



Helping vulnerable customers

Introduction

We think it's important to make sure that, should you need them, you can access the wide range of services we offer. We recognise that you may have different needs based on your situation and we want to ensure your safety at all times so it's important we understand your circumstances.

If you believe your situation means that you need extra support from us, let us know so that we can make things easier for you. Every situation is different, but here are a few examples of some where you might need extra support. We explore some of these examples later on in this document:

- Customers with young children
- Customers who are of pensionable age
- Customers who have a disability, impairment, or who are chronically sick. This is particularly important where you are using mains-operated medical equipment to maintain your well-being, and you require advance warning of an interruption in your electricity supply
- Customers with a visual or hearing impairment

Over the following pages we set out our range of services for our vulnerable customers. We have specified which of these services are designed to benefit customers with particular needs. We aim to communicate with our customers in a clear and jargon-free manner at all times. If, however, you find any parts of this document difficult to understand, or would like to discuss anything further, please contact our Customer Service Team using one of the methods detailed at the end.

1. You can ask to go on our Priority Services Register (PSR)

To identify households which may need additional help in the case of an emergency (such as loss of supply) and to quickly and easily provide advanced warning and additional help in the case of a planned interruption in your supply, we keep a confidential register, called the Priority Services Register.

If, due to your personal characteristics or circumstances, you require additional assistance, you can ask to be added to our Priority Services Register at any time (we will ask you at the time we

Helping vulnerable customers

become your supplier whether you wish to be added). This may, for example, be because you are of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick, or you have a visual, hearing or other impairment. Just complete the form available to download on our website and return it to us. You can also call our Customer Service Team on 01926 320 700 or contact us using one of the methods detailed at the end of this document to let us know your details. Alternatively, someone else can contact us on your behalf and give us your details.

We ensure that electricity distributors and gas transporters have up to date information on our Priority Service Register so that they can help you in the event of an interruption to your service.

You don't have to go on the PSR if you don't want to. There are other services you may find helpful depending on your needs. Read on for more information.

2. You can appoint someone to receive your bills, or talk to us on your behalf.

We can arrange to send your gas or electricity bills to any other person (for example, a relative or friend) who has agreed to receive them. As our customer, responsibility for payment of the bill will remain with you at all times, but this service can be useful if someone else is helping you manage your day to day affairs. You can also appoint that person to discuss your account with us on your behalf.

These services are completely free of charge. They can be temporary or permanent, and we can still send you a copy of your bill at the same time if you wish to receive one. You can set things up quickly and easily by calling us on 01926 320 700 or using one of the other contact methods detailed at the end of this document.

3. You may be eligible for a free Gas Safety Check

If you live in rented accommodation, your landlord is responsible for arranging a gas safety check. If you own your home, and you are in receipt of means-tested benefit such as Tax Credits, you may be entitled to a free gas safety check each year. To be eligible, you must satisfy *either* of the following additional requirements:

- Your household includes at least one child under the age of five; or
- You are of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick. If you live with others, they must all be of pensionable age, disabled, chronically sick, or under the age of 18.

We will arrange for a properly qualified local third party Gas Safety Engineer to attend and carry out checks on the safety of gas appliances and other gas fittings in your home.

If you are concerned about your gas installation or appliances but you are not entitled to a free gas safety check, you can employ a gas engineer to undertake a check at your expense. It is important you ensure the engineer is a member of the Gas Safe Register (formerly CORGI).

You can find a list of registered businesses by visiting the Gas Safe Register's website www.gassaferegister.co.uk or calling 0800 408 550.

Helping vulnerable customers

4. What we'll do when visiting your home

Should we, or our representatives, need to visit your home in response to an emergency call-out, we will prioritise your request and deal with it as a matter of urgency.

Although we try to keep all our home visits to a minimum, there are occasions where we will need access to your property, like to carry out our obligations relating to the inspection of your meters.

Visits will otherwise be arranged by appointment and will always take place within normal working hours (between 8am and 6pm on a weekday). If you'd prefer our representatives to visit you during daylight hours only, let us know by contacting our Customer Service Team on 01926 320 700, or using one of the other contact methods detailed at the end of this document, and we can arrange this.

If we fail to meet the arranged appointment you are entitled to £30 compensation. This is payable under our Guaranteed Standards of Performance. Take a look at our policy entitled 'Guaranteed Standards of Performance' within the 'Our Policies' subsection of our website or on request from our Customer Service Team on 01926 320 700.

Identification cards

All our representatives and field agents carry an identity card at all times, which they will show you without being prompted. Do not be embarrassed to ask for and check their identity card carefully before letting them into your property.

If you are concerned in any way about whether someone is genuinely from First Utility, contact us on 01926 320 700 to check their credentials. If you are at all suspicious don't take any risks – call the police.

Passwords

For your security and peace of mind, you can ask, when booking an appointment, that our representative uses a password or signal when arriving at your property. We will pass this to your local electricity or gas distributor, and to any representatives or field agents involved in a visit. When they arrive at your home you can then ask them for the password or signal before letting them in. To use this service, simply ask us when arranging any such appointment.

5. We'll help you with your meter.

Reading your meter

We've committed to rolling out Smart Meters to all our customers before 2020. Smart Meters are 'smarter' than digital and mechanical meters because, usually, you don't need to take manual meter readings. If you have a Smart Meter we will receive your meter data remotely. This means we will not require regular access to your home to read

Helping vulnerable customers

your meter. However, we may, on occasion, need to access your property to inspect your meter equipment. We will always do our best to agree an appointment with you.

If you do not have a Smart Meter and, due to your personal circumstances or vulnerability, you have told us that neither you nor anyone else can read the meter, we will arrange for someone to come and take a meter reading periodically, and to inform you of that meter reading. This service will be provided free of charge.

Meter location

If you pay your electricity charges through a prepayment meter and you are finding it difficult to access your meter, you can ask us to move it in order to provide better access. We will do so free of charge if it is appropriate and reasonably practicable for us to do so. You must be of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick, or have a visual or hearing impairment.

6. Paying your bill

We offer a number of payment options. Please call us on 01926 320 700 if you would like further information. Alternatively, please refer to our 'Paying Your Bill - Help for Domestic Customers' document available on our website (within the 'Our policies' subsection of our website).

If you are unable to pay your bill, or are worried that you may have difficulty paying, please contact us. We will talk through the options with you so that we can agree with you what the best plan of action would be for your particular circumstances. This will allow you to carry on using electricity and/or gas. We will also provide you with information on energy efficiency information.

Options that may be available are:

- Short-term deferment of payment;
- Agreeing a debt repayment plan as instalments;
- Agreeing a regular instalment plan for future bills;
- Installation of a prepayment meter, where it is safe and reasonably practicable to do so;
- Where relevant, arranging for payment directly from benefits through the Fuel Direct Scheme (detailed below).

We will take all reasonable steps to ascertain your ability to pay and will take this into account when calculating the amount of money you should pay, taking into consideration the amount of electricity and/or gas you use. We will agree the amount with you and confirm that you are able to pay the amount agreed. If you continue to have problems paying we can review the amount you have to pay.

Helping vulnerable customers

Fuel Direct

If you are in receipt of Pension Credit, Income Support or Jobseekers Allowance and have a debt to us of greater than £65.45, you may be able to take advantage of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Fuel Direct scheme. Under this scheme the DWP will take money each week to the value of the current Fuel Direct rate directly from your benefits, and pay us the money you owe for any electricity and/or gas debt you have with us as well as for your current usage. It normally takes 14 days for us to set up this arrangement for you with the DWP.

Disconnecting your electricity or gas supply for non payment

In extreme circumstances, if you do not pay your bill, we may take steps to disconnect your supply. However, we will not do so without first fully considering your individual circumstances at the time. We would only disconnect as a last resort. If you or anyone in your household is vulnerable, then we will not disconnect you between 1 October and 31 March. In any event, we will take all reasonable steps to find out whether you or someone in the household is vulnerable before disconnecting the electricity and/or gas supply to your premises.

Please note, if you are a dual fuel customer, disconnection of your electricity supply does not automatically mean disconnection of your gas supply or vice-versa.

7. Providing information to you

We will always aim to provide the facilities you need to communicate effectively with us. See below for further details. If you are blind or partially sighted and you (or someone on your behalf) asks us for information about any bill or statement of account, we will provide you with that information free of charge in a format that is readily accessible to you.

8. Communicating with us

We have a full range of ways you can communicate with us to suit your specific requirements:

Telephone: 01926 320 700

Text telephone: 18002 01926 320 700

Helping vulnerable customers

Email: customer.service@first-utility.com

Post: First Utility, PO Box 4360, Warwick, CV34 9DB

Talking bill: If you have poor eyesight we can have your monthly bill read out to you free of charge. Please call us on 01926 320 700 to arrange this.

Large print or Braille bills: We can arrange for you to receive your monthly electricity and/or gas bill in large print or Braille format. Please call us on 01926 320 700 to arrange for these services.

Audio cassette tape or CD: We supply all our codes of practice on audio tape. Please call us to request a copy.

9. Useful contacts

Age UK

England: Telephone: 0800 169 6565 Email: contact@ageuk.org.uk Website: www.ageuk.org.uk

Scotland: Causewayside House 160 Causewayside Edinburgh EH9 1PR Telephone: 0845 470 80 90 Email: enquiries@ageconcernandhelptheagedscotland.org.uk

Wales: Ty John Pathy 13/14 Neptune Court Vanguard Way Cardiff CF24 5PJ Telephone: 029 2043 1555 Email: enquiries@agecymru.org.uk

Energy Ombudsman

Address: PO Box 966 Warrington WA4 9DF

Telephone: 0330 440 1624

Text telephone: 0330 440 1600 Fax: 0330 440 1625

Email: enquiries@os-energy.org

Website: www.ombudsman-services.org/energy

National Debtline

Telephone: 0808 808 4000

Website: www.nationaldebtline.org

Energy Saving Trust

Telephone (advice line): 0300 123 1234 (calls charged at National Rate)

Helping vulnerable customers

Website: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

Email: energy-advice@est.org.uk

Address, England: 21 Dartmouth Street London SW1H 9BP Telephone: 020 7222 0101

Address, Scotland: 2nd Floor Ocean Point 1 94 Ocean Drive Edinburgh EH6 6JH Telephone: 0131 555 7900

Address, Wales: Regus House, Falcon Drive, Cardiff, CF10 4RU Telephone 029 2046 8340

Citizens Advice Consumer Service

Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/energy

The Disabled Living Foundation

Address: Ground Floor, Landmark House, Hammersmith Bridge Road, London, W6 9EJ

Telephone: 0300 999 0004

Email: info@dlf.org.uk

Website: www.dlf.org.uk