

REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 9
DATE OF MEETING:	11th MARCH 2021	CATEGORY: (See Notes) DELEGATED or RECOMMENDED
REPORT FROM:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR SERVICE DELIVERY	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	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 first presented to the Committee on 19 November 2020 is approved.
- 1.2 That the Policy is implemented with effect from 1 April 2021.

2.0 Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 To seek the Committee's approval to the revised Housing Income Management Policy, which was presented to the Committee on the 19 November 2020.

3.0 Executive Summary

- 3.1 The Council's Housing Income Management Policy which has been in place since 2015 has been reviewed. The draft policy was presented to the Committee as a draft for consultation on 19 November 2020.
- 3.2 Consultation with key stakeholders, partner organisations and the public has been completed.
- 3.3 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 a renewed emphasis on working in partnership with other Council Services and external partner agencies.

4.0 Detail

- 4.1 On 19th November 2020 the Committee considered the Council's revised Income Management Policy as a draft for consultation. The initial report highlighted the aims of the new Policy, which seeks to meet the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) best Practice guidance "How to adapt your approach to rent collection for Universal Credit by:

- Enhancing pre- tenancy work with prospective tenants
- Collecting rent in advance
- Adopting a whole organisation approach to collecting rent arrears
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4.2 Public consultation was carried out on-line through the Council's website. The draft consultation document was also provided to relevant partner agencies who attend the South Derbyshire Financial Inclusion Group.

The following questions were asked in the survey:

- In your opinion is the Income Recovery Policy easy to understand?
- Do you think the Council has set out a fair and ethical way to manage / recover arrears?
- Do you think the Council has correctly identified all prevention methods?
- Are there any aspects to the recovery of arrears the Council has not included?

4.3 It is disappointing to note that despite the considerable efforts made to engage with customers only eight responses were received. The results are below:

- Q1 – Yes (6), No (1), Unsure (1)
- Q2 – Yes (6), No (1), Unsure (1)
- Q3 – Yes (6), No (0), Unsure (2)
- Q4 –Yes (4), No (2), Unsure (2)

4.4 In addition to survey feedback, the Council has also received emails from partners and staff offering feedback. This feedback has been predominantly positive and included specific points from the Derbyshire Discretionary fund including.:

- We are pleased to see that SDDC has continued to only request two weeks rent in advance from new tenants, and feel that this represents a good balance between affordability for the tenant and SDDC's interests
- We are also pleased to see that there is a focus on how to save for the first two weeks' rent and claiming Universal Credit as part of the pre-tenancy work with tenants.

4.5 Comments were also received with regard to the general wellbeing of new tenants on Universal Credit who may not yet have received payment when taking on a new Council Tenancy which may inhibit their ability to pay the required two weeks rent in advance. It was suggested that the Council adopts a blanket policy not to take any further action in these cases. However, such an approach may fetter the discretion of the Council to act against tenants in rent arrears. Officers will of course aim to support any new or existing tenants in making payments whilst awaiting their payment, or making arrangements to clear any outstanding arrears once payments are received

4.6 Overall, the feedback from customers and partners suggests general acceptance of the revised and it is recommended that the draft policy is implemented with effect from 1 April 2021.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no direct financial implications within this report.

6.0 Corporate Implications

6.1 Employment Implications

There are no direct employment implications within this report.

7.0 Legal Implications

7.1 There are no direct legal implications within this report.

8.0 Corporate Plan Implications

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

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

9.0 Risk Impact

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

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

10.0 Community Impact

10.1 Consultation

Tenants, the public and stakeholders were consulted with regard to this Policy over a six-week period.

10.2 Equality and Diversity Impact

The Policy will be subject to an Equality impact Assessment before it is implemented.

10.3 Social Value Impact

This revised Policy contributes directly to the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy by supporting households to sustain their tenancies to maintain their health and wellbeing.

10.4 Environmental Sustainability

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

11.0 Conclusions

11.1 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.

11.2 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.

11.3 The success of this Policy will also rely heavily on internal and external partnership working.

