

## 1 Scope

- 1.1 This policy covers collection of rent, support, and other charges; and the action we will take to recover arrears.
- 1.2 The policy links to Aster's Rent First approach which encourages all colleagues to understand that rent collection is critical to the aims of the business. This includes improving our digital approach to income collection providing our customers with every possible payment option making our income collection more efficient.

## 2 Policy Statement

- 2.1 We will ensure that our methods of rent and arrears collection comply with the Rent Standard and housing legislation, along with the court pre-action protocol.
- 2.2 We will maximise the collection of rent, support, service charges and any other monies owed to us.
- 2.3 We will ensure compliance with any data protection policy and anti-money laundering policies.
- 2.4 We will support customers affected by welfare reforms such as the under-occupation penalty, the benefit cap, and local housing allowance restrictions to downsize to a smaller/more affordable property.
- 2.5 We will offer customers a variety of payment methods which are easy to use and economical.
- 2.6 We will not accept cash payments at any of our offices.
- 2.7 Aster will support customers who are experiencing financial hardship by providing advice, internal support with benefit advice, and sign posting to specialist financial and debt organisations.
- 2.8 We will encourage customers to pay their rent in advance to prevent arrears on their account. We can help customers in financial hardship achieve this over time by putting payment plans in place.
- 2.9 We will communicate with our customers by providing account statements when requested; telling them of any changes to their accounts; encouraging them to tell us before they get into difficulty with their payments; and having appropriate advice on our website.
- 2.10 We will communicate with a range of options both electronic and analogue, primarily telephone, email, and letter; but taking the customer's preferred method of contact into account.

- 2.11 We will treat customers who owe us money in a firm but fair way. We will tell customers as soon as their account goes into arrears; give advice and signposting to customers in arrears; work with our partners and other agencies to help customers in financial difficulty; make arrangements for the repayment of debt, taking into account the circumstances of the customer.
- 2.12 We will enforce this policy through: using a staged approach to debt collection; only consider court proceedings when arrears have not been reduced or an agreement made; evicting only when engagement and agreed repayments for a court order have failed; taking legal action to collect money owed by former tenants.
- 2.13 We reserve the right to refuse to re-house an existing Aster Group tenant or leaseholder who owes us money for rent, support, service charges or any other debt other than in exceptional circumstances as approved by the regional head of housing.
- 2.14 We reserve the right to refuse to house new applicants to Aster or former customers of the Group who still have housing or support related debt with Aster or another housing provider and have failed to keep to a repayment plan for six consecutive months or make a reasonable attempt to clear the majority of the debt other than in exceptional circumstances as approved by the Regional Head of Housing.
- 2.15 We will take the needs of vulnerable people into account when enforcing this policy, including any disabilities, deputies, appointees or informed consents.

### 3 Monitoring and Review

- 3.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years unless there is a change to regulation, legislation or a service provided by us.
- 3.2 The effectiveness of this policy will be scrutinised annually by the *Business Performance & Strategy Panel*
- 3.3 There are a range of Key Performance Measures (KPIs) used to monitor arrears performance:
- Current tenant arrears
  - Former tenant arrears
  - % Rent Collected
  - Leasehold arrears
  - Shared ownership arrears

Arrears performance is reported monthly to the Housing Leadership Team (HLT) and included in the Business Critical KPIs to ensure compliance and adherence with this policy and relevant Aster strategies.

## 4 Related Policies and Procedures

- [Recoverable Service Charge Policy](#)
- [Rent and Other Charges Policy](#)
- [Honesty Policy](#)
- [Rent Arrears Procedure](#)
- [Former Tenant Arrears Procedure](#)
- [Write On Write Off Procedure](#)
- [Collection of Income by Credit/Debit Card Procedure](#)
- [Refund Procedure](#)
- [Bankruptcy & Debt Relief Procedure](#)
- [Garage Customer Accounts Procedure](#)
- [Shared Ownership Procedure](#)
- [Leasehold Procedure](#)
- [Recharge procedure](#)
- [Eviction Procedure](#)

5 Governance			
Effective From:	05/09/2019	Expires:	05/09/2022
Policy Owner:	Regional Director – Somerset, Dorset, Devon & Cornwall		
Policy Author:	Policy Officer		
Approved by:	Customer Community Network		
Delegation Matrix Code:	R056	Version Number:	4.0