



## Vulnerable Renters Payment Scheme

## **Definitions**

Private Rented Sector (PRS): any property that is privately owned and being rented out as housing is classified as Private Rented Sector housing.

Social Rented Housing: housing rented from a housing association or council acting as landlord.

Low income: a key criterion of the scheme is that applicant has income / savings which renders them unable to pay the amount requested from the scheme themselves. Assessment of affordability will be conducted using the Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities.

## **Background**

The Council understands that many residents may be struggling to cope with the rising cost of living, particularly with food and energy costs.

To this end, the Council would like to use some of its available grant funding to help vulnerable households with rent arrears to reduce the risk of them being evicted and becoming homeless. The purpose of this exceptional one-off payment is to support low-income renters who are in rent arrears to avoid eviction or find a new home where necessary in order to prevent homelessness.

## **Overview**

This scheme is designed to assist tenants in rented accommodation to clear arrears of up to £2k. The scheme will only clear arrears on an existing tenancy that has a long term future, in that the reasons the arrears were accrued can be resolved to enable that household to avoid homelessness.

## **Commencement of the Scheme and Scheme Closure**

Applications can be made from 1 December 2023 until 25 March 2024, subject to the availability of funds. Applications received after the spending limit has been reached will not be considered.

## **Applying for a Vulnerable Renters Payment**

Applications to the scheme will be made by contacting Housing Options on 01283 508120 during office hours, evidence will then be submitted by email. Alternative arrangements for particular applicants can be made where necessary and upon request.

## **The eligibility criteria and evidence required for a Vulnerable Renters Payment**

The eligibility criteria for the scheme is as set out below, all of the criteria must be met to receive a payment under the scheme:

1. Applicants must reside within the East Staffordshire Borough Council area.
2. The applicant must be unable to afford to repay the arrears within a reasonable timeframe, usually considered to be no more than 6 months.
3. The situation that caused the arrears has been addressed satisfactorily, or is in the process of being addressed in a way which will offer the tenant a long term future in that property (i.e. the rent is affordable now and is expected to

remain affordable). The Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities will be applied to determine this test.

- a. In the alternative, the applicant has identified an affordable<sup>1</sup> PRS property they would like to move to and need assistance with the upfront costs.
4. There is a risk of homeless if the scheme does not make a payment, and the landlord has agreed that the tenancy can continue for the foreseeable future if the payment is made (this does not mean that there needs to be specific threat of homelessness, such as notice having been served). This test will be at the Council officer's discretion, with reference to the Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities.

### **Examples of evidence to be requested**

This list is not exhaustive:

1. Valid identification, such as a passport or driving licence.
2. Bank statements, showing proof of income and any savings.
3. Payment of Council Tax at the address
4. Tenancy Agreement
5. Statement of the rent account
6. Maximum payment amount, method of payment and timings

Where an applicant meets all the criteria a maximum payment of £2,000 shall be paid. Payments will be made direct to the landlord's bank account within 10 working days from the date of decision.

### **Notification of Decisions, Reviews of Decisions and Complaints**

Applications for payments under the scheme will be considered by officers of the Council and will be notified to the applicant either in writing or by email.

Whilst there is no statutory right to review, any requests for review will be considered by a senior officer. The review request should be submitted in writing within 3 working days of the decision, along with any new supporting information. The application will be reconsidered within 10 working days and the applicant informed in writing or by email of the decision.

The Council's Complaints Procedure will be applied in the event of any complaints about the scheme, a copy of which is available on the Council's website.

### **Managing the risk of Fraud**

The Council will not accept deliberate manipulation of the scheme and fraud. Any applicant who falsifies information to gain payments may face prosecution, and any payment issued will be sought to be recovered in the proceedings.

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<sup>1</sup> Determination be reached using the Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities, specifically para. 6.28, 17.45 & 17.46.

### **The Council's Duties in relation to the threat of Homelessness**

Whilst a payment from the scheme does not directly impact any homeless duties owed under the relevant legislation<sup>2</sup>, a payment from the scheme is designed to remove the risk of homelessness. Thus engagement with the scheme may result in a finding of 'not homeless' due to the factual change in circumstances resulting from a payment being made under the scheme.

### **Data Protection and use of Data**

All information and data provided by applicants shall be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Data Protection Policy and privacy notices which are available on the Council's website.

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<sup>2</sup> Housing Act 1996 Part VII (as amended)