

Warm Homes Newsletter

Issue 6

Managing Money Better

Need help with your energy bills and energy debts?

Free and impartial advice to help you save money on your energy bills and keep your home warm is available from us.

An energy advisor from the councils Managing Money Better service can offer fuel debt advice and making sure you understand your heating system and controls. We can also advise on financial assistance available to help you to heat your home.

It's very important that you check your energy bills regularly and provide regular meter readings to your energy supplier. This is to ensure your payments are keeping up with your energy usage and you are not underpaying and falling into fuel debt with your Energy Company.

If you feel unable to talk to anyone about fuel debt please visit <https://nationaldebtlife.org/fact-sheet-library/gas-and-electricity-arrears-ew/>

Energy price cap explained

The energy price cap limits what you pay for each unit of gas and electricity that you use, plus it sets a maximum daily standing charge (what you pay to have your home connected). It's based largely on what the energy suppliers pay and applies only to providers' standard and default tariffs. From 1 October, the price cap is set at £1,834 a year based on ofgem's new lower, typical use figures. However, from 1 January 2024 this will be increasing to £1,928.

Remember though, it's the rates that are capped, so use more and you pay more. Each price cap only lasts three months and will therefore be reviewed again in April 2024.

Direct debit is the cheapest way to pay for your energy, because it costs energy suppliers less to manage. If you currently pay by other methods after receiving your bill - for example cheque, card, or bank transfer - you'll almost certainly save money by switching.

For more information on the price cap visit <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/energy-price-cap>

Home Upgrade Grant (HUG)

The Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) is a government grant scheme to provide energy efficiency upgrades and low carbon heating to homes in County Durham that are eligible. The criteria for eligibility is set out by The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and includes being off the gas grid, low income, Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) between D and G and be in a specific area determined by postcode.

For more information please contact energyworks@durham.gov.uk



Warm Homes



Warm and Healthy Homes scheme

You may be eligible for a free gas boiler service or free minor gas boiler repair, if you are;

- an owner occupier with an income of less than £31,000
- and have health issues that are made worse by living in a cold, damp home,

including a cardiovascular condition, a respiratory disease, limited mobility, immuno suppression, long Covid or have a premature baby from 34 weeks to 9 months living in your property.

To ask about the Warm and Healthy Home Scheme email warmhomes@durham.gov.uk

Grants for Energy Efficiency measures

What is the Energy Company Obligation?

The Government Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) scheme provides low income households with grants for energy efficiency improvements.

The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) is a scheme that requires energy companies to help households who are struggling with their fuel bills. It is a government initiative that obligates energy companies to reduce carbon emissions and help the UK meet carbon reduction targets.

Included within ECO grants are non-condensing boiler replacement and Air Source Heat Pumps, Solar PV, Replacement Storage Heaters, Loft Insulation, Room in Roof Insulation, Cavity Wall Insulation and Internal Wall Insulation.

Solid Wall Insulation - An external wall insulation system is a thermally insulated, protective, decorative exterior cladding procedure involving the use of expanded polystyrene, mineral wool or foam topped off with a reinforced cement based, mineral or synthetic finish and plaster.

Internal Wall Insulation - Internal wall insulation is done by fitting rigid insulation boards to the wall, or by building a stud wall filled in with insulation material such as mineral wool fibre.

Non Condensing Boiler – How do I know if I have one? If you currently have a boiler installed in your home and aren't quite sure if it's a condensing boiler or not, there are a few

things you can check with your current system or in your boiler manual.

When was it installed? If your boiler was installed in your home after April 2005, the regulations put into place at this time will mean your boiler will be a condensing one. All boilers manufactured after this time are condensing. Check the flue. If your boiler has a metal flue for excess gases, then your boiler will probably be non-condensing. Condensing flues are usually through an external wall or your roof.

Steam and drainpipe. If you can see the steam coming from the flue through an external wall (or roof), and if you also have a white plastic pipe leading to a drain, this will certainly be from a condensing boiler.

Solar PV - Solar Photovoltaic (PV) panels produce electricity from the energy emitted by the sun and in doing so they provide your home with carbon-free and bill-free electricity.

Replacement Storage Heaters – Radiators are built with heat retaining clay bricks that build up heat during the night and release heat as required during the day.

Loft Insulation - Insulating the roof space of your home is the simplest, most cost-effective way of saving energy and reducing your heating bills.

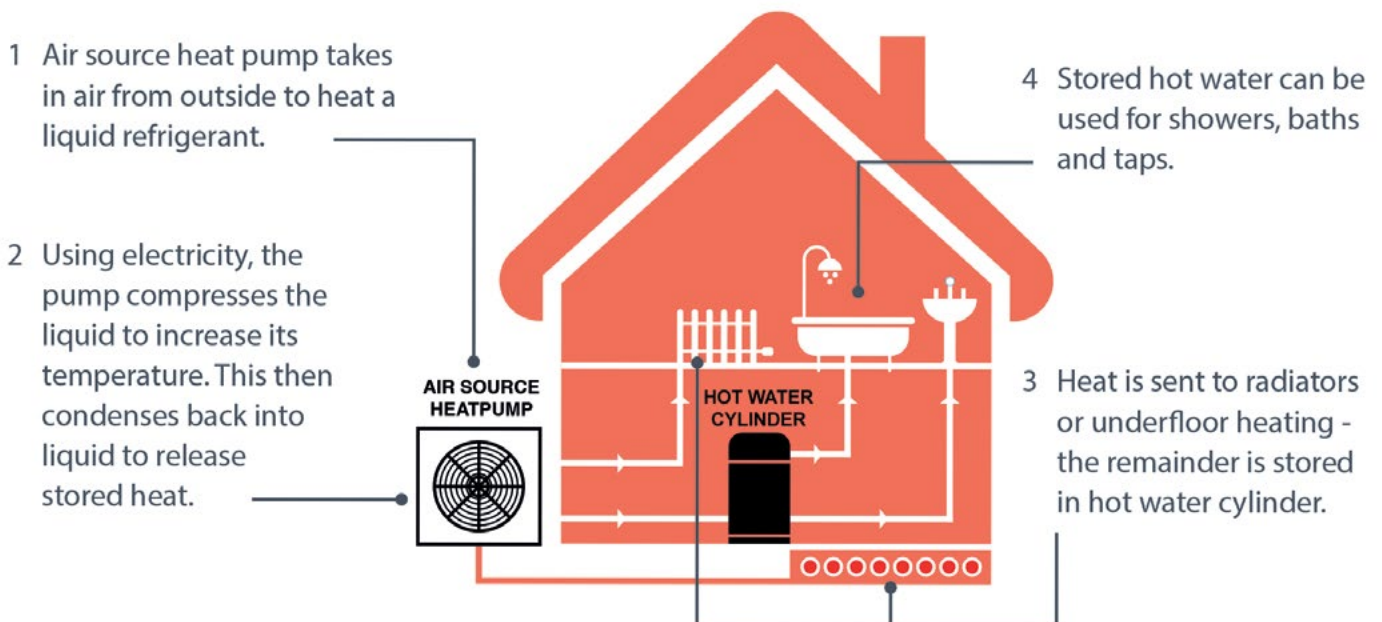


Room in Roof Insulation - By employing the latest insulation materials and methods, insulating existing attic rooms means that you can still use the roof space for storage or additional room space if needed while still trapping heat in the property and rooms below. A room in roof or attic room is simply defined by the presence of a fixed staircase to access the room.

Cavity Wall Insulation – The cavity can be filled with an insulating material by injecting foam or beads into the wall. This restricts any warmth passing between them, reducing the money you spend on heating.

Air Source Heat Pumps – a form of heating which extracts warmth from the air, even when it is very cold outside and used warmth to heat your home and provide you with hot water.

An air source heat pump works in a very similar way to gas central heating, with a unit attached to the side of your home converting the heat in the outside air to room heating and hot water.



How to apply

You can contact any of the obligated energy suppliers to find out how they may be able to help you benefit from the ECO scheme, even if they are not your energy provider. Obligated suppliers can be found by visiting <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/environmental-and-social-schemes/energy-company-obligation-eco/contacts-guidance-and-resources/eco-supplier-contact-details>

Who is eligible?

To find out whether you are eligible and more information please visit <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/environmental-and-social-schemes/energy-company-obligation-eco/homeowners-and-tenants>

Can I benefit from ECO?

In order to benefit from ECO your property will need to require energy efficiency upgrades. The specific measures that would benefit your home would be determined by a retrofit assessment. You must own your own home or have permission from your landlord.

It is important to note that eligibility for ECO doesn't necessarily mean that an energy supplier or installer will decide to install energy efficiency measures in your home.

Durham County Council supports the uptake of ECO4 within the county and reviews income and tenure eligibility for ECO Flex applications on behalf of obligated energy suppliers and their contractors. However only obligated energy suppliers and not Durham County Council can decide if your ECO4 application is eligible, technically suitable and compliant with Ofgem's ECO4 regulations.

Durham County Council does not fund the ECO scheme.

For more information about ECO visit <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/environmental-and-social-schemes/energy-company-obligation-eco>



Watch out for the silent killer

You can't see it, taste it, or smell it, but Carbon Monoxide (CO) can kill.

What is CO?

Carbon Monoxide is a poisonous gas that is produced when gas, oil, solid fuels and liquid petroleum gas (LPG) do not burn fully. It can occur when an appliance has been incorrectly fitted, badly repaired or poorly maintained.

Spotting the signs



Lazy yellow or orange flames (rather than crisp and blue) on a gas appliance



Pilot lights frequently blowing out



Dark staining or sooting around/on appliances



Increased condensation on windows



What should I do if I suspect CO poisoning?

1. Call the National Gas Emergency Service on **0800 111 999**
2. Turn off gas appliances immediately, open doors & windows and leave the property
3. See your doctor immediately or go to the hospital

Recognising the symptoms

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Breathlessness
- Collapse
- Loss of consciousness



Smell Gas?

Call the National Gas Emergency Service on **0800 111 999**

 northerngasnetworks.co.uk

Stay safe...

At home

- Install an **approved** audible CO alarm fitted to British Standard EN 50291
- Get your appliances serviced by a qualified engineer once a year.
 - **0800 408 5500** or visit Gas Safe Register gassaferegister.co.uk (gas appliances)
 - **01684 278170** or visit Heating Equipment Testing & Approval Schemes (HETAS) hetas.co.uk (solid fuel)
 - **01473 626 298** or visit Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) oftec.org (oil appliances)

On the water

- In large boats, such as houseboats, it is important to make sure that any gasoline-powered engines on boats are checked regularly

Camping and barbecues

- Even when the flames have gone out smouldering coals can still kill. Never bring a barbecue or camping stove inside an enclosed area, such as a tent
- If you are heading on a boat trip or camping holiday, pack a CO alarm

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Heat the person NOT the property

With temperatures dropping, what's the alternative to turning up the heating?

- **Consider layering up on clothes**
The benefits of wearing multiple layers instead of a single layer is that it provides maximum insulation, trapping pockets of air between the layers, which our bodies heat which then warms us up.
- **Eat regularly**
The NHS says eating regularly will help keep you warm and you should have at least one hot meal per day. It also recommends drinking hot drinks regularly.
- **Keep your feet warm with socks.**
The floor can be the coldest place in the home so ensuring your feet are kept warm will help you feel warm generally. Try wearing socks, slippers and have a rug or carpet to cover the floor.
- **Other heating options**
The good old fashioned hot water bottle is still a good way of keeping warm, however, there are lots of other items available such as a microwaveable wheat bag, heated throws and even heated insoles and gilets. If you are considering purchasing an electric heat item, check the running cost and product reviews first.

Before you consider cutting back on heating, it may be dangerous for older people, or those with asthma and other health conditions. If in doubt, speak to your GP, you can also visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-warm-keep-well-leaflet-gives-advice-on-staying-healthy-in-cold-weather/top-tips-for-keeping-warm-and-well-this-winter>



It's also important to heat your home to a suitable temperature to ensure that you avoid condensation which may cause mould and damp problems which can lead to health issues or make existing health conditions worse. Keeping your home warm and ventilated will reduce the impact of condensation, take a look at the following guides Existing home ventilation guide <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/advice/fixing-damp-and-condensation/>

Top energy saving tips

You could also save money on all your energy bills by adopting some of the following:

Tip 1 – Monitor your energy usage

Keeping a watchful eye on your consumption can help you decide when you need to change the way you use energy.

Tip 2 – Smart meters

Can help track your consumption with real time information.

Tip 3 – Free and impartial advice

The council's Managing Money Better Service provides advice on your energy bills, fuel debts and Warm Homes campaign.

Tip 4 – Heating thermostat

Almost half of your energy bill comes from heating and hot water usage. Turning your heating down by one degree could save up to £55* a year.

Tip 5 – TV, computers, mobile phones etc

Avoid leaving these on standby and don't leave them to charge unnecessarily. This could save £35* a year.

Tip 6 – Lights

Always turn off lights when not required. Open your curtains or blinds as wide as possible during the day to let as much daylight in as possible.

Tip 7 – Curtains

Close curtains at dusk to stop heat leaking through windows and tuck curtains behind radiators.

Tip 8 – Washing machines

Fill the washing machine, tumble drier or dishwasher as one full load uses less energy than two half loads and...

Tip 9 – Wash clothes at a lower temperature

If not dirty wash at thirty.



Tip 10 – Kettles

Only heat the amount of water you really need.

Tip 11 – Hot water

Needs to be hot but never scalding. For most people the cylinder thermostat set at 60°C is fine for bathing and washing.

Tip 12 – Be smarter about water

Installing a more efficient shower head can save you as much as £18* per person a year on energy bills.

Tip 13 – Appliances

When buying a new appliance, if you can afford it, choose an appliance with a high energy-efficiency rating.

Tip 14 – Roof Insulation

Insulating your loft can stop heat escaping from your home and could save around £150* a year off your energy bills. Grants may be available subject to eligibility.

Tip 15 – Cavity Wall Insulation

About a third of all the heat lost in an uninsulated home escapes through the cavity walls. Insulating walls could save around £140* a year on your energy bills. If you have any damp problems this must be resolved before insulation is installed. Grants may be available subject to eligibility for cavity wall insulation.

Tip 16 – Solid Wall Insulation

Houses over 100 years old usually have solid brick or stone walls. These properties can only be insulated by attaching insulation boards or sheets to the inside walls or to the external side of the wall. Grants may be available subject to eligibility.

Tip 17 – Draught-proofing

A cold draught can cause your home to lose heat. Draught excluders or draught-proofing kits are a good way to prevent this. Seal cracks in floors and skirting boards and your letterbox.

Remember ventilation is also important, especially if you have open fires, gas fires or a boiler with a flue.

Tip 18 – Install a new gas boiler

Upgrading to a new A-rated condensing boiler with a programmer, room thermostat and thermostatic radiator controls could save around £300* a year. Grants may be available subject to eligibility.

Tip 19 – Install a new Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP)

ASHPs extract warmth from the air, even when it is very cold outside and uses this warmth to heat your home and provide you with hot water. An ASHP can be a very efficient form of heating saving up to 40%* on energy bills as compared to heating your home with oil or electricity. Grants may be available subject to eligibility.

Tip 20 – Double glazing helps insulate your home from the cold and helps reduce your heating bills

You could save as much as £110* a year by installing A-rated double glazing. If you don't have double glazing, you can use a plastic lining for your windows to save energy and keep more heat in.

IMPORTANT Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

You can't see it, taste it or smell it, but Carbon Monoxide can kill. According to the NHS every year there are around 60 deaths from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning in England and about 200 people are left seriously ill. Learn how to keep you and your family safe from carbon monoxide poisoning by contacting warmhomes@durham.gov.uk and ask for a copy of the Carbon Monoxide Safety leaflet.

Helpful contacts

Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice County Durham are a local charity who provide debt and other advice to thousands of people every year. Their services are free, confidential and impartial, so if you're struggling with your Council Tax bill, or any other debts, they can provide guidance, money advice and debt solutions.

www.citizensadvicecd.org.uk

Tel: 0300 323 2000

Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm

Stop Loan Sharks

If you are a victim of a loan shark, Stop Loan Sharks can help you get a loan shark off your back. They offer online chat and call back services.

www.stoploansharks.co.uk

Tel: 0300 555 2222 any time, 24/7

Home Improvement Agency

The HIA provides advice, guidance and practical assistance to people who are older, disabled or on low incomes to repair, improve or adapt their homes, to enable them to maintain their independence in their chosen home.

www.durham.gov.uk/

[homeimprovementagency](http://www.durham.gov.uk/homeimprovementagency)

Age UK County Durham

Age UK County Durham provide a free and impartial service to help people aged 50 and over across County Durham to maximise their income. A holistic approach ensures clients receive expert support throughout their claim journey, whilst also addressing other issues including aids/ adaptations, energy, care provision and client welfare.

Tel: 0191 374 6367

Email: your.rights@ageukcountydurham.org.uk

Community Money Advice County Durham

This project ran by Durham Christian Partnership offers a free, non-judgemental and confidential service for anyone struggling with financial issues, debt or managing their money. They offer appointments at a number of foodbank centres across the county, as well as offering advice by telephone, email, post or video call. In special circumstances they can arrange home visits.

www.durhamcp.org.uk/community-money-advice-county-durham

Tel: 0191 303 7514 to request a callback

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

MoneyHelper

The Government's MoneyHelper service provides clear money and pension guidance online and over the phone. Money help all in one place, that's free to use.

www.moneyhelper.org.uk

Tel: 0800 138 7777

Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm

Welfare Rights

We have specialist staff who can help you understand what benefits you may be entitled to, support you make a benefits claim, make an appeal against a benefit decision and provide representation at an appeal.

www.durham.gov.uk/welfarerights

Tel: 03000 268 968

Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5pm,

Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm

Moving house or going through a crisis?

You may be able to get help from our Welfare Assistance Scheme. This can be to help you stay or get into housing, or with your daily living expenses.

www.durham.gov.uk/welfareassistance

Tel: 03000 267 900

Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5pm,

Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm



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Winter Fuel Payment

A fuel payment for people born on or before 25 September 1957, you could get between £250 and £600 to help you pay your heating bills. Most people get the Winter Fuel Payment automatically if they're eligible. For enquires call 0800 731 0160 or visit <https://www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment>

Cold Weather Payment

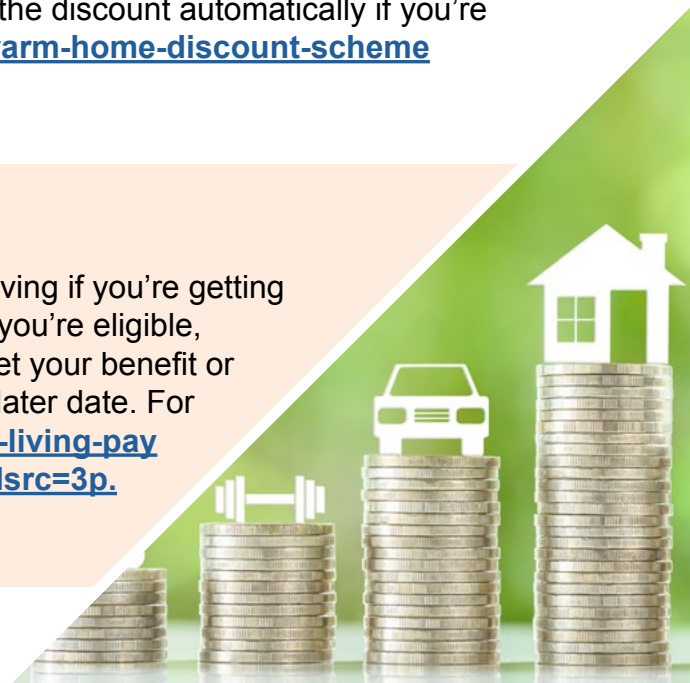
You'll get a payment if the average temperature in your area is recorded as, or forecast to be, zero degrees celsius or below over 7 consecutive days. You'll get £25 for each 7 day period of very cold weather between 1 November 2023 and 31 March 2024. You do not need to apply. If you're eligible to get Cold Weather Payments, you'll be paid automatically. For details on eligibility visit <https://www.gov.uk/cold-weather-payment/eligibility>

Warm Home Discount

You could get £150 off your electricity bill for winter 2023 to 2024 under the Warm Home Discount Scheme. The money is not paid to you - it's a one-off discount applied to your electricity bill between early October 2023 and 31 March 2024. You'll usually get the discount automatically if you're eligible. For further details visit <https://www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme>

Cost of Living Payments

You may be able to get payments to help with the cost of living if you're getting certain benefits or tax credits. You do not need to apply. If you're eligible, you'll be paid automatically in the same way you usually get your benefit or tax credits. This includes if you're found to be eligible at a later date. For further details visit <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/cost-of-living-payment?gclid=33f9c257b2841cb49465a703158d9bca&gclidsrc=3p.ds&#other-help>



What is the Priority Services Register?

The Priority Services Register (PSR) is a service from your Energy Supplier to provide free support to people who may be vulnerable – perhaps because of their age, health or disability. It ensures individuals with special requirements have access to additional support from their energy supplier as and when they require it. This support varies by supplier and by an individual's circumstances and includes:

- Large-format or Braille bills
- Advanced notice of service interruption
- Priority in a power cut
- Quarterly meter readings

Contact us if you want to find out if you can register for the PSR.

NEA's Warm and Safe Homes Advice (WASH)

This is a free support service providing advice to householders in England and Wales on their energy bills and keeping warm and safe in their home. We can also help with benefits advice and income maximisation. 0800 3047159

How to contact us

To find out more about any of the above schemes contact us on **03000 268000** and ask for the Warm Homes Team or e-mail, warmhomes@durham.gov.uk or log onto www.durham.gov.uk/warmhomescampaign