



Raising awareness of
energy savings and
help in paying bills



What is **Energy** best deal?

The Energy Best Deal campaign, run by Citizens Advice during winter 2008/09, aimed to raise awareness amongst consumers about the savings that can be made by switching energy supplier, changing the way bills are paid, and the help available from energy suppliers and Government for those struggling to pay. The national roll-out of the campaign across England and Wales was funded by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and supported by Ofgem, following a successful pilot phase funded by Ofgem.

The campaign ran from October 2008 to March 2009. It targeted both consumers and advisers in order to spread the word about the benefits of checking energy tariffs and switching supplier to get the best deal. Consumers of all ages were given advice, but sessions were particularly marketed at people on low incomes and frontline workers helping such clients.

An independent evaluation of the scheme was undertaken by the Centre for Sustainable Energy.

Why?



Energy Best Deal builds on the research under Ofgem's Consumer First programme which showed that many vulnerable customers needed more information and guidance about:

- tariff and payments options;
- access to grants to install insulation and central heating; and
- ways to manage bills through energy efficiency.

Citizens Advice Bureaux experienced a 20 per cent increase in enquiries relating to fuel debt in 2008/09 compared with 2007/08, demonstrating the importance of consumers checking that they are getting the best deal on their tariff and payment method. There are other steps consumers can take to manage their bills, such as taking up help available to use energy more efficiently in the home.

Those on low or fixed incomes are often the victims of fuel poverty. Energy Best Deal sought to ensure that these consumers received the information they needed to empower them to review and tackle their fuel costs.

Consumers may not know where to go to check the tariff they are on, or be aware that there are better deals that they could switch onto to save them money. It can also be the case that people are reluctant to change as they are concerned they either won't be better off or may lose their fuel supply.

The Energy Best Deal sessions were presented by a trusted and impartial source. They talked consumers and frontline workers through each of these issues and reassured them about the process.

Who took part?



- Energy Best Deal directly reached almost 2,000 consumers and over 2,000 frontline workers. In the year after the sessions, it is estimated that the frontline workers' training will have enabled them to benefit at least a further 30,000 homes.
- The regional Financial Capability Forums co-ordinated delivery of the sessions across England and Wales. Sessions were delivered by a wide range of organisations.
- The majority of consumers reached were from groups who are at higher risk of fuel poverty; this included housing association tenants, long term sick or disabled, older people and young parents.
- A quarter of those attending the sessions paid by cash, cheque or card on receipt of their fuel bills with just under a third using token or prepayment meters.
- Sessions were oversubscribed, demonstrating both the need and appetite for further training in the future from these groups and others.
- Staff from housing associations, local authorities, Citizens Advice Bureaux and other voluntary sector advice agencies were given training by the campaign. They have subsequently been in touch with many from hard to reach groups.

Key findings

86 per cent of consumers indicated an **intention to take action** on their energy bills, following the session.

Half of those who looked into getting a better deal **had switched suppliers** within a few months of their session.

- 86 per cent of consumers indicated an intention to take action on their energy bills, following the session almost two thirds of consumers who attended sessions said they would seek a better deal by contacting their fuel company, investigating the prices of other companies or changing supplier.
- 9 per cent indicated they would apply for a Government home improvement grant.
- Follow-up interviews showed that 45 per cent of consumers had looked into getting a better deal on their energy since the event, with younger people more likely to do so than the over 60s.
- 20 per cent of consumers interviewed had switched supplier or tariff following the sessions.
- The frontline workers trained will share the information with over 30,000 consumers (many in fuel poverty) within a year.
- Many of the consumers that the frontline workers are in contact with are from hard to reach groups.
- Just under 30 per cent of consumers at the sessions were employed; 18 per cent were unemployed; 14 per cent were disabled or long-term sick; 27 per cent were retired; 6 per cent were carers and 3 per cent were students

Consumers

- Over two thirds (69 per cent) of those who looked into getting a better deal said they had found it easy, or fairly easy, to get information about the different tariffs available. This shows that the presentation effectively signposted people as to where and how to source information.
- Half (49 per cent) of those who looked into getting a better deal had switched suppliers within a few months of their session.
- Younger people were more likely to seek a better deal than older people: 80 per cent of under 30s intended to seek a better deal when asked directly after the session, compared to 50 per cent of over 60s.

Frontline workers and volunteers

- Energy Best Deal successfully increased the capacity of frontline workers to advise on fuel issues. Just over half of frontline workers had not previously given advice about getting a better deal from energy suppliers, but nearly all (89 per cent) said they planned to do so following the session. The independent survey reported that 80 per cent of interviewees had actually provided advice on fuel issues since attending a session.
- Almost all (98 per cent) frontline workers said they felt better informed about switching fuel supplier and payment methods following the sessions, and over three quarters (77 per cent) said that they would look for a better deal for their own energy supply as a result. The interviews showed that 45 per cent had already done this and 15 per cent had already gone on to switch energy supplier or tariff.
- 90 per cent of all frontline workers said that as a result of the sessions they intended to change the advice they gave to their clients.



Energy Best Deal key facts:

- If you have never switched supplier you could save on average between £73-£91 depending on how you pay and where you live;
- Most people can switch supplier (this includes people on token, key or card meters);
- If you don't want to switch make sure you are on your supplier's cheapest available tariff;
- Most energy suppliers offer help to customers struggling to pay their energy bills;
- Nearly everyone over the age of 60 is entitled to a winter fuel payment of either £125 or £250;
- Customers over the age of 80 can get £200, £275 or £400 depending on their circumstances; and
- Switching can take 6-8 weeks, but you will not be cut off or be without power during that time. Your gas or electricity will continue to be supplied by your old provider.

Client stories

- Jenny, a lone parent on a low income phoned the bureau a couple of weeks after attending an Energy Best Deal session to describe how her participation had helped her to switch to a cheaper supplier and also to receive help from the Warm Front scheme. This paid for a replacement boiler, loft insulation and energy saving light bulbs.
- Mo, a housing association employee, explained how the training will help him to talk to residents about how to choose the energy supplier and tariff that is most appropriate for them.
- After a session, Simon got back in touch with the trainer, he said "When I got home, I got on the phone to my energy company and they have told me they're going to change my meter and put me on a lower tariff, I just have to send details of my disability."
- Maria who is retired, attended an Energy Best Deal session. She lives alone and has various health complaints. She told the trainer how her gas central heating hadn't been working and she'd been left using electric heaters. After the session, she decided to take some action on her situation. She applied for a grant from the Warm Front scheme and is now awaiting an assessment.
- After coming to a session, Laila, a young mother with two small children told the trainer that she was going to look into the energy tariff that she was on, as she was paying more than some of her neighbours and wanted the best deal.



For further information contact:

Faye Jordan

Press and Public Affairs Officer

Tel: 0207 812 5481

Email: faye.jordan@citizensadvice.org.uk

September 2009

Citizens Advice

Registered charity number: 279057

Citizens Advice is an operating name of The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux



Tel: 0207 833 2181

www.citizensadvice.org.uk



www.ofgem.gov.uk