

# Energy Best Deal 2016/17 Review



# Why Energy Best Deal?

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Energy Best Deal is a consumer education programme developed by Ofgem and Citizens Advice.

Through group sessions, the programme provides valuable information and guidance to vulnerable consumers and the frontline advice workers who work with them. It raises awareness of the savings energy consumers can make and the help available for those struggling to pay their bills.

More recently, the programme has been expanded with Energy Best Deal Extra, to offer one-to-one energy advice to vulnerable consumers.

Energy Best Deal group sessions provide information and guidance to consumers and frontline advice workers on how consumers:

- can 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 consumers need help with their energy bills.

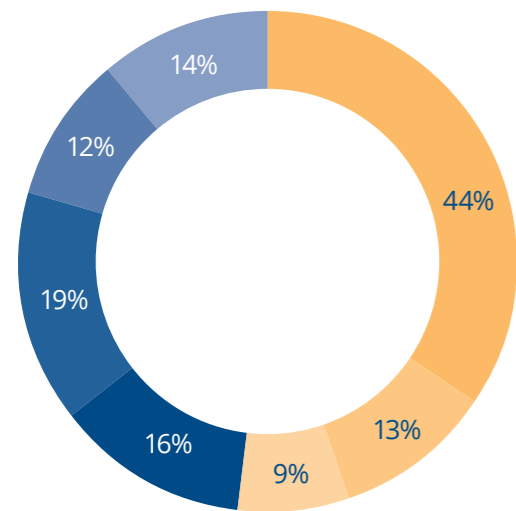
- In 2016/17, local Citizens Advice in England and Wales helped with over 68,000 fuel debt issues.
- Between April 2016 to March 2017 nearly 761,000 people looked at pages related to energy problems and how to save money on fuel bills on the Citizens Advice website [citizensadvice.org.uk](http://citizensadvice.org.uk). More than 29,000 of these looked at information on problems paying energy bills.
- Over half (52%) of the consumers who attend EBD sessions report that they had never previously switched supplier (except for when moving home).

In a 2017 survey of clients conducted by Citizens Advice, we found:

- 72% switch the heating off or turn it down to save money
- 52% heat and use fewer rooms than they would like, to save money
- 37% have to cut back on other necessities, like cooking, to afford energy use

# Who benefits?

Energy Best Deal group sessions are aimed at vulnerable consumers who are most at risk of fuel poverty and the frontline 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 are often held at venues working with groups such as elderly people, tenants, parents or people with health problems.

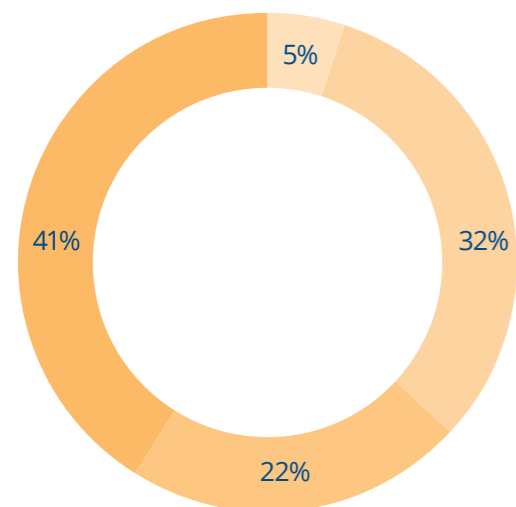


## The employment status of clients who attended group sessions\*

- 44% retired
- 13% working part time
- 9% working full time
- 16% unemployed
- 19% not working due to long-term health condition
- 12% not working due to disability
- 14% carers

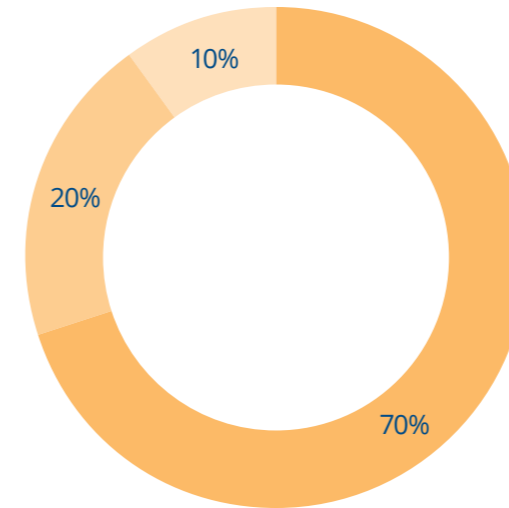
\*Consumers were able to give more than one response

78% of consumers had a household income of less than £18,000 a year and 49% were over 60.



## Consumers' reported ability to cope with fuel bills

- 5% Impossible to manage – I'm already in debt with my fuel bills.
- 32% A worry, but I'm able to manage
- 22% A financial strain – sometimes I have to switch the heating off or not pay my energy bill
- 41% Not a problem.



## Consumers' reported home warmth during winter

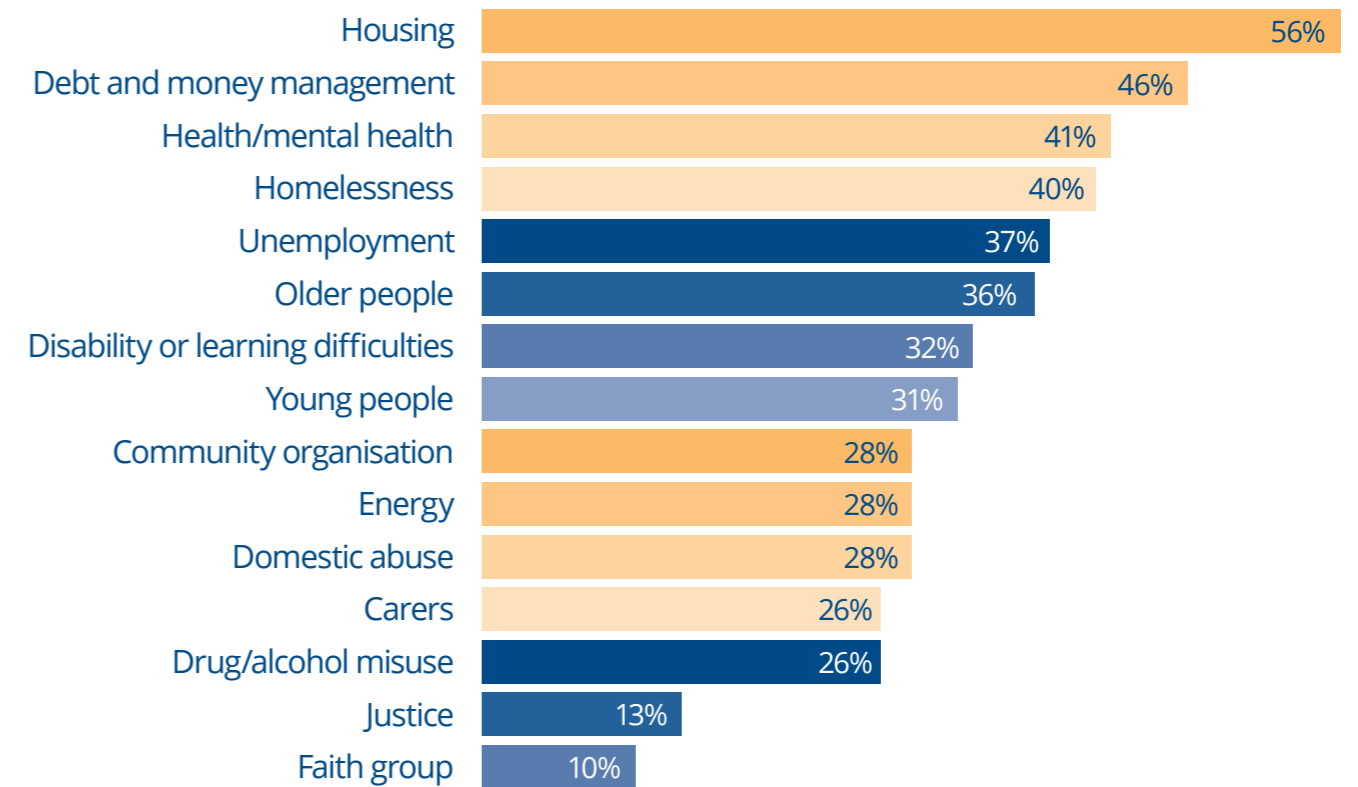
- 70% – Home is warm enough
- 20% – Too cold, switch down heating to save money
- 10% – Too cold, heating/insulation not good enough

**Nine out of ten frontline workers reported that they felt the sessions had helped them to provide more accurate or detailed help and advice to their clients.**

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?

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A total of 1,451 Energy Best Deal sessions were delivered directly to 10,789 consumers and 4,513 frontline workers across England and Wales.

To assess the impact of the Energy Best Deal campaign, Citizens Advice commissioned the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) to conduct an independent evaluation. This included analysing feedback obtained through feedback questionnaires completed by consumers and frontline workers at sessions and completing qualitative interviews at a later date. Interviews explored how the programme had helped consumers 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.

## Consumers

All consumers who attended a group session were asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the session. 4621 (43% of) consumers had completed a questionnaire. A sample of these were contacted for the follow-up calls. The projects successfully encouraged consumers to take action and help people to feel empowered to take action:

- 98% of consumers found the EBD session useful
- Over 80% of people said they were likely to take action as a result of the session
- 43% had looked for a better deal after the session
- 40% took action to save energy at home  
84% of people who found a better deal had switched to it
- Over 1 in 3 (38%) who had no experience of switching supplier had looked for a better deal

According to a 2017 Ofgem consumer engagement survey, six percent of all consumers were first-time supplier switchers (i.e. who had switched supplier for the first time in the past 12 months)

## Frontline workers

Of the 4,513 frontline workers who attended a session,

- 98% said they felt more informed about switching energy supplier and payment methods as a result of the EBD session
- 87% said that the session had changed their opinion on the importance of fuel poverty to their clients
- Four in five (81%) consumers said that they shared what they had learnt at the Energy Best Deal session with someone else
- Over 80% of consumers said that they were likely to take each action in each of the following areas: Look for a better deal on energy bills, apply for a grant to improve the energy efficiency of their home, apply for the warm home discount, do something to save energy at home, seek further advice or information and share what they've learnt with someone else

**Based on self-reported figures, on average, each frontline worker has since provided advice on energy-related topics to 16 clients since attending an EBD session**

CSE evaluation report

## Case study - energy saving around the house

Ms F attended an EBD session. She found the session very useful. She now goes round and turns off children's gadgets that they've left on to avoid wasting energy. She had previously attended a Money Management course run by Citizens Advice. However, she had not taken on more significant changes, such as switching tariffs or payment method. As a consequence, her savings are likely to be small, as she is currently using a prepayment meter. She stated her intention to apply in June for the Warm Home Discount and to ask to be placed on the PSR.

## Case study - switch to cheaper tariff and placed on supplier PSR

Mr J learned about switching at the EBD session. He has a long term health condition and has to undergo regular dialysis treatment. In follow-up to the session, he used a price comparison website himself and phoned other energy suppliers to find a better deal. He found that he could save the most money by switching tariffs with his existing supplier. He expects to pay £30 less per month with his new tariff. He found the session was helpful in making him more aware about how to save money on his energy bills. Upon learning about it at the session, he also asked his supplier to add him to their priority services register.

## Case study - ongoing support for consumer in debt and unable to switch

For some consumers, the EBD session has led to ongoing support to complex situations. After attending the session Mrs R called their supplier to check their tariff and found out that they were in debt by over £3,000. As a result of this they had turned their heating off completely as they couldn't afford it. They were feeling colder at home and started using a gas heater in the evenings to stay warm, which was costing her money. Also as a result of being in debt she was unable to switch suppliers. Having been to the group session at with her local Citizens Advice, she got in touch with them and sought help with her debts. She attended a number of appointments. The issue is still ongoing but she feels less stressed and worried about the situation overall because she knows she is being helped and where to go for help in the future.



# Energy Best Deal Extra

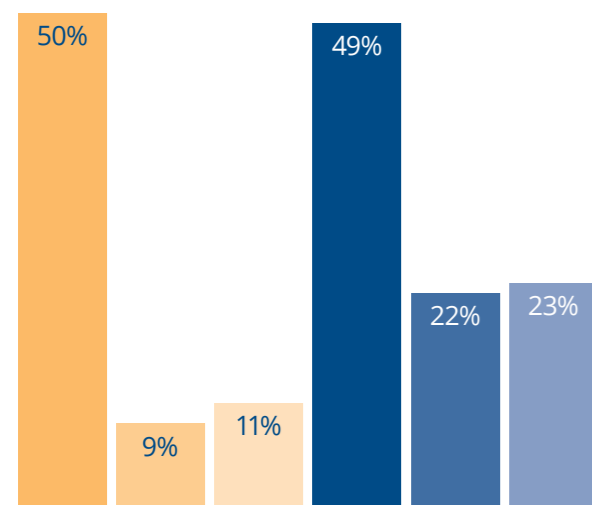
As a result of additional funding over the last five years, local Citizens Advice have been able to offer additional one-to-one support to consumers. Consumers who have attended an Energy Best Deal or other financial capability session, or who visit their local Citizens Advice and present with an energy related issue can access the service. These sessions allow for a more intensive and bespoke intervention.

During one to one appointments, energy advisers are able to support their clients with matters related to:

- Relief from fuel poverty
- Energy and thermal efficiency measures
- Advice such as identifying and claiming benefits, and dealing with debt

## Local Citizens Advice in England and Wales delivered advice to a total of 5,325 clients.

- 50% were on low incomes,
- 9% were disabled,
- 11% received a Personal Independence Payment,
- 49% were unemployed,
- 22% were of pensionable age,
- 23% had child dependants.



on a wide range of energy related issues Following EBDx energy advice to clients:

- 52% looked for a better deal. 82% who found a better deal switched to it
- 21% applied for WHD to help with their energy bills
- 13% switched payment method
- 22% applied for additional benefits or tax credits. The most common benefit applied for was Personal Independence Payment (PIP).
- 'No cost behavioural measures, such as turning off lights and appliances or changing temperature controls, are the most frequently reported types of actions taken – by 86% of EBDx clients.

**The EBDx programme should be continued. It is as an important added-value service which reaches particularly vulnerable consumers and provides them with a more personalised form of support, overcoming barriers to their engagement with the energy sector and relevant schemes.**

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## Case studies – the difference Citizens Advice sessions have made to people – some real life examples

### Case study – Income maximisation and improved health

Mr K lives in a flat which he rents privately. He's unable to work due to a disability. He uses a prepayment meter to pay for his energy. He sought energy advice for help with his overall financial situation and that his flat was draughty.

The advisor referred Mr K for funded draught proofing measures, which included having draught sealing strips around his windows. Mr. K was also supported to apply to his supplier for Warm Home Discount. This was awarded, saving £140 on his electric bill.

Mr K commented that the advisor was extremely helpful and he appreciated the benefit he had gained from the advice given. He feels generally warmer at home since these changes were made, and his bills have reduced so energy payments are now easier to afford. He also said that both his physical health and mental wellbeing have improved as a result of the advice given and the subsequent improvements made to his flat.

### Case study – Help to improve warmth of home

Mrs O has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). She has a prepayment meter and wanted help to find a cheaper tariff and possibly apply for a dual fuel tariff. However, she was put off doing so due to the need for a credit check and she was worried about her bad credit history.

The specialist adviser visited Mrs O at her home to discuss what help could be provided. The adviser helped her apply for free draught-proofing, thick curtains and warmer bedding. The advisor also helped get the heating in her housing association home fixed so that she now feels warmer than before, which helps with her condition.

Mrs O was really pleased with the support she received from her local Citizens Advice and said it was a 'brilliant service'.

### Case study – help switching and applying for additional benefits

Mrs L suffers with a respiratory condition and has had a recent stint in hospital due to heart failure. Her respiratory condition had been affected by having a cold home. The credit on her prepayment meter had run out while she was in hospital which resulted in her fridge turning off and food going to waste and then the fridge broke.

The Citizens Advice Advisor helped her to switch her meter from prepayment to a smart meter and moved tariff and to quarterly billing. As a result, her bills are lower and she feels less worried. She also received help to apply for a personal independent payment to maximise her income and has been awarded around £500 a month. The adviser at the local Citizens Advice also applied for a charity grant for a new fridge freezer which was successful.

Mrs L said that "the lady I saw was very, very helpful in a lot more ways than I expected her to be, in relation to the heating controls and the fridge freezer. I feel a lot safer with the new smart meter, more secure. If I go into hospital I feel a lot less worried because I know I don't have to worry about the fridge or anything in the flat turning off again with no one to top the meter up."

# Who delivers the sessions?

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Sessions are delivered across England and Wales by a network of agencies that are members of regional financial capability forums. The forums cover all counties of England and Wales and membership includes organisations with an interest in helping people to manage their money and improve their financial capability. Over half of the 157 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.

**ofgem**

Ofgem [ofgem.gov.uk/consumers](http://ofgem.gov.uk/consumers)



**Energy Best Deal** 2016/17 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.

## Further information

For more information about Energy Best Deal, including a range of resources, visit the Citizens Advice website [citizensadvice.org.uk/financialskillsforlife](http://citizensadvice.org.uk/financialskillsforlife) (click on What we do>Energy Best Deal). You can also contact the Energy projects team at Citizens Advice: [energybestdeal@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:energybestdeal@citizensadvice.org.uk)

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