

Widowed mum left without heating over £29 bill

A widowed mum says she has been left with no heating in her new council house after the local authority failed to pay a debt left by the previous tenant.

Sarah Thomson moved into her new home in Lasswade over the summer before realising the gas supply had been cut off but when she tried to have it reinstated she was told there was still £29 outstanding on the account.

And she says when she asked the council to deal with the debt a support worker advised her to take out a crisis loan to pay it off herself.

Sarah said: "They refused to take responsibility and expected me to go into debt myself over an unpaid bill that had nothing to do with me.

"It may not seem like a huge amount but when every penny counts it is important and, on principle alone, I shouldn't have to pay. A letter demanding payment came to the house but it wasn't sent to me it was sent to the council. It is their debt not mine."

Sarah, whose husband died several years ago, was moved to the house from a home in Pathhead where conditions were so bad the owner of the neighbouring property put up a giant banner in the garden shaming Midlothian Council for its condition.

At the time the outside of the property was in a dilapidated

state with peeling paint and cracks in the wall, inside sewage leaked in through the taps and bugs infested the rooms.

The council moved former nurse Sarah, 38, and her teenage daughter into the new house in Lasswade but instead of a fresh new start she found more problems.

She said: "When I went to use the gas I found it had been cut off and I called the power company who said there was an outstanding amount of debt on the electricity bill and they could not reinstate the gas until it was cleared.

"The electricity works but I have no heating and have to boil kettles for hot water which costs me a fortune. I should have basic amenities in my home but instead of simply clearing the debt, the council is messing around.

"I don't understand why they don't just do the right thing."

A Midlothian Council spokesman said: "We are very concerned to hear that our tenant is having challenges with the utility company. It is unacceptable for a new tenant to be held responsible for a prior occupant's debt, which the energy supplier needs to resolve.

"We are referring Ms Thomson to Changeworks. Changeworks is a registered charity that supports residents with utility issues. They can help her resolve the matter as she's obviously not liable for a bill for someone living in the home previously."

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter