

## Council Tax Protocol Signed!

In our last newsletter we reported that it would be another few months before Rother District Council would be in a position to sign the Citizens Advice Council Tax Protocol. This was mainly due to concerns about the impact of Breathing Space (see below) on Council Tax debt.

It was subsequently agreed that there would be no conflict and it is now signed!

The Citizens Advice Council Tax Protocol was developed in partnership with the Local Government Association and offers practical steps to prevent people from getting into debt. We look forward to continuing to work with the Council to help people to pay their council tax bills while accessing debt advice when needed.

A short summary of the protocol is available on the Citizens Advice website at

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/campaigns/Council%20Tax/CTP%20infographic%20October%202018.pdf](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/campaigns/Council%20Tax/CTP%20infographic%20October%202018.pdf)

The full protocol is at

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/campaigns/Council%20Tax/Citizens%20Advice%20Council%20Tax%20Protocol%202017.pdf](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/campaigns/Council%20Tax/Citizens%20Advice%20Council%20Tax%20Protocol%202017.pdf)

## Insecure workers face “triple hit” of pandemic hardship, says Citizens Advice

With the number of people on zero-hour contracts at an all time high of 1 million, Citizens Advice has warned of an unfolding workers' rights crisis.

New research from Citizens Advice found agency workers and those on zero-hours contracts, including “gig economy” workers, were more likely to have seen their employment rights violated, faced job losses and lost income during the pandemic compared to the rest of the working population.

More than half (52%) of insecure workers classed themselves as key workers. Compared to the rest of the working population insecure workers were on average:

Four times more likely to have faced losing their job

Three times more likely to have been made to work while ill and to have not been paid wages they were owed

One and half times more likely to have lost income, with those who had lost income averaging a loss of £1,000 a month since March

CA advisers have seen worrying examples of potential employment rights violations. These include an agency worker who was told to ‘self isolate’ and sent home without pay from her factory job after she told management staff she was pregnant, and an agency worker who was denied sick pay they were entitled to after testing positive for Covid.

Citizens Advice warns many insecure workers are struggling to understand their rights or defend them due to a complex and patchwork system for employment enforcement.

## Breathing Space

Following campaigning from the debt advice sector, including Citizens Advice, the new Breathing Space scheme will go live on 4 May 2021.

The 60-day breathing space period will see enforcement action from creditors halted and interest frozen for people with problem debt. During this period, individuals will receive professional debt advice to find a long-term solution to their financial difficulties. Those people receiving mental health crisis treatment will receive the same protections until their treatment is complete. For more information see:

[www.gov.uk/government/news/breathing-space-to-help-millions-in-debt](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/breathing-space-to-help-millions-in-debt)

# Fairness at Work

Citizens Advice is asking the Government to take urgent action to ensure that workers are treated fairly and safely during this unprecedented crisis.

## Why things need to change

We are facing the worst jobs crisis for a generation. **New Citizens Advice research shows 1 in 6 (17%) are facing redundancy.** Businesses are having to make difficult decisions about people's jobs to stay afloat. Most employers want to do the right thing, even in these difficult times. But a picture is emerging in our data that many are not.

One area is of particular concern: discrimination. Our evidence suggests a danger of unfair and discriminatory practices by employers when selecting people for redundancy.

Parents, carers, disabled people and those who previously shielded are at least twice as likely to face redundancy as the rest of the working population. Our polling showed that:

1 in 4 disabled people (27%) were facing redundancy

Half of those who were in the shielded group (48%), as they were extremely clinically vulnerable to coronavirus, were at risk of redundancy

2 in 5 parents or carers (39%) faced losing their job

There are 6 national organisations which enforce workers' rights, but employees who have been unfairly sacked or treated often don't know where to turn, or can't guarantee their situation will be investigated. While they could take their issue to an employment tribunal, there was already a backlog of 400,000 cases going into this crisis.

**Without urgent government action, the jobs crisis risks being faced unequally. This will affect people who have historically faced higher barriers in finding suitable work.**

## What we're doing

The government has rightly recognised that the enforcement system in the UK is in need of reform. Last year, it committed to addressing this urgent problem by establishing a Single Enforcement Body for employment rights.

We're asking the Government to:

- Put emergency funding into existing enforcement bodies, to ensure people are treated fairly and safely by employers during this unprecedented crisis.
- Fast-track its plan for setting up a Single Enforcement Body. People need a single point of access where they can go and expect to have their rights enforced.

## Keeping up to date on the Covid-19 pandemic

Regulations, recommendations and advice on the pandemic are moving too fast to be covered definitively in a quarterly newsletter. Always ensure you have the most up to date information from the CA website and Gov.uk.

## Half a million renters in arrears as evictions set to resume

**In December, Citizens Advice helped someone every two minutes with an issue to do with their privately rented housing**

**Average amount owed on rent is over £700, with one in four private renters in arrears having been threatened with eviction or cancellation of contract by their landlord**

Half a million private renters in the UK are behind on their rent, with protections against eviction due to expire. This comes as the country enters another period of national lockdown, causing further economic hardship. Renters have already been badly affected by the economic consequences of the pandemic with one in three private renters losing income.

For the majority struggling with their rent, this is a new challenge - 58% of those behind on rent had no rent arrears in February 2020. For people already struggling with rent before the pandemic hit, their arrears have got worse for 40% of them. On average, people who have fallen behind on rent now owe £730, which would mean around £360 million is owed across the country. Mortgage payers have been able to benefit from formal payment holidays, but renters have been forced to fall back on negotiating month-by-month with their landlords.

The temporary ban on bailiffs enforcing evictions in Tiers 2, 3 and 4 has ended and Citizens Advice is warning that, without further help for renters, an avalanche of evictions could take place in the spring.

A quarter of those surveyed who have rent arrears have already been threatened with eviction, termination of their rental contract, or handed an eviction notice despite the emergency rules.

Citizens Advice is calling for:

A legal ban on bailiff action and pause on all possession proceedings during the national lockdown in England and in tiers 2 and above.

Targeted financial support for people in England who've built up rent arrears. The government should consider a system of grants and government-backed loans - comparable to schemes in Scotland and Wales - to help people pay back their rent arrears sustainably and stay in their homes.