

1.45 Rates Financial Hardship Policy

Policy Owner	Executive Director Corporate & Commercial Services
Responsible Officer	Manager Finance
Date of Approval	01/07/2025
Amended/Revised	09/07/2025

Objective

The objective of this policy is to establish a clear, fair, and transparent framework for identifying and assisting ratepayers experiencing genuine financial hardship. The policy seeks to ensure that affected ratepayers are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect, while maintaining the financial sustainability of the City's revenue base.

Scope

This policy applies to all ratepayers who are experiencing financial hardship and are unable to meet their obligations in relation to general rates levied under the *Local Government Act 1995*, including arrears.

The policy does not apply to commercial developments or investment properties that are not the ratepayer's principal place of residence or core business premises.

Applicants will be expected to enter into a payment arrangement to clear any outstanding amounts within three (3) years from the date of approval. Future rates must be paid by their due date; however, requests to include future levies in an existing arrangement may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Policy Statement

The City acknowledges that unforeseen life circumstances—such as illness, unemployment, under-employment, family breakdown, or broader economic challenges—can cause temporary or ongoing financial hardship for ratepayers.

In response, the City is committed to working collaboratively with affected ratepayers to provide flexible and supportive payment solutions, including:

- Tailored payment arrangements;
- Temporary deferral of payments;
- Suspension of interest charges (excluding Emergency Services Levy interest).

All hardship applications will be assessed individually and treated confidentially. Decisions will be made under appropriate delegated authority.

Eligibility Criteria & Application Process

Ratepayers seeking assistance must:

- Complete and submit a Rates Financial Hardship Application Form;
- Provide relevant supporting documentation, including a letter from a recognised Financial Counsellor;
- Demonstrate a prior history of meeting rate obligations in a timely manner, unless exceptional circumstances apply.

The City will consider applications from ratepayers whose circumstances may include, but are not limited to:

- Recent unemployment or reduced income;
- Illness, injury, or recovery from a medical condition;
- Loss of income;
- Unexpected financial commitments (e.g. caring for and/or supporting extended family) impacting ability to pay.

Assessment and Payment Arrangements

Each application will be assessed on its merits, considering the ratepayer's specific circumstances. Payment arrangements will:

- Be based on an agreed frequency and amount;
- Establish a realistic and achievable end date;
- Require the ratepayer to notify the City of any changes in their financial situation that may impact the arrangement.

To be eligible, ratepayers must show evidence of genuine effort to meet past obligations and a willingness to engage with the City in resolving outstanding amounts.

Legislative and Strategic Context

This policy is enacted in accordance with the following legislation and guidance:

- Local Government Act 1995, specifically:
 - Section 6.49 – Agreement as to Payment of Rates and Service Charges
 - Section 6.51 – Accrual of Interest on Overdue Rates)
- Local Government (Financial Management) Regulations 1996
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) (as relevant to personal and financial information)
- City of Albany Strategic Community Plan: fostering a resilient and inclusive community, and ensuring responsible and sustainable financial management.

Review Position and Date

This policy is to remain in force until 30 June 2028, unless otherwise reviewed or revoked earlier by Council resolution.

Associated Documents

The following documents have a bearing on this policy and that may be useful reference material for users of this policy, follow:

- Rates Recovery Procedure (Internal document).
- Delegations & Authorisations Register.
- Rates Financial Hardship Application Form.