

RouPELL Park Residents Management Cooperative Ltd



RENT COLLECTION AND ARREARS POLICY

1. Policy	Rent Collection and Arrears	Draft	
2. Applies to	All Residents of RouPELL Park Resident Management Co-op (RPRMC)	If Y date of draft	
		Date Approved	28 October 2014
Post holder responsible for review	Estate Director	Date for review	28 October 2015
3. Approval level	Board		

1. Introduction

This policy covers the aims and objectives of RouPELL Park Resident Management Co-op Ltd (RPRMC) in its approach to the collection of rent and the recovery of rent arrears and associated charges.

Rent arrears in the context of this policy relates to:-

- All arrears of rent owed by current tenants of RPRMC including water rates and other service or amenity charges.
- Legal costs owed by current tenants that have accrued as a result of possession proceedings being taken against their tenancy.

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RPRMC recognises the need to ensure that there are effective measures in place to collect rent due in order to meet its obligations to Lambeth Council under the terms of its management agreement to maximise income collection and reduce historic rent arrears.

2. Aims and Objectives

This policy is designed to assist officers in the management of rent collection and rent arrears and to assist RPRMC residents understand the way in which it works to increase accountability to them.

- We will manage rent based on the management of risk as well as the level and age of arrears and will act in a pro-active way based on a strong emphasis on personal contact in the collection of rent and the prevention of rent arrears.
- We believe there is a need to deliver a timely, informative and customer focused service to our tenants so that necessary arrears prevention and enforcement action is taken and that these procedures are properly documented.
- We will seek to maximise rental income through the consistent promotion of a payment culture amongst tenants with the intention of preventing tenants from getting into arrears in the first place.
- Where arrears already exist we will work with residents to clear them as quickly as possible in a way that is sustainable and maximises the likelihood of the debt being cleared.
- We will focus on preventing arrears by providing tenants with the information, support and advice required to maximise their income and to prevent, minimise or manage debt. We will try to sustain tenancies using legal proceedings and eviction as a last resort.
- We will ensure that tenants and their representatives are treated equally, fairly and with respect by a customer focussed service. Information in relation to rent arrears will be accurate, easy to understand and contain clear information in relation to repayment options, methods of payments available and relevant support and advice agencies.
- We recognize the needs of vulnerable tenants and will ensure that we work in a way that supports them to pay their rent and support them in repaying their arrears. Where appropriate we will make recommendations to the London Borough of Lambeth to write-off arrears in cases where genuine hardship or vulnerability issues exist.

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- We will work with key partners in Lambeth Council, the Health Service and the voluntary sector to take a holistic view of residents to provide a more efficient rent recovery service.
- We will work with partners to maximise benefits take up for residents through signposting and advice.
- We will work with the Council to set performance targets for RPRMC and monitor our performance against them. We will also ensure that officers are provided with regular training on good practice in the management of arrears and receive regular updates in relation to legislative changes.
- Where tenants do not make reasonable efforts to repay rent owed that enforcement action up to and including rent arrears will be taken.

3. Legal Framework

This policy is compatible with and compliant to current legislation including:-

- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 1996
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Pre-Action Protocol

4. Tenancy Sustainment

RPRMC is committed to sustaining tenancies whenever possible. Legal proceedings and evictions will only be used as a last resort when all other available options to collect arrears have been exhausted.

We recognize the need to offer a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to providing advice regarding rent arrears and other debts. All officers directly involved with the arrears management process will receive appropriate training and will actively promote support programmes and agencies including:

- Every Pound Counts – The London Borough of Lambeth’s initiative which provides welfare benefits advice to encourage income maximisation.

- National Debt Helpline – Free telephone service which provides confidential and independent advice on how to deal with debt problems.
- Lambeth Citizens Advice Bureau – Free independent advice service that can provide welfare benefit, Housing Benefit and debt advice.
- Centre 70 – Free independent advice service that can provide welfare benefit, Housing Benefit and debt advice.
- Lambeth Law Centre – Independent legal advice service able to assist with legal advice with regard to Housing Benefit, welfare benefit and rent arrears possession proceedings.

RPRMC's aim is to maximise rental income collected, as such we positively support initiatives which are designed to assist tenants in maximising their income and enabling tenants to prioritize their debts in order to pay their rent.

5. Vulnerability

RPRMC is committed to ensuring that it takes into account the specific needs of different groups of its residents in considering the delivery of the rent arrears service it provides and in determining the approach to arrears enforcement action taken.

We will signpost our vulnerable tenants to appropriate housing support services and liaise with other agencies about their particular care and support needs. We will also provide assistance to vulnerable tenants in order to ensure that appropriate support measures are put into place to assist them with managing their rent account with the aim of preventing vulnerable tenants from being put at risk of losing their home.

6. Payment Methods

Working with Lambeth Council we are committed to providing a wide variety of rent payment methods for its tenants. These take into account both traditional and more modern payment options and are designed to meet the needs of all our tenants.

Current methods of payment include:

- Swipe Card via PayPoint
- Direct Debit
- Standing Order
- Internet payment via the Council's website
- Automated Telephone payment line
- By Post via cheque payment
- In person at the Cashiers Office

We will promote Direct Debit as the preferred method of payment and will encourage all tenants to pay by this method.

7. Equalities and Diversity

RPRMC does not discriminate residents regardless of their race, religion, language, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, health or disability, location, political or immigration status. We deliver our rent collection and arrears function in accordance with our Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy, ensuring that appropriate advice and assistance is given to those disadvantaged in the community, and that adequate translation and interpretation facilities, large print material, Minicom, induction loops etc. are available. All actions carried out are in accordance with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998.

We recognise that vulnerable tenants have housing related support needs and will work with agencies to equip those needs.

8. Training and Promotion

RPRMC recognises that the success of this policy and the proper implementation of our Rent Collection and Arrears Procedure is dependent upon the knowledge and ability of the officers delivering it. We are therefore committed to providing regular training to all officers in order to ensure that they are suitably skilled and have the up-to-date legislative knowledge required to effectively deliver the requirements of the policy and procedure.

We will therefore ensure that the training needs of all staff are assessed through the annual appraisal process and the annual training plan.

9. Implementation and Review

The overall responsibility for the approval of the Rent Arrears Policy will lie with the Estate Director with the scrutiny of the Board. The Board will monitor arrears performance along with the Lambeth Council Client Team.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis unless there are significant changes in legislation that require revision at an earlier date.