



**Committee: Housing, Health & Community**

**Date: 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	Housing Policy
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Lauren Stretch, Director of Housing

## **REPORT SUMMARY**

Since 2020, Housing have been reviewing and renewing all its policies and strategies. Many of these are now approaching their review dates.

On 4 September 2023, a Policy working group was held with members of this committee who were invited to read and make comments and suggestions on the 4 reviewed policies as per below.

*Appendix A: Income Management Policy*

*Appendix B: Former Tenant Debt Recovery Policy*

*Appendix C: Recharge Policy*

*Appendix D: Electrical Safety Policy*

Any amendments and suggestions have been implemented as discussed to form the final draft documents.

Each policy has had amendments made which are explained below in a more detail.

### **Income Management Policy**

This policy relates to current tenants and all debts from rent accounts and sub accounts such as utilities and recharges. When reviewing this policy, consideration was given to the support that we can provide to Tenants considering the cost-of-living crisis.

Particular attention was given to the ways in which residents can pay and any methods which can simplify it for them such as direct payments to the Council from Universal credit where residents are struggling.

### **Former Tenant Debt Recovery Policy**

This policy has been updated to reflect that all former tenant debts are now passed to a third-party provider for collection. They are responsible for chasing the debt and taking payment.

Where a debt is un-recoverable or all avenues of recovery have failed, they will then refer the case to the Housing Department for write off.

These debts used to be chased in house by our housing officers, however, this process proved inefficient, and debts had risen.

### **Recharge Policy**

This was introduced several years ago and was the first time such a policy had been implemented by Brentwood Borough Council.

The revised policy is very similar; however, the types of recharges have been updated to be more inclusive of unauthorised alterations or tenant neglect/damage to properties as we have seen an increase in these in recent years.

### **Electrical Safety Policy**

This policy was first presented to the Environment, Enforcement & Housing Committee on 5 July 2021 where it was approved.

Since this time, an amendment to the 18<sup>th</sup> Edition IET Wiring BS 7671:2018 Regulations was implemented on 27 September 2022, to BS7671:2018+A2:2022. The changes include a requirement to protect final circuits supplying electrical socket outlets to ensure there is appropriate protection in higher risk residential buildings, houses in multiple occupation, purpose-built student accommodation and care homes against a prolonged electrical discharge (arc or sparking) or an electrical surge where an unexpected increase in voltage occurs. This fundamental change in Regulation is following the tragic disaster at Grenfell Tower.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R1: To approve the below reviewed policies for immediate implementation by the Housing Service.**

- 1. Income Management Policy**
- 2. Former Tenant Debt Recovery Policy**
- 3. Recharge Policy**
- 4. Electrical Safety Policy**

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

1.1 In order to keep all Housing policies relevant and up to date with Housing Legislation, they require regular reviews and updates.

## **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

2.1 To leave a policy un-reviewed is not an option as this could mean the Council is working to outdated legislation.

2.2 There has been consideration given to including the Former Tenant Debt Recovery Policy within the Income Management Policy, however, it was felt that it needed to be a document within its own right due to the differing types of possible debt and how this would be handled for collection purposes.

## **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3.1 Since 2020, Housing have been reviewing and renewing all its policies and strategies.

3.2 A full policy schedule has been developed as a working document which highlights the last review date and next review date to ensure each one is up to date and relevant to current legislation.

3.3 This schedule which can be found at Appendix 5.

3.4 As we introduced several policies in one go, these are now all due to be reviewed at the same time, this is not manageable within officer capacity and therefore, you will note that some have a revised review date in order to allow us to spread them evenly across the year.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Name & Title: Tim Willis, Director – Resources & Section 151 Officer**  
**Tel & Email: 01277 312500 / tim.willis@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk**

4.1 There is a direct impact on finances to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) if a robust Income Management, Former Tenant and Recharge Policy does not exist. By implementing these reviewed policies, the Council can improve the income maximisation and mitigate any losses to the HRA.

4.2 There are no direct financial implications to the Electrical Safety Policy, however, the HRA should ensure there is sufficient budget to cover the cost of the initial electrical test and any remedial works required to bring the electrical systems up to standard.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Name & Title: Claire Mayhew, Acting Joint Director – People & Governance & Monitoring Officer**  
**Tel & Email 01277 312500 / claire.mayhew@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk**

5.1 The council must ensure it complies with legislation.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

6.1 Any requirements will be met from current resource and equipment.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

7.1 By not implementing the proposed changes to the review of policies, there is a potential that the Council's working practices would not meet the current legislative requirements.

7.2 The Committee by adopting a policy will assist in mitigating any challenges to decisions made with regard to the Councils decisions in any of the affected areas.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1 Consultation with Tenant Talkback has been conducted and relevant feedback and suggestions considered and where necessary implemented.

8.2 A members working group was also held on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2023 for any comments or considerations to be put forward.

## **9.0 EQUALITY & HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

**Name & Title: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager - Communities, Leisure and Health**

**Tel & Email 01277 312500 kim.anderson@brentwood.gov.uk**

9.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

- a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
- b. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- c. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

9.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

9.3 The proposals in this report will not have a disproportionate adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

9.4 Effective representation of local people's views, through Tenants Talkback which supports equality of housing opportunities and life chances.

**10.0 ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS**

**Name & Title: Phil Drane, Director - Place**

**Tel & Email 01277 312500 / phil.drane@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk**

10.1 There are no direct economic implications to observe.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Income Management Policy

Appendix B: Former Tenant Debt Recovery Policy

Appendix C: Recharge Policy

Appendix D: Electrical Safety Policy

Appendix E: Policy Schedule

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Electrical Safety Policy review – Environment, Enforcement and Housing Committee	5 July 2021