



Press release

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HELP WITH ENERGY BILLS

Citizens Advice is calling on people to consider switching energy supplier.

Throughout November the Citizens Advice offices will be offering advice sessions to help anyone in Central Bedfordshire understand their energy bills and guide them in switching suppliers.

As people prepare for winter one of the things many can do is switch to a better gas and electricity deal. The findings from an Ipsos MORI survey of 2,000 UK participants shows millions of householders across the UK don't realise how much they could save from switching energy supplier or tariff.

The figures find that:

- 40 per cent of people don't know how to switch.
- Over 12 million people don't believe switching could save them money.
- 16 million householders believe switching myths, such as that they may be disconnected for a short period whilst changing energy supplier.

Citizens Advice local offices based in Ampthill, Biggleswade, Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard are urging householders to winter-proof their energy bills.

Findings from the MORI study showed that misunderstandings and misconceptions could be a major reason behind why people are not switching. Nearly two thirds of people wrongly believe one or more switching myths are true.

- A third of people wrongly think that prepayment customers can't switch supplier if they're in any debt.
- A quarter of people wrongly think that tenants require their landlord's permission to switch.
- 25 per cent of people wrongly think they might be disconnected when changing supplier.
- One in five wrongly think you can't change energy supplier when you move house, rather than staying with the property's existing supplier.

Jenny Hedges, Manager at Citizens Advice Mid Bedfordshire said:

“By shopping around and switching to a different energy deal it may be possible for consumers to cut hundreds of pounds from their gas and electricity bills. Whether you own your home or rent it, and regardless of whether you have a prepayment meter, there are often savings to be made.

“The process of shopping around and switching is fairly straightforward but some people might be unsure about how to find the best tariff. Others might be put off by common myths about switching.

“That's why the four Citizens Advice offices are running advice sessions during November to help people understand their bills, understand the implications of switching and find the cheapest deal before temperatures really start to drop.”

Information can be found on the local office websites and can be requested by email.

www.dunstablecab.org.uk

www.leightonlinladedcab.org.uk

www.midbedscab.org.uk

To book advice sessions or request information call the Ampthill and Biggleswade offices on 01525 402742 or drop in to the Dunstable and Leighton Linlade offices.

****ENDS****

Notes to editors:

- **For more information please contact:** Jenny Hedges
(manager@ampthill.cabnet.org.uk)

Seven energy saving tips

1. Switch energy supplier

Visit BeAnEnergyShopper.com Many could save around £200, some even more.

2. Move furniture away from radiators

Even just moving furniture away from radiators can help make a room more comfortable by letting the warmth circulate better – 42 per cent have one or more radiators blocked by furniture. If you can – ask someone to help if it's heavy.

3. Draught proof

Draught-proofing windows and doors could save you £25 to £35 a year. 46 per cent of people still need to draught-proof their windows and doors.

4. Energy Saving light bulbs

Replacing all standard bulbs and halogen spotlights in your home with energy saving light bulbs could save you £35 a year.

5. Standby

You can save around £30 a year just by remembering to turn your appliances off standby mode.

6. Kettle

Filling the kettle up with as much water as needed could save around £9 in energy bills a year.

7. Shower smarter

Spending one minute less in the shower each day could save as much as £10 off energy bills each year. At least 25 per cent of people could cut a minute off their showers.

* Not including thermostat or switching saving.

Switching Myths

MYTH: Households cannot change energy supplier if they have a pre-payment meter.

FALSE

If you have a prepayment meter, you'll be able to switch supplier unless you owe your supplier more than £500 for gas or electricity

MYTH: If you rent and are responsible for paying the bills, you require your landlord's permission before you can change energy supplier **FALSE**

You have the right to switch supplier if you pay your energy supplier directly for your bills.

You should check your tenancy agreement to see if the landlord has a 'preferred supplier'.

This won't stop you from switching supplier, but you should tell your landlord or letting agent.

You may have to return the account to the original supplier at the end of your tenancy.

MYTH: If you move house, you need to use the existing supplier which is serving the new property **FALSE**

While you'll be automatically put onto a 'deemed contract' with the existing supplier of the property, there's nothing to stop you switching. The deemed contract will normally be one of the most expensive tariffs available, so you should look for a better deal with the existing supplier or a find a new supplier as soon as you move in. You can only change suppliers from the day you become responsible for the property. Switching will normally take about 21 days, so you'll have to pay at least one bill with the existing supplier.

MYTH: If a household changes energy supplier, it must change both gas and electricity to the new supplier **FALSE**

Consumers can choose to have gas and electricity supplied by different companies or by the same supplier, which is called 'dual fuel'. It's up to consumers to choose the right tariff(s) for them, whether that's a flexible tariff, the cheapest tariff or an environmentally friendly tariff.

MYTH: Households may be disconnected for a short period whilst changing energy supplier
FALSE

There should be no break in supply when there is a change of supplier.

MYTH: When households switch energy supplier, the meter will need to be changed **FALSE**
It's just the supplier and tariff that change when a household switches energy supplier.

MYTH: When households switch energy supplier, pipes/cables supplying the house will need to be changed **FALSE**
It's just the supplier and tariff that change when a household switches energy supplier.

MYTH: The 'Big 6' energy suppliers offer the best deals – smaller suppliers are more expensive (the Big 6 energy suppliers are: E.ON, Npower, British Gas, SSE, EDF Energy and Scottish Power) **FALSE**

It's best to shop around to find the best deal. You can use an accredited price comparison website to compare prices from different energy suppliers.

MYTH: A household cannot change energy supplier if the current supplier has installed a smart meter in the property **FALSE**

You can switch, but it's possible that you'll lose some of the smart meter functionality. For example, you may have to start submitting meter readings again. This would stop once the supplier you move to introduces smart meters to their customers. If it's important to you, you should check with the new supplier to make sure they currently offer smart meters before you switch. Suppliers can't refuse to supply you because you have a smart meter.

MYTH: Households on pre-payment meters cannot change energy supplier if they are in some debt to their current supplier **FALSE**

If you've owed money for more than 28 days, you can switch supplier but your debt must be below £500 for gas and £500 for electricity. If you haven't owed the money for 28 days yet, you'll have to wait for this time to pass. You'll need to ask the new supplier to agree to transfer your debt along with your supply (this is called the 'Debt Assignment Protocol').

Debt advice

- If you're struggling to pay your gas and electricity bills, contact your supplier to discuss your options to pay what you owe them. They have to help you come to a solution.
- You should try to negotiate a deal that works for both of you. Suggest a repayment plan that will allow you to repay your debts in instalments that you can afford.
- If you're struggling to make repayments, let the supplier know as soon as possible.
- It's also worth seeking advice to help you work out if there might be extra help available to help you afford your energy bills.
- If you don't try to solve the problem with your supplier, they might threaten to disconnect your supply. They can do this unless you are elderly or vulnerable and it is winter.
- You can contact your local Citizens Advice office for free debt advice if you need help with gas or electricity arrears