

# Winter worries and wisdom!



Keep Shropshire Warm is a free and impartial energy advice service for Shropshire residents, run by local charity Marches Energy Agency. We offer in-depth advice to residents via home visits, at events and over the phone. Take a look at some of the most common winter worries and our tips on how to manage these.

## ???

### How can I stay warm at home whilst saving money?



Close the curtains as it gets dark, this retains more heat in the room. Thermal linings are a great addition to curtains too.



Try not to place furniture in front of your radiators – it can mean the heat doesn't circulate very well in the room. The same goes for putting washing on them for longer than necessary. Use a heated airer.



Consider purchasing a heated throw. At a cost of about £40, these just cost a few pence an hour to run. Wrapping up in a shawl or blanket when sat down can also help.



Warm layers in bed are a good idea, thermal underwear and socks are useful if it's particularly cold. A hat can help keep you warm too if you are susceptible to the cold.



Hot water bottle or an electric blanket are really good, but don't use them at the same time. Check the electric blanket is one that can be left on, or it might be designed for warming the bed in advance only.



By cutting your shower time down from 10 minutes to 5, this could save you £100 per person per year if you have an electric shower.



Use draught excluders and tape to plug gaps underneath doors and in draughty windows - making sure there is some air flow to help avoid condensation. Reflective radiator panels can be fitted behind radiators on exterior walls to reflect heat back into the room.



Are there any benefits you may be eligible for that you are not claiming? Check here [www.gov.uk/check-benefits-financial-support/](http://www.gov.uk/check-benefits-financial-support/) or contact Jobcentre Plus on 0800 055 6688 or CAB Shropshire on 0808 278 7894 (Mon-Fri 10 am to 4 pm).

# Bills and Suppliers Help



## Q Should I switch supplier?

If you are on a variable tariff, it might be a good time to shop around for a fixed-price tariff. Currently, there are a few 12-month fixed deals that undercut the price cap, but these may not be around for long due to the uncertainty of oil prices which might impact on energy prices.

## Q Tariffs are confusing, what should I look for?

Your current supplier will tell you on your last statement or bill whether you are on their cheapest tariff. Have a look at a comparison site like Uswitch to compare tariffs with other suppliers. Sometimes suppliers offer low or no exit fees, so this may reduce the risk of entering into a fixed tariff if the price cap does decrease later on.

## Q What is the price cap?

The price cap sets the maximum price the Energy Companies can charge if you are on a Standard Variable tariff. This increased by 10% in October 2024, and a possible further 3% in January 2025. It is important to remember that the Price Cap creates the unit rate only, so the more you use, the more you pay.

## Q Should I fix my tariff?

You may think about changing to a fixed tariff, which sets the price you pay for a set period. This might seem higher now, but it gives you the confidence to know what your monthly Direct Debits instalments will be over the year. It is too far to forecast what will happen to the price cap in April, but it could increase.

## Q I can't keep up with my energy bills, what should I do?

Contact your supplier as soon as possible. They might offer a cheaper tariff or a payment plan. Some Energy Companies offer a hardship fund.

You can ask your supplier for a payment holiday for a couple of months if you are experiencing unexpected difficult financial circumstances, such as losing your job or experiencing ill health. If you have multiple debts, you can ask for time to seek professional help from agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureau or National Debtline.

Some energy companies allow you to pay your energy debt off through deductions from certain benefits like Universal Credit or Pension Credit. This is called Fuel Direct.

<https://www.gov.uk/bills-benefits> or contact the government office that deals with your benefit type.

You can ask to move to a Prepayment meter to pay for your energy rather than a credit meter, giving you control over how much you top up and when. The costs of paying this way have been reduced to make the tariffs comparable with paying by direct debit.

## **What is the Priority Services Register and how can it help?**

The Priority Services Register (PSR) is a way that suppliers can help those who have extra communication, access or safety needs to gain equal access to services. The PSR is a completely free service, designed to make it easier for those who need a little extra help. Each energy supplier and electricity network operator maintain their own register, meaning that you can register and receive essential benefits that will make the management of your energy supply easier. Find out more <https://cadentgas.com/help-and-advice/priority-services-register#jointhe-psr> or contact us and we can help, call 0800 112 3743 or email [ksw@mea.org.uk](mailto:ksw@mea.org.uk).

## **Are smart meters safe?**

There is no evidence to suggest that smart meters pose any risk to your health. Smart meters provide information about how much energy you are using, helping you to make savings and making sure your bills are accurate.

---

## **Heating and appliances**

### **Is it best to switch off my heating and use an electric heater in one room?**

Generally, it is much cheaper to use your central heating. Make sure the rooms you are in are at a healthy temperature - 18C or 21C if you have certain health conditions is a good guide. Using one electric heater usually costs more than centrally heating a whole home and will leave you cold and at more risk of winter illness. Turn individual radiators down to the minimum in the rooms that are not in frequent use. Also, see if you can turn the central heating thermostat down by a few degrees if you have the heating on for a longer time.

### **Is it ok for me to skip a boiler service to save money?**

No, spending £70 on a service can help prolong the life of your boiler, potentially saving you thousands of pounds on a replacement.

### **Where can I find a reputable firm to fix my boiler?**

Look at the Gas Safe Register for local accredited engineers.

[www.gassaferegister.co.uk/find-an-engineer-or-check-the-register/](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/find-an-engineer-or-check-the-register/) or call [0800 408 5500](tel:08004085500)

## **Q Where do I go to get a new a gas boiler?**

Get at least 3 quotes if you can, from gas safe engineers. Get it serviced every 12 months to maintain the warranty and prolong its longevity. Details can be found via the same link and telephone number above.

## **Q Is it cheaper to run my appliances at night?**

Only if your supplier offers you cheaper electricity at certain times, for instance to charge your electric vehicle or Economy 7.

## **Q My oil boiler will need replacing soon, what do I do?**

You could consider replacing it with a renewable heating system, such as an Air Source Heat Pump, depending on the suitability of your property. You may even qualify for a grant to contribute towards your costs. <https://www.gov.uk/apply-boiler-upgrade-scheme> or contact us for advice on eligibility via the details below.

## **Q Can I turn up my thermostat to warm the home faster?**

No – it will heat up your property at the same pace, no matter the temperature on your thermostat. We would suggest using the timer function to turn it on about an hour before you need it.

## **Q Is carbon monoxide a risk, what should I do to protect myself?**

Yes, it is a risk you can't see, taste or smell – exposure to it at low levels can still cause long-term health issues and high exposures can be deadly. To protect yourself, install a carbon monoxide alarm in all rooms with such appliances and make sure you test them too. Gas safety checks for appliances are useful – Cadent Gas can provide free safety checks for eligible households <https://cadentgas.com/suspect-carbon-monoxide> or call us on the details below for more information.

## **Q Are there any grants available?**

For longer term energy efficiency improvements to your home, such as possible grant schemes for insulation measures or heating, or if you have broken heating and can't afford to repair or replace it, please contact us and we can discuss what is available and help check eligibility.

# Get in touch

0800 112 3743

| [ksw@mea.org.uk](mailto:ksw@mea.org.uk)

Marches Energy Agency (Charity No. 1070942)

The Pump House, Coton Hill, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY1 2DP.

