



Money and Debt Policy

1 Purpose

At Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing (MTVH) we believe that maximising our customers' incomes, developing their financial skills, and enabling access to products and services is a key part of putting customers at the heart of what we do. Supporting individuals and communities aligns with our aim that customers have choice and control and the chance to live well.

We understand that there are many reasons why people can find themselves in financial difficulty or debt. We are committed to supporting customers with money and debt issues in order to help them gain financial independence and sustain their tenancies.

2 Scope

This policy applies to all MTVH customers where money is due to MTVH via a tenancy or a lease (including former tenancies). This may include but not limited to rent; service, personal or garage charges; care and support services; rechargeable repairs; sundry debts; court costs and major works. This policy does not apply where there is a loan or a commercial agreement.

3 Our responsibilities

We will commit to:

- Deal sensitively with anyone in arrears
- Focus on the individual
- Identify support options available and ensure customers have access to what they are entitled to
- Adopt the principles of Treating Customers Fairly (TCF) and current legislative guidance
- Diversity awareness

To achieve this we will employ a variety of methods such as:

- Clear communication - detailing the process for the collection of money by a variety of communication channels.
- Early intervention - identifying and contacting customers who fall into arrears as soon as possible to prevent arrears increasing.
- Taking into account the customer's personal circumstances when deciding the most appropriate method of recovery and providing an enhanced service where a customer has been assessed as requiring additional support.
- Offering advice, support and signposting to customers to help them access welfare benefits including but not limited to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.
- Offering arrangements to repay arrears in instalments based on an assessment of what is affordable and permissible, and regularly reviewing the arrangement to make sure it is still suitable and does not cause any undue hardship.
- Having clear standards for account management, customer contact and TCF.
- Providing high quality training to meet the quality assurance standards with regular testing of processes to ensure adherence to legislation.

4 Accessibility

For ease of access we have systems in place that enable customers to make payments and discuss their rent/service charge/payments in a variety of methods, including online self-service.



5 Safeguarding

Colleagues are trained on issues such as welfare benefits, basic money advice skills, and identifying financial and other types of abuse. Our Safeguarding Policy ensures that anyone working for us can identify different safeguarding issues and understands the duty to report. Where there are children involved or an adult at risk in the household and there is risk of harm, safeguarding concerns will always be raised.

6 Advice

We aim to identify and contact customers who fall into arrears as soon as possible to prevent arrears increasing.

We are committed to proactively signposting customers to advice services and supporting them where a need is identified, especially in cases where customers have learning/physical disabilities and/or mental health issues, which places them at an increased risk.

We have dedicated internal teams available that will make access to these support services easier for customers. Customers in social rented tenancies have access to our Money Advice Team who will assist with tasks such as benefit applications and budgeting.

7 Customer responsibilities

Customers must make every effort to meet all tenancy, lease and contractual obligations, including keeping up with financial obligations to us. This includes making payments when signing up for a new tenancy. For more detail on payments at sign up refer to the Lettings Policy.

Payment of outstanding amounts is due in full. Payment arrangements are offered on completion of an affordability assessment, in order to avoid undue hardship.

We encourage use of Direct Debits where payments are due from customers.

We take it very seriously if a colleague is treated in an abusive or violent way. We have a duty of care not only for our customers but for colleagues too. Therefore we will not tolerate any form of violent, threatening or aggressive behavior and will encourage all incidents to be reported immediately.

8 Legal proceedings

We will work with customers to set up payment arrangements and avoid legal proceedings. Where it becomes necessary, we will use legal proceedings to recover any debts outstanding if an appropriate payment arrangement is not reached or maintained. These include but are not limited to:

- County Court Judgements
- Lease dispute & lease forfeiture
- Possession proceedings (using all grounds of the Housing Act – the exception is that we won't use ground 8 for social rented tenancies)

We will consider legal action to regain possession of property and lease forfeiture as a last resort. An example of this could be where there is persistent, deliberate and/or reckless refusal and/or failure to maintain the terms of an order made by the court.

8.1 Shared Ownership

We will accept only one lender payment towards arrears for each shared ownership property. Should a further lender payment be made for the same property, MTVH will protect its equity by seeking possession regardless of that payment. In exceptional circumstances the Chief



Financial Officer (CFO) will consider accepting a further lender payment based on a risk analysis relating to the equity held in the property.

9 Legal/Regulatory context

The procedures which support the Money and Debt Policy adhere to the following:

- The Housing Act
- Homelessness Reduction Act
- Pre-Action Protocols
- Common Hold and Leasehold Reform Act
- Housing and Regeneration Act
- Protection from Eviction Act
- FCA Regulation [Mortgage Conduct of Business](#) (MCOB) rules
- FCA Principles, Treating Customers Fairly (TCF)

10 Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion

In implementing this policy MTVH will not discriminate against any colleague, customer or stakeholder on the grounds of their gender, sexual orientation, gender reassignment status, ethnic origin, age, religious belief, disability, marital status and pregnancy/maternity.

11 Key policy information

Policy Owner	Director of Customer Experience
Author	Compliance
Approved by	Income, Compliance, Director Central Customer Services (Tim Millns) and Customer Services Senior Leadership Team
Effective from	December 2019
Approach to review	This Policy & associated Procedures will be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if legislation, regulatory changes or operational need require an earlier review. Any amendments will be appropriately consulted on and signed off before being clearly communicated to customers and colleagues.
Latest next review date	December 2022