



**From the Deputy National Welfare Adviser**

Dear Area/Branch Secretaries, Welfare Officers and Shipmates

**CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) – SURVIVING ISOLATION 4 (FINANCE 2)**

RNA Central Office and I hope that all shipmates are **staying well and staying at home**. According to Boris the new message is “Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives” at least in England but staying at home remains part of this where appropriate. For most of our shipmates it will “as you were” with no change. The last briefing provided advice on protecting your finances. This one gives advice on banking, avoiding fraud, cancellations, refunds and on saving money.

**Need a repayment holiday?** Banks and building societies are offering up to three months payment holidays on debt for those struggling due to Covid 19. This includes mortgages, loans, credit cards, store cards and overdrafts with temporary suspension of charges and can help in the short term. **However do remember this is not a permanent fix.** You may accumulate interest and you still need to pay back the deferred debt when the holiday period ends. So do your sums carefully and ensure you both need it and will be able to afford paying the debt back later.

**Want to Bank Smarter?** Many of us already use our mobile or laptop to manage our finances but millions of us do not. This crisis is an ideal time to think about this, particularly when access to banking in branch may be limited. Online banking can be of huge benefit to older shipmates but we may shy away as being seen as too hard but it does have many advantages. All banks are working hard to increase the uptake of online banking and it's worth looking at if you are self-isolating.

The hardest part, like many things is getting started. You don't need to be an internet ace to do this. Each Bank provides an online guide on how to set this up and priority telephone support for those classified as vulnerable. It is straightforward and you will need the usual personal details and details of one of your existing accounts. Then you will be allocated a pass code by post or email which you need to access the account. You can change that to something you will really remember. A similar process is followed for telephone banking where you get things done by speaking to an adviser or you can download an app to your phone for mobile banking. All of these are secure.

If you really can't do it yourself and/or find it all too confusing you do have the option of getting a trusted family member to sort it out with the bank on your behalf. They will need a completed by you third-party mandate form returned to the bank. However do be sure this is what you really want as it gives that person the right to make calls, query statements and operate the account on your behalf.

**Avoid Fraud!** One reason for avoiding on-line banking can be worry about fraud. This is understandable but it is relatively secure. However there are sadly low-life cyber criminals out there who seek out the vulnerable at crisis times such as this pandemic. They may sound very plausible and caring or claim to be your bank or the police but do beware. When in doubt just put the phone down and tell family or a friend. If you remember some simple rules though you can keep you and your money safe!

- No bank or building society will ever call you and ask for the full security details of your account; the only time that happens is when you start the process of registration or logging in.
- Never share your personal details with anyone
- Make sure all passwords or pass code numbers are hard to guess
- Change your passwords or pass code numbers regularly
- If you write them down (not recommended) keep them in a safe place



Fraud risks come in by emails or calls. What warning signs are there and what should you do?

- Check if it's being stated as really urgent (to put pressure on you), bad grammar, bad spelling and errors in how it's addressed to you.
- If it's an unsolicited call or email and asks for your personal or financial details don't be afraid to hang up and do not respond.
- Remember if claiming to be from your bank, it will never ask for personal security information (see above).
- Be very cautious of requests to download update files or click on hyperlinks in the message; they can give access to your computer or take you to fake sites.
- Be cautious of emails, texts or social media eg WhatsApp about Coronavirus financial support and never click on attachments or links unless you know the sender.
- Only call organisations using the official phone number on the website, do not accept an offered number.
- If claiming to be your bank only use the number on the back of your debit or credit card not one given during a call.
- Offers of sanitizers or face masks should be treated with caution and the seller checked carefully before you part with your money. Any offer of a vaccine should be deleted immediately, there is not one proven yet with only clinical trials ongoing.
- Make sure your phone and laptop security settings are up to date.
- When in doubt stop and talk to family or friends about it.

**If you want to know more** then Take Five to Stop Fraud at <https://takefive-stopfraud.org.uk/> has good advice and banks etc have fraud advice on their websites.

**What happens if I am defrauded despite being careful?** You may still lose money but do speak to your bank immediately and also report any fraud to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or via [Actionfraud.police.police.org](http://Actionfraud.police.police.org)

**What are my rights if I've been cancelled on?** Everything depends on the T&C of your particular booking so have a look but there are still laws that govern the sale of tickets for events, travel and holidays that can give you rights to refunds. In many cases if you don't ask, you won't get them automatically and some firms will try to delay repayment shipmates or just offer vouchers so keep asking if you want the cash. Remember to be reasonable though as since the crisis started many firms will have had many, many requests to deal with.

For ticketed events like a concert or show you can get a refund if booked it through a primary ticket seller like Ticketmaster or the venue if booked directly but beware this may not extend to any booking fees or cost of delivery. You agreed those in T&C sadly just as equally sadly if you bought from a resale site eg Viagogo it depends on the T&Cs and the site.

For travel involving flights, holiday and hotel closure the position is clear. Operators are obliged to offer refunds although you can ask if you prefer to rebook for a later date. Some airlines have been slow to refund and offered vouchers instead. You do not have to accept these, just ask your airline carrier to prove to you where in their T&C this is an option. If your holiday provider is ATOL (Air Travel Organiser's License) or ABTA (Association of British Travel Agents) protected this may help in cases of cancellation. ATOL-protected holidays are package holidays that include flights whereas ABTA protection only covers holidays that involve rail, cruise or self-drive but not package breaks where flights are included. Having contacted the provider direct **first** and failed to agree the next step is to complain if you feel you are still being treated unfairly.

**How do I sort that?** Routes of complaint are you writing to the provider/seller first setting out your complaint history and claim after first making sure your claim is valid. You can use templates from



complaints advice site <https://www.resolver.co.uk/how-to-complain> or you can pass to a claim management company to apply on your behalf but beware fees will be charged by the latter and not all companies eg some airlines will deal with them or Resolver. If the company does not move at all then ultimately you have the option to take legal action yourself by making a court claim (previously the small claims court in England and Wales). Tell them of your intention to do so first and see if a helpful response is forthcoming.

However going to court is a significant step involving time and effort to make a good case whilst the whole process can be stressful. It may be a good idea to seek legal advice at this point and do check your home insurance to see if you have legal cover. For guidance and process on small claims see <https://www.gov.uk/make-court-claim-for-money> or local Citizens Advice Bureau if available. Process details differ across the UK so check out the Courts and Tribunals Services websites in England and Wales (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-courts-and-tribunals-service>), Scotland (<https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/taking-action/small-claims>) and Northern Ireland (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/small-claims-process>).

**Want to save money?** Why not use this time of stay at home to review your outgoings and see if you can get better deals on your spends whether they be utilities, mobile, broadband or TV. You do not have to do it all; there are good comparison sites that will do the work for you. Moneysaving expert offers switching deals in many areas and a comparison tool at <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/>. Surprising what will be offered when you do some browsing and comparison online and then pick up that phone to negotiate. The ultimate lever is to say I'm thinking of leaving. Most providers contact centres will then redirect you at a retentions team as they are keen to keep your custom. These teams have the authority to offer you a deal to keep you with the current provider. TV Sports fan? Don't forget that for some subscription services eg Sky Sport you can pause your subscription whereas BT Sports require completion of an online form for two months credit.

**What about savings?** The recent cut in the Bank of England base rate was somewhat unfairly used by many financial institutions to cut their savings rates by much, much more with rates dropping as low as 0.01%. As above, its time to shop around and switch your savings account to one that gives a bit more and there's up to 1% plus out there still. Certainly worth having. There are a number of money comparison sites but <https://moneyfacts.co.uk/savings-accounts/> is worth a look for options.

**Please distribute this widely and look after your shipmates and oppos by phone, text, e-media or letter.**

Best wishes and remember to stay safe, stay well and stay at home.

*Geoff Apperley*