



Gas and electricity are priority bills as you can have your supply disconnected for non-payment.

It is worthwhile checking the following details:

1) Do you owe the money?

- Is the bill in your name? – You are only liable from the date you move into a property. You should not have to agree to take over a debt to keep the supply connected.
- Is the meter reading an actual reading or was it estimated? - An estimated bill could mean that you don't owe as much as you think.
- Is your meter working properly? - You can check this by switching off all appliances; including pilot lights and central heating clocks; then **using a torch** check to see if the dial is still turning. If it is you should contact the fuel company as it may be dangerous. N.B. If the company check the meter and it is found not to be faulty a charge is likely to be incurred.

2) High Bills

If you are a tenant and have high fuel bills due to dampness or disrepair, your landlord is responsible for rectifying the damage. - Get advice.

3) Energy savings, grants and efficiency

- If you are receiving certain benefits or on low income you may be able to apply for the **Warm Home Discount Scheme**, contact your energy provider, they will tell you if you qualify for the annual payment which is then credited to your energy account during the winter months.
- **Better Behaving Boiler Scheme** – is a central grant for owner occupiers who are on low income and do not have a working central heating system or have an old and inefficient boiler. Private tenants can access this grant if they have responsibility for the heating system. Contact Bolton Care and Repair – 01204 335679 or email boltoncareandrepair@boltonathome.org.uk
- **Healthy Heating** – this is a grant for people with ill health. You must receive a disability benefit, have no workable central heating system and you must be referred by a health professional. Contact Bolton Care and Repair – 01204 335679 or email boltoncareandrepair@boltonathome.org.uk
- **Poor insulation/draft proofing** – if you are 60+ you may be able to get help with draft proofing from the Handy Person Scheme. Contact Bolton Care and Repair – 01204 335679 or email boltoncareandrepair@boltonathome.org.uk
- **Green Deal + Energy Company Obligation (ECO)** – from January 2013 all households will be able to make enquires about the Green Deal + ECO, regarding energy saving improvement around the home, you may have to pay some or all of the costs back, over time, through your energy bills.
- In addition the **Energy Company Obligation (ECO)**, will work alongside the Green Deal by helping those in homes which are expensive to upgrade and vulnerable households which cannot afford adequate heating. Contact Greater Manchester Energy Advice Service – 0800 009 3363 or visit - www.manchester.gov.uk

THE NUMBER TO RING FOR REPORTING ALL GAS LEAKS IS 0800 111999
TRANSCO – COVERS ALL GAS SUPPLIERS

4) Arrangements to pay

- There are a number of ways to pay your fuel bills including; cash, budget schemes, standing orders and direct debits. Ask the fuel company which one will suit you best.

- Fuel companies will usually agree to an arrangement allowing you to pay for your fuel weekly, fortnightly, or monthly. The amount agreed should cover your current usage plus an affordable amount off any arrears.
- If you are in receipt of Income Support or Income Based Job Seekers' Allowance, and in arrears with your fuel bill, your fuel company can ask the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) to send payments directly to them out of your benefit. This amount would include your current weekly usage plus a standard amount per week off the arrears. Alternatively you can contact and ask them to send a form to you directly to apply for fuel direct.
- Fuel Companies are bound by conditions in their licences which require that :-
 - The repayment of arrears should be calculated in line with a customer's ability to pay. (i.e. at a rate they can afford; regardless of the debt outstanding)
 - When a customer is unable to pay, a prepayment meter should be installed as an alternative to disconnection; if it is safe and practical to do so.
 - A prepayment meter should be calibrated to collect arrears in line with a customer's ability to pay.
- If you already have a prepayment meter and are finding it hard to cope ask the fuel company to see if they can reduce the amount you are paying for your arrears to a level you can afford.
- If you are having difficulty paying your bills the fuel companies should bear in mind your circumstances, and where possible amend your repayments to take ability to pay into account.

Failure to comply with these conditions should be reported to Consumer Focus

5) Disconnection

- Where all the members of a household with an income are pensioners or sick, disconnection should not take place between 1st October and 31st March, as long as they can't pay.
- If you are a private tenant whose rent includes an amount for fuel; and you are facing disconnection, this could constitute harassment.
- Fuel companies can refuse a supply if you owe them money.
- If you have been disconnected and are unable to pay the reconnection fee, the DWP may grant a Crisis Loan to meet the cost. You do not have to be in receipt of Income Support to apply.

6) Cold Weather Payments

In a period of very cold weather you *may* be entitled to a cold weather payment if you are in receipt of Income Support or income based Job Seekers' Allowance. This should be paid automatically within your benefit.

7) Winter Fuel Payments

These are paid to all people over the age of 60 (with a few exceptions). They are usually paid automatically and do not affect your pension. Telephone the Winter Fuel Payment Helpline on 08459 15 15 15 for more details.



8) Further Advice

Disputes with fuel boards can be dealt with by Energy Ombudsman Service – www.ombudsman-services.org/energy.html

Who supplies my gas: **0870 6081524**
 Who supplies my electricity: **0870 7510093**

Your Name
Your Address

Customer Accounts
(Your supplier, check
your bill for details)

Date:

Gas / Electricity* Account – Request for New Method of Payment
(*delete as appropriate)

Account Number _____

Dear Sirs

I have received your recent letter concerning my outstanding arrears and possible disconnection of my supply.

Due to financial difficulties I would ask that consideration be given to (Please tick as appropriate) :-

- A budget account A revised budget account

OR

- Installation of a prepayment meter

Please calibrate the meter at the lowest possible setting as:

* I am in receipt of Income Support/ Income Based Job Seekers Allowance

* I have a very low income and enclose a financial statement showing the extent of my difficulties
(* delete as applicable)

I understand that you are required by the terms of your licence to take into account a customer's ability to pay when assessing the rate of recovery of arrears.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Yours faithfully

Your Signature

*Customer Accounts
(Your supplier, check
your bill for details)*

*Your Name
Your Address*

Date

Gas / Electricity* – Request for reduced recovery of arrears via prepayment meter
*(*delete as appropriate)*

Account Number: _____

Dear Sir or Madam,

A pre-payment meter has been installed at my home which has been set to collect my outstanding arrears as well as for my current consumption.

Due to financial difficulties I would ask that this be calibrated at the lowest possible setting as:

* I am in receipt of Income Support / Income Based Job Seekers Allowance / Income Based Employment Support Allowance

* I have a very low income and enclose a draft statement of my income and outgoings showing the extent of my difficulties

(delete as applicable)*

I understand that you are required by the terms of your licence to take into account a customer's ability to pay when assessing the rate of recovery of arrears.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Yours faithfully

Your Signature