



## **Unit 9**

### **Complaint Resolution & Consumer Organisations**

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## Document History

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### Reviewed by

This document (or component parts) has been reviewed by the following:

Name	Title & Company	Issue Date	Revision
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### Approvals

This document requires the following approvals:

Name	Title	Issue Date	Revision
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## Unit 9

### Complaint resolution and consumer organisations

#### Introduction

In this unit we will explore the different stages of a complaint. This will alert you to the importance of being aware of how far the complaint has progressed when advising the consumer so that you can guide them accordingly as to the next appropriate step and direct the complaint elsewhere when appropriate. Ultimately, once all other avenues have been exhausted, the consumer may have to consider taking action through the court system to resolve their complaint. This unit includes an overview of the Small Claims Procedure which is used in relatively low value civil cases.

We will also consider the organisations that work alongside Citizens Advice. These organisations have been referred to in previous units but here we will consider them specifically within the context of how they work together with Citizens Advice.

There will also be consideration of other organisations that you will need to become familiar with in your daily work. These are the other organisations to which you may direct consumers for appropriate sources of advice, information and assistance. Information about these organisations can also be found on Knowledge Base. Sometimes it will be appropriate for you to take full details of the consumer's complaint and then pass the details of the case on to another organisation so that they can act on the information that you have provided to them. This is known as a **referral** of the case. You may receive a number of enquiries where Citizens Advice is not the most appropriate organisation to deal with the enquiry. This may be because the issue is 'out of scope' (for example, a complaint from a consumer who has purchased faulty goods that are not connected to the postal or energy industries) or another organisation is better placed to provide further guidance. These enquiries are handled by taking details of the enquiry and then simply providing the consumer with contact information for the appropriate alternative organisation. This procedure is called a **signpost**.

The stages of C's journey addressed in this unit are as indicated below:



These issues will be discussed in the following categories:

Section 1: Resolving complaints

Section 2: Citizens Advice and key partner organisations

Section 3: Consumer organisations

## Section 1

### Resolving complaints

The consumer may be faced with a number of options in attempting to resolve a complaint. The first step should usually be to contact the business that they have the problem with and attempt to resolve the dispute in accordance with any complaints' procedure that they have. If the matter is not resolved at that stage it may be advisable for the consumer to consider alternative dispute resolution (ADR) schemes. These are means of resolving disputes outside of the court system. Some consumer organisations will offer dispute resolution schemes.

Within the energy industry, the Gas and Electricity (Consumer Complaint Handling Standards) Regulations 2008 provide that suppliers and licensed GT / DNO (providers) must have appropriate complaint procedures in place and that they have a duty to comply with those procedures when they receive complaints. Some of the requirements of these Regulations were discussed in unit 4 'Energy supply contracts'. Providers must also have procedures in place for dealing with referrals from Citizens Advice. In addition, the CCRs have some application in this area.

We will now consider the journey that may be experienced by a consumer when progressing a typical complaint in relation to a supplier / GT / DNO. In this section the following areas will be covered:

- Complaining to the company
- Company referrals
- Energy Ombudsman
- Court action

#### Complaining to the company

Generally when consumers contact Citizens Advice, advisors should advise the consumer to contact the company to raise their complaint and appropriate advice and guidance should be given to assist with this (note that this may not always be appropriate). The details of a supplier's complaints handling procedures are usually published in the form of a code of practice that deals with complaints. These procedures have to be published on suppliers' websites or otherwise made available when requested. The procedures for each company follow broadly the same structure although some differ in the detail. An example of a complaints handling procedure can be found at the end of unit 4.

In addition, the following are required as part of the pre-contract information under the CCRs. All five items are required, where applicable, for distance and off-premises contracts but only the first two are required for on-premises contracts. (The items relate to numbers 11, 13, 14, 20 and 5 - Pre Contract Information, at the end of unit 3)

- ✓ the complaint handling policy
- ✓ the existence and conditions of after-sale customer assistance, after-sales services and commercial guarantees
- ✓ the existence of relevant codes of conduct and how copies can be obtained
- ✓ any out-of-court complaint and redress mechanism and how to access it, for example, the Energy Ombudsman Service
- ✓ the address for complaints, if there is a specific one

#### **Practical tip**

When advising a consumer about how to complain to the company you need to access that company's specific complaints' procedure which can be found on Knowledge Base. This may include a preferred telephone number that can be used specifically by consumers who have contacted Citizens Advice for advice.

#### **(a) Stage one - raising the complaint**

The consumer needs to contact the company with their complaint. The procedures allow for the complaint to be made in person (either by telephone or in person) or in writing (letter or e-mail). The complaints at this stage are often (although not always) handled by an agent that deals with general enquiries and they will try, where possible, to resolve the complaint immediately. The CCRs state that if a trader provides a telephone helpline for post contract consumer queries, then the charge to the consumer must be at no more than the basic rate. If the trader charges a consumer any more than the basic rate then they must reimburse the difference. This only applies to telephone numbers operated by a business which are for consumers to seek help in relation to a concluded contract, for example, to discuss contractual problems or exercise cancellation rights.

#### **Practical tip**

It is always advisable for the consumer to confirm their complaint in writing, even if it is dealt with initially by telephone. The consumer should be advised to WRDKC / COP.

#### **(b) Stage 2 – escalation of the complaint to the complaints department**



If the problem is not resolved by the end of the first working day after it was received the provider must direct the complaint to their department that is dedicated to handling complaints.

### **(c) Stage 3 – internal review**

If the complaint is still not resolved it should be directed to a senior member of staff for review. There will be a dedicated person or team that deals with such complaints who may have various titles (for example, Head of Complaints, Customer Services Director, Senior Management Team). Some complaints actually provide the name of a dedicated person that the complaint should be directed to.

### **(d) Stage 4 – refer to the Energy Ombudsman**

If the consumer has received the final response letter from the business or if the complaint has not been resolved after eight weeks (12 weeks for the small suppliers) the consumer can contact the Energy Ombudsman. Suppliers have to inform the consumer about the Ombudsman and provide contact details. Alternatively, the Ombudsman may deal with the complaint when the complainant has encountered sustained difficulty in registering a complaint with a member. Further information on the Energy Ombudsman can be found in section 2 of this unit.

#### **Practical tips**

Consumers may contact Citizens Advice to complain about the level of customer service of a company because they are not happy with the way that their complaint has been handled by the supplier. The consumer may be unhappy with the behaviour of a member of staff in terms of their general attitude, a failure to take any action in relation to the complaint or a failure to honour any promises in terms of the action that they agreed to take.

The consumer may complain about the fact that they have been unable to contact the company despite numerous attempts because the phone queue has been too long.

### **Company referrals**

Companies have referral procedures that they have agreed with Citizens Advice if consumers contact us to complain. The consumer will generally be advised to complain to the supplier / GT / DNO in accordance with their complaints handling procedure if they have not already done so, but in some circumstances the complaint may be referred direct to them. Situations when it would be appropriate for the advisor to send a **company referral** include:



- ✓ the consumer has followed initial guidance given by Citizens Advice to contact the company and allowed the company a reasonable period of time to deal with the matter but the complaint remains unresolved
- ✓ the consumer has not received a reasonable resolution after attempting to progress the complaint through the complaints handling procedure

In appropriate circumstances a repeat referral may be sent if the complaint has not been resolved after the first referral.

### **Practical tip**

There are other circumstances in which a company referral might be sent. You will receive further training in relation to this matter and will be able to refer to the details included within the RAST protocols.

## **Energy Ombudsman**

Once the referral procedures within Citizens Advice have been exhausted, the consumer may direct their complaint to the Energy Ombudsman if it remains unresolved (see section 2 for further details).

You will now be able to see that when receiving complaints from consumers, it is important to consider what stage they have reached in dealing with their complaint as this will affect the advice and assistance that you will offer.

## **Court action**

If the consumer has exhausted the complaints handling procedure, Citizens Advice company referral mechanism and the Energy Ombudsman, but still remains unhappy then they may consider making a legal claim using the civil court system. It is likely that the claim would be issued using the Small Claims Procedure in the county court (**sheriff court**). This procedure is generally used for claims of a relatively low value (up to £10,000 or **£3,000 in Scotland**). There are a limited number of issues where Ofgem may be able to make a determination and this should be considered first (see section 2).

Taking someone to court, for example, to claim compensation, or being taken to court, for example, for non-payment, is likely to be very stressful and quite time consuming. Even though there are procedures in place to make small claims as quick, simple and cheap as possible, it is still not something to undertake lightly. When issuing a claim there are forms that need to be completed, procedures to follow and fees to pay at various stages. If a business fails to abide by a judgment (**decree**) ordered by the courts, there are enforcement procedures that can be used. Further information about this can be found on the following court websites: gov.uk (search for small claims), [www.scotcourts.gov.uk](http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk)





### **Practical tip**

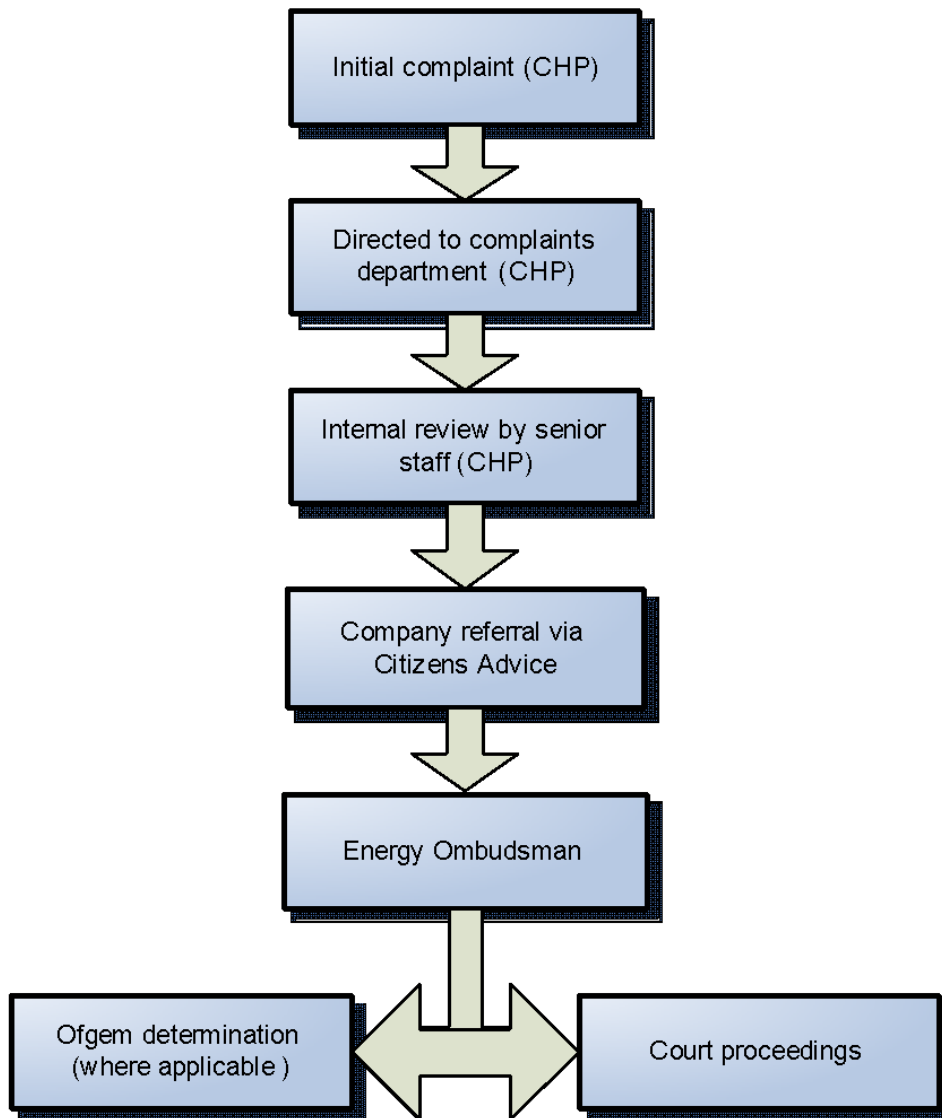
Care should be taken to ensure that consumers recognise that such action should be taken as a last resort as there is no guarantee that their client will be successful,

The claim form they will need to complete is Form N1, which can be found on the Court Service website Scotland

The summons form is Form 1 and can be found on the Scottish Court Service website

Consumers should be signpost to their local Citizens Advice for further details if necessary, or alternative they can speak to the court clerk.

## Typical consumer complaint s journey



CHP = in accordance with the complaint s handling procedure



## Summary

- Consumers experiencing problems with their supplier, GT or DNO should complain to the company directly. They are required to have a complaints handling procedure which must be made available to consumers and must comply with certain requirements. The consumer should make their complaint in accordance with the relevant procedure for that particular company and should always confirm their complaint in writing. Any telephone helplines provided for this purpose must not charge the consumer more than the basic rate or reimbursements of the difference must be made.
- If the complaint remains unresolved Citizens Advice may be able to send a company referral. In some cases, the consumer's complaint may be directed to the team even if the complaints procedure has not yet been fully exhausted (see office protocols for details).
- The complaint may be considered by the Energy Ombudsman if the consumer remains unsatisfied. The complaint must be about an issue that the Ombudsman can deal with and must have been made within the relevant timescales. The consumer can only use the Ombudsman service if they have received a 'deadlock letter' or the complaint remains unresolved after eight weeks (12 weeks for the smaller suppliers). In some circumstances the Ombudsman will deal with the complaint where the complainant has encountered sustained difficulty in registering a complaint with a member.
- The consumer may have to think about court action if all else has failed. This should be considered carefully and should only be used as a last resort. Consumers should be signposted to their local bureaux for further advice in accordance with RAST protocols.

## Section 2

### Citizen's Advice and key partner organisations

- Citizens Advice is a charitable organisation funded by local and central government.
- Citizens Advice is a charitable organisation and from April 2012 they now operate the Consumer Advice consumer service delivered in partnership with TSS.
- OFGEM is the regulator for the gas and electricity industry.
- The Energy Ombudsman provides an independent dispute resolution scheme the for gas and electricity consumers.
- Consumer Focus was a public body which is part of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and one of their core functions is to secure a fair deal for energy consumers. They are now part of Citizens Advice.
- Local authority TSS have responsibility for the enforcement of laws to ensure a fair trading environment generally, which include the energy sector.

Each of these organisations will be discussed in further detail below in the following order:

Competition & Markets Authority (previously OFT)

Trading Standards Services

Consumer Focus (now part of Citizens Advice)

The Extra Help Unit

Energy Ombudsman

Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem)

Let's now consider how these organisations work with Citizens Advice in further detail.

## Competition & Markets Authority (CMA)

The CMA took over many of the functions of the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) in 2014. It aims to ensure that consumers have as much choice as possible within the marketplace as choice gives consumers power. As a result most people see its work in terms of advising on whether large-scale mergers should be permitted and whether certain practices are in the interests of a truly competitive market. However, there is a broader role, in conjunction with other agencies, to help consumers understand their rights and protect consumer interests throughout the UK as well as ensuring that businesses are fair and competitive.

## Trading Standards Services (TSS)

The role of TSS as local authority regulators is to enforce laws that protect consumers and ensure a fair and safe trading environment as was explained in Unit 1 (Sections 1 and 2). You were informed that TSS also have access to the Citizens Advice database and they use this information to carry out part of their role. It was also explained that some of the cases that you receive will need to be referred to TSS. Here, we will focus on the types of cases that need to be referred to TSS for further consideration. Any cases must be referred in accordance with your office protocols.

### Practical tip

When referring a case to TSS in accordance with RAST protocols, it is important that you explain to the consumer that you are referring the matter to TSS for their consideration. Do not state that TSS will be taking action or investigating further.

The issues that will need to be referred to TSS may fall within the following categories:

- ✓ selling off-premises and doorstep crime
- ✓ safety
- ✓ unfair practices

### (a) Selling off-premises and doorstep crime

Consumers who buy goods and services on their doorstep or in other circumstances considered to be away from business premises, may be protected by the CCRs which provide a right to cancel (see unit 3 'Marketing energy' and unit 4 'Energy supply contracts' for further details). The business is required to provide the consumer with specific information about their right to cancel. If this information is not provided then the case should be handled in accordance with RAST protocols.

Doorstep crime is where householders are persuaded to allow people to enter their property who then steal from them or trick the householder into giving them money. These complaints should be handled in accordance with RAST protocols.

## **(b) Safety**

TSS enforce legislation which protects consumers against unsafe goods. Therefore if it appears that a consumer has goods which appear to be unsafe such matters should be handled in accordance with RAST protocols.

Examples of unsafe goods:

- ✓ appliances that explode or set on fire
- ✓ products that cause injury to a person or their property as a result of a fault or the design of the item
- ✓ appliances that leak gas due to faults / poor design
- ✓ appliances that cause electric shocks resulting from faults/poor design.

Note that TSS do not deal with unsafe services, for example, work carried out by an electrician or gas engineer. These cases should be handled in accordance with protocols for further action and advice. TSS also enforce legislation that deals with unsafe appliances in rented accommodation and complaints that gas safety checks have not been carried out in this type of accommodation.

## **(c) Unfair practices**

The CPR provide protection against businesses who engage in unfair activities that are likely to affect consumers' decisions or actions and this was discussed in unit 3 'Marketing energy'. TSS enforces this piece of law and therefore cases that involve unfair practices should be handled in accordance with protocols for further action and advice. Remember that this includes:

- ✓ providing misleading information  
(for example, a supplier tells a consumer that they will save £200 a year on their gas bill if they switch from their current supplier but this information is incorrect)
- ✓ failure to provide important information  
(for example, not informing consumers about their right to cancel an agreement)
- ✓ aggressive behaviour  
(for example, constantly phoning and visiting the a potential customer in the hope of pressurising them into switching supplier)



- ✓ contravention of the requirements of professional diligence (activities that do not fall into the above categories but may still be against honest market practices or the general principles of good faith)

## **Consumer Focus (now part of Citizens Advice)**

Consumer Focus was the statutory organisation campaigning for a fair deal for consumers in England, Wales, Scotland, and, for postal services, Northern Ireland. This responsibility has now been passed to Citizens Advice. Consumer Focus was created through the merger of three consumer organisations – energywatch, Postwatch and the National Consumer Council (including the Welsh and Scottish Consumer Councils).

The organisation is the voice of the consumer, and works to secure a fair deal on their behalf. Citizens Advice provides advice and information on consumer matters and makes proposals about these matters to the government and the European Commission (amongst others). Citizens Advice provides general advice and information on energy issues via its website and also carries out research into consumer matters and seeks consumers' views.

Citizens Advice has a duty to investigate complaints that include issues regarding disconnections, refusals to reconnect and the failure of PPM. There is also the power to investigate complaints made by or on behalf of a vulnerable consumer defined as 'somebody who it is not reasonable to expect to pursue a complaint on their own behalf'. In these situations advice may be provided to consumers or representations made on their behalf where appropriate. This work is carried out by the EHU, the roles and functions of which are explained in more detail below.

## The Extra Help Unit

The EHU works with vulnerable consumers and those facing disconnection to help them resolve their disputes in energy matters. Its advisors often contact the supplier / GT / DNO to make representations on the consumer's behalf in order to attempt to resolve the complaint. Advice may also be provided to those consumers requiring information in relation to grants and cheaper tariffs and cases can be directed to other organisations for advice in relation to debt and energy efficiency.

Cases may be referred to the EHU by Ofgem, the Energy Ombudsman and MPs. Citizens Advice also regularly refers cases to the EHU and therefore it is important that you are familiar with what it does and in what circumstances cases are referred to it. Cases should be referred in the following circumstances:

- ✓ the consumer has been **disconnected**, or
- ✓ the consumer has been **threatened with disconnection** (where there is a real and imminent likelihood of being disconnected), or
- ✓ has experienced a **failure in a PPM** or
- ✓ the case involves a '**vulnerable**' person

The majority of cases that are dealt with by the EHU are concerned with debt and disconnections. The circumstances where the EHU will deal with cases in relation to such matters were discussed in detail in unit 8 'Debt and disconnection'.

### Practical tips

These materials provide a general outline as to when cases should be referred to the EHU so that you can see how Citizens Advice and the EHU work together. **Cases must be referred in accordance with RAST protocols.**

## Energy Ombudsman

An ombudsman is a service that enables independent and impartial means of resolving disputes outside of the court system where the parties cannot resolve the issues themselves. In unit 4 'Energy supply contracts' it was explained that licensed suppliers, GT and DNO are required to be a member of a qualifying redress scheme and that currently, the Energy Ombudsman is the only scheme for the energy industry. The function of the Ombudsman is to handle unresolved complaints that have been made to energy suppliers and GT/ DNO who are members and where appropriate, provide redress and remedies. A list of their members is available on their website. The Ombudsman service is administered by The Ombudsman Service Ltd, which





is a not-for profit private limited company that is funded by its members. The service is free to the consumers but members must pay a fee every time a case is dealt with (whether formally or informally).

It will deal with disputes between members and their consumers in relation to specific services. The services covered include:

- ✓ metering and billing
- ✓ transfers
- ✓ sales of products and services
- ✓ the provision of regulated products and services by licensed GT / DNO (this covers issues associated with the utility cable/pipe going into the property and how this is provided and would include complaints regarding: damaged cables, reinstatement work; and the provision of supply/non-supply)

The Energy Ombudsman may refuse to accept a complaint, if they think that the complainant has no reasonable prospect of success, recovery or redress.

The procedure is that the consumer must first raise their complaint with the member direct. They should follow the procedure set out in their code of practice and allow the supplier time to resolve the dispute. The Ombudsman can only deal with the complaint if the consumer has reported the matter to the supplier within twelve months of being aware of the problem. The Ombudsman will then consider complaints if:

- ✓ the consumer receives a letter from the member saying that it is unable or unwilling to resolve the matter (a deadlock letter) and the complaint is made to the ombudsman within six months of the issue of the letter
- ✓ after eight weeks (12 weeks for the smaller suppliers) if they have not resolved the problem to the consumer's satisfaction and the complaint is made to the Ombudsman Service within nine months of first reporting the issue to the member
- ✓ the consumer has encountered sustained difficulty in registering a complaint with a member

Issues that occurred before 1 July 2006 cannot be dealt with and the Ombudsman will generally try to settle the complaint informally but if this is not possible or appropriate, then a formal investigation will be conducted. The decision will be made in accordance with what is fair and reasonable in all of the circumstances having regard to principles of law, good practice, equitable conduct and good administration. Therefore, the legal position is not necessarily the deciding factor in a dispute. The decision is binding on the member if accepted by the customer but the consumer can choose not to accept the decision and may pursue the matter through the courts.

The Ombudsman may make an award of up to £10,000 in appropriate cases (based on proven costs incurred and in some cases a token goodwill payment). Alternatively, an explanation or an apology from a supplier can be ordered, or some practical steps that will provide benefit to the consumer. The Ombudsman may suggest that the consumer pursues the matter through the court system if they are seeking an award beyond £5,000.

### **Practical tip**

If a consumer has a complaint against a supplier or licensed GT / DNO that has not been resolved after complaining directly to them you should consider signposting them to the EO. When considering this you need to ask yourself:

1. Is the complaint something that falls within the remit of the Ombudsman?
2. Has the consumer fully escalated their complaint in accordance with the complaint handling procedure and received a deadlock letter or has the complaint not been resolved to their satisfaction within eight weeks (12 weeks for the smaller suppliers)? Remember that in some cases the Ombudsman will deal with the complaint where the consumer has experienced sustained difficulty in registering a complaint.
3. Will the complaint fall within the relevant time limits for cases that can be dealt with by the Ombudsman?

The complaint should only be directed to the Ombudsman if you can answer yes to all of these questions.

The Energy Ombudsman does not provide advice and if a consumer requires advice on a matter that is not within the expertise of Citizens Advice they should be directed to another appropriate organisation.

## Ofgem

The role, functions and powers of Ofgem as the regulator of the energy industry were explained in detail in unit 1 'Understanding the energy industry'. Remember that its main functions involve looking after the interests of consumers, promoting competition and securing energy supplies for the future. Ofgem does not generally handle queries and complaints for energy consumers in relation to problems that they are experiencing. Many consumers who contact them are signposted to other appropriate organisations such as Citizens Advice or the EHU. Ofgem may handle more general queries from consumers on matters of policy (for example, how pricing is regulated and plans for securing energy supplies).

There are a number of specific issues where Ofgem has the power to make decisions in relation to disputes between GT / DNO and their customers. These are referred to as 'determinations'. The power to do this is contained in a number of sources including the GA, the EA, the different Standards of Performance Regulations (guaranteed standards) and the SLC. The main areas where Ofgem can make a determination are listed below:

- ✓ the reasonableness of charges in relation to connections and alterations
- ✓ disputes regarding connection and alteration designs / technical schemes
- ✓ disputes over the terms of a connection agreement
- ✓ disputes regarding the correct application of a charging methodology
- ✓ disputes concerning payments under the guaranteed standards

Ofgem, will only deal with such issues where the consumer has first exhausted the supplier's complaints handling procedure and used the Energy Ombudsman but the matter remains unresolved. Disputes regarding connections and alterations must be brought within 12 months of the connection or alteration. A determination is treated as though it were decision made by the county court and is therefore binding on both parties who do not then have the option of pursuing the matter through the court system.



## Summary

- Citizens Advice works closely with a number of other organisations and it is important that advisors know about them and in what circumstances it may be appropriate to direct consumers to them or otherwise interact with them.
- Citizens Advice is a charitable organisation funded by local and central government who operates the Citizens Advice consumer service. They have a role in helping consumers to understand their rights and to protect the interests of the consumer. Data is used by Ofgem to guide them of its functions.
- The CMA aims to ensure that consumers have as much choice as possible within the marketplace as choice gives consumers power. As a result most people see its work in terms of advising on whether large-scale mergers should be permitted and whether certain practices are in the interests of a truly competitive market.
- TSS are responsible for ensuring a fair and safe trading environment within their particular locality. Cases should be referred to TSS in accordance with office protocols if the consumer complains about doorstep crime, unfair practices, unsafe goods or gas safety checks / unsafe appliances in furnished rented accommodation.
- Citizens Advice is the voice of the consumer campaigning for a fair deal. It provides online advice and operates its own knowledge base and 'Ask the Advisor' service. There is a duty to consider complaints regarding disconnections, refusals to reconnect and failures of PPMs in certain circumstances. There is also the power to investigate complaints made by or on behalf of vulnerable consumers. These types of complaints that are received by CA should be referred to the EHU in accordance with office referral protocols.
- The Energy Ombudsman provides a complaint resolution service for consumers who have complaints about their members. The consumer must have escalated the complaint through the company's complaint handling procedure and received a deadlock letter, or the complaint must remain unresolved after eight weeks (or 12 weeks for the smaller suppliers). There is the power to require the member to take appropriate action to resolve the dispute. If the consumer does not wish to accept the decision they can pursue the matter through the court system, or via an Ofgem determination where appropriate.
- Ofgem is the regulator of the industry. It does not generally handle consumer complaints but does have the power to make decisions in certain disputes (the decision is referred to as a 'determination'). This power only exists in relation to very specific complaint types including: connections and alterations, charging methodology and payments under Guaranteed Standards.

## Section 3

### Consumer organisations

Let's now consider some of the organisations that you might consider using to refer or signpost cases. It should be emphasised that this section does not cover detailed information about the bodies and organisations discussed. Web details are given in order that further information can be obtained where necessary. This is particularly important when a consumer wishes to pursue a complaint or to seek redress, as time limits and other criteria may apply. Some of the organisations discussed in section 2 are also listed here as a reminder.

These notes do not provide an exhaustive list and should only be considered as a good starting point. You may need to locate other organisations that are not noted in this section in relation to enquiries that are 'out of scope'. Details of these other organisations can be found on Adviceguide.

The organisations are considered below in alphabetical order by the following subjects:

Advice  
Contestable work  
Data protection  
Debt  
Disabilities  
Disconnection  
Dispute resolution  
Doorstep crime  
Energy efficiency advice  
Gas and electric installations  
Government  
Grants and schemes  
Marketing  
Oil  
Outlets for charging PPM devices  
Renewable energy  
Safety  
Trade associations  
Vulnerable consumers

There are a number of organisations which have different contact details for Scotland and even some which are completely specific to Scotland. In these notes the Scottish variations are highlighted in grey as one of the following:

- a separate box for the most commonly used organisations
- separate contact details in the main notes

## Advice

### Age UK

**Tel: 0800 1696565**

**Website: [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)**

Age UK is the country's largest charity dedicated to helping everyone make the most of later life. Services and support are provided in issues such as money, health and care wellbeing and to enable and support older people.

### Age Cymru

**Tel: 08000 223444**

**Website: [www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/)**

Age Cymru works to improve the lives of older people and challenge against prejudice in society.

### Age Scotland

**Contact Details:**

**Tel: 0333 3232400 –if you want to volunteer or for Information and Advice for older people**

**Silverline Scotland 0800 4 70 80 90**

**Website: [www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland)**

Age Scotland is the largest charity in Scotland dedicated to enabling everyone to make the most out of later life.

## Local Citizens Advice (LCA)

**[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) (general information and to find LCA office)**

Citizens Advice is a charitable organisation that offers free advice and assistance. This is a national organisation but individuals access services locally through LCAs and most advisors are unpaid volunteers.

There is a number of offices throughout the UK. LCAs provide confidential advice and assistance on almost any subject matter, the main areas being benefits, debt, employment, housing, legal relationships, legal and tax. LCAs play an important role in influencing social policy and offer free advice face-to-face, over the telephone and via e-mail. It may be appropriate to signpost people to a LCA if they require advice or assistance with any matter that is outside the scope of the Citizens Advice consumer service. (for example



complaints about gas and electricity installations in rented properties). Details can be found on [citizensadvice.org.uk](http://citizensadvice.org.uk).

#### **Citizens Advice Scotland**

[www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk)

CAB Scotland provides advice and information to people in need in over 200 locations throughout Scotland.

#### **Citizens Advice Direct**

[www.citizensadvisedirect.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvisedirect.org.uk)

Offers telephone and email advice to anyone who contacts them on any matter.

#### **Legal Services Agency (Scotland)(LSA)**

[www.lsa.org.uk](http://www.lsa.org.uk)

The LSA is Scotland's national law centre. Generally, LSA aims to assist those in disadvantage (any form of disadvantage) who suffer injustice. LSA particularly concentrates on housing and social welfare law, but also deals with a number of other areas including mental health and social work. It is a key source of legal research, advice and representation for those who are disadvantaged and initial advice is free. Scottish consumers who are at a disadvantage may be directed to this service.

#### **Citizens Advice consumer service**

[citizensadvice.org.uk](http://citizensadvice.org.uk)

Citizens Advice consumer service is a telephone and online advice service for general consumer issues offering clear, practical and impartial advice on consumer issues. Both the advice and call provided is free of charge. Citizens Advice consumer service provide an initial advice service, giving consumers information about their rights and what practical steps the consumer can take to pursue the complaint themselves. Citizens Advice consumer service cannot complain on behalf of consumers. The organisation works in partnership with TSS and other partners. If you receive a complaint from a person who has a complaint that is outside of the scope of issues that you can deal with, for example because it does not relate to energy issues, then it may be appropriate to direct that complaint to elsewhere within Citizens Advice in accordance with RAST protocols. The service operates in England, Scotland and Wales. A Welsh speaking service is available to consumers. Consumers in Northern Ireland should contact Consumerline (Tel (08456) 006262, website: [www.consumerline.org](http://www.consumerline.org)).

## Contestable work

### Lloyds Register

[www.lloydsregister.co.uk](http://www.lloydsregister.co.uk)

This organisation operates both the Gas Industry Registration Scheme on behalf of Gas Transporters and the National Electricity Registration scheme on behalf of Distribution Network Operators. They carry out the accreditation for service providers (UIPs) to enable them to carry out contestable works. Consumers who want to source a registered provider for contestable works should be signposted to this organisation. Consumers can find a list of providers on the website.

## Data protection

### Information Commissioner's Office (The) (ICO)

[www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)

The ICO has responsibility for the enforcement and supervision of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The aim therefore, is to ensure that the public has proper access to official information and that personal information is also protected. Consumers who complain about the misuse of their personal information should be signposted to this organisation.

### Scottish Information Commissioner's Office

Website: [www.itspublicknowledge.info](http://www.itspublicknowledge.info)

E-mail: [enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info](mailto:enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info)

The Scottish Information Commissioner has responsibility for the enforcement and supervision of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. The aim therefore, is to ensure that the public has proper access to official information and that personal information is also protected. Consumers who complain about the misuse of their personal information should be signposted to this organisation.

## Debt

### Citizens Advice

Tel: Adviceline England: 0300 330 1313 & Wales 03444 77 20 20

Website: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money)

Citizens Advice offers support and assistance to clients with debt and money issues including how to sort out your debts, how to dispute a credit debt, tips on budgeting, options for getting out of debt, dealing with urgent debt etc.





### **National Debtline**

**Tel: (0808) 808 4000 (Freephone)**

**Website: [www.nationaldebtline.org](http://www.nationaldebtline.org)**

This is an independent service which is part of the Money Advice Trust. The service is provided free of charge and in confidence. It aims to assist those who are in debt by offering expert advice and by providing self-help to deal with debts.

### **Money Advice Service (The)**

**Tel: 0300 500 5000**

**Website: [www.moneyadvice.org.uk/en](http://www.moneyadvice.org.uk/en)**

Free impartial money advice, set up by government to help clients to improve their finances. There are support tools and calculators provided to keep clients on track and plan ahead and support is offered to clients in person over the phone and online.

### **Money Advice Scotland**

**Tel: (0141) 572 0237 (Freephone)**

**Website: [www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk](http://www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk)**

Money Advice Scotland is primarily a support agency for those organisations and individuals who provide a free, independent, confidential and impartial money advice service to the general public. It does not provide an advice service to the general public itself but can direct people to their nearest free advice agency.

### **StepChange**

**Tel: (0800) 138 1111**

**Website: [www.stepchange.org](http://www.stepchange.org)**

This is a charitable organisation which offers debt/budgeting advice and a specialist credit counselling service. The organisation works to a code of ethics and helps debtors to negotiate future payments with creditors (previously called the Consumer Credit Counselling Service). Advice is given on a wide range of matters including: debt management plan and bankruptcy advice to equity release and mortgages.



## Disabilities

### Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

The EHRC aims to diminish inequality and discrimination and to safeguard human rights. It is the sole public body that deals with such issues, replacing the previous system where three separate organisations were used (Disability Rights Commission, Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission). People who would like further information and advice about disability rights, or those who feel that they have been denied such rights, can be signposted to the Commission.

## Disconnection

### Extra Help Unit (EHU)

**Consumers who have been disconnected or face the immediate threat of disconnection should be referred to the EHU.** Customers experiencing the failure of a PPM should also be directed to the EHU in certain circumstances. See RAST protocols for further details.

## Dispute resolution

### Energy Ombudsman

<https://www.ombudsman-services.org/energy.html>

The Energy Ombudsman can help to resolve disputes in the energy industry between consumers and their members (GT / DNO / Suppliers). The Ombudsman can deal with disputes related to billing, transfers, service and sales (see section 2 for further details). Remember that the general procedure is that the consumer must first raise their complaint with the member direct, follow their complaints handling procedure and allow the supplier time to resolve the dispute. If not resolved the case will generally go through the Citizens Advice company referral procedure. If, after eight weeks (12 weeks for smaller suppliers) the consumer is still not happy with the progress of the complaint, or if they have received a 'deadlock letter' from the supplier, you can signpost them to the Energy Ombudsman. In some circumstances the Ombudsman may be willing to take on the case where the consumer has experienced substantial difficulty in attempting to register a complaint.

### Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (The) (OFGEM)

[www.ofgem.gov.uk](http://www.ofgem.gov.uk)

Ofgem is the regulator for the gas and electricity markets and it is funded by the licensed energy companies. It protects consumers by: promoting competition, regulating monopolies, ensuring sufficient investment to secure energy supplies, considering the needs of vulnerable consumers, etc. Ofgem also works closely with



Citizens Advice. Remember that Ofgem has the power to determine disputes in very limited circumstances in relation to disputes involving connections and alterations and payments under the guaranteed standards (see section 2 for further detail). If the consumer has exhausted the complaints procedure with the Energy Ombudsman and remains unhappy with the outcome, they could be signposted to Ofgem for a determination if their dispute is within scope. They could also be signposted here if they want to discuss overall industry issues / policies such as pricing or sustainable energy.

## **Doorstep crime**

### **Trading Standards Services (TSS)**

#### **Contact details as per RAST protocols**

When you receive calls relating to doorstep crime where a householder is tricked into parting with their money or into signing a document which misleads as to its purpose or into letting a rogue into their property who is, or claims to be, an agent for the energy industry and then steals from them. These cases should be handled in accordance with protocols for further action and advice.

## **Energy efficiency**

### **Energy Savings Trust (EST)**

[www.energysavingtrust.org.uk](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk)

The EST provides free and impartial advice on saving money through energy efficiency, average consumption, fighting climate change and reducing carbon monoxide emissions from the home. The trust is a national organisation with local advice centres which can also provide details of grants for energy efficiency measures such as cavity walls, loft insulation and installing renewable energy sources. People who want to reduce their energy bills or who want other information in relation to energy efficiency could be directed to the trust. Consumers wanting to access information about feed-in tariffs should also be directed to this organisation.

### **Energy Suppliers**

All energy suppliers are obliged to offer energy efficiency advice. Suppliers offer advice online and also have energy efficiency information lines. Consumers may be advised to contact their own supplier for energy efficiency advice. The consumer can find their contact details on their bill or online. Alternatively, you may be able to access the number via the Adviceguide.

### **National Energy Action (NEA)**

[www.nea.org.uk](http://www.nea.org.uk)

#### **Energy Action Scotland**



[www.eas.org.uk](http://www.eas.org.uk)

The function of this organisation is to develop and promote energy efficiency services and to campaign for warmer homes. NEA aims to reduce fuel poverty by tackling heating and insulation problems of low income households. They carry out research into fuel poverty and contribute to the development of policy and practice in relation to fuel poverty and energy efficiency. Their website contains practical tips for saving energy and reducing bills. They also have details of grants and schemes available. Consumers who want guidance on energy efficiency or information about grants and schemes could be signposted to this organisation.

### **Warm Zones**

[www.warmzones.co.uk](http://www.warmzones.co.uk)

This is a fuel poverty charity that works with local authorities and gives help to fuel poor households by connecting them with local and national schemes that assist with energy efficient installations (for example, free cavity and loft insulation) and crisis funding in relation to heating and insulation. It also provides advice on entitlement to benefits. Energy efficiency advice is available to everybody, not just fuel poor households. The scheme only operates in specific areas. Consumers can find out if their household is located in a Warm Zone area and contact details for their local Warm Zone on the website or by e-mailing the organisation ([enquiries@warmzones.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@warmzones.co.uk))

### **Gas and electric installations**

#### **Electrical Contractor's Association**

[www.eca.co.uk](http://www.eca.co.uk)

This is a trade association which encourages and assists its members to provide services which are safe and of good quality / value. All members can self-certify that their work is compliant with Part P of the Building Regulations. If a consumer complains about work done by a member the case should be handled in accordance with RAST protocols.

#### **Gas Safe Register**

[www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)

Gas Safe Register aims to protect the public from unsafe gas installations. By law, anyone installing or repairing gas fittings or appliances must be registered with Gas Safe Register. The organisation investigates complaints about unsafe installations that have been carried out by registered and non-registered traders. Those consumers requesting pre-shopping advice in connection with gas installations could be signposted here or those wanting to complain about a potentially unsafe installation. Consumers could also be directed here if they are seeking repairs on condemned appliances. These types of cases should be handled in accordance with RAST protocols..



## Government

### Directgov

[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

This is a government website which provides a single point of access for government information and services. There are web pages providing advice and information on reducing energy in the home and energy efficiency grants available from the government, local authorities and suppliers. The site also provides advice on benefits available. Some benefits are administered by the DWP and must generally be claimed via the consumer's local Jobcentre Plus (for example, crisis loans) or their local Pension Centre (for example, cold weather payments) and the Directgov website provides contact details for local centres. You may use the website to find the details for the consumer's local Jobcentre Plus or local Pension Centre if they do not have internet access.

### Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

[www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

The HSE shares responsibility for enforcing the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 along with local authorities. The Executive has an enforcement role in relation to the duties that are placed on landlords (such as annual safety checks and maintenance of gas equipment) and the Gas Safe Register (in monitoring competence of engineers and investigating complaints). The HSE plays a role in preventing injury to consumers and the public from carbon monoxide poisoning or fire and explosions. The website contains information and advice on managing gas appliances and equipment safely, what to do in an emergency and how to avoid damaging gas equipment (pipes and mains) when consumers have to dig their land. They also deal with electrical safety at work issues, by way of enforcement. Consumers who want advice and information on gas safety issues may be directed to the HSE.

## Grants and schemes

Some suppliers operate trust funds or other schemes to help consumers pay their bills. Some may offer insulation schemes but these are separate programmes and they do not all operate both. Details of supplier trust schemes are noted below.

### British Energy Trust (incorporating the Scottish Gas Energy Trust)

[www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk](http://www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk) and [www.scottishgasenergytrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishgasenergytrust.org.uk)

E-mail: [bdget@charisgrants.com](mailto:bdget@charisgrants.com)

The British Gas Energy Trust is a registered charity which includes the Scottish Energy Trust. The Trust offers grants to assist those who are in arrears with their energy and other household bills and costs.



Applicants for assistance with energy bills must be domestic consumers of British or Scottish Gas. In some cases, those who live in homes which are supplied by these companies may alternatively be eligible for help with other household bills, even if they are not the account holder. The grants are administered by Charis who are a grant management company. Occupants of households which are supplied by British or Scottish Gas who are in arrears with their gas, electricity or other household bills should be directed to the trust.

### **EDF Energy Trust**

[www.edfenergytrust.org.uk](http://www.edfenergytrust.org.uk)

The EDF Energy Trust is a registered charity. The trust offers grants and advice on energy efficiency and money advice. Applicants for assistance with energy bills must be domestic consumers of the EDF energy brand (this including previous brands such as London Energy, Seeboard Energy and SWEB Energy which are now merged with the EDF Energy brand). In some cases, those who live in homes which are supplied by these companies may alternatively be eligible for help with other household bills, even if they are not the account holder. The grants are administered by Charis who are a grant management company. Occupants of households which are supplied by the EDF Energy brand who are in arrears with their gas, electricity or other household bills should be directed to the trust.

### **Eon Caring Energy**

[www.eonenergy.com](http://www.eonenergy.com)

Consumers who have low incomes may be able to claim financial assistance with repairing or installing heating systems using this in-house service. They may be eligible to get assistance to cover the cost of household appliances. The service also offers: free and discounted energy efficiency measures, energy efficiency advice, benefit entitlement checks, advice on payment methods and tariffs and referrals to other grant schemes.

### **Npower First Step**

[www.npower.com](http://www.npower.com)

This is an in-house scheme for vulnerable consumers who are struggling to pay their energy bills. Consumers can receive assistance on how to manage their energy bills but may also be able to claim for help from the First Step fund which may clear all or part of their debt. They also offer benefit entitlement checks and energy efficiency advice. Npower consumers who are experiencing difficulty in paying their energy bills should be directed to this service.

### **Scottish Power Energy Peoples Trust Funds**

[www.energypeopletrust.com](http://www.energypeopletrust.com)

This is an independent charity set up to help people in fuel poverty. It invites organisations such as charities, local authorities, local community groups and support organisations (non-for-profit bodies) to apply for funds to help people in fuel poverty. The funding is used to support schemes that may include crisis funding, income maximisation, energy efficiency measures and research. If a relevant organisation contacts Citizens



Advice seeking funding they could be directed to the trust fund but it will not be relevant for individual consumers who are facing difficulties.

## Marketing

### The Advertising Standards Authority

[www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk)

This authority enforces standards set for non-broadcast adverts such as those found in newspapers, videos, cinema commercials, commercial e-mails, SMS text messaging, pop up and banner adverts on the internet. The ASA also has responsibility for standards set for TV and radio advertising. There are various sanctions that can be used for those found to be in breach of the codes of practice. CA advisors may signpost consumers to the ASA where, for example, the consumer alleges that adverts are misleading, offensive or inappropriate. Such issues should also be considered in accordance with office protocols for further action and advice.

### Telephone Preference Service (TPS)

[www.tpsonline.org.uk](http://www.tpsonline.org.uk)

It is illegal for companies to carry out direct marketing calls to people who have indicated that they do not wish to receive them. Consumers can register with the TPS to ensure that their details are not available to businesses which may otherwise call. This can be done via the TPS website, by telephone or by fax. The registration process takes up to 28 days to implement. It may be appropriate to signpost consumers to this organisation if they complain about unwanted sales calls.

### Trading Standards Services (TSS)

#### Contact details as per RAST protocols

Many suppliers use door-to-door salespeople in order to sell their products and services. If the sellers do not comply with the law relating to these off-premises sales (the ICAC Regulations), for example, by failing to supply information about the right to cancel, then the case should be referred to the relevant TSS in accordance with RAST protocols.

## Oil

### Oil Firing Technical Association (Oftec)

[www.oftec.org](http://www.oftec.org)

Oftec represents the oil heating and cooking industry in the UK and Republic of Ireland. It provides help and advice to consumers as well as technical information to professionals. Consumers can conduct an online search to source a registered technician. There are also a series of frequently asked questions that are informative to consumers on issues such as boilers, storage tanks, etc.

## Outlets for charging PPMs and paying bills

### PayZone

[www.payzone.co.uk](http://www.payzone.co.uk)

Payzone outlets enable consumers to charge certain PPM devices (smartcards, tokens, keys and quantum cards) and in some cases, pay bills for credit meters. Not all suppliers are part of the Payzone scheme (they may be part of the Paypoint scheme detailed below) and there are restrictions on the payment types that are accepted at the outlets. Consumers who want to know if there is a Payzone outlet in their area or if their supplier is part of the scheme can check online. You can check online on behalf of consumers who do not have access to the internet.

### PayPoint

[www.paypoint.co.uk](http://www.paypoint.co.uk)

Paypoint outlets enable consumers to charge certain PPM devices (smartcards, tokens, keys and quantum cards) and in some cases, pay bills for credit meters. Not all suppliers are part of the Paypoint scheme and there are restrictions on the payment types that are accepted at the outlets. Consumers who want to know if there is a Paypoint outlet in their area or if their supplier is part of the scheme can check online. You can check online on behalf of consumers who do not have access to the internet

## Renewable energy

### Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS)

[www.microgenerationcertification.org.uk](http://www.microgenerationcertification.org.uk)

This is the organisation that certifies microgeneration products and installers. Consumers who want to access feed-in tariffs will need to have their systems installed by an MCS installer.

### Renewable Energy Association (REA)

[www.realassurance.org.uk](http://www.realassurance.org.uk)

REA operates the REAL Assured Code which professes to guarantee a high quality experience for consumers wishing to buy or lease small electricity generation units for their home, for a community building or for a small business.





## Safety

### British Standards Institution (BSI)

[www.bsigroup.co.uk](http://www.bsigroup.co.uk)

BSI is the organisation that is responsible for the production of British Standards. It is also able to test consumer products. Consumers may be signposted to the BSI if they want to know what the British Standard is for a product, for example to check that a carbon monoxide detector that they have purchased meets the British Standard.

### Trading Standards Services (TSS)

#### Contact details as per RAST protocols

When you receive calls relating to unsafe gas and electricity appliances, or about gas safety checks / the safety of gas appliances in furnished rented accommodation these may be referred to TSS in accordance with RAST protocols.

### National Gas Emergency Line

[www.nationalgrid.com](http://www.nationalgrid.com)

National Grid operates the National Gas Emergency Number which is a 24 hour service. Consumers who smell gas or suspect that there is a gas leak either inside or outside of their property should contact the National Gas Emergency Line. Consumers should also call this number if they suspect a leak of carbon monoxide.

## Trade associations

### Energy UK

<http://www.energy-uk.org.uk/>

Energy UK was established in April 2012 following a merger of the Association of Electricity Producers, the Energy Retail Association and the UK Business Council for Sustainable Energy. Reflecting changes in the energy industry, they have come together to form a clear and consistent voice across the sector, working to achieve a sustainable energy future for members and for the UK. Representing over 70 members of different sizes, varying from generators to suppliers.

The Big 6 energy suppliers are all members. The ERA codes of practice on billing and face to face marketing are managed by the Codes manager within Energy UK. The website contains details of the codes and also provides guidance and contact details for other organisations in relation to: energy efficiency, fuel poverty, complaint resolution and disconnection. They do not handle consumer complaints but consumers who would like further details of the codes of practice could be directed to the website.



## **Energy Network Association (ENA)**

[www.energynetworks.org.uk](http://www.energynetworks.org.uk)

The ENA is the trade association for the gas and electricity networks. The ENA aims to promote UK gas and electricity networks to ensure that they are the safest, most reliable, efficient and sustainable networks in the world. Their website contains a section containing FAQs providing guidance to members of the public regarding: who their supplier is, whose network they are on and what to do in an emergency situation.

## **Vulnerable consumers**

### **Extra Help Unit**

#### **Contact details as per RAST protocols**

The EHU has the power to deal with energy cases involving vulnerable consumers. Cases should be referred to the EHU in accordance with RAST protocols if they fit within the criteria for qualifying as a 'vulnerable consumer' (see section 2 for further details).

#### **See also:**

**The various organisations that offer assistance to vulnerable consumers under 'Grants', 'Energy efficiency' and 'Debt'.**

This is not an exhaustive list of organisations and you will no doubt develop the list during your time as a consumer advisor. In addition, your particular centre may have its own list of organisations for signposting and referrals. You may also find useful information and links on the Adviceguide.



## Summary

- Citizens Advice advisors sometimes need to direct consumers to other organisations. Where the contact details of an organisation are provided to a consumer who must then contact the organisation themselves, this is known as a 'signpost'. If the consumer's details are taken and the case is passed to the organisation from Citizens Advice this is known as a 'referral'. You will receive further training on signposts and referrals and you will take these actions in accordance with any relevant RAST protocols.
- There are a large number of organisations that may be able to offer advice, guidance or assistance to consumers.
- These materials do not provide an exhaustive list of organisations and you will no doubt develop the list during your time as a consumer advisor. In addition your particular centre may have its own list of organisations for signposting and referrals.
- You may also find useful information and links on the Knowledge Base.

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