

Rent recovery

and other charges

Rent from our properties is ASRA's main source of income. When tenants do not pay their rent it means that we have less money available to manage or maintain your home. This also means higher rents for those who do pay their rents. In short, it is in everyone's interest to ensure that we collect what is due to us.

Consistent failure to pay your rent is a very serious matter and can result in eviction from your home.

How is rent paid?

Rent is due each week in advance on a regular basis and must not be paid in arrears. You can pay by one of the following methods:

- ▶ At any post office using your rent card or rent payment book
- ▶ By standing order with your bank
- ▶ By direct housing benefit payment

Payments may also be made in person by cheque or cash at ASRA's office and cheques may be sent through the post [not cash]. However, this should not be viewed as an alternative to regular payment to one of the above methods.

You will receive a rent statement at least every three months and you should check to ensure that all of your payments are recorded correctly. It is your responsibility to ensure that your rent is paid whether it is paid directly by yourself or paid by your local council.

What if you owe rent?

Don't hope the problem will go away. Contact us immediately for help and guidance on how to manage your rent arrears before the problem gets too bad. We will do all we can to assist, especially if you are having problems with Housing Benefit, but you must always remember that **every tenant is responsible for making sure their rent gets paid.**

ASRA has a very clear set of policies and procedures governing rent arrears and rent collection. If you do fall behind with your rent, an Income Recovery officer will be in contact with you. The full policy and procedure for recovering unpaid



rent is available on request and a summary appears below. Our procedures are regularly reviewed and are subject to change.

If you owe two or more weeks rent (or over £200), you will receive a reminder letter from your Income Recovery Officer. There may be a number of reasons why your account is in debt, but even if you have paid recently it is worth checking that your payment has been received.

If you have not paid the outstanding balance, then you should contact us. If you are waiting for housing benefits payments you should contact your local council as well.

As a minimum we would ask those in employment to pay £5 per week to reduce the arrears and at least £2.95 for those not in work. However, the more that can be repaid, the quicker the arrears will be reduced.

If we do not receive payment, recovery action will be taken. This starts with serving a Notice of Seeking Possession (which is the first stage of legal action). If the outstanding balance is not paid the situation becomes very serious and we will request a court hearing.

If a court hearing is applied for, you will be responsible for the costs of taking this action. Even if you have cleared the debt at this stage, you will still have to pay our costs for issuing the summons.

If you are served with a court summons, the court will advise you and you must attend. The judge will consider ASRA's request for a possession order (which determines whether or not you should lose your home) and we will ask for either a 'suspended order' or an 'outright order'. The difference will depend on whether we have accepted your offer to clear the debt. An outright order will mean you can be evicted, usually after a certain number of days given by the judge.

A possession order can be 'suspended on terms'. This means that you pay an agreed amount on dates set by the court. If you do not keep to this order, we can apply for an eviction warrant and you will lose your home.

Sadly we do evict people. We do not want to do this but people who persistently fail to pay must expect this.

Court action is a serious matter. It can result in you losing your home and becoming homeless, make you ineligible for a transfer or a mutual exchange and a court order (a County Court Judgement) can mean that you will find it very hard to get credit from shops or banks.

Our procedure is governed by some discretion. Your circumstances may mean that it is inappropriate to take the next action within the stages mentioned above. However, unless you tell us we will not be flexible and the action sequence (as stated above) will continue. It is important that you keep us informed of any changes in your circumstances.



What can I do?

If you are in arrears with your rent you should:

- ▲ Contact your Income Recovery Officer immediately to discuss what needs to be done
- ▲ Make a list of your income and expenses and work out how much you can realistically afford to pay on a regular basis to clear the arrears. This will help you with your discussions with us.
- ▲ Make an effort to pay something – it is better than paying nothing at all. Even if you are awaiting a housing benefit claim to be processed you should make a contribution to show a commitment. This can be refunded at a later date.
- ▲ Apply for housing and other benefits – see our leaflet.
- ▲ Make an appointment to see a Benefits Advisor at your local Citizen's Advice Bureau or local council to check your eligibility for benefits. Your local law centre can also advise you on your rights.

Former ASRA tenants with rent arrears

Eviction or leaving without notice is not the end of the debt recovery procedure. We recover all monies due to us and use debt collection agencies to trace former tenants who leave owing us money (not all from evictions). We will not re-house any former tenant who left owing money unless they clear the outstanding debt including court costs.

Further information

For further information about rent payments and the rent arrears process please contact the Income Recovery Team at ASRA on 020 7940 6600 or call your Income Recovery Officer directly. Their name can be found on your rent statement.

Remember – your home is at risk if you consistently fail to pay your rent. However, ASRA will work with you to help you manage your rent payments.