



	Somer Community Housing Trust	Version: 2
Policy	Income Management	
Ref	SCHT/HS/POL/IM	
Staff affected	Housing Services staff	
Approved by	SCHT Board	September 2010
Lead Officer	Julie Evans – Director of Customer Services (Housing & Support)	

Policy Statement

The Trust recognises the importance of ensuring that it provides effective and efficient mechanisms for the collection of rent and other charges, including the prevention and recovery of arrears. This policy details how it will achieve this and in doing so will take into account the needs of both residents and the Trust.

1. SCOPE

1.1 This policy and its accompanying procedures are actioned within the Housing Services division of the Trust by the Income Management Officers who form part of the Trust's 3 Neighbourhood Services Teams.

1.2 The policy will address the following:

- The collection of monies charged for the provision of housing and associated services
- The prevention of arrears
- Actions to be undertaken when arrears accrue

- The support residents can expect to address the causes of non-payment
- 1.3 The Trust recognises the importance of early intervention to prevent arrears and for their effective management in terms of both beneficial outcomes for residents and for maximising the resources available to it to maintain the stock, provide services to residents and in achieving the performance standards expected by our regulator and funders.
 - 1.4 The Trust recognises that many of its residents are on low incomes and appreciates that some may occasionally have difficulties in making prompt and timely payments. The Trust aims to provide services which will assist in alleviating these difficulties.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 2.1 The Director of Customer Services (Housing & Support) has overarching responsibility for the policy and its related procedures.
- 2.2 The Neighbourhood Services Managers have operational responsibility for ensuring adherence to the policy and procedures.
- 2.3 Income Management Officers are responsible for the day to day application of this policy and its associated procedures.
- 2.4 The Revenues section of Somer Housing Group is responsible through a service level agreement for the provision of accounting services to the Trust. This includes the raising of charges including rent and service charges against the tenancy accounts of Trust tenants and the posting of payments received.

3. DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 **Tenant** - an individual who holds a tenancy contract with the Trust.
- 3.2 **Rent** – a charge made in exchange for exclusive possession of a dwelling for the use and occupation by the tenant as their only or principal home. Rent also includes charges for services provided by the Trust in association with the use and occupation of the property. Rent is charged weekly in advance and falls due on the Monday of each charging period for tenancies let on standard Assured and Assured Shorthold contracts. Rent is charged monthly in advance and falls due on the first of each month for tenancies let on monthly contracts.
- 3.3 **Rent and Service Charge Arrears** – Rent and/or service charge which remains unpaid at the close of each period.

4. PRINCIPLES

- 4.1 In applying this policy the Trust will adhere to the following principles:

- Make it easy for tenants to pay the right amount at the right time.
- Ensure tenants accounts are accurate, with all debit and payments being made to accounts in a timely and accurate way
- Implement a proactive approach towards the prevention of rent arrears at both pre and post tenancy take up.
- The Trust will ensure that this policy is applied equally and consistently to all tenants.
- The Trust recognises the need to contact residents at the earliest opportunity after an arrear accrues. It will take into consideration the communication needs and preferences of residents but whenever possible contact will be made via a telephone call or face to face meeting.
- Where it is necessary to make arrangements to clear arrears, those arrangements will be based on an analysis of income, expenditure, other household circumstances and the residents' ability to pay but also upon the need to clear the debt as quickly as possible.
- Maintain accurate records of actions taken, arrangements to pay, contacts made and the reasons for disregarding or overriding any system recommended action on the Trusts housing management system. The Trust will comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act with regard to holding and filing personal data.
- Adopt recovery actions that are consistent with the pre-action protocol recommended by Her Majesty's Court Service.
- Work with residents to explore all other methods of payment without having to seek possession and to only use eviction as a last resort.
- Take legal action only where other options have failed or where there is no alternative.
- Acknowledge its role in the prevention of homelessness and work with partner organisations to achieve this and to sustain tenancies.
- Publicise the availability of, and promote the uptake of welfare benefits including Housing Benefit (HB). It will offer to provide an estimation of entitlement to HB.
- Employ an experienced, knowledgeable and competent staff team which is capable of providing basic welfare rights and debt management advice in order to help resolve related issues facing residents.

- Work with specialist advice agencies to provide additional financial support services in relation to debt advice, money management, welfare benefits and housing benefit. It will work towards achieving financial inclusion for those currently excluded
- Communicate its Income Management Policy and Procedure in formats that are accessible to all sections of its community

5. APPLICATION

The Procedure document that accompanies this policy covers the following headings:

- Making contact with tenants
- Arrears Actions
- Financial Inclusion
- Benefits Advice and Support
- Legal Action

Equal Opportunities Assessment	No individual or group of individuals are knowingly disadvantaged by the adoption of this policy.
Legal/Regulatory Framework	Housing Act 1985 Housing Act 1988 Housing Act 1996 Regulatory Code Pre-action protocol for possession (Rent Arrears)
Performance & Quality Framework	KLOE 4
Associated Policies & Procedures	Allocations Policy Tenancy Agreement Tenant Handbook Customer Care Charter Former Tenant Arrears Policy & Procedure Recharge Policy & Procedure Homeseachers SLA Tolerated Trespassers Policy & Procedure Financial Inclusion Strategy Service Level Agreement re HB services with B&NES SLA with Bath CAB to provide money management & debt advice SLA with South Wansdyke Advice Network to provide HB maximisation service
Policy Category	Housing Management
Responsibility	Divisional Customer Services (Housing & Support)
Consultation	SRC - Staff -

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