

Housing – Income Pre-Tenancy Framework

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**ROTHERHAM METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Housing – Income Pre-Tenancy Framework**

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**Housing – Income Pre-Tenancy Framework**

**1.0 Introduction**

This framework sets out guidance for an efficient and effective approach to affordability assessments which comply with legislative requirements, other frameworks already in place where applicable and wider corporate objectives.

The framework details how affordability assessments will be conducted by the Income Pre-Tenancy team and how the team will respond in specific scenarios.

**2.0 Purpose**

The aims of the Housing Income team are centred on the main corporate vision and one Council approach:

* Every child able to fulfil their potential
* People are safe, health and live well
* Every neighbourhood thriving
* Extending economic opportunity
* A cleaner, greener local environment

The team serves a wide-ranging purpose that focuses not only on collection of income, but also instilling support for those with vulnerabilities through our financial inclusion team, whilst creating the opportunity of employment through our Employment Solutions service.

The service provision delivers a holistic approach that looks to communicate effectively and coherently with customers and third parties at all stages to ensure we support our customers and provide added value to them.

The Income and Financial inclusion team aim to:

* Deliver an efficient, effective, and consistent approach to income management and debt recovery
* Adopt a ‘firm but fair’ approach that reflects a commitment to creating sustainable tenancies which balances prevention, support, and recovery
* Ensure customers have access to appropriate support to maximise their income, receive welfare benefits advice and referrals to other appropriate partners.
* Be respectful, inclusive, and clear in our communications with customers
* Provide an accessible and accountable income management service provision
* Ensure a value for money approach is embedded
* Ensure staff are aware of the framework and understand its aims
* Offer a strong tenancy support and financial inclusion service that looks to understand what the barriers are for customers and households to help directly and signpost appropriately for further and specialist support.

The Income Pre-Tenancy team specifically aims to:

* Deliver an efficient, effective, and consistent approach to affordability assessments.
* Be respectful, inclusive, and clear in our communications with customers.
* Give customers access to support which helps to maximise their income, receive welfare benefit advice, and provide referrals to other appropriate partners.
* Look to identify barriers for customers and work with them to break these down.
* Empower customers to take control of their financial health and sustain a tenancy.
* Ensure staff are aware of the framework and understand its aims.

**3.0 The Procedure**

**3.1 Prioritisation**

All affordability assessments (I&E’s) will be worked in order of receipt / booking.

Should a future I&E take priority it is the responsibility of the requesting team to make arrangements for any displaced bookings to be rescheduled.

**3.2 Income and Expenditure (I&E) Booking**

It’s your move (IYM), first financial assessment and all panel requests are to be booked into available appointment slots in Stopford in relation to the income and expenditure. Stopford is a third-party system that is utilised by Housing Options colleagues to book I&E appointments.

The request for Homeless I&Es should be sent to the Income Pre-Tenancy mailbox with all supporting information attached to Housing Management System. The request will be sent from the specific homeless officer dealing with the customers application.

All supporting information should be attached before a booking is made or an email request is sent, unless discussed with and agreed by the Financial Inclusion Coordinator.

**3.3 Supporting Financial Information**

To ensure the appointment can flow smoothly, supporting information is required which should be gathered by the officer(s) dealing with the application. In usual circumstances these will be in the Homeless or Key Choices teams. Once supporting information is gathered it should be uploaded to the customer application on the Housing Management System.

Supporting information includes, but not limited to:

* Bank statement (dated in last two months) showing a complete month of transactions for **ALL** accounts held by the customer.
* Transactions to be no older than three months.
* Credit Union statements for any accounts held by the customer (dated in last two months) showing a complete month of transactions. Transactions to be no older than three months.
* Payslips, unless income from work is explicitly shown on bank or credit union statement.
* Student Finance Loan documentation (essential for anyone in receipt of a student loan).
* Tax return for self-employed or information from Accountant to confirm income and expenses generated from work.
* Benefit letter, or UC screen shots.
* I&E from organisations supporting the customer, e.g. Penderels Trust / CAB etc.

In all cases the minimum supporting information required is the bank statement.

Where appropriate financial information has not been obtained before the I&E is booked / requested, the officer allocated to the case will return the case to the requesting officer/team. Any further request for an I&E will then need to be resubmitted when the information is available. The customer will not be contacted to inform them of this decision.

**3.4 Bank Statement Requirements**

A bank statement is required for all I&Es, unless specifically agreed with the Financial Inclusion Coordinator

For a sole tenant the supporting financial information list (3.3) above applies.

For joint tenants, the supporting financial information list (3.3) above applies, for each tenant.

For sole tenants with an occupying partner, the supporting financial information list (3.3) above applies for each individual. This is to ensure correct benefits are being paid (e.g. joint benefit claims) and that income is being maximised for each individual.

For sole or joint tenants with non-dependent adults in the property, information on the non-dependant financial situation is also required e.g. What is their income from work? Do they receive benefits? This can be obtained during the I&E but is helpful to have in advance.

If a sole or joint tenant does not have a bank account, please discuss this with the Financial Inclusion Coordinator in the first instance.

Should any other scenario apply the Financial Inclusion Coordinator should be contacted for advice on how to proceed.

**3.5 I&E Calculations**

I&Es will be completed using the system known as Policy in Practice (PiP). As a contingency plan should this system fail, a manual I&E will be completed on Excel.

A ‘self-service’ version of the system can be completed by the customer, should they not be able to undertake a call during usual office hours. After completion this should be returned to the income pre tenancy inbox where it will be reviewed by a member of the team. If this option is required, the Financial Inclusion Coordinator should be contacted for advice on how to proceed.

**3.6 Non-Dependents and budget calculations**

Where a tenant will be joined by a non-dependent in the property, we will base the I&E on the tenant themselves, applying any appropriate non-dependant charges. Should the non-dependent contribute to the household we will include an amount in the budget to show this.

Example: An I&E for a single tenancy is being prepared, the tenant will have her grown up son living with her. Her son is in receipt of UC and PIP and therefore no automatic non-dependent charge is taken from mum’s UC award. Mum is the appointee for her son’s finances and they share a bank account.

When the I&E is completed however, the property with all associated bills is unaffordable using just mum’s income.

She explains that both her and her son put all their money into one account, and this pays for all the bills and living expenses. If we showed this on the I&E the property would be affordable. However, as mum is the tenant we should show her income on the I&E as she is liable party for the rent payments, with any contribution son would need to make from his income to make the property affordable and sustainable for them both.

In this case the I&E should be sent as unaffordable for review by managers before proceeding.

Where there is ambiguity over whether someone is a non-dependent or a boarder this should be discussed with the Financial Inclusion Coordinator in advance. In the majority of cases this will be a non-dependent unless the tenant has a specific Tenancy Agreement with the boarder.

**3.7 Joint Tenant, non-couple**

Where a joint tenancy I&E is being completed for a non-couple (e.g. brother and sister) there will need to be two I&E’s completed showing a 50% charge for household costs (rent, utilities, food etc). This will ensure correct calculation of Housing Costs and benefits are applied.

When the two I&E’s have been completed they will be brought together manually to check the overall affordability of the property for both liable parties.

It is also worth noting here that in this scenario there could be two different income streams, as both parties are treated as individuals and so one could have ESA + PIP + Housing Benefit and the other could be working and have some UC + Housing Costs.

In this situation a longer I&E appointment will be needed, therefore a double appointment will need to be booked in Stopford.

**3.8 Affordability Outcome**

Where the outcome of an IYM I&E shows as unaffordable the case will be presented to the Financial Inclusion Coordinator for review. In turn this will then forward to the Management team in Key Choices for review and discussion. All possible outcomes will be reviewed, and the outcome of these discussions will be documented on the customers application.

For a Homeless I&E request the unaffordable outcome is reported to the Homeless Officer who requested the I&E.

For a HAP I&E request the unaffordable outcome is reported to the Key Choices Officer working these cases, where it will be discussed in Panel.

In all cases notes will be added to the Housing Management System to confirm what action will be taken.

**3.9 Translations**

Where a customer requires a translator, we will use the DA Languages facility and connect to them with a speaker of their preferred language.

To help facilitate and plan it is helpful to know this is required at the time of the I&E booking / request.

Family and/or friends are not permitted to translate for a customer. This is a requirement set by Legal Services.

When completing a translation case, the I&E appointment will take longer, if booking is made in Stopford two consecutive appointment slots will be required. If this is not booked correctly the appointment will not go ahead and the case will be returned to Key Choices for them to rebook in an appropriate double appointment space.

**3.10 No Contact**

When an I&E is attempted but no contact is gained the team will leave a voicemail and also send a text message to the customer, giving them a date and time to respond by and putting them ‘on contact’.

Should the customer not respond by the given date and time the case will be returned to the requesting team.

In the case of appointments booked into Stopford, a limited response time is available due to subsequent I&E bookings.

In the case of appointments requested via email a longer response time can be given, due to the flexibility of the cases.

In all cases, if the customer does not respond by the given time a new request will need to be submitted for a future I&E.

**3.11 Ad Hoc**

Any I&E request submitted which is outside the scope of prior listed I&E’s will be treated as Ad-Hoc and the priority determined by the Financial Inclusion Coordinator.

These can include requests from Housing Income Team, Tenancy Support or other departments within the Council to determine affordability for a current or future Council property.

Within this bracket falls Furnished upgrade requests, which come directly from the Rotherham Furnished Homes team and are to assess a tenant’s ability to afford an increase in package.

In most cases a full I&E is not required but where it is the team will contact the customer and make the necessary arrangements for this to take place.

**3.12 Referrals**

As part of the I&E process a customer can be identified as benefitting from support provided by a third party, these could include support around:

* Tenancy Support (RMBC, Young Tenants etc)
* Employment Support
* Money Advice
* Advocacy and Appeals
* Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
* CGL (Drugs/Alcohol)
* Gambling
* Mental Health

*This is not an exhaustive list.*

Where a referral is made a copy of this will be attached to Housing Management System. In the case of self-referring organisations, the customer will be provided with the contact details and encouraged to seek help.

**3.13 Related Documents**

This framework has been drawn up with reference to relevant legislation, including but not limited to:

* Financial Inclusion Policy
* Income Recovery Framework
* Housing Allocation Policy
* Homeless Reduction Act

**4.0 Performance**

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| **Performance Indicator** | **Indicator Description** | **Target 2023/24** | **Outturn 2023/24** | **Target 2024/25** |
| **FI 5** | Amount of additional welfare benefits sourced  | £1,088,040.00(Total salaries for FI team) | £1,344,188.00 | £987,900.00(Total salaries for FI Team-reduced due to Employment Solutions Team being replaced by Money and Benefits Service) |
| **FI 8** | Customer Satisfaction with (IPT and TSO) provision (when case is closed) | 98% | **100%** | 98% |

**5.0 Roles and Responsibilities**

The Assistant Director of Housing will retain the overall responsibility for the implementation of this framework. The Financial Inclusion Manager is responsible for the operational delivery of this framework and the associated procedures and has the responsibility for ensuring compliance with regulatory and legislative requirements.

**6.0 Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluation**

The effectiveness of this Procedure is reported upon monthly with the key performance indicators overseen by the Head of Service. The effectiveness of this procedure will be reviewed at 12 monthly intervals to ensure best practice is always delivered.

**7.0 Legislation and Guidance**

* Housing Act 1985
* Protection from Eviction Act 1977
* Landlord and Tenant Act 1987
* Civil Procedure Rules 1998
* County Court Act 1984
* Human Rights Act 1998
* Equalities Act 2010
* The Limitation Act 1980
* General Data Protection Regulation 2016
* Any additional supplementary Legislation and guidance

**8.0 Policy Control Statement**

The Head of Service for Business and Commercial Services is responsible for ensuring adoption of, and adherence to this framework and its associated procedures.

The Financial Inclusion Team Leader is responsible for day to day operational management of the team.

The Financial Inclusion Team Leader is required to develop, implement, and maintain relevant guidance and procedures for employees and managers.

All Income Pre-Tenancy staff are responsible for the operational aspect of the Pre-Tenancy service and will ensure there is compliance with relevant legislation and due regard for best practice.

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| Approval date: |  |
| Date of next review: |  |
| Officer/Date: | Comments: |

**Appendix 1**

