

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION RENT COLLECTION POLICY

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Prepared by:	Rachel Ryan
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Lead officer:	Rachel Ryan

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Stockport Homes' (SHG) approach to rent collection and arrears management is underpinned by the fundamental recognition that rent and service charge income received is used to support customers, manage, repair and maintain the housing stock and sustain the provision of the service.

1.2 Customers in temporary accommodation are often facing challenging financial circumstances and a supportive approach is taken towards maximising income and money management. Enhanced support will be given to enable customers to meet and pay the charges due with the premise that customers should pay for services they receive and that this is a fundamental of preparation for independent living.

1.3 This Policy sets out the ways in which customers in temporary accommodation are supported to pay rent and service charges and how arrears are managed.

2 STRATEGIC LINKS

2.1 This Policy has been written to take into account obligations arising from other SHG policies, strategies and national legislation. In particular:

- The Housing Act (1985) and (1996)
- SHG's Former Tenants Arrears Policy
- Stockport Council's Corporate Recovery Policy
- Temporary Accommodation Support Policy
- Temporary Accommodation Eviction Policy

3 POLICY STATEMENT

3.1 Customers residing in Temporary Accommodation have a licensed obligation to pay rent and service charge and maintain an account free of arrears.

3.2 All customers have access to money and benefit advice from their Project Worker and through the specialist Money Advice team.

3.3 The key principles on which rent collection and arrears management are taken are:

- Prompt early action to minimise arrears from escalating
- Personal contact with customers at all stages of the process
- Availability of high quality advice and support

4 IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Customers are assisted to complete benefit applications for housing benefit costs.

4.2 Customers are supported to maximise their income through benefit entitlements and work opportunities.

4.3 Customers are advised on the options of how to pay their rent and service charge. This discussion is had when customers arrive at the scheme, as part of customers 'booking in' to Temporary Accommodation:

- Rent and service charge can be paid at any temporary accommodation scheme on any day in cash
- Rent and service charge can be paid over the phone, online, via Council services, and using standing orders
- Payment contributions are accepted for any outstanding balance due on current or former accounts (in accordance with a customer's payment plan)
- All payments are receipted

4.4 Customers are kept informed of upcoming benefit changes and how this might affect them.

4.5 Customers will be advised of any change to rent or service charge payable promptly.

4.6 Scheme Managers carry out regular accounts audits to identify customers who are or who may be coming into arrears and take early action.

4.7 Project Workers meet with customers at least once per week and discuss rent and service charge payments if needed and address any wider financial issues or concerns.

4.8 Any arrears will result in a Non-Payment Notice being served which includes a positive action plan to best avoid the notice being enacted. This is detailed in the Temporary Accommodation Eviction Policy and Procedure.

4.9 Where customers fail to attempt to clear their arrears or do not engage with support to address their arrears, a Notice to Quit may be served as per their License Agreement.

4.10 A customer's Housing Options Officer and any other relevant partner agencies will be advised if a customer's housing application may be impacted by arrears; budgeting concerns are identified, or a Non-Payment Notice is issued, as detailed in the Temporary Accommodation Eviction Policy and Procedure.

5 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 Identified in the Equality Impact Assessment, SHG will ensure that measures are in place to support vulnerable customers who often have challenges due to disability, age and ethnicity. As such:

5.2 SHG will ensure that residents who are vulnerable are not sent inappropriate letters for technical or small arrears balances.

5.3 SHG will ensure that rent payment options are accessible and convenient for people with support needs.

5.4 SHG will contact Social Services and other relevant agencies for dealing with the arrears of customers who have support needs which make them less able to manage their own financial affairs.

5.5 SHG will liaise with the Council's Housing Benefit section and/or the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for Universal Credit claims, to help ensure that residents with support needs receive housing cost benefits promptly. Where benefits are not applicable, specialist support will be accessed via agencies such as Money Advice Team, Citizens Advice Bureau.

5.6 If required or requested, an interpreter will be used if the residents has English as a second language and will translate arrears letters if the customers cannot be contacted by phone. British Sign Language interpreters will also be utilised and documents sent in large print when required.

6 OWNERSHIP, MONITORING AND REVIEW

6.1 The Temporary Accommodation Rent and Arrears Policy is owned by the Directorate of Neighbourhoods and Support (with responsibilities in associated Directorates for the implementation of the policy.)

6.2 The policy will be and reviewed in line with the Policy Review Group schedule and any enquiries relating to the policy can be directed to the Temporary Accommodation Manager and/or the Project Officer.