



**KNOW
YOUR ENERGY
RIGHTS**

Information and advice
to help you solve your energy complaints.



Many older people are suffering in silence

Over half (55%) feel that companies take advantage of older people, while nearly a quarter (24%) find complaining intimidating

Among those that have complained one in three (30%) were passed from pillar to post



Close to one in five (17%) over-65s did not complain when they had a problem with their energy supplier

Heading into winter, we all come to rely on our heating and energy services more and more. Particularly later in life, it's important for our health that we stay warm and well.

However, there are times when things go wrong and it may be necessary to make a complaint to your energy supplier.

In fact, our research tells us that more than 1.7 million¹ older people in the UK are suffering in silence when they experience bad service from their energy supplier. We have also found that older people also experience accessibility issues, as nearly a quarter (23%) of those in later life struggled to hear or understand the operator at their energy company when they call or complain, while more than one in 10 (11%) have difficulty reading their bills as the print is too small.

We are the energy ombudsman. If you have an unresolved complaint about a gas or electricity company, then we may be able to help. We are approved by the energy regulator Ofgem to independently handle disputes between energy companies and their customers. Our service is free to consumers and simple to use.

We also publish data about energy complaints to help you make informed decisions about the suppliers you use.

We want to give you the confidence to make the most of your energy, know what to do when things go wrong and how to effectively make a complaint. This guide should help you to do just that.

¹ The latest Office for National Statistics figures show that there are 10,377,127 people aged 65 and over in the UK. Our consumer omnibus survey showed that 17% of respondents aged 65 and over did not complain when they had a problem, which equates to 1.7 million older people currently suffering in silence.

How to complain to your energy provider

If something does go wrong with an energy supplier, the first thing to do is contact the company as soon as you can.

Explain the problem and what you would like to be done to fix it.

Remember:

- Try not to get emotional and keep your anger in check - you can be assertive without being aggressive;
- Don't be embarrassed – it's your right to complain if you're not satisfied;
- Admit your part in the problem if you have any fault; and
- Deal with one complaint at a time; ensure what you say is clear and fair.

Make a note of any contact you have with the company, including dates, times and the names of the people you speak to. Keep a record of any calls, emails, letters or receipts. If you have to send anything off always send photocopies – keep hold of the originals.

If you are getting nowhere, try to escalate your complaint. Most companies publish their complaint procedure on their website. If not, you can ask what the process is either by phone or letter. Alternatively, you could take to Twitter or Facebook. Our research tells us that nearly a third (31%) of people who escalate a complaint do so using social media. If you're not sure how to do this, ask a relative or friend to help.




If your complaint remains unresolved after a reasonable amount of time has passed (usually eight weeks) you should be able to take it to the energy ombudsman, free of charge.

Resolver takes the hassle out of complaining

www.resolver.co.uk is a free online tool and app that offer consumer guidance and simplifies the process of complaining to the energy company. It takes you through the process and explains your rights to you so there's no confusion.

Resolver can help you prepare your emails and letters by providing templates. It stores each step of your complaint in an individual case file and if it remains unresolved Resolver packages up your complaint and sends it to the energy ombudsman.

Remember...

- You have the right to complain to your energy supplier if something  goes wrong
- You can find contact information for your energy supplier on your bill, or on the company's website. You might use the same company for both electricity and gas or have a different one for each  – check your bills to find out who your supplier is for each fuel.
- Your energy supplier has eight weeks to resolve the complaint from the point that it is first registered with them.
- If you do not think the complaint has been resolved or it has not been resolved to your satisfaction after eight weeks you can complain to the energy ombudsman by calling 03  40 1624 or going to www.ombudsman-services.org/energy

Ombudsman Services

Ofgem requires all energy companies to work with the energy ombudsman to resolve complaints that have not been dealt with within eight weeks, or have reached deadlock.

If you're getting nowhere with your complaint, Ombudsman Services might be able to help. We offer a FREE and impartial service to help consumers to resolve their complaints. We are the energy ombudsman. We are:

- Approved – by numerous regulators and competent authorities to provide independent redress in a range of sectors, including energy, communications, property, home improvement and retail.
- Accessible – we have an easy-to-use online service to help resolve complaints – **www.ombudsman-services.org**. You can also contact us via phone (on 0330 440 1624), email or post.
- Friendly and professional - our people are trained to listen and empathise. We base our decisions on the evidence provided by both sides, and our knowledge of relevant codes of practice.
- Experienced – we have over a decade of experience handling consumer complaints and have resolved over 1.3 million issues to date.
- Dedicated to resolving complaints – we aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible with the most appropriate outcome.

You can find out more about what we do via our website **www.ombudsman-services.org** where we publish case studies and data about energy companies.

How to get help from Ombudsman Services

Before Ombudsman Services can help, you must first complain to the company and give them a chance to sort out your problem.

The information on page 3 will help you with this. The company usually has up to eight weeks to resolve your complaint, unless it confirms in writing that it can no longer help; this is called a deadlock letter.

If your complaint remains unresolved, visit **www.ombudsman-services.org**. Here you can log the details of your complaint, explain what you'd like the company to do about it and upload any evidence you may have. We will try to resolve your complaint as quickly as possible, often in a matter of days. Alternatively, you can call us on 0330 440 1624, or contact us by post.

If the company is at fault, we'll aim to return you to the position you would have been in had the problem not occurred. Sometimes we'll require the company to give you a financial award for any stress and inconvenience caused. If you accept our resolution, it becomes legally binding on the company.



If, for some reason, we cannot accept your complaint at this time, we will give you advice on what to do next.



Make the most of your energy

A warm, cosy home can help us all get through the cold winter months.

Here are some tips from Age UK to help you make the most of your energy and stay warm this winter:

- Draw your curtains in the evenings to minimise heat loss.
 Pull long curtains behind radiators so heat doesn't get trapped.
- Fit draught excluders around windows and doors in older homes.
- Take control of your heating – using a room thermostat, programmer and thermostatic radiator valves can save you up to £165 per year.
- Switch appliances off when not in use rather than using standby.
- Wait until you have a full load before running the washing machine or use a half load setting. Run the machine at lower temperatures.
- Don't leave the chargers to mobile phones and other devices on overnight and unplug them when they're not in use – many still use power even if they're not connected to anything!
- Get into the habit of turning lights off – but not at the expense of your safety. Keep stairs well lit to reduce the risk of falling. Most energy suppliers will offer night lights so you don't have to have the main light on at night.
- Get your boiler serviced annually to make sure  running as efficient as possible.

Be an energy shopper

You could save £300 if you switch suppliers after being with one provider for a long time. If you use a lot of energy then you could save even more.

The Be An Energy Shopper website gives straightforward, impartial advice from Ofgem on how to shop around for your gas and electricity. There's information on how to read your bill, how to read your meter and how to compare tariffs.

Even if you're a savvy energy shopper and have switched in the past, it's worth checking once a year. New tariffs and deals are launched all the time so what was a good deal two years ago might not be as good now. Remember exit fees don't apply 49 days before the end of your tariff so you don't have to wait until the end of your deal to start shopping around.

The most straightforward way to shop around is to find out your current tariff and usage details (which you can find on a recent bill) and use a comparison website. The Be An Energy Shopper website also has links to Ofgem-accredited price comparison sites, so you can be sure that the information is reliable.

Did you know you could also make savings by being on a dual fuel tariff (one that covers both gas and electricity) and by managing your account online? If you don't feel confident doing this, you could always ask a friend or relative to help.

To learn more go to www.goenergyshopping.co.uk/winter

Doorstep scams

National Trading Standards tells us that 85% of victims of doorstep scams are aged 65 or over.

But don't worry! There are lots of things you can do to protect yourself and stay safe:

- When someone rings your doorbell stop and think – are you expecting a caller? You don't have to answer the door.
- Use your door chain, spy-hole or window to see who the caller is before you answer the door.
- Check visitors are who they say they are by always asking to see identity cards and examine them carefully. Remember you can always ask them to return at a later date when someone will be with you.
- Lock all your doors; someone may be distracting you at the front while another person tries to enter your home at the back.
- Join the priority services register of your utility company (see opposite) so you can set up a password with them.

Join the priority services register

If you are of pensionable age and above, have a disability, a long-term illness or hearing and/or sight loss, you can join the priority services register of your energy supplier.

This entitles you to free services and support which might include:

- A password scheme so that you know callers from the energy company are who they say they are.
- Advance notice of disruption and alternative facilities for cooking and heating.
- Help during a power cut.
- An annual gas safety check.
- Controls and adaptations to make appliances and meters easy to use.
- Your bills being sent or copied to a nominated person, or being supplied in large print or Braille.



If you receive Pension Credit

Winter protection

A new, efficient boiler can save you between £90 and £275 per year on your energy bills. They are expensive, but you could qualify for a free boiler and free insulation if you receive Pension Credit. A quick way to check if you qualify is to call the Energy Saving Trust advice service on 0300 123 1234 and answer a few basic questions.

Cold weather payment

You may be eligible for cold weather payments. Between 1 November and 31 March if the temperature is at 0 degrees celcius for seven days in a row you will receive £25 and this will continue for every seven days of the cold snap.

Winter fuel payment

You could get between £100 and £300 tax-free to help pay your heating bills if you were born on or before 5 May 1953. This is known as a 'winter fuel payment'.

Most payments are made automatically between November and December. You should get your money by Christmas.

You usually get a winter fuel payment automatically if you get the state pension or another social security benefit (not housing benefit, council tax reduction, child benefit or universal credit).

Don't forget – Ofgem rules prevent a supplier from disconnecting a pensioner during the winter months



Ombudsman Services

Established in 2002, running government-approved redress schemes in the communications, energy and property sectors.

www.ombudsman-services.org / 0330 440 1624

Age UK

The country's largest charity dedicated to helping everyone make the most of later life by providing information and advice, by campaigning and by providing tailored products and services.

www.ageuk.org.uk / 0800 169 2081

Citizens Advice

The UK's largest advice provider, equipped to deal with a range of issues including debt and money, relationships, housing and consumer rights.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk / 03454 04 05 06

Which? Consumer Rights

Free website to help people understand their rights and find simple ways of solving everyday consumer problems. Includes step-by-step guides and handy template letters to help consumers get results and make companies act on their complaints.

www.which.co.uk/consumer-rights



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