

# From housing problems to consumer rights FLAS is here to help

Barely six-months old, Community's Free Legal Advice Service (FLAS) is already proving very popular with members. With calls varying from housing matters to consumer rights issues; from Child Support Agency queries to neighbourhood disputes FLAS is rapidly becoming a highly-prized membership benefit.

## What is FLAS?

FLAS is a telephone-based legal advice service (Freephone 0800 389 6332 – choose option 3) to help members with a wide range of legal queries. The service is based at The Member Service Centre in Kidderminster and currently has two trained legal advisers – Kelly Hale and David Hewitt.

## How does FLAS work?

In many cases Kelly and David will be able to deal with your legal query in the first phone call.

Where this is not possible they will research the matter and come back to you with advice.

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for Kelly or David to look at documents that you have which relate to the issue. There may also be instances in which it is necessary for a letter to a third party to be drafted by them on your behalf.

Where the legal issue is particularly complex it may be referred on to Community approved specialist solicitors, or another agency, for further advice.

Whatever course of action Kelly or David recommend will always be discussed with you in full before any decisions are taken.

Says Kelly Hale, 'From one day to the next, we never know what the next member query is going to be. However, we still have a philosophy of "if we can help, we will."

'We like to think that we are approachable and understanding and that that comes through when we are providing legal advice, support and help to members.

'The feedback that we have received from members who have had help from FLAS has been great.'

Says David Hewitt, 'I firmly believe that FLAS provides a real leg-up for Community members. A lot of what we do is all about empowering members – letting them know their rights and that they can often do more than they first thought about a difficult legal issue.

'FLAS is also about standing alongside a member with support and reassurance. The legal world can often appear quite intimidating at first. FLAS is there to help members overcome that.

'For example, lots of members contact us about consumer issues. Sadly, there are plenty of unscrupulous people and businesses out there. Helping members to resolve issues like that, whilst letting them know that they are not on their own, is really what this job is all about – we're here to help.'

## Community members' stories



The member was contacted by a debt recovery agency regarding an amount of money he allegedly owed from the mid 1990s. He

had no idea at all as to the source of the alleged debt. He was very concerned about this and his opponents adopted a very aggressive attitude towards him.

FLAS advised the member about the weakness of his opponents claim against him, in particular the rules of relevant time limits and their unacceptable conduct in pursuing him.

Several letters were drafted on behalf of the member to his opponents, resulting in them dropping their ill-founded claim against him.



Another member was experiencing difficulties in recovering his deposit from his landlord regarding a rented property that

he was no longer living at. English was not the member's first language and it was suspected that that was being used against him in withholding the return of his deposit without any good reason.

The member was given advice and guidance throughout, including the landlord's legal obligation to have placed his deposit in the Deposit Protection Scheme. After several weeks of persistence and FLAS working with the member, the landlord returned the deposit to the member.



In another case a member was being chased by a mail order company for charges applied to an account that she

had cancelled some time ago.

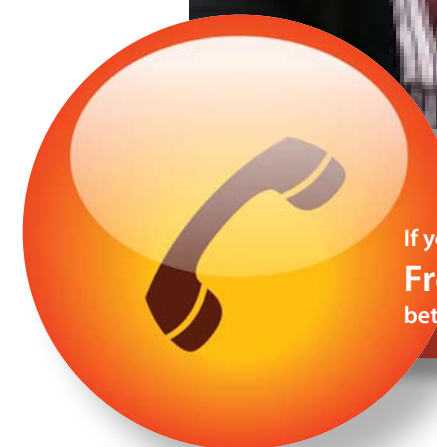
FLAS provided the member with telephone advice about how she should deal with the unjustified demands of the mail order company. Consequently, letters followed to the mail order company from the member, stressing both their wholly unacceptable behaviour in pursuing an alleged debt that they had not right to do so and the member's position in law in general. The matter was dropped by the mail order company shortly thereafter.



Kelly Hale



David Hewitt



If you need help and support with any legal issue outside of the workplace call  
**Freephone 0800 389 6332** (choose option 3)  
between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.