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MONEY BOX LIVE

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LEWIS: Hello. The amount we owe is beginning to creep up again. At the end of December, we all owed between us a shade under one and a half trillion pounds. That's three times what the government takes from us in tax each year. And for the first time since June, the amount we owe on consumer credit - that's leaving out mortgages - rose. Our total debt on credit cards, loans, overdrafts and so on now stands at £226 billion. Now that's more than enough to run the NHS and all our schools and universities for a year. Of course debt isn't in itself bad. And I can almost hear the emails being written as I say those words, but it isn't. What is bad is debt you can't manage. Often though reasonable credit is turned into unmanageable debt by an unforeseen change in life. Losing your job, falling seriously ill, relationship breaking down, even having an unexpected baby can all have a destabilising effect on carefully balanced finances. So today Money Box Live is about credit and debt: good borrowing and cheap borrowing, managing your debt, and of course what to do if it turns well septic. Where can you go for help? And where should you *never* go under *any* circumstances? There are places that offer to help which will only make your problems worse. Whatever your question, you can call Money Box Live now - 03700 100 444. And with me today to answer your questions, in Birmingham is Michael Park. He's Money Adviser with National Debtline. That's one of the national charities which offers free help to people with debts. The other major national charity offering help is the Consumer Credit Counselling Service, CCCS. And in Glasgow, we have Liz McVey, who's Managing Counsellor with them. She'll also help us with any particularly Scottish aspect to the debt. And with me in the studio is Jasmine Birtles, a

writer and broadcaster about money, who also runs Moneymagpie.com, which is a consumer and finance advice site. Our first question is from Denise who's calling from Cambridge. Denise, your question?

DENISE: Hello there. We need to get a new mortgage which comes to fruition at the end of April. We currently owe £250,000. 150 of it is interest only and the other 100 is on repayment. We have an outstanding credit card debt of £37,000. We are both of the age of 55 and we have our endowment policies maturing at the end of March and we have a sum of £60,000 coming to us. My question is do we pay some of the interest only off of the £150,000 of our mortgage, or the £37,000 outstanding on our credit card? And we are currently paying 6.9% on our mortgage repayment.

LEWIS: Gosh, there's a full personal finance picture there, Jasmine.

DENISE: *(laughs)* Sorry, I'm so sorry.

LEWIS: No, no, it's detail we need. Thank you very much.

DENISE: That's okay.

LEWIS: Thank you very much indeed. Let's start with one of our debt advisers first. Liz McVey, what would you say to this?

McVEY: I think obviously the credit cards are bound to be of a much higher interest rate, aren't they, and so therefore it makes more economic sense to pay that off first. It's really difficult because obviously mortgages are more difficult to get right now as well and you do have that extra sum of money, but the amount of money ... Are you just making the minimum payment per month to your credit card?

DENISE: Yes we are the moment, yes.

McVEY: Yeah. Then I would say try and get rid of that. Because what interest are

you paying on your credit card?

DENISE: It varies between each company. They vary between 18% to 21% per annum.

McVEY: Much higher then.

DENISE: Yes.

LEWIS: That means to me, Denise, that you're paying nearly £6,000 a year ...

BIRTLES: Ooh, that hurts.

LEWIS: ... in interest, which is an awful lot of money to be giving to the banks, isn't it?

DENISE: I didn't look at it that way, yes.

LEWIS: I mean that's not paying the debt off. That's just basically paying the interest on those amounts. It really is quite frightening. So, yes, I mean I'm not an adviser but I must say I would bung all that money and get rid of your credit card debt. Jasmine Birtles?

BIRTLES: Yeah, have you tried switching any of the credit card debt to 0% deals because paradoxically there are more around at the moment even though generally speaking credit card rates have gone up?

DENISE: I didn't think any ... I didn't know any of the other credit cards were actually doing that actually anymore.

BIRTLES: Oh yes, yes there are a few. And some of them are doing it for ooh you know 15, 16 months. I mean I would suggest that you switch as much as you can into

0%. And anything you can't - as Liz says you know just pay it off because it's expensive ...

DENISE: It is.

BIRTLES: ... and then put the rest into the interest only. I don't like interest only.

LEWIS: And Denise, when do you get your £60,000?

DENISE: It comes to fruition at the end of March, but we can't pay off any of our mortgage till 1st May, otherwise we have to pay you know the charges.

LEWIS: But you can pay off your credit card, so I think that might be a very good step. And of course the other thing, Michael Park, if I can bring you in - it's one thing paying off a credit card. It's another thing not running up the debt again, isn't it?

DENISE: No, no, we hadn't planned on doing that.

LEWIS: Right, Michael ...

DENISE: My concern is my age. We're both 55 and we've got just 10 years to pay off the mortgage.

LEWIS: Indeed. Michael Park?

PARK: Absolutely. I'd say if you're going to pay off that debt, then just cut up the credit card afterwards so you can't then run the debt up again and leave yourself in perhaps a worse situation than before.

LEWIS: Yes and particularly important as you are approaching retirement. I mean Denise is obviously a few years off that, but as you do approach that age your income's going to go down in most cases and the debt you can service is going to be

much less, isn't it?

PARK: Absolutely, yeah.

LEWIS: So I think we're agreed. Pay off your credit card. Pay off the rest off your interest free. And cut those cards up, Denise ...

DENISE: Yes, we will.

LEWIS: ... because you don't want to retire with £37,000 of debt.

DENISE: Not at all.

LEWIS: That would take all your pension to pay the interest actually.

BIRTLES: Also consider putting off retirement for a few years. You're going to make more money if you do anyway. If you're happy working for a little bit longer, you do get an extra lump of money from the government and ...

DENISE: Oh really, I didn't know that.

BIRTLES: Yes, it's worth having a look. If you go to direct.gov.uk/betterfuture, they've got all the new rules that are coming in. You know because the pension rules are changing this year and it's better for women, it's getting better for women, apart from the fact that women ...

LEWIS: The pension age is rising.

BIRTLES: The pension age is rising. So apart from that fairly major point ...

LEWIS: It will be 65 for Denise, I suspect.

BIRTLES: Yes, it will.

LEWIS: Yeah, okay, thanks very much for your call, Denise, and good luck with that. And we're moving on now to a place called Mobile where we have Joanna. Joanna on your mobile, what's your question?

JOANNA: Yes, hello. I have unsecured borrowing of about £15,000, just under. And I had my baby in September, so I'm on maternity leave at the moment. I'm a single parent. I'm not sure if I'll be returning to work. And I've been able to service the debt so far, but from March I will have to default. So I'm wondering what my best options would be? Would it be to negotiate with the individual lenders or maybe just to declare myself insolvent with perhaps a debt relief order?

LEWIS: Right, Michael Park?

PARK: I would say firstly make sure you're getting all the benefits you're entitled to, so child tax credits, working tax credits if either you or your partner are working. Once you've done that, you can then draw up a budget sheet to calculate what is a realistic offer to pay towards them.

JOANNA: Yes.

PARK: If you can then obviously meet your minimum payments, there isn't really a problem. If you can't, then you need to negotiate reduced payments with your creditors. So you would take your surplus income after all of your essential expenditure, split it fairly amongst any creditors that you do have, and you can try and negotiate reduced payments. Obviously this is a little bit ... Depending on how much you're paying, it could be just a short-term solution. If you're hoping to get back to work in the near future, then it's a short-term solution. You're right though - if it's more of a long-term thing, then you might want to have a look at some of the insolvency options like debt relief orders, perhaps IVA or bankruptcy as well.

LEWIS: Joanna, can I ask do you own your own home?

JOANNA: No.

LEWIS: So bankruptcy is an option then, Liz McVey?

JOANNA: Right.

McVEY: Yes indeed, yeah.

LEWIS: Liz, what would you say here?

McVEY: I think very similar to what Michael's already said. The key thing is to look at your budget and obviously then try and negotiate with the creditors if you have a difficulty in making the minimum payments. What I would also say is to contact an agency like ourselves, the Consumer Credit Counselling Service, or National Debtline and seek some help because quite often creditors like it better when you've sought help from a third party.

LEWIS: Yes it's easier if they do the negotiating rather than you definitely.

JOANNA: Okay. Yes, I had wondered about going to the Citizens Advice Bureau.

LEWIS: Yes, well there are three options. There's the two on the programme, which is National Debtline or Consumer Credit Counselling Service - both of which are free, both of which are national charities - and there are links to them on our website, bbc.co.uk/moneybox, and with our own helpline. Or of course the local Citizens Advice office can give help on that usually very well. So it's worth going to one of those free agencies rather than paying anyone. And if you open any newspaper, watch television in the afternoons or listen to commercial radio, you will find endless people trying to offer you ways of getting out of your debt or helping you with your debt. Much better to go to a free charity that will offer you that advice for nothing, won't

make any judgements and will offer very practical advice. Joanna, thanks very much for your call. And we're going to Joan now in Greater Manchester who I think has been called by one of these companies. Joan, your question?

JOAN: Oh yeah, my question is I was called before Christmas by one of those companies offering to wipe out my debt completely with one particular you know credit card. They assured me that you know I wouldn't have to pay anything, the usual stuff. I'm sure you've heard it all before. And up to now, we're still ongoing and they do seem to be what they say they are. I got my daughter to check out their various references that they give on their letter and they all seem to come up okay. But it's going on a bit long really and I'm just getting a bit concerned whether you know I'm just being ... *(laughs)* Oh what's the word? I can't think of the word, but you know what I'm saying.

LEWIS: Strung along. And, Joan, this is a company that's not saying it will help you deal with your debt. It's saying it can get your debt written off?

JOAN: *(over)* No, on, they would definitely ... yeah. I can read it out.

LEWIS: No, it's alright, I know the kind of company.

JOAN: You know the company. Okay, fine.

LEWIS: And if anybody wants to hear what we said about them on Saturday on Money Box, they can listen to the item on that. It's the first item on Money Box last Saturday through the website, bbc.co.uk/moneybox. Let's ask some of our debt advisers what they think of these companies. Liz McVey?

McVEY: I think I'm just naturally suspicious. I don't know whether it's the Scottishness in me, but I am always suspicious of people who are promising what seems quite extravagant claims to be able to write off debt. They may be able to do it. I think my experience would suggest that it's not generally going to be a good result and that

what you'd be far better doing is to contact, as I said, ourselves at Consumer Credit Counselling Service or National Debtline and get some advice with the debt situation that you have.

LEWIS: And Jasmine Birtles, I mean these people are claiming that there are flaws in the Consumer Credit ... Well not in the Act, but ...

BIRTLES: In the agreement, yes.

LEWIS: Flaws in the agreement, which don't conform with the Act. Now there have been a couple of court cases about that recently and they don't seem to indicate that this method works.

BIRTLES: No, absolutely, and it does seem particularly those companies that effectively ask for money upfront are making you know a nice bit of cash, but with no real guarantees. And not only that. Although I have spoken to one or two people who *have* had their debt wiped off in this way - and this was a while ago - there are very, very few that actually manage it. And even if they do get their debt wiped off, it still stays on your credit record as unpaid. So say it's, I don't know £8,000, £10,000, that sits on your credit record as a very big, black mark for later on saying this is unpaid totally. So personally I dislike the whole business. It just doesn't seem right at all.

LEWIS: No. I mean it certainly doesn't seem right to try and get out of a debt you honestly went into. But leaving that aside, if the banks have made a mistake, people do think they should not have to pay the debt. But as far as we know, it almost never works and two test cases - one in October and one in December - did indicate that it was very, very unlikely to work. And certainly my view is if it was me, I would not give these people any more money. If they were really confident, they'd wait till it was successful and then take a cut rather than asking for a fee upfront. Michael Park, have you had people come to you with these ideas?

PARK: Yeah, I mean what they're talking about, as both Liz and Jasmine said, is debts that are unenforceable because of an unenforceable agreement - either it wasn't

executed correctly, perhaps it wasn't signed correctly or the terms of the Consumer Credit Act weren't adhered to. You're absolutely right, it's very rare that a debt will be written off because of this. If you think there is a problem with the way the debt was taken out or the agreement that you signed, you'd be better off taking it down to your local Trading Standards, Citizens Advice Bureau, or perhaps even a solicitor, to get them have a look over the agreement instead of paying you know what can be quite a large upfront fee for no guarantees.

LEWIS: Okay, so Joan, we're a bit suspicious. In fact we're very suspicious generally. I hope you haven't paid them too much. And if they ask for more, I think I'd think about it very, very carefully before you part with any money that could after all be used to pay off your debt. Just before we go to Alice now, I just wanted to deal with a couple of emails that will be fairly straightforward, I think. John has emailed us to say he has a Barclaycard with an outstanding balance. He's charged 2.75% on the cash bit - 2.075 I should say - and 1.873% per month on the standard balance, and he never seems to get rid of the cash money. Michael, what's going on here?

PARK: It sounds like they're leaving the cash borrowing to the end of the payment. So, yeah, his payments are going to be very expensive until the debt's cleared, so he's not going to be paying that part of it off until the very end of the debt.

LEWIS: Right, so this is the rule, Jasmine, is it - that they take off the cheapest debt first and leave the most expensive one accruing interest?

BIRTLES: Annoyingly, yes. Yes, it's this sort of hierarchy of debt, as they call it. And it's something particularly to watch out for if you do switch a debt over to a 0% credit card. I mean I always say if you do that, do not use that card to buy anything because when you make your payment (assuming that you're going to be paying off at 0%) the amount that you've used, that you've bought on that credit card stays on and the interest starts to accrue and accrue. I mean my advice would be do whatever you can do pay that whole debt off as fast as possible.

LEWIS: John says he knows that's the answer, but it's very difficult, and I can

understand that. But I mean his debt is accruing on cash at nearly 28%, and on the purchases at nearly 25%. And this, he says, is on a Barclaycard. It is a huge amount of interest, isn't it?

BIRTLES: I mean again if he can switch it over to a 0% deal. It depends on your credit record; it's not available to everyone. But again if you can switch the whole lot, that would be very helpful, I would suggest.

LEWIS: Yes and that does depend on your credit record. And talking of credit records, Des has said he's just finished paying off his two credit cards - well done, Des ...

BIRTLES: Good man.

LEWIS: *(laughs)* ... 'and I was thinking of closing my account with them. Is this a good idea?' I think it probably is.

BIRTLES: Yes, I would say. *(laughs)* Yeah, if you don't need it, don't have it, absolutely. The thing about credit cards is they're a bit like knives really. You know they can be very useful in the right hands, used in the right way, but they can be extremely harmful if you *don't* use them in the right way. And it's up to you. If you think that you would be tempted to go and use it to splurge on something, then absolutely cut it up, close it down.

LEWIS: He also says - Michael, this is a very practical thing - how *do* I close a credit card account?

BIRTLES: Well just phone them up.

PARK: Yeah write them a letter or phone them up. It's always best to deal with them in writing and keep a copy of what you sent them. Put it in writing - I want to close this account down - and cut up your credit card.

LEWIS: And then it will eventually come off your credit record and make things easier from that point of view in the future.

PARK: Absolutely. And also if you want to apply for mortgages or stuff in the future, it might help to have lower available credit.

LEWIS: Yes because even though you're not borrowing on it - if you've got a credit limit of £10,000, then they'll say well he could be borrowing £10,000 on that and they'll look at that as well as what you're actually doing.

PARK: Exactly, yes.

BIRTLES: Good point.

LEWIS: Okay, thanks very much for that email, Des. Let's go back to our calls. Alice from Essex is calling. Alice, your question?

ALICE: Oh good afternoon. It's to do with one of my children who is married and two children of 12 and 9. If I just run through the little questions and then you can see. The first one. I've been told that they have sent one of their children to a private school, which is being paid for by someone else. I'm told that that could be reclaimed by the bankruptcy people. They have gone bankrupt voluntarily because there's no way they can pay off the debt. They have a car. They're very foolish, I have to say. They have a car that they bought a year ago, a brand new one. I take it that that will be taken away from them. I'm told that they will be given a certain amount to live on and anything that they may earn over and above that will be taken to help pay off the debt. And other things like how long will this go on for?

LEWIS: Okay, well let's put all that to Liz McVey. Liz, you must come across a lot of people like this?

McVEY: I think ... It is slightly different in Scotland as well, so I'm thinking

Michael maybe ...

LEWIS: Oh sorry, yes, let's get Michael to give us the English picture and then you can talk to us about what would happen in Scotland, Liz.

McVEY: Okay.

LEWIS: Michael?

PARK: With regards to the private school, to be perfectly honest I'm not sure. I would recommend phoning National Debtline, CCCS or going and visiting Citizens Advice, giving a bit more detail, and we'd look into that for you. With regards to the car, yes a car is an asset and it may be at risk in bankruptcy. The official receiver who deals with the bankruptcy isn't going to say oh no, you can't have a car. If you can argue that you need it for work or for mobility or for the children, they will let you have a car, though it probably won't be a very valuable car.

ALICE: They've got two. One is new and one is old.

PARK: Yes, so what they would probably say is either make them sell the new one and just keep the old one. Or if they could argue that they needed two cars, then they may make them sell the new one and buy a cheaper one.

ALICE: And they will take the money?

PARK: They would take the money and distribute that fairly between the creditors, yes.

LEWIS: And how long does all this last? How long does bankruptcy last, Michael, because some people seem to think oh it's an easy option - go bankrupt; within a year, you're back on your feet? That's not quite right, is it?

PARK: You would normally be bankrupt for no more than one year as long as everything goes according to plan, there's no problems. It would be on your credit reference file and on the insolvency register for 6 years though.

LEWIS: Right and that of course would stop you getting further into debt.

PARK: It can make it difficult for you to get further credit. And with regards to the amount they're going to be left to live on, the official receiver who deals with the bankruptcy will have a look at their income and expenditure. They will take away their essentials first. As long as they're not living beyond their means - having a very expensive flash house, that sort of stuff ...

LEWIS: It sounds as if they *have* been actually.

ALICE: They had to sell their house. They had to sell the house because they knew what was going to happen. They sold that three or four years ago, so they're in rented accommodation.

PARK: Right.

ALICE: But it's larger than they need.

PARK: Yes. So what the official receiver would do is have a look at the area they're living in, what the general price of renting is there. Leave them enough money for rent, bills, food, clothing, travelling expenses, that sort of stuff. Whatever's left is the surplus income and they're normally looking to take between 50 and 70% of that. That's called an income payment order and it can run for anything up to 3 years.

LEWIS: Okay. And ...

ALICE: And the ...

LEWIS: Sorry.

ALICE: Beg your pardon.

LEWIS: Yes one more, Alice.

ALICE: Well I'm well retired and I gather it's 6 years for the no credit. Now this is pretty morbid, but should I pop my clogs in the next 6 years - anything that I may leave them, would that be taken?

PARK: No, that would normally be within the first year of the bankruptcy. If they were to come into a sum of money or any kind of assets, then yeah the official receiver could look at that in perhaps the first year. It might extend into 3 years, but normally probably not.

LEWIS: And what if ... Alice, do they have children?

ALICE: They do.

LEWIS: What if Alice left it to the children? Would that be a safer thing to do?

PARK: It would be, yes.

ALICE: That's what I was considering doing.

PARK: The official receiver would not be able to touch any assets belonging to the children.

LEWIS: No. Okay, well that's very helpful. Thanks, Alice.

ALICE: So basically the bailiffs could take any assets to help pay off the debt?

PARK: They could, yeah. But there are lots of things that are excluded. They'll be left with you know general things that are needed for their household. But yeah, any assets of value are at risk, yes.

LEWIS: Thanks very much for your call, Alice. And Liz, just briefly, I know things are very different in Scotland because the law in this regard is completely different. How would it work there? Would it be similar?

McVEY: Quite similar, yeah. I think the private education, I think it would depend on who was paying that and did the fee ... You know if it was x amount per month, did that go directly to the couple? If so, it would I think be viewed as income.

PARK: I would have to agree there, yes.

McVEY: And I think therefore if the school situation is to continue, it's perhaps better for that person to pay it directly to the school and that therefore removes that case. The car is probably £1,000 in value. That's all you're going to get to keep in Scotland, so anything over that is going to be taken. And you're going to need to have a car that's worth no more than £1,000. And same thing with inheritance. First year only. Anything over that is not going to be affected.

LEWIS: Okay, thanks for that. And just to remind you, Consumer Credit Counselling Service, National Debtline and Citizens Advice - which we've had an email from someone who works in one saying please, please mention us again, so I am - *(laughter)* where you can get local face to face advice on all these things free and it will help you as much as anyone can. We're now going to Mary who's in Bridgend. Mary, your question?

MARY: Oh hello. I'm 67 nearly and I'm retiring at the end of April on a very, very small budget. I have about £174 a month, which will be a very small nurse's pension, and about £134 a week old age pension. Now I'm managing quite well at the moment, but when I reduce my income by terminating my employment ... My bosses have been very good and have kept me on two years extra really when they didn't have to

and I'm panicking a little bit now because I have an outstanding debt of about £11,000 on a loan and I have a credit card on which there is an amount of about £1,900. It may not seem a lot to other people, but to me it's horrendous. Now many of the questions I wanted to ask, you've already answered to other people. What I wanted to know was do I go to Lloyds TSB and ask them to renegotiate this loan for a smaller amount? Do I go to the Visa card people and ask them? And I really don't know which way to turn.

LEWIS: No, it's probably best to get professional help with that. Jasmine?

BIRTLES: I was going to say, yes I would talk to CCCS or CAB or National Debtline. I know CCCS and CAB would do it for you. And I think that would be the quickest and probably the most successful way to do it, to get them, because they're doing it every day all day for so many people and they're likely to be able to do something like that for you.

LEWIS: And Liz McVey, I mean Mary is well over pension age. We've had another email from someone who's ten years younger than her, but is fearing the time when she has to live on a pension. And there is a growing number of people, isn't there, that are approaching pension age with debts and they don't quite know how to deal with it. Liz McVey, what are you finding?

McVEY: I think exactly that; that people are very much you have a big asset, which is normally a house, and there's no mortgage on it, so it's going to be worth you know a few bob as they say. But cash-wise there's not so much money coming in, so you're kind of asset rich, cash poor, which is very difficult. And to think about ... (*Lewis tries to interject*) Sorry?

LEWIS: No, I was going to say and under 70 it's very hard to realise anything from your house because ...

McVEY: Very much.

LEWIS: ... I mean you can do it, but you'll end up with very little for what you give up ...

McVEY: Exactly.

LEWIS: ... so that is also difficult. Mary, I think it is really go and get professional advice from one of these debt counselling agencies: Consumer Credit Counselling Service, National Debtline or Citizens Advice.

MARY: And how would I contact them - by phone or ...

LEWIS: Do you have access to a computer?

MARY: Yes, I do.

LEWIS: Okay, well if you look at our website, which is bbc.co.uk/moneybox, we will have links to them on our website. And I should say if people put in Consumer Credit Counselling Service or National Debtline into one of the search engines, the first few items you get will not be those organisations. They'll be people trying to take money off you.

BIRTLES: The paid for ones.

LEWIS: So make sure you get the *real* Consumer Credit Counselling Service and the *real* National Debtline.

MARY: And they don't charge for that?

LEWIS: And they don't charge. There's no charge. They are dealing with it all the time and they will offer you the best way to deal with your debts. Can't stress that enough. We've just got time I think to squeeze in Jane from London. Jane, your question?

JANE: Hi. If there's a hole in one's money at the end of a month, is borrowing via a pawnbroker the quickest and cheapest way to cover an unexpected expense like replacing a washing machine?

LEWIS: Well pawnbrokers charge high rates of interest, as do most people who lend you money till the end of the month. The APR's are often in the thousands. But I suppose it is a quick way as long as you know you can pay it back. Jasmine?

BIRTLES: Yes, I think it's actually one of the least worst of, as you say, the quick money lenders. I loathe and detest pay day loan type of operations - I've never come across one that I thought was alright; and certainly doorstep lenders - I mean as Paul says, you know thousands of percent. I've heard you know half decent things at least about pawn broking. However, I would say, as with everything, shop around because the amount ...

JANE: Clearly had one time to shop around. You know suddenly you need it.

BIRTLES: Yes.

JANE: You know the money's going to be there next month, you know within say a fortnight. Would that be exorbitant or can one not borrow for such a short time?

BIRTLES: Oh you can, you can certainly do it. There are online pawn broking operations around as well now, so you might like to just have a look at some of those and go to high street ones and just see what they'll offer. But it's all risky. You know all these things are risky.

LEWIS: And briefly, Michael do you have any people coming to you with pawn broking debt?

PARK: Not so many. But what I would say is try using credit unions instead. It's no good for the immediate future, but if you could plan ahead for this sort of experience,

you could start putting away £10 or £20 a month with a credit union; and then eventually if you do need to borrow money, they'll probably lend you maybe double of what you've saved with them. It's a much cheaper and safer way of borrowing.

BIRTLES: Yes, I wish more people knew about credit unions.

LEWIS: Okay, well I think we're going to have to leave it there, except to say somebody said I should ... "Paul Lewis", he says - that's me - "should leave his feelings out of it and stick to the facts." He's had several agreements declared unenforceable using a solicitor and a barrister. So it may work for some people. But be careful what you pay upfront is what I would say. That's all we have time for. My thanks to Michael Park of National Debtline; Liz McVey, Consumer Credit Counselling Service; and Jasmine Birtles of Moneymagpie.com. And thanks for all your calls and emails. You can find out more about borrowing and debt from our Action Line - 0800 044 044 - or our website, bbc.co.uk/moneybox. Listen again, download a copy, read a transcript in a couple of days. I'm back at noon on Saturday with Money Box and here to take more of your calls on Money Box Live next Wednesday afternoon.