



**East Dorset
& Purbeck**

The Dorset Energy Unit

We help people to find a way forward

Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck is an independent charity that provides free, confidential and impartial advice and support. Our goal is to help everyone find a way forward, whatever their problem.



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We're part of the National Citizens Advice Service

Our Principles

- Free
- Confidential
- Independent
- Impartial

Our Aims

- To provide the advice people need for the problems they face
- To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives

Dorset Energy Unit – About Us

- Started in August 2020
- We provide energy advice across all of Dorset & BCP Council areas
- We have seen many changes to the energy market. Our advice has adapted to reflect this
- We have a team of energy specialists, caseworkers, energy debt advisers and admin support staff

Why the need?

- In 2023, there were an estimated 13% of households (3.17 million) in fuel poverty in England under the Low Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE) metric, effectively unchanged from 13.1% in 2022 (3.18 million)
- In 2023, 36.4 per cent of households (8.91 million) had to spend more than 10 per cent of their income (after housing costs) on energy (original definition of fuel poverty), up from 27.4 per cent in 2022 (6.66 million).
- The average fuel poverty gap for England in 2023 (the reduction in fuel costs needed for a household to not be in fuel poverty) was estimated at £417

- The Dorset Energy Unit is funded externally via grants without this funding we would not be able to continue to provide this service

- Meet the high level of client demand
- Reach clients who are rurally isolated

Problems Faced By Our Clients

- Standing charges remain high – 96p per day for dual fuel - £348 per year
- Social Tariff for Energy Costs – no progress unfortunately
- New account systems
- Meter issues – particularly exotic meters (eco10, superdeal)

What we do

Energy Consumer Champions

- Energy advice at events & support groups to raise awareness

Energy Advice Appointments

- Our Advisers offer in person, phone and email energy advice appointments
- We give energy advice, resolve billing issues and meter problems, help with supplier questions and prepayment meters
- Offer a full benefit check to maximise income
- Assess eligible grants, assist households to get back on supply when they have not been able to afford to top-up their meters and make referrals for other support services
- We give carbon monoxide poisoning awareness and offer free CO monitors

Frontline Worker Training for South West Region

- Help professionals identify residents in Fuel Poverty and what help and support is available

Energy Advice Training for Frontline Workers

Fuel poverty in our region has continued to rise, and it often links with many other issues faced by vulnerable people in our community - such as debt

We offer free energy training to frontline staff and volunteers working in, and with the community to help households in, or at risk of fuel poverty. This includes people facing difficulty heating their homes and struggling to pay their energy bills.

To book, visit our website www.edpcitizensadvice.org.uk or book via Eventbrite:

www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/east-dorset-and-purbeck-citizens-advice-38618096543

or, email: rl.sw@edpcitizensadvice.org.uk



Improving Access to Energy Advice

Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck has recently secured funding from SGN to deliver the following across both Dorset and BCP Council areas:

- Provide energy safeguarding support services to help alleviate fuel poverty ensuring that the service can be tailored to meet the needs of a diverse community
- Train and support frontline workers to identify and support households living in fuel poverty and triage into the service where required
- We've launched our new third party Priority Phone Line. This is for professionals who work directly with vulnerable residents in one to one situations e.g. social workers and social prescribers, to help their client who may not have access to hot water, heating, electricity
- Hold and attend energy events and workshops at warm spaces and community hubs
- Give greater access to residents for energy advice



Dorset Energy Bus

As part of our partnership with SGN, funding was secured for a Dorset Energy Advice Bus which was launched in September

We provide free energy advice to households across Dorset who are struggling with costs, and who cannot access existing services due to rural isolation, restricted mobility, cost of fuel or limited access to public transport

Our bus stops at locations across Dorset providing residents with access to free energy advice including:

- *Energy efficiency advice*
- *Billing issues*
- *Meter problems*
- *Supplier questions*
- *Prepayment meter questions*
- *Carbon monoxide awareness*
- *Free CO monitors*



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Dorset Energy Bus Stops

- **Tuesday:** Nourish, Blandford
- **Wednesday:** Father's House, Shaftesbury;
Sturminster Newton (monthly)
- **Thursday:** The Islanders Youth & Community
Centre and Tesco Car Park, Portland
- **Thursday:** The Hub, Lyme Regis (monthly)
- **Friday:** Littlemoor Youth & Community
Centre, Littlemoor

How we've helped

July-September 2024:



- Advised 315 clients with **2,503** issues
- Issued **£4,216** in emergency pre-payment meter vouchers and other charitable support
- **79** carbon monoxide monitors ordered
- **271** people helped to apply to the Priority Services Register
- **232** household received winter warm packs
- The total financial value of advice given during this period is **£314,338**. This is through increased benefits, debts written off, grants and reimbursements

62% of the people helped had long term health conditions

Winter Fuel Allowance for Pensioners

- If client was **born before 23rd September 1958** they could receive either £200 or £300 (if born before 23 September 1944) to help with heating bills for winter 2024 to 2025. This is known as a 'Winter Fuel Payment'
- Client's may be eligible if they or their partner get certain benefits. If they are eligible, they'll normally get the Winter Fuel Payment automatically
www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment/eligibility
- We are promoting benefit checks to ensure residents are accessing all the benefits available
- If the receipt of pension credit were automatic, this would guarantee all eligible households access to the benefits attached to pension credit. Around 880,000 eligible pensioners do not receive pension credit and are cut off from Winter Fuel Payment*

*www.nea.org.uk/news/october-energy-bill-rise-to-plunge-400000-more-uk-households-into-fuel-poverty-this-winter/

www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment

www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment/eligibility

www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment/how-to-claim



Warm Home Discount

The Warm Home Discount Scheme is a one-off £150 discount off your electricity bill. The discount is usually applied over the winter. The scheme for this year opened at the start of October.

A client will qualify if they either:

- get the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit
- are on a low income and have high energy costs (this is based on property info: type, age and floor area.)
- Eligibility checking tool is open: <https://www.gov.uk/check-if-youre-eligible-for-warm-home-discount>
- The discount is also available for eligible permanent residents living in a Park Home who pay their electricity bills directly to their park site owner. This must be applied for through Charis:

<https://charisgrants.com/partners/park-homes/>

Case Study – Kevin’s Story

*Kevin came to Citizens Advice seeking help with his boiler and meter. We quickly identified that Kevin was living in fuel poverty due to his limited income and high energy costs.

Kevin has a number of health issues and has not been able to have his young daughter live with him in part due to the heating and hot water problems in his current property.

After his supplier replaced his gas Credit Meter with a Prepayment Meter (PPM), Kevin noticed he was paying £23 from every top up to repay a debt from a previous tenant, which totalled £1600. Kevin’s boiler stopped working resulting in no heating or hot water, this had a detrimental effect on Kevin’s health and wellbeing.

- We advised Kevin to apply for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) to help increase his benefit income. Expected income increase of **£3,777.80 p/yr**
- Energy efficiency advice was given, a review of usage and tariff was provided and we assisted Kevin to apply for the Priority Service Register, with an annual expected saving of **£550**
- Reviewed option on remaining on a PPM or moving back to a Credit Meter
- Identified Kevin could get help from Local Energy Advice Partnership (LEAP)/Ridgewater Energy via the home visiting team for simple energy measures worth **£50** for an assessment for a free replacement boiler under Household Support Fund (HSF) funding. New boiler has been fitted worth **£3,000**
- Energy Adviser assisted with making a complaint to the supplier regarding the gas meter debt, the **£1,600** was cleared and **£300** refunded

Total financial gains = £9,277.80

*Name has been changed to protect identity

Dorset Energy Unit Feedback

"I can't thank you enough for the help you have given me. Words cannot express my gratitude thank you so much."

"I hardly dare believe it. You have worked so very hard to resolve my issue with Utility Warehouse. I am down to have a new meter soon and she is also looking into the complaint of having estimated bills for over a year of single occupancy after my husband's death."

"Thank you so much for all your help with this, I very much appreciate it. As you know, I think you are all superstars...and many of us could not get through all of this without your assistance!"

"Thank you for your support and guidance regarding my issues with my energy bills. These things create a lot of stress and anxiety, and it really does help to have someone on your side when you are dealing with these giant corporations."

Contact the Dorset Energy Unit

Tel: 01929 775500

Email: energy@edpcitizensadvice.org.uk

Frontline Worker Training

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