

# Tenant Engagement Expenses and Incentives Policy **DRAFT** v.1

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Dover District Council (“the Council”) values the time and contribution of residents (tenants and leaseholders) who wish to participate in activities with the Housing Management Service.
- 1.2 It is important that residents know that their contribution is valued and that they are not out of pocket because of being involved. The Council will also occasionally incentivise engagement to encourage engagement and show our appreciation.

# 2. Definitions

- 2.1 For the purposes of this Policy:
  - ‘We’, ‘ours’ and ‘us’ refers to Dover District Council.
  - ‘Tenants’ refers to an individual or individuals who have an active tenancy agreement with the Council and live in and rent a Council-owned property.
  - ‘Leaseholders’ refers to an individual who has purchased a property under a long-term lease as part of a block of flats, maisonettes owned by the Council or is partly owned by the Council through the Shared Ownership scheme.
  - ‘Residents’ refers to both our tenants and leaseholders.
  - ‘Staff’ refers to members of the Tenant Engagement Team and Housing Services.

# 3. Legal duties

- 3.1 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 introduced new rules that social housing landlords must comply with regarding the landlord’s transparency with, and accountability to tenants. The Regulator of Social Housing (“the Regulator”) published its revised Consumer Standards on 1 April 2024, including the [Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard](#). This means that the Council must:
  - Treat tenants with fairness and respect
  - Take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes for tenants
  - Take tenants’ views into account in their decision making about how landlord services are delivered and communicate how tenants’ views have been considered
- 3.2 For the purposes of this Policy, the Council extends its responsibilities to tenants under the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard to include all residents.
- 3.3 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, also referred to as the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), encourages public bodies to understand how different people will be affected by their activities so that policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet the needs of different groups.

## 4. Policy purpose and scope

- 4.1 The purpose of this Policy is to provide residents with a clear and transparent procedure for reimbursement of eligible expenses.
- 4.2 The Policy covers all groups and tenant engagement activities formally recognised by the Council's Housing Services, for example Dover District Tenancy Consultative Group (DDTCG) and other groups or activities referenced in our [Tenant Engagement Strategy](#).
- 4.3 To support the equal opportunity of underrepresented groups. For example, offering different travel options to residents who have disabilities intends to widen the scope of residents who are able to attend engagement activities.
- 4.4 The Policy should be read alongside the following policies:
  - Tenancy Strategy 2021 – 2026
  - Tenant Engagement Strategy 2022 – 2027
  - Equality Policy

## 5. Policy aims

- 5.1 The aim of this Policy is to underpin the principles of our expenses and incentive procedures for residents who engage with the Housing Management Service. The specific aims of this Policy are:
  - 1) To treat residents fairly by reimbursing eligible expenses for the purposes of participating in Housing Management activities.
  - 2) To limit barriers to engagement by providing a range of eligible expenses, in some circumstances, we will reimburse travelling by taxi and care costs.
  - 3) In some circumstances, provide incentives to residents to encourage engagement and show our appreciation.
  - 4) As Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) members, we endeavour to meet their [National Tenant Engagement Standards](#): that there is an appropriate system in place for recognition and reimbursement of the time given by residents for engagement activities.

## 6. Policy principles

- 6.1 We are committed to the following principles when supporting tenant engagement through expenses and incentives:
  - 1) Residents who participate in housing management play a significant role in improving housing services for all.

- 2) Those residents do not suffer a financial loss as a result of supporting us in this endeavour.
- 3) Whilst it is important that residents are not out of pocket, staff must consider and encourage the most economical approach to tenant engagement, aligning with the Council's prudent approach to finances.

## 7. Policy statements

### Travel Expenses

- 7.1 We encourage using the most economical and environmentally friendly form of transport; public transport should be used wherever possible and car/taxi sharing is encouraged.
- 7.2 We recognise that for some residents, especially those living in rural areas or with a disability, travelling by taxi or car may be the only realistic option.
- 7.3 We will consider online meetings or appropriate venue locations when arranging meetings/events to reduce travel costs where possible and appropriate.
- 7.4 All mileage claims are paid at the current [HM Revenues & Customs \(HMRC\) mileage rates in line with government guidelines.](#)
- 7.5 Travel by rail and bus
  - Where possible, staff will pre-book national rail journeys for residents. When booking, both staff and/or residents should purchase the best value ticket, considering any mobility issues. For reimbursement a receipt must be provided for all journeys.
  - Bus journeys will be reimbursed with a valid ticket. If residents have a free bus pass, they will be expected to use it and where residents have a season ticket, they will be paid the equivalent to a day's journey. For example, a weekly ticket would be divided by 7 (the same approach would apply to rail season tickets to calculate the day cost).
  - Residents can provide a physical copy of their ticket(s) to the Dover District Council Offices or to a member of the Tenant Engagement Team or email an image of their ticket(s) to [tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk](mailto:tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk)
- 7.6 Private car or van use
  - Car or van mileage claims will be made at the current HMRC rates.
  - We trust that residents will take the quickest or shortest route and we will not be responsible for any additional miles where a resident takes a longer route than necessary (except for extra miles to account for roadworks).
  - An extra 5p per passenger per mile for carrying fellow residents in a car or van on journeys which are also tenant engagement journeys for them.
- 7.7 Motorcycle use
  - Residents travelling by motorcycle can claim mileage at the current HMRC rate.

- We trust that residents will take the quickest or shortest route and we will not be responsible for any additional miles where a resident takes a longer route than necessary (except for extra miles to account for roadworks).

#### 7.8 Bicycle use

- Residents travelling by bicycle can claim mileage at the current HMRC rate.
- Whilst we encourage the use of bicycles from an environmental perspective, we understand that this method of transport might not be appropriate or preferred for everyone.

#### 7.9 Travel by taxi

- Eligibility for a taxi includes:
  - A disability which means the resident cannot use public transport or drive a private vehicle.
  - Where/when public transport is not available or practical. We recognise that this may be the case for:
    - some of our rural communities are not serviced by public transport
    - if the meeting venue is not on or in reasonable walking distance of a public transport route
    - if the time taken to get to a meeting using public transport is unreasonable.
  - When group travel by taxi is more cost effective than individual fares.
  - Eligibility for taxis will be agreed in advance, residents should email [tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk](mailto:tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk), telephone the Council Offices to discuss this with the Tenant Engagement Team or talk to a member of the team in person. Eligibility for a taxi will be decided on a case-by-case basis in consideration of the above.
- Arrangements for taxis are only made as a last resort and consideration should be made as to why the meeting cannot be had online.
- Where travel by taxi is required, sharing of taxis is encouraged and expected wherever possible.
- We trust that residents will take the quickest or shortest route and we will not be responsible for any additional miles where a resident takes a longer route than necessary (except for extra miles to account for roadworks).
- For reimbursement a receipt(s) must be provided for all journeys.
- Residents can provide a physical copy of their ticket(s) to the Dover District Council Offices or to a member of the Tenant Engagement Team or email an image of their ticket(s) to [tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk](mailto:tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk)

#### 7.10 Parking fees

- Car parking fees will be reimbursed with a valid parking ticket or image of the ticket.
- Parking fees can only be claimed for the period of the meeting or event attended including a reasonable time to get to the venue and where there is no free parking available.
- Parking or speeding fines and clamping charges will not be reimbursed.

#### Care expenses

- 7.11 We understand that some of our residents are the primary carer for their relative(s) and to enable engagement we can reimburse additional care expenses incurred in connection with participating in housing management activities. The reimbursement is for the duration of the specified housing management activity plus reasonable travelling time associated with it.
- 7.12 Care expenses shall only be payable to residents in respect of the expense of arranging for the care of a spouse, partner, child, parent, or a person who lives in the same household as the resident otherwise than by reason of being his/her employee, joint tenant, lodger or boarder.
- 7.13 The carer must not be a member of the resident's immediate family i.e. spouse or partner, other children of the resident or resident's spouse, or any member of the resident's family who lives at the same address as the resident; nor should it be an employee, joint tenant, lodger or boarder who lives at that address.
- 7.14 Reimbursement shall only be made on satisfactory production of an invoice and will be paid at the actual expenditure incurred.

#### **Acceptable bases of an expenses claim**

- 7.15 A resident might have been travelling to participate in one of the following:
- Dover District Tenancy Consultancy Group (DDTCG)
  - Conference
  - Networking event
  - Training
  - Other travel deemed appropriate and approved by the Tenancy Engagement and Continuous Improvement Officer.

#### **Payment of expenses**

- 7.16 Expenses will be paid by bank transfer only. We do not have access to petty cash.
- 7.17 Payment is made by the Council's Finance team within 10 working days after receipt of a fully completed claim form; a resident can save up several journeys to reduce multiple claims if this is preferable to them (however this needs to be claimed within 12 months).
- 7.18 Payment requisition forms (found on our [website](#)) must be completed fully and emailed to [tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk](mailto:tenantinvolvement@dover.gov.uk), delivered in person to the Council Offices or handed to the Tenancy Engagement and Continuous Improvement Officer.
- 7.19 Payment requisition forms are held for a period of 12 months and then destroyed.
- 7.20 Residents are required to provide their bank details each time they submit an expense.
- 7.21 It is the resident's responsibility to accurately complete the form. Payments may be delayed if claim forms are not fully completed or if supporting receipts are not provided.
- 7.22 If the Council has reasonable grounds to suspect that expenses are being claimed fraudulently, an investigation into the claim may take place leading to the resident's exclusion from engaging in relevant activities in accordance with the code of conduct.

- 7.23 This Policy does not provide an exhaustive list of expenses; payment will be at the discretion of the Housing Engagement team.

### **Resident Incentives**

- 7.24 Housing Services will endeavour to provide suitable refreshments of tea, coffee, water and biscuits during tenant engagement activities.
- 7.25 In the rare case that meetings are expected to last over 4 hours, a light meal will be provided.
- 7.26 We will try to accommodate reasonable dietary requirements when advised. However, if a resident has complex dietary requirements, they may be asked to bring their own food and reclaim the cost claimed up to the maximum [HMRC subsistence expenses scale](#) rate, please refer to paragraph 7.18 and complete our [Meal Expenses Payment Form](#) to claim these relevant costs.
- 7.27 There may be occasions where we offer incentives such as gift vouchers, for example where tenants complete an incentivised tenant satisfaction survey and enter into the accompanying prize draw or where residents complete an incentivised survey and enter into the accompanying prize draw.
- 7.28 Terms and conditions will be published with notification of the prize draw.

## **8. Implementation, monitoring and review**

- 8.1 Monitoring is necessary to ensure that the Council delivers the aims and objectives set out in this Policy. Senior Managers will be responsible for ensuring that staff are complying with this Policy.
- 8.2 Staff will be provided with this Policy to ensure that they comply with the Policy provisions and both legislation and regulation. The procedures will also ensure that staff are providing a consistent approach to tenant engagement.
- 8.3 This Policy will be reviewed every three years, or in response to relevant changes in legislation, organisational structure, development of good practice, or to address operational issues.
- 8.4 Any minor amendments required will be made through delegated approval. Any amendments made because of changes to operational process or Government legislation will be made through the local decision-making process. Major changes will be consulted upon before a decision is taken to implement them.

## **9. Complaints**

- 9.1 The Council's definition of a complaint is:

*“An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or a group of residents.”*

9.2 The Council takes complaints made about any service it provides, officers who work for the Council or contractors who provide our services, seriously. If a tenant or leaseholder wishes to make a complaint about the service they have received, a Council officer or contractor, they can be made:

- In writing (letter or email)
- Using our online complaint form
- Using the Council's Complaint Leaflets (these are available at the Council's office reception, or they can be posted to the tenant / leaseholder)
- Via telephone; or
- In person by an appointment

9.3 All complaints received will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy and Procedure. More information about how to make a complaint can be found on our website: [if you are unhappy \(dover.gov.uk\)](http://www.dover.gov.uk).

## 10. Equality, diversity and inclusion

10.1 DDC is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and to eliminating unlawful discrimination on the grounds of race, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, belief, financial status, and any other difference that can lead to discrimination or unfair treatment considering the principles of the Equality Act 2010. Please see our [Equality Policy](#) for more details.

10.2 A full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was conducted for this policy in accordance with our Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) when carrying out our duties (s149 of Equality Act 2010). The EIA has identified no negative impacts as a result of the Policy's implementation, and therefore there is no requirement at this time for mitigative actions to be put in place.

## 11. Data protection and confidentiality

11.1 We process personal data in compliance with data protection legislation including the Data Protection Act 2018 & UK General Data Protection Regulation. All processing of personal data will be done in line with the data protection principles and where appropriate the necessary exemption applied.

11.2 Full details of how we store and use personal information about our residents can be found on our website and in our privacy notices at [www.dover.gov.uk/privacy](http://www.dover.gov.uk/privacy). This will also contain contact information if you have any questions or require assistance from the data protection/information governance team.

## 12. Version control

	Date required	Completed	Completed by
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<b>Policy adopted</b>	N/a		Rachel Collins, Head of Housing  Beth Becks, Tenancy Engagement and Continuous Improvement Officer  Jodi Blizard, Housing Policy Officer
<b>Review required</b>			
<b>Review required</b>			