Document Control

Title	**Rent Recovery Policy**
Responsible Officer	Housing and Income Recovery Service Manager
Author	Housing and Income Recovery Service Manager
Subject	Rent Collection for Council Tenants
Information Asset Owner	Housing and Income Recovery Service Manager
Approved by	Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee
Approved date	Planned July 2026
Review date	July 2028
Review responsibility	Housing and Income Recovery Service Manager
Applicable to	Reading Borough Council Tenants
DPIA Completion date	
EIA Completion date	July 2026

Revision History

Previously part of Corporate Debt Policy	July 2026

Consultation and Distribution

Housing, Neighbourhood and Leisure Committee	21st July 2026
Lead Councillor for Housing	3rd June 2026
Housing and Communities Management Team	2 April 2026
Tenant Sounding Board	3rd June 2026

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1. Introduction

This Rent Recovery Policy sets out Reading Borough Councils clear framework to effective rent collection, arrears prevention and arrears recovery across it's housing stock, providing support for tenants to manage their rent accounts, and address arrears at the earliest stage, before debts become unmanageable.

This fair approach is essential to good Landlord Services, to minimise debt and maximise rental income, which is vital in enabling the Council to manage, maintain, and improve the Council's housing stock and surrounding environment for the benefit of all tenants.

The policy supports the Council's wider strategic objectives in the Corporate Plan, Corporate Debt Policy and Allocations Policy, with a focus on promoting tenancy sustainability and preventing homelessness, against the backdrop of the cost-of-living crisis.

The Housing Income Recovery Teams, within Landlord Services, is responsible for monitoring rent accounts, and taking enforcement action against tenants when arrears occur. Reading Borough Council takes rent arrears very seriously. Rent payments are a key condition of the Tenancy Agreement, and tenants are expected to ensure that rent is paid in full and on time. It is the tenant's responsibility to make sure that the rent is paid in full when due.

We recognise that sometimes tenants will have genuine financial difficulties and will be unable to pay the rent due. Where arrears have accrued, the Housing Income Recovery Teams will attempt to intervene early by contacting the tenant, to offer support and advice, and agree a clear and affordable repayment plan to recover the arrears and sustain their tenancy. Referrals to the Council's in-house Money Advice Team may also be made when a tenant is struggling with their finances or debts, to resolve any financial difficulties.

The Council will take legal action against tenants who are either unwilling to pay arrears or receive help. After all reasonable steps have been explored, eviction will be the last resort.

2. Scope

The key strategic objectives of this policy are to maximise rental income and minimise the level of arrears. The Council aims to achieve this by:

- Collecting rent when due from tenants to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness.
- Early intervention to prevent tenants from accruing arrears.
- Ensuring effective management of rent arrears to maximise income collection and minimise bad debts.
- Ensuring the treatment of tenants is equitable, accountable, fair, efficient, effective and consistent throughout the recovery processes.
- Promote Income Maximisation for our tenants.
- Only evicting a tenant as a last resort.

3. Responsibilities

3.1 Tenants Responsibilities

The term ‘tenant’ within this policy includes sole tenants, and all joint tenants listed on the tenancy.

All Reading Borough Council tenants sign either a secure tenancy agreement for permanent accommodation and a non secure tenancy agreement for temporary accommodation and therefore have an obligation to pay their rent on time. Extracts from the Tenancy Agreement state:

> *“5.3 Paying rent and service charges is one of your most important responsibilities. Your rent and services charges are due every week and you must pay them on time or in advance. Rent is due from the Tenancy start date. If you have difficulty paying your rent, you should contact the Rents Team immediately.*
>
> *“5.8 If this is a Joint tenancy, each named tenant is jointly responsible for paying the whole rent and any other payments due (arrears chargeable repairs and/or Service charges).”*

"5.9 We can recover all the rent arrears owed on your home from either of the Joint tenants of the property.

This means that if you leave your property, you are still liable for paying the rent and for any arrears, Service charges or chargeable repairs until your tenancy comes to an end."

3.2 Reading Borough Council's Responsibilities

The Council is responsible for setting rent and service charges in accordance with relevant legislation and government policy. Rent charges are reviewed annually, and tenants will be provided with a minimum of four weeks' written notice of any change to rent charges as stated in the tenancy agreement:

"5.1 We are responsible for setting your rent. The amount of rent you pay depends on the size, type, and location of your home. We can increase or decrease your rent at any time. We must tell you, in writing, at least 4 weeks before any rent change.

The Council also has the right to introduce additional services which must be paid for as part of rent or as an additional service charge, as stated in the Tenancy Agreement:

"5.2 We are responsible for setting your service charges. We can introduce new services which you will have to pay for. These will be charged in addition to your rent and will be collected as part of your rent. We must tell you in writing at least 4 weeks before we do this. We can also introduce Service charges for services that you already receive. These will be charged in addition to your rent and will be collected as part of your rent. We must tell you in writing at least 4 weeks before we do this.

4. **Prevention**

Reading Borough Council's approach to rent arrears collection places strong emphasis on the importance of early preventative actions and providing support to help tenants maintain their tenancy whenever possible.

This approach starts before tenancy sign up with pre-tenancy counselling and is promoted further at the point the tenancy agreement is signed.

Tenants will always be advised of the next course of action and the ultimate consequences of non-payment throughout the recovery process.

Preventing rent arrears is essential both for tenants and the Council. Rent arrears can have significant financial and social consequences for tenants, including the risk of homelessness and exclusion from future housing opportunities. Arrears recovery and eviction processes also place substantial financial pressures on the Council, with the cost of an eviction running into thousands of pounds.

We aim to prevent rent arrears from occurring by:

- Promoting a positive payment culture among tenants. Reminding tenants of their responsibility to pay rent when due and ensuring there are accessible methods for them to pay e.g. direct debit, standing order, automated payment line and online options.
- Exploring ways to maximise tenant's income by informing them of benefits they are entitled to.
- Promoting financial inclusion by providing budgeting advice and making referrals to the Money Advice Team to help tenants regain control of their finances. This can include applying for Crisis Resilience Fund, Household support fund, and making an application to Readifood for food parcels.
- Promoting and continuing to review and improve the availability of payment options including:
    - Payment by direct debit monthly on 2nd, 11th or 25th, weekly on a Friday or fortnightly on a Wednesday.
    - Standing Order.
    - Over the phone by Visa Debit, MasterCard, Visa, Mastercard Debit.
    - Online, using the Reading Borough Council website.
      Electronic Payment Card, which can be used at Paypoint, or the Post Office.

- Providing or sign-posting advice and support regarding welfare benefits to maximise tenant's income, this includes making sure the tenant has claimed Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, and if this is the case, has returned their claim with all the accompanying documentation.
- Make a referral to the Housing Support Team if support is needed to manage the tenancy.
- Ensuring that all communications are clear and written in plain English and encourage tenants to make contact. Where English is not the first language, we will provide a translation service where possible, if required.
- Carrying out periodic rent campaigns, using a variety of publications e.g. leaflets, posters and flyers etc.

Reading Borough Council also aims to prevent arrears caused by the most common underlying contributing factors, and taking early actions to mitigate these issues, which include:

- Universal Credit issues.
- Housing Benefit issues.
- Changes in income due to personal circumstances (e.g. illness, death of a partner or relationship breakdown, increase in number of dependants).
- Low income (e.g. unemployment, low paid work, zero-hour contracts or low take-up of benefit).
- Unmanageable household debt and/or competing priorities.
- Difficulty generally in managing finances such as referrals to Readifood for food parcels or for assistance with Energy Support.

The Council makes use of IT systems to monitor and record rent payments. We will also keep a clear record of each contact with the tenant and other agencies to ensure clear case records are available.

Tenants will be kept informed of their rent account with rent statements sent by post, quarterly. Tenants are also able to view their current rent account status online.

Housing Income Recovery Officers and Specialist Housing Income Recovery Officers receive training to ensure they maximise the use of resources, including IT systems, to provide them with the tools needed to collect income and information to complete a financial assessment, give benefit advice, and make a referral to the in-house Money Advice Team when required.

5. Early intervention

Despite preventative measures, some tenants may still fall into arrears. Early intervention is therefore essential in identifying the causes of non-payment and offering timely support. Tenants can be given advice or referred to organisations that are able to help.

Rent accounts are monitored on a weekly basis and an initial contact letter is sent to those who have missed their first weeks rent payment. This letter encourages contact and provides details of the in-house Money Advice Team. It also is a reminder that it is the tenant’s responsibility to ensure that they maintain and update their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit claim if applicable.

The Council will seek to build constructive working relationships with tenants and provide support through telephone calls, text messages, emails, letters, and home visits where appropriate when a tenant falls into arrears, to offer advice. We will also work with other services that are supporting the tenant.

Where attempts to contact the tenant have failed, we will try to contact other agencies, next of kin, or in-house teams who may be able to encourage the tenant to make contact and try to prevent recovery action.

6. Vulnerable tenants

Reading Borough Council recognises that some tenants may be more vulnerable to financial hardship and at greater risk of accruing rent arrears. We will actively seek to identify vulnerable tenants through direct contact with the tenant, and by working closely with the Allocations team at the time of sign up to ensure there is an offer of support available depending on the vulnerability.

Reading Borough Council Landlord Services defines a vulnerable person as:

* Anyone aged 16/17 with a guarantor.
* Care leavers.
* Tenants with mental or physical disabilities.
* Parents who are struggling to cope.
* Anyone who needs Adult Social Care services or Supported Housing services.
* Anyone who identifies as needing additional support to manage their tenancy.

The Council keeps a record of all tenants who state they are vulnerable or have any disabilities. We will make reasonable adjustments to communication methods and service delivery where required. This may include providing information in alternative formats, arranging interpreters or sign language support, or communicating through support workers or representatives, as deemed reasonable by the Housing Income Recovery Officer.

The Council will provide a tailored case by case approach to arrears recovery for vulnerable tenants and be sensitive in dealing with vulnerable tenants who have additional needs, for example additional contacts or visits made.

Where a tenant is identified as vulnerable, Housing Income Recovery Officers will act appropriately to support the tenant, for example by making a referral to the in-house Housing Support Team. They will also demonstrate awareness that non-payment of rent could be indicator of other support needs.

The Housing Income Recovery Team will work closely with Adult and Children's Social Services throughout the arrears process if applicable to ensure that tenants needs are understood, working together to offer support and solve issues with an aligned approach.

In extremely rare circumstances, where a tenant is under 18 or is particularly vulnerable, we will consider if the tenant has the mental capacity to defend possession proceedings, or any issues under the Equality Act 2010.

7. Rent arrears recovery

Rent arrears recovery will escalate in line with a pre-court protocol. This is legislative guidance which prescribes the specific procedure that Reading Borough Council should follow before issuing possession claims. We will request payment in full. If this is not possible, recovery action can be stopped or paused at any stage, prior to asking the court for possession, by the tenant agreeing an affordable repayment plan with the Council.

A financial assessment of the tenant's ability to pay will be completed before a repayment plan is agreed to ensure that it is affordable. This will consider the tenants household income, outgoings and debts. Any repayment plan will be confirmed in writing by letter, email or text, and will confirm what payments the tenant needs to make, when to make them, and for how long. The legal implications of not keeping to the agreement will also be plainly explained to the tenant.

The recovery process can end at any time if the tenant pays their rent arrears and any court costs in full. This is known as a Paid-up Possession Order (Paid up PO).

Where a tenant informs the Council that they are experiencing problems with Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, we will work with the tenant to resolve difficulties. The Housing Income Recovery Officer will work closely with tenants in receipt of Universal Credit to ensure they have supplied all the information required to receive the Housing Costs Element, and make sure the tenant understands their responsibility to pay rent and agree a payment method.

The Council will consider the Corporate Debt Policy, which prioritises rent and rent arrears payments over some other debts owed to the Council, due to the potential risk of eviction and subsequent homelessness, arising from non-payment.

Where tenants persistently fail to pay rent and other charges, and other means of recovering rent arrears have been exhausted, Reading Borough Council will take legal action to evict, always as a last resort.

The Council will request a Money Judgment Order in the majority of cases; this specifies that the tenant has to pay the rent arrears regardless of whether they are evicted, and it could affect their housing options going forward if they fail to do so.

As per the Tenancy Agreement, that the Council will seek to recover any court costs incurred from the tenant.

8. **Service of the notices /Rent Arrears Enforcement**

Where tenants fail to respond to several attempts to contact for initial recovery action, or when a repayment plan has been broken by a missed, late or partial payment, and where there are no mitigating circumstances, we will attempt to visit the property with a tailor made warning letter advising the tenant of the action they need to take to prevent a legal ‘Notice of Seeking Possession’ (NOSP) being served.

This may be delayed where:

- The tenant has done everything they can to progress their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit claim, and/or the tenant’s eligibility has been confirmed, and they are paying any short fall due.
- The tenant is vulnerable, and it may be necessary to spend more time working with the tenant to set up a repayment plan or arrange further support before taking legal action.
- The tenant is experiencing a life crisis where the Housing Income Recovery Officer decides legal action would not be appropriate and/ if referrals are necessary to another agency or in house service to aid in tenancy sustainment.

If the tenant does not make contact to provide details of mitigating circumstances, or fails to make up the missing payment, it will likely result in the service of a NOSP upon the next review of the account.

Although serving a NOSP is our first step in taking legal action against a tenant, the Council’s primary aim remains to resolve issues preventing the tenant making payment without proceeding to court action

9. Notice of Seeking Possession for Introductory Tenancies (NOSP)

Reading Borough Council will serve a Notice of Seeking Possession (Section 128) if an Introductory Tenant does not clear arrears in full or make and adhere to a repayment agreement.

Tenants have the right to a review if the Council decide to serve an Introductory NOSP. Tenants are required to complete a form if they would like a review hearing. This must be submitted within 14 days of the service of the NOSP. The tenant can attend this review but will need to inform us of their intention to attend, or an internal review will be held with no representation from the tenant.

If a tenant states they want to attend the review hearing, the Council must give the tenant 5 days' notice of a review panel location, date and time. The review panel will consist of two officers who are independent from the original decision, and of a higher seniority than those who made the decision to serve the NOSP.

We will provide written confirmation of the outcome of the review panel by the date the NOSP becomes effective (i.e. the date legal proceedings can start).

10. Notice of Seeking Possession for Secure Tenancies (NOSP)

Reading Borough Council will seek possession for secure tenancies under Ground 1 of the Housing Act 1985, which refers to rent arrears or breach of any other term of the tenancy agreement.

'Any rent lawfully due from the tenant has not been paid or the obligation of the tenancy has been broken or not performed'.

The NOSP is valid for 12 months from the date it was served, unless the tenant clears the arrears in full prior to the NOSP being served.

Following the NOSP being served, before taking court action, we will make every reasonable attempt to contact the tenant to discuss:

- The amount of the arrears.
- The cause of the arrears.

- A repayment plan for the arrears.
- Any Housing Benefit/Universal Credit issues.
- The implications of the Notice being served.
- The need for accessing legal, money and housing benefit advice.

The Council will continue to inform tenants of their rent balance through quarterly rent statements and will continue to work with the tenant to resolve outstanding issues to prevent further recovery.

If the tenant sets up an affordable repayment arrangement and keeps to that arrangement, we will agree to delay taking court action for as long as the tenant keeps to the agreement.

If the tenant breaches the repayment agreement, we will inform them of our intention to take further legal action and set clear time limits for making up any shortfall in payment to prevent court action.

We will serve a new NOSP after 12 months if there are still rent arrears to safeguard the debt and reinforce that court action will be taken if the agreement is broken.

11. Court action

The Council will take court action if:

- A repayment arrangement made following the NOSP being served has been broken and the shortfall is not repaid within an acceptable timescale, or
- No satisfactory agreement has been agreed, and a valid Notice remains in place, and
- There are no alternatives to court action after we have taken steps to contact the tenant, reduce the debt and provide support.

The Council will continue to consider the individual circumstances of tenants throughout the recovery process, and the Specialist Housing Income Recovery Officer may exercise discretion where appropriate.

The tenant will be visited by a Specialist Housing Income Recovery Officer before an application is made to the court. This will be accompanied by a hand delivered letter outlining pre court protocol and will provide a final opportunity for the tenant to work with the Council to prevent court action.

The Council will contact the tenant as soon as we receive notification of a date set for the hearing and confirm the date and time of the hearing. We will explain the implications of non-payment once the court has made an order. The Court should also provide written confirmation of this.

It is not appropriate for the Specialist Housing Income Recovery Officer to help the tenant complete their defence form against the claim and if a tenant requests assistance we will direct them to an external advice agency for support.

We will always request that the judge awards us costs of taking court action, and we can request the following orders at court:

- Suspended Possession Order (SPO).
- Outright Possession Order (OPO).
- For the case to be adjourned (ADJ).

When deciding the type of order that will be requested, we will consider:

- The amount of arrears.
- Any previous adjournments.
- The circumstances of the tenant in relation to their ability to repay the debt within an acceptable time.
- Any issues with Housing Benefit or Universal Credit claims.
- The tenant's previous payment history and previous contacts.

An Outright Possession Order (OPO) gives Reading Borough Council immediate possession, or possession within a set time, normally 14 or 28 days. Occasionally we will request an OPO forthwith. This is the only outcome that the court can grant for Introductory Tenancies as possession is mandatory unless the Council are requesting an adjournment. An outright possession is a court judgement that requires a social housing tenant to leave the property by a specific date. If the tenant fails to vacate the landlord (Reading Borough Council) can apply to the court for a Warrant of Eviction.

A Suspended Possession Order (SPO) is where possession of the property will be suspended on terms of weekly, fortnightly or monthly payments of current rent, plus an amount to repay the rent arrears on an agreed date. If the tenant breaches the order, we will contact the tenant to pay the shortfall or set up an affordable repayment arrangement to make up the shortfall within a reasonable time or we will apply to the court for a Warrant of Eviction.

If the tenant is having difficulty keeping to the terms of an SPO, the tenant may apply to court to seek a variation of the terms of the Order. It is the tenant's responsibility to do this, which may incur a court fee that the tenant will need to pay. We would only agree to this where it is the only reasonable step to repay the debt and support the tenant.

Where the tenant has complied in full with the terms of an SPO or makes a lump sum payment and all arrears and costs are cleared, the Order will cease to have effect. A letter will be sent to the tenant to confirm that this is the case.

The tenant or their representative may seek an adjournment if they feel our request for an Order is unreasonable, or there is new information that needs to be considered by the court. The Court may adjourn possession proceedings for a fixed period if we have failed to follow, or are unable to demonstrate that, the pre-action protocol has been followed. The Court could also strike the case out (Dismiss).

The court may also adjourn possession proceedings for a fixed period if there are outstanding Housing Benefit/Universal Credit or benefits issues.

The court may order an Adjournment with Liberty to Restore where there are outstanding issues which cannot be resolved at the hearing, or when the tenant has cleared the arrears, but future payments are unclear. The case will remain undecided in law but can be restored by Reading Borough Council as the claimant, without the need to pay additional court costs at a later date.

The court may order an Adjournment on terms (secure tenancies). These terms are laid down by the Judge. This is usually requested when both parties have agreed repayment terms for low level arrears before the hearing. If payments are not made as agreed, and an acceptable arrangement to make up missing payments is not made, the Council have liberty to apply to the Court for the case to be restored and relisted for further hearing.

The Court may strike out or dismiss the claim if they consider pre court protocol has not been adhered to.

We will request court costs for each case. The only exception to this is where there are exceptional circumstances, such as having to seek advice from a Solicitor or Lawyer.

The tenant will be sent a letter immediately after the Court hearing explaining the outcome, and their rent account will be closely monitored by the Specialist Housing Income Recovery Officer.

Where a court order has been breached, we will make reasonable attempts to contact the tenant to obtain details of the household income and expenditure to establish whether there has been any change of circumstances. In this case we may renegotiate the agreement to cover any shortfall. If this is not possible, the Council will take the relevant steps to seek permission to evict and carry out a further visit to the property before requesting a Warrant of Eviction.

Permission to evict can only be authorised once a written report has been checked by the Housing Income Recovery Team Leader and presented to the Housing Income Recovery Manager. This is then further signed off by the Income Recovery Service Manager. This follows an application to Court through PCOL (possession claims online) and attendance at the County Court to obtain a possession order that has not been adhered to.

When the tenant has complied with their court order and has satisfied the Court Judgement, including Court costs, the Order ends and no further possession action can be taken against the possession order.

Reading Borough Councils approach is that eviction is only used as a last resort and will only be considered when all other options for clearing arrears have been exhausted. The primary aim of this policy is to recover the debt and prevent homelessness rather than regain possession.

Tenants facing eviction are advised of their right to apply to Court to suspend the warrant. This gives the tenant an opportunity to explain the arrears to the judge or make an agreement to repay the debt.

Whilst each application is reviewed on its individual merits, the Council will generally oppose any application to suspend an eviction, and request that it is dismissed by the Judge. The only exceptions to this are where the arrears and costs have been paid in full, or there has been a significant change in the tenant's circumstances deeming it unreasonable or disproportionate to evict the tenant.

Reading Borough Council will attend the eviction with the court bailiff who is responsible for executing the eviction. A Council carpenter must be in attendance to force entry if necessary and change the locks.

If there is intelligence or evidence that the tenant may be violent or cause a risk to public safety, we will request the Police attend the eviction. This is to protect staff and minimise risk.

When tenants are notified of an impending eviction, they will be advised to remove all their possessions from the property. We will dispose of any possessions left in the property at the end of the tenancy according to the terms of the tenancy. Every effort will be made to inform the evicted tenant of this process, as well as their responsibility for meeting any reasonable costs we may have incurred.

If the tenant is not present at the eviction, the Council will store the items for a maximum of 28 days from the date of eviction, except for perishable goods, following which, we will then dispose of any items that are unclaimed.

We will notify the Housing Advice Team, Adult and Children Social services when we apply to court, and when we apply for an eviction warrant. This will allow the relevant departments within the Council to work together to overcome any concerns, and to work with the tenant to prevent further action where this is possible.

12. Loss of rights for tenants in arrears

Tenants who apply to be on the Housing Register will be given no priority need for housing if:

- They are in arrears when they apply to be on the Housing Register
- They go into arrears when they are on the Housing Register

Discretion will be used where a case has been classified as urgent, for example medical need, or the tenant can demonstrate they are keeping to a repayment agreement or where a management transfer has been authorised.

Reading Borough Council will make the full repayment of all arrears a condition for consenting to a mutual exchange.

13. Complaints

Reading Borough Council is committed to handling complaints fairly, promptly, and effectively. We use complaints, comments, and compliments, to help us review and improve our services.

If a tenant has a complaint about any policy or procedure this can be raised through the Council's Complaints Procedure. Further information, including how to make a complaint, is available via the Council's complaints process, linked below.

Housing complaints procedure - Reading Borough Council

14. Tenant insolvencies

Where a tenant is subject to Bankruptcy, an Individual Voluntary Arrangement (IVA), or a Debt Relief Order (DRO) and remains in occupation, they remain liable to pay their ongoing rent as it falls due.

Any rent arrears that arise after the insolvency begins are not included in the insolvency and may be recovered through normal legal action, including possession proceedings.

Rent arrears that existed at the date of the insolvency are qualifying debts and are included within the insolvency. This means that enforcement action to recover those arrears as a debt, such as obtaining a suspended possession order or money judgment, is restricted.

However, inclusion of arrears in an insolvency does not prevent the Council from seeking possession of the property. In these cases, Possession proceedings may be taken, and the Council can rely on rent arrears as a ground, including arrears that are included in the insolvency.

Tenants are expected to maintain their ongoing rent and repay arrears included in an insolvency through an informal arrangement to avoid a breach of tenancy.

The Council does not require the court's permission to begin or continue possession proceedings and may seek possession where rent arrears are unpaid. The court may grant possession of the property, although it cannot make an order requiring payment of arrears that are included in the insolvency.

In Sharples v Places for People Homes Ltd, the Court of Appeal reviewed the interaction between insolvency and a landlord's right to possession. It confirmed that bankruptcy or a Debt Relief Order does not prevent a landlord from obtaining possession, and that a mandatory rent arrears ground can still be satisfied even where the arrears are included in the insolvency.

15. **Monitoring**

Rent arrears are monitored on a weekly basis and data (including value of arrears, geographical area, tenure) is used to inform and support the approach the Council takes for effective rent arrears management.

The Council uses several indicators, including national performance indicators, to measure rent collection and arrears to compare the service alongside other local authorities, as indicated below:

- The amount of rent arrears as a percentage of the yearly rent due on House Mark returns
- BV66a - Rent percentage collected as a proportion of rents due on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) dwellings
- BV66b -The number of local authority tenants with more than seven weeks of (gross) rent arrears as a percentage of the total number of Council tenants
- BV66c -Percentage of local authority tenants in arrears who have had Notices Seeking Possession served
- BV66d - Percentage of local authority tenants evicted as a result of rent arrears

16. **Communication**

Effective communication is essential to managing tenancy breaches and maintaining good relationships between tenants and Reading Borough Council as the landlord. Reading Borough Council commits to:

- **Clear Information:** Providing tenants with accessible information about their responsibilities under the tenancy agreement, and how to report concerns.
- **Responsive Contact:** Acknowledging complaints regarding tenancy breaches promptly and keeping complainants informed of the progress and outcomes of investigations.
- **Neutral and Respectful Dialogue:** Ensuring all communications with tenants are handled impartially, respectfully, and confidentially.
- **Engagement:** Encouraging open dialogue and, where appropriate, facilitating mediation between parties to resolve any disputes amicably.
- **Staff Communication:** Ensuring all staff involved in tenancy management are kept informed of procedures and updates to policy.
- **Multi-Agency Coordination:** Communicating effectively with internal and external agencies such as Environmental Health, the police, and social services when their involvement is required.

- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Providing tenants with opportunities to influence and give feedback on how their tenancies are managed to support continuous service improvement.

This policy is accessible to all tenants including lessee's, as well as Reading Borough Council (RBC) staff, and stakeholders via the Reading Borough Council website and will be updated to reflect any changes.

Internally, this policy will be available to all staff and stored on the Reading Borough Council SharePoint site for easy access.

17. Equalities, diversity and inclusion

Reading Borough Council is committed to ensuring equal and fair access to our services by considering the individual needs of our tenants, their families, and other members of their household. Whilst working with tenants we will consider these needs and make reasonable adjustments where necessary. We will always treat people with fairness, dignity, and respect.

This policy will be implemented in a way that:

- **Treats all tenants fairly and without discrimination** on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or any other protected characteristic.
- **Recognises and respects the diverse needs** of tenants, ensuring communication and support are accessible to everyone, including those with language barriers, disabilities, or other vulnerabilities.
- **Ensures reasonable adjustments** are made to accommodate tenants with specific needs or disabilities in relation to tenancy breach investigations and interventions.
- **Provides equal access** to complaint reporting mechanisms and support services for all tenants.
- **Promotes cultural awareness and sensitivity** among housing management staff to support positive and respectful interactions.
- **Monitors and reviews** the policy's impact on different tenant groups to ensure it does not disproportionately affect any particular community.

All our staff are regularly trained in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion to help them understand when and where we may need to adapt our standard policies, procedures, and working practices to accommodate the unique needs of our residents.

Our policies set out how we seek to meet the specific needs of vulnerable residents, ensuring they receive the appropriate support and adjustments that they need to sustain their tenancies.

18. **Reasonable Adjustments**

Reading Borough Council is committed to ensuring that all tenants, including those with disabilities or specific needs, can fully access and benefit from this policy.
To achieve this, we will:

- **Identify and respond to individual needs** by offering reasonable adjustments in communication, investigation, and resolution of tenancy breaches.
- **Provide information in accessible formats** such as Braille, audio, or translated versions, depending on tenant requirements.
- **Offer alternative methods of communication**, including email, text message, or face-to-face meetings, to suit the preferences and needs of tenants.
- **Adjust appointment times or locations** to accommodate tenants with mobility, health, or caregiving needs.
- **Work closely with support workers, advocates, or family members** where tenants require this assistance to facilitate a move.
- Ensure appropriate sensitivity and tailored support when dealing with tenants with **health conditions or disabilities.**
- **Train staff** to recognise and respond appropriately to requests for reasonable adjustments in relation to tenancy management issues.

19. **Legislation**

Reading Borough Council will always meet legislative and regulatory requirements, including but not limited to the:

- RSH Consumer Standards
- Housing White paper
- Housing Act 1988
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Pre-action protocol for possession claims by social landlords. https://www.justice.gov.uk/courts/procedure-rules/civil/protocol/pre-action-protocol-for-possession-claims-by-social-landlords
- Local Government Act 2000
- Protection from Eviction Act 1977

- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Equalities Act 2010

20. **Links to other Policies**

Allocations-Scheme-2026-final.pdf
Complaints Policy
Corporate Debt Policy
Tenancy Policy

Please also refer to the individual Tenancy Agreement

21. **Implementation and review**

This policy will be reviewed every two years, or when there are changes to best practice or statutory requirements, to ensure the policy achieves its objectives of minimising arrears levels and continuously improve services and performance.

It is the responsibility of the Housing Income Recovery Service Manager to ensure that implementation of the Rent Recovery Policy is monitored. All staff involved in rent collection and arrears recovery issues has the responsibility to read, understand and implement this policy.