



20 December 2011

HELP IS AT HAND IN NEWCASTLE FOR THOSE STRUGGLING WITH WINTER FUEL COSTS

Helping households save money and keep warm

Are you worried about your fuel bills? Do you want to check if you can get a better deal with another fuel supplier? If so, free help and advice is available here in Newcastle.

The Energy Best Deal Campaign, is being run by national charity Citizens Advice with support from energy regulator Ofgem. It offers a package of free, independent energy related advice for vulnerable consumers. Locally, staff from Newcastle CAB and MoneyWise Credit Union have been specially trained to deliver advice that will help people make their homes energy efficient, ensure they are claiming the right benefits and are on the best energy tariff for them.

Record funding of £600k has been provided to run the campaign by British Gas, EDF Energy, E.ON, npower, ScottishPower and Scottish and Southern Energy, to help households across the UK facing increased energy costs.

In early 2011, the Energy Best Deal campaign saw some 340 energy advice sessions delivered across England and Wales by Citizens Advice Bureaux and other agencies, such as housing associations and independent advice agencies, selected from the membership of the regional financial capability forums. To date almost 5,500 frontline advisers have been trained and it is expected that over 94,000 consumers have benefited from the Energy Best Deal training sessions since 2008.

More than 1,200 sessions will be delivered in England, Wales and Scotland between December and May 2011/12. Presentations are aimed at consumers and frontline advisers who are likely to be in contact with those most at risk of falling into fuel poverty, such as pensioners and those on low incomes.

An independent evaluation in 2011 showed that 80% of consumers said they would probably or definitely do something as a result of the session. 50% said they would contact their current energy supplier, 40% said they would look at other energy suppliers' prices, and 38% said they would tell friends and family what they had learnt.

Sarah Harrison, Ofgem's Senior Partner for Sustainable Development, said: "This evaluation shows the value of Energy Best Deal which is particularly critical given the recent increase in energy prices. Vulnerable customers need all the help they can get to get the best deal. Ofgem is pushing forward with reforms to the retail market which will make choosing a better deal easier for all consumers by removing complex tariffs. Easy to understand prices will help make Energy Best Deal even more effective at helping vulnerable consumers."

Gillian Guy, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice said: "Citizens Advice Bureaux are seeing a huge rise in the number of clients seeking help with fuel debts expected to soar. This year alone Citizens Advice Bureaux has dealt with more than 100,000 enquiries about fuel debt and the Citizens Advice website has seen a 78 per cent increase in the number of people viewing our advice on this issue. Energy Best Deal is a vital source of information for our clients who desperately need help to save money on their fuel costs."

Anyone living or working in Newcastle who wants advice on fuel debts or how to get the best deal for energy supplies should contact Newcastle CAB, 35 Nelson Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 5AN Tel: 0191 261 1113 or MoneyWise Credit Union, 187 Shields Road, Byker, Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 1DP Tel: 0191 276 7957

For further information about the campaign please go to:
www.citizensadvice.org.uk/.../fsfl_projects_energybestdeal.htm

Ends

Notes to editors:

1. **Energy Best Deal** builds on the research under Ofgem's Consumer First Programme which showed that many vulnerable customers needed:
 - more information and guidance about tariff and payment options;
 - access to grants to install insulation and central heating;
 - ways to manage bills through energy efficiency.
2. This fourth Energy Best Deal campaign across England, Wales and Scotland during the winter of 2011/12 is being funded by British Gas, EDF Energy, E.ON, npower, ScottishPower and Scottish and Southern Energy and supported by Citizens Advice and Ofgem. Energy Best Deal sessions are delivered in the community by members of Regional Financial Capability Forums.

3. The evaluation of the 2011 campaign was drawn from questionnaires completed after the presentations by 1,133 householders and 1,042 frontline workers. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with a random sample of 80 householders and 20 frontline workers. The full evaluation report is available on-line.
4. Access further information on Energy Best Deal, here:
www.citizensadvice.org.uk/.../fsfl_projects_energybestdeal.htm
5. The Citizens Advice service is a network of independent charities that helps people resolve their money, legal and other problems by providing information and advice and by influencing policymakers. For more information in England and Wales see www.citizensadvice.org.uk
6. Newcastle CAB has been providing free, confidential and independent advice to people who live or work in the City since 1939. For more information see www.newcastlecab.org.uk or contact Shona Alexander, Chief Executive, tel: 0191 261 4917. shona@newcastlecab.org.uk
7. MoneyWise Credit Union is a savings and loans co-operative authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority. It serves a membership open to all who live or work in Newcastle & Gateshead. See www.moneywise.org.uk
8. Ofgem is the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets, which supports the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, the regulator of the gas and electricity industries in Great Britain. The Authority's powers and duties are largely provided for in statute, principally the Gas Act 1986, the Electricity Act 1989, the Utilities Act 2000, the Competition Act 1998, the Enterprise Act 2002, the Energy Act 2004 as well as arising from directly effective European Community legislation.

For more national information contact:

Citizens Advice:

Nick Stanton 02078337078 nick.stanton@citizensadvice.org.uk