICE CHARGE COMPARISONS

Another frequent comment from owners is that a friend who is living in a development across the road is paying a service charge which is €500 less and this is evidence of being "ripped off".

Few two developments are the same and there are so many different reasons why a service charge may be higher. Simple reasons for differences in costs

can be

- ✓ one has an underground car park with 24 hour lighting
- ✓ one has more mech and elec plant, pumps, gates, fire systems etc
- ✓ one has a higher lift ratio to apartments
- ✓ one has no landscaped grounds
- ✓ one has a janitor or security systems on site
- ✓ one is apartments only the other has houses and duplexes
- ✓ one has a proper sinking fund provision

## MANAGING AGENTS – investment and professionalism

In order to operate successfully in this industry a significant commitment and investment in resources is required. Qualified property management staff and a continuous investment in training and improvement, specialised property management systems and support structures are necessary.

The increasing numbers of high-density mixed use developments require a higher level of technical expertise to maximise efficiencies and effectiveness in the service delivery.

The role of the managing agent is more multi tasked and complex than the general perception held. An owner will be more commonly aware of the soft services such as cleaning, refuse, and grounds maintenance but other services arranged and roles undertaken often remain unknown and therefore not necessarily appreciated.

Insurance, financial management and corporate administration are less visible services but require significant resources. What differentiates between a good and poor Managing Agent can be the delivery in these less visible areas

Obviously, the delivery of proper services can only be achieved if the management company is financially well managed. It is therefore critical that the managing agent has an efficient and robust service charge collection procedure and strong financial controls in place.

In reality doing the job is only one part as a strong communications programme is also essential. Transparency, accountability and reporting must be key objectives. If owners are not communicated with regularly or financial statements are not circulated periodically or indeed AGMs are not held in an appropriate timeframe, owners may not be aware of current problems until it is too late. It may only be when they look to sell their apartment that issues come to light in the requisition on title or if they look to make an insurance claim to find out that their insurance is inadequate.

## SERVICES PROVIDED BY A PROFESSIONAL MANAGING AGENT

Frequently I am asked "What exactly do you do". In my reply I endeavour to explain our role and responsibilities under five separate services as follows;

1. Legal and Corporate Administration
2. Insurance Management
3. Financial Management
4. Communications Management
5. Buildings Management

### 1. Corporate Administration

Each development has its own management company which requires corporate administration on the members (owners) behalf and this must be

carried out in compliance with all statutory and company law. A myriad of legislation must be observed such as the Residential Tenancy Act 2004, Health & Safety Legislation, Fire Services Act 1981, Occupiers Liability Act 1995, Waste Management and Litter Pollution Acts and Data Protection Act to mention a few.

Company governance such as calling and attending meetings, (AGM's, EGM's, directors, residents committee meetings) and providing the associated company secretary services, maintaining the register of membership and minute books is required to ensure the management company's statutory compliance and returns are undertaken in a timely manner.

The management company has certain formal estate documentation and its receipt and safe storage particularly the counterpart leases falls under this role and in the event of any owner selling, requisitions on title to the management company must be addressed.

## 2. Insurance Management

Professional expertise is required to ensure the building valuation for reinstatement is competently done and that the scope of cover for fire and perils insurance is adequate and appropriate.

The managing agent's responsibility for arranging suitable insurance cover at competitive rates with minimum excess levels is an important role as insurance constitutes one of the highest expenditure categories and the risk of insufficient cover is serious.

Additional cover for public liability, employer's liability, alternative accommodation, statutory lift engineering and at the discretion of the client directors' and officers' liability cover also must be arranged.

Policy administration and management is required to ensure owners and mortgagors interests are noted on the policy correctly and because of the high level of "multiple unit" claims an efficient claim handling process is essential.

## 3. Financial Management

Preparing and advising on the service charge budgets is a critical role. Against a cost driven environment the professionalism of the managing agent is tested and reflected in their ability to ensure service charge adequacy.

The service charge billing and collection can be a lengthy and involved process as on average in Ireland only c.10% of owners pay on foot of the bill and so the operation of a debt collection programme thereafter is required. This process will include the charging of interest in line with lease terms and arranging and coordinating legal action to ensure full recoveries.

Cash flow management and day to day accounting together with income and expenditure reporting and the coordination and completion of the annual audit all fall under this heading.

## 4. Communications Management

A partnership approach and an inclusive relationship with the directors and owners is a necessity to good estate management. To achieve this investment in quality communications is essential.

It would be reasonable to expect that a communication program would include the gathering and management of owner contact details – coordinating the establishment of a residents committee and board liaison (if the development is still under the developers' control), together with a program of information through service reports, annual newsletters on estate information, occasional notices/circulars when relevant and the delivery of a

comprehensive property management report annually at the AGM. However this alone is often insufficient and a far more significant investment in communications is required.

Given the limited level of consumer understanding of the development and management operational processes or "information deficit" as it's referred to in the media, special resources are required to address numerous matters which arise that are outside the role of the managing agent. This is a real challenge. To explain and circumvent issues that do not correctly fall within the remit of the managing agent is an enormous service burden on a day to day basis. In fact as few as 50% of the owners' letters, emails and call enquiries are genuinely or correctly appropriate to the managing agents responsibility and remit.

Taking and logging such communications and their level of response requires exceptional resources because the agent is, in reality, presented with most of the burden of consumer education which should more correctly have been acquired prior to purchase or through the sales/ conveyance process.

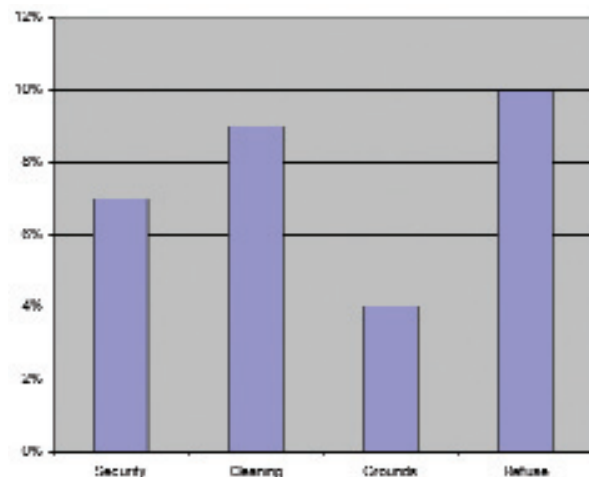
Nonetheless, callers want their questions answered, want explanations, and some want to complain and share their story and unfortunately not always in a reasonable manner. This situation can seriously challenge the sustainability of the managing agent's profits.

## BUILDING MANAGEMENT

This final service heading is by far the most recognised but it equally involves a lot more expertise than can often be obviously seen as follows:

### A. SOFT SERVICES

Soft service is the term used for services to the building environment such as security, cleaning, grounds/landscape and waste management. Generally these costs account for approximately 30% of a service charge budget.



### A. (1) Security

Security in a development will generally involve security systems i.e. CCTV or security guard operatives on site or a combination of both. The adequacy of security is increasingly becoming more prevalent. Open plan designs may be an architect/planners utopia but the major concern for residents in modern developments is now security. Given the increased level of crime and anti social behaviour the installation of CCTV systems or additional gates is often warranted, at the expense and annoyance of the owners when not provided for originally.

The cost of security guarding on site is significant and can range from €16-

€20 per standard hour. This cost differential is significant but consideration must be given to the experience and quality of the security firm selected. Security firms are now required to be licensed as set out in the Private Securities Act 2004.

### A. (2) Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance

Cleaning and grounds maintenance are the more visible services arranged by a managing agent. However it is important to note that generally less than 15% of a service charge budget is spent in these areas and whilst a similar percentage applies whether it is a large or small development the per unit cost can vary significantly as larger developments benefit considerably from economies of scale.

For example on average owners in large developments will pay €185 to €215 p.a. for cleaning and €75 p.a. to €100 p.a. per unit for grounds maintenance while owners in small developments will pay €200p.a. to €300p.a. for each of the two services per unit.

Significant factors in determining these service costs are the quality of building fabric finish, the specification and frequency of the service and the quality of residents in relation to their interest and observation of litter control, use of play areas, and the use of refuse houses etc.

It is important to determine the specification and frequency of the cleaning and grounds maintenance so that it is appropriate to the level of service that is reasonably expected. It is common that a complaint in relation to the quality of the service is in fact not due to the standard of the contractor or service provided but rather the frequency of the service carried out, or perhaps a misunderstanding of what the contractor is engaged to carry out.

With high level weekend usage timing may be a factor too i.e. cleaning on a Friday may be diminished by Sunday evening and best moved to Mondays to lengthen the service benefit.

Regular window and carpet cleaning is also necessary and the cost will be determined by the frequency required/ desired by the directors.

### A. (3) Waste Management

Refuse collection is generally managed by private firms as the requirement and cost to pull bins to the street frontage is not practicable or aesthetically acceptable in most developments. In addition private firms tend to offer more frequent collections and better recycling facilities. The cost of refuse generally accounts for 10% of the service charge budget and can range from €200 to €260 p.a. per unit.

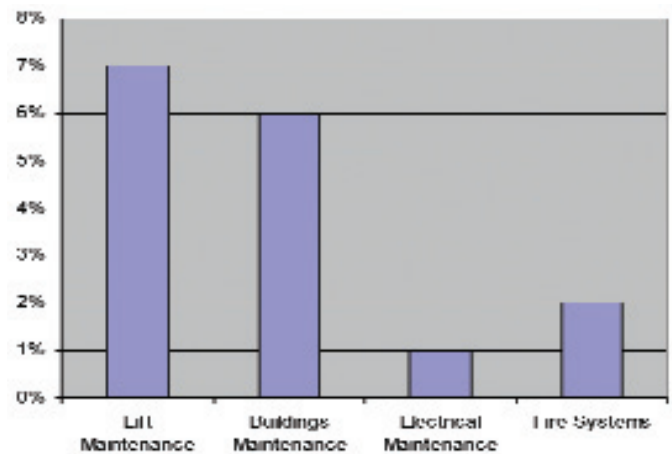
If residents manage their waste volume by recycling more they will pay less for refuse collections. Recyclable waste bins which cater for paper, carton, cardboard and cans are usually at least 50% cheaper to collect than general waste bins.

## B. HARD SERVICES

Hard services is the term used to cover mechanical and electrical servicing for plant such as lifts, vehicular and pedestrian gates, sewage and water pumps, generators, building and electrical maintenance along with fire safety systems. Generally these costs account for approximately 15% of a service charge budget.

### B. (1) Lifts

The typical economic life of a lift is 20 – 25 years and upgrade/replacement costs expected can be between €40,000 to €70,000 per lift after this time. Consequently not only is there a sizeable annual lift maintenance cost but there will also be a large capital outlay required in the future. The cost of lift



maintenance in a particular development can vary significantly based on the ratio of lifts to apartments, the type of lift installed and the quality model of lift (high or low end).

Lift Service providers offer a range of maintenance packages from basic to fully comprehensive. The standard maintenance contract would normally cost approx €1,000 plus VAT per lift compared to €2,000 plus VAT per lift for fully comprehensive. However in the longer term a fully comprehensive package may be better value as it will cover;

- All replacement parts due to fair wear and tear
- Preventative maintenance
- 24 hour call out cover 7 days a week
- 24 hour monitoring of phone line in lift
- Call out costs except for repairs due to vandalism, misuse or abuse
- Replacement motor cost of circa €4,000 and full rope replacement

It must be noted that no lift contract covers upgrade parts/programming required either due to manufacturer recommendations or due to the parts being no longer available meaning another similar part must be customised. Therefore each lift must be evaluated for parts availability and condition prior to a contract being issued

I would nearly always recommend a comprehensive maintenance package as the additional cost not only pays for itself in the medium term but it can also extend the economic life of a lift before significant capital expenditure is required.

### B. (2) Vehicular Gates

Vehicular gates are one of the most troublesome areas as they tend to have a high level of mechanical failure due to poor design, misuse and vandalism. No contract can alleviate the high reactive costs incurred by these factors although the actual service costs for recommended manufacturers maintenance is moderate.

### B. (3) Fire Safety Systems

Fire systems usually include fire alarms, automatic opening smoke vents (AOVs) and fire extinguishers. It is surprising, given the importance of this area, that only c. 2% of the service charge budget is expended here. I believe owners should make a greater investment in this important area to ensure the fire and safety systems are not only maintained and monitored appropriately but are also upgraded as necessary.

By nature these systems are specific to each building and although they have been designed and built according to a standard by definition, it is often discovered subsequent to construction that inadequacies exist either by design or equipment. For this reason I have grave concerns for the operational effectiveness of the fire safety measures/systems in apartment buildings in Ireland which often are not compliant with Fire Safety Regulations and potentially present a serious risk to the occupants in the event of a fire.

Another area of growing concern is the lack of emphasis on emergency lighting maintenance, repair and recommended new installs. When areas in the buildings are identified as needing additional emergency light fittings there is a distinct inaction that follows. The cost of battery and new fitting replacements are often unforeseen and expensive. However this is not viewed with the level of importance it should be by owners and the management companies and hence this area can be neglected at great risk to the lives of the occupants in the event of a necessary building evacuation. The attitude should be that these are consumable items of high importance.

## **B. (4) General Building Maintenance**

General and electrical maintenance covers a whole range of small to medium repairs to the building fabric and fittings i.e., plant breakdown, intercom, access systems, repairs to mat wells, letterboxes, locks and key supply, way finding and fire signage, electrical repairs and bulb replacement. Costs will arise for planned preventative maintenance contracts and reactive repairs either due to wear and tear, damage or vandalism.

Buildings Management also includes other responsibilities such as energy consumption, after hour's emergency service, and janitor management, although they are usually charged for as ancillary services.

## **B. (5) House Rules Management**

The breaking of house rules (such as noise, wooden floors, satellite dishes) can be quite distressing for the owners concerned and such house rules management can be extensive. A general increase in anti social behaviour and petty crime has added to the problem and indeed perpetuated an expectation that such matters are exclusively for the managing agent to resolve.

A property manager can spend a considerable amount of time trying to deal with these issues however they are not expert investigators or negotiators and to a large degree this is not a building or facility management role and should be addressed as it is in other more established jurisdictions through a community watch and gardai liaison programme.

An unreasonable expectation of how these matters may be resolved exists as, although covenants set down requirements for "quiet enjoyment", there are no real sanctions available to address promptly and efficiently such matters and covenants are therefore difficult to enforce.

Managing agents must have clear policies and procedures for handling house rule breaches, complaints of nuisance from neighbours and disputes between occupiers and these procedures and their limitations must be made known to all the owners.

The level of house rule compliance largely depends on the development's location and the quality of occupiers and the community's own initiatives to resolve these issues

## **B. (6) Health & Safety Management**

H&S is very broad in its definition but essentially it is for the safety of all building users as follows:

- Occupiers and building users (visitors and contractors instructed to site by the management company)
- Employees, i.e. janitor
- Contractors, i.e. managing agent and all others instructed to site by them

It is each and everyone's responsibility to ensure that all behaviour/ business are conducted in a safe manner and the health of others is protected.

As far as is practicable, the managing agent endeavors to manage the general H&S condition of the building in the communal areas and external building fabric. A monthly visual inspection must be conducted on these areas and all emergency evacuation routes to check for obstruction.

Any works carried out by contractors instructed by the management company must be performed according to safe work practices. The managing agent must also ensure correct training and direction is provided for their own staff and those managed by them, namely the janitors, gardeners and property managers.

There are circumstances that become H&S issues for example,

- poor waste management – pest infestation
- insufficient maintenance on M&E plant causing loss of services or impact on environment – lift entrapment, fire, spillage
- building fabric defects – dislodgement, slips, trips and falls
- Systems need to be in place to manage these occurrences effectively and competently to prevent any harmful risk.

## **B. (7) Contractor Management**

Contractor Management of all of the above service providers is required to ensure competence, H&S compliance, validation of insurance and verification of attendance and value for money. Professional managing agents consider this a critical role and operate an approved contractor database from where only appropriate contractors can be selected by their property managers.

Another area seldom visible to a management company is the annual certification of fall arrest systems for high-level works, which serve the purpose of safe access for window/ drainage cleaning and any other reactive works required from height. It is the responsibility of the managing company to ensure that all contractors operate safe systems of work and access permission is strictly managed to these areas.

These are the value added benefits of contracting competent managing agents however, my experience is that few are aware of the importance of these matters.

## **SINKING FUNDS – AND THE ROLE OF THE MANAGING AGENT**

A sinking fund is a pool of money created to build up funds which can be used to pay for large items of infrequent expenditure such as the refurbishment of a roof and for major items which arise more regularly such as redecoration of the common area interiors. The sums required can be significant over say a 30 year life cycle. The fund must be initiated from the very first year and then adjusted as necessary annually and collected to avoid, as the work arises, the costs having to be funded through a special levy or a one off lump sum.

Funds and expenditure headings must be specific to the development and will differ accordingly. However in simple terms infrequent but essential refurbishment or replacement headings are:

- Lifts (motors/parts and carriage)
- Mechanical and electrical plant – lighting systems, pumps, fire alarm and safety systems, Intercoms, security plant i.e. CCTV cameras.
- Gates - motors and parts
- Roofs - major repairs to, or replacement of materials and parts
- Roads and car parks, footpaths/kerbs re-surfacing, repairs or replacement
- Replacement of windows (the management company is often responsible for individual apartment windows)
- Repairs to building fabric i.e. re-pointing of brickwork

Whilst more regular refurbishment might include:

- Interior common areas - redecoration of walls, ceilings and woodwork (usually includes external side of apartment doors and door frames)
- Re-carpeting and re-tiling of floors
- Exterior repainting of walls surfaces, balconies, railings and woodwork

The usual method of calculating how much money is to go into the fund each year is to take the expected costs of future works and divide it by the number of years which may be expected to pass before it is incurred. However this requires specialist expertise and a chartered quantity surveyor should be consulted to assess the building fabric, materials and plant to ensure the all the provisions are identified and adequately accounted. The expected life of plant and equipment which will depend on the item in question and will be influenced by

- The quality of the original installation.
- The type and level of maintenance carried out
- Technological advances which may make an item obsolete or difficult to maintain
- Legislation, particularly Health & Safety

In the absence of the directors seeking this professional advice the managing agent may be asked to assist them in the preparation of a sinking fund estimate using information available and current best estimates. However, unless qualified, a managing agent should decline such role and recommend the engagement of a suitably qualified Chartered Building/Quantity Surveyor to carry out a detailed inspection and report, and to provide guidelines for the annual level of sinking fund provision required. The managing agent should caution the client and clearly state that they accept no responsibility or liability for any inaccuracies in estimates prepared by unqualified parties.

The responsibility for ensuring the sinking fund provision is adequately provided rests with the directors of the management company and not with the managing agent.

The responsibility and duty of a managing agent in relation to sinking funds is as follows ;

- To promote and ensure the requirement and responsibility of a sinking fund is fully understood by the client.
- To assist in the appointment of a specialist consultant to carry out the requirement assessment.
- To consider and advise annually adjustments to the fund according to current up to date forecasts, including vat and fees.
- To collect and invest the funds safely and in a separate bank account in the management company's own name and to maintain and account for such moneys separately so as to ensure they are not spent on other works or enhancements not intended for the fund.

- To proactively plan, schedule and arrange for such works as they arise in consultation with the client so that continuous maintenance of the common areas is to a consistent standard. This will ensure that the owners' investments are protected in the longer term.

The money owners invest into sinking funds is reflected in the quality appearance and operations of the development. It is seldom appreciated that the investment is recoverable in the ongoing capital value, either crystallised clearly in the value achieved when sold or maybe less tangibly in the quality and reputation of the development as a place to live.

A sinking fund also helps spread the costs between successive owners. This is an important feature given that 2<sup>nd</sup> hand purchasers often acquire insufficient knowledge of the extent and adequacy of such funds when buying into a development and then find they have to pay a levy for work arising from wear and tear which occurred prior to their purchase.

Unlike contemporary houses where the owner may elect the timing, quality and cost of the maintenance of his dwelling, but then must arrange or do the work himself, apartments and the nature of multi ownership dictate the sinking fund method is essential.

In Ireland contributions to sinking funds range from non existent, to modest. Anecdotal suggestions I have heard is that they should be in the region of 10% of the service charge budget. However, there is no basis whatsoever for this calculation. Each building is different and unless all buildings were the same such a scale rate could not be determined.

As there is limited consumer information or regulation requiring any level of adequacy, the contribution has been largely left to what the directors have deemed an appropriate amount that owners could afford to pay. Therefore there is always the likelihood of work not being carried out at all due to lack of funds.

The adequacy of sinking fund provisions has been a heavily debated topic recently and it is generally accepted that the current level of annual sinking fund contributions are not adequate to meet the future capital requirements of developments. It is likely that one-off capital levies will be common in future years as owners are forced to carry out necessary capital works. This must change to ensure the sustainability of this form of housing in to the future. The alternative is dilapidated and delinquent buildings.

## REGULATION AND LICENSING

As we await regulation of the industry there is a wide gap in the quality and services offered by managing agents. It is understandable that owners are mindful of costs but unfortunately in a lot of cases owner / directors will select a managing agent based solely on cost. This decision may be made based on a saving of €10,000 per annum which seems a lot but may equate to as little as €50 per apartment per annum. This extra €50 maybe the best investment an owner can make. If things go wrong in a development they can go seriously wrong. If the board selects a professional managing agent they can have peace of mind that expertise is on hand not only to deal with serious issues as they arise but to ensure the professional ongoing maintenance of their development for the long term.

It is clear that there is a considerable amount of work and expertise required in properly managing a multi unit residential development and it can be tasking at times for owners. It is easy to make the change to a professional firm who will deliver a quality service under best practice guidelines. Pick up the phone! ■