



Switching

Most gas and electricity consumers can switch supplier, unless they have an outstanding fuel debt (the debt threshold for prepayment meter customers however is £500), or have a term in their lease which prohibits them from switching supplier. Also, those with a specific tariff for their electric storage heating may find it more difficult to find a comparable tariff to switch to (but see note, below).

Switching supplier could save householders money, as tariffs change and suppliers compete with one another. It is important that consumers ensure they are on the cheapest tariff possible and this may be with another supplier. Switching supply can take a couple of weeks and during that time supply continues from the existing supplier and there is no break in the supply of gas or electricity.

The process of switching requires having information to hand on the current payment arrangements and tariffs of the householder. There are a number of price comparison websites (PCWs) which make the process of comparison straight-forward. The information that is used for these comparison tools should be as accurate as possible to ensure a correct picture of what is available and the likely savings, so the householder should have the following information to hand:

- name of current supplier
- tariff name
- details of previous electricity/gas use in kilowatt hours

The name of the tariff and energy consumption details are on the annual energy statement. If this is not available, ask the supplier for details of annual usage in kilowatt hours.

A householder can switch via price comparison sites or by directly contacting the energy supplier they have chosen to switch to. The new supplier will take the details of the customer and contact their existing supplier to make all the arrangements. This process is normally straightforward and the householder will receive written confirmation of their new contract, the tariff and the date on which it will commence.

Citizens Advice currently runs Energy Best Deal Scotland which aims to promote switching as a way of ensuring that customers are paying the most competitive prices for their gas and electricity. There is also an Advisors Guide, which provides detailed step-by-step information on helping a householder through the switching process and working out what is best for their circumstances. Visit

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/consumer/energy/energy-supply/

The Energy Switch Guarantee is an industry-led list of 10 commitments, which so far 11 companies have signed up to. The key pledges are:

- Your supply won't be disrupted during the switching process
- Switching is free
- It will take no more than 21 days
- Your new supplier will send you the details of your new supply arrangement and you will then have 14 days to change your mind.
- Your current supplier will send you your bill no later than 6 weeks after the date of switch and if they owe you money they will refund you no later than 14 days after that.

Full details are at www.energyswitchguarantee.com

Suppliers provide a range of information in a specific format, intended to help with comparison and switching. This includes a Personal Projection (PP) and tariff information labels (TIL).

Note: *Following CMA's Energy Market Investigation, the Restricted Meters Order 2016 was introduced. From September 2017, relevant suppliers made all their **single-rate** tariffs immediately available to domestic customers on restricted meters, without making switching to these tariffs conditional on replacement of the restricted meter i.e. switching from a restricted tariff to a single rate tariff should not be at a cost to the customer. Relevant suppliers must also now ensure that domestic customers on restricted meters have access to information on the switching options available to them. Consumer bodies (Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland) play a specific role in ensuring suppliers provide them with information about restricted meter customers in a timely way. The Order does not apply to Economy 7 customers, nor does it apply to those with a smart meter. The Restricted Meters Order 2016 will remain in place until 2020 (when the smart meter rollout is due to end).*