Somerset
REGIONAL COUNCIL

Policy Title	Rates and Charges Hardship Policy
Policy Number	F014
Date of Adoption	22 July 2026
Effective Date	22 July 2026
Document Custodian	Chief Financial Officer
Review Date	30 June 2030
Associated Documents	Revenue Statement 2026/27
Relevant Legislation	*Local Government Act 2009* *Local Government Regulation 2012*

VERSION DETAILS **(see end of document for Revision History)**	**Date of Council Decision**	**Decision Notice (Item Ref No.)**	**Effective Date**	**Notes**
Original Adoption	22 July 2026	2026-1481	22 July 2026	New Policy

1. PURPOSE

The objective of this policy is to provide a framework to identify and provide assistance to ratepayers who are experiencing financial difficulties.

Council is committed to treating ratepayers fairly, with respect, sensitivity and confidentiality at all times.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all eligible ratepayers in the Council area who are experiencing financial difficulties and as a result are unable to pay their rates and charges.

3. POLICY

This policy is based on shared responsibility between Council and the ratepayer seeking support. The objective of this approach is for Council to support the ratepayer through the period of financial difficulty through relaxation of penalties and ongoing collection activities, and for the ratepayer to commit to a realistic payment arrangement that allows them to pay off the outstanding rates and charges in a reasonable period of time.

Council is committed to effective processes for the early identification of a ratepayer who is in financial hardship which includes, but not limited to:

- A ratepayer contacting Council themselves.
- A referral by the Queensland Ombudsman.
- A referral by an accredited financial counsellor or community agency providing assistance to people experiencing hardship.

Eligibility Principles

Ratepayers experiencing financial difficulties are identified as those who intend to pay their rates and charges but do not have the financial capacity to make payment in full by the due date.

The following criteria will be considered in determining if a ratepayer is eligible for support under this policy:

- The application is for a single property;
- Generally, the property is a residential property that is the principal place of residence of the ratepayer;
- The ratepayer does not have any interest in other property;
- The ratepayer has made payments to their rate account within the last 12 months;
- The ratepayer does not have a history of arrears and/or failing to adhere to approved payment arrangements; and
- Payments of rates by the ratepayer would cause or contribute to financial hardship.

All applications will be assessed using the information supplied by the ratepayer during the application process, along with any other relevant information contained in Council records.

Applicants who have provided insufficient information will be contacted requesting further information. If requested information is not provided, or information cannot be substantiated, the application will not be considered.

Support for other types of properties where the ratepayer is experiencing financial hardship may be considered in extenuating circumstances and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis upon application.

This policy is **not** intended to:

- Provide support to ratepayers with an extended history of non-payment of rates and charges;
- Provide indefinite support to ratepayers whose financial circumstances mean they cannot pay their rates and charges, and there is no prospect of their financial circumstances improving over time.

Assistance Offered

- **Rates Payment Commitment Plan**

Generally payment arrangements will not be for a period of longer than 12 months and repayments must be sufficient to ensure that all arrears are up to date at the conclusion of the repayment plan period.

Rates and charges will continue to be levied. The payment arrangement does not apply to further rates and charges and these should be paid by their due date so that the account does not fall further into arrears.

Council will not pursue further recovery action against a ratepayer while an agreed

payment commitment plan is current and the ratepayer adheres to the repayment schedule. Interest will, however, continue to accrue on the arrears balance.

- **Payment Pause (Deferment)**

Council may provide a payment pause for a period of up to six (6) months allowing the ratepayer time to organise their financial circumstances. During any payment pause arrangement, rates and charges will continue to be levied and will accrue interest. At the end of any payment pause arrangement the ratepayer will be required to either pay the outstanding rate balance or enter a suitable payment arrangement. Generally the outstanding balance in this circumstance would be repaid within 6 months.

Council will not pursue further recovery action against a ratepayer. Interest will, however, continue to accrue on the arrears balance.

- **Waiving or Suspending of Interest**

Not all ratepayers experiencing financial difficulties, are experiencing financial hardship. Where Council is satisfied that a ratepayer is experiencing financial hardship, Council may:

- write-off or reduce the interest already charged; and/or
- suspend interest being charged while a payment arrangement is current.

This will be assessed on a case by case basis by the Chief Executive Officer or his delegate, and will only be considered where there is not an extended history of non-payment of rates and charges.

Extension of Support

The intent of the assistance measures is not to provide indefinite support to ratepayers. They are intended to be a temporary measures to assist ratepayers experiencing difficulty in meeting their commitments.

Only in extenuating circumstances will a further extension of support be granted. The provision of further assistance will be assessed on a case by case basis by the Chief Executive Officer or his delegate.

4. DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Financial Difficulties	A temporary loss of financial capacity generally brought about by a sudden and unexpected change in financial position through illness, loss of employment, or other personal circumstances.
Financial Hardship	A temporary loss of financial capacity generally brought about by a sudden and unexpected change in financial position through illness, loss of employment, or other personal circumstances that would be considered significant by present community standards.
Interest	Interest accrued on outstanding rates and charges, levied in accordance with Council's annual budget.
Payment Arrangement	Rates Payment Commitment Plan
Payment Pause	An arrangement for a period of up to 6 months where no payments are made against the outstanding rates and charges balance.
Residential Owner-Occupied	As defined in the adopted revenue statement for the relevant financial year.

7. ENDORSEMENT

This policy was adopted by the Somerset Regional Council at the Ordinary Meeting of 22 July 2026 and has subsequently been endorsed for application from 22 July 2026 by the Chief Executive Officer.

Signed: Date: 22 July 2026

Name: Andrew Johnson

Title: Chief Executive Officer

8. REVISION HISTORY

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