



INCOME RECOVERY POLICY

This Policy applies to current and former tenants and owner occupiers who pay a service charge to the Association. The policy is implemented by the Housing Management Department.

Habinteg Housing Association (Ulster) Ltd recognises that prevention and control of Rent and Service Charge arrears is crucial to maximising available resources. Income is needed to improve and maintain properties and provide services to residents. Prevention of arrears also means that residents avoid the risk of debt and any associated legal action.

The Association is committed to keeping the level of arrears as low as possible and sets performance standards annually which fully meet with the requirements of the Department of Social Development. The overall aim is to minimise the level of arrears in a sensitive but effective manner in order to meet the Association's own targets which are set, each year, in the organisation's Business Plan.

All actions taken are according to the requirements of legislation and the procedures of the Association, using clear and accessible information.

The Association will adhere to the following main principles when implementing the policy.

Prevention

Prevention is the key to arrears control and the Association will ensure that measures are taken to minimise the risk of arrears arising in the first instance.

At commencement of tenancies, Habinteg will ensure that tenants are aware of their obligations and methods of payment and will encourage maximum take up of benefits, where possible.

The Association will respond promptly to enquiries on rent and service charge and will refer tenants/callers to other specialist advice agencies if necessary

Habinteg will encourage all tenants, when terminating tenancies, to pay any outstanding arrears and advise of the implications involved if arrears are not paid in full.

Quick and Sensitive approach

The Association's Housing Management team will:

- Carry out a home visit 6-8 weeks after commencement of tenancy to establish if the new tenant is experiencing difficulties maintaining any aspect of their tenancy.
- provide four rent/service charge statements annually, showing payments due and any arrears;
- monitor all accounts regularly in accordance with procedures;
- make contact with residents through letters, telephone calls, home visits and e-mail;
- encourage residents to pay promptly and provide a range of convenient methods of payment;
- provide relevant training to staff;
- inform residents of the consequences of non-payment;
- negotiate affordable agreements to reduce arrears;
- record all actions taken at each stage of the recovery process;
- work with other agencies to support residents;
- make use of all available options for arrears recovery;
- aim, where possible, to secure repayment without legal proceedings.

The Association recognises that failure to keep up payments may be symptomatic of a range of problems and will seek to identify the cause of the problem and possible solutions. However, if all attempts to control the arrear fail, a Notice of Seeking Possession will be served which may lead to an Order for Possession being granted in court. This is the most serious situation which can occur and the one which the Association will make every effort to avoid. Eviction is always the last resort. In the absence of cooperation from a resident, however, the Association will proceed with repossession.

Reporting Arrears

Housing Management Staff will provide 4 reports, annually, to the Housing Management Committee detailing rent and service charge arrears with details of action taken to date.