

In 2009 we published an article entitled '**12 Steps** to help you stay in control of your money'. Sadly, we are again facing a cost-of-living crisis and we are very conscious that many of our Members may struggle with energy, food and other living costs as prices continue to spiral. There is help out there, so we are publishing our new **12** step guide to help you stay in control. You can find this with the links on our website: www.pluscu.co.uk/managing-the-cost-of-living



1: Don't panic

Take some time to understand your finances and if you have a partner, do this together. Don't let money be a taboo subject. A problem shared is a problem halved.

2: Review what you spend

Have an honest conversation with yourself on what you spend - is it necessary and are you getting the best deal? Millions are spent every year on subscriptions that aren't used or needed. 16 million people in the UK are out of contract on their mobile and broadband and could get a cheaper deal. Could you get your insurance at a lower cost? Do you need to buy that 'Brand'? There are many comparison websites on line to help including: [Compare the Market](#), [Confused.com](#), [GoCompare](#), [MoneySuperMarket](#), [MySupermarketCompare](#), [PriceSpy](#) etc.

3: Create a Budget

Managing your money and making ends meet, whatever your income, takes careful organisation. The first step to taking control of things is to work out your living costs and knowing what is coming in and out and when. Making a budget gives you a clear picture of where your money goes and shows where you might have a chance to save. There are lots of free budget planners on-line but you are welcome to use ours: www.pluscu.co.uk/budget-planner or come into one of our branches and we will try to help.

4: Are you getting the Benefits you are entitled to?

Billions of Pounds of benefits and tax credits remain unclaimed in the UK each year. According to research by our partner InBest, up to 70% of credit union loan applicants are missing out on an average of £465 per month in unclaimed benefits. Use our Benefits Calculator to find out what you could claim. By entering a few details about your situation, you'll get a free and impartial assessment of all the benefits and tax credits you are entitled to and what you have to do to claim them. www.pluscu.co.uk/benefits-calculator

5: Managing higher electricity and gas bills

The Government will give every household £400 off their electricity bill. This is called the Energy Bills Support Scheme. You don't need to do anything to get the money and you won't have to pay it back. The £400 will be automatically added to your energy account over 6 months starting from October 2022. If you have a prepayment meter, the £400 will be added to your meter or you'll be given vouchers. For more information about the energy crisis please see our website: www.pluscu.co.uk/managing-the-cost-of-living

Vulnerable energy consumers can get free advice from Energy Champions funded by Citizen's Advice. They help people by helping with switching, signing up for Warm Home Discount (saving up to £140), signing up for the Priority Services Register and taking measures to make their homes more energy efficient. In our area, Upper Norwood Library Hub are offering free 1:1 telephone or online advice sessions for individuals or online/face-to-face group sessions. To take part email BESN@unlt.org or call 020 8670 4321. Or look at the webpage: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/our-work/our-prevention-work/BESN

6: Choosing between eating and heating?

Our local Councils have just got a share of the Government's Household Support Fund to help provide support to people with essential costs. To see if you are eligible, look at Lewisham's webpage: www.lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/benefits/the-household-fund or Bromley's webpage: www.bromley.gov.uk/householdsupportfund

7: Does your child qualify for free school meals or help with school uniforms costs?

If you're on means-tested benefits and on a low income, your child may qualify for free school meals. Check the Government website www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals. Free school meals are part of something called 'pupil premium'. As well as providing free school meals, pupil premium provides extra funding of up to £1,350 to your child's school. The school can then use this funding to support your child's education through extra tuition, teaching staff or after-school activities, so speak to your school or council to see if you can get further help. You could get as much as £200 a year towards the cost of your child's school uniform. Check here: www.gov.uk/help-school-clothing-costs

8: Are you getting all the childcare costs you can?

There are many schemes offering help with childcare costs. Visit Martin Lewis's brilliant site: www.moneysavingexpert.com/family/childcare-costs

9: Council tax rebate!

20 million households in England in council tax bands A to D will get a £150 rebate on their council tax to help with the soaring cost of energy. If you pay your council tax by direct debit, the £150 should be paid into your bank account. If not, you'll be notified about how to claim it. You can ask your bank to use this £150 rebate to pay your energy bills instead of paying off your overdraft. This is known as 'exercising your first right of appropriation'. You can check how to exercise your first right of appropriation on National Debtline here: www.nationaldebtline.org/sample-letters/ask-your-bank-pay-particular-bills

10: Drive down the cost of Fuel

The price of petrol and diesel are at record highs. Use this cheap fuel finder tool to help www.petrolprices.com. You can also check out how to drive more efficiently here www.moneysavingexpert.com/reclaim/cheaper-fuel

11: Making food go further

Take a look at the 'Too Good To Go' App in the Apple or Android stores. 9 million people are now using this to find good quality foods from local businesses at low cost. The following websites are examples of those offering hints and tips on how to make great meals on a budget www.bbc.co.uk/food/collections/1_dinners, www.taste.com.au/recipes/collections/top-50-budget-meals. However If you're struggling to afford food, there are places that can help. You can and SHOULD use them – don't let pride get in the way. Foodbanks give out free parcels that should provide at least three days' worth of in-date, non-perishable food. Two-and-a-half million were given away last year – and there's no shame in it: www.lewisham.foodbank.org.uk and www.bromleyborough.foodbank.org.uk

12: In Debt and need help?

If you are experiencing financial difficulties, try not to worry - you are not alone and there is help out there. Take responsibility for your situation and any debt you may have. Ignoring the problem will only make it worse. Contact the organisations you owe money to and let them know you are having problems. They may be able to discuss options for paying back. Think carefully about borrowing money to repay debts. Sometimes consolidating debt can help make the repayments more manageable, but get advice and especially before borrowing against your home, and avoid payday and door step lenders if you can. For further help, please contact www.citizensadvice.org.uk (Adviceline (England): 0800 144 8848) or www.stepchange.org (Adviceline 0800 138 1111) or see www.pluscu.co.uk/in-debt-need-help. Eight out of ten (79%) people in financial difficulty who used debt advice would recommend it and 70% said it had been more helpful than they had anticipated.