



Your guide to home maintenance

Your guide to home maintenance is a series of information leaflets that gives you all the information you need to keep your home in tiptop condition.



How to pay for works of repair or improvement

If you own your own home and you need to carry out repairs or improvements, financing the works is probably your biggest obstacle. You need to look at your funding options carefully before you organise any works, and remember, don't leave it until the last minute. Plan ahead to allow for you to either save for the improvements long term or to organise funding from elsewhere. Probably the easiest way of paying for the work is from your own savings. If you do not have enough savings for the work you require there are several other options available.

Have the work done in stages

Split the work into stages and carry it out when you can afford it. Your builder may revise his quote(s) as time passes.

Borrow the amount required

Before deciding to borrow money it's important to work out whether you'll be able to repay it in the future. If you find that your spending exceeds or is close to your income already, think very carefully about whether you really can afford to borrow more. Also bear in mind that paying back loans and credit cards may become a problem if, for example, interest rates go up or you lose your job.

Banks, building societies and other financial institutions offer:

■ Home Improvement loans

These are added onto your mortgage enabling you to secure a far better repayment interest than an ordinary repayment loan. Contact your mortgage lender for details of their scheme.

■ Re-mortgage or equity release

If your house is paid for, you may be able to take out a loan or equity release on the property.

■ Secured loans

Money is secured against your property or another suitable asset. Interest rates are usually lower than for an unsecured personal loan. With a secured loan, the lender has the right to force the sale of the asset against which the loan is secured if you fail to keep up the repayments.

The most common form of secured loan is called a 'further advance' and is made against your home by borrowing extra on your mortgage (your mortgage is itself a secured loan). Because secured loans are less risky for the lender they are usually cheaper than unsecured loans.

Secured loans are mostly suitable for borrowing large amounts of money over the longer term, for example for home improvements.

■ Personal loans

Money is not secure and interest rates tend to be higher. They are best where only a small sum is required.

An unsecured loan means the lender relies on your promise to pay it back. They're taking a bigger risk than with a secured loan, so interest rates for unsecured loans tend to be higher.

You normally have set payments over an agreed period and penalties may apply if you want to repay the loan early. Unsecured loans are often more expensive and less flexible than secured loans, but suitable if you want a short-term loan (one to five years).

■ Overdraft

This can be a relatively cheap solution if you need to spread the costs over several months.

Overdrafts are like a 'safety net' on your current account; they allow you to borrow up to a certain limit when there's no money in your account and can be useful to cover short term cash flow problems.

Overdrafts offer more flexible borrowing than taking out a loan because you can repay them when it suits you, but they're not usually suitable for borrowing large amounts over a long period as the interest rate is generally higher than with a personal loan. You need a bank account in order to have an overdraft.

The council would recommend that you consult an Independent Financial Advisor to find the best deal for you.

You can obtain general information from the Financial Services Authority (FSA) the UK's financial watchdog. The FSA produces a series of guides "Money Made Clear" which give you facts about financial products and services to help you make an informed decision. These guides are available from the FSA helpline or website www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk.

On the Money Made Clear website you can access:

- a budget calculator to help you to work out how much money you have available each month.
- product comparison tables to help you compare products
- information on bank accounts and other financial services

Discretionary Social Fund

Budgeting loans are available from the Social Fund for people who have been on certain benefits such as Income Support for 26 weeks or longer. These loans are to meet intermittent expenses for specific items which may be difficult to budget for. These may cover improvement, maintenance and security of the home.

Welfare Benefits

You may be entitled to a variety of benefits that could boost your income and help pay towards repairs. To check whether you would be entitled to this extra income contact your local Benefits Agency Office or look on website www.direct.gov.uk for the on-line benefits advisor.

Credit Unions

Credit unions are mutual financial organisations which are owned and run by their members for their members. Members have a common bond, such as living in the same area, a common workplace, membership of a housing association or similar. Credit unions are non-profit making savings and loan co-operatives, who charge lower rates for consumer loans.

You can apply for a loan after you have been saving with them for at least three months. Once you've established a record as a reliable saver they will also lend you money based on what you can afford to repay.

The FSA produces a "Money Made Clear" guide "Just the facts about credit unions" which gives you facts about Credit Unions which is available from the FSA helpline or website www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk.

In the Gateshead area there are two local credit unions:

Gateshead First Credit Union Ltd

St Joseph's Emmaus Centre
Walker Terrace, Gateshead, NE8 1EB
Email:
office@gatesheadfirstcu.freemove.co.uk

Available for any one who lives or works in the Gateshead area.
Employees of Gateshead Council, Gateshead Hospital Trusts or Primary Care Trust can pay into the scheme by payroll deduction.

Cestria Credit Union

Birtley Town Council Offices, Durham
Road, Birtley DH3 2TB
Telephone: 0191 492 2777, Email:
cestria@creditunion.eclipse.co.uk

Available for any one who lives or works in the Birtley and Kibblesworth areas of Gateshead (this credit union also covers Ouston and Chester-le-Street areas)

Insurance

If the work is as a result of an accident or subsidence, you can claim costs from your building insurance. Make sure you know what you are insured against, it should be set out in your policy and can include storm damage, flood damage, falling trees, subsidence, burglaries, vandalism, leaks accidental breakages or damage to fittings.

If your house suffers damage that can be rectified by your insurers, make notes as soon as you can. Make a record of how and when the damage occurred and, what the weather conditions were at the time.

If criminals, such as a burglar, caused the damage you must report the matter to the police and get a crime number to give to your insurance company. If the damage was caused by a third party, such as a car crashing into your house, you must get that person's insurance details.

Take photos of the damage. It is a good idea to take photographs of your house and contents before there is a problem. You can then show your insurers what the house or goods were like before you needed to make a claim.

Contact your insurance company and tell them what has happened. They will either send you a claim form or send an assessor to visit you and see the damage. Your insurers will tell you what to do next. You may have to obtain quotes or simply get the job done and send them the invoice or receipt.

Energy Efficiency Grants

Residents can access help with home insulation and heating system improvements. To find out more contact either: Gateshead WarmZone, which is a partnership between Gateshead Council, Gateshead Housing Company, Scottish Power, and National Grid Transco that aims to improve energy efficiency across all households within Gateshead. This is a five-year scheme that will cover all housing within the Borough on an electoral ward-by-ward basis. You can obtain further information from:

Gateshead WarmZone

1st Floor
Swinburne House
Swinburne Street
Gateshead
NE8 1AX
Telephone: 0191 477 1919



The Warm Front Team, which is a government-funded scheme that provides grants to make homes warmer, healthier and more energy efficient. These grants are available to householders who are 60 years or over, or to families on low incomes who have children less than 16 years of age. New heating systems may be available to people over 60 who are claiming certain benefits. You can obtain further information from:

Warm Front Team

Freephone 0800 316 2814
Minicom 0800 072 0156
Website www.wfteam.co.uk

Homeowners can obtain assistance for using sustainable energy technology from The Low Carbon Building Programme which is an initiative by the Department of Trade and Industry, managed by the Energy Savings Trust. The programme provides grants to homeowners for micro generation technologies such as solar hot water panels, wind micro turbines and so on. You can obtain information from:

The Low Carbon Building Programme

Tel: 0800 915 7722

Website:

www.lowcarbonbuildings.org.uk

Anchor NewcastleGateshead Staying Put Agency

This agency offers the HomeSure Service that helps elderly people with repairs and maintenance to their house. They can do many of the tasks involved in specifying works, finding builders and they may also be able to find different ways for you to fund the work such as loans or grants from a variety of sources. They will charge a service fee so the overall cost will be higher. You can contact the HomeSure Service:

Anchor NewcastleGateshead Staying Put Agency,

Metropolitan House
Longrigg Road, Swalwell
Gateshead
NE16 3AS
Tel: (0191) 495 6177

Council Assistance

The Council can offer advice on what repairs are required to bring your home to the Decent Home Standard. There is a series of Home Maintenance leaflets that give you advice about certain types of repairs.

If your home falls below the Decent Home Standard and you are unable to access a high street loan, then you may be eligible for financial assistance from the Council towards the cost of the work, either in the form of loans or grants. To be eligible for assistance you must have owned and lived in your home for 3 years or more and your home falls within council tax bands A, B or C.

The full range of advice, leaflets, loans and grants available are found on the Council's website www.gateshead.gov.uk or you can telephone the Home Improvement Team on 0191 433 3000 for details.

Charities and other organisations

There are a variety of charities and other organisations that may be able to provide assistance although specific groups of people are more likely to benefit than others. These organisations include ex-service charities, trade unions, ex-employees associations or self-help or special interest groups.

Remember

Don't forget the dangers to you and others when you tackle those D-I-Y jobs. In carrying out any repair works there are always risks, make sure you minimise them by taking a few simple precautions. Always use the right protective gear for the job. Always follow manufacturers' instructions.

Don't turn your
D.I.Y. into D.Y.I.
- Doing
Yourself Injury!

For further advice and
guidance on home
maintenance contact
Gateshead Council's Home
Improvement Team on
0191 433 7007

Notes



This information is available on request in Braille, audiotape/cd or large print or in a different language. Please contact the Home Improvement Team on 0191 433 7007.