Housing Rights

https://www.housingrights.org.uk/housing-advice/mortgage-problems/sorting-out-mortgage-problems

Generated: 13th November 2026 8:29pm

Sorting out mortgage problems

This information is for homeowners in Northern Ireland.

Mortgage problems can feel overwhelming. It’s normal to worry about keeping on top of mortgage payments. If you’re having trouble paying your mortgage, it’s essential to seek help and contact your lender.

On this page, you can find some advice on:

- talking to your lender
- getting help to make your payments and
- dealing with other mortgage problems

Speak to your lender as soon as possible

Getting letters or emails from your lender can feel scary. But it's essential to read them. This way, you'll know about possible problems before they get worse.

Your lender will usually send a letter or email if you miss a mortgage payment. They’ll ask you to contact them about the missed payment and explain how you plan to catch up. Lenders want to work with you to keep you in your home. It’s easier for them to do this than to go through the repossession and eviction process.

Most lenders have special teams that work with people who need help. They can help you make a plan to budget and manage your money better.

You’ll usually have seven days to contact your lender or pay the missed payment.

If you do not contact your lender or you miss up to three payments, your lender may start legal action against you.

Negotiate with your lender

Reach out to your lender as soon as you miss a payment or expect to miss one soon. It’s easier to fix problems with your mortgage when you act early. At the same time, please speak to one of our advisers. They can help you talk to your lender and make a plan.

If you feel rushed or intimidated by a lender to leave your home, this might be illegal. They must have a legal reason to take away your home, and you may be able to stop repossession at any stage in the process.

Help to pay your mortgage

Apply for a government loan

You may be able to get some government help.

Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI) is a loan to help with housing costs such as:

- interest on a mortgage
- a loan to buy a home
- improving your home

You can apply for SMI if you’re a homeowner and you're getting one of the following benefits:

- Pension Credit
- Universal Credit or
- a legacy benefit. These include income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance and income-related employment and support allowance

You can apply for SMI as soon as you start receiving one of the above benefits. But for some people there will be a waiting time before receiving SMI. You will get SMI:

- from the date you start getting Pension Credit (there is no waiting period) or
- after getting Universal Credit for three months or
- after 39 consecutive weeks of claiming one of the legacy benefits

Since SMI is a loan, you'll need to pay it back with interest. You must be able to prove how you spent the money. To apply for SMI, complete the form online or ask for a form to be sent out to you.

The amount of SMI you get depends on how much you owe. Keep in mind, it might not be enough to pay back everything you owe.

Other help

If you get other benefits, you may be able to get help to pay for:

- your rates bill
- some service charges on your home
- your rent, if you own part of your home and rent part of it

Get advice to find out what you may be entitled to.

Video: Getting help with mortgage payments

Video transcript

Thinking about mortgage problems can feel overwhelming. It can be hard to know what to do and where to start.

Falling behind on payments can be easy, because of changes like losing a job, getting ill, splitting up with a partner or higher interest rates.

Every day at Housing Rights, we help people to tackle mortgage debt and stay in their homes.

It's best if you get advice as soon as possible, even if you're just starting to worry about missing a payment.

But no matter what stage you're at, we can talk to you about your options. We can also speak to your lender or their solicitor on your behalf.

This can involve looking at your income, checking if you're eligible for help with interest and making a realistic repayment plan.

Our advice is free and confidential and an adviser can talk you through a plan that works for you.

Contact Housing Rights if you’re worried about mortgage problems. You can call, email or chat to an adviser online.

Options to pay off mortgage debt

Getting into arrears is serious. It's important to speak with your lender. You should keep a record of the contact you have with your lender:

- take notes when you talk to your lender
- keep any letters, emails, or texts from your lender

Being in mortgage arrears doesn't necessarily mean that you’ll lose your home. You also won't have to pay the arrears all at once. There are lots of ways to get back on track. Talk to your lender about whether any of the following options could work:

Capitalising your arrears

This is when you ask your lender to add the arrears to the amount (or ‘capital’) you originally borrowed. It means the amount of arrears is spread over the remaining term of your mortgage. It can make the amount easier to pay but usually increases your monthly payment.

Paying extra each month

Your lender may give you more time to pay if you can manage small payments towards the arrears every month. Even small payments can stop the interest from increasing. This is a good option if your situation has improved since you fell behind. You can:

- make a formal agreement to increase your monthly payment. The amount you agree to must be enough to clear your arrears in the time left on your mortgage
- ask for ‘forbearance’. This means that your lender will put you into a fixed rate
- offer a token payment. If you cannot pay enough to have a formal agreement, the lender may accept smaller payments

Extending the mortgage term

The mortgage term is the amount of time you have to repay the mortgage. Lenders offer different mortgage terms, usually 25-30 years. You can ask your lender to extend your mortgage term. Your monthly payments will go down, but you will end up paying more overall. This is seen as ‘new lending.’ It means you need to meet the lender’s criteria, which can be difficult.

A temporary payment arrangement

If you have short-term financial problems, you can ask for a temporary change to how you pay your mortgage. For example, you can ask to pause payments or reduce the amount until you’re back on your feet.

Claiming on mortgage payment protection insurance

This can cover payments if you are unable to pay for certain reasons. For example, if you are sick or made redundant. If you took out insurance when you bought your home, check if you can claim on it to cover arrears.

Selling your home to pay off your debt

Unfortunately, in some cases, selling your home will be the only option available. Your lender might repossess your home and sell it if you cannot pay your mortgage. Before doing this, they should give you the chance to sell your home yourself. You are likely to secure a higher sale price than if the house is repossessed and sold by the lender

You will also avoid the additional costs of possession action and enforcement.

If you take this option, you will need to show that you are taking active steps to sell your home. For example, you would need to have it listed with an estate agent.

Selling a home in negative equity

If you’re in negative equity, you need to be careful about selling your home to clear the debt. ‘Negative equity’ means you owe more on your mortgage than your home is worth. This means that selling your home will not be enough to cover all your debts.

Speak to an adviser if you’re in negative equity. It can be tricky, but our advisers can help you work through it. Your lender should still give you the chance to

repay your debts.

Be aware that:

- you need your lender’s permission to put your home on the market if you’re in negative equity
- if you voluntarily hand over the keys to your lender, you may still owe money
- some companies charge a fee to sell a home that's in negative equity

Our advisers can talk you through selling your home and avoiding extra costs

Be careful with ‘mortgage rescue’ schemes

Mortgage rescue schemes are private companies that buy your home and rent it back to you.

They are also known as ‘sale and rent back’ schemes. These schemes are promoted as letting you stay in your home by agreeing to let you become a tenant. But there are risks with these schemes, such as:

- you can be evicted when your tenancy ends or if you cannot pay the rent
- the scheme may pay less than your property is worth, but charge you high rent
- you may not be able to get help with housing costs

It’s better to work with an adviser to manage and pay back your debt, rather than take the risks with a mortgage rescue scheme.

Remember, there are no government mortgage rescue schemes in Northern Ireland. They’re always privately owned.

More advice

- Managing your mortgage
- Taken to court by your mortgage lender