



Action for Warm Homes
Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland

FUEL POVERTY ACTION GUIDE

A practical guide to help MPs, MLAs, local councillors, health professionals and advice workers answer queries on energy bills, heating, home insulation and energy efficiency.

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FOREWORD



Welcome to the Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Action Guide

This guide is designed to be a practical and easy to use document that will help you navigate pathways to support householders who have concerns about paying bills and keeping their homes warm.

As outlined, there is much help and support available from a range of organisations including Government and Energy Suppliers. This guide aims to bring that information and advice together for your accessibility and convenience.

Fuel Poverty is brought about by the interaction of low income, high energy prices and poor heating and insulation standards of the housing stock. The 2016 Northern Ireland House Condition Survey indicates that 22% of households in Northern Ireland experience fuel poverty.

The respective UK Governments formally recognise the importance for people to adequately heat and power their homes, which is evidenced by the annual investment in fuel poverty schemes such as the Affordable Warmth

Scheme of between £16 to £20million and the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) of £9million. While welcome, we need to redouble our efforts to tackle the issue head on.

It is vital that community groups, local Councils, health professionals, advice workers, Politicians and anyone who has direct pathways with those struggling to heat their homes affordably can help and support their clients with up to date timely information. This is the main aim of the guide, however, if you wish to know more about the work of National Energy Action (NEA) Northern Ireland and the fuel poverty landscape, please do get in touch.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Austin".

Ms. Pat Austin

Director of NEA Northern Ireland

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 About National Energy Action (NEA)

NEA is the national charity working to end fuel poverty in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. NEA seeks to achieve this objective through a wide range of activities including campaigning work, policy development, implementation of practical programmes and training and advice services.

- NEA seeks to influence the political process at local, regional and national level by making well-researched and informed representations on the causes and consequences of fuel poverty and on the policies and programmes required to remedy the problem.
- NEA delivers Northern Exposure, a community action based project, funded by PHA, designed to tackle the high levels of fuel poverty within Belfast working directly with community and voluntary stakeholders and health professionals.
- NEA offers authoritative and expert training to organisations and individuals providing advice, guidance and information to energy consumers and, in particular, to disadvantaged consumers.

1.2 About this guide

This guide is intended to assist Members of Parliament, Members of the Legislative Assembly, local Councillors, health professionals, community and advice workers in identifying problems associated with high energy costs and to help provide information and guidance on how to work towards resolving these problems.

It considers the most common areas of concern for domestic energy consumers and describes

their rights and entitlements, and the agencies available to assist them.

This guide describes practical action to alleviate fuel poverty, to benefit the health and well-being of householders and to increase their disposable income. Also contained within the guide are details of the specialist agencies to which householders can be referred.

The causes of fuel poverty are inadequate thermal insulation, inefficient and uneconomic heating systems, low household income, and high fuel prices. The consequence is that thousands of households in Northern Ireland cannot afford sufficient warmth for health and well-being.

However, fuel poverty can often be a complex problem and there may be a range of different actions that can be taken to improve the circumstances of a householder or client.

1.3 Identifying the problem

Individuals will rarely identify themselves as experiencing fuel poverty.

Instead they will often highlight a range of problems that could be signs of fuel poverty.

Common complaints are:

- “I can’t pay my electricity/gas bill.”
- “I can’t afford an oil fill.”
- “I’m worried about being disconnected.”
- “I can’t afford to heat my home.”
- “My house is cold.”
- “My house is damp and mouldy.”
- “I’m always ill.”

SOLUTIONS

Check availability of grants and initiatives to improve heating and insulation in the home



**Go to Part 2
Practical Help for Warmer Homes**

Check availability of welfare benefits



**Go to Part 3
Maximising Income**

Ensure the client is on the best payment method



**Go to Part 4
Paying for Energy**

Discuss the potential for saving money by switching supplier(s)



**Go to Part 5
Switching Supplier**

For problems with organisations



**Go to Part 6
Complaints**

Check if the client is potentially vulnerable or has particular needs



**Go to Part 7
Priority or Vulnerable Customers**

For a list of useful contacts and agencies



**Go to Part 8
Contacts and Other Sources of Help**



PART 2: PRACTICAL HELP FOR WARMER HOMES

The most effective solution to fuel poverty lies in energy efficiency improvements to ensure that the fabric of the dwelling is insulated to as high a standard as possible, and that the heating provision is efficient and economic.

2.1 Advice

The leading provider of independent energy advice in Northern Ireland is Bryson Energy. Bryson Energy, in partnership with The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), provides a freephone telephone advice service for households on energy efficiency, fuel budgeting, grant schemes and renewable energy.

Bryson Energy Advice Line
0800 142 2865

Even small improvements may make the difference between fuel poverty and affordable energy costs.

Your gas or electricity supplier will also be able to provide advice and information on how to reduce your energy bills.

2.2 Practical help

There are a number of grants or initiatives that may be available for domestic energy efficiency improvements, although eligibility is dependent on variables such as household income, housing tenure, age or family circumstances.

2.3 Grants for owners and private rented tenants

The Affordable Warmth Scheme

The Affordable Warmth Scheme is a grant initiative funded by the Department for Communities (DfC) and delivered by the 11 local Councils and the NIHE to owner occupiers and private tenants.

The initiative targets specific areas with high levels of fuel poverty and therefore only householders within the targeted areas will be contacted by their local Council.

Households currently must:

- Be an owner occupier or a private tenant; and
- Have a gross annual household income of less than £20,000.

Measures provided include:

- Priority 1:** Insulation, ventilation and draught-proofing.
- Priority 2:** Central Heating – replacing solid fuel, LPG, economy 7, broken or inefficient heating.
- Priority 3:** Windows – replacement of single glazing or defective double glazing.
- Priority 4:** Solid Wall Insulation.

The scheme also allows for some self-referrals in certain circumstances. Householders who have not been targeted can still apply for a grant themselves if they meet the income and tenure criteria above; but may also need to show that they meet other circumstances such as no heating or vulnerability to cold related illnesses.

To find out more you can contact the Affordable Warmth Team in your local Council.

Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP)

The NISEP is a customer funded programme which provides energy efficiency measures to home owners and private tenants. The NISEP offers a range of measures including insulation and heating.

- The NISEP currently runs on a financial year basis.

- The NISEP is means tested and eligibility is based on income bands depending on your circumstances.
- There are a range of schemes available and the full list is available at <https://www.uregni.gov.uk/publications/nisep-list-schemes-2018-19>.
- For householders above the income limits, there are cash-back schemes, which offer discounts on insulation measures.

There is a limited fund each year so the grants are awarded on a first come, first served basis.

Boiler Replacement Allowance

The Boiler Replacement Allowance is funded by the Department for Communities (DfC) and administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

- The allowance offers up to a maximum of £1,000 towards the cost of a new efficient boiler;
- Applicants must be owner occupiers with a boiler over 15 years old and have a gross household income of less than £40,000 per annum; and
- Applicants will need to pay for the rest of the cost themselves.

To find out more about making an application, visit https://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/benefits/boiler_replacement_allowance.htm or call 03448 920 900.

2.4 Initiatives for Housing Association Tenants

- Registered Housing Associations operate maintenance schemes which periodically upgrade heating and insulation.
- The Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) 2018-19 includes two schemes for Housing Associations:

‘Cosy Homes’ and ‘Housing Association Energy Saver’. Tenants need to contact their Housing Association to check if they are included in the scheme.

- Some Housing Associations have designated officers who will provide energy efficiency advice – check with your Housing Association for more information.

2.5 Initiatives for Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) Tenants

The NIHE has a designated team providing energy efficiency measures to NIHE stock. A number of programmes are currently running which includes upgrading heating systems, insulation and window replacement. Tenants can contact their local maintenance team with any concerns or queries about their accommodation.

The NIHE also works in partnership with Bryson Energy to operate the Heatsmart initiative, which offers tenants a free home visit. Advice is provided on energy efficiency; heating controls including programmers; fuel bills; budgeting and debt. For more information or to arrange a home visit call Bryson Energy on 0800 142 2865.

2.6 Housing Fitness

The current statutory minimum fitness standard for housing is set out in Schedule 5 of the Housing (NI) Order 1992 and acts as an objective measure to assess housing standards. The fitness standard states that a dwelling should be fit for human habitation with a reasonable degree of thermal comfort including efficient heating and effective insulation. The fitness standard covers all tenures.

Social Housing Tenants

Social housing tenants should contact their maintenance team; in the event of the repair or problem remaining unresolved, they can consider using the complaints procedure.

PART 2: PRACTICAL HELP FOR WARMER HOMES

Private Rented Tenants

Private landlords are generally responsible for keeping the heating system in good order and tenants with heating, insulation or ventilation problems can initially report these to the landlord. However, if no action has been taken to resolve the problem, tenants may wish to consider getting specialist housing advice or advocacy.

The following agencies may be helpful for legal and technical advice on housing matters:

Environmental Health

Environmental Health departments are based within each of the 11 Councils and can provide

home visits for private tenants and offer advice on damp, and if applicable, issue a notice to the landlord if the housing defect is prejudicial to health.

Housing Rights

Housing Rights is a specialist housing advice charity which gives practical housing advice and support online, in person and by phone. Their experts can provide free and confidential advice. The Housing Rights advice website is available at www.housingadviceni.org alternatively the telephone helpline can be contacted on 028 9024 5640.

PART 3: MAXIMISING INCOME

Low income is one of the main causes of fuel poverty. Part of the long-term solution to fuel poverty lies in ensuring that families and individuals are as financially secure as possible and receiving all the benefits to which they are entitled.

3.1 Action

Householders can contact a government agency or local advice centre (see details below) to ensure that they are receiving the benefits to which they are entitled.

Government Agencies

The Northern Ireland Pension Centre (for individuals or couples who are approaching or at state pension age). For more information, call 0800 587 0892.

Jobs and Benefits Offices provide advice and assistance with benefit applications for any age. For a full list of Jobs and Benefit offices; visit: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/jobs-benefits-offices-jobcentres-and-social-security-offices>.

Make the Call is a free telephone helpline provided by the Department for Communities (DfC), which provides benefits advice to all ages. For more information, call 0800 232 1271.

Advice Organisations

Advice NI has a network of local advice centres across Northern Ireland; offering free independent advice on a range of areas including benefits; see www.adviceni.net for a list of local advice centres.

Citizens Advice Bureaux operate throughout Northern Ireland providing free, confidential and independent advice. To find your local office or get advice online; visit <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/nireland/>.

PART 3: MAXIMISING INCOME

The Welfare Changes Helpline provides advice to all ages on the changes to the benefits system under Welfare Reform, including Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payments and the new Supplementary Payments. The service is delivered by Advice NI, Citizens Advice Bureaux and Law Centre NI, and includes a specialist legal advice service for challenging decisions. Contact the helpline on 0808 802 0020 (Lines are open 9.00am to 5.00pm).

Law Centre NI provides legal support to organisations and disadvantaged individuals throughout Northern Ireland in the areas of social security, employment, community care, mental health and certain immigration related issues. In addition, the Legal Support Project can assist with social security tribunals. The advice line is available Monday to Friday from 9.30am–1.00pm. Contact the advice line on 028 9024 4401.

3.2 Other Financial Assistance

Cold Weather Payments

Cold Weather Payments are made to eligible households in an area where a period of 'exceptionally cold weather' has occurred or been forecast to occur. The amount of the

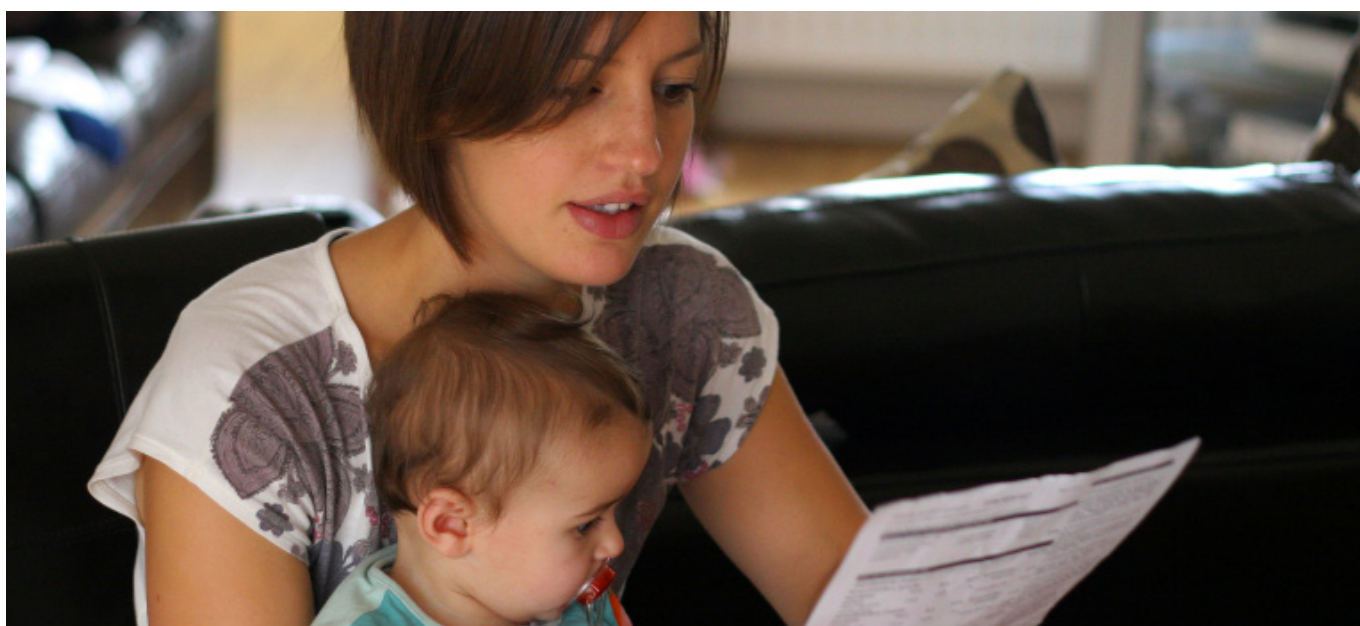
payment is £25 for any qualifying week. It is paid automatically to people on certain means tested benefits, who have a disability or pension related premium or a child under 5.

A period of cold weather is defined as seven consecutive days, during which the average daily temperature is 0°C or lower. For full details of the criteria, visit <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/cold-weather-payment>.

Winter Fuel Payments

A Winter Fuel Payment is an annual payment between £100 and £300 to help people with the costs of keeping warm in the winter. It is paid to those who have reached state pension age (For the winter period 2018–19; householders must have been born on or before 5 November 1953).

Payments are made automatically between November and December to those who are in receipt of the State Pension or another Social Security benefit. If the householder hasn't claimed any benefits (e.g. deferred pension), they will need to obtain a claim form by calling the Winter Fuel Payments Helpline on 0800 7310160 or by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment>.



PART 4: PAYING FOR ENERGY

Difficulties in paying for oil, gas and electricity and the threat of disconnection or self-disconnection can be a symptom of fuel poverty.

They may also be caused by an unexpectedly high bill or being unable to afford an 'oil fill'. The long-term solution lies in improved heating and insulation standards. In the short-term, however, it is necessary to consider the support and protection available to those customers having difficulty with their fuel bills.

4.1 Action

If the bill is unexpectedly high, advise the householder to contact their gas or electricity supplier to have the meter read or to provide their own reading. An unexpectedly high bill may be caused by the meter being misread, or by a succession of underestimated bills followed by an accurate bill.

4.2 Contacting the Energy Supplier

Energy suppliers will work with customers to find solutions to payment difficulties, but they can only do this if they are alerted to the problem. Where customers cannot afford to pay their bill, the priority is to contact the energy supplier as soon as possible to agree a payment plan. Consider:

- The ability to pay is the main criterion in working out affordable repayment of debt;
- People can be over-optimistic about their ability to repay debt and should be encouraged to pay only what they can reasonably afford. Clearing the debt reduces worry and allows consumers more choice of supplier, but it is essential that they do not commit themselves to unrealistic levels of repayment;
- Energy suppliers offer special payment plans to help those in debt; and
- For pre-payment customers, there is a limit of repayment at 40p in the pound, that cannot be exceeded on vends but equally could be lower.

4.3 Energy Suppliers and Customers in Difficulty

Energy suppliers must follow procedures laid down by the Utility Regulator in dealing with vulnerable and disadvantaged customers. These include:

- Offering a wide range of payment methods;
- Following strict procedures for dealing with customers in difficulty in order to prevent disconnection from supply (each supplier should have a code of practice on their website); and
- Offer a prepayment meter.

Customers must not be disconnected if:

- A payment arrangement is kept to or a prepayment meter is installed; and
- They are deemed vulnerable customers (see below).

Suppliers are responsible for deciding whether a customer is vulnerable and where a supplier determines that a customer is, for reasons of age, health, disability or severe financial insecurity, unable to safeguard their personal welfare or the personal welfare of other members of the household, the customer will not be disconnected at any time throughout the year.

Vulnerable Households

To offer additional support to households, the electricity and natural gas suppliers have agreed to the following minimum standards in relation to specific households:

During the winter period (1st October to 31st March) they will not knowingly disconnect either the electricity or gas supply of a household, where a customer or household member is pensionable age, disabled, chronically sick or a child under the age of 18.

4.4 Explore other payment options

Energy suppliers offer a wide range of payment options but it is important to consider the disadvantages as well as the benefits associated with all payment arrangements before deciding on what is the most appropriate method.

- A prepayment meter can work as a budgeting aid for some consumers, however, there is a risk of being left without a fuel supply if the keypad cannot be topped up for any reason.
- Many suppliers now offer smart options including paying online.
- Standard credit by arrears (paid quarterly usually by cheque or standing order).
- Direct Debit generally offers the lowest price and can be extremely convenient, although there is a possibility that there may be insufficient funds to meet the agreed monthly payments and the household will incur bank charges. Households without a bank account cannot enter into a direct debit arrangement.

Installing a Prepayment Meter

Most householders are eligible to get an electricity or natural gas prepayment meter installed for free, however, those on the Critical Care Register who require essential equipment (see section 7) are not eligible and can set up alternative payment plans.

4.5 Paying for Home Heating Oil

Oil is normally cheaper when you purchase a larger quantity, however, this is not always viable for those who cannot afford the larger volumes.

Oil differs from natural gas and electricity and is usually delivered in bulk. There are many payment methods and a large number of

suppliers provide flexible savings plans. You can check with your supplier what methods are available, see below:

Paying in advance:

- Paying for bulk buy – most suppliers will accept a direct debit or card payment or can have an account set up if you regularly use the same supplier.

Budgeting options:

- Many suppliers can set up a regular direct debit plan spread throughout the year, often called a home heat plan.
- PayPoint – the majority of suppliers will accept PayPoint as this enables the customer to budget by topping up credit on a smart card at a PayPoint location throughout Northern Ireland, which is usually located at convenience stores. The minimum payment is £10.00.
- Saving stamps are available from certain Councils; check to see if they administer a saving stamp scheme.

Oil stamps are like cash so they need to be kept safe and cannot be refunded if lost.

Oil buying clubs – oil buying clubs or ‘brokering’ schemes involve bulk buying in cluster areas, for example a street or local community. There are a number of clubs around Northern Ireland; you can find your nearest club by contacting Bryson Energy on 0800 1422 865.

4.6 Special Circumstances

If the householder is an older person, chronically sick or disabled, see the special section on support for these customers on page 12. If the householder is unhappy about the way they have been treated by their energy company, see the Complaints and Enquiries section on page 11.

PART 5: SWITCHING SUPPLIER

Electricity and gas prices are regulated and tend not to fluctuate suddenly, but oil prices can change on a daily basis, so any action to reduce household fuel bills will have a beneficial effect on fuel poverty.

In the Northern Ireland domestic energy market there are currently five electricity suppliers and two gas suppliers. Savings can often be made by switching to another electricity and/or gas supplier. This should be a relatively easy process but some people may find it confusing. The key to making switching easier is gaining access to good quality, independent information.

5.1 Action

Gas and Electricity markets in Northern Ireland have been fully competitive since 2011. This means that householders have a choice of electricity supplier, and a gas supplier (only in certain areas). Customers who have never switched supplier are more likely to be able to reduce their bills significantly, but most consumers can reduce their existing fuel costs if they shop around to get the best deal.

Switching natural gas is only available in certain areas so check with the supplier.

5.2 Obtain information so that accurate price comparisons can be made

Northern Ireland has regulated tariffs and all suppliers provide details of their current tariffs on their websites. When considering switching, householders will need a meter reading and a meter point reference number, which can be found on their latest bill.

The Consumer Council publishes up to date comparison tables, and has an online price comparison tool, which can be found by visiting:

<http://www.consumerCouncil.org.uk/energy/electricity-gas-price-comparison>.

Enirgy www.enirgy.info provides electricity price comparison for domestic customers.

Power to Switch offers price comparisons including electricity, gas and oil and helps with switching <https://powertoswitch.co.uk/>.

5.3 The Process of Switching

1. Decide on your new supplier

Once you have decided which deal you prefer, you can contact your new supplier by phone, online or with a face to face adviser. You do not need to contact your current supplier, but you will need a bill from your current supplier for reference.

2. The new supplier will arrange for the switch to take place

The new supplier will arrange the switching process and will contact the customer's current supplier.

3. Take a meter reading

The new supplier will read the meter (or ask for a customer reading) around the time of the switch. The old supplier will use the meter reading to work out the final bill and the new supplier will use it to start the new account. A note should be kept of the reading in case of any future dispute.

4. Cooling-off period

When any contract is signed to switch supplier there is, by law, a 14 day cooling-off period. All suppliers should phone or write to the customer to ensure they understand that a contract has been entered into, and that the customer is happy with the way the sale was made. If the customer changes their mind they have the right to cancel the contract during this period.

PART 5: SWITCHING SUPPLIER

5. How long should it take?

The process to transfer supply from one company to another should take no longer than three weeks after the end of a 14 day cooling-off period. The new supplier will keep the client informed of progress.

In most cases customers can switch with debt passed over, however, this depends on the amount and age of the debt, so get advice from your potential new supplier if unsure.

PART 6: COMPLAINTS AND ENQUIRIES

6.1 Complaints about Gas and Electricity

In the event of a complaint about electricity or natural gas, including problems with switching supplier, the first contact should be with the company that currently supplies the gas or electricity – the address and telephone number will be on the customer bill. Most problems should be capable of a quick and simple resolution.

If the company's response is not to the satisfaction of the customer, and the dispute cannot be resolved in a satisfactory manner, the customer can complain to The Consumer Council. In some cases, the Utility Regulator can attempt to resolve the case if The Consumer Council is unable to do so. See Contacts Section 8.3.

6.2 Complaints about Oil

Complaints about oil can often be resolved by contacting the supplier. If this is not resolved satisfactorily, the Northern Ireland Oil Federation can attempt to resolve complaints about member suppliers. Alternatively The Consumer Council operate a service which can deal with complaints see Contacts Section 8.3.

The Northern Ireland Oil Federation is the trade association for registered distributors in Northern Ireland. Registered members adhere to a customer charter. For more information, visit www.nioil.com.

The Consumer Council regularly monitors the price of oil and deals with complaints. For more information, visit www.consumerCouncil.org.uk.



PART 7: EXTRA HELP FOR VULNERABLE CUSTOMERS

7.1 Special Services provided by Energy Suppliers

Householders who meet any of the criteria set out below can apply for inclusion on their energy supplier's Customer Care Scheme:

- pensionable age;
- disabled;
- chronically sick.

Services available through the customer care include:

- Relocation of the meter for improved access. If it is difficult to read or access the electricity or gas meter, energy companies will consider moving the meter, free of charge, to a more convenient position.
- Password protection scheme. Energy companies and customers can agree a personal password for use by company staff when they visit the home. In this way, customers will be protected from bogus callers claiming to be representatives of the gas/electricity company.
- Quarterly meter readings. Some companies do this as standard, but if customers have difficulty in reading their meter or are worried about inaccurate bills, their supplier can arrange for someone to call every quarter to read the meter.
- Bill nominee scheme. On request, bills can be sent to the address of a friend, relative or carer so that they can help to arrange payment.
- Services for customers with impaired hearing or vision. Companies can provide Braille and talking bills and must also have available suitable facilities to handle complaints and enquiries from customers who are visually or hearing impaired.

Electricity and gas suppliers cannot cut off a supply of electricity in any month from October to March to a domestic premises if the premises is occupied by a customer who is

(1) of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick and (2) lives alone or only with other persons who are of pensionable age, disabled, chronically sick or under the age of 18.

Applying for the Customer Care Schemes

To ensure a householder receives additional services they need to sign up to their supplier's and distributor's Customer Care Scheme.

Remember that the supplier/distributor may not be aware that the householder is vulnerable or has additional needs. Both supplier and distributor for electricity, and supplier for gas, will need to be informed.

7.2 Critical Care Register (Electricity)

The critical care register is a separate register for householders who rely on life supporting electrical equipment. Customers on the register receive a notification three days before a planned interruption. If the power cut is unplanned, they will receive up to date information by phone. This provides reassurance and in the case of prolonged power cuts enables making alternative arrangements.

Qualifying criteria includes relying on medical equipment such as:

- Oxygen Concentrator;
- Personal Suction Machine;
- Home Dialysis;
- Electrical Profiling Bed;
- Electric Hoist;
- Nutrition Infusion Systems;
- Patient Vital Signs Monitoring Systems;
- Ventilator;
- Nebuliser;
- Electric Pressure Relieving Mattress;
- Household Lift/Stairlift; and
- Medication Infusion Systems.

Assistance will vary depending on the personal circumstances but may include the provision of

a special priority number to call during power cuts or supply interruption. More information can be found online: www.nienetworks.co.uk/help-advice/vulnerable-customers/critical-care-register or by contacting NIE Networks directly on 03457 643 643.

7.3 Quick Check 101

Quick Check 101 is an initiative to help stop bogus callers and help people feel safer in their homes. Under the scheme, residents can now phone 101, the police non-emergency number, to check the identity of callers to their home, who claim to represent an energy company or NI Water.

The scheme is a collaboration between the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Utility Regulator, and includes all of Northern Ireland's energy and water companies.

7.4 Health and Safety

Carbon Monoxide is a deadly gas that cannot be seen, smelt or tasted. It can be produced by fuel burning appliances in your home, such as a gas boiler.

Householders should take the following steps to protect their homes and families:

- Make sure that fuel burning appliances such as fires, boilers and gas cookers are regularly serviced by a qualified engineer. For gas appliances engineers must be Gas Safe registered. For oil and solid fuel appliances it is recommended to use an engineer registered with OFTEC. Ask your engineer for proof of their registration.
- Install an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm. These can be bought from DIY stores, supermarkets and high street shops; they cost around £15 and could save lives!

Danger signs are:

- Gas flames burning orange or yellow instead of the normal blue;

- Soot stains on or above the appliance; and
- Coal or wood fires that burn slowly or go out.

Actions to take:

- Appliances should be checked for safety every year by a competent person. Gas appliances should only be checked by Gas Safe registered engineers.
- The property must be properly ventilated – vents should never be blocked!
- Chimneys and flues should be regularly swept and cleaned.
- Carbon Monoxide detectors can be purchased (they should conform to British Standard BS 7860).

In the event of a suspected gas leak:

- Doors and windows should be opened to get rid of any gas;
- Checks should be made to ensure that the gas supply to an appliance has not been left on unlit or that a pilot light has not gone out;
- The supply should be turned off at the mains;
- Matches or naked flames should never be used; and
- No electrical switches should be turned on or off (including doorbells).

Annual Gas Safety Check

If the home is privately rented, then the landlord has a legal duty to carry out an annual safety check of gas appliances and provide the tenant with a Gas Safety Certificate. If the landlord hasn't supplied this, the tenant should ask the landlord for a copy.

If you smell gas call the 24-hour gas emergency service on 0800 002 001. If you have a power cut call your supplier. For further information on how to stay safe visit <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/carbon-monoxide>.

PART 7: EXTRA HELP FOR VULNERABLE CUSTOMERS

Electricity

Where there is concern about a safety problem with the meter, cables or other equipment leading into the home, Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) Networks should be contacted on their emergency telephone number: 03457 643 643. This is also the number to call if the supply of electricity to the home is interrupted.

Restoring supply is the responsibility of NIE Networks. If the power cut is caused by a fault on the network, the householder may be entitled to a compensation payment, if it lasts for longer than 24 hours in normal weather. For more information on how to claim, visit <http://www.nienetworks.co.uk/help-advice/claims-complaints/customer-standards>.

Home Safety Check

Most councils will provide a free home safety check for people with health problems over pension age or with young children (aged under five). Check with your local Council to see if you are eligible.

A home visit can be arranged and in many cases useful safety equipment may be provided subject to council funding.

Keep Warm Packs

The Public Health Agency (PHA) provides Keep Warm Packs to vulnerable householders most in need and who are at a greater risk of fuel poverty and cold related illnesses. The criteria for a Keep Warm Pack includes the following:

- a. A person with a long-term health problem;
- b. A person with a disability that makes them less mobile or means they must spend more time at home;
- c. Anyone over 65 years old;
- d. A family with dependent children (under the age of 5);
- e. A pregnant woman;
- f. A person who is homeless.

The PHA works in partnership with local organisations to distribute the packs during the winter. For further information please contact the PHA on 028 9536 1683.



PART 8: CONTACTS AND OTHER SOURCES OF HELP

8.1 Energy Advice

Bryson Energy

Website: <http://www.brysonenergy.org/> **Tel:** 0800 142 2865 (All of Northern Ireland)

Northern Exposure (Greater Belfast)

Northern Exposure is funded by the Public Health Agency (PHA) and delivered by National Energy Action (NEA) Northern Ireland. It is a community development project which provides information and energy advice to health professionals, community groups and to the public, and facilitates referrals to grants and other initiatives including benefit entitlement checks. For further information contact NEA NI on 028 9023 9909 or www.nea.org.uk/northernireland/.

Warmer Ways to Better Health (Northern Area)

Energy Efficiency Advice Service

The Northern Area Energy Efficiency Advice Service is part of Warmer Ways to Better Health, funded by the Public Health Agency, and provides information on grant support schemes to improve the energy efficiency and thermal comfort of homes. A home visit can also be arranged to provide bespoke advice. Energy Efficiency Advisers can be contacted at four council locations:

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

Tel: 028 9034 0160 **Email:** envhealth@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Tel: 028 2766 0257 **Email:** environmental.health@causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Tel: 0300 1245 000 (Select Environmental Health)
Email: homesafety-energyadvice@midandeastantrim.gov.uk

Mid Ulster District Council

Tel: 03000 132 132 **Email:** health.wellbeing@midulstercouncil.org

Energy Saving Trust

The Energy Saving Trust is a UK wide social enterprise which can provide information to help people and organisations save energy with expert impartial advice on energy efficiency, renewables and low carbon transport. For more information go to <http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/>.

8.2 Advice on Income Maximisation

Advice NI

Tel: 028 9064 5919 **Website:** www.adviceni.net
(For benefits advice call 0800 988 2377 – Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm)

PART 8: CONTACTS AND OTHER SOURCES OF HELP

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/nireland/

Welfare Changes Helpline

Tel: 0808 802 0020 (Lines are open 9.00am to 5.00pm).

Jobs and Benefits and Social Security offices:

Visit: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/jobs-benefits-offices-jobcentres-and-social-security-offices>

Make the Call (Department for Communities) 0800 232 1271.

Pensions Centre NI Enquiries: 0800 587 0892

8.3 Consumer Complaints and Enquiries

The Consumer Council

The Consumer Council represents customers on energy matters in Northern Ireland and has a dedicated team which investigates enquiries and complaints on behalf of consumers, free of charge. The Consumer Council will liaise directly with the company involved in an effort to achieve a fair and satisfactory resolution for the individual. The Consumer Council also publishes a range of advice and information on their website <http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/>.

You can complain online or call: 0800 121 6022

The Utility Regulator

The Utility Regulator is responsible for regulating the electricity, gas, water and sewerage industries in Northern Ireland, promoting the short and long-term interests of consumers. Information on making a complaint is available on their website: www.uregni.gov.uk/how-complain.

8.4 Housing Advice

Housing Rights 028 9024 5640 **Visit:** www.housingrights.org.uk

8.5 Legal Advice

Law Centre NI 028 9024 4401 **Visit:** www.lawcentreni.org

8.6 Health and Safety Advice

Gas Safe (previously Corgi)

Tel: 0800 408 5500 **Visit:** www.gassaferegister.co.uk

Northern Ireland gas emergency service (If you smell gas): 0800 002 001

OFTEC (for oil and solid fuel installers):

Tel: 01473 626298 **Visit:** www.oftec.org.uk

Public Health Agency

Tel: 0300 555 0114 **Visit:** www.publichealth.hscni.net

Northern Ireland Health & Safety Executive

Tel: 0800 0320 121 **Visit:** www.hseni.gov.uk

8.7 Suppliers and Network Operators

Network Operators Natural Gas

firmus energy

Tel: 0800 032 4567 **Visit:** <http://www.firmusenergy.co.uk>

Phoenix Natural Gas

Tel: 03454 55 55 55 **Visit:** <http://www.phoenixnaturalgas.com>

SGN Natural Gas

Tel: 0800 975 7774 **Visit:** <https://sgnnaturalgas.co.uk/>

Suppliers

Firmus Energy

Tel: 0800 032 4567 **Visit:** <http://www.firmusenergy.co.uk>

SSE Airtricity

Tel: 0345 900 5253 **Visit:** www.airtricitygasni.com

Network Operator Electricity

NIE Networks

Tel: 03457 643 643 **Visit:** www.nienetworks.co.uk

Suppliers

Power NI

Tel: 03457 455 455 **Visit:** www.powerni.co.uk

SSE Airtricity

Tel: 0345 601 9093 **Visit:** www.sseairtricity.com

Budget Energy

Tel: 0800 012 1177 **Visit:** www.budgetenergy.co.uk

Electric Ireland

Tel: 0345 600 5335 **Visit:** www.electricireland.com

Click Energy

Tel: 0800 107 0732 **Visit:** www.clickenergyni.com

LPG Suppliers

Calor Gas

Tel: 028 9045 5588 **Visit:** www.mycalorgas.com

Flogas

Tel: 0800 574 57 **Visit:** www.flogas.co.uk

Other Fuels

Northern Ireland Oil Federation

Tel: 028 9186 2916 **Visit:** www.nioil.com/

Northern Ireland Coal Trade Association

Visit: www.nictal.co.uk



Action for Warm Homes
Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland

FUEL POVERTY ACTION GUIDE

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www.nea.org.uk

NEA is an independent charity.
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Registered in England No: 1853927

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