

Support to Success

Your first stop for help and advice to...



Getting help with debt

Help and support available to get help with debt

www.solihull.gov.uk/supporttosuccess



Getting help with debt

If you're in debt it's important to do something, because the problem won't just go away. Don't ignore calls or letters from the people you owe money to. Following the steps in this leaflet can help you get back in control of your finances.

How much of your debt can you afford to pay off?

Make a list of all the people you owe money to and how much you owe them. Work out how much you can afford to pay by listing all the money coming into and being spent out of your household. Once you've worked out how much you have left over you will be in a position to contact those you owe money to and explain how you can pay off the debt.

For more information on budgeting pick up a Support to Success Get Budgeting leaflet from your local Solihull Connect centre or visit **www.solihull.gov.uk/supporttosuccess**

Deal with the most important debts first

Things like rent, mortgage and Council Tax arrears are called priority debts because the consequences of not dealing with them can be very serious. Explain to the companies you owe money to how you can afford to pay off the arrears i.e. if you are able to pay an amount each month or if you do not have any spare money at the moment but know you'll have a lump sum in three months time. Give these companies your budget sheet so they know your financial situation. If you can't afford to reach an agreement to clear your priority debts, the outcome may be serious. Get help and advice straight away from one of the organisations listed on the back of this leaflet.

Dealing with less important debts

How you deal with the less important debts will depend on how much money you have left in your budget after dealing with your priority debts. Don't be talked into making payments you can't afford – if you can't keep them up you'll just get into more debt.

Ways debts may be collected

If you are unable to make arrangements to repay your debts, those you owe money to may try to collect the debt in the following ways:

Use a **debt collecting agency**. Don't let debt collectors pressure you into making arrangements you can't keep. Have a clear understanding of how much you can afford to repay to ensure you stick to any arrangements made.

Use **Enforcement Agents or Enforcement Officers (previously known as Bailiffs)**. If you receive a notice of enforcement it means you have at least seven days notice of an Enforcement Officer visiting you. Don't ignore the notice – any visits made will add significant fees, increasing your debt. If you have had notice of enforcement and can't afford to pay your debt, contact the person you owe money to and discuss your situation or get free independent help and advice from one of the organisations listed on the back of this leaflet.

Threaten to **take you to court**. You will usually receive a written warning saying there will be court action if you don't settle your debt. Contact the company you owe money to to try and make an arrangement to pay. If court action has started, make sure you always reply to letters from the court within the time limit stated. If you can't afford to pay the debt or need help with any forms from the court, get free independent help and advice from one of the organisations listed on the back of this leaflet.

Remember not to panic – free independent help and advice is available to support you to successfully get out of debt.

For support to successfully get help with debt contact one of the following organisations:

Citizens Advice Solihull Borough could help you resolve any legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice. For more information visit **www.adviceguide.org.uk** or your nearest office:

- **Chelmsley Office** 176 Bosworth Drive, Chelmsley Wood B37 5DZ
- **Shirley Office** The Shirley Centre, 274 Stratford Road, B90 3AD
- **Solihull Office** The Priory, Churchill Road, Solihull, B91 3LF

Solihull Community Housing tenants should contact the **Money Advice Team** on 0121 717 1515 or visit **www.solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk**

Advice in Our Area – 0121 703 0945 (Mon-Fri 10.00am-2.30pm)

National Debtline – 0808 808 4000 **www.nationaldebtline.co.uk**

Stepchange Debt Charity – 0800 138 1111 **www.stepchange.org**

Free advice, calculators and support to help you take control of debt or borrow affordably are available through the government's **Money Advice Service** at **www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk**

Get help if you owe money to a Loan Shark

If you have borrowed money from someone who may not have given you paperwork, is charging you significantly more than the original debt or has threatened you for a payment you may have been targeted by a loan shark. Get help and advice straight away. You can speak in confidence to the Illegal Money Lending Team on 0300 555 222 or email **reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk**

For more information visit **www.facebook.com/stoploansharkproject**