

Debt / Mortgage Difficulties – Services and options available in Oxford

The following information is designed to help give advice and to signpost people that are worried or anxious about mortgage arrears or debt problems in Oxford.

Lender Options

If you are in mortgage difficulties you should initially speak to your mortgage lender to make them aware of the situation. There are a number of options available that a lender could take:

- Reduce monthly payments for a period (including a payment holiday)
- Capitalise payments
- Cut the charges made
- Extend the length of loan
- Spread the payment of the total amount owed
- Offer a better loan rate
- Allow time to sell home (if that is preferred by homeowner)

It is also worth exploring whether other lenders might be able to offer a better interest rate or a better mortgage package to suit you.

If you're struggling to pay your mortgage, one option you might be thinking about is a sale and rent back scheme run by a private firm. **Beware of 'rent / buy back', 'sell to let' or 'sale and lease back' schemes, and if you do want to consider this, get assurances as to your protection and consult a solicitor or advice centre first.** There is little protection for you if the company that buys the property gets into financial trouble itself, and little to stop you being evicted. You may also not be eligible for Housing Benefit.

Review own situation

You should also review the situation in your own household to clarify what to do. This should include:

- Reviewing household expenditure to see if there are any savings that can be made
- Considering whether income could be increased – by taking a lodger, for example
- Are all working individuals in the household contributing to household costs?
- List and prioritise all debts (Court Orders, Rent/Mortgage Arrears, Council Tax costs should be paid before any other debts)
- Which payments are you behind on?
- Speaking to all (priority) creditors and making an offer that is affordable to pay
- Do you have any mortgage protection insurance (MPPI) or any other insurance?
- Are there any options open to you, such as selling your home or moving to something smaller?

Take professional advice

There are many agencies that can offer advice. This can be specific **Money Advice** to help you manage debts, mortgage or rent arrears, or **Welfare Advice** to make sure that you are getting all the benefits and help that you are entitled to. **Housing Advice** may also be appropriate in order to ensure that you can stay in your own home, and are not at risk of homelessness. Money advisors may also be able to help consolidate debts and recommend appropriate action, including administration orders, IVAs (Individual Voluntary Arrangements), or bankruptcy orders.

Professional services

There are a number of websites and telephone help-lines that can give advice, and help you to deal with some of this yourself.

National Debtline – free service to help deal with debt problems including web chat
Tel: 0808 808 4000 Web: www.nationaldebtline.org

Citizens Advice Bureau – helps to deal with legal, money and welfare benefit issues
Tel: 03444 111 444 Web: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Shelter – offers independent help with housing and welfare benefits
Tel: 0808 800 4444 Web: <https://england.shelter.org.uk/>

Oxford City Council – the website includes a benefits calculator to check if you are entitled to Housing or Council Tax Benefit, and the NHAS leaflet ‘Are you worried about your mortgage?’ that you can download Web: www.oxford.gov.uk

Job Centre Plus / Universal Credit – website gives information and advice on making a claim and the help you may be eligible for
Tel: 0800 055 6688 Web: www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus

Pension Credit – for information and advice
Tel: 0800 99 1234 Web: <https://www.gov.uk/pension-credit>

Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit - information and advice
Tel: 0845 300 3900 Web: www.gov.uk/working-tax-credit

Payplan – gives advice on your debts
Tel: 0800 280 2816 Web: www.payplan.com

Advice Centres (and opening times) in Oxford

Most centres also run outreach sessions in other venues. Some centres deal with clients only from certain areas of the city. It is best to telephone first.

Agnes Smith Advice Centre, Blackbird Leys
Address: 96 Blackbird Leys Road
Telephone: 770206
Web: <https://www.agnessmith.co.uk/>
Opening hours: Monday-Friday 9:30am to 5pm
Drop-in sessions: Monday & Wednesday 10am to 2pm (at the Centre)
Tuesday & Thursday 10am to 2pm (at the Farmhouse in Greater Leys)
The other sessions are by appointment only

Oxfordshire Welfare Rights and Barton Advice Centre
Address: Barton Neighbourhood Centre, Underhill Circus
Telephone: 744165
Web: <http://www.oxfordshirewelfarerights.btck.co.uk/>
Drop-in sessions: Monday 10.00 – 1.00 (for residents in OX3)
Other times by appointment.

Oxfordshire Chinese Community & Advice Centre

Address: 44B Princes Street

Telephone: 204188

Web: www.occac.org.uk

Drop-in sessions: Monday 12pm – 3pm

Other times by appointment.

Oxford Citizens' Advice Bureau

Address: 95 St. Aldates

Telephone: 03444 111 444

Web: <https://citizensadviceoxford.org.uk/>

Drop-in sessions: Monday to Friday 10am – 2pm

Other times by appointment or for telephone advice

Rose Hill & Donnington Advice Centre

Address: The Cabin, The Oval, Rose Hill (behind the Children's Centre)

Telephone: 438634

Web: <http://adviceoxford.org.uk/get-advice/rose-hill-and-donnington-advice-centre/>

Drop-in sessions: Contact for drop-in and appointment times

Turpin Miller Solicitors

Address: 1 Agnes Court, Oxford Road, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2EN

Telephone: 770111

Turpin Miller provide money advice services funded by the Legal Services Commission, but these may be chargeable if you do not qualify for legal aid

Housing Options Service, Oxford City Council

Address: St Aldates Chambers, St Aldates, Oxford (opposite the Town Hall)

Telephone: 249811

Email: housingneeds@oxford.gov.uk

Web: <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/>

Options appointment service: Monday – Thursday 9.30 - 4.30

Friday 9.30 – 4.00

Oxford City Council – Housing Options Team

The Housing Options Team can give advice and assistance if you are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is therefore important you seek advice at the earliest opportunity. The Council's first priority would be to sustain your current accommodation. Therefore the Housing Options Team can provide legal advice or signpost you to relevant services. If the Council cannot sustain your current accommodation they can also provide advice to secure alternative accommodation.

This could include help to rent a property in the private rented sector (through the Home Choice or Lord Mayors Deposit Guarantee schemes); or a referral into the Mortgage Rescue Scheme (where a housing association would usually buy and rent-back the home). Advice can also be given by the Housing Options Team on joining the Council's housing register and bidding for property using Choice Based Lettings.

Other Government Initiatives

Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI)

If you're a homeowner, you might be able to get help towards interest payments on:

- your mortgage
- loans you've taken out for certain repairs and improvements to your home

This help is called Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI). It's paid as a loan, which you'll need to repay with interest when you sell or transfer ownership of your home. You usually need to be getting, or treated as getting, a [qualifying benefit](#) to get SMI. There's no guarantee that you'll get SMI for a mortgage or loan you take out.

Web: <https://www.gov.uk/support-for-mortgage-interest>

Help for first time buyers

The government has created the Help to Buy schemes including Help to Buy: Shared Ownership and Help to Buy: Equity Loan to help people take steps to buy your own home. The Help to Buy: ISA pays first-time buyers a government bonus. For example, save £200 a month and we'll add £50, up to a maximum of £3,000, boosting your ISA savings of £12,000 to £15,000. Further information can be found on the Help to Buy web site.

Web: <https://www.helptobuy.gov.uk/>

Court Action

Should you receive a court letter or letter from a solicitor in regards to your home, you should take immediate advice. A new mortgage pre- action protocol, introduced by the Civil Justice Council, came into effect in late 2008. The new protocol makes clear that repossessions should be a last resort. Lenders are expected to discuss and agree with borrowers alternatives to repossession.

If you do have a Court date, as well as taking professional advice, you should always attend Court. Initial possession hearings at the Oxford County Court are on a Tuesday morning and there is a County Court Duty Scheme funded Court Desk service – provided by Turpin Miller solicitors – to provide advice and advocacy at these hearings. Court Desks are successful in preventing immediate repossession in up to 85% of cases, but can only do this if the defendant turns up.