



INVOLUNTARY PPM INSTALLATION & BAD DEBT PROVISION

The Scottish Pensioners' Forum notes that Ofgem is in discussion with the UK Government on this and related matters. We believe that by leaving issues such as this to be tackled through market mechanisms, and to be paid for by consumers, the UK Government is failing to shoulder its responsibilities in the relief of poverty, especially that generated by artificially high fuel prices, a general cost of living crisis and the impact of its own fiscal policies.

SPF welcomed the review of Forced PPM installation, especially because it revealed failings by suppliers and the courts to follow 'due process'. In any restart of enforced installation, suppliers should not be able to reclaim any additional costs for processes that they should have already been following.

SPF questions whether suppliers are yet adequately equipped to assess vulnerabilities, including financial, and should, as a matter of routine, be in contact with relevant agencies to ensure forced PPM installation is a last resort and all other avenues are fully explored and documented before recourse is made to it.

Mass signing-off of warrants is not acceptable, nor is remote switching in cases where 'smart' meters are already installed.

SPF remains concerned that the continuing increase in daily standing charges has a disproportionate impact on low usage consumers and small households, such as pensioners. Any increased allowance for bad debt will thus impact groups such as this disproportionately and tend to increase fuel poverty. In effect the poor are paying for the poor and themselves becoming poorer in the process.

SPF notes that allowance for increased bad debt levels, in part as a result of increased application of Additional Support Credits, will, for 12 months, be applied initially to PPM consumers only, but, thereafter, will be spread amongst all consumers. SPF cannot support such increases in standing charges.

SPF was puzzled why rebuilding of public trust in suppliers was considered in policy papers essentially focused on vulnerable consumers. It is surely in the commercial interests of suppliers and their reputation management, rather than consumers, that they are perceived as acting responsibly.