



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council

Oifig an Cheannasaí Airgeadais, An Roinn Airgeadais,
Oifigí na Cathrach, An Ché Adhmaid, Baile Átha Cliath 8, Éire

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Minister Darragh O'Brien TD,
Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage,
Seanad Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

7th February 2022

Dear Minister O'Brien,

I hope you are keeping well. I write to you as Chair of the Audit Committee of Dublin City Council. You will appreciate the important governance role fulfilled by the Audit Committee with regard to oversight of financial management, internal controls and compliance with statutory obligations. Dublin City Council gives priority to improving how services are managed and resources utilised so as to achieve efficiencies and better outcomes for our Capital City.

The Audit Committee has received a number of presentations over time on the matter of housing rents and in particular rent collection and arrears. This issue has been discussed at length and in depth by the Audit Committee members and Dublin City Council management. Housing rent arrears of circa €37m (subject to the outcome of the year-end verification process), is a matter of concern, from a financial, social and resource allocation perspective. A key issue that has been consistently raised is the absence of a mechanism whereby rents payable by social housing tenants who receive a social welfare related payment, are deducted prior to the transfer of the social payment. This has been a key mechanism in many jurisdictions in achieving stability, that is, stability for the Housing Authority in having certainty of funds flow and the stability for Housing Authority staff in having the capacity to direct resources to other more socially beneficial issues. Most importantly, this mechanism provides stability to the social housing tenant.

Studies have consistently shown over time, that budgeting is more difficult on lower incomes than higher or average incomes. Ad hoc issues that can be accommodated on an average income become a huge financial obstacle and concern for those on lower incomes. The stress, anxiety and mental health impacts of debt are considerable. Budgeting is a life skill that many in society struggle to apply, across all groups in society. The Differential Rents Scheme goes some way to contribute to reduced debt by reference to tenant income as against market rental values. However there is a clear and obvious advantage to having a recurring debt for a key service being reassuringly cleared each rental period.


This mechanism removes the stress of receiving debt related correspondence, debt related calls to the property, and other measures.

The Committee has been informed that the basis for not introducing this measure, provided for in legislation but requiring enactment, is data protection concerns around the social housing tenant. It is not clear how these concerns have not been a barrier in other jurisdictions. Again the benefits to tenants of having a clear debt free path would seem to be denied under current arrangements.

I might take this opportunity to emphasise that this letter is intended to be constructive and in no way imply that this one measure will reduce rent arrears in Dublin City Council. There is a programme of measures being applied which the Audit Committee fully intends to monitor and question so as to secure good services and resource allocation for our City.

Thank you for your time in considering the views of the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Louise Ryan". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Louise Ryan
Chair
Audit Committee
Dublin City Council