



A grassroots campaign taking action against mammoth fuel bills and working towards an affordable, sustainable and democratic energy system

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Fuel Poverty Action response to Ofgem on Consumer Standards

The appalling way many customers, including vulnerable ones, are treated by energy firms is a national disgrace. Many are left traumatised by months or years of unhelpful, incompetent and inhumane treatment. Urgent and radical action is needed by Ofgem.

People that cannot afford to pay their bill, and those given wrong bills, face an uphill battle to resolve their issues. Many hours are wasted on hold or repeating calls, as poor systems lose information and fail to make progress. Staff are often badly trained and unhelpful.

Social media is full of horror stories about energy firm customer service, or lack of it. Entire groups have been set up for the frustrated and traumatised customers of different firms. Customers are threatened and harassed instead of helped. People are bombarded by threats to add further costs, damage their credit rating and even break into their homes. There is a complete lack of empathy, understanding, care and humanity. The potential for positive relationships and constructive outcomes is being destroyed.

These terrible service levels are reflected in the poor star ratings of most firms by Citizens Advice, which should be prominently displayed on their websites and materials so people are informed before signing up. There should also be fines for poor service - for example 1% of turnover if below 4.0 and 2% of turnover if below 3.0.

A completely different approach is needed. Customer facing staff need to be properly trained and incentivised to help people. Systems need to be transformed so issues are quickly resolved not dragged out for months or years - destroying lives and wasting time and money.

We are shocked that some energy firms are asking for more overhead money to make their customer service slightly less bad. They are already getting paid huge sums, and giving them yet more money will not solve the issue. Unless standards are improved they should lose their licenses to operate.

In summary, the problem is so severe that Ofgem needs to take much more radical and decisive action than is being proposed. Transformation is needed, not tweaks.