

Cost of living crisis - paying your bills and managing debts

1. What should I do if I'm struggling to pay my bills or debts?

If you find yourself in a situation where you're struggling 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. 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.

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 the advice below or contact Money Matters on **0800 1707 008** (Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.30pm).

2. Maximising your income

You may want to consider a benefit check to make sure you are receiving all the income you are entitled to:

- Visit <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/welfare-benefits/welfare-rights-and-money-advice/check-your-entitlement-benefits-online> or www.entitledto.co.uk/ to check that you are getting the full amount of support that you are entitled to.
- Visit www.newcastle.gov.uk/welfarerights or phone Newcastle City Council's **Welfare Rights Service** on **0191 277 2627** (Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 12 noon) to get advice about your benefits.

3. Mortgage and rent

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

YHN tenants can contact YHN by phone (0191 278 8600), email (yhn@yhn.org.uk) 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 are struggling to pay your 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

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 spread your instalments over 12 months. You can apply to do this online [here](#) or by emailing council.tax@newcastle.gov.uk

Newcastle City Council may also be able to delay recovery action depending on your circumstances, but you **must** contact Revenues and Benefits to discuss your account. There is a dedicated online form to use to explain your circumstances, which you can complete [here](#). You can also email council.tax@newcastle.gov.uk or phone **0191 278 7878** and ask for Council Tax. If you are struggling to make your regular payment because you are waiting for a new benefit award, you can let Revenues and Benefits know by completing an online form [here](#) or emailing 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

5. Gas and electric

On 01 April 2022 the energy [price cap](#) increased by 54% due to a rise in global gas prices over the last 6 months. If you are struggling with your gas and electric bills or worried about heating your home, you should contact your supplier in the first instance. You can also visit the [Ofgem](#) or the dedicated [Council](#) webpage for information on saving energy and reducing your bills at home.

In response to the energy costs crisis, [The Social Security Benefits \(Claims and Payments\) \(Modification\) Regulations 2022](#) comes into force on 26 April. From that date, the DWP will not accept new requests for third party deductions for gas or electricity consumption, or for increases to existing deductions. Suppliers can continue to request deductions for arrears only at the standard rate, and you can request deductions for arrears and consumption.

The Money Saving Expert published [Heat the Human not the Home](#) which includes practical tips to keep warm.

6. Enforcement Agents

The government has issued [new guidance](#) for Enforcement Agents when attending premises during the taking control of goods process. If you contacted by an Enforcement Agent, please contact Money Matters for advice on **0800 1707 008**, or email moneymatters@newcastle.gov.uk

7. Water Bills

If you are struggling to pay your water bills [Northumbrian Water](#) have a range of support schemes that may be able to help.

8. Other debts

If you would like to discuss your options to deal with your debts, please contact Money Matters for advice on **0800 1707 008** or email moneymatters@newcastle.gov.uk

9. Recovery of DWP overpayments

The DWP is able to recover benefit related overpayments and social fund loans directly from ongoing claims. Anyone experiencing financial hardship can request deferral of repayments by contacting the Debt Management line on **0800 916 0647**.

10. Businesses and self-employed

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

11. Further information

Information on support for residents in financial hardship is available on our webpages for [welfare rights](#), [debt](#) and [homelessness](#).

[InformationNOW](#) provides extensive information on the support available in the city.

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

This information was accurate at the time of publishing (19 May 2022).