



# Housing Services Rent policy (2023)

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Purpose of this policy**

This purpose of this policy (previously known as the Income Management policy) is to explain how Havering Council (“the Council”) calculates, charges and recovers rent and rent-associated payments due for occupation of its permanent and temporary homes.

## **1.2 Aims, objectives and outcomes of this policy**

The aim of this policy is to ensure housing tenants are able to successfully sustain the tenancy of their home by ensuring due rent and all associated charges are fully settled in a timely manner.

The Council takes a firm, but fair, approach to rent income collection, because regular, full settlement of rent and associated charges is essential to maintaining the provision of necessary front line housing services.

## **1.3 Scope of this policy**

This policy applies to all Council housing tenants, excluding the occupiers of leasehold and shared ownership properties.

## **1.4 Delegated authority to make minor changes to this policy**

The Assistant Director of Housing Operations, in consultation with the Director of Housing and Property and/or Director of Living Well, will be able to approve minor amendments that do not significantly change this policy or associated procedures.

## **1.5 Timescales for this policy**

This policy will take effect in July 2023 and will be subject to review every three years. However, it may be revised beforehand to accommodate the introduction of any relevant regulatory or statutory changes that may take place during the interim.

## **1.6 Legal context of this policy**

This policy adheres to the following legislative requirements:

- Housing Act 1985, 1996 & 2004
- Localism Act 2011
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Protection from Eviction Act 1977
- Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018

### **1.7 Equal Opportunities**

The Council will seek to ensure that this policy is, at all times, implemented in a manner that is fair to all sections of the local community.

All applicants for housing or re-housing will be invited to indicate if they wish to make use of the Council's translation and interpretation services, or if they require additional services to enable them to access and understand the policy to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in any way.

They also will be invited to provide details of ethnic origin, sexuality, disability and other equalities information. Provision of this information is not obligatory or a requirement for acceptance of an application.

However, such information will help the Council monitor the number and type of protected characteristics requiring hostel support, and will help ensure that service improvement evolves in line with any changing local needs.

Equalities records will be kept and monitored to ensure hostel accommodations are offered and allocated fairly. This policy will be regularly reviewed to ensure it is not operated in any way that could discriminate or disadvantage against any particular group of people.

### **1.8 Data Protection**

Havering Council takes personal privacy very seriously.

Any personal information provided will be kept confidential and never shared without the individual's prior knowledge and consent, unless required to do so by law.

For full details about how the Council protects personal data, please visit [Havering Council Data Protection policy](#).

### **1.9 Financial Inclusion**

Rent arrears are often associated with the existence of other household debts, unemployment, and with accessing welfare benefits.

Financial Inclusion is about having the access, knowledge and capability to use mainstream financial services, manage money and alleviate poverty.

The Council is committed to financial inclusion and supporting tenants to sustain their tenancy.

Housing's Income Services team provides specialist advice and support to tenants in financial difficulty on matters such as budgeting, money management and dealing with debt.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 - How rent is calculated**

Rents are based on a variety of factors and this can be found in the Rent Setting Policy 2023.

### **2.2 - How rent is charged**

Weekly rents are due weekly in advance each Monday, over 48 weeks. There are four rent-free weeks per year, approximately quarterly.

Whichever payment type is used, rent accounts must always be kept settled.

### **2.3 - Setting up a Rent Account**

A rent account will be set up for the tenant by the Rent Accounts team on the day they move into the property.

Rent will be due from the first day of tenancy. Information on managing the rent account will be provided to the tenant when signing up to the tenancy. Tenancies will always start on a Monday.

### **2.4 - Rent increases**

London Borough of Havering rent levels are set in strict accordance with government guidelines and in accordance with the Rent Setting Policy

Tenants will be advised in writing about any change in their rent at least four weeks before the change is due take place. Any change will also be shown in the notification slip sent to them.

## **3. What is and is not included in our rent charges**

### **3.1 - Items included in our rent charge**

Our Rent charge include two elements:

- Net rent - This is the basic charge for occupying your home.
- Service Charges -These are charges for communal or shared services provided by the Council to a building or estate. The way charges are calculated and what they cover are set out in the Tenancy Agreement.

A service charge is only payable where it has been 'reasonably incurred.' This means that the works must be carried out and be necessary.

The following are examples of the kind of services currently available:

<b>Service Name</b>	<b>Service Description</b>
Block Cleaning	A charge made to residents of flats and maisonettes for the cleaning of communal stairwells.
Caretaking	External cleaning tasks including the removal of litter and graffiti refuse area cleaning, etc. carried out by Estate Caretakers.
Bulk Refuse	The removal of bulk refuse and fly-tips where the Council is unable to identify the person/s responsible.
Grounds Maintenance	Regular communal grounds maintenance tasks including grass cutting, pruning and hedge trimming.
Neighbourhood Enforcement	Warden patrols of the estates to prevent or minimise instances of anti-social behaviour.
Communal TV aerial and Door Entry	A service charge payable by all residents who have access to communal/satellite TV aerials and door entry points.
Heating and hot water charges	For heating and hot water supplied through a communal boiler.
Communal lighting	Lighting of communal areas of the estate.
Sheltered Housing cleaning	Cleaning the shared areas of sheltered accommodation by the Sheltered Housing housekeepers.
Sheltered Housing Intensive Management	A service charge in respect of the supported housing service provision provided by the Sheltered Scheme Officers.
Management fee	There may be a charge to cover all associated administrative costs incurred by the Council or the managing agent.

### **3.2 - Items not included in our rent charges:**

Items not included in our rent charge comprise:

- Council Tax
- Electricity
- Gas
- Water

Essex & Suffolk Water (E&SW) fixes your water charge and is independent of the Council. We currently collect this charge on their behalf unless you have a water meter installed. We are aiming to stop the collection of water rates from April 2024.

Tenants can apply to have a water meter installed either by visiting: [www.eswater.co.uk/services/water/water-meters/apply-for-a-meter](http://www.eswater.co.uk/services/water/water-meters/apply-for-a-meter) or by calling 0345 782 0999.

Tenants should inform E&SW that they are a tenant of Havering Council and have the Council's permission to apply for a meter. They will need to quote the E&SW account number for your property, which can be obtained from the Income Services team.

If it is not practical to fit a water meter in a property, the tenants will be eligible to be transferred to the Assessed Household Charge, which is based on the number of bedrooms in the home.

## **4. Rent payment options**

The Council offers a number of ways in which to pay rent:

- **Direct Debit**

This is the quickest, easiest and most worry-free way to make sure due rent is paid on time.

Payments are made automatically by the due date. If the amount due changes, the direct debit payments change too, without the need for the tenant to contact their bank/building society. Also, by using this method, the tenant can authorise an agreed amount each month to settle any rent arrears.

To arrange payment by direct debit, the tenant will need to return a completed direct debit instruction form to the Council, which can be either:

- a) electronically downloaded from the Havering Council website and printed by the tenant, or
- b) requested in paper format from the Council by calling 01708 434000.

- **Standing Order**

An automated payment method that requires the tenant to ensure any adjustment in the payment amount is notified to their bank/building society in sufficient time to meet the due payment date.

Consequently, this method carries the risk that the correct amount will not be paid by the due date. The tenant's bank/building society may charge the tenant for this service.

- **Internet/Telephone banking**

The tenant's 14-digit rent reference number will be required.

- **Telephone**

Payments by telephone may be made by Debit Card only, and calling the Debit Card line on 01708 433993; an automated service that operates 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.

The tenant will need to have their debit card details and 14-digit rent reference number to hand when using this service.

- **Online**

Rent can be paid online at <https://payments.havering.gov.uk/>. The tenant's 14-digit rent reference number will be required.

- **Post Office or PayPoint terminal**

Rent can be paid at a Post Office or any shop displaying the Pay Point logo. A receipt will be provided, however payments made using these methods may take longer to reach the tenant's rent account.

- **Universal Credit payment**

Universal Credit is a single payment that replaces and combines six benefits, including Housing Benefit, to help working-age people with a low household income.

Universal Credit is paid monthly to the recipient and it is their responsibility to pay due rent directly to the Council.

Upon request, the Council can automatically deduct rent each month from Universal Credit. For assistance, tenants wishing automated rent deductions should call the Council's contact centre on 01708 434000 and ask to be put through to an Income Officer.

## **5. Rent arrears**

When signing a Tenancy Agreement with Havering Council, the tenant is legally required to ensure that rent due is paid by the date specified in the agreement.

**Failure to pay rent in full by the due date is a breach of contract**, jeopardising the continuation of the tenancy. It is the tenant's responsibility to notify the Income Services team immediately if a delay in rent payment is anticipated.

Housing's Income Services team closely monitors due payments from tenants, and a reasonably tolerant approach is taken towards those facing genuine financial hardship.

If Income Services detects a payment failure, they will contact the tenant with a view to arranging settlement or agreeing a realistic repayment plan based on the tenant's income and expenditure.

Tenants at risk of eviction should, therefore, contact the Housing Solutions team by email at [housing.solutions@havering.gov.uk](mailto:housing.solutions@havering.gov.uk), or by telephone on 01708 432824.



If all reasonable attempts to contact the tenant fail and if:

- the tenant refuses to engage with Income Services, or
- full settlement is not made within six weeks

a Notice of Seeking Possession or a Notice to Quit will be served on the tenant.

If the tenant has not vacated the property on the date that the notice expires, the Council will apply to the court for a Possession Order, which will give the date by which the court will require the tenant to vacate the property.

Where the Council is successful in securing a Possession Order, court costs will be applied for, and a money judgement (also known as a County Court Judgement (CCJ)<sup>1</sup>) entered.

If the tenant has not vacated the property by the date given in the Possession Order, the Council will seek a Warrant of Possession from the court.

The tenant will receive a Notice of Eviction from the Court-appointed bailiffs, giving the date upon which eviction will take place.

**If the tenant is evicted for any reason, they may be classed as ‘intentionally homeless’ and the Council may no longer have a duty to rehouse them.**

Eviction is seen by the Council as the last resort in managing arrears. Tenancy sustainment is always considered the best and preferred outcome for all concerned.

## **6. Help for those struggling to pay their rent**

Tenants struggling to pay their rent must contact the Housing Solutions team (contact details are given in 5.1 above) to help avoid the accumulation of rent arrears and possible eviction from the property.

The Council provides an expert team to offer practical financial advice on matters such as budgetary management, and tenancy support services in order to agree an affordable, sustainable repayment plan.

Other useful sources of advice with paying off rent arrears:

- **Citizens Advice** (Havering)  
Tel: 0808 189 8273  
Website: [citizensadvicehavering.org](http://citizensadvicehavering.org)
- **National Debtline**  
Tel: 0808 808 4000  
Website: [nationaldebtline.org](http://nationaldebtline.org)

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<sup>1</sup> A CCJ is a court order that is registered against a person who fails to repay money that they owe. It means that the person will find it very difficult to secure loans or credit in future.

## **7. Dissemination and communication of this policy**

Housing Services will consult with all directly or indirectly affected stakeholders to ensure this policy fulfils its purpose to be clear and transparent. It will be made available internally and externally in print and electronic formats.

It will also be made available in easy-read and multi-lingual versions, copies of which will be obtainable upon request.

## **8. Implementation of this policy**

This policy will take effect on August 2023. Responsibility for the successful implementation of this policy will be with Havering Council's Assistant Director of Housing Operations.

## **9. Monitoring and review of this policy**

In the interests of continuous improvement, this policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains relevant, up-to-date and fit-for-purpose for the Council and the residents of Havering.