

# HOUSING INCOME COLLECTION POLICY

Approved October 2024

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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy applies to all housing income collected including service charges. It applies to all Haringey Council tenants/licensees in rented or licensed property where the Council is responsible for rent collection, this includes charges for temporary accommodation, garages and travellers sites. This policy does not though apply to the collection of fees and charges to leaseholders which is covered in separate policies and procedures.
- 1.2 When we use the terms 'we', 'our', and 'us' we mean Haringey Council in this policy.
- 1.3 Our income management functions are to charge and collect rent and service charges along with any arrears from our tenants/licensees. This includes providing support to those that need it.

## 2 Aim of the policy

- 2.1 The aim of this policy is to set out how we manage our housing income collection effectively and support a 'Rent First' approach. The housing income this relates to is rents and service charges, including tenancy charges invoiced to tenants by third parties on the Council's behalf (e.g. for metered heating and hot water). Service charges cover services that tenants are provided with.
- 2.2 This policy describes what we will do to collect, support tenants to pay their rent and drive a payment culture. The Council understands that tenants/licensees may fall behind with payments from time to time and has agreed approaches to help and treat such cases. This is covered by the housing arrears policy. We have deliberately separated the housing income collection and housing arrears policies to keep them concise and easy to understand.
- 2.3 This policy sets out how we will:
  - Make tenants/licensees aware of their responsibilities to pay their rent and/or other housing related charges.
  - Explain how much rent tenants/licensees have to pay including repayments for previously unpaid rent & charges.
  - Offer a range of different payment methods.
  - Issue a rent statement every three months and maintain regular contact at the start and throughout all tenancies.
  - Provide appropriate notice in writing of any change to the rent, other than changes to Housing Benefit (HB) or Universal Credit (UC).
  - Help new tenants/licensees, intervene early and work in partnership and across Council directorates to prevent or reduce arrears and to sustain tenancies.
  - Assist tenants/licensees to claim Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction.

- Refer tenants/licensees for support where they are making a claim for UC and provide advice on any other benefits they may be entitled to.
- Work collaboratively with our Housing Benefit team and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to resolve any queries about tenants/licensees benefits.
- Write our income collection letters, emails and text messages in plain English with a simple, accessible and jargon-free style and ensure that translation and interpretation is provided where possible/when necessary.

### 3 Tenant obligations

- 3.1 Tenants/licensees are responsible for paying their rent and licence fees, including any service charges, as set out in their tenancy agreement and for telling us if they have any problems paying their rent or fall into arrears.
- 3.2 Tenants/licensees who experience difficulties with paying their rent should discuss this directly with their Income Management Officer. These could also be raised with the Tenancy Management Officer who will liaise with the Income Management team.
- 3.3 Tenants/licensees are also responsible for paying any former arrears of unpaid rent/charges.

### 4 Pre signup

- 4.1 We will encourage a positive payment culture of rent and other housing related charges for all our tenants/licensees including charges for non-residential accommodation i.e. garages.
- 4.2 We set the ethos for rent and income collection on first contact with the prospective tenant. We will advise on rent payments and encourage tenants/licensees to complete any benefit claims and provide all necessary information promptly.
- 4.3 Where a new tenant/licensee of residential accommodation is claiming UC and is identified as falling within a Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Tier One or Tier Two Factor grouping then an immediate request for an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA) may be made.

## 5 At the signup

- 5.1 At sign up a new tenant/licensee will be required to pay one week's rent in advance.
- 5.2 This payment can be made via debit or credit card unless the tenant/licensee is likely to be entitled to full (HB)/(UC) in which case a token payment of £10 or non-HB/UC eligible charges such as heating would be expected. The aim of this is to guide new tenants on making timely payments.
- 5.3 Tenants/licensees are encouraged to pay their rent by Direct Debit because this is the easiest way to pay.
- 5.5 If tenants/licensees choose to pay their rent by Direct Debit, we will have various incentives to encourage this including a prize draw. Officers can revise or withdraw any of the incentives in consultation with the Lead Member for Housing.
- 5.6 We will provide tenants/licensees with clear and accessible information on their responsibilities, payment methods and available support at sign-up.
- 5.7 Rent is due weekly in advance each Monday and the tenant/licensee must pay the weekly rent promptly when due in accordance with the terms of their tenancy/licence agreement. This is unless they have an agreement to pay monthly.
- 5.8 We will notify tenants/licensees of charges and payment options for heating and hot water where this is billed separately based on metered usage.
- 5.9 Joint tenants/licensees/licenses are jointly liable for the payment of the rent and we may seek recovery for all or part of any arrears from any individual joint tenant/licensee.
- 5.10 We will aim to conduct an income and expenditure assessment to identify the financial support needs of tenant/licensees.

## 6 Promoting a payment culture

- 6.1 We will:
  - Encourage early payment and preventing tenants/licensees falling into arrears will always be our first step.
  - Use a range of preventative measures to help sustain tenancies and minimise the use of possession action.
  - Signpost tenants/licensees for support and advice with welfare benefit applications.
  - Provide tenants/licensees with a variety of payment options including by Direct Debit, online, standing order, by phone or using their rent card at any post office or any outlets displaying the Paypoint logo.
  - Closely monitor accounts to identify problems at an early stage.
  - Keep tenants/licensees informed about their rent account balance through regular rent statements. Tenants/licensees can also access their rent accounts 24/7 online by registering for 'My Account' on our website at the following address: [myaccount.haringey.gov.uk/](https://myaccount.haringey.gov.uk/)

- Aim to identify any vulnerabilities or additional needs of tenants/licensees. and provide or refer them to appropriate support services as necessary in line with our vulnerable tenants and leaseholders policy.
- Identify any communication needs that arise in relation to disability and race and provide information in alternative formats as required in line with our translation and interpretation policy. We will record these needs on our housing management system to guide future communications.
- Publicise potentially serious personal consequences of accumulating arrears, for example through newsletters and periodic media campaigns.
- Take steps to maximise tenants/licensees income, including promoting benefit take-up, highlighting initiatives, referring to work coaches for training and employment support, referring to appropriate agencies where necessary for debt advice and assistance.
- Ask tenants/licensees to inform us of any change in personal circumstances and if they are likely to miss a payment.

## 7 Tenant/licensee Credits

- 7.1 If there is a credit balance on a tenant's/licensee's account, they must apply for a refund in line with our corporate debt refund policy. We will not refund credits after a period of 6 years.

## 8 Service Charges, Heat and Other Utilities

- 8.1 Charges for heating and other utilities may be included in a tenant's/licensee's rent as required.
- 8.2 Tenants/ licensees should check whether these charges are payable weekly or billed monthly. These charges are detailed in the tenancy / licence agreement or in other communications from the Council which will also explain where payments should be made.
- 8.3 The Council may from time to time use a third party to invoice for some charges on its behalf (e.g. metered heating and hot water). Where this is the case, the Council will explain where payments should be made as necessary.

## 9 Recharges

- 9.1 There may be instances where we need to charge tenants/ licensees for services, any linked accounts would be shown on 'MyAccount'
- 9.2 This includes that we may charge the tenant for damage to our properties they have caused or by members of their household, their pets or visitors to their property that is not the result of normal wear and tear in line with our responsive repairs policy.

## 10 Links to other policies

- 10.1 This policy links to and should be read together with the following Haringey Council policies:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Corporate debt refund policy                           | <a href="#">Responsive Repairs policy</a>                            |
| <a href="#">Housing arrears policy</a>                 | Safeguarding policy  |
| <a href="#">Haringey Ethical Debt reduction policy</a> | <a href="#">Safeguarding council tenants and leaseholders policy</a> |
| Home ownership income collection policy                | <a href="#">Vulnerable tenants and leaseholders policy</a>           |
| <a href="#">HRA Rent Setting Statement</a>             | <a href="#">Heat services policies</a>                               |
| <a href="#">Translation and Interpretation Policy</a>  |  |

## 11 Resident co-design and engagement

- 11.1 When did you discuss development of this policy with residents?  
At meetings of the Resident Voice Board in February and May 2024.

11.2 What did they tell you?

They emphasised the importance of either providing or signposting vulnerable tenants/licensees to appropriate support or advice with welfare benefit applications as necessary. At section 3 of the policy, tenants should have the option of discussing difficulties with paying their rent with their Tenancy Management Officer in addition to their Income Management Officer. At section 4.2 of the policy, they told us that the wording should be changed to reflect that where the tenant is entitled to full Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, the Council has an expectation that at sign up, a token payment of £10 should be made at the sign up instead of needing to pay one week's rent in advance.

11.3 How has what residents told us informed development of this policy?

The policy states that we will identify any vulnerabilities or additional needs of tenants/licensees and provide or refer them to appropriate support services as necessary in line with our vulnerable tenants and leaseholders policy. At section 3, we have added that tenants can also discuss difficulties with paying their rent with their Tenancy Management Officer. We have changed the wording at section 4.2 to confirm it is the Council's expectation that where the tenant is likely to be entitled to full Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, that a token payment of £10 should be made at the sign up instead of needing to pay one week's rent in advance.

## 12 Equality Impact Assessment

- 12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) was carried out as part of the development of this policy. The EQIA found that the policy should have a positive impact on the protected characteristics of age, disability and race; and that it will have a neutral impact on those with other protected characteristics.

## 13 Reviewing the policy

- 13.1 We will review this policy every three years with the next review date due in October 2027 unless earlier events or legislation require an earlier update to the policy.

## 14 Legislation

- 14.1 As the landlord, we will ensure that we carry out our housing income collection policy in accordance with statutory requirements and best practice as follows:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Deregulation Act 2015                                 | Housing Act 1988 (as amended by the Housing Act 1996) |
| Equality Act 2010                                     | Housing and Planning Act 2016                         |
| Homelessness Act 2002                                 | Localism Act 2011                                     |
| Housing Act 1996                                      | Protection From Eviction Act 1977                     |
| Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the Housing Act 1996) | Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016                      |