

Tenancy Debt and Income Management Policy

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The policy sets out the general principles to be applied in relation to the management and collection of rent, service charges and other tenancy related debt, through which the organisation seeks to minimise unpaid rent and service charges. Invoicing and subsequent collection of sundry debts is covered by the Sundry Debt Management and Recovery Policy
- 1.2 All Group entities are required to ensure that all debt due is collected and they are dependent upon the receipt of this income for the continuation of the provision of services.
- 1.3 The Tenancy Debt and Income Management policy has always focused on ensuring a balance between the Wrekin Housing Group (the 'Group') supporting its customers and enabling them to sustain their tenancies while recognising how critical income collection is to the success of the business as a whole.
- 1.4 Income collection is a priority for the Group and all employees have a role in contributing to our continued strong performance. We aim to make our processes efficient and effective whilst maintaining and improving performance. This will see an increase in relation to technology where it is beneficial to the customer.
- 1.5 The Group remains committed to maximising financial inclusion, working in partnership with our tenants and ensuring that our homes are affordable with the objective of sustaining tenancies. The Group recognises that recent changes to welfare arrangements and the current pressures of inflation and the ever-increasing cost of living represent an intense and substantial challenge for both The Group and many of our tenants. We will continue to help and support our tenants through a proactive approach and open approach in all of our support and advice.

2.0 Policy Statement

- 2.1 The Group recognises the importance of sustaining excellent income collection performance and the contribution this makes to maintaining wider service delivery. The Policy applies to all properties under the management of the Wrekin Housing Group and all streams of income where payments are expected from its tenants.
- 2.2 The policy will support a systematic assessment of a tenant's ability to maintain payments that are due. This will include the following:
- Consider the affordability of a property for a prospective tenant before an offer of housing is made;
 - If an expected payment is not received, contact all tenants at the earliest opportunity;

- Determine the cause of the deficit in payment and assess the opportunity for implementing support and assistance requiring that this is accepted;
- Manage continued non-payment through an effective enforcement response;
- Promote realistic and sustainable repayment of any debts that accrue;
- Learn from experiences and use the customer intelligence gathered to shape our response should further payments be missed in the future;
- Focus on tenancy sustainability and keeping tenant in their homes wherever possible;
- Promote the support on offer from our Money Matters service at all times regardless of whether a tenant is behind with their payments or not, and;
- Build individual and community resilience, identifying and promoting funding streams that return direct benefit to our Tenants.

2.3 The Group requires all tenants to maintain payments and will promote flexibility of instalments through its payment plan initiative. Tenants are encouraged to match their payment plan to their income streams in terms of frequency and date with a view of maximising successful collection.

2.4 The Group offers a wide range of payment options that reflects its diverse customer base. Digital options through its customer portal and App are encouraged and the direct debit method of payment is promoted as its preferred payment option given its convenience for the customer, reliability and cost effectiveness.

2.5 The Group requires payment in advance of four weeks rent when every prospective tenant accepts a new property, although discretion can be shown to those who have vulnerabilities or disabilities. The Group has an expectation that this payment is maintained on their account and forms part of their instalment plan. All existing tenants are encouraged to move into advance with their rent account. The pace at which this happens is determined by their affordability to do so.

2.6 The policy supports an arrears process that creates a structure for communication and enforcement action for all tenants who continue to miss payments. It is recognised that all people are different, as are the reasons for non-payment and the process insists on the offer of support and assistance for all tenants and encourages increased communication for those deemed to be vulnerable.

3.0 Policy Scope

3.1 It is the primary aim of this policy to ensure that the Group maximises the income it uses to maintain wider service delivery through keeping unpaid rent and other tenancy debts to an absolute minimum. In doing so, the policy must also support a sufficient balance between supporting and assisting those in need and being efficient and effective with the escalation of the arrears process through a range of enforcement tools for those who continually fail to pay their rent and service charges in a satisfactory manner.

3.2 This policy covers debts relating to current or former tenancy debts as well as debts owed by leaseholders through non-payment of service charges. Areas of wider corporate debt are covered in the Sundry Debt Management and Recovery Policy.

4.0 Definitions

4.1 For the purposes of this policy, a '**debt**' is any monies owed to the Group that have not been paid by the due date.

4.2 **Tenant debt** also refers to former tenants and leaseholders

5.0 Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 The **Wrekin Housing Group Board** has overall responsibility for setting the broad direction of the Tenancy Debt and Income Management Policy and ensuring the Group is compliant with its statutory and legal requirements and meets its tenant's needs.

5.2 The **Group Chief Executive** will be responsible for:

- Ensuring sufficient resources are provided for those working directly with the Groups tenants in both the fields of support and enforcement;
- Ensuring the policy is applied consistently and aligns with the Groups vision and values;
- Creating the sufficient structure with delegated organisational responsibilities for the implementation of this policy.

5.3 The **Executive Director of Operations** and **Head of Service** will be responsible for:

- Ensuring the necessary level of focus is given to the delivery of proactive and reactive responses in regards to income collection and debt reduction;
- The effective integration of the housing teams and Money Matters service so that they work together for the benefit of the customer;
- Ensuring the sufficient allocation of resources are available to deliver the proactive and reactive responses;
- Ensuring suitable monitoring and reporting mechanisms are in place to measure the non-payment / collection of income to the business.

5.4 **Service Managers** will be responsible for:

- Reviewing the policy and making sure it recognises changes in statutory and legal requirements;
- The policy being up to date and relevant in terms of best practice both within and outside of the sector, with a particular focus on the changes brought about by the Welfare Reform Act;
- Ensuring that there is appropriate training and guidance available to allow for the contents of the policy to be delivered on a day to day basis.

5.5 **Customer facing housing staff** will be responsible for:

- Day to day monitoring of accounts to determine that all missed payments are managed in accordance with the policy;

- Ensuring that the best practice promoted in the policy is delivered on a day to day basis;
- That the necessary focus on tenancy sustainment is applied and that the importance keeping tenants in their homes is recognised.

5.6 **Specialist support staff** will be responsible for:

- Day to day management of all referrals into the service to determine that income is maximised for individual customers;
- Ensuring that the customer is placed at the centre of all work undertaken with the aim of improving their circumstances at all times;
- That the needs of the business are also recognised in all work undertaken and a good balance is struck when seeking outcomes;

6.0 Policy Implementation

6.1 Details of how this policy is implemented is detailed in the Tenancy Debt and Income Management Procedure.

Summary of changes table

Revision history			
Author	Summary of changes	Version	Authorised by & date
Ben Murphy	In line with review cycle	V3.0: June 2023	The Wrekin Housing Group Board

The Wrekin Housing Group	Policy control sheet Tenancy Debt and Income Management Policy Policy reference number - 2023/026
Policy Author	Ben Murphy Tenant Services Manager Housing
Direct Lead	Nick Grubb Head of Housing
Version	V3.0: June 2023
Target audience	Employees of the Wrekin Housing Group
Consultation	Income Management Operational Group Legal Services Employee Forum Wrekin Voices Group (Customers who are digitally involved with the Group) Closed Facebook group of Customers Executive Management Group Customer Committee The Wrekin Housing Group Board
Customer Feedback Summary	The policy has been sent to over 300 customers for their feedback
Date of Equality Impact Assessment	An Equality Impact Assessment was completed on 13 th February 2023
Date of Data Privacy Impact Assessment	No personal data is processed as a result of the adoption of this policy.
Approving Body	The Wrekin Housing Group Board
Date of final approval	July 2023
Implementation date	July 2023
Monitoring and Reporting	Daily account management; Weekly monitoring by teams; Monthly monitoring by managers; Income Management Improvement Board; Income Management Operational Group; Monthly targets to measures session; Key information included in Management Accounts; Annual reporting via Annual accounts; Annual report to tenants.
Review date	January 2026
Expiry date	July 2026
Review cycle	Three-Year Review Cycle
Policy category	Finance
Associated policies and procedures	Rent and Service Charge Policy; Leasehold Management Policy; Repairs & Maintenance Policy; Write Off of Irrecoverable Debts Policy; Sundry Debt Management Recovery Policy; Allocations & Lettings Policy; Tenancy Changes Policy; Tenancy Sustainment Policy; Intervention Procedures.
Policy location	SharePoint Wrekin Housing Group website