

REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES	AGENDA ITEM: 10
DATE OF MEETING:	19th November 2020.	CATEGORY: (See Notes) DELEGATED or RECOMMENDED
REPORT FROM:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR SERVICE DELIVERY	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	PAUL WHITTINGHAM Paul.whittingham@southderbys.gov.uk	DOC:
SUBJECT:	HOUSING INCOME MANAGEMENT POLICY	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: (See Notes)

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Housing Income Management Policy is issued for consultation with the public and stakeholders. The Policy is attached at Appendix A.
- 1.2 That the final version of the Policy is reported to the Committee in early 2021 for implementation with effect from 1st April 2021.

2.0 Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 To seek the Committee's approval to a revised Housing Income Management Policy, as a draft for consultation. The current Policy has been in operation since 2015.

3.0 Executive Summary

- 3.1 The Council's Housing Income Management Policy which has been in place since 2015 has been reviewed.
- 3.2 The revised Policy reflects the Council's response to recent changes in benefit legislation, especially the introduction of Universal Credit. It also reflects the response to other changes in the operating environment, notably the move away from cash payments to more electronic payment methods.
- 3.3 Other key changes in the Policy include ensuring compliance with recent Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) best practice, the shift towards ensuring that rents are paid in advance and also a renewed emphasis on working in partnership with other Council teams and also external partner agencies.

3.4 Subject to approval by the Committee, tenants partners and other stakeholders will be asked for their comments before a final version of the Policy is presented to Committee prior to implementation.

4.0 Detail

4.1 The revised Housing Income Management Policy builds on the Policy introduced in 2015 and provides the framework for responding to challenging conditions in the housing environment.

4.2 Implementing this Policy will directly assist the Council in achieving its corporate aims by ensuring that tenants are supported in managing their rent accounts and that the Council's income is maintained.

4.3 Whilst there are no direct regulatory requirements in this area, there are examples of guidance and good practice that have been considered within the review of the current Policy.

4.4 The revised Policy meets the requirements of the CIH best Practice guidance "How to adapt your approach to rent collection for Universal Credit. This guidance identifies three key areas which the Policy addresses.

- Enhancing pre- tenancy work with prospective tenants
- Collecting rent in advance
- Adopting a whole organisation approach to collecting rent arrears.

4.5 The revised Policy retains the focus of the previous Policy in aiming to support tenants in making rent payments and resolving more deep-seated financial problems that they may have.

4.6 However, legal action to recover debt and if necessary, recover possession of the dwelling remains as the option of last resort where all other avenues to resolve a rent arrear have been exhausted.

4.7 Any possession action must be taken through the County Court and the Council must comply with the procedures and Pre-Action Protocol before a case progresses to this stage.

4.8 Also retained and enhanced within the revised Policy is an emphasis on partnership working , internally where there is the potential for Customer Services to play a greater part in initial contact with customers and also externally through the Financial Inclusion Group in which the Council plays a lead role.

4.9 Subject to approval by the Committee, it is proposed that the Policy will be published for consultation with the public and reviewed by the Financial Inclusion Group and other stakeholders for a period of six weeks

4.10 Comments arising from the consultation will be included within the final version of the Policy which will be reported to this Committee for endorsement prior to its implementation.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no direct financial implications within this report.

6.0 Corporate Implications

Employment Implications

6.1 There are no direct employment implications within this report

Legal Implications

6.2 There are no direct legal implications within this report

Corporate Plan Implications

6.3 This revised Policy contributes directly to the aims within the Council's Corporate Plan:

- a. Supporting and safeguarding the most vulnerable and with partners encourage independent living and keep residents healthy and happy in their homes.
- b. Promote health and wellbeing across the District.
- c. Support unemployed residents back into work.

Risk Impact

6.4 This revised Policy contributes directly to mitigating the risks identified within the Service Delivery Risk register:

- a. SD1 - Loss of income to the Housing Revenue Account-
- b. SD4 – Universal Credit People - help support the most vulnerable, including those affected by financial changes.

7.0 Community Impact

Consultation

7.1 Tenants, the public and stakeholders will be consulted with regard to this Policy over a 6 week period.

Equality and Diversity Impact

7.2 The final version of the Policy will be subject to an Equality impact Assessment before it is implemented.

Social Value Impact

7.3 This revised Policy contributes directly to the Council's Sustainable Communities Strategy by supporting households to sustain their tenancies to maintain their health and well being.

Environmental Sustainability

7.4 The revised Policy contributes to reducing the use of paper and surface mail through the use of other means of communication with tenants.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 The previous Income Management Policy provided a solid foundation for the prevention and recovery of rent arrears. The revised Policy builds on this to create a “payment culture” alongside the support and assistance necessary for tenants who need assistance in making rent payments and managing their financial circumstances.
- 8.2 The revised Policy ensures that rent payment, collection and support services adapt to reflect the changed environment especially regarding the impact of Universal Credit and electronic rent payment methods
- 8.3 The success of this Policy will also rely heavily on internal and external partnership working.

9.0 Background Papers

None