**1.0 Introduction**

One Manchester aims to maximise its income by collecting as much income due as possible, across all income streams, whilst ensuring a high quality service is provided to customers.

One Manchester adopts a firm but fair approach, ensuring early intervention is made, support is provided where necessary and legal action is pursued as a last resort, only when all other options have been exhausted, or where customers are refusing to engage or co-operate.

The Government’s continuing changes to the welfare benefit system presents a major risk for the business. Approximately two thirds of One Manchester’s tenants are in receipt of housing benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit, therefore any change has the potential to have a major impact. To counter the impact, One Manchester provides in-house support on a wide range of issues including debt advice, money/budgeting advice, tenancy support, employment support, digital inclusion support and literacy support. We aim to respond quickly to any changes in the welfare benefit system to ensure that tenants are supported through any transition.

**2.0 Purpose**

One Manchester aims to have a high performing income management service. The income management service will be delivered to maximise income and benefits for customers, promoting a payment culture, preventing homelessness and contribute to achieving sustainable tenancies and communities.

It is recognised that many tenants are financially or otherwise disadvantaged and a supportive and sympathetic approach will be adopted from an early stage. In particular, the specific needs of minority ethnic groups, people having vulnerabilities and the elderly will be taken in to account in collection and process of recording supporting information.

**3.0 Scope**

Income recovery includes:

* Rent and service charges from current tenants of all tenures
* Rent and service charges from former tenants
* Rent from garages
* Leaseholder service charges
* Rechargeable repairs

**4.0 The Policy**

The guiding principles in our approach to income recovery are:

* We will develop an approach to income recovery which is efficient, effective, modern and ambitious
* We may take different approaches to the different tenures and types of debt
* We will develop a culture of payment pre, during and post tenancy
* We will develop action plans for each financial year which ensure the service is progressing, improving and reflecting best practice
* We will develop challenging key performance indicators and useful performance information
* We will provide a range of accessible and flexible payment methods that are regularly promoted, publicised and reviewed
* We aim to achieve a reduction in arrears, year on year, by collecting rent and service charges due
* We aim to achieve maximum housing benefit / housing cost element of Universal Credit take up and accurate assessments and payment of benefit through advice and verification of claims
* We will enable customers to manage their rent accounts (and other bills) through the provision of postal or online access to rent statements, customer information leaflets and newsletters, attendance at community events and through One Manchester’s website
* We will ensure special circumstances and vulnerability are recognised and considered in income maximisation, advice and assistance
* We will make information available to customers on how to pay their rent and what to do if they fall into rent arrears
* We will set up payment arrangements for arrears after affordability assessments have been set up following analysis of the customer’s financial position
* We will utilise dis-aggregated customer insight data to target appropriate advice and services and to review trends of non-payment geographically and by diversity strand
* We will develop approaches for using data to predict the potential payment patterns and implement approaches to reduce the impact of irregular payment patterns
* We will work closely with Manchester City Council’s Revenue and Benefits section and the Department for Work & Pensions
* We will work to prevent homelessness, wherever possible, by appropriate intervention, timely advice and liaison with appropriate agencies
* We will provide help and support to customers to claim welfare benefits, request reconsiderations and appeal benefit decisions where appropriate
* We will work collaboratively across the business to ensure effective joint working and information sharing
* We will initiate the appropriate legal action without undue delay against tenants whose arrears are escalating and are not engaging with us with due consideration to the Court’s Protocol
* We will treat eviction as the last resort when clear and deliberate failure to pay is apparent
* Where appropriate, we will use mandatory grounds for possession
* We will work with other agencies to promote financial inclusion and a joined up service delivery
* We will continue to pro-actively respond to welfare reform
* We will ensure our Financial Inclusion Service dovetails effectively with the Income Recovery Service and that it maximises value to One Manchester and our customers
* We will support customers in applying for and obtaining employment in accordance with our employment and support strategies
* We will strive to achieve Value for Money in the delivery of this policy and in conjunction with One Manchester’s Value for Money Strategy

**5.0 Equality**

One Manchester will ensure that this policy is applied fairly to all our customers.  We will not directly or indirectly discriminate against any person or group of people because of their race, religion, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability or other grounds set out in our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on this policy

**6.0 Method and approach**

This policy should be read in conjunction with the detailed procedures and guidance notes to meet its aims.

**7.0 Responsibility**

The Director of Communities is responsible for ensuring this policy complies with regulatory and legislative requirements.

All staff within the Income Recovery section are required to comply with and implement this policy.

**8.0 Monitoring, review and evaluation**

* The Director of Communities will routinely monitor performance relating to this policy
* Quarterly reports will be provided to Board on progress against this policy
* Key Performance Information will be provided to the Executive Management Team on a monthly basis as part of the Performance Management Framework, reporting progress towards targets and trends
* This policy will normally be reviewed every 3 years or earlier if changes are required
* An earlier review will be carried out if there are firm proposals by the Government to make changes to the welfare benefit system or legal recovery techniques that would have a significant and detrimental impact on our ability to collect rent.

**9.0 Legislation**

This policy has been written in accordance with relevant guidance and legislation, which includes:

* Housing Act 1985
* Housing Act 1996
* Welfare Reform Act 2012
* General Data Protection Regulations 2016
* Equality Act 2010
* Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
* Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard
* Tenancy Standard

**10.0 Associated Policies**

* Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
* Bad Debt and Write Off Policy
* Recharge Policy
* Adults at Risk of Harm Policy