



SERVICE CHARGES POLICY

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1. This policy applies to the setting of service charges of the below housing services:
 - 1.1.1. General Needs Housing
 - 1.1.2. Supported Housing
 - 1.1.3. Specialist Supported Housing

2. POLICY AIM

- 2.1. The Service Charge Policy sets out Keystage Housing's approach for setting service charges for all residents and leaseholders (including commercial property) where a service charge is payable.
- 2.2. This policy sets out the key principles to setting service charges for the Group. Service charges should always be determined by the property and tenancy agreement or lease in place.
- 2.3. Keystage Housing will apply a fair and reasonable methodology for Service Charges and how they are apportioned and collected.
- 2.4. This policy runs in parallel to the Rent-Setting policy, with consideration of affordable rents.
- 2.5. We aim to deliver quality services Keystage Housing are:
 - 2.5.1. Cost efficient, clear and transparent;
 - 2.5.2. Compliant with statute, case law and guidance issued by the Regulator;
 - 2.5.3. Consistent with other properties within the Group; and
 - 2.5.4. Set at a level which makes them lettable and affordable.
- 2.6. There are currently two approaches to Service Charges:
 - 2.6.1. **Fixed service charges**
 - 2.6.1.1. Fixed service charges are assessed annually to reflect the estimated cost of providing the services set out in the relevant tenancy agreement. Should there be an overspend by the landlord, there is no provision for recouping the extra cost. If the annual costs to the landlord are less than the fixed charges then the customer will not receive a refund. With Fixed Service Charges a tenant knows exactly how much they will be required to pay on an annual basis regardless of what actual expenditure is which helps with budgeting and calculating affordability.
 - 2.6.2. **Variable service charges**
 - 2.6.2.1. The application of variable service charges by Keystage Housing is determined by the relevant tenancy agreement or lease. The tenancy agreement, Licence or lease should include:
 - 2.6.2.1.1. the relevant review dates;
 - 2.6.2.1.2. the dates of the service charge period; April to March unless the tenancy agreement already states differently;
 - 2.6.2.1.3. the relevant services recoverable under the service charge schedule;
 - 2.6.2.1.4. the frequency of payment for the service charge;
 - 2.6.2.1.5. the method, or methods, by which the costs of services will be shared by, or 3 apportioned between, residents in a block and/or across an estate;
 - 2.6.2.1.6. whether Keystage Housing is allowed to set service charges based on estimated service costs, which will then be reconciled when the actual service costs are known.



3. WHERE DOES THIS POLICY APPLY

- 3.1. This Policy applies to all stock and tenures across Keystage Housing (including properties owned by others and managed by us).

4. HOW DO KEYSTAGE HOUSING WORK UNDER THIS POLICY

- 4.1. Service charges will be reviewed annually with due reference to applicable guidance, legislation, and the cost of the services provided.
- 4.2. Service charges, which can be a mixture of fixed and variable charges, will be calculated at a level sufficient to recover the estimated direct cost of the service provision and any associated indirect costs such as administration. These will be apportioned in a reasonable manner between those households receiving those services. We will aim to ensure we only provide services which are affordable to residents. Proposed changes in services or service levels will be subject to consultation and may also require amendment to tenancy agreements and leases. All service charges will contain an element of the cost of provision and administration of the service.
- 4.3. ***Fair and Reasonable***
 - 4.3.1. In apportioning costs, Keystage Housing will seek to achieve a fair and reasonable apportionment of the costs between all residents, regardless of whether they pay a fixed or variable service charge and as set out in the lease or tenancy agreement. Where the agreement does not specify any apportionment, we will seek to achieve a fair and reasonable apportionment and we will share the costs between all residents in a block and/or estate. Charges for communal areas will be apportioned across those customers with access to these areas. By fair and reasonable we mean that residents are charged for services that are available to, but not necessarily used by, them in accordance with the terms of their individual lease or tenancy agreement.
- 4.4. ***New Developments***
 - 4.4.1. It is our objective to build and develop new homes that are designed and constructed to be as efficient as possible to ensure that running costs, including associated service charges, are cost effective and affordable for occupiers. We will determine which services will be provided and their costs from both external contractors and our own in-house maintenance team. We will apportion the costs fairly between the relevant properties. We will also consider future repairs and replacement and look to create a sinking fund to meet these costs based on the estimated future costs split over the number of years the particular component or feature is expected to last.
 - 4.4.2. When appraising new developments that are projected to have substantial service charges, consideration will be given to the viability of any affordable rent scheme. The terms of the lease/tenancy agreement will determine whether the service charges will be fixed or variable, depending on tenure type. New tenants will be informed of the services provided and the service standards they can expect.



4.5. **Eligible Charges**

- 4.5.1. Some service charge elements are eligible for Housing Benefit or the Universal Credit housing component and are known as 'eligible charges'. Eligible charges will include communal services which the residents are unable to opt out of as these are applied to all residents on the scheme. Ineligible services charges are non-communal personal services, such as heating and water, to individual properties or a service that the resident is able to opt out of, such as gardening and window cleaning, which we are not obliged to provide. Most charges will be classed as eligible charges. We will ensure that any ineligible charges are necessary, appropriate and proportionate. When considering which services to provide, we will consider if the charges will be eligible for payment under Housing Benefit or Universal Credit criteria to ensure they remain affordable and our properties remain desirable. There are certain charges (e.g. window cleaning and lifts) for some ground floor flats that are not eligible for Universal Credit that would have been eligible for Housing Benefit.
- 4.5.2. When we send out estimates of what next year's charges are going to be, we will show services as either 'eligible' or 'non-eligible'. Housing Benefit (HB) or Universal Credit (UC) will not pay for 'non-eligible' or personal charges. Only 'eligible' charges will be considered for benefit purposes.
- 4.5.3. Affordable Rents (set at up to 80% of the market valuation) are inclusive of service charges. Where services are provided as part of the tenancy agreement, these will be clearly set out with the annual charge included within the rent.

4.6. **Sinking Funds**

- 4.6.1. Sinking funds will be collected where specified in the lease/tenancy agreement and held in accordance with regulations. Where necessary, funds will be allocated and when necessary be available and utilised for major repairs and/or future replacement provision. Information,

4.7. **Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.7.1. We will consult residents about proposed changes to existing services, proposed implementation of new services and the standard of existing services on their estate or scheme.
- 4.7.2. We will involve residents in monitoring the performance of our grounds maintenance and cleaning services as these are significant elements of the service charge for many of our residents.
- 4.7.3. Charges and consultation over works or contracts will be made in accordance with legislation, case law, and the content of occupancy agreements.
- 4.7.4. In line with Section 20 of the Landlord & Tenant Act 1985, we will reserve the right to consult with leaseholders or shared owners if any major or cyclical works costs are likely to exceed £250 for any leaseholder or shared owner. If we intend to enter into any service contract for longer than a year that we think will cost more than £100 for any leaseholder or other variable service charge payer, we will consult in accordance with the Act. We will consider the customers views as well as cost, service provision and value for money when making a decision.
- 4.7.5. For leaseholders and shared owners in line with their lease agreements, we will:



- 4.7.5.1. Provide an estimated service charge bill. This will include statements of anticipated expenditure for services to which the customer contributes.
- 4.7.5.2. Provide a statement of actual service charge expenditure within six months of the year end or as the lease/tenancy agreement states.
- 4.7.5.3. Provide customers with an annual statement of major works/sinking fund charges.
- 4.7.5.4. When leaseholders and shared owners purchase, the service charge costs associated with the sale will be outlined in the conveyance documents through the legal transaction.
- 4.7.6. Complaints regarding Service Charges will be dealt with in line with Keystage Housing's Complaints Policy. Complaints that require legal remedies (challenge of apportionments or services provided that cannot be resolved between the customer and KEYSTAGE HOUSING) cannot be dealt with through our complaints procedure.
- 4.7.7. The First approach should be used for matters relating to the requirement to pay or the reasonableness of service charge.
- 4.7.8. Any request for a refund due to the failure of a service will be dealt with through our complaints and compensation policy.
- 4.8. Recovering Service Charges**
 - 4.8.1. We will collect service charges in a flexible and effective way, promoting a choice of payment methods, in line with the lease or tenancy agreement and deliver or signpost to debt advice if customers are unable to pay. We aim to minimise annual service charge fluctuations unless a significant change to a service contract is experienced.
 - 4.8.2. Service charge accounts will be independently audited in accordance with statutory requirements and the terms of the lease/tenancy agreement.
 - 4.8.3. Where there is a temporary breakdown in service or failure to deliver a service, any adjustments will be made in the year end service charge accounts. In addition, consideration may also need to be given to the payment of discretionary compensation where there has been a service failure, in line with Keystage Housing's combined compensation policy.
- 4.9. Third Party Managing Agents**
 - 4.9.1. Some supported housing stock is managed by third party Management Agents on Keystage Housing's behalf. The setting of the elements of the service charge for which the Management agent is responsible is undertaken by the Management agent in consultation with Keystage Housing as set out in the Management agreement. For the avoidance of doubt, Keystage Housing retains overall responsibility and accountability as the landlord.

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY

- 5.1. The responsibility for the setting of the annual service charge notifications lies with the Keystage Housing Board.
- 5.2. The responsibility for the implementation of the service charge setting policy lies with the Directors of Keystage Housing and the Financial Controller.



- 5.3. It will be the responsibility of the Finance Controller to inform the board of the increase/decrease to be applied for the relevant financial year. For service charge purposes, financial year runs April to March of each year.
- 5.4. The Finance and Revenues Team will ensure that tenants receive notification of the rent increase/decrease no later than one calendar month prior to the new rent taking effect. The rent notification letter will meet statutory requirements on format and content.
- 5.5. Finally, it will be responsibility of the Finance Team to apply the documented procedures to ensure that the system is updated and reconciled to take account of the revised service charges.
- 5.6. Compliance with the Service Charge policy will be checked via our audit process. internally through a process combining management sign off, internal and internal audit checks. Compliance will be reported to the Keystage Housing Board.

6. TIMING OF RENT REVIEWS AND INCREASES

- 6.1. Service Charges will be reviewed annually in accordance with regulatory requirements.
- 6.2. The annual review of rents and Service Charges will be done as part of the budget setting process and the board will be asked to approve any amendments to rents and service charges
- 6.3. Tenants will be given a minimum of one calendar months' notice in writing of changes to their charge and the rent review will be usually applied from the first Monday in April.

7. COMMUNICATION

- 7.1. Keystage Housing will be open and transparent in which we set rent and service charges to our tenants. We will inform our tenants of how the rent has been set and information will be made widely available through various communication channels.
- 7.2. We will inform tenants of any changes to their rents at least 4 weeks prior to any new charge being applied and to assist our tenants, we will advise Housing Benefits if applicable of any changes. Information will be written or conveyed to tenants in language and manner which is appropriate to them. The review letter will include;
 - 7.2.1. Details of the new charge, including a breakdown of the full charge
 - 7.2.2. An explanation as to how the new charge has been calculated
 - 7.2.3. Details any changes to payment of the new charge
 - 7.2.4. Clear contact details

8. INFORMATION AND DATA PROTECTION

- 8.1. All information provided to Keystage Housing will be managed as per our GDPR policy; though we may share information with partner local authorities; other registered landlords and the Regulator of Social Housing where there is an agreed Information Sharing Agreement, a legal basis under the Data Protection Act 2018. Information is used only in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. More information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/data-protection>

9. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 9.1. Keystage Housing's Board will monitor compliance with this policy and approve rent levels for annual increases or amendments, ensuring at all times that we continue to meet legislative compliance and identify and monitor any associated risks to income with



particular reference to : Setting rents for social housing - An addendum to the Regulator of Social Housing's 2019 Sector risk profile (published by the Regulator in March 2020)

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

10.1. Keystage Housing is committed to valuing and promoting Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. We expect our staff to share these values and treat all our customers with fairness and respect. All protected attributes (as defined within the Equality Act 2010) will be considered to ensure equality of treatment for all customers without discrimination or prejudice. The policy will pay particular regard to ensure we are sensitive to such diversities surrounding the setting and reviewing of rents and service charges.

10.2. Definitions:

10.2.1. A **service charge** is the charge payable by a tenant, leaseholder, freeholder or licensee towards the costs of services, general maintenance, repairs or reserve and sinking funds. It also covers other charges or costs, including any administrative or management costs, incurred now and in the future, where the cost is not recovered through a rental charge.

10.2.2. A **fixed service charge** is where the cost of providing services to a property are set out at the beginning of each financial year. The customer pays the service charge throughout the year and at no point will there be additional amounts to pay or refunds due back.

10.2.3. A **variable service charge** is where an estimated charge is set at the beginning of the financial year, and a final account is produced once the year is complete. The final account compares the actual costs in delivering services to a property against the estimate, and may result in a credit or an additional amount due from the customer.

10.2.4. A **variable rent charge** is where a service charge is payable by a customer not subject to lease or tenancy such as a freeholder. The freehold transfer document will set out the obligations of the freeholder to contribute towards charges and subsequent owners will enter into a deed agreeing to continue making the contribution. These have been included in our definition of a service charge policy and are treated the same as variable service charges.

10.2.5. A **sinking fund or reserve fund** is a fund that saves money to pay for future long term maintenance and renewals required, such as repairs to the roof or a lift. It provides a way to spread the cost of expensive repairs

11. RELATED POLICIES

- GF09- Rent Setting Policy
- GF19- Revenues Policy
- GF03- Data Protection Policy

12. POLICY REVIEW

12.1. This policy (and where appropriate, the associated strategy and/or procedures) will be reviewed every three years, or more frequently if required, to address legislative, regulatory, best practice or operational issues. Compliance with this procedure will be monitored by the Directors, Quality Assurance Team, and Finance Controller for the effectiveness of this policy and recommend policy changes to improve service delivery.



13. APPENDIX- ELIGIBLE AND NON ELIGIBLE CHARGES

CHARGE DESCRIPTION	WHAT CHARGE PAYS FOR	FACTORS CONSIDERED WHEN SETTING CHARGE
Administration	The administration related to the provision of services	Charge is calculated as 15% of overall service charges. The eligible/ineligible for housing benefit split will mirror that of the service charges it covers.
Building insurance	Buildings insurance for properties owned or leased by Keystage Housing	The total cost of Keystage Housing's building's most recent buildings insurance policy, divided by the number of units it covers.
CCTV provision	The hire, maintenance and repair costs associated with any CCTV provision provided to protect the property through deterrence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
Cleaning of communal areas	The cost of cleaning communal areas of a property, whether performed by a company paid by Keystage Housing to provide the service or by Keystage Housing staff themselves. May include cleaning materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
Communal Aerial Provision and Maintenance	The leasing and maintenance costs for communal aerials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year



<p>Communal equipment repairs</p>	<p>The repairs of any communal equipment provided by Keystage Housing not covered in any more specific charge, e.g. furniture in communal lounge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
<p>Communal equipment hire</p>	<p>The cost of provision of any communal equipment within a property containing more than one household, e.g. door entry equipment, lifts, furniture etc.</p>	<p>Each item of equipment is given an estimated lifespan (see Appendix III). The cost of this equipment is spread across its lifespan to provide the chargeable amount.</p>
<p>Communal gardening and grounds maintenance</p>	<p>The cost of gardening and grounds maintenance, including tree works, for communal outdoor areas, whether done by a company, whether performed by a company paid by Keystage Housing or by Keystage Housing staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
<p>Communal gas, electricity, water rates</p>	<p>The cost of provision of utilities to communal areas of a property containing more than one household.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where households pay their personal utility costs directly, i.e. not through service charges, the cost is determined by the bill Keystage Housing pays for the communal areas. • Where households pay their personal utility costs through service charge, the communal charge is calculated as a proportion of the overall bill for the property. The proportion is based on the square footage of communal and personal areas in the building. • The cost of the service over the 12-month period prior to the setting of the charge



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
Communal laundry repairs	Repairs to communal laundry facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
Communal laundry servicing	Servicing of communal laundry facilities, or the provision of communal laundry facilities where the appliances are leased by Keystage Housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
Communal lift repairs	Repairs for communal lifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
Communal lift servicing	Regular servicing of communal lifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year



Communal lights maintenance	Maintenance of communal lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available.• Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
Communal window cleaning	The cost of cleaning windows (excluding ground level windows unless they are for communal areas).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available.• Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year•
Communal TV license Not eligible for housing benefit	The cost of a television license for a communal television.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protected license cost.
Council tax	The payment of council tax for any office space on site from which a service is provided to all residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available.• Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
Door entry system maintenance	The upkeep of door entry systems, where they are in use in a property containing more than one household.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available.



<p>Electric, legionella etc. safety testing</p>	<p>The provision of routine safety tests of electric installations, electric appliances provided by Keystage Housing, legionella testing of water supply etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
<p>Fire prevention equipment servicing</p>	<p>The regular servicing of any fire prevention equipment provided by Keystage Housing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
<p>Fire prevention equipment repairs</p>	<p>Repairs for any fire prevention equipment provided by Keystage Housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
<p>Fire risk assessments</p>	<p>The provision of fire risk assessments for sites containing more than one household.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
<p>Furniture and white goods rental</p>	<p>The rental of furniture and white good provided within accommodation across a property containing more than one household.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where the furniture and white goods are rented by Keystage Housing, this cost will be passed on to residents.



<p>Electric, legionella etc. safety testing</p>	<p>The provision of routine safety tests of electric installations, electric appliances provided by Keystage Housing, legionella testing of water supply etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
<p>Furniture and white goods rental</p>	<p>The rental of furniture and white good provided within accommodation across a property containing more than one household.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where the furniture and white goods are rented by Keystage Housing, this cost will be passed on to residents.
<p>Hygiene equipment</p>	<p>Provision for disposing of specific waste products, e.g. used sanitary items, in communal areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available. • Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
<p>Intensive Housing Management (IHM)</p>	<p>Only charged in supported housing. IHM covers the additional housing management costs incurred as a result of providing housing to a specific client group. The costs are usually associated with the nature of the client group and the significantly higher turnover associated with these services, for example increased re-let</p>	<p>IHM is calculated using a formula of A-B, where: A = the total re-let and maintenance costs for a specified support service. B = the total average re-let and maintenance costs for Keystage Housing's social housing in let through a nominations agreement with a local authority. The difference is then divided by the number of properties in receipt of the service to create the service charge amount.</p>



<p>Personal gas, electricity, water rates. <i>Not eligible for housing benefit.</i></p>	<p>The provision of gas, electricity and water to individual households within a property containing more than one household, where Keystage Housing pays the relevant cost on behalf of the household. This charge does not include provision of utilities to communal areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available.• Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year• Overall costs for the property have the costs for communal areas removed (see Communal gas, electricity, water, above) and are then divided by the number of units.
<p>Pest Control</p>	<p>Services provided to control and eradicate the spread of pests through communal areas of a property.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available.• Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year• Note that as pest control is a highly unpredictable cost, the overall organisational charge is split across all properties managed by Keystage Housing to ensure fairness.
<p>Rubbish disposal</p>	<p>The disposal of waste associated with a site containing more than one household, where Keystage Housing pays for this service. In specific sites, this may include a charge for disposal of clinical waste. This charge may also pay for disposal of fly tipped items in communal areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available.• Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year



Security costs	Provision of a security or concierge service to any site, to protect the fabric of the building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available.• Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
Sewage pumping station servicing	The servicing of any sewage pumping station serving the relevant properties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available.• Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
Staff time spent delivering eligible services	<p>Only charged in supported housing. This charge covers the time spent by staff working at a specific service delivering eligible housing management activities, rather than support activities. Eligible activities may include work relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• allocations• anti-social behaviour• rent collection or management of rent accounts• enforcing or managing license or tenancy agreements• health and safety• liaison with contractors on site• time spent on property maintenance• time spent on resident consultation relating to the above• time spent on management functions relating to the above	<p>This charge is calculated as a percentage of the staff costs apportioned to a specific service.</p>



<p>Tenant's internet costs <i>Not eligible for housing benefit</i></p>	<p>The provision of internet access to tenants throughout a building or in communal areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cost of the service over the most recent 12-month period for which audited accounts are available.• Any quotes, estimates or fixed contract prices for the service to be received over the coming year
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