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PRESS RELEASE

Council urges residents to get in touch if they are experiencing financial difficulties

Mid Sussex District Council is urging residents who are struggling to meet their household costs to get in touch for support and advice.

The coronavirus pandemic has made 2020 an extremely difficult year and the Council is encouraging local people to seek help if they are facing issues with debt, are struggling with household bills or are finding it hard to pay their rent and/or Council Tax.

Mid Sussex District Council is signed up to the national Citizens Advice Good Practice Protocol, a public commitment to the principles of fairness, partnership working and transparency in local authority debt collection.

By working together, local authorities, enforcement agencies and advice agencies give Council Tax payers a better service, helping people to pay their Council Tax bills while accessing debt advice where needed. Early intervention and proactive contact with people struggling with bill payments can help prevent them incurring further charges and help alleviate stress.

“We know that there are people across Mid Sussex who are experiencing difficulties,” said Councillor Andrew MacNaughton, Mid Sussex Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning.

“If you are unable to make your rent or mortgage payments, our Housing Needs Team is here to help you. If you’re struggling, please get in touch so that we can help make sure you do not risk losing your home.

“Our Housing Needs Team are trained, knowledgeable, will work with you on your options,

and can guide you towards other sources of support, like claiming benefits and debt management.

“If you are a tenant of a social landlord in Mid Sussex please get in touch with your landlord as they can also provide assistance. If you are in difficulty, please do not ignore the problem because it will not go away.

“Landlords too may be facing financial pressures and tenants should continue to pay their rent if they can afford it. If you are a private landlord who may be serving notice on your tenant due to arrears, please contact us because we can offer advice and mediation to both you and your tenants to help avoid evictions.”

Councillor Ruth De Mierre, Mid Sussex Cabinet Member for Customer Services said:

“We want people to know that, if you are struggling to pay your bills, you’re not alone and we can help you get through this difficult time.

“If you are struggling to pay your Council Tax, we have a Revenues team who can put you in contact with the Money & Pensions Service, who provide free independent debt advice. They can help you to put payments of non-priority debts, like credit card bills, on hold and create arrangements that work for you and your unique financial situation.

“We know it’s hard to take that first step and reach out for help but the worst thing you can do is ignore the situation because it could lead to court proceedings, additional costly fees, and ever increasing debt. Ultimately, it could even result in you losing your home. Please don’t delay, get in contact with us if you are struggling and together we’ll help you through this.”

Jason Mather, Head of Client Services for Citizens Advice in West Sussex (North, South, East), said:

“We’re delighted that Mid Sussex District Council has signed the national Citizens Advice Council Tax Good Practice Protocol committing to fair collection practices, and to be building on our strong relationship and partnership work for the benefit of people living in Mid Sussex.”

If you are struggling financially please contact Mid Sussex District Council on 01444 477564 or email revenue@midsussex.gov.uk

To contact the Mid Sussex Housing Needs team call 01444 477574 or email housingadvice@midsussex.org.uk

Alternatively, Citizens Advice in West Sussex provide free, confidential, independent and impartial advice. Email or web chat at www.advicewestsussex.org.uk or call 0344 477 1171.

ENDS

For more information please contact **Mat Jarman** on 01444 477387 or Mat.Jarman@midsussex.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

The Citizens Advice Council Tax Good Practice Protocol includes:

- Fostering more effective partnership working
- Ensuring effective communication to Council Tax payers about the billing process, how to get support and debt advice
- For recovery, if a Council Tax bill is not paid: to ensure greater effort is made at or before the Tribunal Courts and Enforcement Act's compliance stage, including referring people for debt and money advice and to assess whether vulnerability or hardship applies, to avoid escalating a debt