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## Cross-sector work on the cost-of-living crisis: UKRN announcement

21<sup>st</sup> September 2022

In May, [our statement](#) on the cost-of-living crisis set out three key priorities. Since then, the UKRN has worked at pace with key stakeholders to find ways to improve the journey for consumers with money problems. We want to make the consumer journey more consistent across sectors and clarify expectations to ensure that customers get better outcomes and can be confident contacting their creditors. Today, we are announcing our progress towards tackling this crisis.

As the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on household budgets develops, we know that millions of consumers will struggle with their bills. Given this, the Financial Conduct Authority, Ofgem and Ofwat are working in partnership with [Advice UK](#), [Citizens Advice](#), [Money and Pensions Service](#), [Money Advice Trust](#), [Money and Mental Health Policy Institute](#) and [StepChange](#) to identify some of the challenges facing consumers struggling with bills and debts across different sectors, as a first step. Together, we want to improve consistency of approach, reduce consumer confusion and ultimately ease the mental burden on consumers by helping everyone understand expectations at this difficult time.

When consumers start to struggle with their household bills, getting the right advice at the right time on the options they have and the help available can make a real difference. We know there will be many people facing debt problems for the first time - navigating their way through this can be overwhelming if people do not know what support is available. People have to deal with a number of companies and firms across a range of sectors. Each time they have to repeat personal, financial and sensitive information about their circumstances to their providers, which is stressful and exhausting.

Consumers need to be fully informed to make good choices and so regulated firms should be making every effort to support their customers' decision-making. Without this, customers may disengage and end up with worse long-term outcomes.

### **What is our aim?**

We know that people don't seek debt advice if they think there's nothing anyone can do to help, or that sharing their money problems might limit their ability to access credit or other services in the future. We aim to tackle these barriers to engagement, improve the experience of consumers in financial difficulty and ensure they get the right help and support at the right time.

We want creditors across sectors to consistently treat customers fairly and to make it easy for people to get the support they need, including:

- making it easy for people to engage with them in a way, and at a time, that suits them
- offering appropriate forbearance that takes account of individual, personal and financial circumstances, including any characteristics of vulnerability
- supporting those in financial difficulty or struggling with debt by making them aware of and helping them access money guidance or free debt advice

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- taking steps where possible to eliminate/reduce the need for people to have to repeat information to different creditors

To support this, we are:

- Sharing best practice and the experience of people who access advice
- Working with No. 10 and the Cabinet Office to support their [‘Help for Households’](#) campaign by pooling our expertise to ensure it can act as a single, trusted source of information and advice which is easy to navigate, so that people know where to go for help and aren’t given conflicting information or mis-advised.

We welcome the opportunity to build out this approach through the UKRN membership and beyond so that consumers can access the support and forbearance they need to deal with bills across sectors.