Rechargeable Repairs Policy and Procedure

1. Definitions

The term 'Stroud' includes, in this policy/procedure, Stroud staff, principally those operating in Housing Services as well as external contractors appointed by Stroud District Council.

The term 'Repair' is most frequently used for the purposes of this policy document. It should be noted, however, that Housing Services is responsible for the provision of general repairs and rechargeable repairs.

References to the above are detailed in the Procedure Guide.

Stroud is obliged to give the tenant opportunities to pay any rechargeable repairs and in return the tenant is expected to meet his/her obligations under the Tenancy Agreement.

For more information, please see Section 4 of the Tenants' Handbook and the following Schedules of the Tenancy Agreement.

The Tenancy Agreement, Schedule 1 (Clause 2) and Schedule 3 (Clause 2) states:

Schedule 1 - Repairs

2. Repairs

We will maintain:

- The structure and outside of your building (including drains, gutters and outside pipes);
- Water, Gas, Electricity and sanitation systems (including basins, sinks, baths and toilets, but not other fixtures, fittings and appliances for using water, gas or electricity);
- The space and water heating systems; and
- Any parts of the building which you share with other tenants or leaseholders.

But we **WILL NOT** carry out any repairs needed because of damage caused by you, your household, visitors or others. In addition we will not be liable if you (or someone on your behalf) have installed a defective system or fitting without permission.

Schedule 3 - Repairs

2. Repairs

You will be responsible for repairs and replacements to your home which you need to carry out because of damage caused by you, your household, visitors or others. You must carry out the repairs and replacements to our satisfaction and within a reasonable time. If you do not do the work or if your repairs do not meet our standards, we may carry out the work and charge you. You MUST pay the charge in full within 28 days of receiving the bill, unless we have agreed with you a different way of paying the charge.

We may decide not to charge you if the repair is needed because of criminal damage which you have reported to the Police and have an appropriate crime reference number for. **An incident number is not sufficient**. The tenant must provide the Crime Reference Number and this should be added to the comments line on the IHMS by the person ordering the repair.

A list of repairs that you are responsible for, other than those described above can be found in your Tenant's Handbook, Section 4, "Looking after your Home".

2. General Principles & Objectives of Repairs Recharging

Stroud District Council tenants have a shared responsibility in the upkeep of their homes and are expected to carry out repairs where damage has been caused by themselves, their family or visitors to their home. If they do not do this, or request that the Council completes the work, the tenants should be recharged the cost of the work or the appropriate call-out fee, together with an administration fee and the relevant amount of VAT.

Stroud District Council recognises that occasionally tenants may have financial difficulties and are unable to pay charges due. Our policy, therefore, embodies a **'firm but fair'** approach to provide all tenants with rechargeable repair debts using sound financial advice and assistance with practical arrangements for repayment.

To support these principles Stroud has the following control objectives:

- to use policies and procedures that are effective, easily administered, and are standard within the Housing Services operation.
- to maximise income to the Housing Revenue Account, to maximise service delivery to the benefit of all tenants, by minimising rechargeable debts.
- to ensure the primary function is to recover debt rather than use legal action thereby increasing the debt.
- to reduce the impact of personal debt by providing advice and support at an early stage to tenants who are in financial difficulty.
- to consider each case individually, fairly and objectively within the Policy and Procedure set down.
- to maintain good working communications with all other colleagues and agencies involved in rechargeable repairs and financial matters such as debt advice, particularly amongst others CAB, Mothers Union and Money Advice Services.
- to discourage tenants from accumulating debts by demonstrating that prompt action will be taken over rechargeable repairs both in terms of recovery and genuine support and advice to instil a payment culture amongst Stroud's tenants and leaseholders.
- to ensure staff are sufficiently trained in relation to rechargeable repairs and equally as important in terms of the wider social and interpersonal skills required for this discipline.
- to strike a balance between the cost and likely success of recovery particularly for repeat rechargeable repairs.
- to observe and annually review Stroud's overall policies, procedures and objectives.

3. General Principles of Contact with Tenants

ELDERLY AND VULNERABLE TENANTS

Stroud has many tenants who are elderly, who are vulnerable through mental or physical disabilities, who have young dependent children and who cannot read or write. Our policy is specifically tailored to ensure that sufficient checks are in place to reflect the special circumstances of such tenants. The checks are:

For tenants of pensionable age and disabled tenants:-

- Repayment arrangements must be realistic.
- Positive attempts must be made to identify any support worker/agency working with the individual who may be able to help assist the rechargeable repairs recovery.
- A referral to our collection agents will **not** be carried out until a home visit/interview has been complete, or every effort has been made, without success, to contact the tenant.
- Notify Social Services/Support Networks that proceedings in the County Court are about to commence.
- All letters are to be sent on yellow paper with black text for improved visibility.

For vulnerable tenants or tenants with mental health problems/learning difficulties:-

- Repayment arrangements must be realistic.
- Positive attempts must be made to identify any support worker/agency working with the individual who may be able to help assist the rechargeable repairs recovery.
- A referral to our collection agents will **not** be carried out until a home visit/interview has been complete, or every effort has been made, without success, to contact the tenant.
- Notify Social Services/Support Networks that proceedings in the County Court are about to commence.

HOME VISITS

For interviews in the tenants home Stroud staff (and their contractors) will:-

- Introduce and identify themselves with ID cards.
- Politely explain the purpose of the visit.
- Ensure there is adequate privacy for the tenant.
- Staff to observe the guidance contained in the 'Dealing the Aggression and Violence' Divisional Policy Document as regards best practice interview techniques and precautionary measures for difficult interviews.

LETTERS

All correspondence will be in accordance with our Customer Service Guarantee standards and be:-

- In plain English
- Correctly addressed
- Have direct line phone number of the sender
- In sealed envelopes

and following an interview or home visit will:-

- Summarise the key points of the meeting
- Show a current balance with date
- Request to pay outstanding debt with suitable repayment arrangement
- A summary of the action that will follow if the tenant does not pay as agreed

TENANCIES WITH UN-NAMED PARTNERS

In the case of a tenancy with one person named as the tenant, any discussions regarding the particulars of the recharge will only be discussed with them, unless that person provides written consent to Housing Services advocating access for the third party. This will then be entered as a diary note on the rent account and the house file.

EXTERNAL PARTNERS

General queries from our Contractors and other Local Authorities and Housing Associations will be provided free of charge.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Tenants are responsible for:

- Repairing deliberate damage caused by themselves or visitors to their homes.
- Decorating the inside of their properties and keeping them in a good state of decoration (except in Sheltered Schemes).
- Minor repairs to woodwork and plaster.
- Providing and maintaining TV aerials (except shared services provided and maintained by Metro Digital).
- Chimney sweeping.
- Electrical fuses in appliances.
- Repairs to tenants own appliances.
- Garden paths - except those that give access from a public footpath into and around the property.
- Garden fences and gates - except those connected to public land.
- Garden sheds and greenhouses - except those installed by the Council.
- Small items such as keys, washing lines and shower curtains (except those in shared areas such as Sheltered Schemes).
- Electric showers – except those installed by the Council or those not designated as tenant's responsibility when they took on the tenancy (see tenancy checklist).

If the Council completes repairs on behalf of the tenant then the cost is recharged to the tenant.

Rechargeable Repairs Procedure

If the Council has to complete repairs that are tenants' responsibility (see list above) then these are 'recharged' to the tenant.

When a tenant phones to request a repair they should be advised if it is rechargeable and if possible given an estimation of the cost. It should be noted that tenants have to pay an additional 15% VAT and an administration fee of 15% when we charge them.

A tenant may choose to complete the repair for his or herself and they should be advised that repairs have to be completed by suitably qualified and experienced persons.

Examples of common rechargeable repairs are:

- Reglazing a window following the tenant accidentally breaking it
- Changing the locks following a tenant losing their keys

What is a re-charge?

SDC's repairs and maintenance service assists residents to keep their homes in good order. However there are some circumstances where repair or maintenance work is the responsibility of the resident, and whilst Stroud District Council (SDC) can carry out this work, the cost is rechargeable to the resident.

Why do SDC have a re-charge policy?

We are committed to making sure we are clear with residents about what work we are responsible for, and what work residents are responsible for. By making sure we are consistent about the way decisions are made about re-charging residents for work, we can maximise the repairs and maintenance budget that can then be spent on looking after and improving all residents homes.

The service is paid for from all tenant's rents. Whilst the majority of residents look after their home, a small minority cause deliberate damage or do not keep their home in reasonable condition. This policy seeks to ensure that residents neglecting their homes or causing damage are recharged, and avoids other residents having to meet the cost.

Who does this policy apply to?

All tenants and leaseholders in properties managed by SDC.

What can I expect when I have re-chargeable work carried out?

- Tell you whether you are responsible for paying the costs of the work at the time you order it.
- When you request a repair listed on the Rechargeable Schedule we will tell you at the time approximately how much it will cost.
- We will normally send you an invoice for the work within 10 working days of the work being completed

When will SDC re-charge for a repair?

This policy outlines the circumstances when SDC will re-charge you for the cost of work to your home.

You will be recharged if:

- The work is needed because of damage, caused either deliberately, accidentally, as a result of neglect or the actions of a member of your household or visitors to your home. Some common examples of repairs needed as a result of damage or neglect are:

  - Damage to internal and external doors
  - Damage to kitchen units and worktops
  - Broken windows or window locks
  - Missed appointments with our contractor
  - Blocked toilet or drainage - where the blockage has been caused by the disposal of inappropriate waste

- You fit any type of installation or fixed appliance requiring repair or maintenance that we did not give you our ***written*** agreement to install. Where you have mutually exchanged into the property, this includes any installation of fixed appliance made by the previous tenant and not by SDC, such as built in cookers or electric showers.

- You have altered the property without our written agreement and have not reinstated the property to its original condition.

- Having obtained prior written permission and agreed to maintain, the installation was poorly fitted by you, or somebody employed by you to fit it. We will be happy to offer you advice before you install an appliance or fixture. Please ask us about this.

- If we later discover that you are responsible for works that we have already carried out.

These circumstances can apply whilst you are living in a property or if you are moving out of a property managed by SDC, including if you are exchanging properties with another resident.

What if it wasn't my fault?

Should any damage be caused by a member of your household, an invited or uninvited visitor to your home or any communal areas if you live in a block of flats, then as the tenant you are still responsible for paying for the damage to be put right. Where the damage has been caused by someone not invited to your home and you feel the damage is deliberate or a result of vandalism, you should report the matter to the Police to investigate and ask for the Crime Reference number. Where a Crime Reference number is given to SDC we may not recharge the cost of the work to you.

Does SDC consider individuals circumstances when deciding whether to re-charge work?

We will consider residents individual circumstances. This includes the nature of the work in relation to whether there are any factors that make the resident vulnerable, such as:

- The physical health and wellbeing of the resident
- Any support provided to the resident to maintain their tenancy.

We may require supporting evidence of this, but will discuss this with you. We may be able to make an arrangement to pay by instalments. This is discussed later in this policy.

What is the difference between emergency & non-urgent re-chargeable work?

Emergency works include:

- Work to make the property secure
- Work to reinstate services such as, water, sewage, electricity
- Lost keys or damaged locks

Non-urgent works include:

- Cracked windows
- Repairs to internal doors and walls
- Damage to kitchen or bathroom fittings

How much will re-chargeable work cost?

It is not always possible to give a completely accurate figure because of the nature of the work, but below are a number of examples for common rechargeable items:

New Internal door	£120
New front door	£400 to £500
New door handle	£18
Repairs to plasterwork (patch)	£45
Renew double glazed window	£90 to £160
Renew glass to door	£50 to £120
Renew double electric socket	£45
Renew light pendant	£35
Renew sink unit	£320
Renew kitchen unit door	£70

At what stage do I actually have to pay for the work?

- For emergency works, we will tell you what you have to pay at the stage that we order the work and normally confirm this by invoice within 10 working days. We expect payment within 28 days.

- For non-emergency work, we will write to you asking you to complete a form accepting responsibility for the repair work and agreeing to pay. The work will not be ordered until this form has been received from you.

How do I pay SDC for the re-charge?

You can pay in the same way you pay your rent. If you already pay your rent or service charge by direct debit, the cost of the recharge will simply be added to this, although you can make alternative arrangements to pay when you order the rechargeable repair if you prefer.

You can pay by debit card either by:

- Following the 'pay for it' link www.stroud.gov.uk website. You will need your:

    - Invoice number,
    - Account Name
    - Address
    - Postcode

- By phoning your Rent Officer and making a telephone payment.

What if I can't afford to pay for the work in one payment?

If you can't afford to pay for the cost of the re-charge in one payment, please talk to our Income Recovery Team, who will negotiate a payment plan with you based on your individual circumstances. This will enable you to pay an agreed amount over a period of time.

To help prevent you getting into too much debt, we will not let you order any other non-urgent rechargeable work until you have finished paying for the first one.

What will happen if I don't pay for the re-charge?

If you don't pay for rechargeable work carried out, we will seek to recover the money through SDC's income recovery procedures. This could ultimately result in a summons to appear in Court. If actions in Court are successful then you will incur Court costs and your credit rating will be affected. Alternatively, we could refer the debt to our collection agents who administer a bailiff service. This will also affect your credit rating.

SDC will also will refuse any further repairs work and you will only be entitled to emergency repairs only. You may also be excluded from any planned improvements, for example, a new kitchen or bathroom, or put to the end of the programme.

In addition, we do not allow residents with outstanding debts to mutually exchange with another resident or to transfer to another SDC home.

What if I don't want the work to be carried out?

On rare occasions we have to carry out essential work and recharge you in order to keep the property in good order, even if you do not want the work carried out. We have the right to do this under the terms of the tenancy condition that you signed when you moved into your home. If this situation arises we will always discuss it with you first, and explain what will happen if we cannot reach an agreement about getting the work done.

What do I do if I am not happy with the way SDC has handled re-charging work to me?

If you are unhappy about the way in which we have recharged work to you, you may wish to follow our complaints procedure. Please ask us for our leaflet about making a complaint, or refer to your copy of the Tenants' Handbook for full details. You could also contact the Citizens Advice Bureau on 01453 762084 for independent legal advice on your circumstances.

How will we learn from, and make sure this policy meets the needs of both residents and SDC?

We will:

- Carry out a 'satisfaction survey' it is our policy to ensure that all of our tenants who have had a responsive repair are sent a satisfaction form to make sure that they are happy not only with the work that has been carried out, but also to make sure that residents were happy with their dealings with us. We will consider the results of the satisfaction survey to make sure that any lessons can be taken forward and used to improve the way we carry out rechargeable work in the future.

- Monitor our performance against the service standards and any complaints received (given earlier) to make sure we are keeping the promises we make to you when you have some rechargeable work done.