



PRESS RELEASE

7th February 2022

As the cost of living soars, Citizens Advice across Oxfordshire has seen a 36% increase in people seeking support for problems with 'fuel debt' – even before the increased energy prices kick in

More people are seeking one-to-one support from Citizens Advice than at any point during the pandemic. That's according to stark new figures released today which reveal the enormous pressures facing households even before the 54% increase* to energy bills kick in this April. Almost one in 10 (9%) of people nationwide are already in energy arrears, even before the price cap rise.

The charity warns that crisis support - including referrals to food banks and advice on emergency one-off grants - is at the highest level on record. Similarly, advice on managing energy debts has reached unprecedented heights.

How to support low-income households through the cost-of-living crisis

To help people weather the cost-of-living crisis, Citizens Advice is urging the government to adjust the package of measures.

This includes targeted support to low income households in line with inflation to be paid through the benefits system this April, and an expanded Warm Home Discount scheme for Winter 2022 when prices are due to rise again.

Naomi, Caseworker at Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire said:

"I am seeing desperation. People are having to rob Peter to pay Paul. Each week people need to decide which is their priority – do they pay for heating, rent or food. I have single men crying on the phone. Their heating is not on yet they can see the metre is running. It is terrifying."

Teresa Archer, Chief Officer at Citizen Advice West Oxfordshire said:

"We know this is an extremely worrying time for many. With the 54% rise* to the energy price cap, the loss of the £20 per week Universal Credit uplift and increasing food costs, we encourage those people who are in debt or are struggling to budget to get in touch so we can help them through these challenging times. The £200 energy loan announced by Government last week will be given to all households in October 2022. Whilst this will help some people in the short term, it will still have to be paid back in the longer term keeping bills higher for longer."

Contact Citizen Advice for advice on www.caox.org.uk or [talk](#) to one of our energy advisers

Ends.

Notes to Editors

- * The 54% energy price increase is based on the amount of energy units used.
- Nationally representative polling commissioned by Citizens Advice in January 2022 shows that huge numbers will be unable to afford April's price cap rise:
 - More than one in seven (16%) would not be able to cover the anticipated average price cap rise of £60 per month. That is equivalent to around 8.5 million people
 - This rises to over a quarter (27%) of disabled people and more than a third (36%) of people on Universal Credit
 - Almost one in 10 (9%) are already in energy arrears, even before the price cap rise
- Today's increase will affect at least 22 million households - nearly 80% of the national market - who are on the price cap

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 Free phone 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 20-21. We had 3.5 million visits to our national website. For full service statistics see Citizens Advice monthly publication [Advice Trends](#).