



# You are at risk of losing your home



**!** Act now to stop this happening to you

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If you have any comments about this booklet please contact:  
The Financial Inclusion Officer, Sandwell Homes, Sandwell Road,  
West Bromwich B70 8TQ Tel: 0121 569 6045

# Introduction

**You have been sent this booklet because you are behind with your rent payments. We need to hear from you straight away so we can help – otherwise you are at risk of losing your home.**

We recognise that there are lots of reasons why people get into financial difficulties. Often the root cause of money problems is a change in circumstances which may include:-

- A change in your/your partner's income (including wages and benefits)
- A change in your/your partner's health
- A relationship breakdown
- An adult leaving or returning to your household (i.e. son or daughter)
- An increase or decrease in the number of hours you/your partner works
- The birth of a child
- Redundancy
- Unemployment
- Bereavement
- Developing an addiction

**Don't bury your head in the sand – it will only make the situation worse and you could face serious consequences such as being evicted from your home.**

**Act now.**

**The important thing is to do something about it as soon as possible. Take positive action by following the five easy steps detailed in this booklet.**

**We are here to help.**



# step one

## Paying your rent

**Rent is a priority payment, which means you will face serious consequences if you fall behind with your payments. You are failing to keep up with your current payments and will have received warning letters advising you of your rent arrears and requesting payment.**

Should you not respond, or if you fail to keep to agreements to repay your rent arrears in a reasonable time, legal proceedings will be started which could result in you being evicted (losing your home).



## Claiming Housing Benefit

Housing Benefit can provide help towards payment of your rent.

If you are on a low income, whether you're working or not, and you need help to pay all or part of your rent, you may qualify to receive Housing Benefit.

If you already receive Housing Benefit but need more help paying your rent, you may qualify for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). There is a limited budget for DHPs and you will need to fill in a form.

### How can I find out more?

To find out more and to do a trial calculation to see if you qualify for Housing Benefit, visit:

**[www.sandwell.gov.uk/benefits](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/benefits)** and click on the 'Benefits Calculator' link.

Alternatively, contact Sandwell Homes Rents Team on **0121 569 6000** (Option 2) or you can speak to a customer adviser at Sandwell Council on **0845 351 0020** or go in person to either Oldbury Council House or Lodge Road, West Bromwich.

# How to pay your rent arrears

You need to contact us immediately to discuss payment of your rent arrears. Telephone Sandwell Homes on **0121 569 6000** (Option 2), we're open 8.00am to 8.00pm Monday to Friday, or call the number on your arrears letter.

## Ways to pay your rent immediately include:



By telephone – by credit or debit card on **0845 355 3500**.



By a secure online payment at **[www.sandwellhomes.org.uk](http://www.sandwellhomes.org.uk)**



At council or neighbourhood cash offices – by cash, postal order, credit or debit card. Your rent card has details of cash taking offices.

## Making regular future payments:

Sandwell Homes' preferred method of payment is Direct Debit. This is the easiest way to pay your rent and will help you to make regular payments in the future.



To request a Direct Debit form telephone **0121 569 5031**. Alternatively you can download the Direct Debit Mandate Form from our website **[www.sandwellhomes.org.uk](http://www.sandwellhomes.org.uk)**

## step two

# Identifying your debts

**In addition to being behind with your rent payments, we recognise that you may also owe money to other creditors. Getting organised and identifying all your debts will help you regain control over your finances.**

Sort out any paperwork you have from the people you owe money to. Once you have done this you will be able to make a list of everyone you need to contact. If you are unsure who you owe money to you can obtain this information (for a fee of £2) from a credit reference agency. They will provide you with a breakdown of your debts.

### The main credit reference agencies are:

#### **Equifax**

Credit File Advice Centre,  
PO Box 1140 Bradford BD1 5US  
[www.equifax.co.uk](http://www.equifax.co.uk)

#### **Experian Ltd**

Consumer Help Service,  
PO Box 8000 Nottingham NG80 7WF  
0844 481 8000  
[www.experian.co.uk](http://www.experian.co.uk)

#### **Call Credit**

Consumer Services Team,  
PO Box 491 Leeds LS3 1WZ  
0870 060 1414  
[www.callcredit.co.uk](http://www.callcredit.co.uk)



# Understanding the difference between **priority** and **non-priority** debts

Priority debts are not necessarily the highest debts you have but they are the ones that should be dealt with first as they have the most serious consequences if ignored.

## Priority debts include:

Debt	Possible action against you
<b>Rent arrears</b>	Eviction (loss of your home)/CCJ*
<b>Mortgage arrears</b>	Eviction (loss of your home)/CCJ*
<b>Secured loan</b> (loan secured against your house)	Eviction (loss of your home)/CCJ*
<b>Council tax/ community charge</b>	Deduction from income or benefits /imprisonment
<b>TV licence arrears</b>	Magistrate court fine/imprisonment
<b>Gas/electric</b>	Disconnection (supply cut-off)
<b>Magistrates' court fines</b>	Deduction from income or benefits /imprisonment
<b>Maintenance</b>	Deduction from income or benefits/imprisonment
<b>Income tax, national insurance &amp; VAT arrears</b>	Distrain (goods seized)/bankruptcy

\*County Court Judgement see page 8

## Non-priority debts include:

<b>Debt</b>	<b>Possible action against you</b>
<b>Unsecured loans (including doorstep lenders)</b>	County court claim resulting in a CCJ
<b>Telephone arrears</b>	Disconnection
<b>Store cards</b>	County court claim resulting in a CCJ
<b>Credit cards</b>	County court claim resulting in a CCJ
<b>Former tenant arrears</b>	County court claim resulting in a CCJ
<b>Water arrears</b>	County court claim resulting in a CCJ
<b>Hire purchase/conditional sale arrears</b>	Repossession of goods (this may be a priority debt if the goods are deemed to be essential)
<b>Catalogue arrears</b>	County court claim resulting in a CCJ

## What is a CCJ?

The consequences of failing to pay a non-priority debt are usually less serious than not paying a priority debt. However, your creditors (the people you owe money to) may take you to court for any money that you owe them and this could result in a County Court Judgement (CCJ) against you.

A CCJ is an order made by the court which states the amount you must pay towards an individual debt. The order can specify how much and when the money should be paid and if it can be paid in installments. The court will take into consideration your financial circumstances and will not make you pay more than you can afford.

# step **three**

## **Maximising your income**

**It is important that you make sure you are receiving all the benefits you are entitled to – as many as 8 out of 10 people are under-claiming benefits.**



Sandwell Council's Welfare Rights Unit gives advice on all benefits to residents whatever their age. This includes assistance with claiming Housing Benefit. The benefits system provides practical help and financial support if you are unemployed and looking for work. It also provides you with additional income when your earnings are low, if you are bringing up children, are retired, care for someone, are ill or have a disability.

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Home visits can be arranged and the Welfare Rights team will complete all the relevant forms on your behalf and represent

you where claims fail. They guarantee they will never make anyone financially worse-off.

## **How to get in touch**

To book an appointment with the Sandwell Homes dedicated Welfare Rights Worker call the number on your arrears letter. Alternatively, you can call the Welfare Rights Advice Line direct on **0121 569 3158** (open 9.30am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday) or email **welfarerights\_team@sandwell.gov.uk**

## step **four**

# Seeking help and advice with debt

**For free, independent, impartial and confidential advice on dealing with debt, get in touch with Sandwell Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).**



Advisers will provide you with up-to-date advice and information using a unique electronic information system, link you with other services and agencies, negotiate with your creditors, write letters and complete forms on your behalf.

## How to contact the CAB

Sandwell Homes has dedicated CAB Debt Advice Workers. Appointments are available to both tenants and leaseholders who are in rent arrears. Call **0121 500 2700** to book or call the Rents Team on **0121 569 6000** (Option 2) to make an appointment on your behalf.

### **Alternatively you can:-**

Contact the CAB Telephone Advice Line on **0121 500 2703** (open 2.00pm to 4.00pm Monday to Friday), go online at **[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)** or visit one of the five CAB offices in Sandwell which are located in West Bromwich, Oldbury, Cradley Heath, Tipton and Smethwick.

## **Did you know?**

**In the last year alone, Sandwell Citizens Advice Bureau helped nearly 39,000 clients to solve almost 110,000 problems. The level of debt dealt with was above £38 million and the CAB assisted their clients with claiming almost £8 million in benefits.**

# Preparing for your appointment

For any debt advice appointment you must bring with you evidence of all your income (for example wage slips, benefit letters, bank statements) which must be dated no more than one month from the date of your interview. For example if your interview is on 5th April, evidence of your income must be dated between 5th March and 5th April.

You must also bring evidence of all your debts (for example rent arrears letters, utility bills, credit card statements and loan agreements).

Without the above the CAB may not be able to contact your creditors and you will have to return for a further appointment with this information.

## Other contacts

### National Debt Line

Contact number: **0808 808 4000**

[www.nationaldebtline.co.uk](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk)

The National Debt Line, a government funded service, can offer you over the phone advice on your finances.

### Consumer Credit Counselling Service

Contact number: **0800 138 1111**

[www.cccs.co.uk](http://www.cccs.co.uk)

A registered charity whose purpose is to assist people who are in financial difficulty by providing free, independent, impartial and realistic advice.

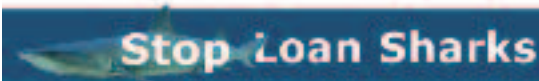
## step five

# Obtaining affordable credit

**We recognise that you may need a loan from time to time, for example if essential appliances breakdown.**

If you need a loan for whatever reason, don't be tempted to borrow from a doorstep lender (these are **legal** money lenders but they charge very high rates of interest) or a loan shark (these are **illegal** money lenders and should never be used).

Loan sharks prey on the most vulnerable people in our community, lend money at extortionate interest rates and turn nasty when you struggle to pay. It may seem like a quick fix, some easy cash when you're at your most desperate, but the consequences of turning to a loan shark can be devastating.



### **Illegal Money Lending Team**

**Working with Trading Standards – funded by BIS**

If you are aware of loan shark activity in your area, you can contact the Illegal Money Lending team in confidence in the following ways:

- Call the 24/7 confidential hotline on **0300 555 2222**
- Text 'loan shark + your message' to **60003**
- E-mail **reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk**
- Log-on to **www.direct.gov.uk/stoploansharks**

We strongly advise you to consider obtaining affordable credit from the 6 Towns Credit Union instead. All saving members of the Credit Union (over the age of 18) are eligible to apply for a loan from £50 to £2,000.

The Credit Union can offer a cheaper alternative to borrowing from doorstep lenders or some high street shops. A comparison is given below for **£500 borrowed over 52 weeks**.

Lender	Weekly Repayment	Interest Paid	Total Cost	Typical Annual Percentage Rate (APR)
Credit Union	£10.84	£63.62	<b>£563.62</b>	26.8%
Provident	£17.50	£410.00	<b>£910.00</b>	272.2%

(source [www.providentpersonalcredit.com](http://www.providentpersonalcredit.com), accessed 26.01.11)

Most loans are arranged during an appointment with a loan officer. You will need to provide up-to-date evidence of your income, your outgoings and details of any other commitments you have.

Members can also access services such as a Christmas savings account, a budget account and a pre-paid Mastercard.



### How can I find out more?

The Credit Union can be found at:  
 382 High Street, West Bromwich, B70 9LB  
 Tel: **0121 553 3110**  
 Website: [www.sixtowns.co.uk](http://www.sixtowns.co.uk)

# Summary

**Follow our five easy steps to avoid losing your home and set out on a brighter financial future:**

**step one** Contact us, see if you qualify for Housing Benefit and pay your rent arrears

**step two** Identify all your debts

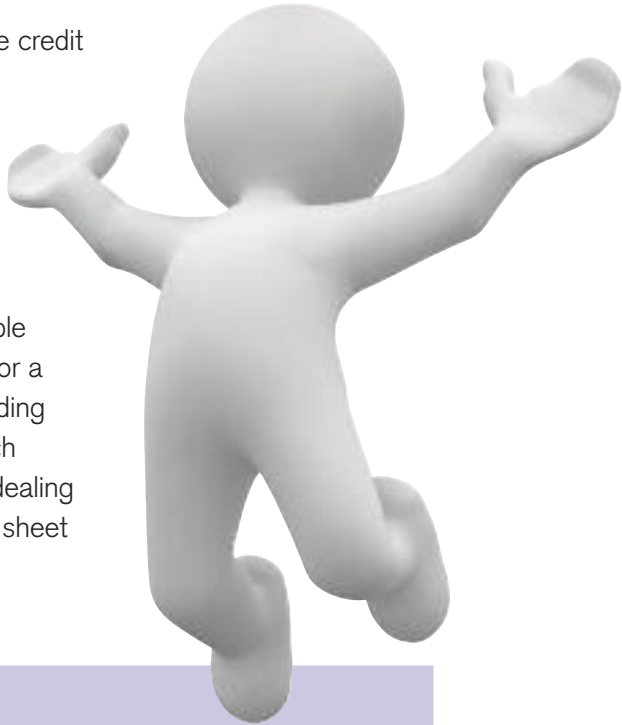
**step three** Have a benefit check to maximise your income

**step four** Arrange to see a CAB debt advice worker

**step five** Obtain affordable credit

For further help and advice contact the Sandwell Homes Rents Team on **0121 569 6000** (Option 2).

You may want to contact the people you owe money to yourself. Ask for a copy of the Sandwell Homes 'Finding Financial Freedom' brochure which includes a step-by-step guide to dealing with debt, with a personal budget sheet and sample letters for creditors.



## **Important notice**

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained within this booklet is correct at time of printing (June 2011).

If you would like a copy of this booklet translated, or require a copy in Braille, large print or on audio tape please contact **0121 569 6030**.

### Arabic

إذا كنت تود الحصول على نسخة مترجمة من هذا المستند، أو كنت بحاجة لنسخة مطبوعة بطريقة برايل للمكفوفين أو طباعة مكبرة أو على شريط تسجيل صوتي، يرجى الاتصال برقم 0121-569 6030

### Bengali

আপনি যদি এই নথিটির অনুবাদ পতে চান অথবা ব্রেইল-এ, বড় অক্ষরের ছাপায় অথবা অডিও টেপ-এ এটি চান, তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে 0121-569 6030 নম্বরে যোগাযোগ করুন

### Kurdish Kumanji

Eger hûn dixwazin kopiyekê vê dokumentê bibe wergerandin yan jî dixwazin kopiyekê bi Tipên Koran (Braille), bi Tipên Mezî yan jî wekî Axaftina Qeydkirî bidest bixînin, jî kerema xwe têkildar bin bi hejmara telefonê 0121-569 6030.

### Kurdish Sorani

"ئەگەر تۆ دتهوات ئەم بە گەیه و مر بگرینەوه  
سەر زمانى خۆت، یان بە د ی برهیل، چاپی  
قەمو یان لە سەر شریتی کاسەت بۆ تۆ ئامادە  
بکەین، تکایە پەيوەندی بکە بە ژمارە تەلەفۆنی  
.0121-569-6030

### Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦੀ ਇਕ ਕਾਪੀ ਦਾ ਅਨੁਵਾਦ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਜਾਂ ਬ੍ਰੇਲ, ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ ਜਾਂ ਆਡੀਓ ਟੇਪ ਦੀ ਕਾਪੀ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ 0121-569 6030 'ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ

### Polish

Aby uzyskać tłumaczenie tego dokumentu, lub jego egzemplarz alfabetem Braille'a, dużym drukiem lub na kasiecie audio, prosimy o kontakt telefoniczny pod numerem 0121-569 6030

### Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کی ایک ترجمہ شدہ نقل چاہئے یا بریل، بڑے حروف یا آڈیو ٹیپ میں ایک نقل کی ضرورت ہو تو برائے مہربانی 0121-569 6030 پر رابطہ کریں

**Sandwell Homes**

Quality Housing, Efficient Services



# MAKE THE LEAP...



*...and join over 4000 other Sandwell Homes tenants who choose to pay by Direct Debit.*

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Neighbourhood Office or call us on 0121 569 5031

*It's one less thing to worry about*

