

Your Energy Your Money

## FACILITATOR CHEAT SHEET

### Discussion / Presentation on Saving Money on Your Bills & Switching Providers / Tariffs

*Below are prompts and information for a discussion or presentation on saving on energy bills, switching, tariffs, and bills. Suggested hand-outs are indicated, which can be found online.*

*You can run this as a presentation, use this to lead a discussion pulling out the points that are relevant to your group, or feed this into your own discussions and activities.*

#### Introduction

- Saving money on our energy bills benefits both the environment and our budget
- Using less energy at home is an easy way to save money, that we can start today
- However there are other ways many people can save on their bills as well, such as changing tariffs, switching provider, or getting assistance with bills

#### Using less energy

- The easiest way to start saving money immediately is to use less energy. This will lower the cost of your bill, and help the environment as well
- You may want to use this as an opportunity to discuss ideas for using less energy. There are activities later in the session which feed into this.

#### How else can we save?

- With our energy, it is important to understand that we:
  - Are signed up to an energy company who provides our gas or electricity, and bills us (unless we pay our landlord directly). This is our **provider**
  - We will also be on a **tariff**, or plan, which determines the rate that we pay for each amount (kWh, or Kilowatt-hour) of gas or electricity that we use
  - How much we use, or our usage, also determines how much we will pay
- Many people could save money by switching provider and / or tariff. According to uSwitch.com (comparison website), the average annual saving made by customers switching tariff or provider is £228 (2015).
- Note that if someone pays their landlord directly for gas or electricity, they will not be able to switch. However if they feel they are paying too much, they could consider asking their landlord if there is a cheaper company / tariff they could switch to. There are also regulations around if the usage is split across a number of flats / rooms. See the client booklet for more information on this.
  - *Has anyone ever switched provider or tariff? What was their experience of switching? How did they do it? Was it simple, complicated? Did they have any problems?*

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### Switching providers and tariffs

- Before you switch, you will want to find out what your current tariff is if applicable. If you are locked into a deal, ie one that has a fixed price for a set period of time, you may have to pay a penalty to switch so it may not be worth it.
- The easiest way to see if you would benefit from switching is to use an online switching site. Ofgem publish a list of sites backed by the confidence code (see the additional information sheets). These sites meet standards that mean they should be safe and reliable to use.
- If someone is not comfortable doing this online, most switching sites will do this over the phone. You can also call individual energy companies to ask about their cheapest tariff and the cost.
- *We recommend people try this on two different sites, as they may not show all the available companies and thus options.*
- To use one of these sites, you will ideally need a copy of your last few bills or your yearly statement. If you are moving, then you can enter details of your property size and they still estimate accordingly.

### Switching site walk through

- *If you are able, the ideal is to walk the group through using an online switching site and run a demonstration ie for someone in a two bedroom flat on a meter. Alternatively someone may want to use their own usage as an example.*
- When using a switching site you *generally* need to:
  - Enter your email address and postcode. You can opt out of sales emails
  - Enter if you use gas, and if you are on a dual fuel tariff—ie that your gas and electricity are through the same provider
  - Enter your current provider. If you don't have one, you may have to select one at random to proceed
  - Enter how you currently pay (or if you don't currently pay, enter how you would like to pay)
  - Enter if you have an economy 7 metre (see the additional information sheets)
  - Enter what tariff you are on. Again if you don't currently pay, you may need to enter one simply to proceed. At the end it will still list your cheapest options
  - You will then enter how much gas or electricity you use, either in kWh (from your bill) or what you pay. If you don't know, there is usually an option to enter details about your property and usage
  - Finally you are usually asked if you want to be shown all plans, or only ones you can switch to that day / online. Choosing all plans will give you more options and may mean cheaper options
- The site will then give you a list of providers and tariffs, showing how much you can save. See the additional information sheets for more information on tariffs
- There may be companies people have not heard of before. To find out more, which.co.uk offers reviews from their consumer surveys free of charge at <http://switch.which.co.uk/energy-suppliers/energy-companies-rated.html>
- If you choose to switch, some plans allow you to do this online. For others you may need to phone the new company to set up your account
- The cheapest plan may be a new tariff with your same provider

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### Alternatives to switching provider

- Some people may not want to switch provider. However, they can still phone their existing company to see if there is a cheaper tariff they could move to
- Unless you choose a cheaper tariff, you are often put on a standard tariff which may be the most expensive
- If you are locked into a tariff, you won't be able to switch without a penalty charge, so switching may not offer a saving

### Why wouldn't you want to switch?

- People may have concerns about switching. Asking the group what these are, and talking them through can help
- Common concerns are that
  - Their gas or electricity will change. In fact, the gas / electricity stays the same, only the billing changes.
  - The new company may not provide good customer service. Looking online at reviews, and at the Which survey, can be useful. Remember that people are more likely to post a bad experience than a good one, which is why the Which survey may be more balanced
  - Their gas / electricity will get cut off during the switch. This should not happen as only the billing changes
  - They won't get an accurate bill. Taking a metre reading on the day of switch can help with this
  - They can't switch if they have debts. This will depend on how they pay, and the type of debt. See the additional information sheet
  - They are renting.
    - If they pay their bills directly to the utility provider, by law they can switch. However, when they move out they may need to switch it back to the original provider so any tariff that locks you in may not be possible. They should check their tenancy agreement to see if this is specified
    - If they reimburse the landlord, then they cannot switch. They could consider asking the landlord if there is a cheaper option (see the client booklet for more information on this)

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### Types of Tariffs

- There are many different types of tariffs that differ from company to company. However several types are:
  - Standard tariff. Generally the most expensive as no discounts are offered
  - Online only. You will not receive a paper bill, instead all correspondence is emailed and bills are provided online. Generally this is cheaper than the standard tariff
  - Fixed rates. The amount you pay per kWh (kilowatt Hour) is fixed, so if prices go up, or down, the amount you pay per kWh stays the same. Generally you are fixed in for a set period of time, and there is a penalty to leave early. This can provide a savings if prices are rising, but you may pay more than average if prices fall. Your bill will still change depending on how much energy you are using
  - Green tariffs. Generally more expensive, they support renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power. The energy you receive into your house is the same
  - Economy 7 or 10 tariffs. Generally for people who have electricity only including storage heaters, which fill up with heat at night. The energy is cheaper at night, and more expensive in the day.

### Ways to pay

(details on each of these are provided in the booklet, or on the additional information sheet)

- There are a number of ways to pay. Most common are:
  - Direct Debit
  - Monthly or Quarterly billing
  - Prepayment Meter
- It is important to think about which one works best for you, based on your income, if it is regular, how you budget, and if you are able to save. Some ways may be cheaper, such as a direct debit, however if you do not have money in your account when the money is taken you will be penalised. Prepayment metres are often more expensive, but some people like these because they find it easier to budget.
- Alternatively, you may pay your landlord directly, as is laid out in your tenancy agreement.

### Reading your meter

- When would you want to read your meter?
  - When you move into a new home—Take a meter reading the day you get the keys. This ensures you only pay for the energy that you use
  - When you receive an estimated bill, to provide an accurate reading so they can adjust the bill if needed
  - When you move—Take a final reading when you move out
  - When you switch provider— Take a meter reading on the day of the switch
  - If you are having any disputes with your company around usage— You may want to keep a daily meter reading log
- When you take a meter reading, it's always a good idea to write it down and to take a photo (ie on your phone) so that you have a clear record. Be sure to record the date and time as well
- Once you have your meter reading, provide this to your provider so they can ensure your bills are correct

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- There are many different types of meters. To help the group read their own, we recommend going through a leaflet on reading a meter. The Centre for Sustainable Energy produce one, found under resources or at <https://www.cse.org.uk/downloads/advice-leaflets/energy-advice/advice-leaflet-reading-your-gas-or-electricity-meter.pdf>

### Reading your bill

- If you pay by direct debit or bill, being able to read your bill is very important to ensure you are paying the correct amount
- With the group, we recommend printing out a sample bill and going through this with the group. The Centre for Sustainable Energy has one in their resources, at <https://www.cse.org.uk/advice/advice-and-support/understanding-your-electricity-bill>
- Key points are to check:
- Are the details on the bill correct?
- Does your meter number match the one on the bill?
- Is the bill based on an estimate or an actual meter reading? If it's an estimate, you may want to provide an up to date meter reading to get a more accurate bill
- If you pay by billing, when do you need to pay by?
- If you have any questions or concerns, be sure to contact your energy supplier immediately
- Remember if you are having problems with your bills, and you are not able to sort this out with your provider, you can make a complaint. Ask the company for a copy of their complaints procedure

### Getting help

- If you are on a low income you may be eligible for help with your bills. The Home Heat Helpline can tell you more about what you may be eligible for. This could include:
  - The Warm Home Discount, a grant of £140 (at July 2015) off your electricity bill if you are on a very low income
  - Help with gas or electricity debts. Generally you need to be able to demonstrate a clear reason why you got into debt, and how you will avoid this happening again in the future
  - Grants or loans for energy efficient improvements
- The Home Heat Helpline can be reached on 0800 33 66 99
- If you have energy debts, help may be available including grants to help pay these. For help contact your local free debt advice agency or:
  - Stepchange 0800 138 1111 [www.stepchange.org](http://www.stepchange.org)
  - Payplan can set up a debt management plan for you 0800 280 2816 [www.payplan.com](http://www.payplan.com) (Maybe cheaper for mobiles: 020 7760 8980)
  - National Debt line Free: 0808-808 4000 [www.nationaldebtline.co.uk](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk)
  - Home Heat Helpline 0800 33 66 99
  - Charis Grants 01733 421021 [www.charisgrants.com](http://www.charisgrants.com) They oversee hardship funds for a number of utility companies