

Money Advice Policy

1. Aim

- 1.1. The aim of this policy is to set out the approach to delivering the money advice service, which will maximise income collection to the business and to our customers.

2. Scope

- 2.1. The policy applies to all current Onward tenants being considered for a tenancy with Onward, and Shared Owners of any tenure. Leasehold customers requiring assistance will be referred externally for any financial advice.

3. Policy detail

- 3.1. Onward employ a team of dedicated Money Advice Specialists who will work closely with customers and in line with Neighbourhood+ and the Financial Inclusion Strategy to offer a comprehensive, professional money advice service. The team will deal with a range of financial inclusion issues which will include welfare benefits, debts, budgeting, contents insurance, utilities, accessing financial services, financial capability, and extreme hardship.
- 3.2. Onward operates an Emergency Fund which is administered by the Money Advice team to support customers in extreme need with immediate financial assistance.

4. Support and advice

- 4.1. To increase financial capability Onward will seek to enable and empower customers to help themselves and prevent a dependency on the service. Customers wishing to access the service will be evaluated to establish the level of support needed. Where customers have the capability, advice and assistance will be given to enable customers to resolve their issues, and where appropriate encouraged to seek assistance from friends, family, or other agencies. Specialists will provide more intensive support to vulnerable customers.
- 4.2. The success of a Money Advice case is dependent on engagement from customers. The service will only benefit those customers who actively engage with the team during a case.
- 4.3. Customers who we consider to be more likely to accrue early tenancy arrears will be supported by the Money Advice team to help to sustain their tenancies. Higher risk customers will be identified through pre-tenancy financial checks.
- 4.4. All new customers will be offered a call with Money Advice before receiving the keys for their rented home, so the team can carry out a financial health check, put any relevant actions into place, and determine if any on-going support is needed for the customer.
- 4.5. The Money Advice team will support customers with sensitivity, empathy and care, with our support tailored to meet the needs of our customers. Advice is confidential to the customer, and the team approach each case without any judgement; just an objective to help our customers in the best way.

5. Referrals

- 5.1. Referrals will be accepted from all Onward teams, external agencies, and customer self-referrals. Each Specialist will manage their own workload of cases within their geographical patch and cover across all regions to ensure referrals and cases get progressed.
- 5.2. Priority will be given to referrals being made where there is a risk of the customer losing their home, where there is a severe vulnerability, or the customer is in extreme immediate hardship.

6. An example of a Money Advice case

- 6.1. This is a typical example of a customer who Onward may support with Money Advice. To note, Onward do not only support with benefits, this example is purely illustrative.
- 6.2. A customer calls Onward's Customer Service Centre and reports that they are experiencing financial difficulties and is seeking support. The Onward colleague refers this case to Money Advice.
- 6.2. The Money Advice Specialist calls the customer within 48 hours to have a confidential discussion about their finances and is able to offer suggestions and direct support to help. This help included a claim for Universal Credit to support the customer during this current period when their income has dropped, a Discretionary Housing Payment claim to help with rent payments over this temporary period, and a claim for Personal Independence Payment as the customer reported a health condition.
- 6.3. The Money Advice Specialist helped this customer with all of the required forms and follow-ups with the appropriate agencies. The Specialist kept the customer up to date at all points during the process. The claims were successful, and this customer was in a much better position as a consequence.

7. Income Collection

- 7.1. Rent is a priority and our Money Advice Specialists will work alongside our Customer Accounts Specialists to ensure rent is paid on time to maximise income collection to the business. We will work with customers and wider teams to support tenancy sustainment by helping to avoid legal proceedings and subsequent evictions. Rent and service charge collection and tenancy sustainment are priorities.
- 7.2. Money Advice and Customer Accounts will work together in a joined-up way where there is a Money Advice case involving rent arrears.

8. Neighbourhood+

- 8.1. Financial Inclusion plays a key role in improving neighbourhoods and making a difference to people's lives. As part of Onward's Neighbourhood+ approach, we will deliver targeted initiatives relating to financial issues including tackling poverty, affordable borrowing, and fuel savings.

9. Partnership working

- 9.1. We will work with other teams across the business, including Specialist Living to deliver a holistic approach to helping customers, and with partner agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, food banks and debt charities. Customers will be signposted to

relevant agencies where it is deemed to be appropriate. We will foster good working relationships with partner organisations to maintain a range of services for our customers.

10. Debt Management

- 10.1. Onward is registered with the Financial Conduct Authority to deliver debt adjusting and debt counselling. Money Advice Specialists can assist customers by negotiating with creditors and offering repayment plans. Where it is deemed that the customer may require a more complex debt solution the customer will be referred to an external agency registered to deliver this level of advice.

11. Hardship Support

- 11.1. Onward customers are increasingly experiencing extreme financial hardship which is leading to difficulty in meeting costs associated with sustaining their tenancies; particularly for Universal Credit claimants. Colleagues are frequently being presented with situations where customers have no access to food, money or fuel.
- 11.2. Assistance available includes (but is not exhaustive exceptional circumstances) the following:
 - 11.2.1. Financial assistance in order to maintain a basic standard of living e.g. food, fuel, toiletries, nappies (not an exhaustive list) from a standard list of items
 - 11.2.2. One-off payments to clear or reduce debts in exceptional circumstances to avoid further debt accruing
 - 11.2.3. School uniforms if unable to source directly from the school
 - 11.2.4. We may discretionally purchase household items for customers, including furniture and white goods
- 11.3. Applicants must:
 - 11.3.1. Be an Onward tenant
 - 11.3.2. Be able to demonstrate genuine hardship.
 - 11.3.3. Have undertaken an income and expenditure check and taken necessary steps to improve their financial situation before applying to the fund.
 - 11.3.4. Be prepared to provide evidence of income and expenditure.
- 11.4. The fund will be administered via Supermarket deliveries, supporting management of utility top ups via 3rd party organisations.
- 11.5. The maximum spend per household will not usually exceed £250 over a rolling 12-month period.
- 11.6. The Money Advice Specialist may support customers to access other avenues of assistance before using the fund
- 11.7. Customers would not normally be in debt to Onward in order to receive assistance to clear other debts, however awards will be looked at on a case by case basis.

12. Equality Impact

- 12.1. Onward provides accessible services and makes reasonable adjustments for those with protected characteristics or additional needs. We treat customers fairly and with respect regardless of gender, race, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation and marital status, publish information in accessible formats, and collect equalities data to inform monitoring and review.

13. Responsibility and monitoring

- 13.1. The Customer Experience and Digital Director is accountable for ensuring this policy is legally compliant and reviewed and updated as required. The Head of Customer Accounts & Money Advice is responsible for producing the policy, ensuring the policy is implemented and work practices throughout the Onward organisation are compliant with the policy.
- 13.2. Performance information including income gains to the customer and number of customers supported will be monitored against target by the Money Advice Manager with performance information provided to the Senior Leadership Team monthly.
- 13.3. Training in relation to the Money Advice Specialists role will be provided on a regular basis on debt management, benefits, and compliance with the Financial Conduct Authority regulations.

Linked documents:	Financial Inclusion Strategy Income Management Policy Lettings Policy Tenancy and Neighbourhood Management Policy Financial Conduct Authority Handbook Relevant National Standards or Regulation Relevant Legislation
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