



Energy Advice in Detail

Issues brought to the Citizens Advice
network in Scotland 2017-18

March 2019



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The Citizens Advice network in Scotland includes 60 Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), the Citizens Advice Consumer Service (CACCS¹) and the Extra Help Unit (EHU).

Our Advice

The Citizens Advice Network supports clients in a variety of ways:

- > in person
- > over the phone
- > online
- > by post
- > at home

We advise on a wide range of energy topics from finding the cheapest tariff or accessing financial support to support with debt or billing issues. The evidence from our services is central to our policy and advocacy work, allowing us to highlight the issues facing consumers and to lobby government, suppliers and many others across the energy sector for positive change.

The analysis presented shows issues advised on by the Citizens Advice network in Scotland in 2017-18. The data shows that of the three main strands of

¹ The Citizens Advice Consumer Service is now operated by Advice Direct Scotland and as of April 2019 is no longer part of the Citizens Advice Network in Scotland.

the network, the majority of energy-related advice in Scotland continues to be provided by Scottish bureaux, accounting for 92% of the advice provided in 2017-18.

This reflects the complementary nature of the Citizens Advice network:

- > Citizens Advice Bureaux primarily provide advice on complex interrelated issues;
- > the Extra Help Unit undertakes specialist case work on behalf of vulnerable consumers, often in urgent need of assistance; and
- > the Citizens Advice Consumer Service has a statutory remit to deliver first tier advice.

In 2017-18, a total of 41,233 energy issues were advised on across the whole Citizens Advice network in Scotland.²

In addition, the energy advice pages provided on the Scotland section of the Citizens Advice self-help website (<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/>) was viewed 26,355 times in 2017-18.

The network secured a client financial gain of £1.8 million for consumers presenting with energy issues in 2017-18.

Type of Advice Service	Number of Energy Issues Advised On	% of Total
CAB	38,068	92
EHU	1,014	3
CACCS	2,151	5
Citizens Advice Network in Scotland	41,233	

² This was for advice given between 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

The Citizens Advice self-help website was viewed 26,355 times in 2017-18.

Top Issues³ across the Citizens Advice Network



Billing/Metering



Administrative errors or incorrect/unclear bills



Consumers receiving a 'back-bill' or 'catch-up' bill



Inaccurate meter readings being recorded



Difficulty making payments

A range of complex issues can impact on consumers' finances and limit their ability to pay for essential services, such as their energy bills



Debt and disconnections

Commonly relating to vulnerable clients who have accrued significant fuel debts and who face threatened or actual disconnection from supply



Warm Home Discount



Overcoming barriers to accessing support and varying supplier criteria for support



Helping with digital exclusion when suppliers have online only applications



Switching and Transfers

Refers to contracts, supplier objections to a transfer (for unknown reasons) and issues with transfer times or transfers not being completed

³ These are a summary of some of the biggest issues across the Citizens Advice Scotland network.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Energy Issues Advised on in 2017-18

Advice can be accessed at Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in almost 290 locations across Scotland. The bureaux network helps more than 260,000 people each year with practical advice and support in negotiating on behalf of clients. The Scottish CAB Service is a holistic advice service, offering support with a wide variety of issues from social security and debt to housing, employment and a growing array of consumer issues. CAB support is offered in person, online and over the phone.

In terms of energy issues, the Scottish CAB service has long provided support to energy consumers. The energy advice provided by CAB supports clients

across a wide range of issues, from managing fuel bill debt and arrears to accessing additional support, including available grants/funds for improving energy efficiency.

Each year CAB advisors record the issues they have given advice on. For energy issues these are categorised by

1. Utilities: Regulated Fuel
2. Utilities: Non regulated Fuel
3. Fuel Debt: Regulated
4. Fuel Debt: Non Regulated

CAB Utilities Regulated Fuel 2017-18

Table presents the number of issues brought to Scottish bureaux per regulated fuel category in 2017-18

Issue advised on	No.	% of total
Billing / meter reading	5,353	17
Warm Home Discount	4,013	13
Switching supplier (including unwanted)	3,077	10
Other*	2,355	8
Energy assistance applications	2,330	7
Complaints and redress	2,329	7
Charges	2,306	7
Change of tariff (with existing supplier)	1,974	6
Pre payment meter	1,913	6
Methods of payment (not pre-payment meter)	1,165	4
Pre payment meter – emergency credit	978	3
Priority Services Register (added to)	831	3
Smart meters	682	2
Contract terms and conditions	522	2
Disconnection of supply	358	1
Green Deal / Energy Company / Obligation	335	1
Cancellation and withdrawal	282	1
Emergency utility repair (e.g. heating, water)	129	<1
Delays in supply / delivery	126	<1
Selling methods and techniques	84	<1
Dangerous and unsafe goods / services	83	<1
Total	31,225	

* the 'other category' relates to all of the advice provided by CAB that is not captured by the other advice codes listed in the table.

CAB Utilities Non-Regulated Fuel

Table presents the number of issues brought to Scottish bureaux per non-regulated fuel category in 2017-18

Issue advised on	No.	% of total
Other*	119	25
Fuel options / alternatives (e.g. advice on renewables)	68	14
Charges	67	14
Billing / meter reading	48	10
Complaints and redress	35	7
Switching supplier (including unwanted)	30	6
Contract terms and conditions	23	5
Methods of payment	23	5
Selling methods and techniques	13	3
Cancellation and withdrawal	12	3
Emergency utility repair (e.g. heating, water)	11	2
Disconnection of supply	10	2
Dangerous and unsafe goods / services	8	2
Delays in supply / delivery	8	2
Total	475	

CAB Fuel Debt: Regulated

Table presents the number of issues brought to Scottish bureaux per Regulated Fuel Debt category in 2017-18

Issue advised on	No.	% of total
Difficulty making payments	3,144	52
Liability for debt	1,166	19
Direct deductions from meter	398	7
Other*	363	6
Enforcement action / third party debt collection inc. harassment	352	6
Complaints	187	3
Pre-Payment meter standing charge	144	2
Direct deductions from benefits	132	2
Threatened and actual disconnection of supply	122	2
Creditor harassment	70	1
Total	6078	

CAB Fuel Debt: Non-Regulated

Table presents the number of issues brought to Scottish bureaux per Non -Regulated Fuel Debt category in 2017-18

Issue advised on	No.	% of total
Difficulty making payments	180	62
Liability for debt	53	18
Other*	20	7
Enforcement action / third party debt collection inc. harassment	17	6
Threatened and actual disconnection of supply	10	3
Direct deductions from benefits	6	2
Creditor harassment	2	1
Complaints	2	1
Total	290	

* the 'other category' relates to all of the advice provided by CAB that is not captured by the other advice codes listed in the table.

Extra Help Unit

Energy Cases in Scotland for 2017-18

The Extra Help Unit (EHU) is a GB-wide service delivered by CAS to both domestic and non-domestic GB energy and post consumers. The EHU actively seeks to identify and address policies and practices affecting vulnerable consumers and works closely with the policy units within Citizens Advice Scotland and Citizens Advice (England and Wales), suppliers, and the energy and post industry regulators to make improvements. The majority of consumers are referred to the EHU via the Citizens Advice Consumer Service and, increasingly, by bureaux advisers. Referrals are also received from the Energy Ombudsman, Ofgem, advice agencies and elected representatives. Consumers transferred to the EHU can be very distressed, living on very low incomes and in desperate need of representation. Many clients suffer from health problems and often there are young children or elderly people living in the home.



EHU client satisfaction was 91% in 2017-18



the EHU achieved £237,315 in financial redress for clients in Scotland in 2017-18

“**Just knowing that someone can listen and support. I was getting very close to sinking into a depression, but your support helped me through**”

“**I was uptight and it was making me ill. When they stepped in I could relax a bit**”

The EHU regards consumers as vulnerable when they are unable to resolve a complaint for themselves due to the:

- > urgency of the situation (e.g. risk of disconnection);
- > complexity of case; and
- > personal circumstances (e.g. health or income).

The EHU also has a duty to investigate cases where any consumer:

- > has been disconnected;
- > is threatened with disconnection; and
- > has experienced a failure in a prepayment meter system.

In 2017-18 the EHU provided advice and investigated complaints to clients in Scotland on a total of 1,014 issues.

EHU Level 1 (top 10)

Category	Count	Percentage of total
Billing	349	34%
Metering (general)	204	20%
Debt/disconnections	162	16%
Transfers	95	9%
Prepayment meters (PPM)	72	7%
Other	45	4%
Advice/information	36	4%
Smart meters	17	2%
Customer service failure	14	1%
Networks	11	1%
Grand total	1014	100%

Citizens Advice Consumer Service⁴

Energy Cases in Scotland in 2017-18

The Citizens Advice Consumer Service (CACS) is a telephone, webform and letter advice service jointly run by CAS and Citizens Advice (England and Wales) since 2012.⁴ It is part of the range of advice services offered by the Citizens Advice network in Scotland

to meet a specific consumer demand for online, postal and telephony based consumer advice.

In 2017-18 consumers in Scotland contacted the CACS with 2,151 energy-related issues.

Energy Case Details, Issue, Description	Total	Percentage
Catch up bill received	169	8%
Disputed bill, customer not responsible	164	8%
Pricing information	149	7%
Debt recovery practices	92	4%
Meter accuracy	82	4%
How to change supplier	77	4%
Switching (Non-Smart)	74	3%
Meter provision or exchange	72	3%
Final account reconciliation	69	3%
Supply Point Administration Query (MPRN/MPR)	69	3%
Direct debit issues	69	3%
Grand total	2151	100%

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The Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux –
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