

Guidance on utility services

There are several options for community groups wishing to help residents who are struggling with their electricity, gas or water supply. The information below has been provided with the help of Thames Water and gives details on priority services, financial assistance and resources that are available.

1

Priority Services Register (PSR)

A free service provided by all utilities who operate your network. In Oxfordshire, your main Utility network operators are **SSEN, British Gas and Thames Water**. The priority services are provided only by network operators and you can receive them regardless of who you pay your bills to.

Being on the register can provide:

- Priority support tailored to your needs in an emergency
- Advance notice of planned power cuts or water interruptions
- Accessible information. Account and bill information in an accessible format, for example in larger print or braille.

You will normally be able to get priority services if you:

- are disabled or have a long-term (or short term) physical or mental health condition
- are recovering from an injury
- need foreign language support
- have children under 5 or are pregnant
- have reached your State Pension age

This list is not exhaustive- check with your provider if you are unsure whether you are eligible or not (see contact details below).

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If you claim benefits, you might be able to get a free annual gas safety check, if you own your home and claim means tested benefits. This can be Universal Credit, ESA, or Income Support.

You'll qualify if:

- You live with a child under 5, OR;
- You're disabled or chronically ill, OR;
- You have reached state pension age and live on your own OR with others who are disabled, chronically ill or of pensionable age.

Each network operator maintains its own register. To get on it, you need to contact SSEN for electricity, British Gas for gas and Thames Water for water:

- [SSEN Priority Services Register](#)
- [Thames Water Priority Services Register](#)

Thames Water can also provide paper forms and free post envelopes. Email priorityforms@thameswater.co.uk.

To register for priority services over the phone or for more information about the Register, call the Extra Care Team on 0800 009 3652, 9am to 5pm.

- [British Gas Priority Services Register](#)

Call **0800 0728 625** to register.

If you are a Pay As You Go customer, call **0800 294 8604**.

See [Oxfordshire County Council](#), [Ofgem](#), or [Citizens Advice](#) for more information.

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2 Financial Support

There are various channels to access financial support with utilities bills. This can be through your **network operators** (Thames Water, SSEN, and British Gas, just like the Priority Services Register), through the **government**, or through **charities**.

Network operators

- For Thames Water, visit the [Thames Water Financial help page](#);
- For SSEN, visit the [SSEN Resilient Communities Fund](#);
- For British Gas, visit the [British Gas Energy Trust's page](#).

You can also contact the companies below for free, independent advice:

- [Income Max](#) if you are struggling to pay your bills;
- [The Money Advice Service](#) for free debt advice.

For **energy bills**, there are also 3 types of energy rebates or payments that you could be eligible for:

- Warm Home Discount ;
- Winter Fuel Payment;
- Cold Weather Payment.

While **not all of these will be applicable at the current time**, you can [watch this video by NEA to check your eligibility for energy discounts and rebates](#), or contact your energy supplier.

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Charities

- **Turn2Us** can provide [help with paying energy bills](#). This includes:
 - Getting help from your energy company;
 - Helping you [search for grants](#);
 - Helping you [calculate your benefits entitlement](#);
 - Assisting your with Priority Services Register, debt, and subsidised energy efficiency measures.
- **Step Change** offer a [Debt and Coronavirus Page](#) which includes information on claiming benefits, Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), and help available from creditors.

3 Financial Advice

Citizens Advice can let you know what your options are if you can't pay your bills because of coronavirus. You can also [visit Citizens Advice Oxfordshire](#).

You will find more financial advice by visiting the [UK government's website](#) under 'Work, financial support and money', or by visiting the [Oxfordshire County Council's Money Matters advice page](#).

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4 Further Advice and Resources

- **Thames Water** offer a 24-hour helpline on **0800 316 9800** for urgent issues such as. loss of supply. They also offer a [Coronavirus support page](#).
- **British gas** have a [Covid-19 FAQs page](#).
- **SSEN** outline their [Covid-19 Response on the SSEN website](#).

You may also visit the **NEA** ([National Energy Action](#)) [Help Page](#).

- They offer [resources designed for sharing with community groups or clients](#). Those include:
 - [‘Steps to Affordable Warmth’ videos](#), which contain information on discounts, Priority Services Register, debt, and energy efficiency;
 - [A selection of informational leaflets](#);
 - [Warm and Safe Homes Action Guides](#);
 - See their [article on addressing the impacts of Covid-19 on energy customers](#).
- The NEA’s [Warm and Safe Homes Advice Service](#) is still open during Covid-19
Ring **0800 304 7159** or [visit their Facebook Page](#) for advice on benefit checks, fuel debt and energy efficiency.
For community groups wishing to help local residents, contact Lesley.Tudor-Snodin@nea.org.uk.

The **CAP** ([Community Action on fuel Poverty](#))’s [resource page](#) contains starter kits, guides for practitioners, and articles on fuel poverty.