

**ENERGY
BEST
DEAL**

2015/16 Review

Why Energy Best Deal?

Energy Best Deal is a client campaign developed by Ofgem and Citizens Advice that helps clients on low incomes to:

- Reduce their energy costs by switching tariff, payment method or supplier
- Know where to go for help if paying energy bills is a struggle
- Save money by using less energy in their homes

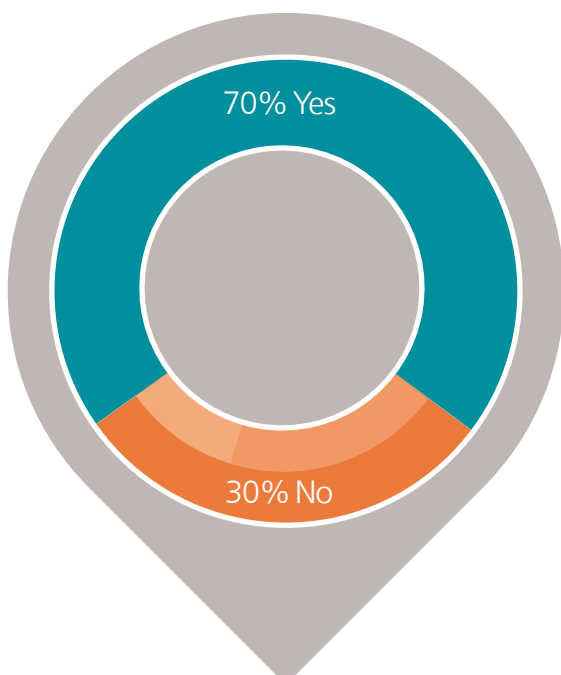
We know clients need help with their energy bills because:

- In 2015, Citizens Advice in England and Wales helped with over 72,000 fuel debt issues.

- Between October 2015 – April 2016 nearly 750,000 people looked at pages related to energy problems and how to save money on fuel bills on the Citizens Advice website citizensadvice.org.uk. More than 24,000 of these looked at information on problems paying energy bills.
- The Citizens Advice Service in Scotland advised on over a total of 28,500 energy issues in 2015/16, an increase from the previous year.
- The Energy Saving Trust estimates that the average home in the UK could save up to £320 on their annual energy bills by taking energy efficiency measures.

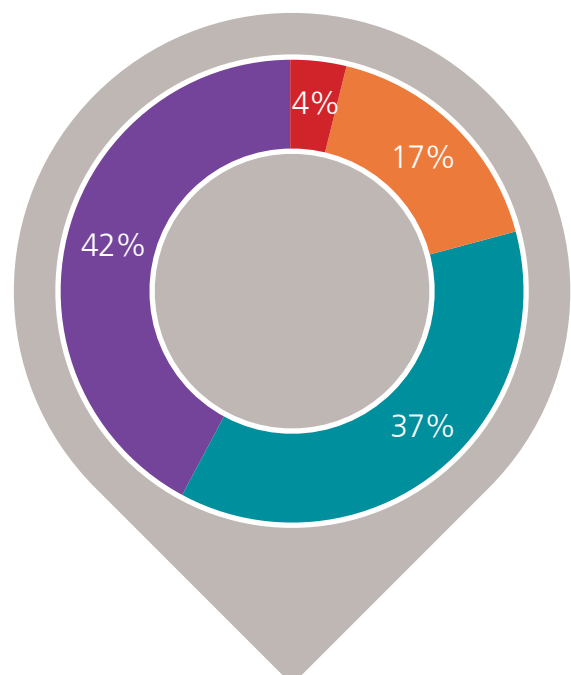
Can you heat your home to a comfortable level in winter?

- 70% said **Yes**
- 30% said **No**
- 19% said **No**, I don't use the heating as much as I'd like due to the cost
- 11% said **No**, I couldn't heat my home sufficiently due to the quality of the building fabric or the heating system



Attitudes to winter fuel bills

- 4% Impossible to manage – I am already in debt with my fuel bills.
- 17% A financial strain – sometimes I have to switch the heating off or not pay my energy bill so that I can afford other household bills.
- 37% A worry, but I'm able to manage without skimping on other important household bills.
- 42% Not a problem.



Who benefits?

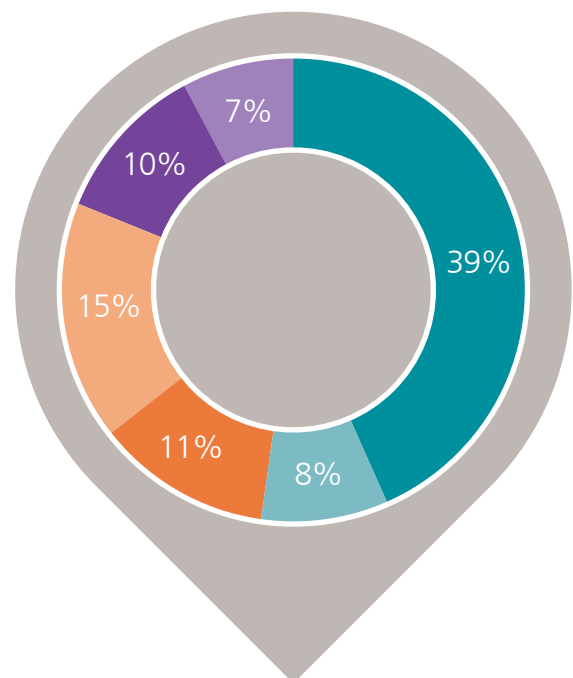
Energy Best Deal is aimed at clients on low incomes who are most at risk of fuel poverty and is also aimed at the workers who support them. Organisations delivering Energy Best Deal sessions have well established links with other local support organisations and the frontline workers and volunteers that work with people in or at risk of fuel poverty. Sessions aimed at clients are usually held with existing groups such as those for elderly people, tenants, parents or people with health problems.

Over half of clients passed on something that they had learnt at the Energy Best Deal session to friends and family.

Centre for Sustainable Energy

The employment status of clients who attended sessions over the winter of 2015/16:

- 39% retired
- 8% working full time
- 11% working part time
- 15% unemployed
- 10% not working due to disability or long-term sickness
- 7% carers

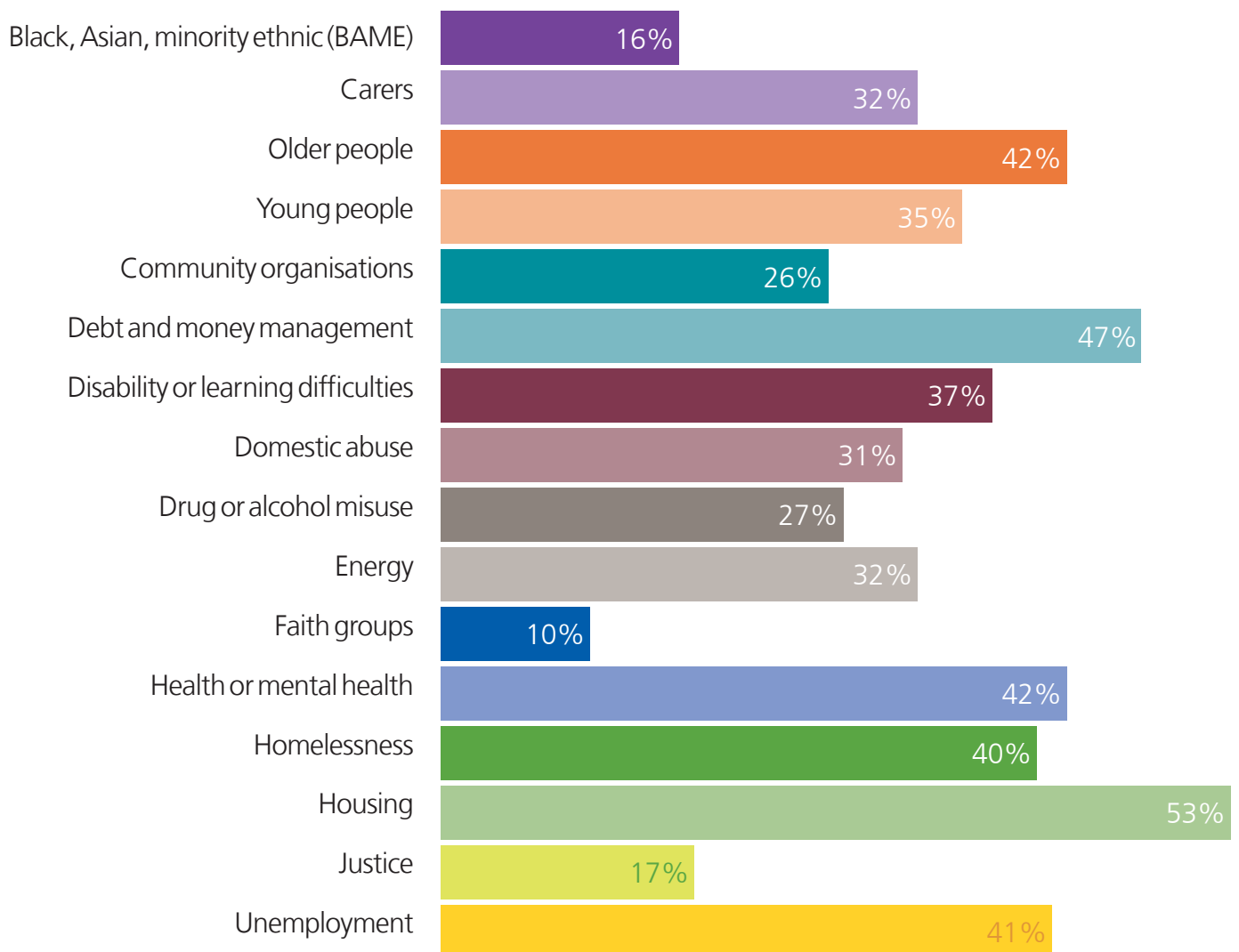


9 out of 10 frontline workers reported that they felt more confident about helping their clients to find the best deal on energy costs after attending an EBD session and 84% said the session had changed their opinion on the importance of fuel poverty for the people they work with.

Centre for Sustainable Energy

Groups supported by Frontline workers

Frontline workers were asked about their own reach. The graph below details the advice areas and vulnerable groups they provided support to, with the largest areas being Housing, Debts, Older people and Health or mental health.



Note: many people chose more than one option and so the total comes to more than 100%

What is the Impact?

Over the winter of 2015/16, a total of 1,999 Energy Best Deal sessions were delivered, directly training 14,153 clients and 5,905 frontline workers.

Based on evaluations of other financial capability programmes, which show that frontline workers use information to help an average of 15 clients in the year following training, Citizens Advice estimates that over 550,000 clients have benefited as a result of Energy Best Deal between 2008 to spring 2016.

To assess the impact of the 2015/16 Energy Best Deal campaign, Citizens Advice commissioned the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) to conduct an independent evaluation. This includes gathering information through a questionnaire distributed at sessions and completing qualitative interviews with clients and frontline workers. The interviews explored how the programme had helped clients to resolve their energy-related issues and to achieve desired changes in their household energy situation. Interviews with frontline workers explored how the sessions had helped them in their role advising clients.

In total, 14,153 clients were reached by EBD advice sessions in 2015/16 across England, Scotland and Wales. All clients who attended a group session were asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the session.

- 7,393 clients had completed a questionnaire by end April 2016 (52% response rate).

The following extracts are some of those findings:

Over half of clients reported intending to look for a better deal on their energy as a result of the EBD session. Clients found the session on how to find the best deal and how to switch energy supplier most useful.

A key piece of advice that clients took away was to add their kilowatt hours of energy use into the comparison site rather than the amount spent. This gave them greater confidence that the comparison results would be accurate.

For some clients, the EBD session highlighted how switching to a cheaper tariff could help them achieve a quick win – to save them money with minimal hassle:

‘Well, I’d never even looked into switching suppliers. I thought it was going to be a lot of hassle, and actually it was really easy.’ (Michelle)

Advice on switching works for some:

‘And straight away, even a lot of us, including me, went straight back to my provider, and actually called them and actually changed my tariff’.
(Rhona)

But not for all :

‘They gave us a brochure just explaining what to do and how it’d be a lot cheaper to work out and to get quotes and stuff. I’ll be honest with you I haven’t done it yet’ (Mark).

Cutting energy use

'Like switching off the electrics, if I'm not using it, switch it off, which I didn't bother before, but I do now. They're little things, sure, but it means a lot.'

'What initially made me go on the programme... was that I didn't know how to programme my timer for my boiler. So, when I came back, I mean, although they didn't cover that, I took it off the wall and read the instructions, and reprogrammed it.'

'Having my heaters down, like, on 20. I normally had it on, like, 30... but I can see the difference on that already.'

'Well, it was all stuff that I already knew, but re-emphasising that having curtains, as well as double glazing was a good one, because I don't have curtains in my lounge. Yeah, most of it was common sense; I already knew it, really.'

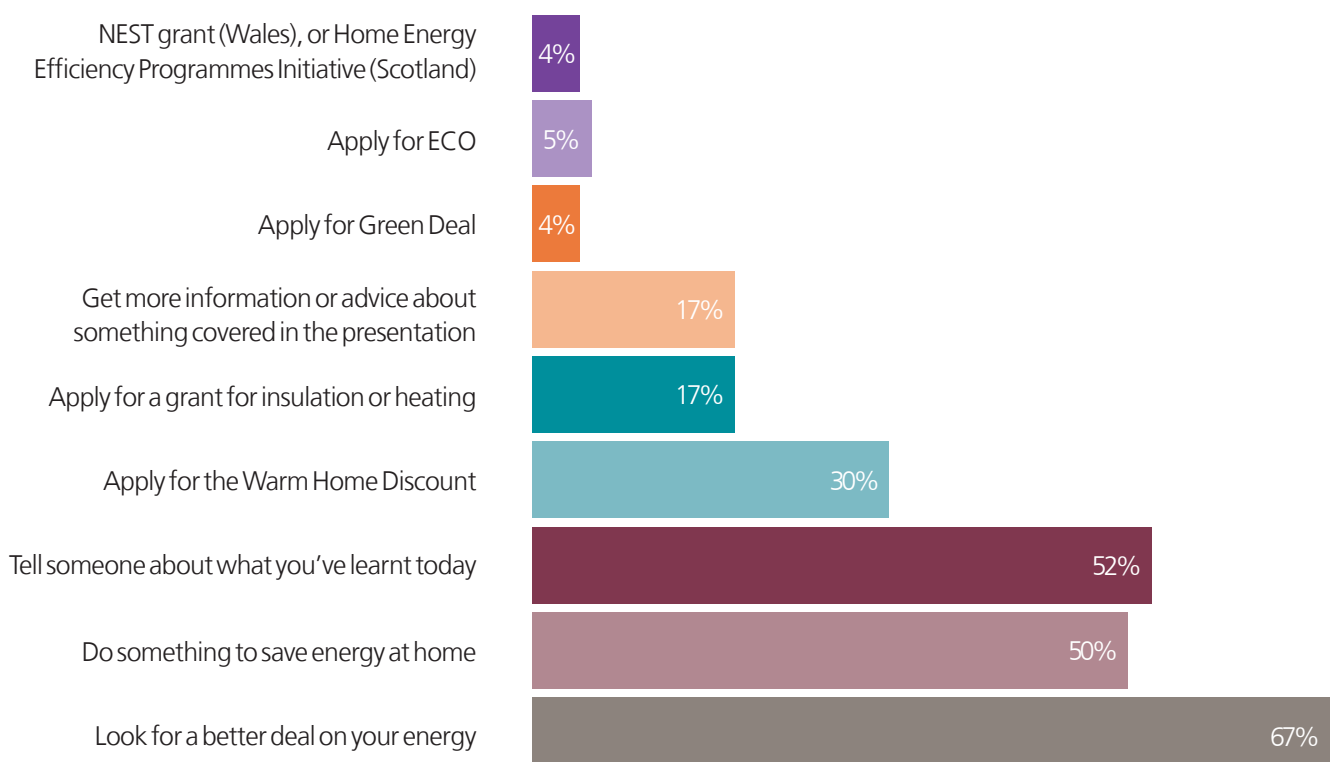
'Don't leave the heating on all night... Like me, I leave my heating on, just put it on low temperature, so I don't turn it off – she said that's not good, you have to I turn it off especially when you're going to bed.'

'What I'm trying to do is see if I can save in a week, what I can save in a week myself – that's what I'm trying to do, set my own little goals.'

David's experience of installing loft insulation

David has had cancer and was struggling to keep his home warm using electric storage heating and a wood burning stove in winter. He had been struggling to find a local builder willing to complete the task of installing insulation. Citizens Advice organised everything for him, contacting the council who provided the funding and a contractor who carried out the works. David immediately noticed the impact and found he didn't need to put on his wood stove on as often in order to keep the home warm.

The chart below shows the actions clients said they would take forward as a result of a session:



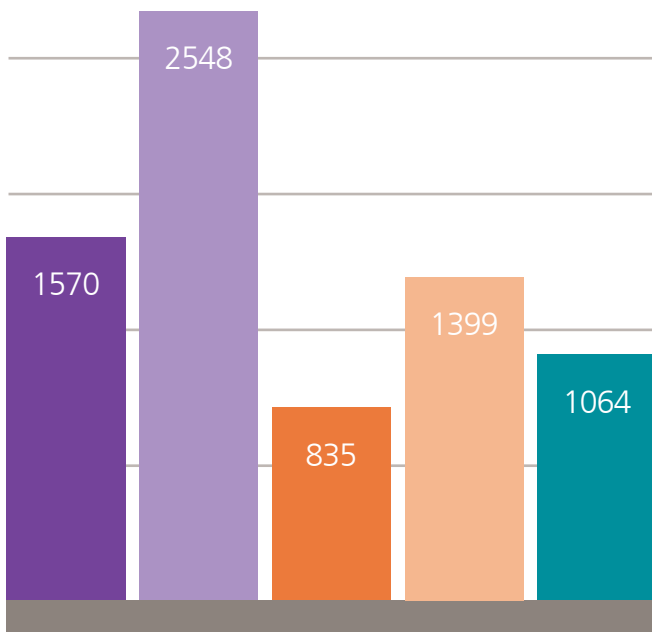
Energy Best Deal **Extra**

As a result of additional funding over the last 4 years, local Citizens Advice delivering Energy Best Deal sessions have been able to offer additional one-to-one appointments to clients attending the sessions. These sessions allow for a more intensive and bespoke intervention for the clients.

Local Citizens Advice in England, Wales and Scotland carried out a total of 5,947 Energy Best Deal Extra (EBDx) advice appointments between October 2015 and April 2016.

- 1570* clients were on low incomes,
- 2548 clients had disabilities,
- 835 clients were unemployed,
- 1399 clients were of pensionable age; and,
- 1064 households contained dependents under the age of 14.

**data refers to England and Wales only.*



The difference Citizens Advice sessions have made to people – some real life examples

Several clients reported that their EBDx appointment had helped them get their debt cancelled, making a really positive difference to their finances.

Resolving a grievance with a supplier

Paul had an ongoing grievance with his energy supplier. He paid his bills by direct debit, but the energy supplier claimed he had a debt and were threatening him with bailiffs and court action. Citizens Advice helped Paul to fight this claim with the supplier. In the end the supplier admitted it was their fault, cancelled the debt and sent a letter confirming this.

Wellbeing benefits

Edith saved £190 on her energy and water bills following the session. She found that her top ups were lasting longer, and she had more money in her purse as a result. Having that extra money enabled her to go out more, and she could afford to heat her home in the cold weather.

'I can go out and about more now, where I couldn't before. Like for instance, I went to Cardiff yesterday. Doesn't mean nothing to you, but it means a lot to me because I haven't been to Cardiff for years. You know, I'd be here all day, and I wouldn't put the heater on until last thing at night, but now... Well, as a matter of fact, I've got it on now, where I wouldn't normally have done in October.'

Who delivers the sessions?

In Scotland, Energy Best Deal is coordinated by Citizens Advice Scotland and sessions are delivered by local Citizens Advice.

In England and Wales, sessions are delivered via the financial capability forums. The forums cover all counties of England and Wales and are made up of organisations with an interest in helping people to manage their money. Just over half of the 197 organisations delivering were local Citizens Advice; others included independent advice organisations, social housing providers and volunteer organisations such as those supporting people in rural areas, older people and young families

Further information

For more information about Energy Best Deal, including a range of resources and the full evaluation report, visit the Citizens Advice website citizensadvice.org.uk/financialskillsforlife (click on Our projects>Energy Best Deal)

You can also contact the client Energy Team at Citizens Advice:
energybestdeal@citizensadvice.org.uk

Ofgem ofgem.gov.uk/information-consumers



Energy Best Deal 2015/16 was funded by EDF Energy; First Utility; ScottishPower; SSE and Utility Warehouse



Citizens Advice Citizens Advice is an operating name of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.



Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux – Citizens Advice Scotland (SC016637)



Saving money with **Energy Best Deal**

A retired tenant of The Gateshead Housing Company, Susie*, heard about the Energy Best Deal drop-in that was taking place in her local community centre and decided to go along and find out more.

Susie had never switched tariff or fuel supplier before and as a result she was on the standard tariff, meaning she was paying more than she needed to be for her usage. So, she wanted to find out if she could save money by getting a better deal.

Before coming to the drop-in session Susie didn't realise it was even possible to change her gas or electricity supplier, so she was pleased to have found out that she was eligible to save money by switching.

Susie undertook a price comparison and was delighted to find out she could save almost £400 a year by switching, so that's what she did!

As well as being able to switch provider and save money, whilst at the session Susie found out about other useful information including different ways of paying for her energy and she received energy efficiency advice for keeping her home warm.

Susie said, "I'm so pleased I decided to go to the drop-in session. The free advice offered by Lee and Helen was really useful – and best of all, by simply switching supplier, I'm going to save £383 this year!"

It was so easy to do, I would recommend everyone to go along to these drop-ins to see how they can save money."

*names have been changed



