

# Are you worried about your mortgage?

## Get advice now

If you are struggling to pay your mortgage, act now  
to stop your situation becoming worse.



Sometimes when your circumstances change, for example you work fewer hours, become sick, receive a cut in your pay, lose your job or have high bills to pay, life seems impossible. Don't let your money problems get on top of you. Get the advice and help you need to prevent you from losing your home.

Not knowing who to talk to is half of the problem. You will be able to get free, confidential and independent advice from the organisations listed at the back of this leaflet. Please remember, it is best to get advice as early as possible. This leaflet provides step-by-step information to help you begin to sort out your money worries and to make other arrangements for paying your mortgage and keeping your home.

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## 1 Don't ignore the problem

When you receive a letter or phone call from your mortgage lender, **never ignore it**. If you don't understand the letter, don't be afraid to ask your lender or speak to a money adviser from one of the independent advice agencies listed at the back of this leaflet.

If you have a fixed-term rate that will be ending soon, you'll get a letter from the lender warning you of when the interest rate and monthly payment will change, and how much your new repayment will be. **Don't ignore the letter.**

Your mortgage is a priority, so make sure you pay this before all other bills. Don't panic and don't take out another loan to help catch up with your mortgage payments. **Get advice instead.**



## 2 Look at your situation and check what help you can get

Take a good look at what you are spending money on. Ask yourself the following questions.

- Can I cut back on my spending without having to struggle?
- Can I get a better deal on my mortgage?
- Am I behind on any other loans secured against my home?
- Can I change the way I am paying my other debts that are not a priority, by talking to the people I owe money to?
- Would an agreed 'payment holiday' or changing to 'interest only' payments help me pay my mortgage?
- Is my home worth more or less than the amount I borrowed to buy it?
- Is my loan regulated by the Consumer Credit Act and can I take action to reduce payments or extend the term of the mortgage in the short term?
- Do I have mortgage payment protection insurance (MPPI) that I can make a claim on?
- Can I get help with paying my mortgage through 'Support for Mortgage Interest'?



**Visit or phone a free, independent advice agency**

to make an appointment to see a money adviser, who can provide free advice. You may see advertisements for independent financial advisers who provide money advice, but these people may charge you for their services, so you must always check first.

When you go to see the adviser, take with you all relevant information on your monthly household income and costs, any benefits you receive and loan payments you are making. The adviser will:

- check that you are getting all the money you and your family should receive
- give you advice on benefits you might be able to get to help with your housing costs
- look into any other help you may be able to receive
- help you tell the lender about the problems you are having, and
- help you manage your finances, and may help you legally if court action has started.



### 3 Talk to your lender

If there's a problem and you cannot pay your monthly mortgage payments in full, you should tell your lender immediately. They should be sympathetic and can help if you let them know as early as possible that you have money problems. Be honest with them about what is causing the problems. Most lenders are committed to helping homeowners who are struggling to make payments. However, if your lender can't help, you should get independent advice. **It is important to contact your lender.** If the lender doesn't know why you're not paying and doesn't hear from you, they are likely to start legal action to repossess your home. Even if possession action begins, you may still be given extra time to stop you losing your home (for example, while waiting for help from the Department for Work and Pensions, waiting for a payment from your mortgage payment protection insurance, or while waiting to go back to work).



### 4 Show that you are willing to pay what you can

To keep your home, you must keep payments going. If you are having problems, work out your budget and look at ways of making savings, cutting back, or increasing the amount of money you have coming in. **If your lender knows you are trying your best to pay the loan, they should give you more time to sort out your money problems.**

If you have any mortgage arrears but then, after looking at your budget and making changes or making the most of your income you find you are able to pay from now on, contact the lender and offer to pay any outstanding arrears. As well as paying your usual monthly payments, you can make payments towards your debts over a reasonable period. You should always contact your lender to tell them about your plan to repay any arrears. If you can't pay now, but will be able to at a later date, let the lender know. If the lender does not agree to your plan, don't panic. Tell them you will be getting help from an independent advice agency.

**Continue to make payments that you know you can afford**, and tell your lender why you are only able to afford this much. This shows them that you are willing to make an effort to pay and increases your chances of keeping your home.

If you cannot pay at all, for example if you lose your job or become ill, don't panic – speak to your lender and get advice straightaway. You should only hand back your keys if the lender has an actual date they are going to evict you (known as a warrant for eviction) as you will still be responsible for paying the loan and insurance until you or the lender sells your home.



## 5 Find out what your options are

Mortgage lenders should only take possession action as a last option. If you took out your mortgage after October 2004, there are rules that lenders must follow. The rules explain how lenders are expected to help borrowers who are having money problems. If you are unhappy with how your lender has been dealing with you, including if you think your lender is ignoring these rules, you can complain to the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS). You can contact the FOS through their website [www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk) or by phoning 0845 080 1800.

**Your lender should think about what they can do to prevent you losing your home.** For example, they may:

- agree to change or lengthen the term of your loan
- accept reduced payments from you in the short term, or
- add your debt to the amount you have borrowed.



A lender can:

- reduce your monthly payments for a certain period or cut what they charge you for being in arrears with your mortgage, and
- extend the time of your loan (this reduces the amount of your monthly payment but you will be making payments over a longer period, and so paying more for your home).

Any changes to your mortgage can lead to penalties or charges, which may cost more to repay in the long term. If you are worried about how your household will be affected by these changes you should get free, independent advice. Whatever you arrange may only be a short-term solution, so as time goes on, your lender will want to keep in regular contact with you and want to know about any changes in your circumstances.



## 6 Make the right decision for you and your family's future

Before you and your lender agree any change to your mortgage repayment, get the lender to tell you about the problems that may arise in the future as a result of the change. You must reach a decision that the lender agrees to and that takes you or your family's circumstances into account. It may help you to talk with family members or friends who have recently dealt with similar changes to their mortgage. **You may also be able to speak to other mortgage lenders on the high street, to see if there is a better interest rate or mortgage package that could be available to you by 'remortgaging'.**

There are some companies that offer to help if you are in financial difficulty by buying your home and allowing you to remain living there as a rent-paying tenant for a fixed term. This is commonly known as a **sale-and-rent-back scheme**, or simply **rent-back** or **sell-to-let**. It is sometimes also called **flash sales**, because the company can buy your home quickly, perhaps within a week, although more often it takes about three to four weeks.



**Only think about sale-and-rent-back schemes as a last resort**, making sure you have looked at all the other options first. If you do need to consider this type of scheme, always make sure the company you use is regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA) before entering into any agreement. An FSA-regulated company must meet certain standards. Its advertising must be clear, fair and not misleading, and you must be given a tenancy agreement for at least five years. To find out more about regulated companies, contact the FSA Helpline (see back page

for number to call). The danger of using a company that is not regulated by the FSA is that you won't have access to complaints and compensation procedures if you have any disagreement or are unhappy with the way the scheme was sold to you. Read the FSA's free sale-and-rent-back factsheet. Download it from [www.moneymadeclear.org.uk/products/mortgages/problems\\_paying\\_your\\_mortgage.html#sale](http://www.moneymadeclear.org.uk/products/mortgages/problems_paying_your_mortgage.html#sale). Any company operating the scheme should give you a copy of the factsheet when you approach them. It tells you:

- what to consider when choosing a scheme
- what risks are involved in the scheme
- what you should expect from companies offering these schemes after 30 June 2011.

Make sure you understand what will happen to you by going on this type of scheme. For instance, find out if you can receive any help with your rent payments by visiting the Department for Work and Pensions' website and downloading its guide [www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/a5-2009-leaflet-advice-homeowners.pdf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/a5-2009-leaflet-advice-homeowners.pdf)

### **Avoid signing up to schemes that appear too good to be true, because they probably are.**



Please get advice from an independent agency before you sign up to one of these schemes. If, after taking advice and finding out about all the help that is available you realise you will not be able to keep your home, you should try to sell your home. Deciding to sell your home yourself is better, because it makes the most of any potential equity (the difference between how much your property is worth and the amount you owe on your mortgage). You must check for any extra costs with your mortgage deal, and consider whether or not you will get the right price for your home, to cover your financial needs (for example, the costs of moving) as well as paying off the mortgage.

Contact your lender to find out if they provide any assistance with selling your home, because some lenders provide support through Assisted Voluntary Sales or Voluntary Sales. You may be able to get help with some of the costs of selling your property, or the lender may give you assistance with marketing your home or give you more time to sell it.

**Before taking steps to sell, always get advice.** This is very important, because in some circumstances you may be seen to have made yourself ‘intentionally homeless’ (for example, if you sell your home when it could have been saved). If this happens, the council may not have a duty to rehouse you. If, after getting advice, you are still not able to save your home then you should check if you are eligible for help under one of the Government’s schemes for homeowners facing repossession (See section 7).



## 7 Help for homeowners facing repossession

There is some government support to help homeowners facing repossession. Talk to your lender, your local authority housing department or ask at an advice agency to see whether you could get this type of help.

### **i | Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI) (UK wide)**

This scheme can help if you are in paid work of less than 16 hours a week, or your partner is in paid work of less than 24 hours a week and you have a mortgage or other loans which are secured on your property. SMI is paid as part of Income Support, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance or Pension Credit. It is for households that can get or are getting any of these benefits.

SMI makes a contribution towards the interest on eligible loans. Payments are calculated using the Bank of England published average mortgage rate and are subject to change.

SMI can be paid on loans of up to £200,000 and would be paid after 13 weeks for most people making a new claim who are of working age. If you receive Pension Credit, you do not have to wait before getting help with your mortgage, and SMI can be paid on loans of up to £100,000.

You should visit [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk), [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk) or [www.thepensionservice.gov.uk](http://www.thepensionservice.gov.uk) for more information.

## ii | Mortgage Rescue Scheme (England only)

The scheme is aimed at helping you as a last resort, where no other options will help prevent your home from being repossessed.

The following are the basic rules which may help you decide if the scheme would be suitable for you:

- You need to have dependent children, be pregnant or have someone else in your household who is pregnant.
- You are an older person (usually above the age of 60).
- You are disabled or have a long term illness.
- Your total household income should not be more than £60,000.
- There are limits to the value of your home, so if your home is very valuable or you have lot of equity in your home (more than 40% of the amount you owe on your mortgage and other secured loans compared to the value of your home) you may not be eligible.



The council will deal with your request to be considered for mortgage rescue and will check that you have had access to money advice to make sure it really is the best solution for you.

To get help under the scheme you will need to do the following:

- Make an appointment with your local authority housing team to arrange a housing options interview.
- Get a money advice agency to carry out an up-to-date assessment of your finances, which will show whether or not the Mortgage Rescue Scheme is an option for you.
- Know that your lender has considered other options to prevent you from losing your home, for example switching to interest-only payments, capitalising the arrears or lengthening the term of the mortgage (see section 5).
- Be sure that you own the property and there are no legal reasons that would prevent you from selling it, such as an ownership dispute.

There are two mortgage rescue options:

- **Shared equity** – This is when a housing association provides a loan to reduce your monthly mortgage payments. You will pay a low monthly interest-only charge on the equity loan, and the total amount repayable may increase if the value of your home increases. The loan will also be secured against your home. You may be able to repay the loan through lump-sum instalments and you will need to repay the whole of the loan if you sell your property, or when you reach the end of the loan agreement (the maximum term would be 25 years) or when you have come to the end of your first mortgage – whichever happens the soonest.
- **Government mortgage to rent** – This is when a housing association buys your home for 90% of its market value and you then become the housing association’s tenant, paying them a rent which is 20% less than the market level for your area.



### iii | **Getting help in court if you are facing repossession (England only)**

You can get help if your case goes to court. Most County Courts in England have a free Court Desk adviser who will be able to offer support to anybody attending a possession hearing. **You should always go to a repossession court hearing.** You should not ignore court forms or hearings and ideally you should get advice before your hearing or go to court in plenty of time so that you can talk to the court desk adviser. They can't approach you so you should ask the court usher to show you where the court desk adviser is. In many cases they can come into the hearing with you to support you and speak to the judge. We know that many people are often worried about going to court, but just showing up for the hearing can make a real difference to your chances of keeping your home.

You can find out which agency provides help at court by contacting your local authority housing department, a local citizens advice bureau (CAB) or other independent advice agency.

**Other help from local authorities – you should always contact your local authority housing department to find out what other help they can provide.**

### **The Pre-Action Protocol (England and Wales only)**



The Pre-Action Protocol exists to ensure lenders prove they have considered all other options before trying to repossess a property. Your lender must send you a copy of this leaflet or other legal information before taking action to repossess your home. Your lender must give you information about how much money you owe on your mortgage, the balance you have left and any interest or charges that you have to pay because you owe them money.

Your lender must consider any reasonable request from you to change the date you pay your mortgage or how you pay, and respond quickly to any offer of payment you make.

If your home is up for sale and you are doing everything you can to sell it, your lender must delay taking any action and must give you time to sell your home.

If you have tried to come to an agreement about changes with your lender and they have refused, they must let you know in writing why they have not agreed any changes with you. Your lender must give you their reasons for not accepting your offer within 10 working days.

If you have made an agreement with your lender and you have not kept to it, your lender must warn you, in writing, that they plan to start court action. They must send you a letter that gives you 15 working days' notice of the action they plan to take.

If you feel that your lender has treated you unfairly when dealing with your mortgage arrears, you may be able to complain to the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS). You must get advice straightaway on how to make a complaint to them.

The court will want to see that you losing your home is a last resort and that other options (see section 5) were looked into first. Your lender will need to show they have followed the Pre-Action Protocol at any court hearing.



# Useful organisations for information and advice

## Government schemes

For more information about help which may be available to you, you can visit [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

If you live in Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales, you should visit [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk), [www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk) or [www.northernireland.gov.uk](http://www.northernireland.gov.uk)

## To help you with your mortgage and debt problems

### Citizens Advice

Helps you to deal with any legal, money, welfare benefits issues or other problems. Find your nearest Citizens Advice Bureau at [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) or under 'C' in your local phone book, and use [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk) for other contacts and information.

### Community Legal Advice

Provides legal advice in England and Wales. Phone **0845 345 4 345** or visit [www.direct.gov.uk/contactCLA](http://www.direct.gov.uk/contactCLA)

### Consumer Credit Counselling Service

Offers you help to deal with several debts. Phone **0800 138 1111** or visit [www.cccs.co.uk](http://www.cccs.co.uk)

### Financial Services Authority (FSA)

Phone the helpline on **0845 606 1234**. The FSA produces several guides on how to manage your money and these are available online at [www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk](http://www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk)

### National Debtline

Helps you to deal with debt problems. Phone **0808 808 4000** or visit [www.nationaldebtline.co.uk](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk)

## Payplan

Gives you advice on your debts. Phone **0800 280 2816** or visit [www.payplan.com](http://www.payplan.com)

## Shelter

Offers you help with housing, mortgage debt or problems with welfare benefits. Phone the free housing advice helpline **0808 800 4444**, open 8am–8pm Mon–Fri or 8am–5pm Sat–Sun, (calls are free from UK landlines and main mobile networks). Or, for advice online, you can visit [www.shelter.org.uk/advice](http://www.shelter.org.uk/advice)

## To check you are getting all the support you are entitled to

### Council Tax Benefit

To see if you're eligible for help with your Council Tax bills, contact your local council.

### Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance and Jobseeker's Allowance

For information and advice, or to make a claim for benefit if you are under state pension age, phone Jobcentre Plus on **0800 055 6688** or visit [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

### Pension Credit

For information and advice, or to make a claim for Pension Credit if you are over state pension age, phone the Pension Service on **0800 99 1234** or visit [www.thepensionservice.gov.uk](http://www.thepensionservice.gov.uk)

### Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit

For more information about Tax Credits, phone **0845 300 3900** or visit [www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits)

Please note: If you want advice on employment and training opportunities or benefits, contact Jobcentre Plus. Advisers can give you information on the range of organisations that can give you free financial and debt advice.

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