

Debt Advice





Helping to maximize your income and avoid debt

It is important you pay your rent and any service charges you are responsible for. If you do not pay your rent or get into arrears, you may lose your home.

Our aims and promises

Sutton Housing Partnership recognises that sometimes you may struggle to make ends meet. We want to help you before you get into debt.

We promise to:

- ⊙ Treat all information that you give us confidentially
- ⊙ Be approachable, supportive non-judgmental and listen to your problems
- ⊙ Attempt to maximise your income through the Debt Advisor's welfare benefit health check
- ⊙ Help you to prioritise your debts and calculate realistic repayments as part of the Debt Advisor's financial planning

Introducing the Debt Advisor

The Debt Advisor is based at Sutton Gate and provides benefit and debt advice and assistance to tenants and leaseholders living in Council accommodation.

How to contact the Debt Advisor

You can contact the Debt Advisor by telephone, during the above hours on Freephone **0800 195 5552**. This service is available on Mondays and Tuesdays between 9am - 5pm and on Wednesdays 9.00am - 12.30pm.

You may also write to the Debt Advisor at:-

**Sutton Housing Partnership
Sutton Gate
1 Carshalton Road
Sutton
SM1 4LE**

Or visit the office. However, it is advisable to make an appointment first.

The Debt Advisor can also help with making applications for backdating of housing benefit and resolving enquiries regarding housing benefit overpayments.

What is Debt?

Many people get into debt at one time or another, often through no fault of their own. Losing your job, having a baby, relationship breakdown, illness and disability, bereavement and small business failure can all result in debt being created.

Types of debt & what action can be taken against you to recover these debts

All debts are important but some are of greater priority than others.

- ⊙ Mortgage – Repossession of your home/eviction.
- ⊙ Second Mortgage – Repossession of your home/eviction.
- ⊙ Rent – Eviction from your home.
- ⊙ Council Tax – Distraint (seizure of goods), deductions from wages/benefit, imprisonment.
- ⊙ Water Rates, Gas & Electricity – Supply disconnected.
- ⊙ Unpaid Magistrates Court Fine – Distraint, deductions from wages/benefit, imprisonment.
- ⊙ Unpaid Maintenance/Child Support – Distraint, deductions from wages/benefit, imprisonment.
- ⊙ Income Tax/VAT/National Insurance – Distraint, bankruptcy.
- ⊙ Telephone – Disconnection.
- ⊙ Hire Purchase (not normal credit) – Repossession of HP Goods.
- ⊙ Unsecured Credit Card debts – County Court Judgement, impaired credit rating.

What can I do to sort out my debts?

The worst thing you can do when you owe money is to ignore the situation. The earlier you contact your creditors, the more flexible they are likely to be in coming to an agreement with you.

It is better to face up to the problem sooner, rather than later.

The steps you should take are:-

- ⊙ Decide which are priority debts and which are not.
- ⊙ Work out your budget and decide how much you can afford each week/month to pay off your debts, putting priority debts at the top of the list.
- ⊙ Contact all your creditors as soon as possible. Explain the situation and how you intend to pay.
- ⊙ Offer to pay off the debt at an amount you can afford, even if it's a small amount per week or month. Most creditors know this is exactly what a Court would order, so have little to gain by taking you to Court.
- ⊙ If you make any arrangements over the phone, ask the name of the person you spoke to. Write down what was said and then follow up with a letter to confirm the arrangements. Remember to quote your account reference and to keep a copy of all letters you send.

- ⦿ Consider whether you can increase your income – e.g. by working more hours, taking in a lodger (see further advice before taking in a lodger as this could affect any benefits you receive), claiming benefits.
- ⦿ Consider switching to a basic bank account that does not let you overspend but check that you will still be able to carry out all the transactions that you need to.

Don't struggle alone!

There are lots of agencies that can help you sort out your debt problems or help you to find somebody who can.

Under no circumstance should you ignore priority debts. It is important that you use your available money to pay these first.

Do not pay other people you owe money to (**secondary creditors**) until you have reached an agreement with all of your priority creditors.

Secondary creditors include:

- ⦿ Unsecured loans
- ⦿ Credit cards
- ⦿ Hire purchase agreements for non-essential goods
- ⦿ Store cards
- ⦿ Catalogue and mail order
- ⦿ Repossessed house or car loans

Don't make promises you can't keep

Do not be bullied into agreeing to repayment agreements, which you cannot keep. Negotiate a rate of repayment that you can afford to maintain, based on the figures in your financial statement. Otherwise, sooner or later, you are likely to default or make payments elsewhere and find yourself back in trouble. Remember, the aim is not to immediately solve your problems but to get things organised so that you can afford to pay your creditors and meet your other expenditure for the foreseeable future.

Make regular payments

It is better to make regular payments, however small, rather than make large occasional payments. You will also need to include a sum to clear the arrears by instalments.

The law is on your side

Although the law gives creditors the power to take action to recover the money you owe them, it also makes them go through fixed procedures before final action can legally be taken.

The law also gives you protection. For example, you cannot legally be evicted from your home without the creditor having taken you to Court and obtained the necessary authority.

Do not be intimidated

Harassing people in debt is illegal. If you are harassed by creditors seek advice immediately. You can make a complaint to the local Trading Standards Office or the Police.

Should I use a 'credit repair' company to clean up my file and help me get credit?

No. Do not pay large fees to companies that claim to be able to remove information from your credit file. Only genuinely incorrect information can be removed, and you can do this yourself by paying £2 to see your credit file and then asking for any mistakes to be corrected. You only have the right to correct information that is wrong.

County Court Judgements and other information will stay on your file for six years, although they can be cancelled if the sum owing is paid within a month of the judgement.

County Court Judgements can also be cancelled if you have genuinely not received the relevant court summons. A missing summons is likely to be reserved and any delay in the process will prolong the period of time you have a County Court Judgements against your name.

If you need advice about your credit file, contact Experian, Equifax or Callcredit, or contact your local Citizen's Advice Bureau or Money Advice Centre.

Once you have paid off the debt that the County Court Judgement relates to, you can get a 'Certificate of Satisfaction' from the Court. You can then ask the credit reference agency to amend your credit file to show that you no longer owe the amount in question.

Welfare Benefit Health Check & Financial Planning:

To help the Debt Advisor offer you advice and assistance, you must:

- ⊙ Tell us about the money you have coming in and what you pay out.
- ⊙ Give your permission to talk to the London Borough of Sutton about your debts.
- ⊙ Give your permission to contact other Government agencies on your behalf.
- ⊙ Let us know if you have difficulties in keeping to any arrangements made.
- ⊙ Inform us if there are any changes in your circumstances, however small.

The Debt Advisor will use the information that you supply to calculate your entitlement to welfare benefits. If necessary, we will use the information to challenge the calculation of benefits being paid to you.

The Debt Advisor will use the information that you supply to work out realistic repayments with you, taking into account your income and expenditure.

How and when to pay your rent:

Your rent should be paid on the first Monday of each charging period. You will receive a calendar of payment dates at the start of each financial year.

You can pay by:-

- ⊙ Cash or cheque with a payment card at any UK Post Office. If paying by cheque make this payable to Post Office.
- ⊙ Cash, cheque and credit or debit card at the Cash Hall, Civic Offices in Sutton, Monday-Friday, 9am-1pm. If paying by cheque make this payable to London Borough of Sutton.
- ⊙ Standing Order Mandates or Direct Debit forms are available on request from Customer Services and Tenancy Services.

- ⊙ Credit or Debit Card via the internet
www.suttonhousingpartnership.org.uk
or Customer Services on Freephone **0800 195 5552**.
- ⊙ Touch tone telephone. Call us on **020 8770 7887** and follow the recorded instructions.

If you pay your rent by Direct Debit or maintain your rent account in credit through the year you will be entered into our free prize draws in February and September each year with a chance to win up to £150.00.

Housing Benefit:

If you are on a low income or in receipt of Income Support or other state benefits you may be eligible for Housing Benefit. You can obtain an application form from the Civic Offices or by phoning the Housing Benefit Section on **020 8770 5444**.

What should you do if you cannot pay your rent or are in arrears?

If you are having difficulty in paying your rent or are in arrears you must contact either our Customer Services Team on Freephone **0800 915 5552**. We will discuss your circumstances and offer advice to help you bring your rent account up to date as soon as possible.

What happens if you fail to pay your rent?

If you fall into arrears we will take action to recover the debt. We will write, telephone or visit you to discuss your arrears and we will provide you with as much help and assistance as possible. If your arrears remain we will take legal action against you, which may result in the loss of your home.

Having rent arrears is likely to prevent you from moving.

It may also affect your ability to purchase your home under the '**Right to Buy**' or any mortgage application for another property.

Debt and money advice is also available from a number of alternative organisations and a list of contacts is available at the Reception Desk.

Advice UK

Represents about 900 independent advice agencies in the United Kingdom. Contact them to find the advice agency nearest to you.

Phone **020 7407 4070**

www.advice.org.uk

Bankruptcy Association

Provides help and advice to members who are in serious debt and bankruptcy. Small annual membership fee. Telephone helpline, advice by

letter, ad hoc area meetings, quarterly journal, legal counselling publications. Phone **01524 782713** (Monday-Friday, 10am-12.30pm)

www.theba.org.uk

Business Debtline

For advice and help with dealing with business debts.

Phone **0800 197 6026**

www.bdl.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau (Sutton)

Offers free, confidential, impartial and independent advice.

The Central Library

St. Nicholas Way

Sutton SM1 1EA

Monday-Friday, 10am-4pm

Drop-in, Monday-Friday, 9.30am-5pm

Phone **020 8405 3535**

Diagnostic Interview

Phone **08701 288 070** – 24 hours recorded information

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Connexions

Free and confidential information for young people between the ages of 13-19 on careers, learning, health, money, housing, work, travel and education.

Phone **080 800 13 2 19** (free from landline, if you ring from a mobile an advisor will ring you back, 8am-2pm)

www.connexions.gov.uk

Consumer Credit Counselling Service

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

Phone **0800 138 1111**

www.cccs.co.uk

Community Legal Service Direct

A free, easy-to-use service to help you solve your legal problems.

Phone **0845 345 4 345**

www.clsdirect.org.uk

Direct Debt Line

Provides a telephone debt advisory service. Visits not available.

Phone **01323 481 111**

www.directdebtline.com

Energy Watch

For problems with gas and electricity companies.

Phone **0845 906 0708**

www.energywatch.org.uk

Financial Services Authority (FSA)

Independent watchdog set up by government under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 to

regulate financial services in the UK, and protect the rights of retail customers.

Phone **0845 606 1234**

www.fsa.gov.uk

Housing Advice Service (London Borough of Sutton)

Civic Offices

St. Nicholas Way

Sutton SM1 1EA

Phone 020 8770 5800

Free housing advice helpline

0808 800 4444

www.sutton.gov.uk

Insolvency Service

Administers and investigates the affairs of bankrupts and companies in compulsory liquidation. Reports criminal offences in those cases.

Phone **020 7291 6895**

www.insolvency.gov.uk

National Debtline

For advice and help on dealing with personal debts.

Phone **0808 808 4000**

www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

Ofcom

For problems with phone and telecoms companies.

Phone **0845 456 3000**

www.ofcom.org.uk

Office of Fair Trading

For problems with credit, loans and hire purchase.

Phone **0845 7224 499**

www.oft.gov.uk

Shelter

Helps 100,000 people a year fight for their rights, get back on their feet, and find and keep a home.

Phone **0808 800 4444**

www.shelter.org.uk

Sure Start

Government programme to deliver the best start in life for every child. Brings together, early education, childcare, health and family support.

Phone **0870 0002288**

www.surestart.gov.uk

Taxaid

Charity offering tax advice for people on low incomes (usually earning less than £15,000 a year). Although people with major tax debt problems may also be advised.

Phone **0845 120 3779**

www.taxaid.org.uk

Trading Standards (London Borough of Sutton)

Tries to ensure the highest levels of fair trading and consumer protection for everybody who lives, works or does business in the Borough.

Phone **020 8770 5070**

www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/sutton

If you have any queries, please contact Customer Services between 8am and 5pm, Monday to Friday on:

Freephone

0800 195 5552

You can also visit our offices at:

Sutton Housing Partnership

Sutton Gate

1 Carshalton Road

Sutton SMI 4LE

Office opening hours:

Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm

Our reception opens at:

8.45am for visitors

Staff will be available to take your enquiries from 9am.

or visit our web site:

www.suttonhousingpartnership.org.uk

or email:

customerservices@suttonhousingpartnership.org.uk

This is Sutton Housing Partnership's information leaflet, **Debt Advice**. If you need a translation of this leaflet please tick the box for the language required and complete the form below or call 0800 195 5552.

Kjo është fletushka informuese e Partneritetit të Sutton-it për Banim, **Këshilla Rreth Borxhit**. Nëse ju nevojitet përkthimi i cilësdo pjesë të kësaj fletushke, ju lusim shëroni katrorin e gjuhës së kërkuar dhe komplettoni formën e mëposhtme ose telefononi 0800 195 5552 për më shumë informata.

 Albanian

هذا كتيب معلومات شراكة إسكان ستون "التصحية لمعالجة الدين". إذا احتجت لترجمة لأي جزء من هذا الكتيب فالرجاء وضع علامة للغة المطلوبة وأكمل النموذج أدناه أو اتصل مع الرقم المجاني: 0800 195 5552 للمزيد من المعلومات.

 Arabic

এটি হচ্ছে সUTTON হাউজিং পার্টনারশীপ'স ইনফরমেশন লিফলেট, ডেট এডভাইস / বাপনি যদি এ লিফলেটের যে কোন অংশের অনুবাদ চান, তাহলে যে ভাষায় আপনার অনুবাদের প্রয়োজন, সে ভাষায় পাশের বাক্সে টিক চিহ্ন দিন এবং নিচের ফর্মটি পূরণ করুন অথবা আরো জানার জন্য 0800 195 5552 নম্বরে টেলিফোন করুন।

 Bengali

这是Sutton住房协会的信息小册子，题为：债务咨询。如果您需要我们将其中的任何一部分翻译成您的母语，请在需要的语言方框中打勾并填写好下面的表格，同时您也可以致电 0800 195 5552 向我们了解详情。

 Chinese

આ સડન હાઉસિંગ પાર્ટનરશીપ માહિતી પત્રિકા છે - ડેટ્સ પર સલાહ. જો તમને આ પત્રિકાના કોઈક અંશને અનુવાદ કરવાની જરૂર હોય, તો તમારી ભાષા પર ટીક કરીને નીચે આપેલા કોષ્ટકને ભરી અથવા વધુ માહિતી માટે 0800 195 5552 પર ફોન કરો.

 Gujarati

Tani waa warqadda warbixinta ee Iskaashatada Guriyaynta ee Sutton, **Talo bixin Daymanka ku saabsan**. Haddii aad turjumaad qoraal ah uga baahan tahay qayb warqaddan ka mid ah, fadlan sax luuqada aad doonayso, buuxinta foomka hoos ku qoran ama wixii warbixino dheeraad ah wac telefoonka 0800 195 5552.

 Somali

یہ قریب سے جتنے پمپرو کے نام سے سٹن ہاؤسنگ پارٹنرشپ کا مطبوعاتی ایفک ہے۔ اگر آپ اس ایفک کے کسی بھی حصے کا ترجمہ حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو براہ کرم اپنی مطلوبہ زبان کے نام پر ایک کاسٹن لکھیے اور درج ذیل نام مکمل کیجئے اور یہ معلومات کے لئے اس نمبر پر فون کیجئے 0800 195 5552.

 Urdu

Many publications can be downloaded directly from our website:

www.suttonhousingpartnership.org.uk. Click on the 'accessibility' button to visit our website designed for those with a visual impairment. Otherwise if you need any of the information in this document in large print, braille or audiotape please tick the box and complete the form.

Name

Address

.....

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Telephone no

Please return to:
Sutton Housing Partnership Limited
Sutton Gate
1 Carshalton Road
Sutton
Surrey SM1 4LE

