

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 race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, age sexual orientation or marital status. The specific needs of minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities and other vulnerabilities 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 Tenants 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
- Make early contact with tenants whose accounts fall into arrears
- Offer information to tenants 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.

2. Implementation of the Policy continued

The Association will:

- Take legal action to recover arrears and possession of a property when all other reasonable steps have been exhausted.
- Recharge the tenant for any court costs incurred as a result of legal action being taken
- Liaise with any other agencies that are involved with the tenant such as Social Services throughout the debt recovery process
- Make all reasonable attempts to recover outstanding debts from former tenants 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 Housing Services Sub Committee.

5. Review

This policy will be reviewed biennially in consultation with tenants.

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

February 2008

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