

Gas and electricity

Changing gas and electricity suppliers and dealing with problems or making complaints can be complicated and time-consuming. In this section, we have provided information about how you can get help to deal with these matters and to get the best service possible.

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Reading your energy meter

Your gas or electricity meter records how much energy you've used. Your energy supplier will need this when working out your bill. If you don't give them regular readings of your meter they will estimate how much energy you have used, which may mean your bill might be too high.

It is your responsibility to take regular meter readings, not your energy supplier. Many people only ever submit a meter reading when they move in or out of a new home, but it is a good idea to give your supplier regular meter readings, for example four times a year.

You can go online or call your supplier and give them the meter reading so they don't have to make an estimate for your bill.

For more information on how to read different types of energy meters visit the [Citizens Advice website](#).

Smart meters

Smart meters are new energy meters that are gradually being introduced around the country. The government is rolling out a programme to see smart meters introduced for free in all UK homes by 2020.

Existing gas and electricity meters only record how much energy you have used in total. As well as doing that, smart meters also identify when you used the energy, which can help you understand how much you're using at different times.

Smart meters also send accurate meter readings to your energy supplier, so you won't receive any more estimated bills or need manual meter readings. You will still receive your energy bills in the same way eg paper or online, but your bill should always be accurate with a smart meter.

The information is provided to you via your own in-home display, which shows you how much gas and electricity you're using, and what it's costing in pounds and pence. Having an in-home display means that you can also look at how much your consumption goes up when using the kettle, oven, hairdryer or anything else that requires power. If you change supplier your meter may no longer be Smart but you can still change supplier.

How to get a smart meter

To get a smart meter you will need to contact your energy supplier. Your gas and electricity supplier will then provide and fit your meter for you at no extra cost. Some energy suppliers are installing smart meters in Newcastle but this is a big national programme so some customers may have to wait a while to get their meter.

For more information on smart meters visit the [Smart Energy GB](#) website.

Choosing or Changing your Energy Supplier

You may be able to save money on your bills by changing your energy supplier:

[Energy Services at the Council](#) has a [comparison and switching service](#). If you switch using their service you will also be helping to tackle fuel poverty in the city as each switch generates a small income which can be used to help vulnerable residents.

You will still use the same meters (unless it is an early Smart meter) and have the same gas pipes and electricity cables. All that will change will be who sells you your gas and electricity, and who sends you your bills.

You may find it useful to read the Citizens Advice information on [Your Energy Supply](#).

Ofgem, the UK energy regulator, has estimated that 35% of households have never switched their supplier and could be missing out on average savings of £300 a year.

Local support to find a cheaper energy provider

There are four [Community & Information hubs and libraries](#) in Newcastle. Each of these has staff who can help. Simply take your current energy bill into one of the hubs at any time during their normal opening hours and ask for help to find your '[EnergyBest Deal](#)'.

For more information on your Information Hub and library please visit the [Libraries](#) article on Information NOW.

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Getting 'Priority Services' from your Gas and Electricity Suppliers

All gas and electricity suppliers are required to give priority services on request and without charge to people of pensionable age, people with disabilities, and the chronically ill.

Examples of these services include:

- a free annual safety check on your gas appliances if all adults in your home are of pensionable age, are disabled or are chronically ill;
- quarterly meter readings if no-one in your household is able to read the meter themselves;
- providing special controls and adapters to help you to read your meter or to use your gas or electricity appliances if you are having difficulties;
- moving your gas or electricity meter to a more convenient position, free of charge, if you are finding it difficult to access or read;
- sending your bill to a nominated third party for payment;
- providing special means, for example a password, for you to confirm the identity of a gas or electricity employee calling at your home;
- providing information about your meter reading and your bills in a suitable format for you if you have a visual or hearing impairment (for example, Braille or 'talking' bills); and
- giving you priority to get your gas or electricity supply restored or, if necessary, arrangements will be made for temporary heating and cooking facilities.

If you think that any of these services would be helpful, you should contact your energy supplier to see whether they can provide them for you.

[Northern Powergrid](#) has a Priority Service for people who feel that they would benefit from receiving priority treatment during a power cut. For example people with long term medical conditions or visual impairment. Registering with the service means you will receive priority treatment during a power cut. They can help you to plan for a power cut, keep you informed and send assistance. Contact them to register.

Locking off your gas supply

Vulnerable people such as those with Alzheimer's or learning disabilities may need extra protection from gas leaks in their home. You can now request a locking cooker valve which can be fitted for free by a your gas provider. The valve allows carers to lock off the gas supply so the cooker cannot be used unless the key holder is present. [Click here for further details.](#)

Winter Fuel and Cold Weather payments

Schemes are available to older people to help pay their energy bills during the colder months.

[The Warm Home Discount Scheme](#) is managed by Lets Talk Charis and provides a £140 discount on your electricity bill if on the qualifying date:

- your supplier was part of the scheme
- your name (or your partner's) was on the bill
- you were getting the Guarantee Credit element of [Pension Credit](#) (even if you get Savings Credit as well)

The discount won't affect your [Cold Weather Payment](#) or [Winter Fuel Payment](#)

Complaining about your Energy Supplier

If you wish to make a complaint about your gas or electricity supplier, your first point of contact should be the supplier's complaints department. You may also find it useful to read the [Citizens Advice article](#) on how to complain to your energy supplier. [Energy Services, Newcastle City Council](#) also provide a telephone helpline and will offer advice if you wish to complain to your supplier.

If you feel that your complaint has not been dealt with satisfactorily, you may then wish to take your complaint to the [Ombudsman Services: Energy](#)

For more information please visit the Information NOW article on [How to make a good complaint](#).

[Citizens Advice Newcastle \(CAN\)](#) provide an online service offering information and advice on consumer issues. They provide clear, practical, impartial advice to help you sort out problems and disagreements you may be having with suppliers of goods or services.

Power cuts

If you have a power cut, you should contact your local electricity network operator rather than your electricity supplier. For Newcastle, this is [Northern Powergrid](#).

[Powercut 105](#) is a free helpline where you can report to or get information about power cuts in your area. You can also call 105 if you spot damage to electricity power lines and substations that could put you, or someone else, in danger. If there's a serious immediate risk, you should call the emergency services too.

Fraud and Scams

Home Improvements

Please be wary of unexpected doorstep callers or telephone calls offering energy saving improvements to your home and charge fees for assessments. The Green Deal is a national scheme which allows you to get energy efficiency improvements to your property without having to pay up front. Contact the trusted organisations listed above for advice. See our article on [Fraud and Scams](#) if you are worried about bogus callers.

Energy pre-payment customers

Energy companies have uncovered a doorstep scam which seems to offer cheaper electricity meter top-ups but ends up with consumers paying twice. Criminals are using cloned keys to top up credit illegally. Some people are being offered £50 of electricity meter top-up for a cash payment of just £25. Energy companies can always detect when they have not received payment for electricity used and any customer buying top-up from a criminal will end up paying twice, first to the criminal and then to their energy supplier. Only the criminal will benefit. Companies never sell electricity top-up door-to-door. There is evidence of serious and organised criminal activity and they are urging customers not to get involved.

If you think you have been affected or would like more information, contact your electricity supplier directly or visit our article on [Fraud and Scams](#) for more information.

Other Useful Articles

You may also find these articles on Information Now useful

- [Help with heating problems and how to pay for them](#)
- [Cold Weather Payments](#)
- [Winter Fuel Payments](#)
- [Energy Saving Tips](#)

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Useful Organisations

Citizens Advice Newcastle (CAN)

Email: citycab@newcastlecab.org.uk

Website: <http://citizensadvice-newcastle.org.uk/>

Telephone: 0300 3309 055

Address: 4th Floor, City Library, NE1 8AX

Energy Services at Newcastle City Council

Email: energy@newcastle.gov.uk

Website: www.newcastle.gov.uk/energyadvice

Telephone: 0191 278 3427

Address: Newcastle City Council, NE6 2SZ

npower Health Through Warmth®

Email: healththroughwarmth@npower.com

Website: healththroughwarmth.com

Telephone: 0800 022 220

Address: Oakhouse, WR4 9FP

Energy Saving Trust Advice

Email: energy-advice@est.org.uk

Website: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7222 0101

Address: 30 North Colonnade, E14 5GP

British Gas Energy Trust

Email: bget@charisgrants.com

Website: www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk

Telephone: 01733 421 021

Address: PO Box 42, PE3 8XH

Newcastle Libraries

Email: information@newcastle.gov.uk

Website: www.newcastle.gov.uk/leisure-libraries-and-tourism/libraries

Telephone: 0191 277 4100

Address: Newcastle City Library, NE1 8AX

Moneysupermarket

Website: www.moneysupermarket.com

Telephone: 0845 345 5708

Address: Moneysupermarket House,, CH5 3UZ

Warm Home Discount Scheme

Email: warmhomediscount@decc.gsi.gov.uk

Website: <https://www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme/overview>

Telephone: 0845 345 5708

Address: Warm Home Discount Team, FY4 5ES

Newcastle City Council

Website: www.newcastle.gov.uk

Telephone: 0191 278 7878

Address: Civic Centre, NE1 8QH

EDF Energy Trust

Email: edfet@charisgrants.com

Website: www.edfenergytrust.org.uk

Telephone: 01733 421060

Address: PO Box 42, PE3 8XH

npower Energy Fund

Email: npef@charisgrants.com

Website: www.npowerenergyfund.com

Telephone: 01733 421021

Address: FREEPOST RSRX-JHTT-AZSG, PE3 8XH

Citizens Advice

Website: www.adviceguide.org.uk

Telephone: 01733 421021

Address: Citizens Advice, EC1A 4HD

GOV.UK

Website: www.gov.uk

Telephone: 01733 421021

Ombudsman Services: Energy

Email: enquiries@os-energy.org

Website: <http://www.ombudsman-services.org/energy.html>

Telephone: 0330 440 1624

Address: PO Box 966, WA4 9DF

Ofgem

Email: consumeraffairs@ofgem.gov.uk

Website: www.ofgem.gov.uk

Telephone: 020 7901 7295

Northern Powergrid

Email: cust.serv@northernpowergrid.com

Website: <http://www.northernpowergrid.com>

Telephone: 0800 66 88 77

Address: RSXE-RCZX-XKBL, Manor House, DH4 7LA

Smart Energy GB

Website: <https://www.smartenergygb.org/en>

Telephone: 0800 66 88 77

Lets Talk Charis

Email: EnergyFund@Lets-Talk.online

Website: <https://www.lets-talk.online/>

Telephone: 0800 66 88 77

Gocompare.com

Email: help@gocompare.com

Website: <http://www.gocompare.com>

Telephone: 01633 654 019

Address: Gocompare.com Limited, NP10 8UH

Compare the Market

Website: <https://www.comparethemarket.com>

Telephone: 0800 093 6831

Address: Pegasus House, PE2 6YS

Related Articles

[Winter Fuel Payments](#)

[Dealing with debt](#)

[Welfare benefits](#)

[Getting advice about your finances](#)

[Help with heating problems and how to pay for them](#)

[Cold Weather Payments](#)

[How to make a good complaint](#)

[Energy saving tips](#)