

Corporate Debt Management Guidance

This document can be provided in large print and in other languages on request. Please contact the Finance – Transactions Group on 01276 707238 and we will send you the requested format as soon as possible.

CORPORATE DEBT MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

Surrey Heath Borough Council provides a wide range of services for which they charge. Effective management and collection of debt is an essential contributor to the Council's financial resources and maximises income available to provide such services.

For further information on these please refer to our Income and Charging Policy – [http://www.surreyheath.gov.uk/council/About The Council/financialreports](http://www.surreyheath.gov.uk/council/About%20The%20Council/financialreports).

Debts arise in a number of areas the most common being:

- Council Tax
- Housing Rents
- Non Domestic Rates
- Housing Benefit overpayment
- Sundry Debts (eg Commercial Rents, Licensing, Building Control, Environmental Health Services, Commercial Refuse Collection)

The aim of this policy is to set out how the Council will go about maximising income from the provision of services by collecting those debts owing to it promptly, effectively, efficiently and economically while ensuring fair treatment to all debtors. In doing so, we will encourage residents to deal with their priority debts first. These are debts which could result in a person losing their freedom or home.

In pursuit of this aim we will ensure:

- Our actions are guided by best practice and comply with legislative requirements.
- Our approach is consistent
- Our actions are transparent
- Our actions are proportionate

The Council expects residents owing it money to settle the debts as quickly as possible. It will support individuals having due regard to their circumstances but will also take all necessary steps to ensure payment is made.

The Council recognises certain debts could result in an individual losing their home or even liberty and will take this into account when agreeing a payment plan with a resident.

Surrey Heath Borough Council's obligations

The following general principles will apply in the management of debts owed to Surrey Heath Borough Council, and we will ensure that:

- Invoices are raised accurately and issued the following working day
- Early contact is made with debtors

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- A repayment agreement is considered where appropriate, if the individual is unable to pay the debt by the due date.
- Recovery procedures recognise the difference between priority and non-priority debts and make clear which debt is being recovered
- All information provided to the debtor is clear and easy to understand
- Advice and information is provided to the debtor at every stage of the recovery process and that individuals are referred to the appropriate external organisations for independent advice
- The approach taken is firm yet sensitive to the circumstances of the individual
- Where there are a number of different types of debt owed to the Council , eg Council Tax, rent, repairs, parking fines etc where known these debts, where possible, will be consolidated and a payment plan put in place covering all debts. Therefore only one payment need be made to us, and that payment will be split among the different departments in accordance with agreed priorities
- Procedures are efficient and cost effective. Irrecoverable debts will be written off in accordance with the Council's financial regulations
- All staff involved in the recovery action comply with the Councils written guidelines
- Our staff are polite and courteous towards debtors at all times

The Council recognises its responsibilities under the Data Protection Act. It will ensure information provided remains secure. Information on debts will be shared as necessary between service areas to help develop repayment plans with a resident.

Before sharing personal information with external agencies acting on behalf of a debtor (such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau), the Council will seek the individual's consent first.

The Debtor's responsibility

The debtor has a responsibility to:

- Communicate with the Council when experiencing genuine financial difficulties
- Acknowledge a genuine debt at the earliest opportunity
- Provide the Council with the information requested to enable an evaluation of the debtor's financial situation to be assessed when reaching agreements for payment by instalment
- Pay agreed instalments promptly
- Contact Surrey Heath Borough Council with any changes to their financial situation or change of address

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Account Collection and Recovery Cycle

Invoices will normally be subject to the recovery cycle shown below

	Action	
Stage 1	28 days after invoice issued	Reminder Notice
Stage 2	14 days after Reminder Notice	Referral Memo's to various departments Referral to CPA where applicable.

At the Council's discretion outstanding invoices may be referred to an external agency, The Credit Protection Association (CPA).

If The CPA are unsuccessful each outstanding account will be reviewed and the next appropriate course of action agreed e.g. Referral to Legal Services.

Regrettably, the Council recognises that on occasions monies owed to it can only be recovered by legal action. You will be informed if the Council intends to take such action. If the Council obtains an order from the court it will take all necessary steps to enforce that order which may include which may include attaching benefits/earnings or the seizure of goods .

Methods of Payment

- Credit and Debit Cards – Payments can be made by telephoning 0845 564 5697 or via our website www.surreyheath.gov.uk
Please note a fee of 1.5% is charged on all credit card payments.
- BACS – Payments through the Bankers Automated Clearing System should be made to Sort Code 60-04-20 Account Number 46079211 in the name of Surrey Heath Borough Council quoting our reference/invoice number.
- Payment at the Kiosk – The Self Service Kiosk is situated within Surrey Heath Borough Council's Contact Centre. You can pay by cash, credit or debit card quoting our reference/invoice number.
- Cheque – Cheques should be made payable to Surrey Heath Borough Council with your name address and contact number on the reverse quoting our reference/invoice number.

Vulnerable individuals

We will endeavour to take account of the needs of vulnerable customers throughout the debt recovery process and will work positively with other agencies as necessary.

When applying this policy to vulnerable customers our officers will consider the wider implications of any recovery actions on the individual and the Council.

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Publicity

This policy will be promoted through the website. Residents will be reminded that such a policy does not mean they do not have to pay their debts but it is a way of managing how they pay the money they owe.

Customer Care, Equality and Diversity

All correspondence with debtors will be accurate and conducted in accordance to the policies the Council has relating to Customer Care and Equality and Diversity. Copies can be downloaded from the Councils website.

Complaints and disputes

The Council will endeavour to resolve any disputes in relation to debt collection at the earliest possible opportunity. We will ensure that the customer is aware of the Councils Complaints procedure and how to make a complaint.

Contact us:

Surrey Borough
Council
Knoll Road,
Camberley, Surrey.
GU15 3HD

Debts relating to Housing Benefits: (01276) 707116
Debts relating to Council Tax: (01276) 707176
Debts relating to Non-Domestic Rates: (01276) 707185
Debts relating to all other outstanding invoices: (01276)
707238

Website: www.surreyheath.gov.uk