

# The Energy Brief:

## Evidence and insight from Citizens Advice Scotland

Volume 2, February 2025

### This winter

Almost one in every five people who walked through our doors received energy advice. We've supported more than **9,000** people across Scotland with their energy needs.

People seeking advice from our network had an average energy debt of **£2,500** – an **8%** increase from last year. The average energy debt in rural Scotland is more than **£3,100**.

Two in every five people (**40%**) who asked for energy advice needed other support, with more than half (**55%**) requiring advice on social security.

### As temperatures dropped, tens of thousands struggled to heat their homes and keep the lights on

Thousands of people sought help from their local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) this winter, unable to afford heating or electricity.



CABs in Scotland gave **9,320** people **34,226** pieces of energy-related advice.



Almost **one in five (17%)** people supported by our network received energy advice.



We advised **3,685** people about accessing fuel vouchers. This was the most common energy advice CAB advisers provided.



Our Extra Help Unit handled **427** complex energy cases.



#### Martin's experience

Martin sought help from his CAB after running out of emergency credit on his prepayment electricity meter. He had exhausted local support and reached the limit for Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis Grants. Having stocked up on food for Christmas, he was ineligible for a fuel voucher from the food bank. With no assistance available, his CAB adviser struggled to find a way to help him top up his meter, putting his food at risk of spoiling.

#### The CAS solution:

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) is calling for a social tariff: a discounted rate on energy bills aimed at people living on low incomes. Introducing a social tariff would provide desperately needed support and reform a market that fails to provide affordable energy to people living on low incomes.



## Energy debt is a problem government must solve

Evidence from our network shows that energy debt is getting worse and is impacting communities across Scotland.



**One in four (26%)** people presenting with debt at CABs have energy debt.



During the winter, the CAB network gave energy debt advice to more than **1,100** people.



Average energy debts brought to CABs is just above **£2,500**: **8%** more than 2023/24.

The average energy debt in rural Scotland is **£3,130**.



### Chloe's experience

Chloe, a nurse who is on a zero-hours contract, approached her CAB for debt advice. Insecure work, childcare costs and arrestment for Council Tax arrears and Tax Credit overpayment contributed to her accruing £3,000 of energy debt and £16,000 debt overall. She is considering bankruptcy. Living with this debt has caused Chloe considerable stress and anxiety.



### The CAS solution:

There is an undeniable case for energy debt relief. We note Ofgem's proposed one-off debt relief scheme. While this proposal will go some way to addressing energy debt, it will not write off all energy debt. Achieving that goal needs the UK Government to fund longer-term debt relief that is available after Ofgem's intervention ends.

## Warm Home Discount offers patchy support

The second most common type of energy advice is related to the Warm Home Discount (WHD). In Scotland, some people eligible for WHD must apply to their energy supplier within the designated application window, and energy suppliers can provide a fixed number of discounts. This system means people who do not apply lose out on WHD support.



### Paul's experience

Paul visited his local CAB to seek debt advice. He had accrued £900 of energy arrears and had used an overdraft facility to buy a new cooker. These financial struggles have impacted Paul negatively, compounding ongoing problems he has experienced around poor mental health and a learning disability. Although he was eligible for the Warm Home Discount, Paul had missed the application deadline. Getting this support would have helped Paul tackle expensive energy costs reduced his worries about household bills.

## Unaffordable energy costs, a weak social safety net, high food prices and housing insecurity are squeezing households living on low incomes

People who visit their CAB for energy advice also get support on other topics, reflecting the complexity of circumstances people face. For those who sought energy advice this winter:



**Two fifths (40%)** also received other advice.



**More than half (55%)** also asked about the social security system.



**One in four (26%)** sought advice regarding food banks.

Between 2023/24 and 2024/25, the connection between housing insecurity and energy problems has increased. Demand for energy advice from people experiencing homelessness or living in temporary accommodation has increased more than demand for any other type of advice.



### Sophie's experience

Sophie sought help from her CAB to request a fuel voucher while living in temporary housing. She had asked her energy supplier for a new top-up card for her meters but had not received it. Sophie is on the Priority Services Register and due to complex medical needs, could not travel to a shop to collect a new card. Her supplier's only solution was to wait until the gas ran out and then send an engineer to apply credit to her meter.

## Energy poses distinct problems in different parts of Scotland



Requests for advice about **fuel vouchers** and **energy trust fund applications** are most common in urban areas.



People in rural communities are most likely to seek advice about **billing and metering problems**.



Those in small, outlying towns are most likely to ask for advice on **discretionary credit for prepayment meters**.



There is less demand for advice on unregulated fuels like coal, natural gas and oil. However, among people using unregulated fuels and requesting energy debt advice, the average debt is just under **£2,000**.

Although people using unregulated fuels have slightly less energy debt than those on regulated fuels, the amounts they owe remain significant. These households face the added financial strain of rural living, including high upfront energy costs.

## About Citizens Advice Scotland

The Citizens Advice network in Scotland is Scotland's largest independent advice provider. Advisers across our 59 Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) support communities across Scotland. Our Extra Help Unit (EHU), based in Glasgow, helps people resolve complex and time-sensitive energy problems. In 2023-24, our network supported over 188,000 people with almost 1.1 million pieces of advice. During this period, we unlocked over £158 million of financial gains for more than 42,000 people. Our advisers look at a person's complete circumstances and helping so many people provides an unparalleled insight into the scale and complexity what's happening in communities throughout Scotland.

### For more information please contact

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