

Gas Charges and Fees Collection - Council Policy

Effective Date	1 July 2023
Policy Owner	Finance
Link to Corporate Plan	Sustainable Organisation
Review Date	June 2024
Related Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gas Supply Act 2003 • Gas Supply Regulation 2007 • Local Government Regulation 2012 • Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Debt Collection Guideline • Information Privacy Act 2009 • National Energy Retail Law (Queensland) Act 2014 • National Energy Retail Law (Queensland) Regulation 2014
Related Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western Downs Regional Council - Register of Delegations • Revenue Statement • 2023/24 Rates and Charges Collection - Council Policy

Policy Version	Approval Date	Adopted/Approved
1	21/06/2023	Special Meeting of Council - Adopt Budget 2023/24 - 21/06/2023

This policy may not be current as Council regularly reviews and updates its policies. The latest controlled version can be found in the policies section of Council's intranet or Website. **A hard copy of this electronic document is uncontrolled.**

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POLICY OBJECTIVES/PURPOSE

The objectives of this policy are to:

- provide transparency by defining the obligations of the gas customers and the processes utilised by Council in assisting them to meet their financial obligations; and
- making the processes used to recover overdue gas charges clear, simple to administer and cost effective; and
- provide equity by providing the same processes to gas customers with similar circumstances; and
- adhere to the debt collection guidelines developed by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission; and
- comply with all relevant legislation including the *Gas Supply Act 2003* and *Gas Supply Regulation 2007*, *Local Government Regulation 2012*, *National Energy Retail Law (Queensland) Act 2014* and *National Energy Retail Law (Queensland) Regulation 2014* and *Information Privacy Act 2009*.

ORGANISATIONAL SCOPE

- This policy applies to all gas customers of the Western Downs Regional Council.
- All overdue gas consumption charges and fees are subject to the actions contained in this policy.

POLICY

Council is committed to the collection of overdue gas charges in a fair, equitable and timely manner but with due concern for any financial hardship faced by gas customers. Council employees will show due diligence in the application of administrative procedures relating to payment arrangements and the selection of various actions for the recovery of overdue gas charges.

RECOVERY ACTION

When a gas account becomes overdue, seven (7) days after the due date of the notice:

- Council will issue a Reminder Notice advising that the gas supply will be disconnected if the all the outstanding gas charges and fees are not paid in full within fourteen (14) days from the date of the letter. Alternatively, if the gas customer is unable to pay all the outstanding charges within fourteen (14) days, the customer must submit a payment plan in writing for approval.

If the account remains unpaid seven (7) days after the Reminder Notice has been issued:

- a Disconnection Warning Letter will be issued advising customers that the supply will be disconnected if the account is not paid in full within seven (7) days. Date will be specified in the letter.

If the account remains unpaid on the date specified in the Disconnection Warning Notice, the gas supply will be disconnected. If the account remains unpaid and the supply is disconnected, a Disconnection Letter is left at the property advising that the supply has been disconnected and the amount required to be paid in order for the supply to be reconnected. In the event that the gas supply is disconnected due to nonpayment, a reconnection fee shall apply. For reconnection to the gas supply all outstanding gas consumption charges plus extra charges including the reconnection fee must be paid in full.

Should the supply be disconnected and the charges remain unpaid, the account is referred to Council's Debt Collection Agency for collection.

In the event that the gas is no longer connected to the Council supply and the account is a final account and the account remains unpaid, the account will be passed to Council's Debt Collection Agency for collection.



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GAS CONNECTION TO ANOTHER PROPERTY

If a gas customer requests connection to another property, all outstanding charges and fees must be paid in full before the customer will be allowed connection to the Council's gas supply at another property. If the new connection is processed and monies are found to be owing the balance outstanding will be transferred to the new account.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Applications for payment arrangements shall be through the approved payment plan method.

Only delegated officers in accordance with the Delegations Authority approved by Council, may agree to recovery of gas debts by periodic part payment or by a deferment of full payment by a defined date. Council will, generally, not agree to the periodic repayment of debt where the term of repayment of outstanding gas charges extends beyond the issue date of the subsequent gas notice. Payment arrangements will be reviewed on a regular basis to confirm compliance with Council policy.

DIRECT DEBITS

Applications for Direct Debit shall be in writing on the approved form.

Where there is a balance outstanding and a direct debit dishonors on two consecutive occasions, the direct debit will be cancelled. Direct debit dishonors may be considered on a case by case basis depending on the regularity of the dishonor.

PAYMENT PLAN/PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS IN DEFAULT

Where payments have not been received in accordance with an approved payment plan a 'Default Notice' will be issued. It will advise the customer that the payment arrangement is in default and request that the default be rectified within fourteen days of the date of the 'Default Notice'.

Where a default on an approved payment arrangement has not been rectified within fourteen (14) days of the date of the 'Default Notice', a 'Notice of Cancellation' will be issued to the customer which will advise that the gas supply may be disconnected for non-payment and referred to Council's debt recovery agency.

A payment arrangement may be reinstated when the arrears of the payment plan instalments are brought up to date. A payment arrangement may be renegotiated where the customer has demonstrated substantial compliance with the original arrangement.

If a payment arrangement has defaulted more than once in the previous twelve months, a direct debit will be the only payment method acceptable in order to have the agreement reinstated and for future payment arrangements.

In addition, where a payment arrangement has been cancelled twice in the previous twelve-month period, no further payment arrangements will be accepted and payment of the arrears will be required in full to prevent disconnection of supply for non-payment.

CREDIT BALANCES

If a payment is received by Council which exceeds the amount owing of the account issued, the additional amount may be applied against any overdue amounts for gas consumption charges.

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Approved hardship will be assessed on an individual basis and will require a written submission and/or an interview.

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DEFINITIONS

Gas Charges:

Any charges incurred by customers who use the gas supplied by Western Downs Regional Council. Charges include gas connection and/or gas consumption, fees and charges.

Disconnection Threshold: The amount outstanding which triggers the action for the gas supply to be disconnected is \$50.00.

Advanced Debt Collection Threshold: The amount outstanding which triggers the action for the account to be referred to Council's debt collection agency is \$50.00.

REVIEW TRIGGER

List of factors which require the policy to be reviewed, e.g.: -

- Periodic review;
- Change in Legislation; Corporate Plan, Planning Scheme etc. affecting this policy;
- Change in community priorities or circumstances relating to this policy; and
- Natural Disaster.

