

Feeling Cold? We can help!

A guide to saving energy and saving money

A dark blue speech bubble containing the text 'citizens advice' in white lowercase letters.

**citizens
advice**

Gateshead

The High Cost of Heat Fuel poverty factors

Energy is an essential service, and everyone should be confident they can adequately heat their home and protect their health. At Citizens Advice Gateshead we strive to be there for people who find themselves in need of support. This booklet has been created to provide an overview of what fuel poverty is, and how someone who finds themselves either in or at risk of being in fuel poverty can do to get support.

There are numerous different routes to support and advice with fuel poverty, which can be overwhelming. This booklet gives an overview of the available support but it is important to remember that you should choose the one that feels right for you and your circumstances.

What is fuel poverty?

By the official definition, someone lives in fuel poverty if they spend 10% or more of their disposable household income on their energy costs.

The key factors that can contribute to fuel poverty are:

- ☑ The energy efficiency of the property (and therefore, the energy required to heat and power the home). Typically, any home with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of lower than C is performing poorly.
- ☑ The cost of energy.
- ☑ Low household income.

Number of households in fuel poverty is rising

In Gateshead, 9,985 households were deemed to be fuel poor in 2019. This is no surprise, as around 32,700 people living in Gateshead reside in some of the most deprived areas in England.

Fuel poverty can affect you regardless of how you pay for your electricity and gas. Whether you are on a prepayment meter, where you pay for your electricity or gas before you use it, or on a tariff with your supplier where you pay by direct debit.

Energy saving tips

Below are some energy saving tips from **Citizens Advice Gateshead** and the **Energy Saving Trust**

Save on heating

If you have a timer on your central heating system, set the heating and hot water to come on only when required.

If you turn down your main thermostat by 1 degree you can save around 10% on your energy bill. But make sure your home is warm enough during cold weather, as being cold can damage your health.

Installing a room thermostat, a programmer and thermostatic radiator valves and using these controls efficiently could save you around £75 a year.

Close your curtains at dusk to stop heat escaping through the windows and check for draughts around windows and doors.

Draught-proofing of window and doors and blocking cracks in floors and skirting boards can save around £20 a year on energy bills.

Save on appliances

Turning your appliances off standby mode can save you £35 a year. Remember not to leave laptops and mobile phones on charge unnecessarily.

Save on lighting

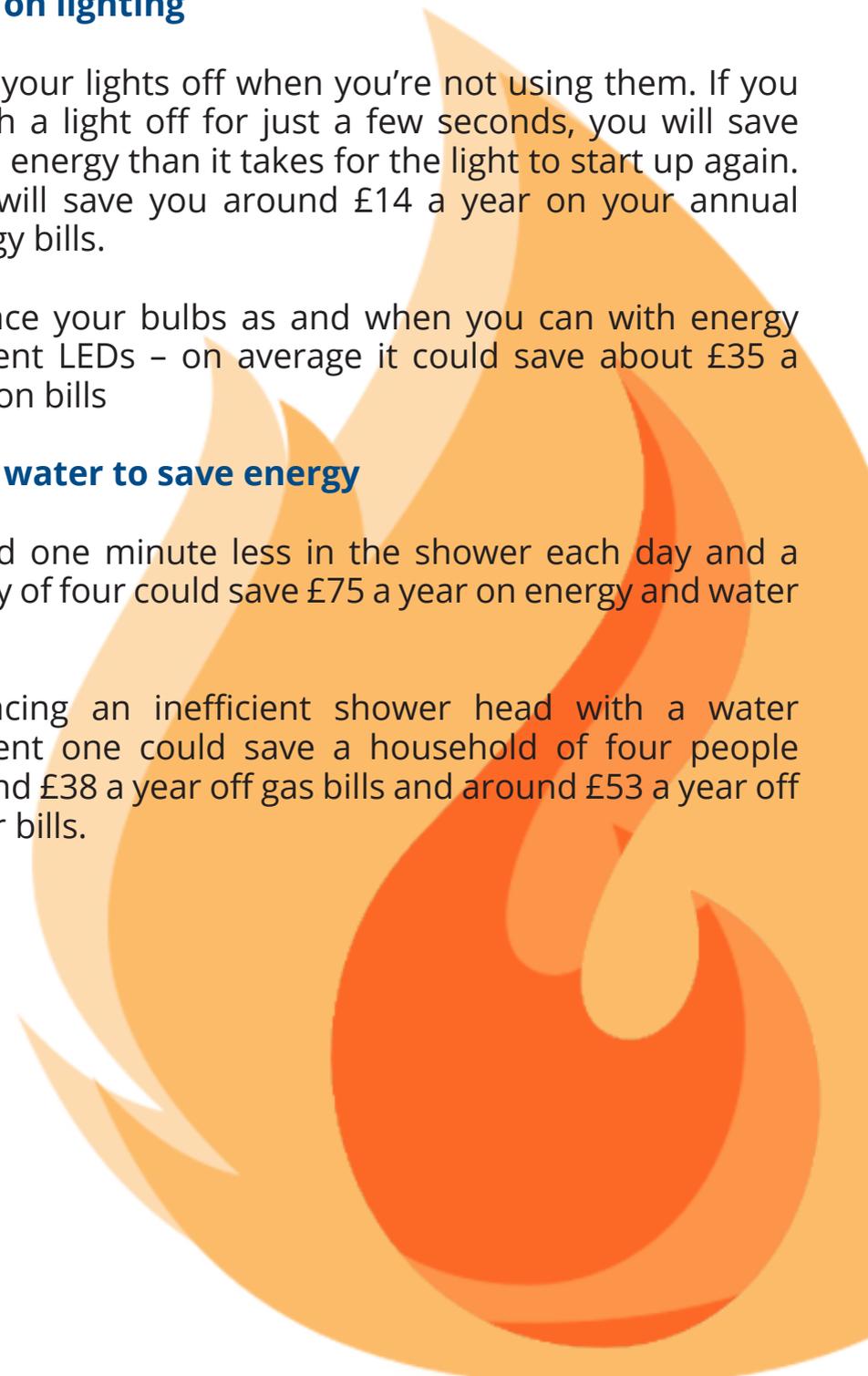
Turn your lights off when you're not using them. If you switch a light off for just a few seconds, you will save more energy than it takes for the light to start up again. This will save you around £14 a year on your annual energy bills.

Replace your bulbs as and when you can with energy efficient LEDs – on average it could save about £35 a year on bills

Save water to save energy

Spend one minute less in the shower each day and a family of four could save £75 a year on energy and water bills.

Replacing an inefficient shower head with a water efficient one could save a household of four people around £38 a year off gas bills and around £53 a year off water bills.



What can you do if you live in fuel poverty?

Your supplier is likely the best-equipped to help you, and we would encourage you to get in touch with them to explain your situation and seek support directly. However, if you have already tried this and are dissatisfied with what was said, or if you feel like you would benefit from some independent advice and information, this flow-chart can help guide you to the best solution for you.

Even if you have received a court warrant or have been threatened with disconnection, our Extra Help Unit may be able to assist you, so get in touch as soon as possible.

Are you confident finding information online and/or doing things yourself?

NO

YES

Contacting your supplier is a good place to start. These websites are also a great source of advice on energy issues:

citizensadvice.org.uk/energy

For information on how to go about addressing all kinds of energy issues

energysavingtrust.org.uk
simpleenergyadvice.org.uk

To find out about Government grants and support available to improve your home's energy efficiency

Do you feel your issue could be addressed by a simple phone call?

YES

NO

Call the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 0808 223 1133. Our energy advice specialists can help to guide you through various issues including:

Understanding tariffs, bills and fuel options

Understanding how to switch energy suppliers, including how to make price comparisons to identify savings

Providing advice on energy efficiency measures and identifying grants that are available to you

Support with complaints or customer service issues with an energy company

Advice on whether you are eligible for Warm Home Discount and Priority Service Register

Citizens Advice Gateshead can give you an Energy Advice appointment to guide you through multiple complex energy issues, or if you are in crisis

You can access Citizens Advice Gateshead's energy advice by calling 0191 478 5100, sending an email to

advice@citizensadvicegateshead.org.uk

or by dropping into our office located on Swan Street, Gateshead, to arrange an appointment. This route may be best for you if:

- You have multiple complex energy issues
- You need advice on benefit entitlement and/or assistance in claiming benefits. This includes checks for eligibility and applications for Warm Home Discount, rebates available from energy suppliers and the Priority Services Register
- You need advice on dealing with and reducing fuel debt, including accessing financial support to pay off fuel debts through charitable grants and ongoing payment plans
- You are in energy crisis and cannot heat or power your home

Quick-fire advice reference

My meter has stopped working and I have put credit on but it has disappeared or isn't registering

One of the simplest reasons for faults is a dirty key or card. The first thing to try is cleaning it with a clean dry cloth before putting it back in.

If your meter develops a fault your supplier must help you. There should be an emergency helpline on your latest bill.

Sometimes suppliers take sums off from meter top-ups to pay towards fuel debts, standing charges or emergency credit. Speak to your supplier about your issue and seek to work out a more affordable payment plan. If they refuse, speak to Citizens Advice Gateshead about your options.

If your gas meter has developed a fault it could be dangerous – call the Gas Emergency Services on 0800 111 999.

My boiler is broken

If you are a tenant, whether social housing or private, write to your landlord and keep a copy of the letter/email yourself. If your landlord refuses, seek help from Citizens Advice Gateshead or Gateshead Council's private landlords support team on 0191 433 3000.

If you own your home check the Simple Energy Advice website, which has an eligibility calculator that can tell you if you can apply for assistance with a new boiler through the government "ECO" scheme.

I can't afford my energy bills and I have already used my emergency credit

Whatever the reason is, and regardless of if you're on a prepayment meter or on a tariff, your first action should be to contact your supplier directly about supporting you through tough times. If they refuse to help, speak to Citizens Advice Gateshead.

If your affordability issue stems from low income, debts or benefit problems, consider seeking benefits and/or money advice from Citizens Advice Gateshead.

My house is cold and damp

There are numerous agencies which can help you to improve the energy efficiency of your home to keep it warm and safe. Contacting your energy supplier for advice is a good place to start.

"Condensation damp" is a common issue in homes which lack proper insulation, ventilation and heating. Things that can help include covering pans when cooking, using an extractor fan in the kitchen or bathroom, closing internal doors when showering or cooking, drying clothes outdoors or using a vented tumble drier, leave a gap between furniture and external walls and opening windows for short periods when you get up

Other kinds of damp such as rising, penetrating, or construction damp require more intervention than simply improving your heating. Speak to Citizens Advice Gateshead if you think your home has any of these kinds of damp.

How to Switch Your Energy Provider

You might be able to save money on your gas and electricity bills by switching to a new supplier or new tariff with your current supplier.

Before you decide to switch

- ☑ Check what kind of meter you have
- ☑ Check if your contract has an 'exit fee' for leaving early
- ☑ Look at your current suppliers tariffs

There are some extra things to consider if you:

- ☑ have a Smart Meter, Prepayment Meter or Economy 7 Meter- you'll need to talk to suppliers about compatibility with your meter and if they have the right tariff for you.
- ☑ if you're in Debt to your supplier- you may not be able to switch or might need to follow a different process.
- ☑ receive the Warm Homes discount- you'll need to check if a new supplier offers the discount as you'll lose it if you don't and you'll also need to apply again if you switch.

If you're not sure you may wish to seek advice before switching from the Consumer Helpline 0808 223 1133

How to switch supplier or tariff

Follow these steps to switch:

- ☑ Compare tariffs from different suppliers- make sure you use a comparison site which is accredited to the Ofgem Confidence Code (the energy comparison site code of conduct).
- ☑ Once you've found one, call the supplier - they'll set up the switch and tell your old supplier. Take a meter reading on the day of the transfer to give to your new supplier - this means they won't charge you for energy used before the switch.
- ☑ Pay your old supplier's final bill or get a refund if you're in credit.

You can compare tariffs and switch online at energycompare.citizensadvice.org.uk

Our price comparison tool operates to Ofgem Confidence Code standards.

Once the switch has started, you'll also need to give the new supplier your energy meter reference numbers. You can find these numbers on your energy bill - they're called:

- ☑ meter point reference number or MPRN
- ☑ meter point administration number or MPAN

The switch should be done within 15 working days of the new supplier receiving the information they need.



www.citizensadvicegateshead.org.uk

www.facebook.com/CitizensAdviceGateshead

twitter.com/AdviceGateshead

Company Limited by guarantee Registration No. 2631064
Charity Registration No 1020565
Registered Office: The Davidson Building, Swan Street,
Gateshead, NE8 1BG
© 2021 Citizens Advice Gateshead

Flame icon based on Funky Flame by Peter van Driel from the Noun Project