



The Energy Brief:

Evidence and insight from Citizens Advice Scotland

Volume 4, August 2025

Even in warmer weather, people cannot afford their energy bills

Demand for support on energy issues from Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) peaks in the winter months. However, the most recent figures from our network from spring and early summer confirm that **energy costs are a year-round problem**. Around 1 in 7 people who visited a CAB from 1 April to 30 June needed help with energy.



More than
4,000
people visited
a CAB to seek
energy advice



More than
2,600
people asked for
support to access
fuel vouchers



More than
1,400
people were
concerned about
energy affordability



Sean's experience

Sean visited his local CAB because he had no money to heat his home or buy food. A medical condition had forced him to stop working. He waited for a month for his first Universal Credit (UC) payment without access to an advance due to existing UC arrears. After receiving three crisis grants in a year, Sean was unable to get another one. Sean's daughter lives with him at weekends. He feared he could not care for her properly without access to emergency support and asked for a referral to a food bank and fuel bank.



The CAS solution:

There is an urgent need for a social tariff. This would provide people living on low incomes with discounted energy bills. **A social tariff would lift thousands of people in Scotland out of fuel poverty.** Citizens Advice Scotland has long called for this solution: this is not an optional extra, but an imperative response due to continuing unaffordable energy costs. People cannot be forced to endure the harm of another winter whereby they are unable to afford to heat and light their homes. The UK Government must act now.

There has been a surge in demand for energy debt advice over the last five years

Unaffordable energy costs have pushed people into energy debt. Our evidence shows:



The number of people seeking our advice with **energy debt has jumped 65% since 2019/20** and the overall quantum of debt people face up by **130%**



The average energy debt people present to CABs is currently **£2,500**



Average energy debt is even higher in rural areas at **£3,180**



More than **1,200** people needed help with energy debt from April to June 2025 alone

Energy debt is an entrenched problem in communities across Scotland. Every day, CAB advisers see the harmful effects that energy debt has on people's financial, physical and mental health. This is unjust and unsustainable.



Patrick's experience

Patrick was struggling with multiple debts and went to his local CAB for support. He is a self-employed gardener, meaning his incomes fluctuates because work is seasonal. Even when work has been available, Patrick has struggled to cover essential costs. When he visited the CAB, Patrick had accrued more than £14,000 of debt. Around £6,300 of this amount was energy debt, alongside £3,000 in Council Tax arrears and nearly £900 of rent arrears. Patrick was so concerned about his finances that he asked his CAB adviser for information about bankruptcy.



The CAS solution:

The time for talking about the problem of energy debt is over. People need action. As an urgent priority, the energy regulator **Ofgem must bring forward concrete plans for a compassionate and robust energy debt relief scheme**. This scheme must be easy to access, focused on writing off debt and implemented with utmost urgency.

Problems with smart meters and the RTS switch-off continue to cause concern

Metering issues drive a significant number of people to seek advice from CABs, with both smart meters and the Radio Teleswitch meter (RTS) switch-off creating increasing demand. From April to June 2025:



More than **1,300** people visited a CAB to talk about smart meters



Around **16%** of people who asked for energy advice needed help with smart meters.



Compared to the first three months of 2025, there has been a **28%** increase in the number of people who sought advice on smart meters.



Hundreds of people went to their local CAB to talk about the Radio Teleswitch metering (RTS) switch-off.

The UK Government and Ofgem have announced a new phased approach to the RTS switch-off that will avoid widespread loss of heating and hot water. The issue is still however generating concern across Scotland with a lack of clarity for people, especially in remote and rural communities.



Georgina and Cassie's experience

Georgina lives in an island community and contacted her local CAB after she received a notice about RTS switch off in April. An engineer visit was scheduled, however, they did not attend and no explanation was offered. Georgina tried to arrange another appointment, only to be told none were available, causing her much anxiety that her energy supply would be switched off. Weeks went by without being able to resolve this. In June, she received a call from her supplier advising that she did not in fact have an RTS meter, leaving Georgina confused and frustrated.

Time and again people who access local CABs and our Extra Help Unit (EHU) tell us about the profound impact that poor communication has on their lives and the difference that clear information and honouring commitments makes – as described by Cassie, who got support from the EHU:

“I love the fact that she [EHU adviser] said she would contact me back in two hours, and she did, on the dot. They [EHU] kept to their promises, and they made sure I would not go the full day without electricity for my children.”



The CAS solution:

The UK Government and Ofgem must ensure that suppliers protect people from any detriment associated with the phased RTS switch-off. Suppliers need to have enough engineers to carry out meter replacements, especially in Scotland's rural communities. Suppliers must also protect RTS households from any financial loss if they are moved to a new electricity tariff. Clear, timely and accurate communication, especially for people living in vulnerable circumstances is essential.

About Citizens Advice Scotland

The Citizens Advice network in Scotland is Scotland's largest independent advice provider. Advisers across all corners of the country work in Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) to provide free, impartial and confidential advice. Our Extra Help Unit (EHU), based in Glasgow, helps people resolve complex and time-sensitive energy problems. Each year our network supports hundreds of thousands of people, unlocking millions of pounds worth of financial gains. By looking at a person's complete circumstances, CAS gains an unparalleled insight into the scale and complexity of what's happening in communities throughout Scotland.

For more information please contact

Stephanie Mander, Social Justice Policy Manager, stephanie.mander@cas.org.uk

To see more of our work on energy, please visit

<https://www.cas.org.uk/what-we-do/our-areas-work/energy>