

78) ENERGY BILLS - The latest in a series of articles by Iain Gregory of Caithness CAB

You may have noticed that it has been a bit chilly recently, but I awoke this morning to find myself distinctly over-heated, and investigation revealed that one wife and two cats were utilising me as a heat source. After extricating myself from an assortment of claws (Liz) and paws (cats) I wandered through to the kitchen and cast a jaundiced eye at the smart meter which indicated that I was generously contributing towards bonus payments for the people running the energy company to whom, albeit unwillingly, I give my business. Soon I shall install my own “off the grid” system and they can all go and seek their vast profits elsewhere.

Now, you may have seen in the press that Ofgem (The Energy regulator) have decided to raise the “cap” on price tariffs, which means that we can expect a rise of somewhere over £100 per annum on many electricity and gas bills. The existing “cap” was set in January and promised a saving of about £76 pa but, by February, off we go again so that was not a complete success. Apparently the problem this time is the wholesale price of energy, so we can only hope and trust that similar enthusiasm will be displayed when said prices fall.

CCAB spend a lot of time helping people who are faced with unaffordable energy bills and, personally, I fail to see why this should have to be the case in one of the major energy producing centres in Europe. As always Citizens Advice Scotland and CCAB are keen to address this, and we need evidence to make our case for change so this is where you can help.

Our Energy Policy Team would like to hear about your experience of:

- Issues relating to accessing the Warm Home Discount (e.g. difficulties with applying for it, or queries over eligibility); scams; problems with energy efficiency or renewables installations such as cavity wall insulation or solar panels; misleading marketing; poor installation standards; aggressive cold calling and cases where the energy savings were wrongly stated. We would like to know the name of the company involved and - where appropriate - the Government scheme e.g. ‘Green Deal’ or ‘Feed in Tariffs’. This helps us to be specific in our ongoing advocacy work.
- Issues with self-disconnection from gas or electricity supply. We are interested to know more about the reasons why people disconnect. What financial difficulty are they in? How much fuel debt? How long have they been disconnected for? What do they do for heat/power instead? What kind of meter do they have? This includes cases where people have just turned off their boiler and stopped using it, or ceased topping up a pre-payment meter, or simply switched off.
- Problems with district or communal heating schemes such as: unaffordable prices; billing issues; under-heating or overheating; technical faults; poor customer service and an inability to switch supplier.
- Using Fuel Direct - particularly when people have lost access to Fuel Direct as a result of being moved onto Universal Credit.

If you want to help please email us at bureau@caithnesscab.casonline.org.uk or post on our Facebook page or just send us a letter.

And remember Home Energy Scotland on 0808 808 2282 are there to help as well. We need things to change so let’s work together to end fuel poverty.