

Corporate Income & Debt Strategy 2026 – 2029

Newark and Sherwood District Council

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1. Purpose of Strategy

Newark and Sherwood District Council is responsible for collecting income from residents and businesses for a range of services, goods, and statutory charges. The Council recognises that timely and effective income collection is essential to ensure the Council has the financial resources required to deliver high-quality services and meet the priorities set out in its Community Plan.

This strategy sets out the Council's commitment to fostering a payment culture that supports prompt settlement of accounts and minimises the build-up of debt.

It aims to maintain outstanding debt at the lowest possible level through proactive engagement, early intervention, and consistent enforcement where necessary.

The Council will adopt a clear, fair, and sensitive approach to debt collection, ensuring that all actions are proportionate and considerate of individual circumstances. At the same time, it will continue to maximise collection performance through coordinated efforts across directorates. This strategy is aligned with departmental debt recovery policies and procedures, providing a unified framework for managing income collection across the organisation.

2. Key Definitions

For the purposes of this strategy key terms are defined as follows:

Debt

Money that is owed or due for the provision of goods and or services, including those listed as being covered in the scope of this strategy.

Arrears

Money that is owed for the provision of goods and or services that should have been paid for earlier, including those listed as being covered in the scope of this strategy.

Income

Income is the money you make in a given time period, for example weekly, monthly, or annually. Your income might come from many sources: salary, investments, interest or annuities.

Vulnerability

Some customers may need additional support in dealing with their financial affairs. A customer is vulnerable if for reasons of age, health, disability, or severe financial hardship, they are unable to safeguard their personal welfare or the personal welfare of other members of their family. Each case will be looked at on an individual basis. Where there is a genuine welfare concern or difficulties dealing with affairs, we actively encourage debt advice and support.

People are considered to be vulnerable for many different reasons. Some of these reasons are as follows: -

- Appears to be elderly and it appears may be easily confused.
- Appears to be physically or mentally ill, severely disabled and/or appears to be suffering mental confusion.
- Is heavily pregnant or has young children less than 5 years old and severe social deprivation is evident.
- Is having difficulty communicating due to profound deafness, blindness or language difficulties and there are no local facilities available to reduce these difficulties.
- Long term serious health problems or terminal illness.

The above list is not exhaustive, and each situation will be viewed individually, but it is essential that vulnerabilities are captured and flagged up for the effective delivery of a corporate debt approach.

3. Scope of the Strategy

This strategy covers all debts owed to the Council including:

- Council Tax
- Non-Domestic Rates (NDR, known as business rates)
- Council House Rent
- Council Garage Rent
- Commercial Rent
- Sundry Debts (including Housing Benefit Overpayments and Former Tenant Arrears)

4. Objectives of the Strategy

The Council's overall objective of this strategy is:

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To ensure the effective provision of services, Newark and Sherwood District Council is committed to collecting all monies owed to the authority in a prompt, efficient, and effective manner. This will be achieved while maintaining a fair and equitable approach to all debtors, ensuring that income is maximised without compromising the principles of transparency and respect.

The objectives of the strategy are to:

- To ensure the prompt collection of payments due
- To prevent the accumulation of debt and arrears
- To provide help and support where possible including referral to support agencies, making payment arrangements or signposting to other financial support that may be accessible
- To understand customers' circumstances and ability to pay to distinguish between a customer who won't pay and a customer who can't pay. This would follow the Council making every opportunity to engage with the customer to allow them to pay, including the development of a tailored instalment plan.
- To be firm but fair in recovery of debt, ensuring consistency in dealing with customers
- To share knowledge, information and expertise across the Council as appropriate and lawful
- To apply best practice in relation to all types of debt collection activity undertaken
- To maximise the income collection performance for the Council

5. How this Strategy Links to the Council's Values

This strategy places customers at the heart of debt management by promoting a fair, sensitive and proportionate approach, taking account of individual circumstances and ability to pay, and distinguishing between customers who cannot pay and those who will not pay. Tailored repayment arrangements and access to advice and support help ensure recovery activity remains compassionate and customer-focused. The strategy also supports the Customer Experience Strategy's emphasis on clear communication by committing to accurate, timely billing, clear correspondence, and transparency about recovery processes and next steps. This helps reduce confusion, manage expectations and minimise unnecessary follow-up contact.

Consistency across services and contact channels is reinforced through a corporate framework for managing debt, improved coordination between directorates, particularly for customers with multiple debts and reduced duplication or conflicting messages. This ensures a collaborative and coherent customer experience.

A strong focus on vulnerability, inclusion and choice reflects the Council's commitment to flexible, adaptive services. Vulnerability is embedded into debt management decisions, early support is encouraged, non-digital channels and third-sector advice remain accessible, and enforcement is used only as a last resort and proportionately.

The strategy focuses on performance, feedback and continuous improvement through regular reporting, use of customer feedback to improve processes, and ongoing staff development. This ensures debt management contributes to the Council's wider culture of accountability and service improvement.

6. Fair, Efficient and Effective Debt Recovery

Each directorate within the Council is responsible for collecting monies owed and ensuring that recovery methods are robust, proportionate, and compliant with relevant legislation and this strategy. The Council will:

- Maintain accurate, complete, and up-to-date records of outstanding amounts.
- Prioritise collection of current-year charges, applying subsequent payments to any arrears to prevent further debt accumulation.
- Apply recovery processes consistently and proportionately, considering individual customer circumstances, and escalate from informal to formal recovery actions as necessary.
- Refer eligible cases to the Council's Corporate Debt Team for further action.
- Arrange for the write-off of bad or doubtful debts in accordance with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules.

Recovery action will begin when payment becomes overdue or when an agreed instalment plan is not maintained. The Council may use any lawful method to pursue outstanding debts. As a guiding principle, recovery action will escalate in severity only when initial, less intrusive efforts to secure payment are unsuccessful.

Customers are encouraged to contact the Council as soon as they experience difficulty in making payments or their circumstances change and they anticipate difficulties in making their payments, to help avoid escalation and identify appropriate support or solutions.

7. Prioritisation of Debts Owed to the Council and Allocation of Payments

The Council has established a prioritisation framework for managing cases where a customer may owe multiple debts. This approach follows the Citizens Advice definition of 'priority debt,' acknowledging that certain debts need urgent attention because non-payment can have serious consequences. By applying this principle, the Council aims to ensure that debt recovery efforts are proportionate, fair, and focused on preventing harm to individuals and businesses.

The Council has determined the following prioritisation for repayment of debt owed to it and will allocate payments in the following priority order:

- Housing Rent arrears
- Council Tax arrears

- Non-Domestic Rates arrears
- Commercial Rent arrears
- Sundry Debt arrears/ Overpaid Housing Benefits/ Garage Rent arrears

8. Managing Cases of Multiple Debt

The Council recognises that some customers may owe more than one debt to the authority at the same time. These cases can be complex and may involve changing circumstances, vulnerability, and competing financial pressures. As referenced in Section 21, 'Associated policies', Newark and Sherwood District Council's Policy on the Management of Cases that Involve Multiple Council Debt sets out how cases of multiple debt will be managed in a coordinated, fair and proportionate way, maximising lawful income collection while protecting customers from avoidable advanced enforcement action.

8.1 Definition of Multiple Debt

For the purposes of this strategy, a "multiple debt" case is where a customer (an individual, business, or organisation) has two or more live debts or arrears owed to the Council across one or more service areas (for example, Council Tax arrears alongside Housing Rent arrears and/or a sundry debt). This may include debts that are at different stages of recovery, including pre-enforcement, legal action, or enforcement.

8.2 Summary of the Policy on the Management of Cases that Involve Multiple Council Debt

The Council's approach to managing multiple-debt cases provides a clear corporate framework to identify cases early through lawful cross-service information sharing and officer-supported customer disclosure; assess circumstances holistically and prioritise repayment using the Single View of Debt (SVoD) calculator alongside professional discretion; and agree sustainable, consolidated payment arrangements that are flexible and regularly reviewed. It is underpinned by inclusive, non-judgemental communication, access to independent advice and, where appropriate, a single point of contact, with enforcement used only as a last resort once support options have been exhausted and with particular care to avoid disproportionate impacts on vulnerable residents.

9. Duties

Council Duties

We have a duty to all residents to ensure cost-effective billing, collection, and recovery of all money due to the Council.

There are multiple reasons why people don't pay:

- Some people may fail to pay or forget to pay because of personal difficulties. We will try to help these people by encouraging them to tell us about their problems so we can help find ways they can pay. Where necessary we will refer them to a specialist welfare team, as outlined in Section 11.

- Some people may fail to pay or make late payments on purpose. In these cases, for those who won't pay, the Council will look to use more robust action to secure payment.

For those who are having difficulty making payments the Council will try to assist customers by:

- Providing advice on the methods of payment available
- Entering payment arrangements
- Assisting the customer in obtaining the correct benefit and debt management advice, by referring them to alternative benefit or debt advise agencies, to help them to pay their bills

To help our customers to minimise debt and prevent the accumulation of debt, the Council aims to achieve good practice in revenue collection. To achieve this, the Council will seek to ensure that:

- Any request for payment is made promptly and is accurately calculated
- Requests for payment clearly show the amount to be paid and when this is due
- Where possible, payment will be requested before the service is provided to avoid the risk of debt accruing
- Appropriate methods of payment are made available
- Contact with the Council can be made through a range of options including face-to-face, telephone, by email or in writing
- Assess ability to pay and, where appropriate, consider a payment plan where full payment cannot be made immediately
- Support is provided to those requesting assistance in making payment or receiving money and debt advice
- Support is provided to those who are identified as being vulnerable
- Take no further action if agreed payments are being made on time.
- Recovery and enforcement actions are reasonable and proportionate
- Recovery documents are clear and inform of the recovery procedures to be followed and the consequences of non-payment
- Any written communication is in plain English, explaining complex terminology when it is required
- Support is provided to customers with language and communication difficulties through the offer of translation services, interpreting and other services wherever possible
- Enquiries are responded to promptly and courteously; excellent communication is recognised by the Council as the key to a good relationship with the customer
- Debt recovery actions enable the effective use of Council resources to deliver the best possible cash flow for the Council.
- The Council will encourage effective sharing of information between directorates and will explore the most efficient and effective way of achieving this

The Council will ensure that all customers are treated in a fair and equitable manner and will have due regard to the requirements of The Human Rights Act, The Equality Act and any other legislation or policies which may have an impact on the recovery of the debt.

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Customer Duties

Debt can arise for various reasons including, medical problems, changes of circumstances, benefit entitlement adjustments, unemployment or failure of a business, changes in working hours, difficulties in managing money, relationship issues, large, unexpected bills. The list is not exhaustive.

The Council expects any person, business or organisation that owes a sum of money to the Council to follow the principles below:

- Pay amounts due promptly, on or before the date that payment is due
- Inform the Council of any changes to their details or circumstances that may affect the amount to be paid or the ability to pay at the earliest opportunity
- Contact the Council if they believe the amount charged is not correct
- Contact the Council if they are unable to pay any amount that is due immediately
- Be open and honest when providing information in connection with the billing, collection or recovery of sums due to the Council
- If recovery action is taken, they must attempt to resolve the matter as soon as possible to avoid delays and additional costs

10. Making Payments

The Council will provide a variety of easy ways to pay, the easier it is to pay, the more likely it is that people will do so. The Council will give full details of the different ways to pay on each bill.

The Council will try, wherever possible, to prevent people having to spend more money or travel just to pay bills. In order to reduce the cost to the Council and, therefore, local taxpayers, the most cost-effective methods of payment will be encouraged. For most bills this will be Direct Debit because it is, by far, the most economical method available. It is also very reliable, easy to set up and cancel, and is backed by a guarantee.

-. To assist the Councils customers we offer a range of payment methods

- Direct Debit
- Online
- Telephone – automated 24-hour telephone payment line
- Post office, PayPoint or Payzone outlets
- Open Banking

Information to provide customers with help and support in making payments is available on the Council's website and on bills and payment correspondence issued by the Council.

11. Advice and Support for Customers

As a responsible public body, the Council is committed to supporting individuals and businesses in settling any outstanding debts that they may owe as quickly as possible. The Council recognises that some customers will experience financial difficulty either for short or longer periods. Customers who find themselves in debt will often have multiple debts and often experience a spiral of debt that affects the whole family and life quality and becomes a way of life. All staff dealing with families in difficult circumstances must be cognizant of this and recognise the effect being in debt has. To assist with this, the Council will offer welfare advice to all its customers and signpost them to support organisations providing help with debt advice.

Appendix 1 provides contact information about independent organisations that may be able to provide financial support and money management or debt advice and assistance. Further information can be found on the Council website.

12. Promoting the Take Up of Benefits and Entitlements

The Council is committed to actively promoting awareness and uptake of entitlements such as national and local benefits, discounts, exemptions, and reliefs. Where appropriate, information on claiming Housing Benefit, Local Council Tax Support, and other discretionary support funds will be included in our correspondence. The Council will make every effort to encourage individuals and businesses to apply for available assistance and will provide guidance on the full range of discounts and reductions that may apply. Officers engaging with customers will, where appropriate, signpost them to relevant sources of advice on benefits and debt-related matters, ensuring support is accessible and well-informed.

13. Arrangements for the Repayment of Arrears

It is the Council's expectation that monies owed will be paid by the due date. Anyone experiencing difficulty in making a payment is encouraged to contact the Council at the earliest opportunity to discuss options for repayment, including making an arrangement to repay debt owed.

In making an arrangement the Council will consider the type of debt and the customer's personal circumstances to arrive at a mutually acceptable payment plan. In coming to an arrangement, consideration will be given to other priority debts of the customer that could result in loss of an essential service, loss of a person's home or imprisonment.

Any arrangement is reliant on the customer sharing information with the Council which is considered necessary to assess their ability to pay; any refusal to divulge such information will prevent an arrangement for repayment of arrears being made.

Arrangements for the repayment of arrears will:

- Seek repayment of all outstanding arrears, as soon as possible
- Where appropriate, seek to ensure the current year's debt is prioritised over older debt

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- Where appropriate, take account of other debts owed to the Council
- Be confirmed in writing to ensure both the customer and the Council are clear on repayment amounts and their frequency.

Failure of a customer to maintain an arrangement for repayment of arrears will result in further action being taken to recover the debt.

14. Use of Enforcement Action or Write off Debt/ Scheme of Delegation

The Council will, where required, make use of the range of enforcement actions made available by relevant legislations, this will include attachment of earnings orders (taking money from your wages), deductions from benefits (asking the DWP to reduce your benefit and make payment to the Council. Effective use of enforcement agents can also be an important way of recovering debt where the Council is satisfied that there are no other appropriate mechanisms for recovering that debt.

The Council will make use of Enforcement Agents, Collection Agents and High Court Enforcement Agents where it is deemed appropriate. This will usually be where there has been no engagement from the customer and after other recovery routes have been exhausted or where it has been demonstrated that the customer is deliberately choosing to delay or not make payments due to the Council.

Enforcement Agents used by the Council will be members of the CIVEA Civil Enforcement Association or another relevant professional body and will be expected to practice the highest industry standards under their associated code of practice.

15. Bad and Doubtful Debts

The Council recognises that in a small number of cases, debts may remain unpaid or not be fully recovered. Where a debt is classified as irrecoverable and all recovery routes have been reasonably exhausted, the Council may consider writing off a debt in accordance with the Council's Constitution, in particular the Financial Procedure Rules.

The Council's financial planning arrangements ensure that there is a provision within the budget each year to meet the estimated costs for bad and doubtful debts

16. Write On and Credit Balances

Where an account sits in credit, the Council will make reasonable efforts to contact the customer to let them know about the credit and ask if they want:

- The money to be used to pay off another debt they owe to the Council, or
- To have the money refunded to them.

If there's money left as a credit on an account and it stays there for more than 13 months without being used, the Council may decide to remove it from the account, this is called "writing it on."

17. Complaints, Disputes, Errors and Feedback

The Council recognise that errors in the billing, collection and recovery of debts can cause distress to customers, and our aim is to get it right first time. If a genuine mistake is made and we notice it or it is brought to our attention, we will put it right and apologise. We will look at our processes to see if we can prevent the same mistake happening again.

Complaints raised by customers about matters covered in this Policy will be dealt with in accordance with the Councils Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy.

Any dispute or complaint regarding an individual debt will be dealt with in compliance to the legal requirement of the collection of that individual debt. Any such dispute or complaint will only stop the continuation of the recovery process or legal mechanism if it is appropriate in the context of the specific legislation

18. Data Protection and Information Sharing

The Council collects and processes customer data to support effective billing, collection, and recovery of debts. This includes personal and financial information necessary to identify accounts, assess payment capacity, and manage interactions across directorates. Data is collected through direct engagement with customers, automated systems, and third-party services used to enhance debt recovery efforts.

All data is handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and relevant privacy legislation. It is stored securely and only accessed by authorised personnel.

The Council uses this data to:

- Build a holistic view of customer debt across directorates, enabling a coordinated and consistent approach to recovery.
- Improve customer experience, by enabling single points of contact and reducing the need for customers to engage with multiple teams about separate debts
- Support ethical enforcement, ensuring that recovery actions are proportionate and sensitive to individual circumstances, especially for vulnerable residents

Data may be shared internally across Council services and externally with appointed agents or contractors, but only where lawful, necessary, and in the interests of the customer or the Council. This includes preventing fraud, avoiding unlawful evasion of payment, and improving service delivery.

The Council is committed to transparency and fairness in its use of data and will continue to review and improve its practices to ensure compliance and public trust.

19. Monitoring and Measuring our Performance against this Strategy

To ensure effective oversight and continuous improvement in the management of corporate debt, the Council will implement a robust performance monitoring framework. This framework will include:

- **Monthly Reporting:** Budget Managers will receive detailed reports on outstanding debt to support timely intervention and localised action.
- **Quarterly Strategic Oversight:** The Senior Leadership Team will be provided with quarterly updates on the overall level of outstanding debt managed by the Council, enabling strategic decision-making and resource allocation.
- **Bad and Doubtful Debt Tracking:** Movements in bad and doubtful debt provisions will be reported quarterly to monitor financial risk and inform forecasting.
- **Service-Level Monitoring:** Income collection and debt recovery performance will be tracked through established service performance arrangements to ensure accountability and identify areas for improvement.
- **Corporate Debt Case Conferences:** Quarterly meetings will be held to review complex or high-risk debt cases, share best practice, and coordinate cross-service responses.
- **Member Engagement:** Periodic reports will be presented to Members, providing updates on debt management, bad debt provisions, and write-off levels to maintain transparency and governance.
- **Debt Write-On Protocols:** Where previously written-off debts are recovered, the Council will apply write-on procedures to account for the payment received and reflect the recovery in financial records.
- **Enforcement Agent Monitoring:** Performance of Enforcement Agents will be regularly reviewed to ensure compliance with contractual obligations and ethical standards.
- **Customer Feedback Integration:** Complaints and compliments will be analysed to shape service delivery and improve the customer experience in debt recovery processes.
- **Staff Development:** Relevant advice, guidance, and training will be delivered to staff involved in debt recovery to maintain high standards of professionalism and competence.

This multi-layered approach ensures that debt management is transparent, accountable, and aligned with the Council's financial and service improvement objectives.

20. Review of this Strategy

The Council is committed to continuous improvement, and it is critical that new approaches and ways of working will be introduced. This strategy will be reviewed annually to allow it to be updated and to take any service improvements or changes into account.

21. Associated Policies

All policies listed can be accessed on our website: [Business finances | Newark & Sherwood District Council](#)

- Policy on the Management of Cases that Involve Multiple Council Debt
- Code of Practice – Local Taxation
- Hardship Relief Policy
- Localised Council Tax Support Scheme
- Write off Policy

22. Appendices

Appendix 1: Communication and Contacting Us

We will give our customers a variety of options to contact us to discuss payment of their accounts:

- By email, in writing, or through web forms on our website
- By telephone on 01636 650000 (you can call us between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday).
- Face to face through the Customer Service Centre's which can be found on our website

Should there be any communication issues, and no support is available via friends or family, we do use an interpretation service for persons whose first language is not English.

Appendix 2: Contact Information for Debt Support Organisations

Citizens Advice Newark and Sherwood

- Tel: 01623 861769
- Arrange a call back: [Arrange a call-back \(Sherwood & Newark\) – Citizens Advice Central Nottinghamshire](#)
- Email advice: [Email Advice – Citizens Advice Central Nottinghamshire](#)
- Website: [Citizens Advice Central Nottinghamshire](#)

National Debtline

- Tel: 0808 808 4000
- Website: www.nationaldebtline.org

Stepchange

- Tel: 0800 138 1111
- Website: www.stepchange.org