

ELECTRICITY AND GAS GUIDE

A Praxis guide to tactics for surviving the high fuel costs this winter.

1) Groups get better results than individuals

Get an agency (like a Citizen's Advice Bureau) to phone on your behalf – that normally gets a better attitude out of the power companies. And you can go ahead and start up your own local group to start doing that for you and your friends and neighbours – the power companies won't know you just came into existence 10 minutes ago, so the effect will be the same. All you need is a phone number and a correspondence address.

2) Consumer Direct / Energy Watch – 08454 04 05 06

Don't spend too much time on the phone getting the run around, Instead call Consumer Direct (formerly Energy Watch) on 08454 04 05 06 and have them log the issue. ScottishPower and British Gas both have teams dedicated to handling Consumer Direct / EnergyWatch complaints and that will help get a proper prompt response.

More at <http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk>

3) Get the powercard / prepayment meters removed

Prepayment meters make you instantly self disconnect when you are short of money, rather than having the power company apply more slowly to the sheriff court for disconnection. So best to get rid of the prepayment meters.

3.1) If you don't have debt

If you don't have debt with the power company, and have no recent history of debt with them, then you can insist that prepayment meters be removed. The power company may try to stall that, so be ready to ask for their customer complaints department and then get on to Consumer Direct / Energy Watch.

3.2) And, even if you do have debt

If you (or people you care for) get DLA, or if you have young children, then you can argue that it is not practical for you to go outside looking for powercards to buy. That the only safe way for you to get power is through a non-prepayment meter.

Power companies will resist these requests at first, so get ready to ask right away for their customer complaints department and then get on to Consumer Direct / Energy Watch.

4) Fuel Direct Scheme

You cant get Electricity and Gas payments taken direct from benefits. That is normally much better than having a powercard prepayment meter. The DWP / Jobcentre Plus will send you out the application form for this if asked.

In most circumstances you must be receiving Income Support or Income Based Job Seekers Allowance to qualify for this. Incapacity Benefit often is ruled not to qualify – although you can

challenge the power company on that.

The power company will often try to reject the fuel direct application. If so, you should challenge them on that – being sick or disabled, being a family with children, and other circumstances like that can and should be enough to have fuel direct accepted.

5) The British Gas Energy Trust – free money – 01733 421060

If you are a British Gas (= Scottish Gas) customer you can apply to the British Gas Energy Trust to clear your debts with British Gas for you. They will also sometimes agree to help with other debts, such as Council Tax.

Call 01733 421060 for an application form (or online at <http://www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk/>)

To qualify you must be:

- A British Gas customer (= Scottish Gas customer); and
- On benefits or low income.

One good use of applying for the British Gas Trust is that it tends to put a hold on disconnection threats and other aggressive payment demands from British Gas for the (sometimes lengthy) time it takes for the British Gas Energy Trust to process your application.

6) Social Tarriffs – cheaper electricity and gas prices for people on low income.

These schemes are kept quiet by power companies, but they all offer them if asked. Details for the two big power companies are:

6.1) ScottishPower Social Tarriff - “CareFree Plus” - for the over 60's only - 0845 2700 700:

“CareFree Plus is our discounted product for some our more vulnerable customers on our [Carefree Register](#).

SAVE MONEY

CareFree Plus offers qualifying Carefree customers a fixed discount of up to nearly £112 per year.

Qualifying CRITERIA

To qualifying for the discount you must be:

1. 60 years of age or over
2. Registered on our CareFree Scheme.
3. In receipt of one of the following benefits:
 - Attendance allowance
 - Council tax benefit (not including single occupancy discount)
 - Disability living allowance
 - Child tax credit (where income is less than £15,592)
 - Housing benefit
 - Income-based JSA
 - Income support

- State pension credit
- Working tax credit (where household income is less than £15,592)
- War disablement pension (which either includes a mobility supplement or constant attendance allowance)
- Disablement pension which includes constant attendance allowance

4. Pay by Prepayment, or receive your bill quarterly.

FIND OUT MORE

If you wish to find out more or sign up for CareFree Plus please call 0845 2700 700 and ask for the CareFree team.”

http://www.scottishpower.co.uk/Home_Energy/Customer_Services/CareFree_Scheme/

6.2) British Gas (=Scottish Gas) Social Tariff - Essentials Tariff – for most all benefits and tax credits - 0800 072 7100

“We want to offer our lowest standard gas and electricity prices to customer that need it most.

If you don't have a bank account or are on supported by government benefits you can still access our cheapest standard gas and electricity prices that other customers paying by direct debit enjoy.

Who is eligible for Essentials?

- Disability Living Allowance
- Attendance Allowance
- War disablement pension (which includes either a mobility supplement or constant attendance allowance)
- Disablement Pension (which includes constant attendance allowance)
- Child Tax Credit (where the relevant income is £14,600 or less)
- Working Tax Credit (where the relevant income is £14,600 or less)
- Council Tax Benefit
- Housing Benefit
- Carers Allowance
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- Income Support
- Income-Based Job Seekers Allowance

How do I sign up?

Please call 0800 072 7100”

<http://www.britishgas.co.uk/products-and-services/energy/are-you-on-benefits.html>

6) Winter Payment Scheme - £125 or more every winter for over 60's - 08459 15 15 15

If you are over 60 in September, you will qualify for free extra money every year from that winter on.

If you get a state pension or benefits (not counting for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and

Child Benefit), then you ought to get this money paid automatically.

But if you are working or otherwise not on a state pension or benefit (not counting for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Child Benefit), then you have to fill out an application form to get the money.

Application form from 08459 15 15 15 or online at

<http://www.thepensionservice.gov.uk/winterfuel/home.asp>

7) More about us at:

- <http://praxisglasgow.wordpress.com/>
- <http://edinburghpraxis.wordpress.com/>