



RENT COLLECTION AND ARREARS POLICY

1. Policy	Rent Collection and Arrears	Review	Yes
2. Applies to	All Tenants of Roupell Park Resident Management Organisation (RPRMO)	If Y date of draft	MAY 23
		Date Approved	
Post holder responsible for review	Estate Director	Date for review	April 2025
3. Approval level	Board		

1. Introduction

This policy covers the aims and objectives of Roupell Park Resident Management Organisation Ltd (RPRMO) 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 RPRMO including service or amenity charges.
- Legal costs owed by current tenants that have accrued as a result of possession proceedings being taken against their tenancy.

RPRMO 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 RPRMO residents understand the way in which it works to increase accountability to them.

- We will try to sustain tenancies using legal proceedings and eviction as a last resort.
- We will work with partners to maximise benefits take up for residents through signposting and advice.
- 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 will use all possible means of contact with resident, including home visits, texts, emails phone calls and letters.
- We will also develop ways to engage residents in virtual interviews using platforms such as Teams and Zoom
- 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 any actions 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 by providing tenants with the information, support and advice required to maximise their income and to prevent, minimise or manage debt..
- 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 taking into account their income and other financial pressures
- 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 recognise 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.

- 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 the Council to set performance targets for RPRMO 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 eviction 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 2018
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- The Equalities Act 2010
- Pre-Action Protocol

4. Welfare Benefits and Economic Environment

The number of benefit claimants on Roupell Park is higher than average in Lambeth but is lower than most comparable social housing estates. Many claimants are in work but on low wages.

Our policy takes into account that Universal Credit will be paid monthly in arrears and that there sometimes delays in processing claims. Action whilst a claim is being processed will therefore be supportive and proportionate although this will not preclude the initial stages of the arrears process being taken.

We will aim to assist all residents in making claims for Universal Credit. We will ensure that information relating to the verification of rent and tenancy are provided within 48 hours of their being requested.

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When tenants are claiming benefit we will encourage tenants to have their rent deducted at source and will maximise the opportunities for payments to

be made direct when tenants are in arrears. However will we seek to make deductions proportionate so that tenants are not left in severe financial hardship.

We will in all cases encourage tenants to set up direct debits or standing order to cover their rent payments.

We recognise that many of our resident's work in sectors where hours worked are uncertain and therefore wages will vary. We will encourage them to maintain contact so that when their circumstances change we are able to vary repayment agreements where required.

During the existing cost of living crisis we recognise that tenants will be under considerable financial stress and will have a number of pressures on their income from what ever source. We will therefore work with a variety of agencies as set out in our statement on tenancy sustainment below.

5. Tenancy Sustainment

RPRMO 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.

RPRMO'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.

6. Vulnerability

RPRMO 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.

7. 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:

- Direct Debit
- Standing Order
- Internet payment via the Council's website
- Automated Telephone payment line
- By Post via cheque payment

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

8. Equalities and Diversity

RPRMO does not discriminate residents regardless of their race, religion, language, ethnicity, gender, gender reassignment, sexuality, age, marital status, 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, Mincom, 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.

9. Training and Promotion

RPRMO 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.

10. 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 a 2 yearly basis unless there are significant changes in legislation that require revision at an earlier date.