

## Coronavirus and paying your bills and managing debts

### 1. Money Matters – Newcastle City Council’s debt and budgeting team

Following the temporary closure of the Housing Advice Centre on 24 March 2020, Money Matters has moved to a telephone-based service. Residents who are worried about their household bills and / or debts can phone **0800 1707 008** if they need advice. Staff can still refer to Money Matters, but there may be a delay in residents being contacted and there is no timescale for face-to-face appointments being resumed.

**The Money Matters team appreciate that this is a difficult time and that people are concerned. The team will do their best to respond to queries as soon as they can. However, they are experiencing additional pressures and there is some disruption to their service.**

### 2. What should I do if my income drops and I can’t afford to pay my debts?

If you find yourself in a situation where you can’t afford to pay your bills or debts you should **not** borrow more money. If you take out more credit now, you could end up in a worse situation when things get back to normal. You should also **not** rush into an insolvency option, such as a Debt Relief Order, bankruptcy, or Individual Voluntary Arrangement. If you are considering one of these options, you should always speak to a debt advisor first to ensure that you understand what it means and the consequences.

During the coronavirus pandemic you should try to maintain payments to your priority bills, which are your mortgage or rent, Council Tax, gas, electricity, water, and any magistrates’ court fines. If you are struggling to pay these bills, please see below.

### 3. Mortgage and rent

The three-month mortgage holiday to homeowners has been extended. If you are already on a payment holiday you should be able to extend this **to a maximum of 6 months**. If you haven’t yet applied for a payment holiday you can do so until **31 March 2021**. A ban on bailiff evictions of mortgage properties has also been extended until **01 April 2021**. You should contact your lender for more information and ensure you understand the implications on your future repayments if you choose this option.

[The Coronavirus Act 2020 \(Residential Tenancies: Protection from Eviction\) \(Amendment\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#) has extended the notice period for landlords to begin possession proceedings to six months (with some exceptions such as ‘serious’ rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, and domestic abuse). [Bailiff evictions in all but the most serious circumstances will be banned until 31 May 2021.](#)

YHN Customer Service Hubs and YHN House have been closed to reduce the spread of coronavirus but delivery of critical services has continued, and plans have been put in place to ensure support continues for the most vulnerable tenants. Tenants can contact YHN by phone, email or [online](#). A special [advice page on rent, finances and benefits](#) has been developed which includes information on how residents can contact YHN if they need support or are having difficulty paying the rent. If you are a private tenant, you can also contact the council’s [Private Rented Service](#) for more information.

If you receive any paperwork relating to losing your home, such as a notice of seeking possession, court paperwork or warrants of eviction, please contact Money Matters for advice on **0800 1707 008**, or email [moneymatters@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:moneymatters@newcastle.gov.uk)

If you are struggling to pay your mortgage or rent because your income is low, and you have less than £16,000 in savings, you may be entitled to [Universal Credit](#). This will include an amount towards your rent.

#### **4. Council Tax**

The Government has announced that working age people receiving Council Tax Reduction will receive a hardship payment up to £150.00 towards their council tax bill. If you are already in receipt of Council Tax Reduction you do not need to do anything, this will be deducted automatically from your council tax bill.

If you are struggling to pay your Council Tax due to a reduction in your income, you may be eligible for [Council Tax Reduction](#) or a discount or an exemption on your bill. More information and how to apply can be found [here](#).

If you are struggling to pay your [Council Tax](#) Newcastle City Council can also spread your instalments over 12 months. You can apply to do this online [here](#) or by emailing [council.tax@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:council.tax@newcastle.gov.uk)

Newcastle City Council may also be able to delay recovery action depending on your circumstances, but residents **must** contact Revenues and Benefits to discuss their account and to find out how Newcastle City Council can support you. There is a dedicated online form to use to explain your circumstances and how you have been impacted by the coronavirus, which you can complete [here](#) or email [council.tax@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:council.tax@newcastle.gov.uk). If you are struggling to make your regular payment because you are waiting for a new benefit award, you can let them know by completing an online form [here](#) or emailing [council.tax@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:council.tax@newcastle.gov.uk)

If you are unable to make a payment via PayPoint due to self-isolation there are different ways to make your payment, which can be found [here](#). If you are unable to use the automated payment line, please phone **0191 278 7878** and ask for Council Tax or email [council.tax@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:council.tax@newcastle.gov.uk)

#### **5. Gas and electric**

[Utility suppliers](#) have agreed with the government to help customers in financial distress and suspend disconnection from supply. If you have a pre-payment meter but are unable to top it up, due to illness or isolation, you can contact your supplier and ask them to credit your meter, so your supply is not interrupted until you are able to top up your meter yourself. Other options may be nominating a third party for credit top ups or being sent a pre-loaded top up card. You should contact your supplier for more information.

#### **6. Non-priority debts**

The [Financial Conduct Authority](#) introduced a range of measures to provide temporary support for consumers facing financial difficulties as a result of coronavirus. You can find a summary of the latest changes in [Coronavirus and information for consumers](#).

If you would like to discuss your options, please contact Money Matters for advice on **0800 1707 008** or email [moneymatters@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:moneymatters@newcastle.gov.uk)

## **7. Enforcement agents able to resume enforcement from 23 August 2020**

Amendment No. 2 (The Taking Control of Goods and Certification of Enforcement Agents (Amendment) (No. 2) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020) has come into force, which now confirms that the 'emergency period' beginning on 26th March 2020 ends on 23rd August 2020. This means that enforcement agents can call from **6am on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2020**.

The government has issued [new guidance](#) for Enforcement Agents when attending premises during the taking control of goods process. For residential properties Enforcement Agents are advised to:

- make reasonable attempts to contact residents prior to visiting in order to assess risk and ensure that the visit can proceed safely and in line with social distancing
- ask residents to notify them if anyone has symptoms, is self-isolating or has been advised to shield. In these circumstances, the agent should not proceed with the visit at that time

If Enforcement Agents do enter your home, they should:

- maintain social distancing as far as possible, including use of appropriate PPE
- minimize contact with other householders
- minimize physical contact with surfaces and objects
- follow good hand hygiene

If you contacted by an Enforcement Agent, please contact Money Matters for advice on **0800 1707 008**, or email [moneymatters@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:moneymatters@newcastle.gov.uk)

## **8. Recovery of DWP overpayments to continue**

The DWP has recommenced the recovery of benefit related overpayments and social fund loans. Anyone experiencing 'real financial hardship' can request deferral of repayments by contacting the Debt Management line on 0800 916 0647.

## **9. Businesses and self-employed**

If you own a business or are self-employed, phone [Business Debtline](#) on **0800 197 6026**.

For information on coronavirus and welfare benefits, visit Newcastle City Council's [website](#).

For information on other support for people affected by the coronavirus, visit [www.newcastle.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/coronavirus)

For queries relating to the support available to promote financial inclusion and prevent homelessness, contact the Active Inclusion Newcastle Unit at [activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk)

This information was accurate at the time of publishing (22 March 2021).