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Are energy bills a crippling cost? Citizens Advice across Oxfordshire offers three ways to reduce this debt

As the cold weather bites and with many more of us at home, the need for extra heating is a necessity. This puts an additional burden on finances already stretched to the limit and not covering the essential costs of living.

Citizens Advice across Oxfordshire is working to support households to keep warm, reduce the risk of people struggling to afford energy and essential food costs, tackle fuel poverty and reduce climate change across the county.

The charity is managing three services to help people most in need.

1) Energy and money saving advice for people on a low income

One-to-one advice tailored energy and money saving advice to people in or at risk of fuel poverty.

This includes people:

- spending more than 10% of net monthly income on utilities
- on low incomes
- in receipt of benefits or Universal Credit
- with a disability/long term sickness
- of pensionable age
- with dependent children.

Advice includes benefit entitlement checks, switching tariffs, identifying grants available, energy efficiency and reducing fuel debt advice.

2) Fuel credit for people on a pre-payment meter in need of emergency credit

Top-up fuel credit is available for people with prepayment meters who are facing financial crisis and unable to continue their energy supply without the extra support.

This includes people who:

- have a pre-payment meter

- have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic due to loss of income and increased fuel usage
- are at risk of self-disconnection.

3) Winter grant for households impacted by Covid-19

An emergency Winter Grant fund that covers basic food, essential supplies and payment towards energy costs is available for households impacted by Covid-19 and unable to cover their essential living costs. Support is available in the form of advice, supermarket and fuel vouchers or through the direct payment of energy or water bills.

This grant is for people who:

- have been impacted by the pandemic and are struggling to afford food or pay utility bills.

Teresa Archer, Chief Officer of Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire said

“The Winter Grant is a lifeline to people across Oxfordshire that are struggling to cope with so many changes. We are seeing people that have lost jobs, are juggling home-working with home-schooling, facing reduced incomes and greater expenses with having family at home, and of course some have lost loved ones. The Winter Grant is providing essential food and fuel support that can help families cope during these life changes imposed on them by the pandemic. People who might be eligible can be referred by any local agency that is already working with them, or they can get in touch with their local Citizens Advice for more information.”

Citizens Advice is pleased to be working in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire South and Vale of the White Horse, West Oxfordshire and Cherwell City District Councils and the many voluntary and community organisations and groups in Oxfordshire to reach and support residents.

How to apply

People can benefit from all of these energy saving services and grants from Monday to Friday by contacting their local Citizens Advice. Contact details can be found at www.caox.org.uk

We give people the knowledge and confidence they need to find their way forward - whoever they are, and whatever their problem.

- The four Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire, Oxford, North Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire and South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse all exist to provide free, confidential, independent advice in Oxfordshire and they are all members of Citizens Advice, the national charity
- For Citizens Advice general local free telephone advice, visit www.caox.org.co.uk.
- Citizens Advice Freephone Adviceline 0800 144 8848 and Textphone: 0800 144 8884

- Citizens Advice in Oxfordshire are supported by more than 670 trained volunteers and 52 paid staff working across 14 advice centres. In the last year, we helped 27,000 people across Oxfordshire with 78,000 issues.
- Citizens Advice is made up of the national charity Citizens Advice; the network of independent local Citizens Advice charities across England and Wales; the Citizens Advice consumer service; and the Witness Service.
- Citizens Advice helped 2.7 million people face to face, over the phone, by email and web chat in 19-20. We had 3.5 million visits to our national website. For full service statistics see Citizens Advice monthly publication [Advice Trends](#).