

Rent and other household costs

Your most important bills will always be your rent and council tax. Failure to pay these may result in court action or even losing your home.

The cost of running your home

Running a home involves many costs. This is a summary of the different costs you need to think about when you are planning your spending.

If you don't manage your money well you could:

- ▶ lose your home
- ▶ get into debt
- ▶ get a bad credit rating

Planning your spending will:

- ▶ stop you getting into arrears
- ▶ give you peace of mind
- ▶ keep you in your home and community



Rent

When working out your spending, paying your rent should be your first priority. Our average rent is £87 a week, but this depends on the size and type of your property. Your rent includes water rates, which we collect for Severn Trent.

The quickest and easiest way to pay is by direct debit. You can now set up a Direct Debit over the phone with our contact centre. We offer many ways to pay so that you can find a way that suits you.

Our Money Advice Team can help you to find out which benefits you are entitled to.

The benefits calculator on Solihull Council's website may give you some idea of whether you are entitled to Housing Benefit.



How and where to pay your rent and other charges

You must pay your rent once a week, on a Monday. You can pay monthly, every two weeks or four weekly if you want to, but if you do, you must pay in advance.

You must pay the correct rent regularly and on time, otherwise we may take action against you, which may result in you losing your home.

You can make payments:

- ▶ by Direct Debit or standing order
- ▶ over the phone with a debit card or credit card by calling 0121 717 1515 (from Monday to Friday between 8am and 8pm and on Saturdays between 9am and 1pm)
- ▶ phoning the automated telephone system on 0121 704 0869 and following the instructions (24 hours a day, seven days a week)
- ▶ on the internet (epayments) using Solihull Council's secure internet payment facility at <https://www.solihull.gov.uk/epay/default.aspx>
- ▶ at any post office using your rent card (swipe card) and at shops and garages where you see the Paypoint or Payzone logos
- ▶ at our Solihull Home Options office, Coppice Way, Chelmsley Wood or Solihull Connect in Solihull town centre (you can pay in cash, by cheque, with a debit card or a credit card)
- ▶ at our Kingshurst Connect office (you can only pay with a debit card or a credit card)
- ▶ at our Chelmsley Wood Connect office using the automated payment machine
- ▶ from your wage or salary, if you are employed by Solihull Council or us.

Budgeting

The best way to start to manage your money and get control of your spending is to work out a budget.

This means making two lists. One of all the money you have coming in each week (for example, wages or salaries, benefits, tax credits and pensions), and another list of what you spend money on.

What to do:

- ▶ add up all the money you have coming in each week
- ▶ then add up all the money you are spending each week
- ▶ compare the amount you spend with the amount you have coming in



- ▶ if you haven't got the same amount of money, or more, coming in, you will have to work out ways of reducing the amount you are spending
- ▶ also check that you are receiving all the benefits you are entitled to.

If you are not sure where your money is going, keep a diary and write down all the money you spend and what you spend it on. This will help you work out where you can cut down and save money.

There are also online tools you can use. Our Money Advice pages on www.solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk or the national Money Advice Service www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk may be able to help.

Our Money Advice Team can also give you face to face advice on budgeting. Contact us for more details or, alternatively, call into our Home Options office at Chelmsley Wood - no appointment needed.



Helping new tenants

We will:

- ▶ complete a pre tenancy interview with you and give you advice and support to help you manage your tenancy
- ▶ make every effort to give you information about the cost of running a home
- ▶ help you apply for Housing Benefit
- ▶ visit you to help you sort out any problems with rent or Housing Benefit, within 28 days of you moving in.

Helping all customers

We will:

- ▶ provide as many ways to pay as possible
- ▶ give you help and advice on how to manage your money and claim benefits
- ▶ give you advice and help if you have any extra needs or particular personal circumstances
- ▶ run incentive schemes that offer you a reward for paying regularly and on time.



Council tax

The average cost of council tax is £25 a week, but yours may be more or less. This should be included in your budgeting.

Gas and electric bills

Paying your gas and electricity bills is also very important.

As a tenant you are encouraged to check which fuel tariff you are on because you can switch your electricity and gas supplier to a cheaper provider to save you money. EBICo (which stands for Ethical Billing Company), is a not-for-profit ethical supplier. They offer cheaper fuel, particularly if you have a prepayment meter, but their tariff is not the best one for everyone. Ask the Money Advice Team for guidance.

Anybody can switch to EBICo to save money on fuel bills, and switching is quick and easy. If you would like to find out more, contact us.

If you are aged 60 or over you may get a winter fuel payment to help pay for keeping warm in winter. This tax-free benefit is normally paid once a year between November and the end of the year. In addition you may also qualify for the Cold Weather Payments which are triggered by a prolonged period of cold weather and are paid automatically to eligible pensioners.

In addition you may also qualify for the Warm Home Discount Scheme to help you pay for fuel during the winter, but you must apply for it. To check your eligibility go to the Government website www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme/overview. If you don't qualify, some suppliers can offer a discount to vulnerable people, for example, those on low incomes. Each supplier has their own rules about who else (known as the 'broader group') can get this help. Check with your supplier if you meet their rules for broader group help and how to apply for it.



Food and other household expenses

Free school meals

Your children may be entitled to free school meals if they are of a certain age or if you claim certain benefits.

If you want to find out more about claiming free school meals please contact your child's school or Solihull Council.



Home contents insurance

Many tenants believe that we automatically insure their furniture, belongings and decorations against fire, theft, vandalism or water damage (such as burst pipes). But this is not the case. Unfortunately some tenants only realise this after the damage has been done.

We make it easy for you to insure your belongings with a special household contents insurance scheme.

The insurance is arranged with Royal and Sun Alliance Insurance PLC. You can pay for the insurance every week, when you pay your rent or service charges. For information on how to apply, please contact us or visit our website.

Other home costs

If you are moving into your first home, you may need to buy furniture and appliances like a fridge or cooker. Before moving into a home of your own, work out if you can afford it.

You will also have to budget to afford your transport costs, phone costs and your TV Licence.

Special occasions

Christmas and other special celebrations can be expensive. It can be tempting to skip paying bills like rent and council tax or to borrow money from loan sharks so that your family and friends don't miss out on presents and treats. To budget for this why not put a little money aside each week throughout the year. We have made it possible for our tenants to save money with Advance Credit Union – even if they have not been allowed a bank account in the past. Paying just £2 means you can open an account and save as much, or as little, as you like each week. They also offer a savings facility specifically designed for Christmas, which is called the Christmas Savings Club and money saved in this account can only be withdrawn at the beginning of November each year.

See the back of this leaflet for Advance Credit Union's contact details.

Other spending

Apart from the costs most people pay, there are others you may need to include in your budget, such as prescriptions, birthdays, holidays, entertainment and life assurance. Every now and then you will have unexpected costs to pay, so try to save a bit in case of emergencies.

There is a handy budget planner at the end of this factsheet.



What happens if you do not pay?

If you are having problems paying your rent or council tax, please contact us straight away. There are several ways we may be able to help.

We can make an appointment either to visit you at home or at a Connect office. This is called a Corporate Debt visit, and aims to make an arrangement with you to pay your rent and council tax based on what you can afford to pay.

We will also look at the support you may be able to get. This may include help from:

- ▶ family or household members
- ▶ people you have appointed to act on your behalf
- ▶ friends
- ▶ Social Services
- ▶ Money Advice Team
- ▶ Citizens Advice
- ▶ support workers
- ▶ other appropriate agencies.

We have staff who will meet you to check you are happy with your payments, that you are claiming all the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction you are entitled to, and to make affordable arrangements for you to pay your rent if there are arrears.

We may ask our Money Advice Team to help you if you are having problems managing your money and you have debts with companies. They will be able to give you advice on paying your debts and they will help you arrange repayments that you can afford.

The sooner we know about any problems you are having, the easier it is for us to help you. It is also easier to pay off smaller amounts of arrears rather than one large debt. We would much prefer to help you solve the problem rather than take action against you.

What action could we take?

If the amount you owe continues to increase and you do not contact us, we will serve you with a Notice of Seeking Possession, Notice of Possession Proceedings or a Notice to Quit, depending on the type of tenancy you have. This is the first step in legal proceedings. You should contact us to make an arrangement to pay off your arrears. If you keep to your arrangement it may stop us from taking any more legal action.



However, if you have an Introductory Tenancy, you must not have any arrears by the nine month review date. If you do have arrears at this point, we may have to extend your Introductory Tenancy by an additional six months to help you sustain your tenancy and move to a Fixed Term Tenancy.

If you do not contact us we may take you to the County Court. At this point we would advise you to get legal help from a Citizens Advice Bureau, or a solicitor. We would also like you to speak to us first to see if we can help.

If you are able to pay your rent account in full before the court hearing then the council may ask to stop the case. (You will not have to pay any costs.)

If there is a court hearing, you will have to go to it and you may incur the cost.

Here are some common outcomes of court cases:

- ▶ At the hearing, the council may ask for an immediate Possession Order of your home or Possession within 7, 14, 21 or 28 days.
- ▶ We can ask for a Suspended Possession Order if you are able to make an agreement with the court and the council to pay the rent and arrears. (We will use the same conditions in our agreement with you.)
- ▶ If the court grants a Suspended Possession Order, we will add the fixed fee on the claim form to your rent account. As long as you pay the money you owe in line with the conditions the court sets, you will be able to stay in your home.
- ▶ The court can adjourn the hearing at the Judge's discretion on terms that you pay your rent and a sum off the arrears weekly, fortnightly, four weekly or monthly.

If you do not pay the money you owe as set out by the court, we can apply to the court for a warrant of eviction. This will also include additional costs being added to your rent account.

If you are evicted, you may not be entitled to another permanent home from the council because you will be seen as having made yourself intentionally homeless. Your debt will then be passed onto a debt collector who will get the rent back on behalf of the council.

Where to get help and advice

It is best to ask for help early. This will help to stop your debts from building up.

If you are struggling to pay your rent contact us as soon as possible. We will offer you help and support.

Note: The costs and contact details in this document were accurate at the time this document was printed.



Dealing with debt and arrears

If you have debts you should try and pay the most important debts (known as 'priority debts') first. Priority debts are your rent and any arrears, council tax and any arrears, outstanding gas and electricity bills and any court costs you have to pay. All your other debts are non-priority debts.

- ▶ Do not ignore your debts – the longer you do nothing about them, the more time they have to increase. If you are having problems paying your rent or council tax, please contact us as soon as possible.
- ▶ Find out whether you are claiming all of the benefits and tax credits you are entitled to. Our Money Advice Team or Citizens Advice may be able to help.
- ▶ Get reliable advice – for example from our Money Advice Team – before borrowing money to pay off your debts.
- ▶ If you have lost your job or you are off work because of illness, check whether your payments are covered by payment protection insurance. Check any credit agreements.
- ▶ Get in touch with your creditors straight away and explain your problems. Go and see them, phone or write to them. Contact everyone you owe money to. If you make arrangements to pay some creditors but not others, you could have problems again.
- ▶ Work out a budget and show it or send it to your creditors when you tell them about your problems.
- ▶ Work out a reasonable offer to repay any money you owe.



Don't worry if it appears very small if that is all you can afford. Creditors prefer you to pay a small amount regularly than make an offer you can't afford.

- ▶ Do not give up trying to reach an agreement, even if creditors are difficult.
- ▶ Fill in the reply forms to court papers and let the court have all the facts. This information will be used to decide if you owe the money and what instalments you should pay.
- ▶ Always go to court hearings. Take a copy of your personal budget with you. Do not think that going to court makes you a criminal. It's not that kind of court.
- ▶ Always keep copies of any letters or court forms you send or receive.



Other useful contacts

If you have any questions about the following please use the contact details below.

Housing Benefit

Phone: 0121 704 8200

Council tax

Phone: 0121 704 8100

Free school meals

Phone: 0121 704 6611 Website: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>

Travel cards

Phone: 0121 254 7272 Website: www.travelwm.co.uk/cards/index.asp

TV Licensing

Phone: 0844 800 6790 Website: www.tvlicensing.co.uk

Advance Credit Union

Phone: 0121 350 8883 Email: info@advancecu.org.uk Website: www.advancecu.org.uk

National Debtline

Phone: 0808 808 4000 Website: www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

Step Change Debt Charity

Phone: 0800 138 1111 Website: www.stepchange.org

Citizens Advice (for debt counselling and benefits advice)

Phone: 0870 751 0955 or 03444 111 444 Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Money Advice Service

Website: <http://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk> The Financial Conduct Authority are a government organisation. They have set up a website that has lots of useful information, advice and online tools to help you understand money and how to manage a budget.

Get in touch with us as soon as you realise you are having problems making payments.

Our Money Advice Team offers free, confidential, fair and independent advice on debt and state benefits. They can also help you find out whether you are receiving all of the benefits that you are entitled to.



To get in touch:



**Freepost RLSS-UEBA-RTUZ
Solihull Community Housing
Endeavour House
Meriden Drive
Solihull B37 6BX**



Typetalk: 18001 0121 717 1515



Phone: 0121 717 1515



Text: 07781 474 722



www.facebook.com/solihullcommunityhousing



twitter.com/@solihullhousing



Email: info@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk



Website: www.solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk

Protecting your personal information: We promise only to use your information strictly within the Data Protection Act 1998. If you supply your email address we will use it to contact you in the future.

If you would like this leaflet in another language or format please contact us.



Weekly Budget Form

Name		Date	
Address		Post Code	

Household

Adults	
Children	
Non - Dependants	

To assist you in completing this calculator please read our Budget Calculator guidance notes

www.solihull.gov.uk/Attachments/GuidanceNotesforBudgetForm.pdf

Income and expenditure

Enter the amount of regular payments for all items on a weekly basis. For example if you pay or receive an item monthly times the amount of the item by 12 and divide by 52 to enter the appropriate weekly amount

Wages/Salary

Your Take Home Pay	
Partner's Take Home Pay	
Regular Overtime/Bonus/Commission	

Benefits

Housing Benefit	
Council Tax Benefit	
Jobseekers' Allowance	
Income Support	
Child Benefit	
Child Tax Credit	
Working Tax Credit	
Maternity Pay/Allowance	
Bereavement Benefits	
Statutory Sick Pay	
Incapacity Benefit	
Employment Support Allowance	
Carer's Allowance	
Disability Living Allowance (care)	
Disability Living Allowance (mobility)	
Industrial Disablement Benefit	
Severe Disablement Allowance	
Attendance Allowance	

Pensions

Retirement Pension	
Occupational Pension	
Private Pension	
Annuity	
War Pension	
Partner's Pension	
Pension Credit	

Other Income

Maintenance	
Student Grant/Loan	
Income from Lodgers/Property	
Son's/Daughters Contribution	
Other Income - Please Specify:	

Total Weekly Income

Savings

Bank	
Building Society	
Other Investments	
e.g Shares	
(Please Detail)	
Rent From Properties	
How many properties do you own?	

Total Savings

Housing Costs

Rent	
Mortgage	
Secured Loans/2nd Mortgage	
Council Tax	
Ground Rent/Service Charge	
Mortgage Endowment Policies/ISA	
House Contents/Buildings Insurance	

Utilities

Water/Sewerage	
Gas	
Electricity	
Coal and other Fuels (eg bottled Gas)	

Housekeeping

Food and General Housekeeping	
Clothing	
Subscriptions, Papers, Magazines	
Cigarettes, Sweets, Alcohol	
Washing Machine Rental/Laundrette	

Children

Childcare	
School Meals/Trips	
Nappies/Baby Items	
Children's Pocket Money	

Other Important Items

Court Fines/Orders	
Maintenance	
Life Assurance	
HP/Conditional Sale	
TV Licence	
Telephone	

Travel

Fares (eg to work/school etc)	
Car Running Costs	
Car Loan	
Motability Car	

Health

Prescriptions	
Care Costs/Special Needs	

Other Expenditure

TV/Video/Sat/Cable	
Appliance Rental	
Entertainment	
Credit/Store Cards	
Catalogues	
Loans	

Total Weekly Expenditure

