

## Who this policy is for

This policy is for all residents of Wyedean Housing Association.

## Introduction

It's important that we collect all the income due to us from our residents.

Rent and other charges are our main source of income. They make it possible for us to provide our service and carry out repairs and improvements to our properties.

We also have a duty to support our residents and help make sure they do not fall into debt or lose their home.

## How we support our residents

As part of our culture, we encourage both our colleagues and our residents to treat the payment of rent and service charges as a priority.

We want to help our residents manage their finances so they don't build up debts or risk losing their home. We do this by:

- making sure anyone who applies for a property is fully aware of their responsibilities to pay their rent and service charges before we complete a tenancy agreement
- clearly explaining how we set rents and service charges and, if we change them, why we've done this
- giving residents at least 4 weeks' notice before we change their rent or service charges
- making residents' rent and service charge statements available on our self-service portal and MyWyedean app so they can see them whenever they choose (we also provide paper statements to residents who are unable to access their details online)
- telling residents immediately if they're late with a payment
- helping residents get advice on the benefits they can claim and how to manage their money, including their debts
- keeping up to date with changes in legislation and referring residents to services that can help them manage the impact of any change

## How we collect income from our residents

Residents can pay their rent and service charges by:

- standing order (our preferred method)
- via our automated payment system
- online

We only issue payment cards in exceptional circumstances.





## Data protection

We take great care to protect our residents' personal information. We only ever discuss sensitive information, including financial information, with the person who holds the tenancy or their authorised representative. Before we discuss a resident's account, we carry out security checks to confirm their identity.

## Paying in advance

Residents must pay their rent and service charges in advance. Where possible, we encourage residents who get Universal Credit to build up a credit on their account. This is because the government wants Universal Credit to help people be responsible for their household expenditure, including their rent, but the amount people receive each month can change.

## Refunding credits

We will refund residents who have a credit on their account if this won't risk them falling into debt.

## What we do when residents owe us money

When we recover debt, we follow clear procedures that make sure we act in a fair and consistent way. We're sensitive to individual circumstances and only take legal action where other measures have failed. We use eviction as a last resort and only when the resident has repeatedly refused to engage with us or make any effort to pay the money they owe.

If a resident is late making a payment, we get in touch with them straight away and clearly explain what they owe and why. We may review their income and expenditure with them to make sure they're prioritising their rent and service charges.

If the resident is at risk of losing their home and needs more support, we'll refer them to other agencies who can help them manage their finances and clear their arrears.

## Residents who are in persistent arrears

We take legal action against residents who refuse to engage with us and make no effort to repay the money they owe.

However, throughout the legal process we'll continue to try and contact the resident and encourage them to repay their debt.



## When a tenancy ends

We expect residents to repay any money they owe us before their tenancy ends. Where the resident clearly can't afford this without suffering serious hardship, we will agree a repayment plan. When we agree a repayment plan, we make sure we have a forwarding address where we can contact the resident.

## Evictions

When tenants owe us money, we only apply to evict them as a last resort, when all other measures to recover the debt have failed. Before we start court proceedings, we carry out an impact assessment to make sure the steps we're taking are proportionate and reasonable.

## Vulnerable residents

Vulnerable residents are people who are:

*"...unable to safeguard their welfare and sustain their tenancy due to age, health, disability or other factors such as domestic abuse."*

This definition covers a wide range of people, including those with alcohol, drug and mental health problems.

Vulnerable residents may have multiple needs. We have alerts on our system so we're aware of our vulnerable residents and work with them in a way that meets their needs.

If one of our vulnerable residents falls into arrears, we offer additional support straight away. We do all we can to make sure they understand the situation they're in.

If the resident is particularly vulnerable or under 18 years of age, we consider whether:

- they have the mental capacity to defend possession proceedings and, if not, make an application to appoint a litigation friend in accordance with Civil Procedure Rules 21
- there are specific things we should do under the Equality Act 2010

We make sure all other agencies who support the vulnerable resident are aware of the arrears and are doing all they can to help them clear the debt and maintain their tenancy.

We only take formal steps to recover the debt, when we're sure we've exhausted all other options to help the resident and an impact assessment has shown that court proceedings are proportionate and reasonable.



# Income Recovery Policy



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## How we manage and monitor what we do

We continually review the way we collect income and recover debt and have clear and challenging targets for improving our performance.

We set annual targets for income collection, including rent, shared ownership and former tenant debts. We also benchmark our performance against that of other housing providers. Our colleagues regularly take part in rent forums which share good practice and new ways of working.

