**Tenant Engagement Expenses, support and recognition guidelines**

**1. Background**

The Tenant Engagement Team at Rotherham Borough Council (RMBC) strongly believe that tenants who take part in engagement activities should be able to do so without being out-of-pocket.

At times we will also offer incentives and support to encourage tenants to engage and to recognise their contribution.

**These guidelines cover the activities that RMBC facilitate with our tenants. The activities that Rotherfed manage are covered by their own policies.**

**2. Expenses**

Out-of-pocket expenses will be refunded on production of an appropriate receipt and should be reclaimed within one calendar month of the expense being incurred.

If a tenant does not have the funds to pay for costs upfront a ‘float payment’ can be arranged of up to £25 per day. We will require receipts for all expenses paid for by a cash advance.

We expect people to make the most cost-effective purchases and arrangements in order to minimise expense claims.

**2.1 Travel**

We are committed to reducing our negative impact on the environment so encourage tenants to use environmentally friendly transport when practical.

We will refund the following travel expenses:

* **Public transport**

We will refund the cost of a standard return public transport journey.

* + **Taxi fares**

If it is impractical to use public transport, we will refund taxi fares. This must first be agreed with the Tenant Engagement Manager. Examples of where it may be impractical to use public transport are:

* + Tenants that have a disability which makes using public transport difficult.
	+ A group of tenants are travelling together, and the taxi fare would be cheaper than public transport.
	+ Adverse weather conditions
	+ Tenants are required to travel alone late at night and feel vulnerable.
	+ **Use of a vehicle**

If a tenant uses their own vehicle, we will refund expenses at the following rates per mile providing that the tenant has a valid driving licence and travels in a car that is road worthy with valid insurance, Tax and MOT certificates.

The below mileage amounts are in line with the existing council policies for staff and volunteers:

**By car -** 45p per mile

**By motorcycle -** 24p per mile

**By bicycle -** 20p per mile

Mileage claims will be calculated based on the shortest possible distance between the points of travel.

We understand that tenants may form friendships outside of meetings and support each other with transport.

However, if you are travelling to represent the Council at an event and you wish to transport other tenants, we encourage you to make sure you have the appropriate level of car insurance.

If a tenant needs to make a journey in excess of 50 miles (one way), please let a member of the Tenant Engagement Team know and we’ll discuss with you the best and most cost-effective form of travel.

We’ll want to consider whether there are any alternative ways to reduce spend, such as vehicle sharing or using public transport, and we’ll discuss with the tenant whether the alternative forms of transport are manageable for them and appropriate for the journey.

**2.2 Car parking**

Car parking costs will be refunded on production of a receipt or ticket.

**2.3 Childcare and carers costs**

Where it is cost effective to do so, tenants with dependent family members may be able to reclaim the cost of registered care, whilst participating in engagement activities.

The cost must be approved by the Tenant Engagement Manager and represent good value for money.

Where possible, we’ll pay care providers directly. If this isn’t possible, we’ll need to see a receipt.

**2.4 Meal costs**

If an engagement activity is longer than 3 hours and there are no refreshments supplied, the tenant can claim back the cost of a meal on production of a receipt, up to a maximum of:

* £6 for breakfast
* £6 for lunch
* £18 for an evening meal

If tenants are at an arranged activity/event, it’s impractical to go and find somewhere else to eat, and the cost of your meal is more than the above allowances, don’t go hungry. Make the purchase and discuss this with the Tenant Engagement Manager afterwards.

**2.5 Overnight stay costs**

When required, we’ll book and pay for unavoidable overnight stays. Where possible, we’ll book bed, breakfast, and an evening meal (if required).

In the rare circumstances where we have not been able to make the booking in advance, we will refund the cost of an overnight stay.

This must be agreed with the Tenant Engagement Manager.

**2.6 Administration costs**

Where practical, tenants are expected to use RMBC resources for any administration they may need to carry out as a result of an engagement activity, e.g. telephone calls, photocopying. If this is not possible, costs incurred will be refunded on the production of a receipt or itemised bill.

**3. Reclaiming expenses**

Tenants reclaiming expenses will be asked to track their mileage where necessary, provide receipts and sign a claim form.

Claims will be paid directly via petty cash or directly into your bank account.

Please speak to the Tenant Engagement Manager, to discuss the process in more detail.

**4. Support and recognition**

We are keen to ensure that our engagement activities are accessed by as many tenants as possible, and we think it is important to recognise the contribution that tenants make.

**4.1 Training and support**

We know that some people may need support to engage with our activities. We want to empower tenants to get involved and we will provide the appropriate training to make sure that everyone we work with feels comfortable in their role.

Training will be delivered by the Tenant Engagement Team and will be tailored to meet your individual needs.

**4.2 Peer Support**

We can link tenants who are new to engagement with a tenant who has relevant experience. We recognise that peer support can give people the confidence to take part in opportunities.

**4.3 Social events**

For some of our regular engagement activities we encourage tenants to get together for social activities.

For example, our Housing Involvement Panel has the opportunity to get together each year, if they deem this the best way to celebrate their involvement. We are keen to support this type of interaction to acknowledge the time and talents of our tenants, as well as create space to interact socially.

**4.4 Incentives for engagement activities**

On occasion we may want to engage with a specific group of tenants, to ensure that we get a range of views representative of our demographics, involve new tenants and encourage people from hard-to reach groups to get involved. We also think it’s important to recognise the time and talents given by the tenants who work with us.

In these circumstances we may offer an incentive to encourage engagement or a reward to say thank you.

**4.5 Surveys**

To attract the attention of tenants to a survey and encourage them to complete it, we may offer the chance to be entered into a draw to win a prize received as vouchers, proportionate to the size of the survey.

**5. How we designed the guidelines**

**5.1 Guidelines consultation**

These guidelines were signed off by:

* Housing Services Senior Management Team – **14/09/2023**
* The VCS Infrastructure Group – **04/12/2023**
* The Housing Involvement Panel – **31/01/2023**

**5.2 The Valuing Volunteers Policy**

These guidelines have been developed to compliment the [Valuing Volunteers policy](file:///C%3A//Users/James.Smith/Downloads/Appendix%201%20-%20Valuing%20Volunteers%20Policy_Final%20%286%29.pdf), which is in operation to support more general volunteering opportunities within the Council.

**5.3 Review**

The guidelines will be reviewed every 2 years, involving Tenants from the Housing Involvement Panel.