

Policy

Title: Rent Collection, Payments and Arrears Management Policy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 For Halton Housing to remain viable and to meet its commitments and responsibilities it is vital that it provides effective, flexible and transparent facilities and services to enable customers to understand and meet their obligations to pay rent and related charges.
- 1.2 Halton Housing encourages its customers to pay their rent regularly and on time, offering many ways of paying rent which are accessible, efficient and effective.
- 1.3 If a customer fails to pay their rent and maintain a clear rent account, Halton Housing makes early contact, adopting a firm but fair approach to recovery of arrears, offering support to sustain tenancies whilst also escalating action through the courts if necessary.

2. Policy Statement

Rent Collection and payments

- 2.1 Rent and service charges will be debited each week on a 48/49 or 52/53-week basis depending on the length of the financial year – as outlined in the Rent and Service Charge Policies.
- 2.2 Rents and service charges are payable weekly in advance. On this basis, an account will be considered in arrears if payment has not been received by the Monday of the week of its due date.
- 2.3 Customers have the option to pay their rent monthly; dependant on the date of payment customer's accounts must be clear at the end of the financial year.
- 2.4 Halton Housing will update customer accounts to show payments received daily.
- 2.5 All customers will be issued with a rent payment card, at the start of their tenancy or upon request. This card details each customer's unique payment reference number which is linked to their tenancy.
- 2.6 Options available for using the rent payment card include:
 - Online payments, via the Halton Housing's website
 - Customer Portal from phone or tablet
 - Pay Point and Post Office outlets
 - 24-hour telephone payment line
- 2.7 Other options to make rent payments include:

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- Direct Debit
 - Standing Order
 - Cheque or postal orders
 - Housing Benefit (HB) or Universal Credit (UC) housing element
- 2.8 Halton Housing will use managed Universal Credit (UC) payments via Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA) and third-party deductions if the criteria are met.
- 2.9 Rent Statements can be accessed by customers at any time via the self-serve options available e.g. Customer Portal/Website. If a customer cannot obtain regular rent statements via these methods, then consideration will be given to providing printed statements. Rent Statements will also be issued upon request and at relevant points in the arrears process to ensure customers are fully aware of their rent arrears position.
- 2.10 Existing Customers will be advised of changes to rents and charges in accordance with statutory notice periods. They will also be given details of the rent payment methods available and as appropriate information on claiming UC or HB. Any changes in services available in relation to rent payment will be communicated at least four weeks in advance. Details of such services will be routinely communicated to customers in correspondence regarding rent or through contact with customers.
- 2.11 When signing their tenancy agreement new customers will be advised of the following:
- Their weekly rent charge and if there are any additional service charges/ heating charges
 - Their responsibility to pay rent and any other charges and the range of payment methods available
 - The option to pay by Direct Debit and completion of the digital form
 - Awareness of UC or HB, their responsibility to make a claim and ongoing responsibility for ensuring rent payments are made
 - If appropriate, HH's intention to make an APA application
 - The support that is available from HH to assist with support and money advice

Arrears Recovery

- 2.12 All customers have a responsibility to pay their rent in full and on time. If customers fail to meet this obligation there will be a clear and progressive approach to collecting any outstanding rent arrears.

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- 2.13 HH's aim is for the arrears to be cleared as quickly and cost effectively as possible. HH will take incremental action against customers who fail to maintain payments or arrangements to clear their arrears.
- 2.14 To collect effectively, HH will maintain accurate up to date information on charges and payments to escalate action and use the latest performance information for proactive arrears collection. HH staffing structure enables a swift response to manage customers rent accounts.
- 2.15 Initial contact will be made after one week's rent is owed; customers will be given a reasonable amount of time to respond to our contact. However, if the response does not lead to payment of arrears, then further action will be taken by serving of a notice seeking possession if more than four weeks rent is owed. If all other avenues are unsuccessful, HH will use the legal process including court action to collect arrears and ultimately repossession of a customer's home, ensuring it meets the terms of the Pre-Action Court Protocol.
- 2.16 HH will assist customers who are in financial difficulty by providing advice and information to support and maximise income as part of our tenancy support and welfare benefit/money advice service.
- 2.17 With the introduction of Universal Credit and the full migration from legacy benefit, HH will support the principal that customers take responsibility for managing their rental payments but understands this transition may have a greater impact on vulnerable customers.
- 2.18 HH will confirm rent details with Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) within one working day of a request for information. Early contact will be made with customers to assess individual circumstances to assist in managing their rent account whilst the UC claim is being processed. HH will apply for an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA) and managed payments direct to the landlords when the criteria stated in the regulations are met.
- 2.19 For customers who are in receipt of Housing Benefit, HH will seek agreement to have it paid directly to their rent accounts. In addition, HH will also seek customers' consent to authorise Halton Borough Councils Benefits Section to discuss details of their HB claim.
- 2.20 To support collection of rent payments, colleagues need to understand the importance of maximising income, and during any contact with customers will assist the team by reinforcing the customer's responsibility to pay their rent.
- 2.21 HH will also proactively pursue other debts owed including former customer arrears and other charges owed by customers. HH will adopt a firm but fair approach to wider customer debts agreeing a reasonable repayment plan and taking incremental action if this plan is not maintained.

2.22 HH choose to use other options available to manage debt as appropriate whilst ensuring a fair and consistent approach. These include:

- Use of Section 21 Notices on introductory tenancies
- Using Ground 8 for persistent arrears

2.23 HH will endeavour to maintain effective links with Halton Borough Council's Housing Benefit Team, the Department of Works and Pensions and Job Centre Plus, as these will be vital to our work to support the customers and maximise income.

2.24 HH will work in partnership with Halton Borough Council Housing Solution Service to manage high level rent arrears and encourage customers to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments and other charitable payments to reduce rent arrears and sustain their tenancy.

2.25 HH understands that customers may be experiencing wider debt problems and in addition to offering an inhouse welfare benefit /money advice service, HH will cooperate with external support agencies including Halton Borough Council and Citizen Advice. If customers seek relief from their debts by making a Breathing Space application or Debt Relief Order, HH will cooperate with these requests to assist in the management of customers rent arrears.

3. Regulatory and/or Legal Compliance

Rent Collection and payments

3.1 HH is compliant with the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing and Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard (TIAS) to provide choices to customers in delivery of services.

3.2 HH is compliant with the terms of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 which sets out that customers must receive:

- A rent book or equivalent showing the name and address of the landlord and of the managing agent (if any), the rent payable, details of the number of occupants permitted in the dwelling (and any other information required under current legislation)
- The landlord's name and address must be included on any written demand for rent or other charges due in or under the tenancy agreement and detail of where payments can be made should be provided
- Customers must be formally notified of the address where they may serve a notice on the landlord as required by Section 48 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987. Landlords should give customers at least one month's written

notice of any rent increase or comply with any statutory requirements for rent increases

- To comply with the good practice requirements of the pre-action court protocol for rent arrears; Customers who do not pay their rent on a rent card (e.g. those who pay by standing order or smartcard) should be provided with access to a rent statement at least every quarter. Our customers will have access to rent statements at any time via our self-serve options
- All customers upon request should be provided with accurate and up-to-date information about their rent account and any amounts owing

Rent Arrears Recovery

3.3 HH's Rent Arrears Recovery Policy and its associated procedures are compatible with obligations imposed by existing legislation, including: -

- Rent Act 1977
- Protection from Eviction Act 1977
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1987
- Housing Act 1988 (as amended by the Housing Act 1996)
- Equality Act 2010
- Pre-action Protocols Civil Procedure Rules

3.4 The Regulator of Social Housing does not appear to have specific expectations relating to rent arrears collection. However effective management of arrears will meet part of the 2015 Governance and Financial Viability Standard which states that:

Financial viability - Registered providers shall manage their resources effectively to ensure their viability is maintained while ensuring that social housing assets are not put at undue risk

4. Diversity Considerations

4.1 A screening has taken place and a checklist completed in January 2025 and confirmed that a full Equality Impact Assessment does not need to be carried out in respect of the policy as it concluded that:

- The Policy is not directly or indirectly discriminatory
- The Policy increases equality of opportunity by permitting or requiring positive action or action to redress disadvantages
- There are no additional measures that can be adopted which would further enhance the equality of opportunity in the context of this policy

5. Links to Strategies, Policies and Associated Documents

5.1 Procedures and other documents that are associated with this policy are as follows:

- Rent Setting & Service Charge Policies
- Write-off of Bad Debts & Credits Policy
- Rent Arrears Recovery Procedure



Translations are available on request, by calling 0303 333 0101.

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