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Energy efficiency fact sheet

# Fuel debt, fuel switching and energy suppliers



## In debt with your fuel bills?

The first thing to do is contact your energy supplier to let them know you are having difficulty paying your bill. It would help if you could give an idea of how much you can afford to repay, and then you can discuss with them and agree how you will repay the debt.

**Some energy suppliers have trust funds with millions of pounds available to clear individual's and families fuel debt. Some details are listed below:**

- **EDF Energy**

This trust fund is managed in this area by The Bristol Debt Advice Centre and they will provide assistance to complete application forms, to clear existing debt they will then help you to plan and budget for your next energy bill. For further information please contact [www.bdac.org.uk](http://www.bdac.org.uk) Heather Allan 0117 954 3544

- **British Gas**

The British Gas Energy Trust provides grants to help individuals and families in need to meet arrears of energy charges. Helen Mcleod Trust Relationship Manager 01733 421021 [www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk](http://www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk)

- **N Power**

[www.spreading-warmth@npower.com](mailto:www.spreading-warmth@npower.com) 0808 1726 999

- **E.ON**

[www.caring.energy@powergen.co.uk](http://www.caring.energy@powergen.co.uk) 0800 0511 480

## ● **Citizen Advice Bureau**

The Citizen Advice Bureau may also give advice on paying household debt. They have a drop-in session between 10am and 3pm every weekday, except Thursday, when there is a telephone advice line available 0870 121017/email: advice@nscab.org.uk

**To maximise your income and therefore have more money available to pay your fuel bills, you could check to see if you are claiming all the benefits you are entitled to.**

## ● **Warm Front Benefit Entitlement Check** 0800 0729 006

## **Fuel switching**

**If you think you are paying too much for your fuel bills you may benefit from switching supplier. The following web sites and telephone numbers may be useful**

**[www.energyhelpline.com](http://www.energyhelpline.com)** 0800 074 0745

**[www.uswitch.com](http://www.uswitch.com)** 0845 601 2856

**[www.simplyswitch.com](http://www.simplyswitch.com)** 08000 111 395

You will notice that the tariffs on prepayment meters are more expensive than the tariffs when paying by standard credit or direct debit.

Contact your energy supplier to see if they can transfer you from a prepayment meter to a normal one. Only do this if you feel you can manage your bills and pay on time. You should ask them what the cheapest way of paying your fuel bill is.

Also if you pay when you receive your bill (standard credit) you could consider the alternative of paying by monthly direct debit. It may save you money, take up less of your time and balance your payments throughout the year. Try and arrange with your supplier that the direct debit doesn't draw money out of your account at an inconvenient time. It may be cheaper again to have both gas and electric from the same supplier.

### **The switching process**

The switching process between suppliers is not immediate and usually takes around four to six weeks.

You will usually have to wait about a month before your new supplier sends you a letter to inform you when your account(s) will be switched. It is important that you take a meter reading of the fuel you are switching and send a copy of the reading to both the new supplier and the supplier you are leaving. If you need help reading your meter, contact either energy supplier.

If you change your mind about switching then you have 14 days to cancel your contract.

If you need help you can call The Home Heat Helpline 0800 33 66 99 or visit [www.homeheathelpline.org](http://www.homeheathelpline.org)



## 'Door steppers' and sales calls

You should only switch suppliers when you are sure that you are getting a competitive deal.

## Priority Services Register

There are free services available for gas and electricity customers across the UK. If you are a domestic customer and one or more of the following applies to you:

- pensionable age
- have a disability
- have long term ill health
- are blind or visually impaired.

You will qualify for the register, every gas and electricity supplier has a register, to join contact your own energy supplier see details on the reverse of your bill.



## Fuel payment methods and dealing with fuel debt

Gas and electric bills can be paid in many different ways. Different methods suit different people, with different lifestyles, financial arrangements and personal circumstances. The following payment methods may help you to make the right decision. In some cases it may be cheaper to have your gas and electric from the same company known as a 'Dual Fuel' arrangement.

### ● Quarterly/bimonthly bill

Bill sent direct to householder to pay over the counter. Suits households with a stable income, and an income that will easily cope with changing prices.

### ● Monthly Direct Debit or standing order from bank account

Set up by the householder so bills are paid automatically through the bank every month. Suits households with regular income, and those who find monthly budgeting easier than quarterly

### ● Budget Schemes or 'cashplan' without bank account

Householder can pay either, weekly, fortnightly or monthly at a post office or pay point using cash. The amount is agreed between the supplier and householder.



### ● Budget meter/token meter/card meter

The house buys tokens or charges a smart card or key that is inserted into the meter. The fuel is therefore paid in advance. Suits households who want a prepayment meter and don't find the access to obtaining keys/tokens a problem and those who are in debt so they can repay debt through meter

### ● Fuel Direct

Income support, pension credit and job seekers allowance claimants can have their fuel debts and an amount to cover their weekly consumption of fuel deducted direct from their benefits. As payment is taken directly out of benefits the customer doesn't have to think about it.

**You can contact the Bristol Debt Advice Centre on 0117 954 354 [energy@bdac.org.uk](mailto:energy@bdac.org.uk) for help and advice with:**

- clearing gas and electricity arrears
- applying for help with other household expenditure
- applying for help with bankruptcy fees
- setting up a manageable payment plan for ongoing electricity and gas usage
- reducing ongoing gas and electricity usage, by providing energy efficiency advice and referrals to energy grant and discount schemes.

### **Meter readings**

Whichever energy supplier you are with, it is better that your bills are based on meter readings, not estimates. Contact your supplier to find out how to read your meter and the different ways you can send them your meter readings.



### **For further information energy efficiency please contact:**

Housing Renewals Team  
Adult Social Services and Housing  
North Somerset Council, Somerset House, Oxford Street  
Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1TG

Tel: **01934 426 686** Fax: **01934 426 728**  
email: [kim.herivel@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:kim.herivel@n-somerset.gov.uk)



**Council documents can be made available in large print, audio, easy read and other formats.  
Documents on our website can also be emailed to you as plain text files.**

**Help is also available for people who require council information in languages other than English.**

**For more information contact: 01934 426 686 or [kim.herivel@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:kim.herivel@n-somerset.gov.uk)**