Longparish Primary School

Debt Recovery Policy and Procedure

Produced By: Longparish Primary School

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear framework at **Longparish Primary School** for the management and recovery of debts.

The school may incur debts relating to school meals, educational visits, clubs, activities, lettings, wraparound provision, or other services provided by the school. Appropriate controls are therefore required to ensure that money owed to the school is recovered promptly and effectively.

As a small village primary school, Longparish Primary School relies on all income due being collected in a timely manner. The school is committed to working positively with parents, carers, staff and other debtors to prevent debts from escalating and to agree manageable repayment arrangements where appropriate.

This policy is written in line with HCC income collection best practice guidance notes and observes the relevant regulations and guidance set out in the Scheme for Financial Management of Schools and any other legal requirements.

The school recognises its responsibility to safeguard public funds and ensure that all income due is collected promptly, efficiently and consistently. Any money owed to the school impacts directly on the resources available for pupils and the delivery of educational provision.

This policy supports the financial management requirements of the Hampshire County Council Scheme for Financing Schools and is binding on all staff involved in the administration, collection and recovery of income.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the school's **Charging and Remissions Policy**. Debt recovery action will only be pursued in respect of charges that have been levied in accordance with that policy and relevant legislation.

Longparish Primary School will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debts as part of its duty in the management of public funds.

If you wish to discuss any debt in confidence, you can do so by contacting the School Administration and Finance Officer, who will be happy to discuss your circumstances and possible payment arrangements.

Responsibilities

Headteacher

The Headteacher will:

- Oversee implementation of this policy.
- Authorise debt recovery actions where appropriate.
- Approve debt write-offs within delegated limits.
- Report significant debts and write-offs to governors.
- Ensure appropriate financial controls are maintained.

School Administration and Finance Officer

The School Administration and Finance Officer will:

- Maintain records of all outstanding debts.
- Issue reminders and recovery correspondence.
- Monitor repayment plans.
- Maintain a complete audit trail of recovery actions.
- Provide debt reports to the Headteacher and governors.

Governing Body

The Governing Body will:

- Monitor debt levels through regular reporting.
- Approve debt write-offs within delegated authority levels.
- Ensure effective oversight of financial controls and stewardship of public funds.

General Principles

Longparish Primary School will:

- Seek to collect income before, or at the time, goods or services are provided wherever possible.
- Use approved payment systems for income collection.
- Issue reminders promptly when payments become overdue.
- Work with families experiencing financial difficulties to agree realistic payment arrangements where appropriate.
- Take reasonable action to recover all outstanding debts.
- Refer debts for formal recovery where all reasonable attempts to recover payment have been unsuccessful.

The school does not generally provide credit arrangements. Payment in advance will be expected wherever practical, particularly for:

- School meals;
- Educational visits;
- Residential trips;
- Extra-curricular clubs;
- Wraparound care; and
- Lettings.

Any exception must be authorised in accordance with the school's financial procedures.

Recovery action will always be proportionate to the size and nature of the debt.

Before referral for legal recovery, reasonable attempts will be made to:

- Contact the debtor;
- Establish the reason for non-payment;
- Agree a repayment arrangement where appropriate; and
- Identify any safeguarding, welfare or hardship considerations.

A full audit trail will be maintained, including invoices, correspondence, reminder notices, records of telephone conversations, repayment agreements and approvals for any debt write-offs.

Recording of Goods and Services Supplied

Where goods or services are provided before payment is received, a record will be maintained detailing:

- The name of the debtor;
- The goods or service supplied;
- The value of the debt;
- The date the debt arose;
- Any payments received;
- Any repayment arrangements agreed; and
- All recovery action taken.

Where invoices are issued, they will clearly state the date by which payment is due.

School Meals and Educational Visits

School Meals

- Parents and staff are expected to pay for school meals in advance through the school's approved online payment system.
- Families experiencing difficulties using the payment system should contact the school office as soon as possible.
- Outstanding meal balances will be monitored regularly and reminders sent by email.
- Where an outstanding balance reaches above £5.00 , a member of staff will contact the parent/carer to:
    - confirm receipt of previous reminders;
    - request immediate payment; and
    - advise that no further chargeable school meals can be provided until the debt is cleared.

At this stage, parents/carers will be expected to provide a packed lunch from home.

Before restricting access to school meals, the school will consider:

- Any safeguarding concerns;
- Any known family vulnerabilities;
- Whether the pupil may be eligible for Free School Meals; and
- Any exceptional circumstances.

Free School Meals

Where a family experiences difficulty paying for school meals, the school may support parents/carers in checking eligibility for Free School Meals or other available assistance.

Parents/carers are encouraged to contact the school confidentially if they believe they may qualify.

Continued Non-Payment

- If payment remains outstanding after a further **7 days**, the school office will contact the parent/carer to establish the reason for non-payment and, where appropriate, agree a repayment plan.
- Repayment plans will normally be confirmed in writing and specify agreed payment amounts and dates.
- If the debt remains unpaid after **one month**, or if a repayment plan has not been adhered to, the Headteacher will issue a final reminder letter or email advising that the debt may be referred for formal recovery if payment is not received within **14 days**.
- If the debt remains outstanding after this period, the matter may be referred to Hampshire County Council Legal Services, debt recovery specialists or another authorised recovery process.

Educational Visits, Residential Trips and Activities

- Payments for trips and activities should be made by the published payment deadline.
- Parents/carers will receive reminders before the event where balances remain outstanding.
- Pupils may be unable to participate in chargeable activities where payment has not been received, unless alternative arrangements have been agreed with the school.
- Where a payment plan has been agreed and payments are not maintained, the debt recovery process outlined above will be followed.
- Outstanding debts may ultimately be referred for formal recovery where appropriate.

Other Debts and Outstanding Balances

This includes debts relating to:

- School lettings;
- Music tuition;
- Wraparound care;
- Extra-curricular clubs;
- Supplier refunds;
- Staff debts; and
- Any other income due to the school.

First Reminder

Issued **30 days** after payment becomes overdue.

Second Reminder

Issued **60 days** after payment becomes overdue.

Final Reminder

A final letter or email will be issued advising that formal recovery action may be taken if the debt is not settled within **14 days**.

Recovery Action

Where all reasonable attempts to recover the debt have failed, the school may refer the matter to Hampshire County Council Legal Services or another authorised debt recovery provider.

Participation in chargeable extracurricular clubs, wraparound care, lettings and educational visits may be withdrawn where debts remain outstanding and no repayment arrangement is in place, subject to safeguarding considerations.

Financial Controls

All income collection and debt recovery processes will be conducted in accordance with the school's internal financial procedures and Hampshire County Council financial regulations.

Staff responsible for financial administration must:

- Maintain accurate accounting records.
- Ensure appropriate segregation of duties wherever practical.
- Retain supporting documentation.
- Comply with audit requirements.
- Report any concerns relating to debt collection to the Headteacher.

Data Protection

Personal information collected and processed as part of debt recovery activities will be managed in accordance with:

- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR);
- Data Protection Act 2018; and
- The school's Data Protection and Privacy Policies.

Information will only be processed for lawful purposes connected with the recovery and management of debts owed to the school.

Write-Off of Irrecoverable Debts

Debts will only be considered for write-off after all reasonable recovery procedures have been completed, documented and determined to be unsuccessful.

Where a debtor has multiple outstanding balances, the total amount owed will be considered when determining the appropriate approval level for write-off.

If all reasonable debt recovery procedures have been exhausted and legal action is considered impractical or unsuccessful, debts may be written off in accordance with Hampshire County Council financial regulations.

Approval levels are as follows:

- **Up to £100** – Headteacher
- **£101 to £200** – Headteacher, reported to the Governors' Finance Committee
- **£201 to £1,000** – Governing Body approval required
- **£1,001 to £5,000** – County Treasurer in consultation with the Chief Executive
- **Over £5,000** – Executive Member in consultation with the relevant Chief Officer

The school will periodically review these limits to ensure they remain consistent with Hampshire County Council financial regulations.

All write-offs will be fully documented and recorded in the school's financial records.

A formal record of debts written off will be maintained and retained for a minimum period of **seven years**.

Audit and Record Retention

The school will maintain appropriate documentation to support all debt recovery activity.

Records will include:

- Invoices;
- Payment records;
- Reminder correspondence;
- Notes of telephone conversations;
- Repayment agreements;
- Legal referral documentation; and
- Write-off approvals.

Debt recovery and write-off records will be retained for a minimum period of **seven years** and made available for audit inspection where required.

Monitoring and Reporting

The School Administration and Finance Officer will maintain accurate records of all outstanding debts and ensure that debt levels can be monitored at any time.

The Headteacher will be informed of any debts that are considered a cause for concern, including staff debts where applicable.

A summary report of:

- Outstanding debts;
- Repayment arrangements;
- Debts referred for recovery; and
- Debt write-offs

will be presented to the Finance Committee **at least termly**.

Governors will ensure appropriate oversight of outstanding debt levels as part of their responsibility for financial management and stewardship of public funds.

Confidentiality

The school recognises that families may experience financial difficulties from time to time. All debt matters will be handled sensitively, professionally and confidentially.

Parents, carers or other debtors experiencing difficulties in making payments are encouraged to contact the School Administration and Finance Officer at the earliest opportunity to discuss available options.

Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Approved By
1.0	September 2026	Headteacher	Full Governing Body

Policy Review

Date of Implementation: September 2026

Date of Review: September 2026

Next Review Due: September 2029

Review Frequency: Every three years, or sooner if legislation, Department for Education guidance, Hampshire County Council financial regulations, the Scheme for Financing Schools, or local procedures are amended.

Reviewing Committee: Full Governing Body (FGB)

Approval

Headteacher: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Chair of Governors: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____