

**BENEFITS POLICY**



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JUNE 2007

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to:
- Maximise the income of the tenants of the Association
  - Reduce the arrears owed to the Association
  - Improve the cashflow of the Association
  - Provide customer friendly benefit advice to our tenants

### 2. POLICY STATEMENT

- 2.1 The Association will provide tenants at any early stage with advice on benefits, changes in rent payable and make contact with tenants whose accounts go into arrears.
- 2.2 A benefit assessment will be done on all new tenants to establish entitlement to benefits and if necessary assistance completing a benefit claim form.
- 2.3 The Rent Income Team will seek to participate in the verification of new claims for Housing Benefit with verification framework compliant Local Authorities. Where an authority is not yet verification framework compliant, forms will be completed to the same standard.
- 2.4 The Rent Income Officer will liaise with all relevant Benefit Offices and seek to establish or improve Service Level Agreements.
- 2.5 The Rent Income Team will encourage all new and existing tenants to claim welfare benefits and offer assistance on the range and type of benefits available.

### 3. IMPLEMENTATION

- 3.1 Staff will be given regular updates to ensure they are aware of changes to benefit regulations.
- 3.2 Tenants will be made aware of the range of benefit they may be entitled to, via literature in public places and regular newsletter campaigns also large print and Braille will be advertised and available on request.
- 3.3 Offer benefit calculations to tenants by telephone, office visit and home visit.
- 3.4 Using the Association's Area Offices to offer Benefit Surgeries.
- 3.5 Use the 'Ferret' welfare benefit advice system to calculate and advise tenants of eligibility to benefits.
- 3.6 Establish links with outside agencies such as CAB who are able to offer specialist advice.

### 4. RESPONSIBILITY

- 4.1 Overall responsibility for implementation lies with the Director of Housing Services.
- 4.2 Rent Income Coordinator is responsible for application of policy and procedure, monitoring performance, identifying shortfall and recommending action to rectify.
- 4.3 Day to day operation of the policy is the responsibility of the Rent Income Team Leader.

### 5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The Association will consult on an annual basis with the Local Authority, outside agencies and benchmarking groups to promote continuous improvement and develop good practice in this policy.
- 5.2 Prior to making any changes to this policy the Association will consent and consider the view of:
  - All relevant staff
  - Senior Management Team
  - Tenants Forum
  - Board of Management
  - Residents, Associations, Tenants Groups, individual interested tenants
  - All relevant outside agencies

### 6. REVIEW

- 6.1 The Association will formally review its Benefits Policy on an annual basis. The review will follow the Association's formal "Best Value Review Framework". Findings and recommendations will be presented to the Association's Board of Management after the views of the Forum have been considered. Each review will be carried out by a review team.
- 6.2 Progress reports will be made to the Board of Management and Forum, to Enable monitoring against strategic aims and objectives and agreed performance indicators. Performance data will be included in the annual report to tenants.

The Association aims to include in the Team representation from tenants, staff, outside agencies/RSL's and Board Members.

### 7. TRAINING

- 7.1 The Association will provide all staff responsible for implementing this policy with comprehensive training.
- 7.2 Training will be given:
  - To new Rent Income staff
  - To existing Rent Income staff on an annual basis as a refresher/update
  - To all relevant staff after change to policy/legislation

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- To relevant outside agencies
- Any other times as identified by the Housing Manager or Rent Income Team Leader

The Association aims to include in the Team representation from tenants, staff, outside agencies/RSL's and Board Members.

### 8. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

8.1 The Association has related relevant policies in the following areas:

- Fast Track Arrears Policy
- Rent Collection Policy
- Eviction Policy
- Benefits Policy
- Write-Off Policy
- Vulnerable Tenants Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Abandoned Tenancies Policy

8.2 The Association has the following procedure to assist staff implementing the policy:

Rent Arrears Prevention  
Rent Arrears Pursuance

### 9. POLICY REVIEW DOCUMENT

Policy Title	Benefits Policy
Dated Created	16 March 2004
Review Period	Annual
Previous Review	
Review Committee	Board of Management
Version	2
Date last amended	26 June 2007
Authorised by	Board of Management
Date of last review	26 June 2007
Date of next review	June 2010

