

MONTHLY GATESHEAD HEALTH STAFF ADVICE BULLETIN

ISSUE 24: Energy

As the days get shorter and the cold weather sets in, people begin to bring out their winter accessories, spend more time couped up inside, and consume more hot drinks. For many it's a time of festivities and a chance to see friends and family, here at Citizens Advice however, we also see the strain the winter months can have on individuals and families. These months bring extra expenses, with a key issue being the amount of additional energy we all use to heat our homes and keep lights on. For our last bulletin of 2023 we want to offer advice on discounts that are available, how to mitigate price increases, and what to do if you are struggling to pay your energy bills.

We also want to update you on the recent announcement from Ofgem, the energy regulator, regarding household energy prices in the UK. Starting in January, there will be an increase in typical annual household bills, with a projected rise of £94 over the year due to a 5% increase in the energy price cap. The cap establishes the maximum amount that energy suppliers can charge for each unit of energy consumed. Previously, a temporary government guarantee was in place to limit household bills, but it concluded in June 2023. As a result, Ofgem's cap now determines the highest price suppliers can charge households per unit of energy. News of these increases may bring concern, but it is our hope that this bulletin can provide some useful information to limit the effect this may have on your household.

Energy Efficiency

To mitigate these increases, we advise everyone to focus on energy efficiency rather than reducing energy usage altogether.

- Assess your central heating system, exploring options like thermostats and timers. You can use these central heating controls to keep your home at a comfortable temperature without heating it more than you need to. Maintaining room temperatures between 18-21 degrees can contribute to efficiency, helping you save energy and reduce your bills.
- You could try lowering your thermostat by 1 degree and seeing if you are still comfortable with that temperature. Each degree reduction on your thermostat settings can result in approximately a 10% reduction in your energy bill.



If you have a health condition that may be exacerbated by cold temperatures, it is advised not to set your thermostat below 21°C.



- Check if your electricity usage can be minimised. You can check the cost of how much each appliance takes to run. Understanding the usage costs of your electrical appliances and exploring alternative ways to use them more efficiently, can help you to save money.

You can compare how much electrical appliances cost to use with this [calculator](#)

- If your heating system breaks or malfunctions, address the issue quickly to avoid using expensive portable electric heaters. If you are a tenant, request your landlord to resolve heating issues, as they are generally responsible for ensuring proper plumbing and heating functionality.
- For other ways to make your home more energy efficient – check out [Citizens Advice Website](#)

Discounts and Grants

Help may be available if you're facing challenges covering your energy bill or topping up your prepayment meter. The support you get depend on:

- how you pay for your energy
- the type of energy you use
- if you claim benefits



There are energy scams to be aware of. Some scammers are pretending to be from energy companies to take your information. If you suspect a scam, do not give out personal information, bank details, or contact details.

- You can [check if something is a scam](#).

Warm Home Discount

The Warm Home Discount Scheme offers a £150 electricity bill discount for winter 2023 to 2024. The discount is applied between early October 2023 and 31 March 2024, automatically for most eligible recipients.

You are eligible if you either:

- Get the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit
- Are on a low income and have high energy costs

For those eligible for the Warm Home Discount (WHD), the £150 payment is made by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to suppliers, it's crucial to have received a confirmation letter from the DWP by now. If not, we recommend contacting the **Warm Home Discount helpline at 0800 030 9322** to check eligibility and ensure receipt of the WHD before the line closes in February.

Grants

- If you're behind with your energy bills, you might be able to get a grant to help you pay off your debt. This might be from your energy company or a charitable trust.
 - [Check which grants you can apply for.](#)
- You might be able to get help with the cost of things like insulation, a new boiler or improvements to your heating.
 - [Check if you can get help making energy-saving improvements to your home.](#)

Get help if you're behind with your energy bills

If you are behind on your gas and electricity bills it's important to contact your supplier to avoid being disconnected. Your energy supplier must help you come to a solution. If you contact your supplier you can discuss ways to pay what you owe and negotiate a deal that works for both of you.



You can use this [link](#) to find out how to contact your energy supplier

Agree a payment plan with your supplier:

- Inform your energy company that you want to pay off your debts in instalments as part of a payment plan.
- This will mean you will pay the same amount over a fixed period of time, paying only what you can afford. The plan will include both what you owe plus an amount for your ongoing usage.

The supplier must take into account:

- How much you can afford: supply them with information about your income and outgoings, debts and personal circumstances.
- How much energy you'll use in the future: they will base this on your past usage, but to make this more accurate give them regular meter readings.



If you need help knowing how much you can afford to pay, use our [budgeting tool](#) to assist you.

Warm Spaces

With an increase of people working from home, some are struggling to pay to keep their homes warm whilst they work. Warm Spaces are available to anyone in need of a warm space to share with others.

If you or someone you know would benefit from a warm space, you can use this [interactive map](#) to see what is available close to you.

Remember you can get in touch with your Citizens Advice Gateshead team for impartial advice, information, and guidance.

Email gestaffswa@citizensadvicegateshead.org.uk or call 0191 490 4231 and we'll be back in touch with you within 1 working day Monday to Friday.