

# Press release: CMA makes switching easier for 700,000 UK energy customers

New CMA measures will help 700,000 restricted meter customers, including around 400,000 in Scotland, to switch without changing their meter.

This follows an extensive investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) into the energy sector, which found that around two thirds of restricted meter customers could save an average of £154 per year by switching energy tariff.

In the past, the cost and hassle of changing their meter could have proved a major barrier for many of these people to switch to a cheaper deal. However, the CMA's new measures mean that restricted meter customers can now more easily access a wide range of different deals and rates.

The CMA is also demanding that suppliers offer:

- reminders about switching, via bills,
- contact details for Citizens Advice or Citizens Advice Scotland (as appropriate), and
- further information to assist them with switching (eg their total consumption, their consumption levels by register, their meter type, their current tariff type).

To help people with restricted meters to get the best deal on their energy, the CMA has made the additional recommendation that Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland become recognised providers of information and support to these customers. Both agencies have now confirmed that they will implement this recommendation.

CMA Director of Remedies Susannah Meeke said:

We want to help as many people as possible to shop around for the best energy deal for them. But, many people on restricted meters have effectively been prevented from doing this because they would need to change their meter – which is both costly and a hassle.

Now they will be able to switch like any other energy customer – and potentially lower their bill by up to £154 a year.

We welcome the fact that Citizens Advice is now offering additional information and support for these customers to help them explore their options.

## Notes for editors

1. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law. For more information on the CMA see our [homepage](#) or follow us on Twitter [@CMAgovuk](#), [Flickr](#) and [LinkedIn](#).
2. Restricted meters are those which apply different rates across different times of the day. Examples of affected energy customers include those with Economy 10 and THTC meters.
3. Suppliers with fewer than 50,000 customers do not have to accept restricted meter customers, although they may choose to do so. A large majority of suppliers have more than 50,000 customers.
4. Media enquiries should be directed to [press@cma.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:press@cma.gsi.gov.uk) or call: 07774 134814

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## [Press release: New opportunities for councils to benefit from growth](#)

Councils are being encouraged to join forces and put forward proposals to retain the growth in their business rates income as the Secretary for Communities and Local Government Sajid Javid announces new pilots today (1 September 2017).

From April 2018, pilots across economic areas will be able to retain 100% of the growth in income raised locally through business rates, responding to council calls to reduce local government's dependence on central government.

Findings from this tranche of pilots will then help develop options for local authorities to retain more of the money they raise in the future.

This move builds on previous pilots originally launched in Liverpool, Greater Manchester, West Midlands, West of England, Cornwall and Greater London in April 2017, which will also continue into next year.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

I am committed to helping local authorities control more of the money they raise locally,

By encouraging councils to work together, with the aim of sharing their business rates income, it enables them to take a much more strategic view on decisions that benefit the wider area.

Expanding the pilot programme is an opportunity to consider how

rates retention could operate across the country and we will continue to work closely with local government to agree the best way forward.

## **Working together to boost growth**

Proposals will need to promote sustainability and collaborative working to promote growth and councils working together to 'pool' their business rates, particularly groups of districts who are proposing to work with their county, will be viewed more favourably.

The government is also keen to spread the pilots across the country, with a focus on rural areas, to ensure that more can be learnt about the scheme in different places.

Alongside the 2018 to 2019 pilots, the government will continue to work with local authorities, the Local Government Association, and others on reform options that give local authorities more control over the money they raise and are sustainable in the long term.

## **Further information**

The deadline for proposals is Friday 27 October – details can be found on [Gov.uk](http://Gov.uk)

Successful pilots will be announced in December 2017 and the department will support authorities in preparing for implementation in April 2018.

Pilot local authorities will retain 100% of the growth in their business rates income in the year of the pilot (2018 to 2019), meaning that the central government share (usually 50% of the growth) will stay in the local area.

The pilot programme will not affect funding to other, non-pilot, local authorities. There is already a system of redistributing funding between councils to ensure that areas with lower business rates income do not lose out.

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## **[Press release: Social housing regulator issues guidance on fees](#)**

In the run up to the introduction of fees for social housing regulation from October 2017, the regulator of social housing has published fees guidance for

registered providers and will be issuing invoices from 4 September.

It has also published terms of reference for a new Fees and Resources Advisory Panel which will meet for the first time in October to enable engagement on fees with a range of stakeholders, and provide transparency.

The regulator was granted powers to charge fees under the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. It set out initial proposals in a discussion paper in 2014 and held a statutory consultation at the end of 2016, consulting extensively with sector representative bodies.

The new fees regime will include:

- a one-off flat-rate registration fee of £2,500 for successful registration with the regulator
- a fixed annual fee of £300 for providers with fewer than 1,000 social housing units
- an annual per unit fee for large providers with 1,000 or more social housing units, for 2017/18 this will be £4.72

Due to the decision to start charging fees from 1 October 2017, 50% of the annual fee is payable for 2017/18.

Julian Ashby, Chair of the HCA Regulation Committee said:

Following extensive consultation with the social housing sector, we undertook to make some changes to the initial proposals. This included delaying the introduction of fees to October 2017 and setting up a Fees and Resources Advisory Panel. I hope the guidance we have published today reinforces our aim for the fee-charging scheme to be fair, simple, transparent and practical. We are committed to keeping our costs under review and therefore the fee level reasonable and proportionate, while maintaining effective regulation.

Thank you to the many organisations who have expressed an interest in joining the Panel. It is part of our commitment to be transparent with stakeholders in relation to the fees charged and the quality of the regulation delivered. And it will enable us to engage with a range of sector stakeholders alongside our existing arrangements.

[Social housing regulation fees – Guidance for registered providers](#) and the [Fees and Resources Advisory Panel – terms of reference](#) are available on the website.

1. The decision statement for the [consultation on fees](#), which ran from November 2016 to January 2017, is available on the website.

2. Funding for some aspects of the regulation function, such as reactive regulation including consumer regulation, will be continued through government grant in aid.

The Homes and Communities Agency is the single, national housing and regeneration delivery agency for England, and is the regulator of social housing providers.

As regulator, its purpose is to promote a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs.

It does this by undertaking robust economic regulation, as enshrined in legislation, focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer.

For more information visit the [HCA website](#) or follow us on [Twitter](#).

Our [media enquiries page](#) has contact details for journalists.

For general queries to the HCA, please email [mail@homesandcommunities.co.uk](mailto:mail@homesandcommunities.co.uk) or call 0300 1234 500.

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## **Press release: Helping north east communities be flood resilient**

The Environment Agency has appointed a new team of engagement officers to help communities be more resilient to flooding in the North East.

The £280,000 a year project includes four new engagement officers spread across four areas – Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Darlington, and Cleveland.

Funded by the Northumbria Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (NRFCC) for the next four years, the officers are working alongside partner organisations to help support communities.

It includes helping businesses and residents to understand their risk of flooding and ensuring those in flood risk areas are signed up to receive free flood warnings.

They're also helping communities prepare themselves for flooding, such as supporting them to develop community flood plans and recruit volunteer Flood Wardens in at risk communities.

The Community Engagement Officers are working on behalf of the Environment Agency and local authority partners.

As well as supporting residents and businesses, working alongside schools will play a key role in helping future generations understand their risk.

## **Direct support for communities**

Phil Taylor, from the Environment Agency's Flood Resilience Team in the North East, said:

We've seen over the last few years alone just how devastating flooding can be for communities, so it's positive news that Northumbria RFCC has agreed to fund these dedicated officers to provide direct support to communities.

In areas where the Environment Agency's free Flood Warning Service is available the officers will be working to increase sign up to the service.

They'll also be helping develop community flood plans that will detail the action each community or business can take to reduce the impact of flooding, and help them return to normal life as soon as possible should a flood happen.

And working with schools and youth groups means children can be educated about what it means to be flood resilient and ensure the messages delivered through the project have long-term impact in flood risk areas for years to come.

To find out more about your local flood risk and sign up to the Flood Warning Service Visit [the gov.uk web pages](#)

## **Durham & Darlington**

Anna Caygill is the new Durham & Darlington Community Engagement Officer. Anna is working on behalf of the Environment Agency and the Durham & Darlington Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) to increase flood resilience in areas at risk of flooding.

There are over 4,000 properties at risk from fluvial flooding across Durham & Darlington's constituencies, however fewer than 54% of properties are signed up to receive alerts and warnings in areas where the free Flood Warning Service is available.

There are also approximately 10,000 properties at risk from surface water flooding which can occur rapidly without warning. Anna said:

I'd like to hear about all of the local flooding issues in Durham & Darlington and work with the local community to see if they can put actions in place to make themselves more resilient.

Previous work has already led to Community Flood Plans being established in areas like Lanchester, Chester-le-Street, Hurworth, and Neasham and I'm hoping to help other communities put similar measures in place while continuing to support the existing volunteers.

You can contact Anna at [anna.caygill@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:anna.caygill@environment-agency.gov.uk) or 07867 372639.

## **Cleveland**

Sarah Pearce is the new Community Engagement Officer for Cleveland. Sarah is working on behalf of the Environment Agency and the Cleveland Emergency Planning Unit (CEPU) to increase flood resilience in areas at risk of flooding. Due to its location, areas of Cleveland are affected by flooding from a number of sources including coastal, river (fluvial) and surface water.

In Hartlepool 900 properties are considered to be at risk of surface water flooding, and in Middlesbrough 2,300 are considered to be at risk.

Across the four Cleveland local authority areas, there are over 6,000 properties at risk from fluvial flooding, however sign up to receive alerts and warnings in areas where the free Flood Warning Service is available is low, for example 11% in Redcar, 13% in Stockton, and just 3% on Hartlepool Headland. One of Sarah's aims is to increase take up of the Flood Warning service. Sarah said:

Previous work across Cleveland has led to Community Flood Warden groups being set up in communities such as Skinningrove, where a flood plan has been developed to support the community in responding to flood events.

I want to help other areas set up new groups and community plans in response to flooding, as well as supporting existing groups. I'd also like to look at the potential to appoint Flood Champions in at risk communities.

You can contact Sarah at [sarah.pearce@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.pearce@environment-agency.gov.uk) or 07867 441 697.

## **Northumberland**

Emma Craig is the new Community Engagement Officer in Northumberland. Emma is working on behalf of the Environment Agency and Northumberland County Council to increase flood resilience in areas at risk of flooding.

Over 300 properties were flooded in Storm Desmond in 2015 but there are over

3,000 properties at risk of fluvial flooding in the county. Sign up to receive alerts and warnings in areas where the free Flood Warning Service is available is around 60%.

There are also around 17,000 properties at risk from surface water flooding. Emma said:

Many communities in Northumberland have created plans and taken action to make themselves more resilient after experiencing significant flooding during Storm Desmond.

I'll be continuing to work in the communities which were affected as well as other areas in Northumberland that remain at risk of flooding.

You can contact Emma at [emma.craig@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:emma.craig@environment-agency.gov.uk) or 0208 474 9845.

## **Tyne & Wear**

Taryn Al-mashgari is the new Community Engagement Officer in Tyne & Wear. Taryn is working on behalf of the Environment Agency, Newcastle City Council, Gateshead Council, South Tyneside Council, North Tyneside Council and Sunderland City Council in communities at risk of flooding from all sources. Taryn will help communities, businesses, and schools to develop plans which will reduce the impact of a flood.

Over five years ago many communities in the Tyne & Wear region experienced serious flooding during 'Thunder Thursday'. Surface water flooding such as this can happen with very little warning so Taryn will be aiming to get communities to take action and prepare for flooding now.

As an example, there are more than 2,800 properties at risk from surface water flooding in Sunderland and 4,100 In South Tyneside, and 1,800 in Gateshead, as well as 1,500 in Newcastle.

There are around 600 properties at risk of fluvial flooding in Tyne & Wear.

Sign up to receive alerts and warnings in areas where the free Flood Warning Service is available in Tyne & Wear is around 14%. Taryn said:

Previous work in Tyne and Wear has developed some good practice. For example a network of flood volunteers in North Tyneside provide local information to the council during periods of bad weather which helps the council direct their emergency response resources. In Gateshead a Community Flood Plan has been developed for an area prone to flooding.

I'll be hoping to replicate this sort of community activity across other areas while continuing to support existing volunteers.

You can contact Taryn at [taryn.al-mashgari@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:taryn.al-mashgari@environment-agency.gov.uk) or 0208 474 9842.

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## [News story: Highways England chairman reappointed](#)

Highways England is responsible for operating, maintaining and improving more than 4,300 miles of motorways and main trunk roads throughout England and is currently delivering the Government's £15bn Road Investment Strategy.

Colin said:

Over the past three years, Highways England has concentrated on safety, customer service and delivering the Government's first five-year Road Investment Strategy. We have made good progress, and much remains to be done in the second half of the period. We are already preparing for the second five-year investment period, fully aligned with the Government's aims for our roads to be safer, smoother, and more sustainable by 2040 for the 4 million drivers who use them each day.

Colin was first appointed chairman of Highways England in December 2014, having previously served as chairman of the company's predecessor, the Highways Agency since July 2014. Prior to that he was chief executive officer of Heathrow Airport Holdings, formerly BAA. His career also saw him serve as Chief Executive of Severn Trent Water PLC and of Hays PLC; Managing Director of Transco Ltd and Engineering Director of British Airways PLC.

He holds a MA in engineering, an MBA and is a Chartered Engineer. He is also Non-Executive Chairman at Renewi PLC with effect from 1 April 2016 and Non-Executive Director at Johnson Matthey PLC.

Colin, who has been reappointed for three years, will continue to be paid £130,000 for a minimum of 78 days' work per annum. The remuneration for Colin's role, and that of other non-executive and senior executive posts, are published within the Highways England's annual report each year.

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.