

RAILWAY HOUSING ASSOCIATION

POLICY STATEMENT

DEBT RECOVERY

1. Statement of Intent

The Association will provide an efficient and effective service to collect rent and other charges. We aim to avoid arrears arising by taking preventative action, providing good advice on benefits and reinforcing the importance of prompt payment.

We will seek to minimise rent arrears and recover all debts including service charges, court costs and rechargeable repairs by taking prompt, effective and sympathetic but firm action.

The Association will deal with debt recovery in a fair and equitable manner irrespective of a resident's ethnicity, nationality, religion or belief, gender or gender orientation, age, disability, sexual orientation or marital status. The specific needs of minority groups will be addressed in implementing this policy.

2. Implementation of the Policy

The Association will:

- Carry out a detailed sign up procedure for all new tenants giving advice about their responsibility to pay rent, the rent payment methods available, completion of Housing Benefit and/or Supporting People subsidy claim forms, and the relevant information contained in the Residents' Handbook.
- Visit new leaseholders and discuss their responsibility to pay service charges, payment methods and relevant information in Leaseholders' Handbook.
- Provide a rent collection service which offers simple to use and convenient payment methods, which are cost effective for the Association.
- Aim to collect 100% of rent and other charges
- Ensure effective recording and monitoring systems
- Operate clear and consistent procedures
- Provide a quarterly statement to tenants about their rent account showing details of all rent due and payments received
- Provide an annual statement to leaseholders showing the actual costs of providing services and details of any adjustments (recovery or reimbursement) due
- Make early contact with residents whose accounts fall into arrears

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- Offer information to residents about other agencies that can provide debt counselling and advice about the availability of benefits
- Make realistic affordable agreements for repayment of arrears taking into account personal circumstances. The minimum repayment will usually be in line with the national guidelines for Housing Benefit overpayment recovery rate, which is reviewed annually.
- Take legal action to recover arrears and possession of a property when all other reasonable steps have been exhausted.
- Recharge the resident for any court costs incurred as a result of legal action being taken
- Liaise with any other agencies that are involved with the resident such as Social Services throughout the debt recovery process
- Make all reasonable attempts to recover outstanding debts from former residents where it is economical to do so. This may include the use of tracing and debt collection agencies.
- Actively pursue the recovery of sundry debts such as court costs and rechargeable repairs as well as rent arrears and service charges

Payments received will be used to pay any outstanding debts in the following order of priority – rent and service charges, court costs, and then sundry debts such as rechargeable repairs

3. Responsibility

The Director of Housing Services is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.

4. Monitoring

Quarterly performance reports will be made to the Board.

5. Review

This policy will be reviewed biennially, in consultation with residents.

This policy applies to the beneficiaries of Joseph Hornby Stockdale Almshouses.

April 2010

**This policy can be made available on request in other languages, large type,
Braille or in audio format.**