

## Factsheet

# Getting help from the council as a carer

If you're supporting someone else as an unpaid carer, you might be able to get help from your local council. This factsheet looks at the carer's assessment – the process the council uses to work out whether you're entitled to support – and what support you might get.



Call free on **0800 319 6789**

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## About Independent Age

Whatever happens as we get older, we all want to remain independent and live life on our own terms. That's why, as well as offering regular friendly contact and a strong campaigning voice, Independent Age can provide you and your family with clear, free and impartial advice on the issues that matter: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.

A charity founded over 150 years ago, we're independent so you can be.

The information in this factsheet applies to England only.

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for information and advice.

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland  
**(0800 12 44 222, [ageuk.org.uk/scotland](https://ageuk.org.uk/scotland))**.

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI  
**(0808 808 7575, [ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland](https://ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland))**.

In this factsheet, you'll find reference to our other free publications. You can order them by calling **0800 319 6789** or by visiting **[independentage.org/publications](https://independentage.org/publications)**

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## 1. Am I a carer?

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A carer is someone who helps another person in their day-to-day life who would struggle to cope without their support. The person might need help because of a physical disability, mental health problem or because of their age, for example. When we talk about carers we mean carers who are unpaid, rather than those who provide care as their job or through a voluntary organisation.

You may be a carer because you've had to step in to support a spouse or partner, or an older relative or friend, who needs your help so that they can continue living in their own home. You don't have to live with the person you're caring for to be considered a carer.

You may help them to:

- wash and dress
- choose the right clothes to wear, for example, reminding them to wrap up if it's a cold day
- use the toilet
- get regular healthy meals and enough to drink
- get to GP appointments or other appointments in the community
- keep their home clean and carry out household chores.

Caring doesn't just mean providing physical help. You might help them in other ways, such as:

- giving emotional support
- keeping an eye on them to make sure they're safe, for example, by making sure they take their medication properly
- helping with budgeting and financial matters.

You might find it hard to judge whether you're a carer. For many people, they feel they're just looking after someone they care about in the same way they would expect or hope to be helped.

However, caring for someone in this way can bring challenges and it's important to seek out the help that's available. By identifying yourself as a carer, you're acknowledging the vital role you're playing and making sure you'll be able to continue caring in future.

### Some examples

Janice lives with her sister Maureen. Maureen is registered blind and needs help with a number of day-to-day tasks, such as getting around their home safely, preparing meals, and opening and reading post. Janice is Maureen's carer.

Gus visits his mum, Hanne, every day. She has severe depression. Gus provides emotional support, keeps her house clean and safe, and checks that she is taking her medication at the correct time. Gus is Hanne's carer.

Jasmina had a stroke last year, which has affected her mobility. She lives with her husband, Paul, who is deaf. Paul carries out tasks Jasmina is no longer able to do, such as preparing food, shopping and helping her to get dressed. Jasmina helps Paul to communicate, for example, by attending medical appointments with him and alerting him when the doorbell rings. Jasmina and Paul are carers for each other.

Irma finds it hard to stand for long periods of time and rarely leaves her house. Her neighbour, Sally, does some shopping for her once a week and regularly washes her bedding and clothes. She also visits her regularly for a chat, to make sure she gets some company. Irma's nephew, Adam, lives in a different part of the country. He visits when he can to help her with household chores and helps her to get to medical appointments. When Sally goes on holiday each year, Adam stays with his aunt for a longer period to help out. Sally and Adam are both carers for Irma.

## 2. What help you can get as a carer

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Caring can be very rewarding but also challenging. Many people are very happy to provide care to people they're close to, but could probably still benefit from support.

As a carer, you may find you need:

- **practical support** – with things such as housework, or shopping and preparing food for you and your family. You might want to take regular or occasional breaks from caring – so you can do things like attend your own medical appointments, see family and friends, or rest – but worry that you'll be leaving your partner, friend or relative without support
- **emotional support** – it's common to feel a mixture of emotions. While you may be happy to care for someone, at times you might also feel inadequate, frustrated, taken for granted, or guilty for feeling upset or resentful about the situation
- **financial support** – this may be due to the extra costs of being a carer, such as added petrol costs from driving the person you care for to appointments. Your income may also have dropped if you're unable to carry on working or have had to reduce your working hours since becoming a carer
- **information** – this could be information about what help is available to you or about how best to look after the person you care for.

It's important to recognise how you're feeling and any concerns you have. You may be entitled to help and support, and you shouldn't feel worried or unsure about asking for it.

In the rest of this factsheet, we'll look at the carer's assessment. This works out whether you qualify for help from your council as a carer. If you'd like to know more about other help available, such as from charities and local support groups, read our guide **Caring for someone**.

### 3. What is a carer's assessment?

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A carer's assessment is a free assessment of your needs as a carer that is carried out by your local council. It's a chance for you to talk about your caring responsibilities and how they affect you.

The council uses the carer's assessment to work out:

- whether you need support
- whether you're willing and able to carry on providing care
- the impact your caring role has on your wellbeing
- what you want to achieve in your day-to-day life
- whether you qualify for help from the council.

#### **Who can have a carer's assessment?**

You have a right to a carer's assessment if you:

- provide unpaid necessary care for someone that's not part of your job
- need any level of support or may need it in the future.

Necessary care is when you're helping someone to carry out activities of daily living and they couldn't do them without your help. It doesn't matter how much care you provide, whether it's practical or emotional support, or what your financial situation is – you are entitled to an assessment.

You don't necessarily have to ask for a carer's assessment to get one. If the council is assessing the needs of the person you care for, they may pick up on your need for support. If this hasn't happened, or the person you help hasn't had a care needs assessment, you should ask for a carer's assessment.



#### **Can I refuse to have a carer's assessment?**

Yes, you can. If you change your mind later on and request an assessment, the council will have to carry one out at that point.

## 4. How to get a carer's assessment

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To arrange an assessment, contact the adult social services department of your local council. If you live in a different area to the person you care for, you'll need to contact the local council for the area they live in. Their details should be in the phone book or search online at [gov.uk/find-local-council](https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council).

### Joint assessments

If the person you look after hasn't had a care needs assessment, this can be carried out at the same time. This will work out what their care needs are and whether they qualify for council help. Read our factsheet [First steps in getting help with your care needs](#) to find out more. Even if they don't qualify for any council help, you may still qualify for support as their carer.

You may prefer to have your assessment carried out separately to the assessment of the person you care for, so you can speak more openly, for example. You have the right to ask for this. A carer's assessment can be arranged:

- somewhere other than your home
- over the phone
- while the person you care for isn't there.



### Good to know

You have a right to a carer's assessment and services to meet your assessed needs, even if the person you help isn't getting council support or has refused a care needs assessment or services.



## Ways you can be assessed

Carer's assessments can be carried out face to face. But they may also take place over the phone or online.

The council might offer you a supported self-assessment, if you're able to do this. It involves completing a questionnaire and then discussing what you've written with someone from the council. If you're interested in this but it hasn't been offered to you, ask your council about it.

You can also refuse a self-assessment and request a face-to-face or phone assessment instead, if you want to – for example, if you're not sure how to explain what you do as a carer, it may be harder to fill out the questionnaire. You might find it easier to talk to an assessor directly instead. It's a good idea to get advice on supported self-assessments if you're not sure. Call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange to speak to an adviser.

## Waiting times for carer's assessments

Government guidance doesn't give exact timescales, but says that social services should complete an assessment within a reasonable time. How long you wait will depend on the urgency of your situation. The council should tell you how long they expect it to take and keep you informed throughout the process.

If you think you've been waiting too long for an assessment, it's best to ask the council for a timeframe first. You can also consider making a complaint to the council using their complaints procedure – see chapter 13.

If you need help urgently – for example, if the person you care for has become unwell and you can't cope on your own – emergency assessments can be arranged for you both. Tell the council if and why there's any particular urgency when you contact them to arrange an assessment. It's a good idea to do this in writing, if you can. In some urgent situations, your council may be able to arrange a temporary care package for the person you care for until an assessment can be arranged.

## 5. Getting help from an independent advocate

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An independent advocate is a trained person who can be involved in your carer's assessment. They can help you understand the process and express your views and wishes. They can also help you to challenge decisions.

The council must arrange an independent advocate for you, if you don't have anyone appropriate to help you and you have substantial difficulty with one of the following:

- understanding the relevant information
- remembering that information
- using the information to be involved in your assessment
- communicating your views, wishes and feelings.

This is so you can be properly involved throughout the carer's assessment process. You must also be provided with an advocate if the council prepares or revises a support plan for you – see chapter 12. If you think you need an advocate but your council tells you that nobody is available, call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange to speak to an adviser.

You have the right to decide who is an appropriate person to help you, if you have the mental capacity to make that decision. If the council suggests a friend or relative is able to help, but you disagree, you're entitled to get a council-arranged independent advocate instead.



### **What is mental capacity?**

Mental capacity is the ability to make and communicate your own decisions when they need to be made. You might lose this because of an illness such as dementia, or if you were unconscious, for example. You may have mental capacity at some times, but not at others.

If you don't qualify for an advocate through the council, you can still arrange to have an advocate involved if you want to, and if advocacy services are available locally. You can contact advocacy services directly. There may be a cost if you're arranging one yourself, so you should always get advice and check whether you're eligible for a council-funded advocate first.

To find out more about advocacy, read our factsheet **Independent advocacy**.

**To do**

Ask the council for details of local advocacy services. You can also search for one online on the Older People's Advocacy Alliance ([opaal.org.uk](https://opaal.org.uk)).

## 6. Preparing for your carer's assessment

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The council should provide you with information in advance to explain what will happen at the assessment. This should include a list of questions that will be covered.

### Things to consider

It's easy to downplay your needs or feel you shouldn't complain. This is usually just the nature of caring for someone. We may feel that the care we give is a normal part of our lives and may not describe it as a caring role. But, it's important to get support if you need it, and an assessment is your chance to talk about that. If you don't mention something important, you risk not getting the help you need.

You may want to think about how being a carer affects you, what might help and whether you want to carry on providing all the care you've been providing – for example:

- are you getting enough sleep or is it disturbed by your caring role?
- is your health affected? If so, how?
- are you able to go out without worrying about the safety of the person you care for?
- are your other relationships being affected?
- do you need information about what support and benefits are available?
- is your caring role affecting your job, if you work?
- would any equipment benefit the person you care for and help you care for them more safely?
- do you need any training, say, in first aid or in moving and handling the person you care for?
- do you want to spend less time in your caring role? You may wish to go back to work or attend a course or just have more time to yourself, for example.

A good tip is to keep a diary for one or two weeks. Write down everything you do to help the person you care for – including daytime and night-time help. You can show your diary to the assessor and ask them to take a copy of it. You can also just use it to jog your memory, so you don't forget to mention anything during your assessment.

**To do**

Don't forget to tell the council about any communication needs you have, so that adjustments can be made for you at your assessment, such as providing an interpreter or information in large print.

## 7. What happens at the assessment

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A carer's assessment must look at:

- your needs for support as a carer
- whether you're willing and able to continue providing the same level of care
- what you want to be able to achieve in your day-to-day life (known as 'outcomes' – see page 15) and whether your caring responsibilities are having any impact on this
- the impact that caring has on your wellbeing
- whether your caring role is sustainable and any possible needs you may have in the future.

The assessment must consider that the amount of care you provide and the impact this has on you might not always be the same – for example, the condition of the person you are caring for may get worse at certain times. Your need for support may have to be considered over a period of time to take changing needs into account.

The person carrying out the assessment must have the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake the assessment.

### **Looking at your need for support**

One of the aims of the assessment is to work out whether you can achieve certain outcomes, as described in the table that follows.

The outcomes	Examples of what this means
<b>Carrying out any caring responsibilities the carer has for a child</b>	Any responsibilities you might have for a child, which could include finding the time to look after a grandchild, if you're responsible for doing this when their parents are unavailable
<b>Providing care to other persons for whom the carer provides care</b>	Being able to look after an adult with care needs, such as an adult child or a husband or wife with care needs
<b>Maintaining a habitable home environment in the carer's home</b>	Keeping your home clean and safe; being able to pay the bills
<b>Managing and maintaining nutrition</b>	Having the time to shop and prepare meals for yourself
<b>Developing and maintaining family or other personal relationships</b>	Having enough contact with other people, including maintaining current relationships with family and friends, and developing new ones, if you don't have the personal relationships you want
<b>Engaging in work, training, education or volunteering</b>	Being able to continue a career or apply for a new job, volunteer, continue your education or undertake any training you want to
<b>Making use of necessary facilities or services in the local community, including recreational facilities or services</b>	Having the opportunity to use services such as local shops, public transport and leisure facilities
<b>Engaging in recreational activities</b>	Finding time to do things you enjoy, such as going on holiday or pursuing a hobby

You may find that your council interprets these outcomes quite narrowly. You may have to put your case forward strongly if you feel they're underestimating your difficulties, or not including something you have difficulty with. It's okay to ask in the assessment whether they have written down everything you have said.

### **Looking at your wellbeing**

The assessor must also consider and discuss the impact that being unable to achieve any of the outcomes listed in the table has on your wellbeing. See chapter 8 for an explanation of what wellbeing means in a carer's assessment.

You'll usually be the best judge of your own wellbeing and need for support, and the council must take this into account. If being able to continue doing something or doing it in a particular way is important to you, make sure you tell the assessor.



## 8. How the council works out if you qualify for support

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The council uses national eligibility criteria to work out whether or not you qualify for council support.

You will qualify for support if your carer's assessment shows that the answer to all three of the following questions is 'yes'.

- Are your needs a result of caring for another adult who needs your help?
- Because of these needs, is your physical or mental health deteriorating (getting worse) or at risk of deteriorating, or are there any of the outcomes described in chapter 7 that you're unable to achieve?
- Is this having, or is it likely to have, a significant impact on your wellbeing?



### Good to know

The assessor must look at all the outcomes and each one is equally important – for example, an assessor can't just look at whether you're able to eat well and keep your home habitable.

You'll be seen as being unable to achieve these outcomes if:

- you can't do them without help, or
- doing them without help would cause you a lot of pain, distress or anxiety, or
- doing them without help puts your, or other people's, health or safety at risk.

## What 'a significant impact on your wellbeing' means

To get council support, it's not enough to show that you need support and are unable to do certain things because of your caring role. You must also show that this has a significant impact on your wellbeing. But what does this mean?

Wellbeing covers a lot of different areas, including your:

- personal relationships
- physical and mental health, and emotional wellbeing
- safety, and protection from abuse or neglect
- financial wellbeing
- housing situation
- control over your daily life
- participation in work, education, training or leisure activities
- ability to contribute to society
- dignity.

If your caring role could have a big effect on at least one of these areas of wellbeing, then this could be considered a significant impact. Or, if your role has a small effect on several of these areas of wellbeing, this could add up to a significant impact overall.

Using this as a basis, councils have to make their own overall judgment on whether your caring role has a significant impact on your wellbeing. This is personal to you and the impact may be different for people who are in similar circumstances. When they're making this decision, the council should consider what is most important to you for what you want and need to achieve in life. Read chapter 13 for information on what to do if you don't agree with the council's decision.

### **An example of someone who may not qualify**

Pieter cares for his sister. This leaves him with little time for leisure activities. However, he describes himself as satisfied with the amount of time he has for himself. Friends and family visit regularly, which gives Pieter the company he wants. He also says that he's able and willing to carry on caring for his sister in this way. The council might decide that Pieter's caring needs don't have a significant impact on his wellbeing because, although his caring role takes up most of his time, he is happy with the amount of leisure time he has.

### **An example of someone who may qualify**

Jane struggles to find time to exercise because she cares for both her parents. She really enjoys swimming, and this also greatly eases the pain she suffers in her joints. For Jane, not having the time to exercise could be seen as having a significant impact on her physical wellbeing as well as her emotional wellbeing. This might not be the case for someone in very good health, or who does not enjoy exercising.

## 9. After your carer's assessment

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After your assessment, the council must give you a written record of the assessment – ask if you don't get one. Check that it's accurate and that everything relevant has been taken into account. You should also be given a copy of the decision about whether you qualify for support.

### If you don't qualify for support

If you don't qualify for support from the council, they must provide information and advice about what can be done to meet or reduce your needs and to stop you developing new support needs in the future. The advice should be personalised and specific.

If you disagree with the council's decision, you might want to challenge it or make a complaint – for example, you might think the assessment isn't an accurate record of your needs. There's usually a time limit to challenging a decision, so you should get advice straightaway. For more information, read our factsheet [Complaints about care and health services](#) or call our Helpline (**0800 319 6789**) to arrange to speak to an adviser.



### Remember

If you don't qualify for support from the council, it doesn't mean you're not a carer. Other support may be available to you. Read our guide [Caring for someone](#) to find out more.

### If you do qualify for support

If you qualify for help, the council might provide care and support to the person you care for, or provide you with support directly. This will be discussed with you, and with the person you care for, if necessary.

See chapter 12 for more information on what support services might be available to you.

You may be charged for support services – see chapter 10.

## 10. What you might pay for support services

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You may be charged for support services. If you qualify for support from the council, you'll be given a financial assessment to work out what you can afford to pay based on your income and savings. However, councils are advised not to charge carers for support provided to them to recognise the valuable role that carers play in society. Any charges should not have a negative impact on your ability to look after yourself and the person you care for.

The council must not charge you for care and support provided to the person you care for. You can only be charged for support provided directly to you. For example, if the person you care for agrees to have replacement care to give you a break, you should not pay for this. The person you care for may be charged though – they would be given a financial assessment to work out how much they should pay. Read our factsheets [Getting a financial assessment for care at home](#) or [Paying care home fees](#) to find out about how they might be charged.

### **Arranging your care**

If the council has decided not to charge you for support, or your financial assessment shows the council will pay something towards your care costs, they must work with you to create a support plan (see chapter 12) showing how your needs should be met.

You can also ask the council to arrange your support services, even if you'll be paying for them all yourself (self-funding). However, they may charge you for arranging this help.

## 11. Personal budgets and direct payments

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### Personal budgets

If you qualify for support and the council is paying for some or all of it, they must prepare a support plan with you to show how your needs are going to be met (see chapter 12). Part of this includes setting a personal budget. This is the amount of money that the council calculates will meet your assessed support needs, as set out in your support plan. It is the total of:

- any amount that the financial assessment found you would have to pay towards your support (if the council charges carers for support services)
- any amount that the council must pay towards your support as a carer.

Everyone who qualifies for financial help from the council has a right to be told what their personal budget is.

### What the council must do

The council must:

- be clear about how they calculated your personal budget
- make sure the budget is high enough to meet your assessed support needs
- consider the local cost of the type of services you need
- tell you what your estimated personal budget is at the start of the support-planning process, so that you can start planning your support knowing how much money is likely to be available
- increase your personal budget if it becomes clear that the amount in the estimated budget isn't enough to meet your needs.

If your support will be provided through a service to the person you care for (such as replacement care to give you a break from caring), this must be included in the personal budget of the person you care for, not yours.

The council must involve you in deciding how your personal budget is spent. For example, if your support plan says you need support to take part in activities you enjoy, you should have a say in what you use that money for.



### Good to know

You must be given a copy of your personal budget – ask if you don't get one.

## Direct payments

If the council is going to contribute to your personal budget, you can choose to receive their part as a direct payment. This means you'd receive money from them to buy services yourself, rather than receiving services from or arranged by the council.

Direct payments can give you more choice and control over your support. You can arrange it in ways that you feel are best to meet your eligible needs – for example, you could directly employ someone to provide services, which might give you more flexibility over when you get support. Your council may also fund a local scheme that provides support for people using direct payments – ask them about the options in your area.

You can't use your direct payment to buy services to meet the needs of the person you care for. The money must only be used to meet your own needs.

You should get advice on whether or not it's the best option for you. Even if you decide to make arrangements yourself, you should still be given information and advice about the local services that can help to meet your needs.

Read our factsheet **Social care: ways to use your personal budget** for more information. Call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange to speak to an adviser.

## 12. Your support plan

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If the council is arranging support services for you, or paying you a direct payment so you can do so yourself, they must develop a written support plan with you. This sets out how your needs will be met.

You must be fully involved in putting this plan together. The council must also involve the person you're caring for, if you wish, and anyone else you ask to be involved. You may be entitled to help from an independent advocate while the plan is being written or reviewed (see chapter 5).

### What should be in your plan

The support plan must always cover:

- what your needs are
- which of your needs qualify for support (eligible needs)
- which needs will be met by the council and how
- how the support services will help you achieve what you want to in your day-to-day life (your outcomes) and help your wellbeing
- what your personal budget is
- how to prevent or delay your needs from getting any worse – for example, details of how to arrange respite care
- whether any of your needs will be met by a direct payment (see chapter 11), how much the direct payment is and how often it will be paid to you.

### Agreeing your plan

The council must do what they can to agree your final support plan with you. You have the right to receive a copy of it – ask for it if you don't get one.

If you don't think your support plan fully meets your needs, raise any concerns with the assessor. You may want to add more information or suggest a change.





### Good to know

If a care and support plan is also being developed for the person you care for, the council shouldn't create the two plans in isolation. They should consider combining the plans, if appropriate – and if you both agree.

## Putting together your support plan

The council must provide information about the services available in your local area, including (where possible) how much they cost. Councils are not limited to meeting your needs in set ways. The types of services suggested will depend on your needs, but might include:

- practical help with things like housework or gardening
- advice about benefits
- emotional support, such as counselling and help to relieve stress
- support to improve your wellbeing and take part in leisure activities, such as gym membership or classes
- training to feel more confident in your caring role, such as moving and handling training
- emotional support from other carers, such as attending a local carers group
- breaks from caring.

If your support plan is not meeting your assessed support needs, contact your council as soon as possible. They must sort out the problem. This may include carrying out a review or taking urgent action if necessary.



### To do

Read our guide [Caring for someone](#) to find out what other support might be available, such as financial support from Carer's Allowance or help from charities.

## 13. What you can do if something goes wrong

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Sometimes, problems can be sorted out by talking to your social worker or their manager. But, if this doesn't work, you have other options.

There are two main ways of trying to resolve disagreements:

- making a complaint
- using a solicitor to pursue a legal case.

You must make a complaint within 12 months of the problem occurring or of you becoming aware of it, although it's usually better to start as soon as possible. Councils must then respond within a certain timeframe, which is set out in their complaints policy. If you're unhappy with the outcome of your complaint, you may be able to take it to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (**0300 061 0614**, [lgo.org.uk](http://lgo.org.uk)).

If you decide to pursue a legal case, the time limit is much shorter. If it becomes necessary to start court proceedings, you're likely to need a judicial review. Judicial reviews must be started within three months of the date when there were first grounds for a legal challenge. There's usually a cost to pursuing a legal case – but, you may qualify for legal aid to help towards legal costs, depending on your circumstances. If you want specialist legal advice, you'll need to look for a community care solicitor.

For more information on making complaints or pursuing legal cases, read our factsheet **Complaints about care and health services**.



### Remember

It's important not to miss any deadlines, especially if you're considering legal action. If you want to complain, it may be best to consider doing this at the same time as getting legal advice so you don't miss the deadlines. For more advice, call our Helpline (**0800 319 6789**) to arrange to speak to an adviser.

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## Thank you

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