

**Fuel Bank Foundation**

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02 September 2022.

Dear Jonathan & Neil,

Since its launch in 2015, Fuel Bank Foundation has now supported over 650,000 people who pre-pay for their energy.

We have a lot of insight around the experiences of people who pay for their energy in this way, and one of our key objectives as a charity is to bring issues that we are seeing on the ground to the attention of policymakers and suppliers so that they can be resolved.

In doing so, we always aim to be as constructive as possible.

So, I wanted to highlight an issue that we are increasingly seeing.

For the people that we support, if they have no money, they have no lights or heating or ability to have a warm shower.

The numbers of people living like this are only going to increase from 1 October and, clearly, we are very concerned about that.

We estimate that the average PPM customer will have to top up their meter by £480 to remain on supply in December. Based on the forecasts of industry analysts, we estimate that that figure could rise to £713 by January 2023.

These figures are simply unaffordable for the people that we support, so many will spend longer and longer periods of the month without energy.

The issue that I want to specifically highlight is the growing number of people we are regularly seeing who are medically dependent on electricity but are paying for it via a prepayment meter.

Some of the people we are supporting:

- use lifesaving breathing equipment
- have electric wheelchairs that need charging so that they can leave their homes
- need hoists to get them out of bed / the bath
- need to keep insulin to treat their diabetes in a fridge
- are partially sighted
- have health conditions that mean it is essential for their homes to be kept at a certain temperature.

So, you can see that, for these people, not having the funds to top up their prepayment meter could be potentially catastrophic and life threatening.

I am, therefore, urging you to ensure that all suppliers check before 1 October that they don't have any customers who are being supplied via a prepayment meter, if to do so would be neither "safe" nor "practicable" (as the Supply Licence says it must be).

Aside from this requirement, suppliers also have various other obligations to support customers in vulnerable circumstances - for example, the requirement to treat customers fairly when they are struggling to pay their bills.

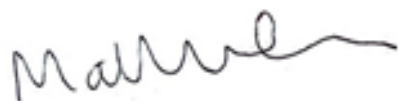
We have previously flagged to them the importance of ensuring that they are complying with their Licence obligations in this area. It could be that a PPM was safe and reasonably practicable when it was installed but, over time, a new customer may have moved into the property, or the medical circumstances of the original customer may have changed. In the current climate, of course, their financial circumstances may have worsened.

So, a regular check (say, annually), that this payment method remains suitable, is essential.

Given the fact that very many people will not be able to sufficiently top up their meters to ensure that they are continuously on supply, this is now more important than ever.

Having highlighted this issue, I urge you to use your powers to ensure that no customer is being supplied via a PPM if their health would be compromised when they self-disconnect.

Please contact me if you would like to discuss this issue in greater detail. I'm hoping that you will take action urgently.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Cole', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew Cole

Head of Fuel Bank Foundation