

Blayney Shire Council



Policy Register

Policy No 5E

Policy Title	Pensioner and Hardship Assistance Policy
Document/File No	
Officer Responsible	Manager Financial Services
Last Review Date	14/11/2011

Objectives

To provide a framework for responding to applications from owners/ratepayers and customers experiencing genuine hardship with the payment of their rates, annual charges and fees.

Policy Statement

Blayney Shire Council



Pensioner and Hardship Assistance Policy

Policy Statement

1. Council recognises that ratepayers may experience hardship in some circumstances in paying rates, annual charges, and fees. The Local Government Act 1993 provides for the following assistance to ratepayers and customers:
 - Periodical payment arrangements for overdue rates and charges [S. 564];
 - Writing off or reducing interest accrued on rates or charges [S. 564 & 567];
 - Waiving, reducing or deferring the payment of the increase in the amount of ratepayable because of hardship resulting from general revaluation of land in the Local Government Area [S. 601];
 - Waiving, or reducing rates, charges and interest of eligible pensioners. [S. 575, 582]
 - Waiving or reducing Council fees when the inability to pay is due to hardship [S. 610E]
2. Council will consider each application for assistance on its merits. A ratepayer may be eligible for consideration for Hardship Assistance in the payment of overdue rates, annual charges, interest, and fees, where:
 - the person is unable to pay due rates, charges fees or accrued interest when due and payable for reasons beyond the persons control; or
 - payment when due would cause the person hardship.
3. In determining eligibility Council require the request to be made in writing to the General Manager, providing reasonable proof of financial hardship. Council may also request details of assets, income and living expenses, and such other information required to make a valid assessment. It may also be requested that the ratepayer attend an interview to assist Council in the understanding of the issues causing hardship.
4. The criteria for assessment will be, but is not limited to, the following:
 - the amount of any rate increase when compared to the average rate increase for the rate category,
 - income from all sources,
 - living expenses,
 - reason for financial hardship,
 - length of occupancy.

Assistance to Eligible Pensioners

1. Council will provide a rebate of rates to eligible pensioners who are granted a mandatory pensioner concession under Section 575 of the Local Government Act 1993.
2. Council will provide assistance to eligible pensioners who are experiencing financial difficulties, by offering alternative payment arrangements and reasonable extension to payment timetables. All payment arrangements must pay the balance owing within a reasonable time frame, not exceeding two years from the date of the arrangement being made, and should

include future rates and charges which will be levied during the arrangement period.

3. Under section 577 of the NSW Local Government Act 1993, in order to avoid hardship, Council may extend the pensioner concession to ratepayers who jointly occupy a dwelling and are jointly liable for rates and charges with an eligible pensioner, if it considers proper to do so.

Backdating of Pensioner Rebates

1. Backdating of pensioner rebate claims pursuant to Section 579 of the NSW Local Government Act 1993 is limited to one (1) previous rating year only, or part thereof.
2. Backdating is only to occur where adequate substantiation can be provided to satisfy the essential criteria of the granting of a rates and charges pensioner concession.
3. Claims made beyond one (1) previous rating year must be requested in writing and referred to Council.

Hardship Assistance by Periodical Payment Arrangements

1. Council may enter into a formal agreement with a ratepayer eligible for alternative periodical payment arrangements for due and payable rates, and charges. Council or the ratepayer may initiate a proposal for a periodical payment agreement. In accordance with section 568 of "the Act", payments will be applied towards the payment of rates and charges in the order in which they became due. Council will provide information on the amounts due and payable on relevant notices.
2. Council may also write off or reduce the accrued interest and costs on rates and charges if the person complies with the periodical agreement (section 542(2)). If the ratepayer fails to make the periodical payment in accordance with the agreement, the payment plan may be cancelled. Full payment of the amount outstanding will be due immediately.

Hardship Assistance by Writing off Accrued Interest and Costs

Council applies interest rates to the maximum allowable under section 566 of "the Act". However Council may write off accrued interest and costs on rates or charges payable by a person under Section 567 of "the Act" and the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 where:

- the person was unable to pay the rates or charges when they became due for reasons beyond the person's control, or
- the person is unable to pay accrued interest for reasons beyond the person's control, or
- payment of the accrued interest would cause the person hardship.

Hardship Assistance Due to Certain Valuation Changes

Under Section 601 of “the Act”, any ratepayer who incurs a rate increase following a newvaluation of land values may apply to Council for rate relief, if the new rate payable causes theratepayer to suffer substantial hardship. [Section 601 (1)]

Council will encourage aggrieved ratepayers to make an appropriate application under the appeal provisions of the NSW Valuation of Land Act 1916. Council may provide assistance, by offering alternative payment arrangements and reasonable extension to payment timetables. All payment arrangements must pay the balance owing within a reasonable time frame, not exceeding two years from the date of the arrangement being made, and should include future rates and charges which will be levied during the arrangement period.

Writing off of Rates, Charges and Interest

In the cases where Council determines to write off rates, charges or interest, the General Manager shall write off debts to the maximum amount allowable under Council delegation register. Any amount above that may only be approved by a Council resolution.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Council Officers will conduct themselves with courtesy and respect when dealing with ratepayers and shall maintain the privacy and confidentiality of all ratepayers’ personal circumstances.

End of Policy

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