

# Staying connected

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## Important information for energy consumers

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# Organisations that help energy consumers

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## 1 What organisations or bodies can help me to find out more about switching supplier?

[Consumer Direct](#) can give general advice on [switching suppliers](#). You can contact them Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, on 08454 04 05 06. For advice in Welsh, you can call 08454 04 05 05.

For online advice, visit the [Consumer Focus](#) website. It has useful information on switching energy provider and allows you to compare the prices of different suppliers.

If you are using another website to compare energy prices, look out for the [Consumer Focus Confidence Code](#) logo. Sites with this logo are safe to use because they meet the minimum standards set by Consumer Focus for comparing energy prices.



For advice based on your personal situation, contact [Citizens Advice](#) or [Citizens Advice Scotland](#). You can find your local office on their websites. Or you can visit the Citizens Advice [Adviceguide](#) website for more general information about switching supplier.

There are a number of other organisations such as [Which?](#) and Money Saving Expert ([MSE](#)) which also have relevant information on their websites.

## 2 Where can I find out about my rights as an electricity and/or gas consumer?

For general information about your rights, you can visit the Citizens Advice [Adviceguide](#) website. Or you can call Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06 (08454 04 05 05 if you speak Welsh). It is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

See our questions about [making complaints](#) for information about your rights if you are unhappy with an energy supplier and want to complain.

## 3 Which public body is responsible for promoting fair and effective competition?

[Ofgem](#) is the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets. Protecting consumers is its first priority. It does this by promoting competition, wherever appropriate, and regulating the large companies that run the gas and electricity networks.

Ofgem does not regulate suppliers' prices. It has an interest in all issues that affect gas and electricity consumers. This includes reducing greenhouse gases and guaranteeing a secure supply of gas and electricity.

#### 4 Who is responsible for consumer protection?

Several organisations help protect energy consumers.

- [Ofgem](#) makes sure that energy companies compete fairly so that consumers get a good deal. It has introduced standards that suppliers must meet before they get a licence to supply energy. Ofgem does not investigate individual consumer complaints but it has set rules which suppliers and distribution companies should follow when handling consumer complaints.
- [Consumer Direct](#) gives independent advice to energy consumers, including on how to make a complaint. Your energy supplier has to include Consumer Direct's contact details on the back of your bill. You can contact Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06 (or 08454 04 05 05 if you speak Welsh). Consumer Direct are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
- The [Ombudsman Services: Energy](#) offers free help to consumers who are not happy with the way their supplier or distribution company has handled a complaint. Your energy supplier has to include the Ombudsman's contact details on the back of your bill. The Ombudsman Services: Energy cannot investigate the complaint until the energy company has had the chance to investigate it (see [Question 30b](#)). You can contact the Ombudsman Services: Energy on 0330 440 1624 or 01925 530263, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Or you can use its [online enquiry form](#).
- [Consumer Focus](#) campaigns for a better deal for energy consumers and provides general advice. It also has a responsibility to help vulnerable consumers who have been disconnected or may be disconnected. If you think you may be a vulnerable consumer, you should contact Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06.

#### 5 What is a vulnerable energy consumer?

Energy suppliers will not disconnect consumers they think are vulnerable, and they will try to make sure they get the help they need to pay their bills.

Vulnerable people may include:

- pensioners
- disabled people
- people who are chronically ill
- people who cannot look after their own welfare or those who live with them

Suppliers have to identify whether a consumer is vulnerable before disconnecting them.

[Consumer Direct](#) can refer vulnerable people to the [Consumer Focus Extra Help Unit](#) for help. You can contact Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06 (or 08454 04 05 05 if you speak Welsh). Consumer Direct are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Vulnerable consumers can also ask to go on their supplier's Priority Services Register. This is a list of special services for people who are on pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick. Services available to people on the Register may include:

- a password to prove that a worker is a representative of the supplier or distribution company
- bills in large print or Braille

- moving (for free) a prepayment meter if it can't easily be reached because of infirmity
- reading (for free) of meter every quarter if they or no-one else in the property can do it
- sending a bill to a nominated representative of the consumer

Customers in receipt of a means-tested benefit, for example income support, pension credit etc, and who live alone or with someone under five and who are of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick may also get a free annual gas safety check.

## **6 Where do I go to find out more on different methods for paying for my electricity or gas bills?**

You should contact your energy supplier to find out the different ways you can pay. All suppliers have to offer a range of payment options, but some options are cheaper than others. For example, if you pay by a monthly Direct Debit, you will usually pay less than if you pay your bill after you get your bill in the post.

### **7a What kind of electricity or gas meters are available?**

Your electricity or gas meter will either be a 'credit' or a 'prepayment' meter.

If you have a credit meter then your supplier will bill you regularly for any electricity or gas that you use. You can pay for energy in a number of different ways including Direct Debit, cash or debit card, or by weekly or fortnightly payment card.

Prepayment meters are often called 'pay as you go' meters. You are required to pay in advance for any electricity or gas you use. If the meter runs out of credit it will disconnect and you will not have an electricity or gas supply until you top it up with more credit.

However, your meter will have a certain amount of emergency credit which you can use until you are able to top up your meter again. Follow the instructions on your prepayment meter to activate the emergency credit. When you next top up your meter, you will need to pay back the emergency credit before additional credit is put on your meter. Contact your supplier for more information about how emergency credit works.

Consumers can 'top' up their meters at Paypoint, Payzone or Post Office outlets. Your supplier will be able to provide you with a list of the nearest outlets.

Your electricity meter will be either:

- a single rate meter, where all your electricity is charged at the same rate, no matter what time of day you use it or
- a two or three rate meter where electricity is charged at different rates at different times of the day (for example Economy 7, Economy 10, White Meter Comfort Plus and Total Heat Total Control)

If you are not sure which type you have, check your meter. If it has more than one display then you have a two or three rate meter. If this is the case you should check to see whether you are on a special tariff that works with your meter eg Economy 7, etc.

Your supplier can provide more information about this including the type of meter you have and, if relevant, when the cheaper hours are.

Gas meters only have a single rate. You will pay the same price regardless of when you use gas in your home.

## 7b What kind of tariffs are available?

Suppliers offer a wide range of different tariffs. Some of the most common types are standard, fixed, price, capped price, online, green tariffs, time of use or off peak tariffs,

Your supplier will have a list of all their available tariffs on their website or you can contact them by telephone.

## 8 Where do I go to get energy efficiency advice?

Your energy supplier has to give you information on how to save energy, if you ask for it, and has to have a phone service and publish information on its website. It also has to give you this information if you are finding it difficult to pay your bill and may want to find ways to reduce your bill in future.

You can also contact the [Energy Saving Trust](#) for free advice based on your personal situation and information about how to apply for energy efficiency grants. For online advice, visit its website. Or you can call 0800 512 012.

## 9 How do I find out the fuel mix of my electricity supply?

Contact your electricity supplier and ask them to explain the sources of the energy you buy from them. All suppliers have to give this information to their consumers once a year. Or you can find the information on the [Consumer Focus](#) website.

## 10 How can I find out more information on 'green tariffs' offered by suppliers

The [Green Energy Supply Certification Scheme](#) gives information tariffs that are environmentally friendly. This means it matches your electricity supply with renewable energy and have other benefits for the environment. All of the tariffs on its website have been checked independently and meet Ofgem's standards for the supply of green energy.

# Understanding your energy bills

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## 11 What information is my supplier obliged to give me on my bill?

Your usual bill has to contain:

- your name and address
- your supplier's address and phone number
- your customer reference / account number (on the front of the bill)
- the name of the tariff you have
- your current balance (how much you owe or are in credit)
- the time period that the bill covers
- previous and current meter readings

- the number of units of energy you have used – for this bill and over the last 12 months
- how much you pay for each unit of energy
- the amount of standing charge, if you have one
- details of any discounts
- the amount of VAT you have to pay
- the MPR/MPAN (unique reference number for the supply)
- your meter serial number
- emergency phone numbers
- the telephone number for Consumer Direct (on the back of your bill)
- information about the Ombudsman Services: Energy (on the back of your bill)

If your supplier has not changed in the previous 12 months your bill should compare how much you used in the period of that bill with the same period 12 months before.

Your bill should also tell you approximately how much you will pay in the next 12 months if you stay on the same tariff, use the same amount of energy as the last 12 months and your tariff price remains the same.

## **12 Will my energy supplier send me information on my actual energy consumption over a given period?**

Some consumers will get regular bills from their supplier and others will not. This depends on the kind of tariff you have. For example, you will often not get regular bills if you have a prepayment meter. You can check your contract or contact your supplier to find out if you will get regular bills.

If you have been with your current supplier for longer than 12 months, you will get an annual statement every year. You will receive this no matter what type of meter or deal you have – even if you do not get regular bills. This statement should remind you of the main points in your contract and tell you:

- the name of your tariff
- how much energy you have used in the past 12 months
- how much you will pay in the next 12 months if you continue to use the same amount of energy
- whether you can get any discounts
- how to switch suppliers if you want to

## **13 Does my supplier have to explain how my bill is calculated?**

Your bills and statement must give you information that explains what you are paying for. So, it must tell you how many units of energy you have used and how much you pay for each unit. It should also explain any other charges.

[Question 11](#) explains what else should be on your bill.

## 14 Who do I contact if I do not understand my bill?

If you don't understand the information on your bill, you should contact your supplier and ask them to explain it to you or you can contact Consumer Direct (see Section 6). If you are still confused, you can contact [Consumer Direct](#) on 08454 04 05 06 (08454 04 05 05 if you speak Welsh). It is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

# Understanding energy contracts

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## 15 What information should I ask a potential supplier before entering a contract?

Your contract is your agreement with your supplier, and it is protected by law. So you should get all the information you need to make the right decision about whether to sign a contract with an energy supplier.

The best way to carry out a price comparison is to use a Confidence Code accredited switching site. They will have information about all of the tariffs offered by suppliers. See [Question 26](#).

You should ask a potential supplier for information about:

- the terms and conditions of tariffs
- length of contract (if fixed term)
- unit prices of gas and electricity
- discounts
- penalties – for example if you want to end your contract early
- cancellation rights
- standing charges

Always consider every bit of your contract carefully before you agree to it. This includes the terms and conditions. If you find them difficult to understand, you can ask the supplier or an independent adviser to explain what they mean.

If something is not in your contract it is not part of your deal. Never let sales agents force you into signing a contract immediately. Ask for all the information you need and ask them to come back or telephone another day once you have had time to read through the details.

When agreeing a contract with a face to face sales agent, make sure that the sales agent does not leave any blanks. Take time to check the whole document.

Your supplier should give you a short period of time (usually two weeks) to change your mind about the contract you have signed.

## 16 What is the maximum length of time a supplier is able to tie a consumer into in a contract?

There is no maximum length. Some suppliers do offer fixed term contracts (contracts for a specific period), but these generally last for one to two years.

## **17 Once I have signed a contract will I be sent a full copy of it?**

You should have a full contract either at the time you sign or as soon as possible after. You should not sign a contract if you believe that any part of it may be missing. If a sales agent says that part of your contract will be sent in the future, do not sign until you have received all the information you need to make a decision about whether this is the right agreement for you.

You can ask your supplier to send you a copy of your contract at any time.

If you agree to a deal online, your supplier will send you a copy of your contract in the post. Or it will send an email that includes the terms and conditions of your contract or a link to the website where you can find this information.

## **18a Will I be asked for a deposit or connection charge when I sign a new energy contract?**

There are many reasons a supplier can ask you for a deposit (a lump sum of money) before it supplies you with gas or electricity. For example, you may have had problems paying bills in the past or you may not be on the electoral roll (the list of people who can vote in this country).

There is no maximum deposit, but it has to be a reasonable amount. You do get the money back with interest after a year as long as you pay your bills on time.

Before it asks you for a deposit, a supplier has to give you other options, including:

- a prepayment meter
- fuel direct scheme (taking payment from your benefits)
- Direct Debit scheme
- regular payment scheme

If none of these options are right for you, you can try proving to the supplier that you have a good credit history or giving the name of someone who will guarantee to pay your energy bills if you fail to pay them. You can also look around for a supplier which doesn't require you to pay a deposit.

You will not have to pay a connection charge if you already have a meter in your home. See [Question 37b](#) for getting a new electricity or gas connection to your home.

## **18b What steps should I take if I think that one of my contract terms has been changed without adequate notice? Who should I contact?**

Your supplier should give you 30 days advance notice of any significant variations to your contract such as price changes.

If you are unhappy with your supplier's actions you should follow the complaints procedure explained in [Question 30b](#).

## **19 Is there a minimum level of supply quality? Am I entitled to compensation if the predetermined quality of supply is not met?**

Yes. There are:

- [minimum standards and standard compensation amounts for gas transporters and electricity distributors](#)

There is also compensation available if certain standards are not met by suppliers, for example missed appointments:

- [minimum standards and standard compensation amounts for gas and electric suppliers](#)

These apply to all consumers.

If you think your supply does not meet these standards, you should follow the complaints procedure set out in [Question 30b](#).

## **20 How often does my supplier have to read my meter? How often should I be provided with a bill based on actual meter readings?**

Gas suppliers have to take all reasonable steps to inspect your meter every two years. This applies even if you start a contract with a supplier towards the end of the two years. They are still responsible for making sure the meter is read on time.

With electricity, suppliers also have to take all reasonable steps to inspect every two years from the date they become your supplier.

Most suppliers will try to read your meter quarterly or at least annually. You can provide a meter reading at any point. Contact details for doing this are usually provided by suppliers on their bills and other communications with you. If your bill is a lot more or less than it should be, you can contact your supplier with a reading and ask for a new bill. If you do not read your meter yourself, your bills may be less accurate and you may have to 'catch up' on payment with future bills.

If you have problems reading your meter, you can ask to go on your supplier's Priority Service Register [See Question 5](#). You can ask them to read your meter four times a year free of charge.

## **21 When and how is my meter read?**

You can read your meter yourself, but at least once every two years your supplier will send an agent to check the meter.

All agents should have a card with a photograph that proves they are from your supplier. There are no situations in which an agent should turn up without this card.

If somebody says they have come to read your meter but they do not have an identification card from your supplier, do not let them into your home.

If it makes you feel safer, you may be able to arrange an appointment for your supplier to come to read your meter at a specific time.

## **22 How and when should I be notified of price changes by my supplier?**

Your supplier has to give you 30 days notice if it is going to change its prices.

If you know your supplier is going to increase prices, you can [switch to another supplier](#) with cheaper prices. You should not be charged to leave your contact early under these circumstances if you give notice before or on the day the price goes up.

## **23 What happens if my supplier goes out of business?**

There is no reason to be worried if your supplier goes out of business (goes bankrupt). You will still get your energy supply.

But you may notice that your bills come less regularly. This is because a new supplier will buy the business or be put in charge of the company by Ofgem.

This may take a while to organise, so you should make sure you put enough money aside to pay for the energy you are using.

If Ofgem puts a new supplier in charge you will go on a deemed contract with a different price. If there is a trade sale the price will stay the same at the start but the supplier will change.

You should also take a reading as soon as you hear your supplier is going out of business. You may need this to check bills in the future.

You may want to look at your contract to check what it says about ending your contract early and termination fees. Your energy supply will not be cut off, so there is no need to accept the first deal that sales agents offer you.

## Switching supplier

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### 24 Where can I find a list of energy suppliers?

The [Direct Gov](#) website lists the contact details for all energy suppliers.

### 25 What information do I need to compare offers from different energy suppliers?

It is advisable to know how much energy you use and what you pay every year.

On your annual statement, you should find information about how much energy you have used in the last year and how much you have paid for it. If you can't find this information, you can ask your supplier for it.

You will then need to compare this with what other suppliers would charge you.

See [Question 15](#) for information about the questions you should ask a potential new supplier before making a decision about whether to switch.

### 26 What tools are available to help me compare offers?

Before you decide to change supplier, you need to find out about deals that are right for you. You will need to know:

- how do you want to pay?
- how much energy do you use? (Check your bill or annual statement)
- how much can you afford to pay?
- what tariff type is best for you?
- what suppliers offer energy in your area?
- will the supplier you are with now charge you to end your contract?
- can the supplier you are with now give you a better deal?

Price comparison websites allow you to compare the prices of different suppliers. It is best to use sites that have the [Consumer Focus Confidence Code](#) logo, which means they are reliable. The Consumer Focus website has a list of [approved sites](#) that offer a free switching service for consumers. Many of these sites also offer a telephone service.



## 27 How do I switch energy supplier?

Find a new deal. You can do this by comparing the prices of different suppliers. The [Consumer Focus Confidence Code](#) is a good place to start to get a list of approved sites that offer a free switching service for consumers.

Contact your new supplier and tell them you want to change. It should do most of the work for you and will give a date when the switch will take place. If you used a price comparison site it should contact the supplier on your behalf.

Call the supplier you are with now and tell them the date you are switching.

On that date, make sure you take a meter reading. Your new supplier may call to request one on this date, but take a note of the reading anyway. This means you can provide the reading to your old or new supplier if any problems arise.

Make sure you pay your final bill from your previous supplier.

Consumer Focus provides more information on [changing suppliers](#).

## 28 When switching supplier is there a risk my energy supply will be disconnected?

No. Your new supplier will use the same wires, pipes and meters as your previous supplier. The only change you should notice is a different supplier name at the top of your bills.

## 29a Are there any reasons why I would not be able to switch energy supplier?

Yes. You may have problems switching if you are in debt with your supplier. Your bill becomes a debt if it remains outstanding after the 'payment due date'.

However, if you are in debt with a supplier, you may be able to switch if:

- you pay for your energy in advance via a prepayment meter and have a debt of less than £200
- your supplier has increased their prices and you have said you want to switch but your supplier has blocked your switch and you are able to pay off your debt within 30 days
- you are in debt because your supplier has made a mistake

If you have problems with any of the above situations, you can contact Consumer Direct, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, on 08454 04 05 06 (or 08454 04 05 05 if you speak Welsh).

- Some consumers will not be able to switch supplier because they do not have a contract with an electricity or gas supplier. This may be because you rent your home and your rental contract says you cannot change supplier or you do not have your own meter(s) and must pay their landlord or freeholder for any electricity or gas used. There are rules, known as the maximum resale price, which limit how much your landlord can charge for the electricity or gas you use

### **29b What is the maximum resale price?**

The Maximum Resale Price limit how much your landlord can charge you for mains gas or mains electricity. Your landlord can only charge you the amount they paid for gas or electricity including the standing charge, plus 5 per cent VAT.

Maximum Resale Price applies if you:

- rent your home and pay the landlord for the gas or electricity used
- are a leaseholder and buy your gas or electricity from the lessor
- are a student and buy your gas or electricity from the landlord
- own or rent a caravan and buy gas or electricity from the caravan site or park owner
- rent a holiday home or chalet and buy gas or electricity from the owner
- own a houseboat or marine craft and buy gas or electricity from the moorings operator

If requested, your landlord must produce copies of any bills from the supplier showing how much gas or electricity has been used. If there is more than one tenant living at the property, the landlord should also explain how each tenant's contribution was calculated.

Maximum Resale Price doesn't apply if the gas or electricity is recovered as part of an inclusive charge.

Landlords are also entitled to recover charges for other costs such as the maintenance and upkeep of their supply system, gas or electricity used in communal areas or administrative charges for reading individual sub-meters. These charges are not covered by the Maximum Resale Price regulations and should be billed separately, for example within the rent or as part of other service charges.

Ofgem publishes a [leaflet](#) on the rules governing the Maximum Resale Price regulations.

### **30a Will it cost me any money to change supplier?**

It depends on the kind of contract (legal agreement) you have with your current energy supplier.

Your supplier can charge you to end your contract early if you have a contract to buy energy for a certain amount of time at a specific price and you want to end your contract early.

But your supplier cannot charge you if:

- you have reached the end of your contract
- you have a variable rate contract that is not for a specific price and period of time

- you have a contract that is for a specific period of time but not a specific price and your supplier has increased the price

You can ask your supplier for a copy of your contract if you can't remember what type you have.

### **30b Who should I contact if I think that I have been unfairly charged to change supplier?**

Your supplier can usually charge you if you want to end your contract early if you have a contract to buy energy for a certain amount of time at a specific price and the contract includes a termination fee.

But your supplier cannot usually charge you if:

- you have reached the end of your contract
- your contract does not include a fee for terminating early
- your contract includes a fee for terminating early but your supplier has increased the prices and you have given the required notice to terminate the contract

You should check your individual contract to see what terms apply.

You should complain directly to your energy supplier if you are not happy with a charge. Suppliers have up to eight weeks to resolve the complaint to your satisfaction.

If you are still not happy after this time, you can take your complaint to the Ombudsman Services: Energy using their [online form](#) or by calling 0330 440 1624. The Ombudsman investigates complaints and can award up to £5,000 compensation.

For more advice on your rights or making a complaint about your energy supplier, you can contact Consumer Direct, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, on 08454 04 05 06 (or 08454 04 05 05 if you speak Welsh). Or you can use the [online form](#) on the Direct.gov website.

### **31 Do suppliers have a duty to provide the price per unit of gas and electricity and details of any additional discounts or charges for each of their tariffs? Where can I find this information?**

Yes. Suppliers have to give detailed information about:

- the terms and conditions of tariffs
- unit prices of gas and electricity
- discounts
- penalties
- standing charges

These are different for each tariff. You should find the details in your contract, your bill or annual statement. If you cannot find your contract, you can ask your supplier for a copy of it.

### **32 I have switched energy supplier, do I still have to pay bills that arrive from my previous supplier?**

You should not pay for any energy that has been used after your switch date.

But you do have to pay for all energy used before you switched supplier.

If you and your previous supplier have disagreed over a final meter reading, you may get another final bill some time after you move out.

### **33 How do I find out who my electricity or gas supplier is?**

#### **Electricity**

You will need to contact your local distribution company, who will have a list of suppliers for your area. Consumer Focus has a list of telephone numbers for [local distribution companies](#) or check your telephone book under 'electricity'.

When you contact the local distribution company, you will need to tell them your address and your meter serial number. You should find this number on a sticker on your meter.

The distribution company should give you a name and a telephone number for your supplier.

#### **Gas**

To find out your gas supplier, contact Xoserve on 0870 608 1524 and tell them your address details. It has a national database of gas suppliers. Or you can contact your local gas transporter.

Your gas transporter will be a major gas transporter or an independent gas transporter. Most people will have a major gas transporter. Call 0870 608 1524 to see if this applies to you.

Once you know who your transporter is, call them and tell them your address and your gas meter serial number. You should find the serial number on a sticker on a meter.

The transporter should be able to give you the name and contact number of your gas supplier.

## **Moving home**

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### **34 I have moved house. Do I still have to pay my bills for my old address?**

You have to pay for any energy you used before you changed address. If you move house without paying a bill, it becomes a debt after 28 days.

Sometimes, your final bill from your old address can be delayed. Or your supplier will need to re-calculate it after it gets your final meter reading. You will need to pay in either of these situations.

But you should not get a bill for energy used after the date you moved out of your last home.

### **35 How do I cancel my contract?**

You need to tell your energy supplier at least two days before you move home.

Your supplier may charge you to end your contract early if it was for a fixed period of time – usually one or two years.

You will also need to be billed for all the energy you have used before moving, so take a meter reading on the day you move and give it to your previous supplier.

If you do not tell your supplier about your move, you may experience a delay in obtaining your final bill or it may not be accurate.

### **36a I have just moved into a new home. How do I get a new energy supplier?**

If you have moved into a new home, you automatically have a contract with the same supplier as the person who lived in the home before you. This is to protect you from having no energy supply when you move into your new home. See [Question 33](#) for information about how to find out who this supplier is.

If you do not want a contract with this supplier, you should organise another contract with a supplier of your choice. If you want to [switch supplier](#), you must give the current supplier 28 days' notice. Normally when you apply to switch to a new supplier, it will automatically inform your current supplier about your intention to leave.

### **36b Do I have to sign a contract with an energy supplier?**

Not always. Even if you do not actually sign a contract, or agree one over the phone, you will have what is called a 'deemed' contract with the company that supplied the property before you moved in.

### **36c Do I still have to pay the bills from the existing supplier at this property before I chose a new supplier?**

Yes. You have to pay bills to the existing supplier for any energy used up until the date your new supplier takes over.

## **Gas and electricity network issues**

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### **37a Who do I contact to be supplied with electricity or gas for the first time?**

When you move into a new home, you automatically have a contract with the supplier of the person who lived in the home before you. You will need to find out who the supplier is, if you do not already know.

All properties must have a Meter Point Administration Number (MPAN)/Meter Point Reference Number (MPRN). If you move into a new building, or if a meter has been replaced, the company that installed the meter may have forgotten to make sure the property has a MPAN/MPRN. If this has happened to you, you can choose any supplier. But you must tell the supplier you choose that you need a MPAN/MPRN.

The supply may not be connected straight away so you should provide as much notice as possible.

### **37b. Do I have to sign a contract to get a new energy connection created?**

Yes. If you don't have an electricity or gas connection at your home you can arrange the connection through a gas transporter or electricity distribution network operator (these are the companies that are responsible for transporting your energy). The contact details are available [here](#).

You will then need to find a supplier (the company you will pay for energy once you are connected). You can choose the supplier that offers the best deal for you, but you will need to agree a tariff and sign a contract. You can also find a supplier first and ask them to handle the connection for you.

If you do not choose a supplier, the connection may not be completed, and you will have no energy supply.

### **38 Who do I have to contact in order to be provided with an electricity or gas meter? What types of meters are available?**

To get an electricity or gas meter, contact your supplier and ask them what your options are. [See Question 7a](#).

You may find that you have little or no choice. For example, if you have had problems paying your bills in the past, your supplier may want you to have a prepayment meter. Or it may not be safe to install a prepayment meter in your home.

By 2020 all consumers should have a new kind of meter – a 'smart meter'. Smart meters are the next generation of gas and electricity meters with a range of additional functions.

Unlike standard meters which have to be read manually by a meter person, smart meters can be read without the energy company visiting your home thanks to new two-way communications technology. This should end estimated and inaccurate bills, which are a major source of consumer complaints. It should also mean less time waiting in for the meter person to arrive.

### **39 Who do I contact in the event of an electricity power cut or loss of gas supply?**

#### **Electricity power cuts**

Contact your electricity distribution company directly and report the issue. The number will be on your electricity bill or look in the telephone book under 'electricity'.

#### **Loss of gas supply**

If you have a sudden loss of gas, this could mean that there is a gas leak in your area. Call the gas emergency hotline immediately on 0800 111 999. You should also report the issue to your gas supplier.

### **40 Am I entitled to financial compensation for the time I do not have any electricity or gas supply?**

Yes, in some situations you may be entitled to a standard payment because you have not received the [minimum standards of energy supply](#).

#### 41 Who do I contact in an emergency such as a gas leak?

If you have a loss of gas supply or smell a leak, call the **gas emergency hotline immediately on 0800 111 999**.

If you think you have a gas leak:

- do not smoke or strike matches
- check you have not left any gas appliances on
- turn off the gas supply using the control valve which is usually next to the meter
- open doors and windows to let the gas out
- do not use electrical switches (or doorbells) or a naked flame

## Resolving complaints and problems with energy companies

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#### 42 I need advice and support to help make a complaint or settle a dispute with my energy supplier, electricity distributor or gas transporter. Who do I contact for free, impartial advice?

See [Question 30b](#) for information about how to complain.

#### 43 I cannot resolve my complaint with my energy supplier, electricity distributor or gas transporter. How do I contact the Ombudsman Services: Energy?

You can take your complaint to the Ombudsman Services: Energy using their [online form](#) or by calling 0330 440 1624. The Ombudsman investigates complaints and can award up to £5,000 compensation.

## Additional support for households

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#### 44 What happens if I don't pay my bill?

If you are having problems paying a bill, you should contact your supplier as soon as possible to discuss payment options.

Your bill becomes a debt if it remains outstanding after the 'payment due date'. Your supplier will contact you to see if you are finding it difficult to pay and to discuss ways you may find paying easier.

This should include:

- paying by regular instalments (for example cash, Direct Debit, etc)
- having a prepayment meter
- having money taken from your benefits so that you pay regularly (Fuel Direct)

Your supplier should not ask you to pay more in each payment than you can afford. It should also offer you advice on how to save energy and spend less in the future.

If you still do not pay your bill, your supplier can apply for a warrant for rights of entry in order to access your meter and disconnect you. It has to tell you in advance if this is what it is going to do. There will be a court hearing, which you can attend and have your say.

The magistrate who hears your case will consider your financial statement ([see Question 45](#)) when making a decision about whether to give your supplier a warrant.

If your supplier gets a warrant, it should tell you in advance when it intend to come to your property and disconnect you.

#### **45 How can I avoid disconnection if I cannot pay my bill?**

The best way to avoid being disconnected is to contact your supplier and find a way to pay that you can afford. Your supplier will assess your ability to pay before it decides on the best plan for you.

You can also contact Consumer Direct on Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, on 08454 04 05 06 (or 08454 04 05 05 if you speak Welsh). It may be able to refer you to the Extra Help Unit at Consumer Focus, who can help vulnerable people deal with disconnection issues.

Consumer Direct can also refer you to a specialist debt advice charity such as [Citizens Advice](#), [Citizens Advice Scotland](#) or the [Money Advice Trust](#) or [Consumer Credit Counselling Service](#).

These organisations can help you prepare a financial statement that sets out how much money you have coming in and how much you need to spend every month.

Contact details are:

- [Citizens Advice](#) or [Citizens Advice Scotland](#)
- the [Money Advice Trust](#) (Tel. 020 7489 7796)
- the [Consumer Credit Counselling Service](#) (Helpline: 0800 138 1111, Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm)

A supplier has to make all reasonable attempts to help you pay your bill before considering disconnection. It must not disconnect consumers in winter if:

- they are pensioners and live alone or only with other pensioners or children under 18
- they are pensioners who are disabled or chronically sick

The main energy suppliers in the UK also aim not to disconnect people who are vulnerable. This means that they are not able to take responsibility for their own welfare or the welfare of people they live with. This includes older people and people who are disabled, but your supplier should consider your case individually.

#### 46 What do I do if I am disconnected?

If you are disconnected, your supplier will give you details of how to contact them to discuss getting connected again. If you are there when it disconnects you, it may offer you a prepayment meter. This will allow you to keep an energy supply and pay off your debt bit by bit as you credit your meter.

Call your supplier, and it will tell you how much you owe. It may add a reconnection fee and administration costs to what you already owe and they may ask for a security deposit.

You can still ask for a prepayment meter, which will allow you to repay the debt gradually.

You may be able to come to an arrangement with your supplier where it will accept a lump sum payment, with the remaining amount being repaid via Direct Debit. However, this depends on your payment history with the company and your circumstances.

#### 47 What support and protection are available for energy consumers in financial hardship?

If you think you may find it difficult to pay your energy bills, you should speak to your supplier to see if it has special tariffs for people in financial hardship.

Large suppliers (and some small suppliers) also give the [Warm Home Discount](#) to specific customers, including people who get the guarantee element of Pension Credit. But the Warm Home Discount can be given to other customers, and each supplier has their own list of who can apply. Speak to your supplier about their Warm Home Discount scheme and whether you are eligible to apply.

British Gas, EDF Energy and npower have set up trust funds to help consumers in debt. You will need to fill in an application form and send supporting evidence: proof of income, proof of disability and bills that you cannot pay, for example. More information can be found on the [British Gas](#), [EDF Energy](#) and [npower](#) websites.

If you are worried about paying your heating bills, you can contact the Home Heat Helpline. It can give you information about help with payment, saving energy and special payment options. Call 0800 33 66 99, 9am–8pm Monday to Friday and 10am–2pm on Saturdays.

#### 48 Where can I find out about grants and schemes to help me save energy?

The [Warm Front scheme](#) gives grants to improve heating and insulation in households that do not have central heating or are poorly insulated. The scheme only operates in England and is only open to people on income-related benefits such as Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance. You can apply or find out more by calling 0800 316 2805, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm, and Saturday, 9am to 5pm. Or visit the website.

If you are in Wales, you may be able to get help from [NEST](#), the Welsh Government's fuel poverty scheme. To find out about grants or to see whether there are other ways to improve your fuel efficiency call 0800 512 012 from a landline or 0300 456 2655 from a mobile.

The [Energy Assistance Package](#) is a similar scheme operating in Scotland. To find out about grants or other money and energy saving measures, call 0800 512 012 or visit the website.

The [Warm Zones](#) scheme also offers financial support and practical advice to vulnerable people at various locations across England and Scotland. You can find information about whether help is available in your area on the website.

Your energy supplier ([see Question 8](#)) and local authority can also give you information about saving energy and help with insulation.