

Government agrees measures with energy industry to support vulnerable people through COVID-19

- Measures include ensuring prepayment and pay-as-you go customers remain supplied with energy through challenging times and supporting all customers in financial distress
- industry agreement signed by all UK domestic suppliers and will come into force immediately

New emergency measures with the energy industry have been agreed by the government to protect the domestic energy supply of those most in need during the disruption caused by COVID-19.

From today customers with pre-payment meters who may not be able to add credit can speak to their supplier about options to keep them supplied. This will benefit over 4 million customers.

This could include nominating a third party for credit top ups, having a discretionary fund added to their credit, or being sent a pre-loaded top up card so that their supply is not interrupted.

More broadly, any energy customer in financial distress will also be supported by their supplier, which could include debt repayments and bill payments being reassessed, reduced or paused where necessary, while disconnection of credit meters will be completely suspended.

Secretary of State for Business and Energy, Alok Sharma, said:

While friends and family will play a role in helping people impacted by the Coronavirus, we recognise there will be many customers who will need additional support and reassurance, particularly those who are financially impacted or in vulnerable circumstances.

The government has committed to do whatever it takes to get our nation through the impacts of this coronavirus pandemic. Today those most in need can rest assured that a secure supply of energy will continue to flow into their homes during this difficult time.

The government and energy industry have agreed to prioritise those existing customers most in need, while identifying customers whose circumstances may have changed as a direct or indirect result of COVID-19.

Chief Executive of Citizens Advice, Dame Gillian Guy, said:

This is an uncertain time for many people. Energy suppliers need to play their part by communicating clearly and supporting their customers as much as possible. Keeping people on supply, making sure they have warm homes and don't face additional financial or other stresses about their energy supply will be essential.

Suppliers will need to put in place support measures for people on prepayment meters, people and families who need to self-isolate or take steps to reduce social contact, and people who may otherwise be in vulnerable situations.

The measures set out and agreed will be implemented immediately by energy suppliers to alleviate pressure on energy customers.

Chief executive of Energy UK, Audrey Gallacher, said:

As providers of essential services and critical infrastructure, the energy industry has well-practised contingency plans in order to ensure the delivery of services and is working closely with the Government on a daily basis to ensure there is no disruption to the generation and supply of energy to customers during these extraordinary circumstances.

The sector is very conscious of the potential consequences for customers confined to their homes for prolonged periods and in particular those customers in vulnerable circumstances or on prepayment meters who may need additional help. Suppliers will be doing all they can to identify such customers and provide additional support wherever possible.

Ofgem will continue to ensure suppliers meet their regulatory obligations. However the government also recognises this will be a challenging time for many supply businesses.

The Chancellor has this week set out a package of targeted measures to support businesses through this period of disruption caused by COVID-19. This includes £330 billion for companies to access loans, a business rates holiday, and help for small firms without insurance. In addition, a new temporary Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme is to be launched in days to support businesses access £1 billion of additional bank lending.

Chief Executive of Energy Networks Association, David Smith, said:

These are unprecedented times but the energy industry is working hard to keep gas and electricity flowing, look after our vulnerable customers and keep customers and staff safe. The UK's electricity and gas network is one of the most reliable in the world and over

36,000 employees are working flat out to continue to provide a safe and reliable supply of energy during this time.

Customers that are unable to top up their pre-payment meter are advised to contact their supplier immediately to discuss how they can be kept on supply. Ofgem recommends consumers leave the meter box unlocked if they need someone else to top up the meter. Smart meter customers should be able to top-up remotely, such as by phone, mobile application or online.

The UK government is working in lock step with the Devolved Administrations, World Health Organization, and international partners to keep the whole of the UK safe. Its approach is clinically led, based on the expert advice of the UK's Chief Medical Officer for England, the NHS and Public Health England.