

Grosvenor Hart Homes: Income Management Policy

Grosvenor Hart Homes

Income Management Policy

Introduction

This policy outlines the approach to the collection of income due to Grosvenor Hart Homes (GHH), in order, to maximise rent collection, minimise debt and enable our tenants to maintain their tenancy. In addition, this policy will maximise the collection of service charge arrears, former tenant arrears and sundry debts owed to Grosvenor Hart Homes.

In order to maintain the financial stability of our organisation and continue to provide high-quality services to our tenants, it's essential that we collect payments in a timely and efficient manner and provide transparency and accountability in the income collection process. GHH sets targets to achieve on an annual basis and provides regular feedback about progress in meeting these targets.

The income collection service is delivered through a combination of a third party and GHH and will be achieved within the context of our legal and regulatory obligations and other related policies and procedures.

GHH operates a person-centred approach and will be proactive in engaging with tenants to enable us to provide support for people to pay their rent, sustain their tenancy and ensure that legal routes are an absolute last resort only when all avenues have failed. This policy aligns to 2022 -2023 pledge of the National Housing Federation: **“No one will be evicted from a housing association home as a result of financial hardship, where they are working with their housing association to get their payments back on track.”**

Scope of the policy

This policy covers all GHH's tenures and both current and former tenants. For the purpose of this policy 'arrears' includes all rent arrears and sundry debts including current rent arrears, service charge arrears, former tenant arrears and housing management sundry debts including associated costs and legal fees arising from the above.

This policy is not designed to cover the technical details of specific service delivery but to present the overall approach and methodology of income management.

This policy outlines the framework and guidelines for collecting income in a compassionate, fair, transparent, and efficient manner.

Key Aims and Objectives

The key aims of this Policy are as follows:

- To deliver a person-centred approach to income management by working collaboratively with tenants to establish trusting relationships
- To maximise cash collection so that payments are received on time and in full. This will help to reduce the risk of non-payment and improve the organisation's overall financial viability
- To make it easier for tenants to pay through various options and to access tenancy support initiatives to maximise income and prevent debt
- To ensure a compassionate, fair, professional, consistent and timely approach to debt recovery by providing clear and consistent communication with tenants about their outstanding balances
- To promote a coordinated preventative approach towards sharing debtor information

- To work in partnership with external agencies/partners to ensure that debt is managed in accordance with legislative provisions and best practice

These aims will be delivered through the following objectives:

- **Rent First Culture:** Rent is due in advance of the commencement of a tenancy and throughout the lifetime of the tenancy. It is the tenant's responsibility to pay the rent in line with the terms set out in their tenancy agreement. For example, if the tenant chooses to pay their rent weekly, one week's rent in advance is due. If the tenant chooses to pay their rent monthly then one month's rent in advance is due.
- Where a tenant receives the full housing element of universal credit they will not be required to pay in advance. Where a tenant is not entitled to the full housing element of universal credit they will be expected to pay in advance their individual contribution to the rent. Where a prospective new tenant cannot pay the rent in advance prior to sign up, authorisation from the Housing Director needs to be sought to authorise the new tenancy.
- **Early Intervention and Prevention:** is key to our person centred approach and by actively monitoring rent accounts, we can identify tenants that need additional advice and support. This will begin as part of the application and matching panel process where affordability checks and benefit maximisation processes will be completed to ensure we fully understand the needs and specific circumstances of each tenant. Where needed GHH will work with tenants prior to moving into a GHH property to ensure they are ready to manage all aspects of their tenancy including their ability and responsibility to pay their rent on time.
- **Promoting a debt prevention and easy payment culture:**
 1. Current tenants are advised of their account balance through annual rent statements, through arrears correspondence and on request
 2. GHH offers various payment methods by which tenants can pay their rent or outstanding debt to the business. We promote Direct Debit as our preferred payment method to enhance our chances of increasing income into the business whilst reducing debt owed
- **Tenant First Culture:** GHH will know all of its tenants needs and have an in depth understanding of their personal circumstances. We will always endeavour to deal with arrears matters in person ensuring our approach is supportive and builds trust. GHH will work with tenants to explore the issues behind the non-payment of rent and work on a solution to get their rent account back on track.
- Correspondence will still be sent to tenants clarifying the in-person discussions or where attempts to meet tenants have not been successful.
- Where required GHH will ensure that tenants can access an interpretation service
- On request, GHH will provide translations of all documents, policies and procedures into another language or format.

Support for Tenants

GHH tenants will be able to access and benefit from a comprehensive support package if it is required including:

- One-to-one support to tenants and members of their households to help them to achieve their goals, whether it be into training, education or employment
- Access to life skills training, welfare benefits advice, maximising income, budgeting advice and job brokerage/career mentoring
- Access to appropriate services to help tenants with support needs manage their rent account.

Partnership Working

We will work in partnership with external support agencies to maximise income for our tenants all whilst reducing debt and sustaining their tenancy.

This includes but is not limited to, local authorities, Pennysmart, Citizens Advice Bureau and debt counselling charities.

Legal Action

Our **person-centred** approach means we will proactively encourage engagement with tenants to enable us to provide the right advice and support, to be able to pay their rent and sustain their tenancy.

We will communicate with the tenants using all of the following means dependent on their individual needs; home visits, telephone calls, emails, text messages, letters and office meetings. GHH will always aim to communicate in a trauma informed approach and through the Family Assistant where tenants have support needs.

Legal action to recover debt will always be a last resort, however, there will be instances where is no other sustainable option and legal proceedings may be issued, when tenants are not engaging with us, not paying their rent on a number of occasions and not reducing their debt.

For the avoidance of doubt a 'refusal to engage' includes, but is not limited to, the complete or persistent failure to co-operate with GHH, meet with the staff, or respond to communication from our staff.

Performance and Quality Monitoring

The key performance indicators reported on are current tenant arrears, former tenant arrears and rent debit written off as bad debt. Income Management performance is reported at an operational and senior leadership team level. The Board receives arrears performance on the monthly performance dashboard.

We will review GHH's income management performance against appropriate benchmarks with a view to continuously improving.

Legislation

- Housing Act 1985, 1988 and 1996
- Equality Act 2010
- Localism Act 2011
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Civil Procedure Rules
- Pre-action Protocol for Possession Claims for Social Landlords 2020
- Protection from Eviction Act 1977

Review schedule

This Policy will be reviewed every three years unless changes to internal policies or legislation require a review to be carried out sooner.

Version	Date approved	Date for review	Document owner
1.1	27.10.23	27.10.26	Karl Dean
1.2	04.07.24	04.07.27	Karl Dean

