

# Financial Inclusion Service Standard

**As a social housing landlord with approximately 10,000 homes, Hillingdon Council provides housing for some of the most vulnerable households, often living on low incomes. As part of our housing service, we are committed to ensuring all new and existing residents can get timely advice and support to sustain their tenancies to prevent tenancy failure.**

## 1. Financial Inclusion team

The Financial Inclusion team have two main objectives:

- to support all new Hillingdon Council residents with resettlement into their new home
- to provide advice and support to Hillingdon residents who are experiencing difficulty in sustaining their tenancy due to rent arrears.

The team provide free advice and support to assist Hillingdon residents using its in-depth knowledge of relevant housing and welfare benefits schemes.

## 2. Who is eligible for support?

Any Hillingdon resident, regardless of tenure who is having difficulty in managing their tenancy or experiencing financial difficulty is eligible for advice and support.

## 3. How to access the Financial Inclusion Service

Residents can self-refer by either calling the Resident Hub on ☎ 01895 556600 or the Financial Inclusion team on ☎ 01895 556199. Residents can also ask to be referred to the service by their Income Maximisation, Neighbourhood Officer or any other internal/external officer.

- We will contact you in five working days of receiving the referral. All urgent referrals will be contacted and allocated within 24 hours.
- If the referral has been accepted the Financial Inclusion Officer will agree a support plan and work in partnership with the resident by:
  - undertaking a benefit check – to ensure they are receiving the correct benefit
  - assisting them to complete income/ expenditure statements to help with effective budgeting and money management skills
  - liaising with appropriate agencies on their behalf where necessary, such as the council's benefits and council tax teams, social services, DWP, and other support organisations
  - agreeing rent arrears repayment plans with the Income Maximisation team



- assisting with applying to the Crisis Resilience Fund to help with rent payments for those who may qualify
- providing basic debt advice and, where appropriate, signpost to specialist debt advice agencies, such as StepChange and Turn2Us, and assisting vulnerable tenants to engage and connect with these agencies where additional help and support is required
- helping them to settle into their new home, including applying for Universal Credit/Housing Benefit, setting up utilities, applying for furniture grants, setting up DD/SO to pay their shortfall, and referring to specialist support agencies where appropriate
- providing advice if they are affected by Benefit Cap or under-occupying and apply for DHP and support with downsizing.
- We will treat you courteously, fairly and with respect and ensure that we understand your circumstances to offer the most appropriate support and response.
- We will confirm support has ended by confirming case closure in writing.

In addition to the above, the landlord service will also use information it receives and its knowledge of tenants' circumstances and issues to identify where the Financial Inclusion team may be able to assist and will contact residents to offer their assistance.

The Financial Inclusion team can be contacted by emailing @ fit@hillington.gov.uk or calling 01895 556199.

## 4. Monitoring compliance and performance

We will:

- monitor resident feedback, including compliments, complaints, and survey responses
- track outcomes from lessons learned, review processes to continually improve our services
- through casework management scrutiny and quality assurance checks.

## 5. Training

Staff will undergo regular training and support to deliver the most effective and appropriate support to residents. This will include keeping up to date with any statutory, regulatory or other changes to services provided within its area of operation.

## 6. Equality and diversity

We are committed to promoting equality and diversity in all aspects of our operations, including the management of residents and leaseholders. Service delivery will be provided without discrimination based on race, gender, disability, or any other protected characteristic.

## 7. Accessibility

We will ensure that residents' needs are considered when delivering our service to ensure that they are treated fairly and everyone receives the best possible outcome.

We will make appropriate arrangements to ensure that customers with distinct communication needs are not unreasonably and disproportionately affected. This could involve providing communications in alternative languages or formats or providing interpretation or transcription as appropriate.

If you would like this document in another language or format, please tell us by using the contact details above.

## 8. Data protection and information exchange

We will comply with our obligations under General Data Protection Regulations 2017 and Data Protection Act 2018.

We will keep your data safe and use it only for the purpose it was given. We will only share your data with your consent or where legislation allows us to do so, or where it is necessary to protect your safety and wellbeing.

## 9. Reviewing our standard

To ensure that this standard continues to reflect the current objectives and practice in respect of financial inclusion, it will be reviewed every

three years unless amendment is prompted by a change in legislation, regulatory requirements, monitoring and reporting, or feedback from residents reveals that a change in the standard is required sooner.

## 10. If you're not satisfied

We realise that sometimes things can go wrong. If they do, we want to hear from you so we can put them right and learn from what has happened.

You can make a complaint through our online complaints process at  [www.hillingdon.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/complaints).

You can also submit a complaint by:

- sending a letter to  Hillingdon Council, Civic Centre, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW
- calling us on  01895 277800
- visiting  Hillingdon Council, Civic Centre, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW or speaking to one of our staff members.

If you're still not satisfied, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman by visiting  [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk).