

Financial Hardship – Collection of Rates and Service Charges Policy

Policy Owner:	Corporate Services
Person Responsible:	Chief Executive Officer
Date of Approval:	15 April 2020
Amended:	21 June 2023

The Financial Hardship – Collection of Rates and Services Charges Policy outlines how the Shire will assist ratepayers experiencing financial hardship.

This purpose of this policy is to allow flexibility for payment of overdue rates and charges to find an appropriate payment solution that is effective and sustainable. This policy ensures all ratepayers are treated with respect, dignity, fairness, equity and confidentiality.

Financial Hardship Criteria

While evidence of hardship will be required, we recognise that not all circumstances are alike. We will take a flexible approach to a range of individual circumstances including, but not limited to, the following situations:

- Recent unemployment or under-employment
- Sickness or recovery from sickness
- Low income or loss of income
- Unanticipated circumstances such as caring for and supporting extended family

Ratepayers are encouraged to provide any information about their individual circumstances that may be relevant for assessment. This may include demonstrating a capacity to make some payment and where possible, entering into a payment proposal. We will consider all circumstances, applying the principles of fairness, integrity and confidentiality whilst complying our statutory responsibilities.

Payment Arrangements

Payment arrangements facilitated in accordance with Section 6.49 of the Act are of an agreed frequency and amount. These arrangements will consider the following:

- That a ratepayer has made genuine effort to meet rate and service charge obligations in the past;
- The payment arrangement will establish a known end date that is realistic and achievable;
- The ratepayer will be responsible for informing the Shire of Chittering of any change in circumstance that jeopardises the agreed payment schedule.

Debt recovery

We will suspend our debt recovery processes once a suitable payment arrangement has been approved with a debtor. Where a debtor is unable to make payments in accordance with the agreed payment plan and the debtor advises us and makes an alternative plan before defaulting on the third due payment, then we will continue to suspend debt recovery processes.

Where a ratepayer has not reasonably adhered to the agreed payment plan, then for any Rates and Service Charge debts that remain outstanding, we will offer the ratepayer one further opportunity of adhering to a payment plan that will clear the total debt.

Rates and service charge debts that remain outstanding, will then be subject to the rates debt recovery procedures prescribed in the ***Local Government Act 1995***.

Financial Counselling

Financial counselling is a free service that assists people in financial difficulty. It helps people work through any problems they may be having with money – this may include managing a household budget and/or negotiating outstanding bills.

Financial counsellors provide information, support and advocacy and offer sound advice and support to anyone struggling to make ends meet. They have extensive knowledge of law and policy, including consumer credit law, debt enforcement practices, the bankruptcy regime, industry hardship policies and government concession frameworks.

Anyone can contact the Financial Counselling Helpline, 1800 007 007. This is a free confidential service for all Western Australians with financial issues. It provides information, strategies and guidance to assist those experiencing financial difficulties.

More information can be found on the [Financial Counsellors website](#).

The [Moneysmart website](#) also offers helpful advice, tools and information to assist in making sensible financial decisions.

Financial Counselling Contact Numbers

- Financial Counselling Australia - 1800 007 007
- The Spiers Centre - 9405 9507
- Anglicare Joondalup Financial Counselling – 1300 11 44 46

Implications (Strategic, Financial, Human Resources)

Consideration is to be given to the following for all requests:-

- Financial Implications to be considered with each case.
- Local Government (Financial Management) Regulations 1996
- Section 6.51 of the Local Government Act 1995 (the Act)
- Section 6.12 of the Act
- Delegated Authority Register

Dispute Resolution

All disputes in regard to this policy will be referred to the Deputy Chief Executive Officer in the first instance. In the event that an agreement cannot be reached, the matter will be submitted to the Chief Executive Officer for a ruling.