

Managing your Bills

We all need a system for managing and paying bills. But it should be one that suits our own needs and helps us stay in control of our finances.

A pile of bills gathering in a drawer can stress you out. And unpaid bills will cost you more if you have to pay late-payment fees or if you lose track of what has been paid.

This factsheet will help you create a system that works for you. It provides information on how to manage and pay your bills. It also includes an Action Plan to help you plan what you need to do and when to do it. A system will work better if it is based on realistic budgeting. If you need help making a household budget, go to the MABS website, www.mabs.ie and use our handy Budgeting Tool or request a 'Guide to Budgeting' leaflet.

Step one – Organise your bills

- Collect all of your bills and keep them together in one place. A good way of sorting and storing bills is to use an accordion file, which you can buy from a stationers. If you pay most of your bills online, you can use an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of them. Some people also keep track of their bills by using large envelopes, with the name of the utility company or creditor written on each envelope. The only downside to this method is that the bill isn't visible and you could forget about it.
- When a bill comes in, check the payment date to see how urgent it is – the payment date will usually be clearly marked. You may also be warned of what the penalty is for late payment.
- Decide on a schedule to pay your bills so that the costs are evenly spread out. If possible, avoid paying a number of bills at the same time, as this could leave you short of money for that week or month.
- Ask about changing a bill's due date if it would be easier for you to pay at a different time of the month. Contact the service provider directly to discuss your options.
- MABS has a 'Helping Hand at Home Planner'. This calendar helps a family plan it's weekly and monthly expenditure by identifying when each bill needs to be paid. You put stickers on the calendar to show when the bills are due. Contact MABS for your free copy.

Many of the banking services described overleaf charge fees. Ask your bank if you're eligible for free banking. If you are eligible, it will mean you will pay no transaction charges, and this will reduce the cost of paying your bills. If you want to open a bank account consider opening a basic bank account which has no transaction charges or maintenance fees for at least 12 months and will reduce the cost of paying your bills.

If you are running short on cash, there are a number of ways you can help yourself. Here are some ideas: Prioritise your bills. If your budget is tight, cut out any non-essential items or unnecessary expenses.

- Shop around for the best deals, but check whether the deal really is a good one or just a marketing gimmick.
- Remember: a bargain is only a bargain if you need the item.
- Grocery shopping can be a significant cost in many households. Try to reduce grocery bills by buying supermarket-own brands, shopping in discount stores or using coupons wherever possible.
- Think about shopping around for services as well as for goods. There are lots of good comparison websites that help you compare the cost of services from different suppliers.
- Talk to your creditors to re-negotiate credit terms or spread out bill payments.
- If you are receiving a social welfare payment, consider using the Household Budget Scheme to help organise the payment of your bills.
- Check if you are eligible for tax and social welfare supports that help employees on low pay. For instance, the Family Income Supplement is a weekly tax-free payment available to employees with children. Details of this and other supports are available from your local social welfare office or online at www.welfare.ie or www.citizensinformation.ie.
- If you are in debt on your gas or electricity bill and at risk of being disconnected, talk to your service provider about getting a pre-pay meter.
- Contact the MABS Helpline on **0761 07 2000** (Monday to Friday, 9am–8pm) for help or guidance on what to do next. If you need help with budgeting or are struggling with repayments.



The Money Advice and Budgeting Service has helpful information, budget sheets and sample letters available online at www.mabs.ie. Advice and information is also available by calling the MABS Helpline 0761 07 2000 (Monday – Friday 9.00 am to 8.00 pm.) and from over 60 offices nationwide.

Disclaimer

Every effort is made to ensure that the information in this publication is accurate. However, no responsibility is accepted by MABS National Development Limited, its funders or the MABS for any errors, omissions or misleading statements on these pages. The information is of a condensed and general nature only and can change from time to time. Readers should, therefore, verify any information on which they rely by contacting the MABS Helpline 0761 07 2000.

