

MP calls for action on fuel poverty

CALL FOR CONSUMERS TO AUTOMATICALLY BE PUT ON LOWEST TARIFF

“UK GOVERNMENT MUST GO FURTHER TO TACKLE FUEL POVERTY”

✘ [SNP MP Mike Weir](#) has called for further action from the UK government to tackle fuel poverty and urged for consumers to automatically be placed on the cheapest tariff possible, unless they request otherwise.

The current UK government proposals leave the responsibility with energy companies to contact their customers with an offer to move.

Mike Weir MP said:-

“The changes should be straightforward – if the consumer is on a contract or supply terms that are not in their best interest, then they should automatically be transferred to a better deal, unless they make the specific decision not to do so.

“We already receive a huge amount of paper from our energy providers – as well as the bills we get special offers, offers to take on maintenance of domestic appliances, drains, pipes and electrics. Invitations to take up different ways to pay your bills, and annual and regular energy statements. All very useful, but how many of us really take the time to go through this mountain of information, and how many just put in the recycling bin with all the other junk mail?

“The use of pre-payment meters is an example of consumers receiving a bad deal- as evidenced by a recent report from Citizens Advice Scotland. The tariff tends to be higher, plus consumers are often put on pre-payment meters because they

have a debt which is then recouped. However the costs of installation can also be added to this, meaning that consumers are pushed further into debt.

“The report from Citizens Advice Scotland cites the case of a single parent with two children. She currently has to lose £7 towards arrears every time she puts £10 in the meter. The £3 remaining is entirely insufficient to heat her home. What chance has she ever of either getting out of the cycle of debt, or of keeping her home warm?

“Because these meters tend to be used when a consumer is already struggling, this has a perverse effect. If someone is already struggling to keep up with payments, they should not be put on an even more expensive tariff which simply deepens the difficulties that they are in.”

CAS is also calling on the governments in London and Edinburgh to better target support for vulnerable consumers in light of the report’s findings.

CAS Policy Officer Sarah Beattie-Smith, who compiled [the report](#), said:-

“The evidence from Citizens Advice Bureaux across Scotland clearly shows that the high cost of energy is causing huge problems for people across the country. CAB advisers see people every day who are forced to choose between heating and eating. We know that difficulty paying for energy can make other problems worse, pushing people into debt, worsening existing health conditions and adding to the stresses and strains of everyday life at a particularly difficult economic time.

“CAS will now be contacting the energy companies with our findings and will be seeking to discuss the measures they can take to help their customers. We recognise that energy companies and governments here in Scotland and at UK level have already taken some very welcome steps to support

consumers who have trouble meeting the high costs of energy.

“However more can and must be done to help Scots heat their homes this winter and in years to come.”

What do you think? Have you personal experience of this? Would it help if the energy provider put you on the lowest tariff to start with?