

Collection Rate Improvement Plan

Council Tax, Business Rates and
Housing Benefit Overpayments

Oadby & Wigston | Our borough -
the place to be

Background

- The Collection Rate Improvement Plan was introduced in September 2022.
- The plan identified 16 changes/actions required within the Revenues and Benefits Teams to maximise collection in Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Benefit overpayments.
- The original plan was last updated in May 2023.
- Since June 2023, I have continued work through the action plan.
- A new plan has been created from March 2024.

Collection Rate Improvement Plan

The previous plan has been transferred into a new user-friendly document.

- Good progress has been made on all actions which would have a positive impact on collection.
- Outstanding actions have been reviewed and either revised or carried forward.

The new plan will adopt a more holistic approach to recovery and collection.



Factors affecting collection rates

National/local issues

- According to external advice agencies, Council Tax arrears is the most common debt problem which people seek advice for.
- It is estimated that 3.5 million people are behind with their Council Tax. At the end of March 2021, the total debt amount outstanding amounted to 4.4 billion.
- Increase in arrears directly aligns with reduced collection and enforcement activity in 2020/21.
- According to the Office for National Statistics (2019) in the most income deprived neighbourhood in Oadby and Wigston, 21.4% of people are estimated to be income deprived.

Current Collection Rates

	Target 23/24	Last Year (Feb)	This Year (Feb)
Council Tax	97.5%	94.69%	93.96%
Business Rates	98.5%	92.57%	92.14%

Income maximisation strategy

My strategy will be to improve financial well-being and resilience of our residents while maintaining the economic stability of the Council by maximising Council Tax and NNDR collection rates.

- Money Advisor Network referrals will assist residents in receiving comprehensive financial support. Residents can choose from three convenient options; Instant access to a digital debt advice tool, the option of receiving an instant call back, or request a scheduled call back at a time convenient to them.
- Adopt a proactive approach to providing financial support to residents. This will be more cost-effective than dealing with the consequences of hardship.
- Engaging with the wider support community will encourage benefit take-up. The extent of unclaimed financial support has a major impact on our residents, local economy and collection rates.
- Targeted communication campaigns to encourage residents to check their benefits and discounts will help build financial resilience.

Actions

Be Proactive

- Engage with customers at an earlier stage.
- Timely/speedy enforcement action generally leads to lower arrears levels and lower debts for residents.
- Regularly review policies, procedures and guidance.

Further process changes

- Changes to our direct debit procedures and increasing the amount of direct debit dates.
- Housing Benefit overpayments to be collected by Direct Debit.
- Completing regular reviews to reduce the risk of fraud and error.

Education/training

- Training and development of the Team.
- Empower residents to seek financial support to help them build resilience.

More support for customers

In addition to existing support measures for customers (Helping Hands, OWBC Financial Inclusion Officer), we will start working with the Money Advisor Network. These are the key benefits:

- Referring customers to free independent debt advice.
- Support for our customers with day-to-day money management skills.
- Focus on building financial wellbeing in the UK.
- Easy to access referral service, including self-referrals. Support is available by telephone or online.
- Monthly Reports will allow us to monitor success rate of referrals.
- Free training is provided for our officers.



Any questions?

The End