

Are you arming yourself with a duster, a mop and a bunch of daffodils ready to spruce up your house for spring? As well as cleaning behind your sofa (yes we know what's lurking back there!) go a little further and take the time to clean up your finances too. We spoke to the ombudsman for its tips on how you can get started.



# Spring-Clean YOUR FINANCES!

**Dust off your debits:** Ask your bank for a list of direct debits and standing orders from your account. You may be making payments for things you no longer need. If you decide to cancel, make sure you tell the business involved as well as your bank. Sometimes we hear from people who have been told their bank can't cancel a payment, but this isn't right. Your bank should be able to cancel any payment on your account itself, if it says it can't give us a call.

**Clear up your calendar:** Keep a note of the dates when any payments that you do still have are due from your bank account – and try to keep some money over to cover any unexpected payments. If you find that you don't have enough funds to pay for upcoming debits, let your bank know as soon as you can as it might be able to do something to help you.


**Grab a tidy deal:** Have a look at what you're paying for your home, travel and any other type of insurance you have. Many companies rely on

people auto-renewing and leave you paying more than you need to as a result. Comparing prices and shopping around for the cheapest deal could save you a fortune. Make sure that any new policy you take out is still right for you – if you need it to cover something specific it's always worth giving the insurer a call to check that it does.

**Keep on top of credit:** If you've been using credit to make ends meet through the winter months, now is the time to tidy it up. Recent research showed that almost half of people who have a 0% deal on a credit card don't pay off their balance by the time the deal ends. Keep an eye on when any promotional deals end, and remember if you don't make your minimum repayments, it'll end earlier. Shop around to see if you could save yourself a tonne each month by doing a balance transfer too.

**Mop up money worries:** The promise of some quick and easy cash from a short-term loan might have felt like the ideal solution at Christmas.

But now you've rolled the loan over twice and there's no sign of being able to repay it. Tackling these problems head on can stop them becoming unmanageable. Speak to the lender and tell it that you're struggling with the repayments. It has a duty to help you. If it doesn't, get in touch – we can tell it to accept affordable monthly repayments and ease the strain. If your money worries go further than this then there are free debt advice groups – such as StepChange or Citizens Advice – that may be able to offer you help in finding a long term solution to your money worries.

We hope that dusting off your finances helps money matters go smoothly in 2015. But if something goes wrong, speak to the financial business involved – they should be able to sort things out. If you still aren't happy, the financial ombudsman might be able to help. 

You can contact the ombudsman service on 0300 123 9 123 or [financial-ombudsman.org.uk](http://financial-ombudsman.org.uk)