

# A guide to cutting your home energy bills



**Dudley**  
Metropolitan Borough Council

**e n e r g y**  
DUDLEY ENERGY ADVICE LINE

**01384 817086**

## Introduction:

**Cutting your home energy bills and making them more affordable doesn't have to mean making big or expensive changes. Small changes and measures can save you money too.**

There are lots of practical things that you can do to save money; from obtaining a smart meter so that you can monitor your usage and avoid any surprise high bills, to taking steps to reduce your energy consumption.

This guide explains how Dudley borough residents can cut their energy bills and keep their homes warm. It also provides details of where people can go for further help and advice on home energy matters and options.

**The Council's Energy Advice Service wants to help you to:**

- Apply for energy discounts
- Insulate your home to make it warmer and cost less to heat.
- Understand how much fuel you use and how you can reduce it by making simple changes.



## Energy Saving Tips

### Cooking

- Only fill the kettle with as much water as you need to boil.
- When boiling vegetables use just enough water to keep them covered.
- Use the kettle to boil water for cooking, instead of heating a pan on an electric stove.
- Putting lids on pans will help to reduce condensation.
- Always use the right sized pan for your cooking ring and put a lid on it. This will help save energy as it will cook quicker.
- Make sure the gas flame only heats the bottom of the pan.
- Make sure taps are fully turned off immediately after use.
- Use a microwave or pressure cooker instead of the oven as they should cook food quicker.
- A steamer or segmented pan means you can cook several vegetables on one ring.
- Switch off the oven sooner, as some dishes will continue to cook whilst the oven is cooling.

### Fridge and freezer tips

- Don't put hot food in a fridge or freezer, wait for it to cool first.
- Keep your fridge at the optimum temperature of around 3 to 5 °C.
- Load and unload your fridge or freezer as quickly as possible and don't leave the fridge door open for longer than you need to.
- Defrost your fridge or freezer on a regular basis to help prevent a build of ice.
- Keep fridges and freezers away from cookers, direct sunlight, and radiators.
- When replacing, consider purchasing an A rated model

## Laundry

- Always use a full load in a washing machine
- 90% of the cost to run a washing machine is spent on heating the water, so if you wash your clothes at 30 – 40 °C you're saving significant amounts of money.
- Use the economy programme on your washing machine whenever possible.
- If the weather is fine, dry your laundry outside instead of using the tumble dryer.
- As tempting as it is, don't dry clothes on the radiators. It makes your boiler work harder than it needs to and causes condensation.
- Keep filters clean in your tumble dryer.
- Use Eco Balls in the tumble dryer. They make gaps in the washing to allow the heat to move more freely so clothes will dry quicker.



## Water

- Turn off the tap when you brush your teeth, this can actually save six litres per minute.
- Many water companies will provide on request water saving measures:
  - Displacement device in your toilet to reduce the volume of water used in each flush.
  - Aerated showerheads reduce the flow but don't compromise on pressure.
  - Shower timers - take a shorter shower, showers can use anything between 6 and 45 litres of water per minute.
- Fix a dripping tap. A dripping tap can waste 15 litres of water a day or 5,500 litres of water a year.
- Consider installing a water meter. You can save money on your bill as the amount you pay will depend on how much water you have used. It's important to work out if a meter is financially worthwhile. As a rough rule of thumb, if there are more or the same number of bedrooms in your house than people, check out getting a meter.
- If within the first year of the meter being installed, you find that your bill is higher than your previous charges, you can revert back to your previous method of payment.

## Electrical appliances

- Turn off the lights in rooms that are not in use.
- Use energy saving light bulbs. LED light bulbs are relatively new; they tend to be the most expensive but can save you money as they can last for 25-30 years. Unlike traditional energy saving bulbs, they are instantly bright when switched on.
- Electric showers are expensive to run – reduce the amount of time you spend in the shower
- On average a household spends between £45 to £80 a year powering appliances left in standby mode or not in use.
- When looking to purchase new household appliances ensure you check the energy efficiency rating. Always purchase A rated appliances when possible.



## Keeping Warm

- Installing loft insulation can save around £150 a year and Installing cavity wall insulation can save around £145 a year.
- Turning down your central heating by 1°C can save you as much as £60 per year.
- Wearing more jumpers, socks and slippers around the house, means you won't be tempted to turn the heating up.
- When relaxing use a throw or a blanket to keep warm. Consider using electric ones – they only cost around a penny an hour to run
- Have at least one hot meal a day and have plenty of hot drinks throughout the day.
- Keep moving; try not to sit still for more than one hour at a time.
- Use a hot water bottle.
- Keep internal doors closed to stop draughts.
- Use thermal or heavy curtains during the winter and close them at dusk.
- On a sunny day, even in winter opening your curtains will let warmth into your home.
- Keep your radiators clear of any furniture (for example, do not put a sofa or chair in front of a radiator as it will absorb a lot of the heat).
- The easiest way to save energy and keep heat in is to identify and block any draughts in your home. There are lots of ways to block draughts - try expanding foam to squirt into cracks and gaps or attach a draught excluder to the bottom of your doors. It's cheap and easy to do, just visit your local DIY store.



## Energy saving myths

**When thinking about saving energy in the home, it's important that we challenge some of the widely held myths that people are often led to believe. Believing these myths can result in wasting energy and higher costs as a result.**

- **Leaving the heating on all day on a low temperature is cheaper than turning the heating up and down or on and off as needed.**  
**FALSE:** For the majority of householders leaving your room thermostat on all day at a lower temperature will not only mean that your home will never be at a comfortable temperature but it will also waste heat when you do not need it. Room thermostats turn the heat on and off when your home reaches the set temperature that you feel comfortable at. Combine this with a timer control that tells your heating system to come on only when you need it to save money on your energy bills.
- **Cranking up the thermostat heats your home faster.**  
**FALSE:** Your room thermostat turns your heating system on or off according to a set temperature. No matter how high you set the temperature, the rate at which your central heating distributes heat remains constant. To heat your home faster, install better insulation. This decreases the rate at which heat is lost through your walls, loft, windows, and floor - heating your home faster and keeping it warm for longer.
- **Electrical appliances, such as TVs, laptops, and phone chargers, don't use electricity when they're plugged in but not in use.**  
**FALSE:** Some electrical appliances and chargers draw energy even when the devices are not being used. The best way to avoid this is to remember to switch off at the wall and pull out the plug.  
By avoiding standby, and making sure devices are not left plugged in or idle, a typical home could save between £50 - £80 a year.
- **It is cheaper to run appliances, such as washing machines, at night than during the day.**  
This may be true, but not for most of us. While some households in the UK are on tariffs that vary depending on the time of day, such as Economy 7, the majority of customers pay the same rate at all times of day and night. However, if you know you are already on an Economy tariff, or are considering switching to one, then running appliances during off-peak periods will be cheaper.

- **With traditional light bulb fittings, you cannot do a straightforward swap to energy saving bulbs such as LED light bulbs.**

**FALSE:** Energy saving and LED light bulbs come in all shapes and sizes and can now be fitted in down-lighters, free-standing lamps and traditional pendants.

- **Cavity wall insulation causes damp in the home.**

**FALSE:** In most cases cavity wall insulation is likely to reduce not cause damp in a home. A combination of proper insulation, adequate ventilation and balanced heating in a home will help avoid cold spots and moisture from condensing on your walls.

- **When using a desktop computer, screensavers save energy.**

**FALSE:** Because your screen remains on, screensavers are basically another programme which consumes energy like any other. While computers have timed sleep settings which do use less energy, switching off your monitor or even your whole computer when taking breaks is the most effective way to stop energy being wasted.

- **It's difficult and a hassle to switch energy suppliers.**

**FALSE:** There are a number of energy price comparison companies where you can find the cheapest tariff for your area by checking online or by telephone. Once you have filled in the application with your details, which typically takes around half an hour, the energy provider will sort the switch for you. Finding the deal that's best for you, and switching energy supplier, can be a great way to reduce your energy bills and since October 2013 it has been made much easier to switch.



## Switching

### Can I save money by switching?

It is very unlikely. The high unexpected gas price rises this year (2022) means that energy companies are not making profit. Unlike many of the smaller companies that have gone bust, many of the larger companies can afford to ride out these price shocks. However, they are no longer offering good deals. Price comparison sites are only able to provide a very limited number of options they can switch you to via the site, if any at all. You can still use these sites to show you all prices available. Many suppliers are closing to new customers.

### Should I switch?

Most people will be best off staying put as they are unlikely to get a better deal elsewhere. However, if you want a fixed deal for peace of mind, comparison sites will show any available. Fixed deals are very likely to be a lot more expensive than staying on a Standard Variable Tariff. This is because the price cap will hold the prices down at least until the end of March. If you are on a fixed tariff now, it may be best to stay with that provider. If your fixed tariff ends, your new Standard Variable Tariff is now the best available.

### Supplier gone bust

#### What happens if your energy company has gone bust, what do I do?

Your gas and electric supply will not be affected, do not worry about the lights going out. The regulator, Ofgem will find you a new energy company and transfer you over to them. They will get in touch with you and set you up as a new customer. You are advised to stay put and not to try and switch away until your account is set up. This could take several weeks. It is a good idea to take meter readings and keep them, or ideally take a photo of your meter, and download any online bills. If the energy company owes you money this is protected, and you should get it back from your new supplier. If you owe money, you will now owe your new supplier this money.

If you are on a fixed tariff with a company that goes bust, your new supplier won't honour this deal, but will move you immediately to their Standard Variable Tariff.

If you wish to move from this new supplier (and can find a supplier who will accept you), you won't be charged any exit fees.

### Priority Services Register

The Priority Services Register ensures energy suppliers provide extra help to vulnerable energy customers. Contact your supplier to see if you are eligible.

# Payment Options

## How to pay your energy bills:

**Provide regular meter reads to your supplier. Increase your direct debit or top up by as much as you can afford to. Keep topping up pre-payment meters regularly even during the summer to even out the costs of your energy across the year.**

### Monthly or quarterly fixed Direct Debit

Direct debit is generally the cheapest way to pay energy bills

Your energy supplier will work out how much you spend on energy in a year and divide this into equal monthly or quarterly payments. Suppliers usually offer a discount to monthly Direct Debit customers, as their accounts are easier to manage.

If you pay for your gas and electricity by monthly Direct Debit, it's important to check your energy bills regularly to ensure you're paying the right amount.

Because energy use is not equal throughout the year, direct debit customers effectively underpay in winter and overpay in summer. It's normal to find your account a little bit in debit at the end of the colder, darker months of the year and in credit at the end of warmer, lighter periods.

### Quarterly Bills

A quarterly or monthly energy bill is sent out, which you pay by cash or cheque at a bank or Post Office. This can be more expensive than paying by direct debit, though you may be eligible for a prompt payment discount if you pay on time.

**If paying by direct debit or quarterly, ensure you submit regular gas and electric meter readings – ideally every month. Submitting meter readings will ensure you have accurate bills and not overpay.**

## Prepayment meters

Prepayment meter customers pay for energy in advance by buying energy tokens or

energy credit loaded on to a key or swipe card. Once the credit is low or runs out, you

top up the card or key with more credit.

This is usually the most expensive way to pay for electricity and gas.

Your energy meter will need to be changed if you want to transfer to an energy tariff that allows you to pay by direct debit or cash/cheque.

Provided you have no more than £500 debt on your meter, prepayment customers can easily switch to another supplier.

## Fuel Direct

If you are on universal credit, income support, job seekers allowance, pension credit or employment and support allowance you may find that you are eligible for the Fuel Direct scheme.

This is where a fixed amount (usually £3.55) is taken directly from your benefits by the

Department of Work and Pensions and paid to your energy supplier to help clear an energy debt. A further amount may also be taken to cover your current energy usage.





## Help with your energy bills

**You may be entitled to some financial support with paying your energy bills, depending upon your circumstances. Various schemes, benefits and grants exist to help you keep affordably warm in your home.**

### Warm Home Discount Scheme

Older people or those on a low income may be entitled to the Warm Home Discount Scheme which gives extra help with your gas and electricity bills during the winter months. The discount for 2021/22 is currently £140 per year.

If you are in receipt of Guarantee Pension Credit, the Department for Work and Pensions will try to make sure you get this discount automatically. People on a low income may also be entitled.

**Each energy supplier has different criteria - either contact your energy provider or Dudley energy advice line for details of whether you are eligible.**

### Cold Weather Payment

Cold Weather Payments are made to households in receipt of qualifying benefits during periods of very cold weather to help people pay for extra heating costs. To get a Cold Weather Payment, the average temperature where you live must be recorded as, or forecast to be, 0°C or below for seven days in a row. Those eligible will automatically get £25 for each seven-day period between 1 November and 31 March.

**To check whether the temperature in your area is low enough for you to receive a payment contact the Dudley energy advice line.**

### Winter Fuel Payment

Most people aged 60 or over can get a Winter Fuel payment to help them pay for gas or electricity heating in winter. This annual tax-free lump sum is normally paid from November and most payments are made by Christmas.

Households with someone over 60 get £200 and over 80s households get £300 (2021/22).

Each person who qualifies for the payment will receive a letter explaining their individual payment. If you qualify, a Winter Fuel Payment will be paid in the same way as you are paid your state pension or main benefit payment.

### Local Welfare Assistance

Dudley Council in partnership with Citizens Advice and Castle & Crystal Credit Union, offers crisis loans to meet urgent needs that pose an immediate and substantial risk to health and safety. Crisis loans can help provide access to essential items such as food, energy supplies (electricity or gas) clothing and in some circumstances white goods and furniture.

**Applications can be made either on-line or by contacting the council on 01384 813510 - if you are calling from a 01384 number you will be charged at a local rate, charges may vary from other numbers i.e. mobiles.**

### Energy Bills Rebate

The Government has announced that from October 2022 households will receive an upfront discount on their electricity bills worth £200. The discount will then be automatically recovered from people's bills in equal £40 instalments over the next five years. This will begin from 2023, when global wholesale gas prices are expected to come down.

Households in England, which are in council tax bands A-D, will also receive a £150 rebate. The rebate to bills will be made directly by local authorities from April 2022. This will not need to be repaid.

On top of this discount, discretionary funding of £144 million will also be provided to support vulnerable people and individuals on low incomes that do not pay Council Tax, or that pay Council Tax for properties in Bands E-H.

## Energy Debt

**You should contact your energy supplier as soon as possible if you are having trouble paying your gas and electricity bills.**

Explain your situation to them and offer to pay an amount that you can afford. Also explore whether they can suggest any ways to reduce your bill, such as paying by monthly direct debit or signing up for an online tariff. You should also start taking energy saving measures - see the section on tips for using less electricity.

Energy suppliers should be willing to set up a payment plan for debt that suits your circumstances, even if you have been threatened with disconnection. Often people are over optimistic about their ability to repay debt; make arrangements to pay only what you can reasonably afford and keep to.

**Debt can be repaid through a variety of means including:**

- Fuel Direct - If you are in receipt of certain benefits and are struggling to keep up with fuel or water bills, you can ask your benefits office to pay them directly out of your benefits. Fuel Direct payments pay for your current energy use and an agreed amount of your unpaid bill each week.
- Prepayment meter - pay for your current energy use and an agreed amount of your unpaid bill each time you top up the meter.
- Some energy companies have set up independent charitable trusts to provide grants to some customers to help them pay for fuel arrears.

**All energy suppliers follow a code of practice that means they must take certain steps before cutting off your supply so they won't do so if you agree a regular payment plan with them and then adhere to it.**

StepChange, a national debt charity can provide you with free impartial debt advice and the right practical solution for you. They can help you to repay your debts by making one affordable payment each month. Contact them on freephone 0800 138 1111, including all mobiles, or use their online debt remedy tool at [www.stepchange.org](http://www.stepchange.org)

**Dudley energy advice line is also always on hand for advice and support with energy debt, call 01384 817086.**





# Useful contacts

## **Dudley energy advice line (DEAL)** Call 01384 817086

This Dudley Council service provides a variety of practical support, information and expert advice on how to keep warm, how to use your heating efficiently, understanding bills, switching providers and checking you are receiving any discounts and grants that you may be eligible for. Home visits are provided free of charge to all Dudley borough residents.

## **The Energy Saving Trust** Call 0300 123 1234

The Energy Saving Advice Service is an independent advice service providing impartial advice on energy efficiency and information on government schemes.

## **Life Centre Debt Advice** Call 01384 442375

Practical help with both money management and debt advice No matter how big or small the concern is.

The Upper Room, 105 High Street, Stourbridge DY8 1EE

## **StepChange debt charity** Call 0800 138 1111

A free, independent and confidential service to support people with managing their debt, run by the charity Money Advice Trust.



DUDLEY ENERGY ADVICE LINE

### **How to contact us**

**By post:** Harbour Buildings, Waterfront West, Brierley Hill DY5 1LN

**Call us:** 01384 817086

**email us:** [winterwarmth@dudley.gov.uk](mailto:winterwarmth@dudley.gov.uk)

**Visit:** [www.dudley.gov.uk](http://www.dudley.gov.uk)

**Office hours:** Mon - Thu: 9.00 am - 5.00 pm, Fri: 9.00 am - 4.30 pm